

Poetry South

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Poetry South

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Poetry South

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Carolyn Elkins

Deep Field Gravitational Lensing

My son is trying—
again—
to explain his work to me.
He points to a photograph of a deep field
in what I would have called,
before I had a son who became a physicist,
“outer space.”

He runs his finger along two delicate curves of white,
like misshapen parentheses,
that frame nothing.
These arcs of light,
or apparent light, he says,
show us something is there
that we cannot see.

He shows me long strings of numbers that
his algorithm takes weeks to calculate,
tells me how many millions of rays
he’s shooting around groups of galaxies
to see how light refracts and bends
to either side, forming absolute illusions
that can be traced backwards,
to tell us what is there,
or rather, *what was there*, he says,
because space *is* time,
when you look this far back,
when you look this deep.

Carolyn Elkins

The Inversion of the World

In the mountains, the sunlight
comes down
in the mornings.
I must wait for it to reach me
here at the near-bottom
by the creek.
The sunlight runs down
and always at sunrise
the breeze flows up,
lifts each leaf up
like a prayer flag
in the freshening light.

At evening everything returns,
sunlight moving up again
more swiftly it seems
than it came down,
the last light a flash
on the ridge tops,
the wind streaming down, now
colder.

They pass each other
like they've struck an uneasy bargain,
some kind of Persephone exchange,
one released from the deep clefts of the world
in a temporary reversal of desires.

Wind slides past light,
light slips through air,
all elements shifting
in the vertical spaces
these mountains created
when, with waves of fire and ash,
they first lifted the bedrock
like an offering
to the cold, receding sky.

Carolyn Elkins

Entropy

Every morning in the fall
my neighbor's cedar plank fence
smokes in the slanted light
as if it were on fire
as if it were unmaking itself
under some terrible force
to ascend in ash and atoms.

In the woods, orange-red leaves smolder
and the fallen trees crumble back to earth.
Thick mist hovers over the stream,
the water breaking up and rising.

I see where the night's hard freeze
has fractured a rock,
splintered off flakes of quartz,
the entropy that makes sand.

I slowly make my way down
the slope. Behind me
thin whorls of fine dust
trail in the cooling air.

Carolyn Elkins

In a Dry Country

No one here remembers
the tons-of-spilling-pins
sound of rain

bones have fallen everywhere
all the soft parts
long burned away

heat ticks like a cicada
in the empty eye sockets

thorns of vertebrae
torture a piece of
sky caged by ribs

cloud shadows slide
over the corrugated dust
silent as sidewinders

no one looks up

Carolyn Elkins

Montevideo Prison

When I was here before,
twenty-seven years ago,
this was the place the mothers
and daughters and wives came
to stand all day
every day
to hold photographs of the disappeared.

Now it's a shopping mall—
silver napkin rings,
leather coats, bone china.
It seems good, a sign
the world has changed.
It's been scrubbed up,
new ceilings and floors put in,
layers and layers of paint.

But if you stand back far enough,
back on the curb the way I've seen
some women do,
and look from there,
you see it's still the same gate going in,
the same unmistakable dark arch,
the inexplicable, heavy stones.

Carolyn Elkins

Patagonia

The cold on Mount Tronador,
deep in the glacier,
black and locked,
casts a sharp spike
down the steep slide,
more ancient than man,
cold we can see,
a long shadow.

Cold leaps out of the lakes
hungry, sleek,
hugging the red trout.
It hunches
in beech forests, back in
where no wind reaches,
silent, dreaming.

Horses wade shoulder deep
through lupines
spilling ice chips
from the blue cups.
Cold clatters to the ground
filling the hoof prints
with splinters.

It accumulates
in pockets,
settles on shoes,
slips into our mouths when we speak.
We carry it bundled on our backs,
sheaves of it clenched in our arms,
the ballast that holds us
weighted to the bottom of the world.

John Zheng

An Interview with Carolyn Elkins

Carolyn Elkins is the author of *Angel Pays a Visit*, *Daedalus Rising*, and *Coriolis Forces*. She has published frequently in journals, including *North American Review*, *Chattahoochee Review*, *Southern Humanities Review*, and *Birmingham Poetry Review*. Three of her poems have been nominated for the Pushcart Prize. Carolyn is associate editor of *Tar River Poetry*. A long-time resident of the Mississippi delta, she currently lives in the Smoky Mountains of North Carolina with her husband Bill Spencer and her cat Welby.

John Zheng: Carolyn, thank you for your time for this interview. My first question is: What made you want to be a poet?

Carolyn Elkins: An unhappy childhood! I think I fell into it the way a lot of poets do: when I was about 12 or 13 years old I was casting around for something to make sense of things, or to make my life feel better, and poetry was very helpful to me then. I liked reading it, and then I enjoyed writing it, and then a few teachers encouraged me, so it just naturally grew to be something important to me.

JZ: Did your personal experience help you with your poetry writing?

CE: Well, I guess in a sense, all personal experience, good or bad, is—or can be—a help in writing poetry. The most important thing, I think, is a poet should feel her emotions more strongly than most people. Wordsworth believed that, and I do too.

JZ: Some years ago I found *Daedalus Rising* in Square Books in Oxford, Mississippi. I felt it was a collection of memories about family, travel, and life in the Delta. Did you write these wonderful poems from personal experiences?

CE: Oh, yes. To my family's dismay, my poems are quite autobiographical! That is not to say they are strictly "true" in all their details—ask my sister or Bill and they'll tell you that! I think I

follow a pattern most personal or autobiographical poets use: I start with a scene or memory or even a phrase someone has said, and I let a story kind of grow from there. I try to stay true to the heart of the real experience, but I don't mind reshaping reality when it serves the poetry.

JZ: Years ago I read a poem of yours, "Golden Road," in the spring 1996 issue of *Tar River Poetry*. How did you happen to write it?

Golden Road

It's happened to me only a few times
though I drive a lot. I'll come around
that corner that moves the low sun
from where it has been
riding in my side window
to shining down my back
and straight on through me,
turning the low road ahead
into sudden gold. And once—
a ride I still go down in dreams—
the road in front was rising
into red hills, and the rain
had made the blacktop shine
so that the sun behind and the road
and hills and sky ahead, all
became one fire
through which I seemed to fly
out from the sun
shooting across radiant space
on an infinite stream of light.
The universe seems what it must be
then, a journey instead of a place,
a road we have yet to set out on,
and have long ago been down.

CE: "Golden Road" is an example of a fairly straightforward autobiographical poem. I was driving in east Tennessee near sunset one evening, and the road really did light up like that: the low sun . . . turn[ed] the low road ahead / into sudden gold. . . . / and the road / and hills and sky ahead, all / became one fire. . . .

It made me feel such a sudden pang of pure joy that I remembered it clearly. And then years later when I was living in Mississippi, driving on Highway 8 one evening, something like it happened again and I felt that same inexplicable happiness, so I wrote the poem. I think a lot of people relate to the experience because that poem has been reprinted more than any other poem of mine.

JZ: Poetry has an emotion in it. In a sonnet that I like called “Father Fishing,” you remember fishing with your father, and in the last two lines, “and as we hauled up the line they would rise / asking silent questions with terrible eyes,” how did you rise to this pitch of emotion?

Father Fishing

I learned at ten how to run a trot line
from many mornings spent on the river
skimming the water just ahead of the whine
of my dad’s Evinrude outboard motor.
We weren’t fishing for fun, but for food,
and we never talked much to each other
but on days when the catch was good
he was happy with me on the river.

On other days, half the fish were dead
when we got there. Some were eaten by fish
bigger than they were, and some suffocated.
Some were alive though, smooth blue-skinned fish,
and as we hauled up the line they would rise
asking silent questions with terrible eyes.

CE: “Father Fishing” was one of the most difficult poems for me to write. My relationship with my father has always been strained, and I was struggling with a complex knot of emotions in that one. The poem was just a long mess until I decided to try the sonnet form. That strict structure immediately controlled the way those emotions could be expressed, so I was able to write it, to my relief.

JZ: The poems in *Daedalus Rising* also made me feel that you were at home with poetry. Can you use a poem to talk about your creative process of writing it?

CE: It's quite typical of my process that I often don't write about something until I've let it "cook" a few years. "Peace Corps" and "Holding Back Darkness" describe events that happened years before I wrote about them. I seem to need some distance before I know what I want to say. One of the poems in *Daedalus Rising* is "Middle Texas" and the process of composing that poem is fairly typical of how I work. You may remember the terrific ice storm in February 1994. It really devastated the trees in a large part of the delta, and Cleveland, where I lived then, seemed to lose more than half its trees in that one storm. What was really depressing was that the trees that didn't fall down or get cut down immediately kept dying by bits and had to be cut down later. Everyone in the area felt depressed by this tremendous devastation of our natural beauty. I couldn't write about it at first, but a few years later my nephew, who lives in Texas, went through an ice storm there, and when he told me about it, it brought back our storm, and I wrote that poem then. It was about the delta ice storm, but it was triggered by the Texas one. I wrote the poem in first person plural to capture the sense that it was a community event. The last images of the poem are negative, but are also meant to be ambiguous.

The desert grows fast out of the west toward us.
Sand as fine as powder blows everywhere,
and at dawn the locusts rise, singing.

Even in a landscape of destruction, life rises, and every day has some beauty in it.

JZ: How did you deal with the intensity in your poems?

CE: My usual way to handle the intensity of emotion in a poem is to wait a long time before I even try to write it. I couldn't write about the events in "Coriolis Forces" for almost twenty years because that poem deals with the death of my brother. And another way to handle intense emotion is to impose a strict form on it, as I did in "Father Fishing."

JZ: The language in your poems is evocative. "Sunk into the Delta," one of my favorites, evokes the Delta I can relate to. The second stanza presents a world of "nothing to see." How did you feel sunk into the emptiness of the Delta?

Sunk into the Delta

I have escaped from my own life
in far too many ways. I know that,
now that I have become stuck here,
immobilized with all my instincts to flee
aroused around me, urgent, and futile.
I am afraid I have sunk into the Delta
up to my soul.

And because there is nothing to see here—
only the cold winter rain falling
into flat and blackened fields—
this heavy sky and flooded earth
become dull mirrors of dark reflections,
where, everywhere in this emptiness,
I meet myself.

CE: When I moved to the Delta from Knoxville, Tennessee, the flat horizon and huge sky were so foreign to me. I'd never lived anywhere so stark. But I came to realize the stark landscape could be a real learning opportunity. Life anywhere really is what people make of it, but that's more clear, I think, in the Delta. I came to appreciate that place and we had really wonderful years there. "Sunk into the Delta" was about the process of learning to settle into that experience.

JZ: It seems that you enjoy poetry slam very much. Can you tell us about an exciting experience you had in poetry slam?

CE: Actually poetry slams terrified me! I was in three slam competitions at the Wildacres Writers Workshop 1996-1998. We went through 3 rounds; those who scored in the highest 50% in Round 1 went to Round 2, and the top two poets went to Round 3. That meant to win you had to have three poems memorized. We didn't use notes. It was like a Dramatic Declamation competition. I'm not really confident of my memorization skills, so I was always scared I'd draw a blank. But I won all three slams I was in, and it was really fun *afterwards*.

JZ: Do you do poetry reading? Where?

CE: I'm mostly retired now, but I used to do quite a few poetry readings. I've read at academic venues—the Mississippi Philological Association annual meetings and the Southern Humanities Conference are two of my favorites—and at bookstores like Malaprop's in Asheville, NC. I read at AWP, which was fun because the crowd was so large and almost everyone in the audience was a writer. But my very favorite reading of all, I think, was for the Eudora Welty Symposium at MUW in 2003. Robert Morgan, Ron Rash, Brad Watson, and Natasha Trethewey were also readers that year. It was a great group and a wonderful crowd.

JZ: Living in the Smoky Mountains must give you a chance to get in close touch with nature. Wallace Stevens has his thirteen ways of looking at a blackbird. How are your ways of looking at the Smokies? Do you write about the Smokies?

CE: I love living here in Western North Carolina. I am so lucky to have a house right in the mountains where I can see hills and thousands of trees. It's a natural paradise. We have fox and bear and coyotes and owls and all kinds of hawks and song birds—and snow in the winter, which I love. I've written only a few poems about living here so far though. I'm a very slow processor of life, as I've said. One poem I wrote since moving here is "The Inversion of the World," which is about how light moves differently when you live on a mountainside.

JZ: As an editor for *Tar River Poetry*, you must have to spend a lot of time reading submissions. How do you find time for your poetry writing?

CE: I wish I had an answer to this. As I'm sure you know from all the editing you've done, it's extremely difficult to find time to do your own writing when you're reading hundreds of other people's poems. In my case, I stopped writing almost entirely the first three years I read for *Tar River*. I was overwhelmed. It's an occupational hazard, I guess. If you have figured out how to do it, let me know!

JZ: I lost most of my weekends editing. You have published a collection of angel poems. I'd like to hear more about your angel poems.

CE: The angel poems were, for the most part, very fun to write. I used to start my writing sessions with what I called “warm-up” poems—poems that were generally lighter in tone than usual for me. The first angel poem was one of those. I was at the Wildacres Writers Retreat and I read it at our nightly gathering and people really responded to it. Every night for a week, my friends asked for another angel poem, so I ended up writing a whole collection of them.

I take spirituality really seriously in the angel poems. I do believe in guardian angels and guidance from the spirit or supernatural world, but the poems have a sense of humor too. I think the poem I am most often asked to read is “Angel Goes to Wal-Mart.” The book *Angel Pays a Visit* sold out in three months, and it’s going to be reprinted by Emrys Press this fall, so that makes me very happy.

Sterling Plump

Prodigal Icon

1.
Blues is disporic embryo
yo dialects you mama throws
to yo daddy lingo
yo yoining memory on Saturday
midnight trains to
Georgia
on my mind.

healing
elixir
from gourds inside
ruins/Spirit breathing fire
arms: Dreams
stubborn insistences
to survive and bloom

I want to know I want to
know its caliber

night is celebrant
this is a mass
thing

2.
Steel sings arias
softly calling:
don't start
that mess it's too early in the evening

blues
a prodigal icon
in cracked mirrors
of still water

Skin of air prayers
orbiting Lord have mercy
quilt

work over time and distance.

3.

Years cannot do anything
to spirit. But they
fertilize the soul
 man/Hold on
 I'm coming/Hold on
 Soul
 man/Hold on

centuries on stage
 conjuring praise of bits
and pieces of paper
 work songs for the spirit
a ledger of flesh rocking

 I got a twenty room
 house/Got twenty rooms

 too many.

4.

Mood. Medium of faith
hope and clarity.

blues: Every
 body know everybody.
 the long
 long
 journey

I accept

Blues reveals Humpty Dumpty's
 Breakage
Gospel gathers the pieces
into polling place
 where self
definition
 and self
invention
vote lyrical poses
 I inherit.

Sterling Plump

Name

for Jeffrey Allen

1.
Memory begins.

A whistle climbs darkness.
Rails speak off somewhere
Mister Sam cusses whips
his team this is not
Bethlehem.

2.
Here I meet the Spirit
after a Kickapoo bath.

3.
The poet in me
greeted sacred book
learning
and alien words
for things I know.

4.
My fourteenth Christmas
has no anticipation of
Santa or a feast.

The old man
is not speaking.
His breaths hard
to come by.

His Mason brothers
sit late hours
to watch and ensure fire

wood/back

logged security
of hickory or oak hallelujahs
prevail night.

5.

I embark
another land streets
and no plowed earth.
No scent of rich black
soil furrowed and harrowed.

when you no longer taste
or feel or touch dirt
absence of memory clogs
veins of perception.

I depart a pear orchard's
sleeves of the gravel's
dust
embraces.

6.

Mississippi, Lord, place
of distilled tears
mired in orbits of debt.

7.

Seventy-two years after
Birth/there's no longer politeness.

Industrial
plants swallow vistas
and
the landscape and paths.
Perhaps
thirsts of memory
can flag
down a freight.

Sumner Hill sits at
the fork/Tennin
Road and North

side graveled crises
Sits at the /cross
road/where tenants'
 shadows
walk nights and nights.

Going and going.

May
be down sand
roaded niggertowns

May
be past Wells Grove
 or Pilgrim
Rest or Mound

Hood or Saint Paul or Holy
 Ghost or Mount
Olive/Spirit prefers
 foot
prints on roads

 Prefers
journeys over journeys
therefore a/ Palimpsest of
 wandering

and wondering how long

how long/Lord, the trane
been gone.

Since I was born.

Robert Bunce

Playing for Keeps

Out on Kerr Lake
In a small aluminum skiff
As we drifted across the
Face of the cove
Your lure snagged
Damn
You turned to me
I'll give you fifty cents
To get that lure for me

Quick as a wink
I didn't have to think
I leapt head first
From the boat
Into the lake
Eight or ten feet
Down
I found the lure
Hung up on a bough
And set it free

To the top
And back in the boat
In two swift moves

It was hard to surprise
Uncle David
But there was that look
In his eyes
He laughed and handed
Me the shiny silver disk

I dove the lake
Everyday
The world below
Was as familiar to me
As the sky to a bird
Or the bird to a tree

Patrick Pritchett

Number 9 Dream

And in this series—it leads to
another, the changes
for migrating
cross the lawn with the moon
dividing, then subdividing.

Lip synching caesura.

It grows clustered. Ferns, birds
the weather above
the harbor, even the waves
accede to the vast
continual remittance.

The way a guitar remembers Sunday.

Brief palsy.
The bricks burned ochre for an hour.
Seized by the strangeness of
evening you would dream she
drowns, and you drown, too.

Sundown, or another name for it.

Patrick Pritchett

Grand Hotel Abyss

It is best visited in autumn
when the logic of the day
yields to the logic of the night.

Along the long road going north
it looks out over the sea's
extravagance

an island where the light of exile
drifts through the open window.

Then the guest rises from the piano
gestures over his cocktail
speaking as a lover speaks

of the séance that is time
and the slow dissolve to the not-yet.

The question of movement, he says, is
first predicament.

“Can the real be the thing continuing
and not its broken light?”

The tree of perfect noise
burns inside its signal.”

Past the balcony's edge
rain transmits a shower of leaves
and the abyss of birds

swirls wildly, their blind bodies
flying naked
in the wind

each throat crushing
the sphere of a perfect note.

Michael Catherwood

Projector

The 59 Dodge is parked in the driveway
where its tail fins stab the air, mirrors
gray with gravel roads. Here our lives are,
jumpy and crooked against the stucco,
Dad's practice swing a slow shadow
that folds across a burned-out lawn.

Eight months pregnant, Mom springs
from the Ford Fairlane wagon embarrassed.
Close up: her bright red lipstick disappears
into the house.

There's the old garage
before it collapsed, its hinged doors
cockeyed and wide open. The stucco
is in chunks under the window
where a rusted push mower reaches
to the fence. The film cuts
to Aunt Ethyl in her mid-forties,
the palm of her hand dramatic
for the camera.

Now the picture pans
by the cherry tree then across
the same peonies that still
madly bloom each May.
Great Grandmother Yonkovich
squints and stares into noon light,
no smile, her arms folded,
her Easter hat spun in satin and glitter.
Then the film turns white and blinding.

Angela Ball

By Way of Explanation

Sue tried to deserve a family.
She married someone who relished these efforts
Fully and temporarily. A foxtrot played,
Eyebeads slung over a shoulder. When he walked in
With her replacement, she took alternate stairs
To the open night. Her design for love
Having failed, she remained
Water, minerals, and salts, but
Was an inaccurate effort.

She accepted a commission, then,
As Stepmother. Cooked and arrayed the foods
Of prominent holidays. When her husband
Began to be courted by students
She became dowdy,
Perched on the steps of a house
Not hers. For too long
Her hands remembered the key.

Angela Ball

How to Sleep

Sleep in the dressing rooms
Of exotic dancers, while perfume swoons
In and out of bottles and avers profoundly.
Invent “Love in the Sky with an Angel.”
Sleep next to the samovar,
Under the Saint Bernard. If you must,
Borrow a nun’s blanket. Travel without a ticket,
Recline in other people’s seats. Don’t let the conductor
Nudge you. The rule is, where you sleep,
You belong. Disobey an orange ladder
And sleep on its top step. When you are given “what for”
Sleep harder. Sleep in the words “KEEP OUT,”
In the words “THIS MEANS YOU.” Let your jaws
Grind them to powder. So long as you sleep,
You sleep. Sleep seventy years ago,
A woman with hair in a loaf and painted nylons,
On a narrow cot in the War Rooms,
A stenographer’s pad beside you,
Veiled romance buzzing in your head. Sleep with what
Has hurt you without meaning to, and will not stop.
Sleep and sleep again, prove you are
The queen of sleep, able to escape life and death
Able to sleep in the speck of ash
At the end of a simple sentence.
Let your jaws
Grind *them* to powder.

Angela Ball

Take Up Arms

*WAIT. If you are afraid
Of a specific horse, ask if you can
Help others tack him up
Or give him a rinse.*
Market pleasure to brutes who pretend
The whole democracy of the world
Can take refuge in a restaurant
Of horses and
Of universal religion.
WAIT. Many of the manned operations
In the UK have added value services such
As ironing, dry cleaning and service washes
Of their tails.
Divine mementos all
Around.

Kimberly Allen

The Mortals and the Specters Through the Night Clerk at the Hotel of Both Worlds

Like sleepwalking, Angela Ball's book of poetry *Night Clerk at the Hotel of Both Worlds* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2007) leaves readers wondering if they are awake or slumbering—which is a good thing in this instance. The work embodies images of an actual night clerk in a hum-drum hotel with a blinking neon sign greeting guests, some in a solid state, others not—some arriving, others leaving.

In the poem "Spring," Ball focuses seemingly on the season most indicative of life, with sparsely opulent description. The first stanza invokes garden-related imagery:

My feelings took a turn for the better
While thinking of white flowers turning into strawberries
Of clover turning into bees, of crowds of wisteria
Swelling and swelling

The second stanza winds into a seemingly out-of-the-way reference to "a friendly dog." Finally, though, the third stanza describes a feeling for newness that there are discoveries yet to be made: "Much of me hadn't been tried out, and I liked that."

In "What to Wear for Divorce," Ball humorously examines another kind of death. The poem can be seen in two ways—the character dresses haggardly, as though in mourning for the end of the marriage or in mocking celebration, exuberant that it's over. The first stanza reads:

Bats in your hair
But only if they can hang upside down
Properly.

While this poem can be seen in one of two ways, the absurdity shines through, especially in the last stanza, when she admonishes the character to "Wear something worn first...By a wolf."

In "Once," Ball looks back on a life—as many humans do—idealizing what might or should have been, while comparing it to

what actually was. The five stanzas of three lines each make for interesting reminiscence, with some instances eliciting humor from the reader, as though imagining a cartoonish “wah, wah, wahhhh” from a trumpet. The most painful, however, is the following:

Once, I imagined a daughter named Maeve
Not a clinic, a handful of Kleenex,
And an uncomfortable ride home.

Though the first four stanzas of “Once” paint pictures of how what *it* is—college or first sexual encounters—should have been, the final stanza is most imaginative and insightful:

Once I visited the Petrified Forest
And was mightily interested by the trees’
Iron stillness. The strange way they left me.

Recalling memories, bad and good, as Ball does in “Once,” might even cause readers to mine their own pasts for when moments of glory turned into letdowns. It is undoubtedly a regular activity for the visitors to her hotel—the mortals and the specters.

Ball, an English professor at the University of Southern Mississippi’s Center for Writers, is an adept poet, whose penchant for the absurd is proudly on display in that ethereal hotel.

Theodore Haddin

Arrowhead in the Tar

Since Creeks and Cherokees departed
here long ago, we don't see their life
that filled the fields and parted
the greening hedgerows.
Along the Mohorn Creek the boulders
roll, swept by waters they dipped
to drink and wash their meat.
Silence here is nothing to the call
once echoed through the woods
to the counsel seat. Leaves and trees
no longer tremble to the dance
and shake of pounding feet.
Today, any set of stones lying
in the grass, may produce something
flat, like an arrowhead, but it won't be.
Here on the street I've almost lost
anticipation of finding anything
of what they were when we made
them go. Air stands still, going
towards noon. The City is pouring
tar, asphalt to line the street.
Suddenly I lean toward the hot, acrid
steam and reach for what I've found,
one white sharp edge I pluck
from the burning heap, still warm
in my fingers, and slide it into my palm.

Theodore Haddin

Finding

Opening the old dresser drawer, finding
the dried red heart-shaped leaf you left,
and the sprig of lavender so carefully wrapped
with a winding weed, and all those dried
queen anne's umbels of white florets kept
like fine snow upon a lavender sheet. Then
I took them out to see and hold to the light.
I held the heart fine cracks and slits had
opened up and held it delicately to the sun.
I tried to see what was gone. White florets
still made a circle where they fell. The heart's
shape remained. What would take the years
to tell, is told. Nothing, no, nothing has
changed the love that spoke so well.

Book Review

Pity the Beautiful: Poems. By Dana Gioia. Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2012. 73 pages. \$15.00, paperback. ISBN 978-1-55597-613-2.

We weave
The fabric of our own existence out of words,
And the right story tells us who we are.

—Dana Gioia

This fourth book of new poems by Dana Gioia continues his assessment of spiritual and practical life that stirs up the past and faces the overweening stimulation of life in the twentieth-first century. His astuteness is reminiscent of T.S. Eliot's, only there's a warmth in the way his humane values get revealed that endears his poems to us, which will be read and reread because of their strength in dealing with the life we are living. The whole book comes as a testimony and a surprise from this poet who continues to amaze us.

No one who opens this book can fail to see how Gioia prepares us for the large issues that ensue in the poems. From the moment of the unopened present (a box) significantly beside the bed in the first poem, we are excited to open this book, the real present, to find our way. Nothing is lost in his engagement with the world as we do.

Furthering his journey, Gioia takes us to a museum in the persona of an angel with a broken wing that tells us a little about religion, hesitation, and war that would destroy religion if it could. The angel remains "A crippled saint against a painted sky" ("The Angel with the Broken Wing"). But then in devastating words Gioia turns his sights on the closest matters of American life, making us sense we are living more through the overgrown department store (or mall) than in our own self-directed lives. Bewildered and overwhelmed by all the *things* and choices flooding his senses, he can only ask, "Where in this splendid clutter / Shall I discover the one true thing?" and more importantly, "Where are you, my errant soul and innermost companion?" ("Shopping"). The reader will recognize this immediately as implied quest for something more significant in that American life.

But just as disturbing, the pitied gods that are no longer divine in the title poem have become the earth-god freeways that interlace the whole country and “cleave our cities, push aside our houses, / Provide no place to walk or rest or gather”(“The Freeways Considered as Earth Gods”). What will change this if indeed it can be? There are answers, and he has some. In a poem that bears closer inspection he advises us to invest in “the rituals that celebrate change,” for “our trust in what they signify” so that our youth can “dream of a future so fitting and so just / That our desire will bring it into being” (“Autumn Inaugural, II”). This doesn’t say yet what will be done with all the concrete, but feeling more deeply with the soul may open our eyes.

This is a reason why Gioia enters the children’s HIV ward so sensitively revealed you would think you were in a London hospital during the plague, where nothing can be done for the destitute children. The belatedly revealed monk who has changed his empty erotic life for the monastery in the Gothic-like tale “Haunted” could easily speak here, if Gioia himself were not more compassionate. In this life, and in America, children *have* to matter. “Special Treatments Ward,” an almost unwritable, deeply moving piece, expresses Gioia’s own profound concern for children and loss of his own son which he’s only able to let go of in the final poem, “Majority.” It will take empathy as strong as Gioia’s to begin a change, cultural or otherwise.

From the existential poems calculated to ask “Who am I” (“Reunion,” “The Road,” “Who’s There?”) to poems about death like “Finding a Box of Family Letters,” one of which urges the speaker to get on with life (for the distance to death is short), an implied urgency is all,—search out the meaning for yourself, even if you turn into the monk who says of his days in the monastery, “This is the life I didn’t want to waste” (“Haunted”). In the other, with a dazzling woman, he found no meaning; but about love, Gioia has much to say.

The naked girl in “Prophecy,” admiring herself, foreshadows all the other “naked poems” in the book, in several of which the couples are either unsuccessful in reviving their love or didn’t have it in the first place. But Gioia has more for us than this. “Naked” hies back to that urgency that only such a primal relation can offer and which gets sustained beautifully and wholly in poems like “The Lunatic, the Lover, and the Poet,” incredibly so in “After a Line of Neruda,” and in “Final Duet,” where Gioia’s form

and meaning coalesce brilliantly in alternating stanzas that have the same end-words.

What begins in “Prophecy” as the vision beneath the murmuring of the wasp gets reiterated in how we react to what’s around us and what we’ve created to make our American world. It’s not just that Gioia is a poet telling us about ourselves, it’s ourselves, in these poems, seeing what we might create. Some of the poems may ring despairingly, but there is hope in the very freedom we still have to improve our vision, our sense of creativity, our ways of treating ourselves in and with love. “Naked” is a starting point for the future, if indeed we will make one. Reading these poems so carefully wrought, will take us through challenging levels of the re-examined life we thought we were living.

—Theodore Haddin

Antonio Machado

Traveler

Traveler, your footsteps are
the road, there's nothing more;
traveler, there is no road,
the road is made by walking.
Walking makes the road,
and if you turn around,
you only see the path
you cannot walk again.
Traveler, there is no road,
only a track of foam upon the sea.

Translated from the Spanish by Dana Gioia

Gwendolyn Mitchell

Distance of Memory

How long does it take to bury
memory—to lose the part that defined,
to wipe away the path and space of one's existence?

Where do we go when there is no longer a place
to which we can return?

Those questions: Whose people are you?
Whose child and where are your folks from?
now mystery within.

How long does it take to lose hold?

So young that it was not yet yours
only stories that others choose to tell,
the safe parts, the things that they would let live
within their own narratives . . .
hard roads, hard roads,
bare feet on hard roads or the soft red dust cushion
summer dried paths
to corn fields or cotton fields

How much cotton would one pick in a lifetime
if all you know was cotton? Not your testimony?
Cotton dress—hand sewn—picked out of rummage sale bin.
A gathering, a gathering brings you closer, yet moves you farther
away
from the threads of these fields,
from the soft white
distance where memory has been and begins again.

Mack Hassler

Carving Up the Tree

for Wesley Marttila

He used a piece of basswood growing near
To where his Dad had made wood. With no lathe
Nor fancy tool but hours by hand he gave
That stick a second life, made books appear
Where knots had been and carved hard with sheer
Persistence till that stick began to save
The years and resurrect images the grave
Had buried deep within our rooted fear.

I think such careful carving somehow makes
Community survive. His art partakes
Of vibrancy and love while memory shakes
The gloom of time from feet and makes tracks.
Strange how a thing as grounded as a tree
Can cause us to move, believe and truly see.

Mack Hassler

Our New Oil

We now own a painting that cost
Us slightly more than our television.
“The Novice” is an oil by our friend
Judy Gaiser, done six years ago.
It shows a quilt that Judy saw
That had been quilted the year before
Gettysburg, a thirteen-year-old girl
Working on the quilt, and Judy’s
Own arms and torso in an apron
At the upper left of the picture.
The composition, mostly rectilinear,
Recedes from right to left so the head
Of Judy helping is gone. With our purchase
Came a photo of the quilt taken
At the quilt show and Judy’s summary
Of the history. She has gotten good
At painting. Our purchase will increase
In value. But our investment

In the history is even headier, I think.
We had just been to Gettysburg and now
Push back more by a year. That artistic girl
Had a brother with John Reynolds
Of Pennsylvania, perhaps, or even Pete
Longstreet of Virginia. But Judy’s aproned
Torso and artist hands are still with us.
The quilt itself has survived and was shown,
As I say, to be the generating image
For the painting. Our kids shall keep it,
In turn, once we are gone. Judy says
The quilting has mistakes I cannot see.
So too the painting, I suppose, and this poem.
Reynolds fell the first day at Gettysburg.
Longstreet the loser lived on to the next
Century. The novice quilter must be
Imaginary. Judy, her husband, my wife

And I drank wine together last evening.
This oil already pumps us up. I think
I am going to love collecting art.

Randall Horton

Brothers: A Short Walk Home

after Carrying Ice for Sunday Dinner by Eudora Welty, circa 1935

well past the swiveled curve the dirt road continues
lined with pallid fencepost. almost
ten years from now parchman will immortalize
these brother's names c-o-n-v-i-c-t-e-d. walking near bolton
born to a way of seeing, they are mississippi
barefooted when brogans should be
optional. perhaps,
the delta is a hot sun coruscated yellow,
there is a colorful
amber, hidden in the defiant walk the defiant ones
always analogous to time—:
say what you will about human condition .or.
who framed this photo black & white who
dictates the dictum to which
these two will jitterbug, cut a rug almost angelic
with bathtub gin burning the gut,
but that will be another epoch—
place your uneducated [self]
at the curve's bank & watch day .these boys. unfold
alongside future's promise in media res
watch: the latch of ice become weight—:
a "never-ending." future's inescapable past.

Holly Day

Hidden

on hands and knees, I drag the rope behind me, carefully
marking out the perimeter of our camp. A rattlesnake
watches me from the slate gray rocks
silent in the heat, wary of our presence.

the perimeter is secure. inside the rope barricade
we tie down the horses, set up
the ring of rocks for a fire, the sleeping blankets
check our guns for sand and grit.

the night comes and we stretch out
beneath the millions of stars burning holes in the sky
coyotes skulk in the shadows beyond the fire
the rattler recoils from the rough rope on his scales.

if I woke up tomorrow and found
that we were the last people on earth
that everything beyond this stretch of sand was gone
I wouldn't be surprised, and I don't think I'd mind.

Holly Day

Love

He put his dick in me and I thought
It was love. I went home and wrote his name
Over and over in my school notebook
Even painted it in the corner of the mirror
In my bedroom, "Shannon + Holly,
Shannon + Holly." I told my friends at school

That we were seeing each other, that we were
In love, that I was in love. I counted
The times we did it for them, told them, five,
We did it five times. I was so proud of myself
Because I had gotten a guy, a popular guy
To notice me, that I was not
Too ugly to fuck. I was not too ugly to fuck.

He put his dick in me every day after school
For a week, then he had his friends put their dicks in me
And I thought they were all in love with me.
My mother was so happy that so many guys were calling me,
Coming over to see me, asking if they could
Take me out for a walk, take me
Trick-or-treating, just take me. "You're growing up
So fast," she said. "Don't forget to wear a jacket."

Patricia L. Hamilton

Liminality

Cat's paws of foam scurry up the shingle,
to swipe at our bare feet, as if the sea
is trying to bat us off balance, tip us
with a splash into the deep unknown.

Across a margin of hot sand, blank
except for a few pigeons' screeds,
a line of nondescript cottages ends
at a nameless café where a man
croons Jimmy Buffett songs to no one.

The patio where he strums is empty,
bleached of promise by the midday sun.
Still, he sings for all he's worth,
here at the edge of the world.

Robert P. Hansen

The Grades Are Done

No more essays improperly formatted;
No more exams with questions unanswered;
No more pleas for leniency, forgiveness;
No more half-hearted jests of bribery—
 Sorry, the grades are not for sell.

Eyes straight ahead—ignore the cleavage—
 remember, she's a college freshmen,
 and you're a thirty-something something. . . .
The college policy allows it, but,
 you're a thirty-something something,
 and she's eighteen.

The grades are done.

No more extra credit;
No more group work;
No more pencils; no more books;
No more exasperated looks;
No more late work.

Tomorrow, the preparations begin
 for summer classes—
for summer clothes—don't take a peek,
 eyes straight ahead.

If I were fifteen years younger,
 a twenty-something something. . .
I could do the things a twenty-something something
 would do to a fresh freshman. . . .

Sigh.
The grades are done.

Eva Hung

Scenes from Hong Kong Country Parks

1. the last leaf

on a tall tree branch
the last leaf
tender
green
red
brittle brown
waits quietly for a breeze
to spread its colours
on the earth that gave it sucker

2. lichen

warmed by the sun and cooled by the morning dew
it writes its life on a rough tree bark:
a patch, pale grey
no bigger than a child's palm
hardly worthy of a human glance

3. four-note cuckoo

the wind suddenly drops
in the margins of the silent leaves
a lone cuckoo makes its notes:

go home, my dear
go home, my dear

4. brook

i am but a clear brook
on me the world's phenomena cast their images
they move
their reflections move
they dissipate
their rippled shadows vanish without a trace
i am but a clear brook

Philip Kobylarz

Effervescence

variations on a theme

The effort is that of placing a spoon—
a spoon, not silver, into the mouth
of a bottle to preserve its bubbles—
quick floating orgasms of cider, and knowing
if we ever do about anything, that
this is a myth which will keep the sparkling
liquid fermenting just as concealing a sneeze—
hand cupped for holding an egg—will restrain
the devil inside us from, tail awag, filtering out.
What to do or what to believe in to do.

What
she found under the dusty shelf, itself a stack
of dusty shelves and other such dried murk,
in the corners—balls of hair entwined in a lint
of what had been there once, but is not, any longer,
a photo of herself missing from an old photo album
rarely played back by flipping through its same
frayed pages—a photo of herself dressed as a fairy
with Grecian headband, lighting a birthday
candle on a cake that was perhaps hers,
probably not. Visitors, we are to ourselves,
with nothing else better to do.

Philip Kobylarz

Sweet Nothings

The day she
has a fitting
for a new dress
she hides
a note, not
even a letter,
under the bread
box, a stain
on the table—
ring of dried
wine. The time
a watch stops.
Sound
of a cat's throat
beating as it asks
to be let
through the window.
Crucifix of silver
on the blush
between her
breasts; she feels
the missing heat
of his breath
and of his
hair there.

Philip C. Kolin

Spring Break

spring break unlocks
the air

from the bonds, bounds,
boundaries of grasping gravity

dandelions like shepherds'
wool sheared in the wind

twirl and spin
spin and twirl

caterpillars trick the grid
of earth's soiled threads

for an air concert
speckled flutes, sunshine strings

mendicant brown pelicans
play st. francis looking

for a feast of daily bread
floating in a cloud bank

two human jellyfish
parasail through the folly of phyla

over the gulf stretching for air
waves blowing kisses to the stars

Philip C. Kolin

A Winter Day on Panama City Beach

the yellow weather flag hoists
hosannas to the winter morning sun

a widower tips his fedora
to the frilly waves reciprocating

their taffeta smiles rustling
glee at his courtship

cistercian gulls process
in snowshoes imprinting prayers

all across the sands
blue plastic trash cans roll

over memories of summer's
empty bottles of suntan promises

a snowbird with a balding beard
hopes the winds today

will bring the fish closer
to shore where his net waits for

riches late in the afternoon—the sky
freezes into a rainbow of marbled saffron

at sunset the sea bundles
its waves for the long journey home

Ron McFarland

Wildfire in Florida

No one knew how it started,
least of all me, age ten,
ignorant of matches for all
practical purposes, but there,
there it was skittering among the
June-dry longleaf pine needles
and brittle palmetto fronds,
flickering full of its own intent,
and Johnny Prine, who was three
wise years older than I, knew
we could fight it off by ourselves
with shovel and rake and maybe
the green garden hose if we could
get it to reach by joining the one
from the back yard with the one
from the side yard, but un-
fortunately, we didn't
know our limits.

M. A. Schaffner

Route One-Thirteen

It wasn't a hawk but a young eagle
standing by the shoulder with a road-killed deer.
We passed at sixty-five; I just had time
to see the two and note how the bird danced—
it doesn't walk that well and lifts its feet
in what looks like a slow jig, or maybe
what a player might do in the end zone.
I don't find this far-fetched. What should it feel
with so much meat and no other creature
likely to go for it? Meanwhile the deer
lay as if running on its side but stunned,
eyes still open, perhaps still alive
thinking this a dream that began badly
with a tap on the haunch while trying to cross
an open space it often cleared but now
could only observe while off to its side
the bird gave a cry and held out a wing
to shade it, or else for better balance.

M. A. Schaffner

It's All a Joke till You Get Back to Work

Dogs chase runners when they can get at them.
It's not always an attack—it can be
a desire to run along, or to herd.
This morning someone's pet came after me.
I just stopped and waited for the owner,
who apologized because that's our way
in this genteel suburb. I had an image
of several of us rounded up in a group
with all the neighborhood dogs scattered round
deciding for us where we had to run.
I'm not sure where we'd go—maybe there'd be
special parks for people where we could play
and take turns laying down our special scents,
unlike our real meetings in the office.
It was a silly thought, and yet the dog
seemed more diligent than I had ever been.

William Wright

Question

A black wolf followed me
through a snow-roofed wood.

We went on for miles through the limb
creaks, the windrows and wet-crisp

footfalls. Silences. I came to know
her heart—I came to know she carried it

in her mouth. She meant no harm, this gift.
We climbed a hill of trees for many hours.

Then, a clearing, a field of cabbage. Distance:
one lit window, one lantern.

Here she let me pet her withers,
her warmth. I watched her throat pulse

in that tiny light, her eyes emerald against
the field. That far ember: a fire,

the promise of bread. She turned back
into her wildness, the barren wood we'd left.

I watched her go. Tell me: How, in dream
and on waking, did I feel an absence

so complete that, just then,
I would have followed her into death?

Kendall Dunkelberg

Beso con Lengua

Back when I lived in Chicago and still ate meat, my roommates and I loved to go to taquerias, where you could get real barrio food, not the Americanized fare that passes for Mexican in Mississippi. Yet my roommates never dared to try my favorite, tacos con lengua, a cross-cultural glossolalia wrapped in tortilla.

Tongue wasn't so foreign to me. My mother grew up eating it on the farm and passed it on to us, buying gigantic beef tongues, studding them with cloves and boiling them in her biggest stock pot. We loved to eat it hot with horseradish or cold in a sandwich, the sensation of the cow's big, tender taste buds on our own was our favorite part, a culinary french kiss long before we became aware of the opposite sex.

Still, now that I've moved to the South, I'm glad I've become a vegetarian. I don't have to draw the line at chitlins: somehow, intestine on intestine doesn't have quite the allure of tongue touching tongue. And I really have no desire to suck the flesh from between the toes of a pig, pickled or otherwise.

Yet I have to admire the honesty of using every part of the animal you eat, in the way that as a boy I admired the idea of the Get Smart Sandwich at the drive-in in Belle Plaine, Iowa, but never could quite stomach the reality of scrambled brains on a sesame bun.

Kendall Dunkelberg

Burying the Bed

After Great Aunt Ruth's funeral,
Uncle Ted hooked a bucket on the tractor
and dug a pit in back of the house.

Everything the family didn't want
or hadn't claimed, he carried through her kitchen
and piled in the hole.

Pots, pans, cast iron skillets
Photo albums, his father's suits
that his mother had saved,

their old TV and Lay-Z-Boy,
rugs, end tables, tax forms, reproductions
of oil paintings, slippers,

even the kitchen table
and chairs, and finally their old
iron bed with the mattress

and box springs still on, floating
atop the detritus of their lives
like a toy boat tossed on the waves.

No one wanted this reminder
of their own generation, no one
was willing to sell it either.

Instead he doused the pile with gasoline,
tossed on a lit book of matches and watched
the history of the farm go up in flames.

When the wind picked up, the fire
nearly leapt to the house, until he ran to the tractor
and pushed the mound of dirt over

the scorched grass then as the bed still smoldered,
filled in the pit, crisscrossing the smoking
ground to tamp it down.

The next morning nothing was left
except an unnatural rise, like a giant's grave,
black and still smoking in the yard.

Ken Letko

The Comfort Clasp

Clasp your hands in front of you,
all your fingers interlaced.

One thumb rests across the other thumb.
Which pinky is on the bottom?

Breathe deeply: once, twice.
Then rearrange the lacework,

placing the other pinky on the bottom
and the other thumb on top.

There seems to be a right way
and a wrong way for each of us.

This may be a social gesture,
signifying relaxation and calm.

It may be a prayer ritual remnant
or a lingering habit begun by accident.

Rainer Maria Rilke

The Bed

Let them believe that any woe we're bound
up in can be shed there in privacy.
No theater like this one's to be found:
lift up the curtain—high—and there will be,

before the Chorus of the Night—which start
to voice their broadly endless song—that Hour
when lovers who are lying in her power
will rail at her and tear her dress apart.

They'll do it for that *other* Hour's sake,
bridling in the background, writhing, twisting—
one those *she* holds can neither still nor slake.
The Hour of Lovers bends toward that resisting

other Hour that at least
has what she found once in *her* lover, yet
more menacing, imbued with greater threat,
committed (and removed) as in some beast.

Translated from the German by Len Krisak

Magdalena Cassel

The Pilot

It takes two arms to lower himself
into his chair, threadbare and brown.
He can feel they are his arms, that eight decades of him
bunch around strained tendons
and silt in his veins. Their spent skin
puckers like cellophane, in dimples of tiny lines.

The chair embraces his back,
cupping him cockpit-close, and he watches the light
splinter in his wife's crystal figurines. The faceted giraffe
dapples the table with refracted sunset.
He saw one in a zoo once,
wanted to touch the sinuous arc of the neck
and level with the shy black eyes. Now giraffes are all
a knickknack his wife dusts, pretty with evening light.
The continents where he flew and fought—
whole continents slowly dissipated from his life. Then the cities
which he had known but not made his,
all cities but this one.
This is his theater now, this living room, where he rests after dinner,
the difficult navigation of his body past the table, into the chair.
He shifts his ankles, narrowing his mind
to getting one slipper off, then the other.

This accomplished, he tilts his head back,
and as he gives himself up to sleep, he sees again
the world through the arc of a windshield,
the dull green nose driven before him, up,
cleaving through cloud, and then the breaking point—
green alchemized to molten gold, and everywhere sunlight.

Notes on Contributors

Kimberly Allen is contributing editor of *Valley Voices*. She works in the MVSU Office of Sponsored Programs as a Grant Specialist. She earned a master's degree in English from the University of Akron (Ohio).

Angela Ball is professor of English in the Center for Writers at the University of Southern Mississippi. She is the author of five poetry collections and the recipient of grants from the Mississippi Arts Commission and the NEA. Her work has appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Ploughshares*, *Poetry*, *the New Republic*, and *Best American Poetry*, among other publications.

Robert Bunce rides his old motorcycle in and around Tate County, Mississippi.

Magdalena Cassel's poem, "The Pilot," is taken from her manuscript-in-progress, *First Person*. A graduate of Amherst College, she currently lives in Chicago, where she works as a computer programmer.

Michael Catherwood's book of poems *Dare* was published by The Backwaters Press in 2006. His awards include Intro Journals Award for Poetry from AWP, two Lily Peter Fellowships, the Holt Prize for Poetry, and National Finalist for the Ruth Lily Collegiate Prize.

Holly Day is a housewife and mother of two living in Minneapolis, Minnesota who teaches needlepoint classes in the Minneapolis school district. Her poetry has recently appeared in *Hawai'i Pacific Review*, *The Oxford American*, and *Slipstream*.

Kendall Dunkelberg directs the creative writing concentration and the Eudora Welty Writers' Symposium at Mississippi University for Women. He has published two books of poems, *Landscapes and Architectures* and *Time Capsules*.

Dana Gioia is the author of *Pity the Beautiful* and three previous poetry collections, including *Interrogations at Noon*, winner of the American Book Award. He is also the author of three books of essays, including *Can Poetry Matter?*, a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award. From 2003-2009, Gioia served as Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts. He currently lectures at the University of Southern California as the Judge Widney Professor of Poetry and Public Culture.

Theodore Haddin, a professor emeritus from The University of Alabama in Birmingham, is the author of two poetry books, *The River and the Road* and *By a Doorway, In the Garden*. He has published articles and reviews on American literature.

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Mack Hassler has just completed a term as department chair of English and is returning to teaching and writing after many years at the Kent State English department. Mack's son, Donald Hassler, is one of the main scientists with an experiment now down on Mars.

Randall Horton is Assistant Professor of English at the University of New Haven. An excerpt from his memoir titled *Roxbury* is published by Katty-wompus Press. Triquarterly/Northwestern University Press will publish his latest poetry collection *Pitch Dark Anarchy* in spring 2013.

Eva Hung was born in Hong Kong and received her Ph.D. from London University. After serving for some 20 years at the Chinese University of Hong Kong as Director of the Research Centre for Translation and Editor of the journal *Renditions*, she left academia to pursue her own interests. She now divides her time between Hong Kong and England.

Philip Kobylarz's work appears or will appear in *Connecticut Review*, *The Iconoclast*, *Visions International*, *New American Writing*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Poetry Salzburg Review* and has appeared in *Best American Poetry*. His book, *Rues*, is forthcoming from Blue Light Press of San Francisco.

Philip C. Kolin, the University Distinguished Professor at the University of Southern Mississippi, has published over 30 books on Shakespeare, Tennessee Williams, Adrienne Kennedy, Suzan-Lori Parks, David Rabe as well as five poetry collections. He is also Editor of the *Southern Quarterly* and Publisher/Editor of *Vineyards: A Journal of Christian Poetry*.

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Ron McFarland grew up in Cocoa, Florida and graduated from Florida State. He now teaches in the English department at the University of Idaho. Pecan Grove Press published his fourth full-length book of poems, *Subtle Thieves*, in the spring of 2012.

Gwendolyn A. Mitchell is the author of *Veins and Rivers* and *House of Women*. Her poetry has appeared in a number of journals and anthologies. She received her MFA in English from Pennsylvania State University. She currently serves as Senior Editor for Third World Press in Chicago.

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Patrick Pritchett is the author of *Gnostic Frequencies* and *Burn*. He is a Lecturer in History and Literature at Harvard University.

M. A. Schaffner has poetry recently published or forthcoming in *The Hollins Critic*, *Magma*, *Orbis*, *La Reata*, and *Prime Number*. Other work includes the collection *The Good Opinion of Squirrels*. He used to work as a civil servant, but now serves civil pugs.

William Wright is author of five poetry collections, including *Night Field Anecdote* (Louisiana Literature Press, 2011) and *Bledsoe* (Texas Review Press, 2011). He is also series editor of *The Southern Poetry Anthology* and founding editor of *Town Creek Poetry*.