

# Poetry South

2016





# Poetry South

Issue 8 2016

The **W** Mississippi University  
for Women  
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# Poetry South

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Jianqing Zheng

MISSISSIPPI HIGHWAY 7

The two-lane tar road  
that takes me  
to the churchyard of Payne Chapel

in the hamlet of Quito  
to search for the tombstone of  
Robert Johnson

and to Mt. Zion MB Church  
by a back road  
along the Yazoo River

east of Morgan City  
to snap a shot  
of the Johnson granite obelisk

in fact takes me to search  
not for who or what  
about this blues singer

but for a song of where I belong  
as I transform my life  
flat and rich as this delta land.

Jianqing Zheng

EMMETT TILL

At the yearend we walk side by side  
on Grand Boulevard. As we reach  
the Tallahatchie Bridge, we stop awhile  
to watch the stagnant flow of the river.

We remain in silence, so do the riverside  
trees. The Tallahatchie River must  
have been your nightmare for sixty years.

The sky is lead gray and the west wind  
is bone-piercing. You shiver a bit.  
Then you cross the bridge, murmuring  
you want to go see that store in Money.

Seeing your figure fade into history, I  
return to the boulevard, to the streetlights  
coming up all at once like jack-o-lanterns.

Jianqing Zheng

DESERT STORM

The sandstorm roams  
on and on  
like a charging lion

that locks its gaze  
on the prey,  
its mouth open wide,

desiring to bite  
anything on its way;  
it whorls, wheezes,

whistles, heaves,  
hurls, and hoists  
itself on its hind legs

into a mushroom cloud  
to expand wave  
after wave of power

to shove in all directions,  
determined to  
wipe out the world.

Jianqing Zheng

SECOND COMING: SOUL

If  
body  
has  
a  
form

soul  
surely  
has  
one  
too

when  
body  
dies

it's  
time  
for  
the  
2nd  
coming  
of  
soul

Jianqing Zheng

CRANES ON THE PLATTE RIVER

1

bitter wind  
the honking of cranes  
in all directions

2

at the sky's edge  
a line of cranes whooping  
across sunset

3

graying clouds  
sandhill cranes  
dim into dusk

4

moonrise  
on the snowy river  
a standing crane

5

spring now  
two whooping cranes  
dance to court

6

river twilight  
wading sandhill cranes  
tinted red

7

cranes are gone  
in the blueblack sky  
a crooked moon

## INTERVIEW WITH JIANQING ZHENG

In the summer of 2016 as Mississippi University for Women agreed to take on the publication of *Poetry South*, longtime supporter Ted Haddin asked founding editor Jianqing (John) Zheng about his thoughts on the transition. Poetry South followed up with a longer interview.

**JZ:** I always had a dream to run an independent poetry magazine. When I started Poetry South, I realized that there should be a literary magazine devoted completely to poetry in the south. In the past seven issues, I tried to imprint its own characteristic by featuring a poet with an interview and his or her poems. Poets featured include Angela Ball, Carolyn Elkins, Richard Jones, Sterling Plumpp, and Dick Lourie. I think most of the poets published were from the south or connected with the south, like Dick Lourie, who lives in Boston, but who keeps coming to the Mississippi Delta and who writes about the delta. My goal is go national. Fortunately, two issues of Poetry South were reviewed and published by the New Pages whose web page helps Poetry South reach far and wide. I am sure you will advance Poetry South to an upper level, and of course Poetry South has been on an upper higher, according to some noted poets.

**PS:** What brought you to Mississippi and to Mississippi Valley State University?

**JZ:** Oh, that's a long story. Two of my college professors, Dr. Don George and his wife Nell George who taught me English in a Chinese university from 1979 or 1980 to 1982, were from the University of Southern Mississippi. They were the first American teachers we ever had back then when China opened its door ajar to the West. Nell was a stamp collector. When a classmate told her that I collected stamps too, we began to have a lot of fun talking about stamps. We kept in touch after they returned to Mississippi. Nell mailed me the American stamps, and I mailed her the Chinese stamps.

I remember around 1984 Dr. George wrote me a letter saying if I could come over to study in a graduate program in English. Because I just married my wife for a year, whom I had dated for around eight years, I was a little undecided about my future. We had good jobs. I taught English at a college and my wife was a pharmacist in a hospital pharmacy. Later in early 1989, I wrote to Don and Nell and expressed my interest in coming to the States for a degree. I thanked them for giving me a second life; it's like the second coming.

Don and Nell were like parents to us, showing more love than my biological

parents did. We were treated as their family members. I remember writing two haibun about Mama Nell, which were translated into German and published bilingually in *Chrysanthemum*, a German poetry magazine. Here's one which sounds more like a condensed bio:

## LAST WORDS

At Mama Nell's funeral held in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, the pastor gave an account of her life experience as a butcher in a slaughterhouse in New Orleans, a singer for two years with the Louis Armstrong Jazz Band before Armstrong became worldly famous, a traveler to the five continents, and a master gardener who planted hundreds of species of day lilies in her front, back and side yards. To me, she was also a pioneer-teacher of English who went to teach in China in the late 1970s and a stamp collector who, on the verge of death, uttered with great effort her last words to me: "Stamps, Chinese stamps, all yours."

funeral processional  
the pall sways too  
with the jazz band

In 1996 after an interview, Mississippi Valley State University offered me a job. Since then, I have been living and working in the Delta for twenty years though I have had a few chances to go elsewhere. People at MVSU are nice and friendly and make us feel at home. I began to write poems about the Delta and drive around photographing anything that grabbed my attention, dilapidated hospitals, abandoned shacks or churches, blues musicians' tombstones, historic sites related to the Emmett Till murder, and of course the Mississippi River.

**PS:** How have you experienced the South as a transplant from China to the Delta?

**JZ:** It's a strange thing. My wife and I began to love the South when we set our feet on the southern land. So tranquil, so far away from hustle and bustle, so undisturbed. We grew up and worked in a metropolitan city when we were in China. It has around 8 to 10 million people with more than sixty universities there. As long as we have been living in Mississippi for so long, we feel we have been rooted here. I remember in the year 2004 when we went to visit China, on our way to the Memphis Airport, we didn't talk while driving, and then my wife broke the silence, saying she began to miss home in Greenwood. Let me use a poem of mine published some years ago in *Big Muddy*, which I think can serve as an answer to your question.

## MOVING

Home is where one lives with memories—  
When we got married  
my friend let us stay in her apartment

for two years. When our baby was born,  
we were on the move—  
we lived with my parents for one month,

then with my wife's for another.  
We never felt home,  
didn't even have the privacy

to moan for a second. At night  
We were envious of the yowling cats—  
we whispered in bed

for the home within our hearts.  
When our son turned five, we had  
a one-bedroom house, yet it was not a home.

Determined for a change, we went  
all the way down to Hattiesburg, Mississippi  
and rented a two-bedroom apartment

where we stayed for five years.  
One evening I received a phone call  
that promised a job.

We moved again, this time  
to a small town  
in the Mississippi Delta where

we finally found our home, and  
our desire for moving in the past twelve years  
has become an abandoned shack crumbling year by year.

**PS:** You have been a major publishing force in Mississippi. Besides *Poetry South*, you have edited *Haiku Page* and *Valley Voices*. What inspired you to begin these magazines?

**JZ:** Oh, thank you for saying this. I feel honored and flattered. Let me tell you a story. In 2004, I went to China to visit my parents and found a zodiac card in my collectibles, which says the job that fits me can be editor and writer. It seems an inspiration. Oh my, as if I had to be born into this kind of editing and writing life. I still keep the card.

Back to the magazines. I started *Haiku Page* with a purpose to help students write brief analysis of haiku by Richard Wright, but that was not too successful. I used to run it one issue per year, published in several issues the haiga by students form University of Texas at El Paso when an art professor Albert Wong collaborated with me. *Haiku Page* has published quite a few good poets; we also published translations, haiku, haibun and brief essays. Albert and I talked about continuing it in 2016 and posted all the issues on his department web page.

*Valley Voices* has been in publication for sixteen years now. As its founding editor, my first design was to run a student magazine. After the first two issues, I realized that it might be better to switch it to a literary journal with an eye to go national. Since then, we have published many excellent poets and story writers. Now it's become a national journal as good as Poetry South, devoted to the publication of poetry, stories, nonfiction, reviews, and sometimes criticism by writers all over the world.

Honestly speaking, a few guest-edited issues were the key to success of *Valley Voices*. For example, the New York School and Diaspora issue, guest-edited by my teacher Angela Ball and associate guest editor David Lehman, brought Valley Voices to the fore when a poem from the issue was selected by Hirsch Edward for the 2016 Best American Poetry Anthology. We felt it a great honor, and of course we have to work harder to publish more good work.

I always feel as a MVSU employee and an editor, editing a quality literary magazine is surely a good way to bring national attention to our university. I also edited a special fall 2016 issue on the Mississippi Delta, for which I have received quite a few emails or calls for its rich contents.

**PS:** Your latest project is the *Journal of Ethnic American Literature*. Tell us about your goals for this publication.

**JZ:** The project on *JEAL* was a different story. In 2010 when I invited the noted scholar Dr. Jerry Ward to guest-edit a special issue on neglected or little known African American writers for *Valley Voices*, I realized it would be better to start a scholarly journal for this special issue so that *Valley Voices* can be focused on publishing creative work. The first issue came out in 2011, and we have published many excellent critical articles

on African American Literature, Native American Literature, and Asian American Literature.

The 2016 issue was a special issue dedicated to Michael S. Harper, guest-edited by Michael Antonucci, an associate professor in a university in Vermont. He studied with Michael S. Harper and is an expert on Harper. Contributors include scholars in the discipline, including Michael Bibby, Robert von Hallberg, Scott Saul, John Wright, Anthony Walton, Robert Stepto, Ronald Sharp, Heather Treseler, Elizabeth Dodd, Kimberly W. Benston, Elizabeth Muther, and also the deceased Nobel laureate Seamus Heaney.

My goal is to make *JEAL* an international journal, to publish new criticism, to be special and different. Now we have decided to publish criticism on any American writer from any racial background to make our journal more inclusive rather than exclusive. *JEAL* has also attracted subscriptions from a few first-tier university libraries such as ones from Harvard and Stanford.

Though we have give more attention to the study and criticism of African American literature (for instance, the 2017 issue is being guest-edited by two internationally known scholars, Dr. Jerry Ward and Dr. Maryemma Graham and is on Gwendolyn Brooks and Margaret Walker. I hope to run a special issue in 2018 on women writers.

**PS:** How has living in the south affected your poetry?

**JZ:** The images of the south have been grown into my mind and body, so each time when I want to write, I can't stop finding material from what I have experienced in my Mississippi life. Both life and writing have been a metamorphosis, like a butterfly from Zhuangzi's dream. In my free verse, I write about the Delta sunset, Robert Johnson's Legend, leaf-raking, shacks by the blues highway, Emmett Till, fireflies, churches, Itta Bena, country roads, road kill, storms, etc.

I also realize that especially when I write haiku or haibun, my creative thinking always associates itself with the life in the Delta. Kind of busy this year with department business, two book projects, several interviews and review essays, but now and then I will "arise and go now and go to Innesfree" of poetry writing, the most enjoyable thing to do to release me from the burden of weekly work to the "bee-loud glade" of writing belonging just to me. Let me show you a haibun about an episode of my Delta life and affected by living in the South:

## YARD VIEW

Bumblebees dance among the blooming azaleas along the fence of my side yard or crawl inside the flowers to feed on nectar and gather pollen. All of a sudden a blue jay appears from nowhere. It dives into the flowery bush and then flies away with a bumblebee in its beak. As if nothing has ever happened, other bumblebees keep buzzing or feeding. In a minute another or maybe the same blue jay comes. It alights on the picket fence, ready to catch its prey. I shoo the bird away, though I know it's useless.

morning wind  
sunshine slides to-and-fro  
on a spider strand

Theodore Haddin

CLOUDS COMING

You'd think nothing could be  
as dry as the dust in Eliot's Waste Land,  
but here we've three months of crackle-heat  
burnt-up grass and dying trees and bound  
to go on faking rain and cooling evenings.  
He looks up, neighbor Clarence, clouds  
coming, a long row of hopeful leftovers  
from the hurricane, and then turns  
back to scratching among his dry grass  
thinking he can ease the threat of death  
all around. It's a sound the sun makes  
without ever striking a note. Clarence  
goes for water we don't have, to solace  
his insistence on making it flow. We  
die here of slow, of tomato vines  
decomposed, and dirt-to-dust as  
in the poem we have to look at.  
The cloud tries to close our eyes.  
We don't know what we will see.  
Somewhere, sometime, someone  
calls from California. "We have  
fire here. Everywhere. That's  
how hot it's come to be."

Theodore Haddin

DIGGING A GRAVE

At the Oakhill the oaks and pines  
were like a great vault  
where humans still did the work  
between the towering limbs  
and shadows, and the ever-greening lawns.  
For it to be peaceful, work in the earth  
had to be perfectly drawn. How far  
down you had to go (the length of  
a shovel plus the width of the blade)  
and planks, the sides reinforced,  
the width as wide as the shovel-length.  
Digging was down, then levelling  
the ground, clear to corners keenly  
cut. No waste of earth for worms  
where a concrete vault lowers  
heavily down. It was all come  
to exactness they didn't know  
about in the funeral parlor.  
Words of the priest and softest  
velvet at the railings didn't come  
near what the shovel revealed  
with my working hands. They,  
it was, seemed to enable the words  
to float out over the cemetery's  
reaches and give lift to infinite  
sighs and tears.

T. R. Hummer

## SCARLATTI

All those years while I sat in the desert mourning  
the blank staff of the sky and the dense  
Score of the mountains on the edge of vision, I thought  
how the hummingbird darting before the ocotillo  
Was transcribing a sonata by Scarlatti—how hard  
it worked, how effortless it seemed—  
And how the falcon harvesting kangaroo mice cut  
with the incisive delicacy of a staccato harpsichord.  
And so I failed Mysticism, and received a C- in Religion  
because I could not let go of the music,  
Anathema to inquisitors, acceptable to priests  
as a poor but necessary substitute, and understood  
By the wisest ascetics as the horizonless sphere,  
Empty as resignation, bloody and naked and pure.

## IMPERVIOUS BLUE

We walked down Main Street past the barber shop  
where men's heads hovered over tents of stained cloth,  
Past the pharmacy, outside of which stood a marvelous machine  
that would weigh you and tell you the future if you dropped  
A penny in—and how I wanted to pull the lever and receive the news  
of futures that seemed inevitable: I would be homeless in winter  
Naked in an empty steel boxcar crusted with permafrost, or, shipwrecked  
and pursued by rabid monkeys, fall into a pit of spiders. But my father  
Refused, my future was not worth a penny, and we walked on  
past benches where black men in overalls sat talking quietly,  
Watching us with tired eyes as we went past, their hands hard  
from cotton bolls and wrenches, their work boots ruptured. 1957:  
There were futures no machine could fathom on the edge of their vision  
in Mississippi, not even the one in the store where we went to buy  
New shoes: where I stared through the scope at the ghost of my own toes,  
my precious white bones ghosted in x-ray far below me  
Through a wormhole of darkness wherein I could see a city burning,  
pistols cracking skulls, children bleeding, and I was one of them,  
Thrown to a curb in Chicago, Birmingham, Memphis, unconscious  
then as now, my shoeless feet bruised from white to impervious blue.

T. R. Hummer

## RECOVERED LIVES

Wasn't I a German once, sailing my miserable boat  
in the North Sea, casting my nets for lobsters?  
I remember the cold, I was always blue, I shivered  
like a dog with a seizure. Do I dredge this up  
Out of the repressed memory of the reborn, or is it the genes  
having a little party and reminiscing? My name  
In German means lobster, though the family history  
peters out at a brewery in Bavaria, a landlocked place  
Where maybe I used my boat as a trough for pigs.  
My boat was my fate for many lives, that I know;  
In Heligoland I rowed among the islands, avoiding Frisians  
for their lechery and Danes for their endless conversation.  
Nights the stars froze and floated down disguised as snow  
and my boat and I wandered from island to island, only  
Hoping for a little fire and a bowl of chowder, but the locals concocted  
fish soups of such vileness even my boat's heart sank.  
It was a long time before it occurred to me I could love anything,  
the sea of my genealogy was so relentless, studded  
With such obdurate stone. I lived and died without noticing  
much of a difference. Even the lobsters were cannibals,  
So my name devoured my name and spat itself out again.  
Now in another country the blood moon hangs itself  
Over the peaceful village, and my patient wife reminds me  
I no longer need a net, and lobsters are out of season,  
Which is code for the purity of happiness in our peaceful life,  
and we sleep entwined under blankets spread in the frame of a boat  
Which is what Odysseus should have done at the end of the story  
instead of walking to Germany, carrying his useless oar.

T. R. Hummer

SOLITAIRE

There are worse things than being awake  
at four in the morning, but it would be  
Too depressing to make a list, so I putter  
in the kitchen, wash last night's wineglasses,  
Wipe down the counter, make a coffee.  
I try to read, but I don't have my reader's  
Mind yet. I want to know more about the change  
from primary orality to literacy in ancient Greece,  
But I don't become literate myself before 9 a.m.  
In the end I put down the book. I pick up  
A deck of cards and lay out a game of solitaire.  
I lose four in a row, and by now I'm obsessed,  
I lay the cards out again. If I'd just cheat a little—  
my grandmother always cheated, and took  
The greatest pleasure in it—I could win and move on,  
but I don't. I have my principles. Not life  
But good life is chiefly to be valued, Socrates is saying,  
but solitaire is a bitch of a game. I keep shuffling  
And playing. No one is awake but me. Socrates  
didn't write: he said that. I can hear his whiney voice  
Saying other things too, like Practice music, eat your tzatsiki,  
drink your hemlock. Usually you play  
Solitaire alone, but suddenly I am playing solitaire  
with death, at 4 a.m. Who isn't? What the hell,  
Socrates says, Cheat death a little. Everybody's doing it.

Jessica Hylton

ANTIQUE WRITING

I brought an old typewriter  
To my office at school  
And most of my students  
Had to ask me what it was

I can't honestly say I did  
Much better—spending  
Over an hour trying  
To figure out how  
To get the number 1

Sure there are better  
Ways to type now  
Hell, even my phone  
Has Autocorrect

But some days thoughts  
Are too complicated  
For an LED screen  
And ink smears mixed  
With typos seem more sincere

Bill Frayer

ANATOMY OF TIME

I see many days reflected.  
The sun has darkened your face,  
left a residue of experience around your eyes.  
Our children have left their prints  
of love and worry around your mouth.

Our home welcomes the morning light  
illuminating the scuffed stairs  
and freshly-painted woodwork covering  
decades of family crises and triumphs  
refinished with weavings, clay, and bright tile  
of years lived in the Mesoamerican sun.

Our hours now exist in a different space.  
We linger over simple meals and books,  
content to sit quietly, listen, and enjoy  
the stories our children tell us  
as they hurry through their days.

Sam Barbee

## FACTORY GIRL

*- Gathering of Poets  
Indera Mills, circa 1900*

In the basement of an early-century mill,  
our coffee steams and bagels delight.  
We confer in this re-purposed story  
where posh carpet and fake wood-flooring  
dampen our mumble and the modern dance

of metal chairs wrenched under round tables.  
Quieted by a soundproof drop ceiling,  
fluted concrete columns support the loom's echoes  
overhead – what upper floor loads determined  
their circumference, buckling stress, thickness of base?

I sense memoirs of husbands and children and cogs  
interacting with forged-steel pistons. Kinfolk weaving  
linen and wools to warm anonymous realms.  
Southern pine timbers cradled her immature frame  
twelve hours each day, spun dust clogging both eyes,

constricting her vision of technology's flesh.  
She lost a finger at ten, but was given the rest  
of the day off to stop bleeding. Hair matted  
with cotton fibers, she tied it back with a strip  
from a squared-off skein tossed in the refuse.

She died one Wednesday morning, sudden whimper muffled,  
but was replaced by a sister, a mere absence again absorbed.  
A modern chandelier now dangles above us, briefly shudders  
with an unresolved pulse, like our stitches of verse,  
hemming springtime fabric sewn to gallantly wear one day.

John Gosslee

## GUEST HOUSE

I go out into the night of Los Angeles,  
the milk mixed with the dust feeds me,  
I don't know if I will return,  
the driver's hands hook the steering wheel.

The talk about man and woman  
as if there is a destination is in the traffic.  
The grocery store clerk  
doesn't know the long shelves' contents.

When I look at the graffiti, the tent city  
in front of the block of failed store fronts  
I feel like the secret that everything is ok.  
In the dream the mechanics work  
through the night to keep the machine's teeth sharp.

The billboard liquor bottles, the film icon's faces,  
the office building windows  
endlessly reflect the outside world,  
tower over the cages blending into the sex.

People ask me for a cigarette, the lighter,  
change, and I give it to them  
because I am a tree on the rising river's bank.

The DJ set goes for two hours, the song,  
the costume shop across the street,  
the lawyer in good faith with his hand  
over the bulb makes the shadow play  
while the battery bleeds out of the flashlight.

The auxiliary chord connecting the ether  
snaps at the intersection  
and I walk toward the neighborhood.

The man closes the park gate,  
the opaque horizon breathes in the soot,  
the streetlights queue the long branches,  
the open door, the shoes let go of the feet.

Richard Boada

MISSISSIPPI WINTER CROWS

I'm trying to harness the arrangement  
of the cosmos and the new

republic of distant light  
that will unlatch you

from this murder of Mississippi  
crows drinking leadened city water

in the parking lot of the Metrocenter Mall,  
a monument to infidelity and palimpsests

so fragile. I keep trying to see you  
against the tundraed cement,

a gravity of cosmos belching pink  
sunlight, but instead I miss your hands

on me and the absence of their pressure  
like prints engraved forever on my bosom.

NO ONE BELONGS HERE MORE THAN YOU

You've been told about knife-fights  
with ghosts and church bells

that would remind people to drink  
water on fearlessly hot days. You knew

this town as a younger man with a new lover  
and the darkness of Mississippi highways with bruises

observing the burning fields. You've been double-crossed  
and now must brace yourself to drink again

the pattern of the levee, a wasting away of slicking clay,  
a return that threatens to undo you all over.

Janet Joyner

TWENTY-NINE NOTCHES

Twenty-nine notches carved  
on the Lebombo baboon's  
fibula evidence a tool,  
a possible mathematical rule.  
Or at least a lunar calendar,  
millenia senior by far  
than the markings honed  
on that Ishango bone.  
A past when predictions  
of the god-swallowing eclipse,  
strategically shrewd as politics,  
might have been useful,  
perhaps even crucial,  
for those anxious over who shall  
remain priestly. Or maybe it was  
was always and only menstrual  
The counting sensually consensual  
in the accounting for it. In which case,  
African women would have been  
the original editions of the world's  
first mathematicians.

Janet Joyner

THE FOOTSTOOL

By the time I came to sit upon it, the stool  
    had long ago been painted white  
and since acquired that chipped and graying effect  
of many a shoe, though my first memory

of the squat little seat—a flat wooden square,  
    its edges wrapped in wicker that arched,  
like Victorian gingerbread, down its four legs  
to accrete miniature elephantine feet—

is not so much of stool, but of tomato,  
    of the peeled tomato just handed to me, the taste of it,  
its juice dripping from my mouth and chin  
onto my bare chest and stomach, running all the way down

to the one exception to my nakedness, to the diapers swaddling  
    my bottom there on that stubby bench, legs and feet dangling,  
dangling before a tin tub filling with the red work of women  
singing at their knives and tomatoes.

Red tomato. White stool.  
    Where it all begins,  
in the analphabetic soup  
of the preverbal.

Katie Darby Mullins

YEARS LATER, REFLECTING ON A CATCH MADE AND DENIED

*“I needed justice in my life/ Here it comes”*

John Darnielle, “The Legend of Chavo Guerrero”

Did it happen, or do I just remember  
my father standing, hand on his heart,  
as the Longhorns finally won the Rose Bowl?  
Was he crying? I was, years later,

when at the end of a hard year,  
the Cowboys were in the playoffs.  
I’d judged him then, not knowing  
the response is automated: the tears  
come whether it makes sense or not.  
My husband was sick.  
I convinced myself if we won  
(like I had anything to do with it)  
this would be our year,  
this would be our year.

But we lost. And it was not  
our year, not by a long shot:  
my husband kept getting sicker  
for a long time, and somehow,  
I knew in my bones he would.

For just a minute, though, I got to live  
in a world where we won:  
Dez’s trap-like fingers coiled  
around the ball, triumph,  
epic. And in the space between  
the catch and the call, I got to scream  
with the anger and joy of someone  
who finally got a break, who needed  
it for so long, it almost didn’t matter  
and who knew it wouldn’t last.  
I got to have the righteous, beautiful fury  
of a champion, though my fingers,  
limp and pointless, clenched a fist  
in the air, nowhere near the field,  
nowhere near victory.

It was crueler, to have the blood-  
flavored taste of success, than lose  
outright. And in between each surgery,  
each tiny failure, was a lifetime,  
where I clenched my fingers  
and tried to hold on  
and was always, always  
denied, constantly reliving  
the bad call, the rotten luck.

Joan Canby

BARN

No coarse argument worrying the sky,  
no rasping throats eyeing the night,

listen to a willow's lullaby rustle  
in the fray as he begins to unlatch

the barn door. Now the Chevy parks  
beside his ten speed blue Schwinn

his labeled boxes of magic tricks taped  
shut hiding their mysteries, a helmet

for the Harley beside his German black  
leathers slighted, dismissed, abandoned,

after orders arrive—Vietnam awaits.

John Sibley Williams

NEW FARMER'S ALMANAC

Spent crops. Burnt seed.  
What should have been  
thin strips of walkable earth  
organizing this field lit  
copper by evening into paths  
is now wide open space,  
pathless. At least the world  
still smells like the world:  
dirt-rich, deliberate,  
as much oak as animal.  
Rust and old oil. Blood.  
Everything else is an orphanage.  
New. Empty. As if everything  
dies wilder than it began.  
In a kitchen watching  
men with my cheekbones  
drag machinery over  
scorched earth, someone  
who is not yet me,  
up on tiptoe, cranks  
the hands of a clock  
forward thinking  
there may be some music  
left inside tomorrow.

John Williams

IT FEELS GOOD TO FINALLY SAY IT

Wet blankets rolled under a door  
only help if you have no plans  
on leaving. The knob brands  
rings into your palm. There are  
no windows to speak of.  
Only mirrors. No pathways  
behind oil paintings uniting  
the inside and outside worlds.  
The people in the memory  
you have just before collapsing  
are strangers to you, to each other.  
They go about introducing themselves.  
A formal ceremony of surfaces.  
A terrible prayer to have known  
and known better. Nothing is enough  
on its own. Except fire. And living.  
Maybe a kiss when all you thought  
you needed was distance. Not so much  
a memory as a reckoning.  
But not that either. Not really.  
If you were a tree this would be easier  
to bear. Your roots surviving you.  
Your seeds bursting forth  
from flame. Limbs crying out  
from having tried to reach  
each other through the dry stillness.  
Maybe you would be crying now  
simply from having touched.

Anne Fisher-Wirth

[SWEAR TO GOD]

from *Mississippi*

Swear to God  
what with Billy's croup  
and the baby's cutting teeth  
sometimes I'm up all night  
baby on the boob  
me and Billy and baby  
crouching by the kettle in the steam tent

Sometimes I get so tired  
my face breaks out all gray  
and little red spots

One supper I burned the fish sticks  
stank up the kitchen something good  
Billy looks at me Mama!  
so I threw the plates to the floor  
and commenced to cry

But that sweet man—  
cracks me a beer  
scoops up Billy and the baby  
winks at me  
tells me *We'll mess with this shit later*  
puts us in the truck and drives us to the lake

*Breathe* he tells me  
*baby breathe*  
*and look at it* *just look at it*

Cynthia Robinson Young

BROWN BAG LUNCH

She fried the chicken early,  
her pan, cast-iron black,  
black as a country night.

Before the sun started baking the earth  
she cut the chicken into legs, breasts, thighs, and wings,  
its skin pale as the women she cleaned for all those years.

Fat and slime pulled and washed off,  
she salted and peppered it,, tapping off a taste with her finger,  
then seasoned it a little more,

tossing it with snow white flour in a brown paper bag,  
not the coffee color of her skin, gently laying it down in  
water poppin' grease,

chicken pieces crowded together,  
somehow avoided touching,  
fried to a golden brown,

honey colored, like her man.  
Wrapped in wax paper,  
with two slices of white bread, tucked  
in another brown bag,  
rough origami  
handed over to his work weathered hands.

This is her offering.

Sandra Kohler

## WHAT I HAVE

On the coldest morning of the year the sunrise is glowing, roseate, finely tuned. A black cat walks down the alley in the snow, picking his way. A blackbird lands in his path. The snow is tattered, patched, marled. In yesterday's cold, I was the only walker at the river: no regulars, no fishermen, no cars: one heron, hunched as I passed on the way down, erect, unfolded, as I came back. I'd like to be at the river now watching sunrise, the heron who also watches. Whatever happens, I have the herons, I think, then wonder, what ever am I thinking of? If I never walked there again. If I never walked there again, how I would miss it? We can have what we miss and miss what we have. At moments I miss my husband, who's in the same room; at moments, have my son, a thousand miles away. In the shortest email he writes there's a voice, indubitably his. There's an oblong of yellow light on the horizon, bright mystery. Does this morning's dusting call for a shovel or a broom? Should I walk or ski, lift weights or knead dough? I don't know what to touch, what to lift, what to carry with me. A small bird lands in the top of the mulberry. Its flight echoes the line of the hills, the spread of radiance along the horizon. I need a manual, a set of directions for the life I should be living; they don't exist, no one has imagined it.

Carol Was

## RECIPE FOR GUMBO

Turn up the volume on the Hoodoo Kings—  
play Tuba Skinny's "Gotta Get Me Some"  
and fill your icy mug with cold Turbo Dog.

Under running water, hold a bundle  
of shrimp fresh out of the Gulf.

Cube grilled chicken breasts  
with a sharp blade, and slice andouille  
that's been smoked for ten hours

over pecan wood and sugar cane.  
With your fiddle foot itching  
to a Louisiana beat, dice the holy trinity—

celery, onions, peppers  
green as palm fronds trailing the balcony.

Next, the roux, jewel of your dish  
needs Nina Simone the way  
a body needs a lover.

Know she'll wield her power while  
you whisk oil into flour. Inhale.  
Let the heat rise gently

as she sings, *I put a spell on you!*  
The liquid changes like candy,  
deepens to caramel.

Slide those veggies in.  
Allow them to sizzle while her song  
infuses the mélange.

You're ready, my friend,  
for the blessing—stewed tomatoes,  
and okra. Blend in the broth

with a slow hand. Don't forget  
the filé, and green onions.  
Feel the song in your mouth,

let her words warm your whole body  
until her voice becomes the gumbo,  
and the gumbo becomes the music itself.

## TOLLING

Easy to blame El Niño for strong gusts  
sweeping Michigan this evening, rattling  
shutters, unsettling the brass bells  
hanging on my back porch,

their clappers, tongues wailing  
in shocked air on a cold, cold night.  
I hear them through thick walls,  
over a truck grinding its way

down Quail Ridge, over TV clamor  
with each frightful news update from  
Paris, San Bernardino, Brussels, Jakarta,  
Yemen, Jordan, Orlando, Istanbul,  
they just keep coming—

the sounds visceral, and it feels  
like a shipwreck inside me while  
the clanging haunts this darkness  
the way it must have when

Lake Superior swallowed the freighter,  
Edmund Fitzgerald. Now these heavy  
wind-chimes toll in my head like  
distant voices leaving.

Carol Was

## WRITING WITH THE BEES

*Apis mellifera*

My gazebo must seem a giant flower, the way  
bees dip around each corner. They dance  
brushing against wood and screen, shadowing  
the angles with curtsies and bows.

Egyptians once believed bees descended  
from gods, the golden honey working

miracles. In Oslo, Norway, teamwork  
built the world's first garden highway  
for bees, but the lure here is cedar's scent,  
enticing them through cracks, dancing  
into captivity. Caught in a fragrant bower,  
they linger when I open the door allowing

escape, appeal inside too great. Wingbeats  
reach a higher pitch when the workers  
are disturbed, warning not to browse  
too close. Drawn to light straightaway,  
they skirt the windows like sun dancers.  
These must be an Italian strain descended

from the 1860 immigrants, reminiscent  
of that calmer species. Swinging  
back and forth in figure eights, their dance  
of buzz and hum rhythmic as clockwork.  
Their language, in patterned pathways  
only they can read, older than bowfins.

Alone in this outdoor fishbowl  
at night I write under a crescent  
moon, poems for a plethora of wayward  
insects that vibrate like lacewings,  
like green frogs pulsing, all wonderworkers.  
Privileged among this humble attendance

of bees, I watch their jitterbug dance  
as they graze my wrist, my elbow.  
How necessary their busywork  
gathering nectar, following its sweet scent.  
There is a longing for words with wings  
that move like a honeybee's sway

in this abundance of a scent-filled yard,  
bowery of flowers and wings, mysterious  
workings of nests and hives underway.

Bob Wickless

## AUGUST STARS

Evening again—  
A tiny wind  
Down the trees.  
Night descends,  
Two swallows, circling,  
Take residence in  
A back chimney.  
Nothing simply  
Takes me in. Space  
Eludes me. Shapes,  
Uncertain in the far  
Light of August stars,  
Could be something  
Beyond the yard—  
Maybe a doe  
By the copper beech  
(Her fawn in tow)  
Plying the reach  
Of I don't know.

## MY FATHER'S TIE

I see it now, over  
A starched summer shirt,  
Involved in the courtship  
Of my young mother.

Or, riding trains south,  
Mirrored against the dark,  
It broods about depression,  
The fate of the nation, what  
One man might do.

Once, left home on the rack  
During the first Great War,  
It understood

How a man goes away,  
Returns to the same place  
In a different country  
Embraced by difficult days.

Secretly knowing  
Some thing beyond fashion,  
It has grown darker, solid,  
More sensible  
As time has gone on.

It has even grown larger—  
Prominent as a plowed highway  
On a snow-covered landscape,  
While my father's pale body  
Has aged and slowly shrunk.

I envision a day  
When, bloated, heavy,  
Hideously misshapen  
And impossible to tie,  
It will slide from its rack  
In the closet  
To the dark bedroom's floor.

Then I'll pick it up,  
Finger it carefully  
As I have just done today,  
And throw it over my shoulders  
To wear like the cloak  
It will surely become—  
Until something else happens  
And I am allowed, finally,  
To pass it on.

Anne Anthony

INSIDE MY CLOSET

*What is to give light must endure burning. —Viktor Frankl*

Inside my closet, where I hang my past,  
I remove the light bulb in the ceiling  
to keep it dark, at least at first.  
The cord's been gone for years.

My closet locks on the inside.  
Both fortress and camp. I stretch against  
sleeping bags that stink  
of smoke and pond. Kick at boots splattered  
with flecks of gutted fish.  
Shuffle memories like a card trick  
in the night.

I replace the light bulb in a mid-life crisis,  
but leave it half unscrewed.  
I enjoy cursing the darkness.

A night will come when my heart feels ready.  
To tighten that bulb to a slow flicker,  
and a flash. To twist harder  
to a glow and a glare.  
To burn myself,  
to feel past pain  
and release my hold.

For now  
I shrink from blinding light.  
Rearrange wire hangers  
in search of something —  
to hold,  
to try on,  
to test the fit of a moment that's happy,  
something thick with deep pockets,  
something warm to beat the cold,  
something downy to lift and comfort  
for these final days  
inside my closet.

Becky Gould Gibson

BRIDGE PARTY

I used to wonder where the bridges were  
and where the ladies went once they got here,  
a narrow footbridge, I supposed, over  
a bottomless chasm with a river

rushing who knows where, nothing whatever  
to catch them if they fell, the sheer terror  
of watching them fall, all the while Mother  
balancing her best bone plate of finger

sandwiches she'd spent hour after hour  
cutting into shapes. Diamond. Heart. Clover.  
Did the ladies understand the danger  
they were facing? When I tried to holler

out a warning, I made not a sound, poor  
lungs gone dead, all I could do was wait for  
Dad to reel in the bridge and deliver  
them all from oblivion to parlor,

Mother bearing the bone plate like armor,  
sandwiches her trophy, now poised to pour  
coffee, serve up fluted pastries on her  
grandmother's porcelain. Oh, for one more

afternoon of bridge like that one! Mother  
the mistress of illusion, such splendor  
she managed on little money. Father  
the demi-god in denim who'd save her

if she needed saving. A pretty pair  
who seemed to live on air and each other,  
and who, for all I knew, would stay right here  
and always be exactly as they were.

George Such

AIRPORT BAGGAGE CLAIM

People push to the edge  
of the conveyor belt,  
stainless steel carts  
threatening shins,  
a fence of bodies  
blocking the view  
of the moving bags –  
so difficult  
to step back  
and wait  
for what is ours  
to come to us.

Grayson Jones

## A GREATER HARVEST

Seeds hold promise.  
First shoots of green evoke wonder.  
Eating the first sugar snaps, right off the vine  
is the culmination;  
effort leading to reward.  
Life doesn't always deliver that.

I am a farmer's daughter.  
I can drive a tractor, bushhog a field,  
side-dress the corn and beans.  
I learn patience through the seasons  
of planting, tending, waiting for fruition.

I reap a spiritual harvest greater than the physical.  
I feel accomplished, self-sufficient, whole  
even when a late freeze or drought deals a loss.

Grayson Jones

BLUEBEARD'S GARDEN

I am afraid to enter.

Large, palmate leaves of squash  
reach to my waist. Okra is head high  
and sunflowers tower above me,  
yellow faces reaching for the sun.  
Tomato vines spill out from their wire cages,  
drooping with red fruit.

All prickle as I creep through  
this fecund profusion  
to gather the ripe and ready to eat  
causing my skin to itch.

It is a risky harvest. I dare not go  
to the far end where hang gourds  
whose shapes I ponder—  
heads on long, stretched necks,  
headless, ample-hipped women.  
Trailing vines are smothering all,  
tendrils wrapping 'round...  
reaching for me.

Grayson Jones

STEVENSON, ALABAMA

Watermelon, red and crisp,  
juicy goodness dripping down chins,  
seed-spitting contests,  
watermelon-rind-teeth grins,  
all from that bulging, green-striped oval.

Taken from the spring branch  
running by Aunt Dimple's yard,  
its icy cold sweetness  
robbed summer's heat,  
purveyed happiness.

Later, as dusk settled,  
lightning bugs danced and courted on the lawn.  
We squished their glowing abdomens  
onto our fingers and earlobes as luminescent jewels.

I was too young to know of uncertainty,  
of the difficulty and brevity of life.  
On that summer night, I was safe, secure  
and full of watermelon.

Mary Hennessy

FARMER'S MARKET, THE WHOLESALE BUILDING:  
RALEIGH, NORTH CAROLINA

January

a mental map as I go—in case I find something. Find what  
I am looking for. Find my way back  
to the lady with a painter's cap  
and five beets for a dollar—a bread crumb  
trail unreliable in a hungry world. Shit, are we lost?  
A woman wearing a wine-colored burka touches my arm. Asks  
if I want to split 20 pounds of zucchini—no cellophane  
here, nothing between your skin and what you came for.  
Lost in the math of that much zucchini, I hear  
“tomates, tomates, tomates,”  
a song sung to small sturdy women who call back in unfamiliar  
dialects as they hurry like sandpipers with tiny steps running  
toward, then away, from the tide. They weave  
in and out like dragonflies and heave dollies heavy  
with cardboard boxes of spinach greens instead  
of new refrigerators. They carry loads of daikon radishes  
like firewood next to their breasts. Two baskets of broccoli  
at two dollars a basket. I hold out four dollar bills as thin  
as the morning light. An old farmer, a commotion in overalls, hands  
me back a dollar and winks. My cheeks color like well-oiled beets  
in a hot oven, like a hand full of sweet plums, come  
summer.

Ann Fitzmaurice

COMPANY

You are alone?

he asked, placing cup to saucer  
turning to leave, mute of answer.

I? Alone? No not me.

Here is the salt shaker, there the pepper, black.

Here are my thoughts, there they come to the page.

Here is the sun dappling across the table  
to illuminate my party.

There are my dreams dancing lovingly within my

head offering company to my desires.

Now comes the soft rub of the street cat.

He knows a good audience, a companion lost

in conversation of thought.

Nancy Benjamin

IF ONLY

I were a Tarheel  
born and bred  
instead of a come-lately  
from New Jersey  
oh, the tales  
I would spin--  
of growing-up years  
on a dirt road  
where no one ever came  
except maybe a Bible salesman  
with scuffed-up case  
selling the one book  
everybody already had

I'd describe  
church dresses  
of itchy muslin  
copied from pictures  
in the Sears catalog  
and stitched by Mama  
on her treadle Singer,  
summer mornings  
picking blackberries  
for Grandma's cobblers  
and blueberries  
for pies.

I'd sing of dusty  
walks to town  
on Saturdays  
with my brother  
past Ben's store  
with one rounded  
gas pump  
and nodding old men  
in rocking chairs  
on our way to see  
Hopalong Cassidy  
at the Rialto

My grandfather  
irascible and whiskered  
would have a battered still  
hidden deep in woods  
where I was NOT  
allowed to go  
whose moonshine  
was so fine  
college boys came  
from miles around  
so they could make  
purple punch  
in garbage cans  
for parties

But I grew up  
on paved sidewalks  
and Birds Eye vegetables  
and was way past college  
when I first drove down  
to find lakes and woods  
and Blue Ridge Mountains  
pitchers of sweet tea  
steaks served in skillets  
Blue Heaven basketball  
and goodbyes so gracious  
they were invitations  
I wanted to accept.

KB Ballentine

ALMOST EVERYTHING, ALMOST NOTHING

Thirty minutes through the valley, halfway up the mountain,  
past ridges and hollows — places cops won't go — past  
plywood and plastic sheeted houses, soil thin and rocky  
between trailers boasting faded flags for curtains until I  
get to her home — the student who made me weep with  
poems so beautiful. *Birch branches scratching sky/  
obscure violets tempt rumor/ something like love in the  
hesitant snow.* Here are her school books, school work,  
papers the State says take to her, but the family won't let  
me in — father, uncles sit outside, screens of smoke around  
their heads, beer cans — some rocking in wind,  
others crushed — clutter the peeling porch. Dogs powdered  
with dirt pant beside concrete blocks. Mama walked away  
from this mess, left her baby girl and three others. And  
my girl (my girl) comes to the door standing wide in  
this October sunshine, won't look at me as we find a place  
away from the men. Watching. Dandruff dusts her  
scalp, blonde strands struggling in the breeze as she  
consumes the bits and pieces. But x times y means  
nothing when baby sister cries, and she steps past her  
brothers playing swords in the yard with —what's that?—  
rusted car fenders. Umber, scarlet in the trees grip winter's  
promise, air cooling as evening comes. She emerges from  
the dim interior, baby and bottle in arms while I flip pages  
under the mountain's widening shadow.

KB Ballentine

MORE OR LESS, LIGHT

*What power has love but forgiveness.* William Carlos Williams

Fog. Morning breaks  
somewhere beyond this mist,  
this haze that saturates, seeps into my skin.  
I know you're already there —  
nuthatch, wren warbling you awake.

Warm, this November clings  
like a summer evening,  
twilight reigning the unbroken hours.

When these dewy pearls dissolve,  
I will reclaim the day —  
no matter that roses blooming by my porch  
will wither with December's frost.

For now, they beckon, a bit of hope  
escaping winter's gloom.

William Reichard,

## WHAT MY MOTHER HEARS

Words fall away from her ear           but music  
lives on in her bones, in the bass flooding up  
through the worn hardwood floor.    She knows  
people are talking to her           or at her  
and she reads lips passably well       but sometimes  
she stops looking at the lips as they mouth the words  
she doesn't care to hear.           Sometimes  
she leaves the hearing aid on the nightstand  
with her rings and hand lotion.       Ninety-one years  
of wanting, children tugging at her sleeves,  
people shouting, and bad news.       She hates  
the telephone, enemy with a cord and a bell.  
It carries voices full of sadness       or bitterness  
or conversations constructed only to check up  
on her, see if she's still breathing.    What falls  
away from her ear is nothing.       Words.  
The world is full of them.           She has sought  
quiet her whole life.                In her mind  
there are sounds, days full of sentences, memories  
she can finally replay, find where the mistakes  
were made.                            Maybe fix them.

Grace C. Ocasio

## GREAT-AUNT RUDY

Could it be your rant was not meant for me but for shadows tugging  
at your sleeves? Paddy rollers you might have dreamed—your mind  
consumed by the vision of you as Negress—petticoated, shifted, and  
jacketed during slavery?

I always believed your words could overturn injustice like a mother  
right siding an upside down child.

The smile you wore most days was crooked as a broken hook-and-eye  
door latch, but I sought you out anyway, implored your hands to tell  
secrets of your girlhood in South Carolina.

Did you seek shelter in brooks near your childhood home?  
Could brooks offset flickers of white hands dismissing you  
when you entered five-and-dimes?

After you departed my home, I kept your wash basin, perhaps to begin  
an ablution of our past, a way to untap our tricky connection until it  
teemed, fertile as a rain forest.

I wanted to consult you like an older sister, wrap my arms around you,  
as though you were a live oak, infuse your sap into my veins.  
At times, your glare uprooted my heart, turned its soil to soot.

But then, I discovered your artful tongue's stories of how you  
apprenticed under Dr. W. E. B. Du Bois, groomed students to hammer  
tent poles in front of courthouses, mechanics' shops, ice cream parlors.

The day you left my home for the hospital I found the pixie-girl photo of you.  
The pixels of your eyes shined tawny-olive as a wood thrush.

Those days you lived with me, I sunk your red clay deep into my nails,  
inhaled, never exhaled it, spread your loam all over my skin  
like a lotion that never expires.

Angelina Oberdan

TO GRIEVE EACH BALE OF COTTON

In the cotton warehouse, abandoned  
bolts of cloth are piled by happenstance,  
and in the glare of the December sun  
that sneaks in through an ajar door,

they are reminiscent of human bodies:  
pallid skin drawn over skeletons and left  
as if there had been a pestilence,  
forgotten, not grieved over.

It's the outline of that fabric,  
hours of thread and days of cotton  
woven and then left to draw gray  
and dust. It's the uselessness

of the men's last days at the looms.  
It's the unexpected end, too fast to sell  
or put up or store or make terms with.  
Somehow, it seems a petty simile

for the loss of children, whose massacre  
is being reported on the radio, who must have  
huddled when the gunman entered  
their classroom, whose bodies

must have cowered and piled together,  
the paleness of the linoleum and their faces  
bone gray. We're blessed  
those children's bodies haven't been left,

but have been clutched again  
by mothers, kissed in their coffins.  
And girls caught by a car bomb  
in Afghanistan, their remains, shattered,

seem to have less relation to these current crises,  
but their mothers and brothers, too,  
will parse through piles of car litter and asphalt  
to claim what little of their daughters and sisters

is left: a piece of white cotton from her shirt, a reaching  
hand. I want that I could understand every one,  
every child lost, every livelihood dead  
without weighing them: better or worse,

light or heavy, cope-able or not, here or there.

But wouldn't I be wrong to grieve each sodden bale,  
askew in the warehouse, to lift each  
and look for something already gone?

Sally Zakariya

## DRIVING TO FRONT ROYAL

We would take Route 55, the slow road,  
the real road, the road where people live  
and work and shop—*Reduce speed ahead.*  
Gainesville, The Plains, Marshall, Markham,  
Linden—names like notes strung out  
along a line of song.

We'd stop at the Marshall Diner for coffee  
and pie, an Edward Hopper sort of place  
now flanked by franchise restaurants.

The cottage, board-and-batten A-frame,  
sat on a hill, and from the deck we'd  
watch light move on the mountains,  
daytime shadows shading into night.

There were more stars then, before  
the place swelled into brash brick houses  
with swimming pools, and never mind  
the Shenandoah winding serpent-like  
just a short walk down the way.

Driving home we had to say good-bye  
to 55 half-way and merge onto the rush  
of Route 66, sure sign the time had come  
to merge back into our weekday selves.

Sally Zakariya

THE THINGS HE LEFT

Books mostly, history, politics, and classics  
the real thing, Latin and Greek  
he taught them years ago to privileged  
prep school boys in Tennessee and still  
read Cicero and Horace in the cafeteria  
at lunch, or so his colleagues told us  
when he died

Also handwritten recipes copied from old  
Gourmet magazines—dishes he wouldn't make  
but savored in the contemplation while he ate  
his corned beef sandwich, imagining perhaps  
a Roman banquet

And Southern blues and jazz on brittle black  
discs, music of his childhood and mine  
Bessie Smith, King Oliver, Lead Belly  
music in the names

He left friends at the deli, carpool and library  
mates, cocktail parties where he beguiled guests  
with his stories and his laugh—and once swigged  
jiggers of maple syrup when the whiskey  
ran low

He left early, before his time, left us three,  
mother and the girls, lost in our own  
quiet blues

Helga Kidder

AT ST. MARY'S CONVENT, SEWANEE, TENNESSEE

*Wouldn't it be easy to die here*  
my friend says, looking down  
on forests of aspen and oak  
fall brushes with golden haloes.  
Charcoal clouds striate the sky  
as wind pinches leaves to let go.

Wonder who named the roads  
we've left behind:  
Rattlesnake Springs Lane,  
Rule of St. Benedict Circle,  
Angel's Rest.

Here we learn how to grow  
edible landscaping: Plant Jerusalem  
artichoke next to marigold,  
nasturtium between squash,  
allium among red Russian kale.

*Ora et labora* -- the nuns believe  
in prayer and work. Hands seeding dirt,  
seeds lifted to heaven  
as leafy plants, flowers, all edible  
kinds of prayer.

A nun, bent over the bar  
of a walker, strolls her tabby  
perched on the seat like a lady in waiting  
through the hall leading to the door,  
showing us the way.

Amy Ash and Calista Buchen

## GRIEF AS INSTRUCTION

process, ruminare, sorrow, undertow  
lesson, follow, warning, order

Carve an arc into the floor with your foot, defiant grin in the grain of the woodwork.

Gather willow branches and dried oak leaves for the altar.

Grow hollow in the evening, fast into burn, into ache, into quiet.

Breathe in this fever, this flush.

Find a way wade through this stream of bedsheet, of moth-wing.

Pretend to sleep. Pretend to eat.

Drink a glass of water. Just a sip. Now another.

Become liquid, become thaw.

Turn away from the bathtub, the hard curve of its jaw. The throat that thirsts.

Become cave. Be the yellow glowing in the darkness.

Stay quiet and close your eyes. Breathe deeply. That's it. Again.

Allow your voice to rise into orchestra, double winds and brass. This music your sorrow owns.

Arrange the chairs. Arrange the flowers. Arrange the photographs, the pens, each memento pristine and ridiculous.

Wave your arms. Faster, faster. Consider the jump.

Hold the cry of the violin in your collarbone.

Bend into wind. Break.

Bury the sounds in the backyard, the small hills marked with stones and wailing, all that is left.

Sandy Feinstein

IMAGINE IMPATIENS

great red blooms  
open before the sun  
has blinked away  
summer's dew.  
Gravity cowed  
by fuchsia, stems  
raised in defiance.

But deer take no note,  
nibble precipitous leafing  
as woodchucks nuzzle roots.  
Then will this Busy Lizzie  
become a Patience Plant?

If it can adapt,  
slow its spurts,  
anticipate frost with torpor,  
quick-sprout green with rain,  
I might lend a net  
against voracious does,  
maybe even splint a stalk.  
Then together we'd defy  
our fallen petals.

Sandy Feinstein

HERALD, SPEAK

I hear the news as a series  
of continuous chirps,  
each added near squeak labored,  
slowed as if it were an effort  
to keep it up, yet fatal to pause.  
Too many in succession  
to be a count of eggs,  
or fledgings returned,  
or even of those who trespass.  
Has this small bird  
the temerity to scold  
a cat or squirrel,  
match its voice to their claws?  
Yet here we are again,  
neighborhood threats unheard,  
disbelieved, ignored.  
The song should be enough  
to keep the cat at bay,  
or prompt the squirrel to pad away.  
But our noise is too constant  
to stop  
a savage machine  
in its tracks.  
We cannot see the difference  
between claws and guns,  
speciation  
and what is unnatural.

Rick Jordan

## FELL FROM AIRPLANE

*(On June 14, 1956, while on his honeymoon, Oran Asa Pruitt mistook an airplane's exit door for a restroom door. He fell 6500 feet to land in the cemetery of Zion Baptist Church in Pokeville, NC.)*

I am flying high  
in the best week of my life.  
I am the big man in a small ship  
and I will not shit in my pants.

First second

The last voices I heard were screams  
not like my football fans  
but like fellow soldiers  
rushing toward the common enemy.

Second second

How is it we stumble into moments of pleasure  
as we self-destruct?  
I spin and tumble, then find a balance.  
I am floating,  
soaring.  
Totally in control.

Third second

I will never see her again.  
This will hurt her so badly.  
All I will miss. All I will miss.  
And all who will laugh at my fall.

Fourth second

As time is taken, it slows.  
Faded heroes and critics appear  
to tell you who you are  
and why it ends this way.

Fifth second

It was my fault.  
I am a man of my own unmaking.

Sixth second

Almost there, I catch the eye of the grave digger.  
With no time to reflect, he is more surprised than I.  
His knuckles whiten, his eyes widen, his mouth shapes  
“What the ... ?”  
As I wonder what final impression I will make  
on this earth.

Seventh second

Sabbath.

Andy Fogle

TRIPTYCH COMPROMISE

At night, creatures seek safety under weed and rocks  
but the ray scans for them, ten feet above.

If you choose my sanctuary, leave drive hidden.  
Am I speaking loud enough? How's the mix?

*We're gonna angle off the edges of the peninsula  
cuz y'all can't agree on anything anymore.*

Tellin' you, we transform God through live words,  
as a corolla spider labors behind a grain of quartz.

\*

The man with the heart of a child heads out the door.  
Deep inside the cloud, not because of anything.

Suggestions there's something wrong with the house  
prowl the limp daylight. Who is he? The father has no son.

They come like music from hollowness,  
like mushrooms from damp.

Just like you, gutters worn out by stormwater.  
Just like you, spitting image, as they say.

\*

Only your eyes and hands to point the way,  
only the pre-dawn memories to sit the now beside.

Since my habits have had it with one another,  
whenever consciousness decides to begin,

I just hope my palms can stop reading shit into  
each other's every movement. When the raincloud begins

its licking, and the air is full of no-telling, Mother Tongue  
and Father Foot, what have you to do with one another now?

Larry D. Thacker

RE-COIL

Like a snake coiled and backing  
into its self-assumption, you can attempt  
to re-spring the mechanisms of regret,  
confess and live harder, play harder, know  
a thing clearer, like unmistakable heat-seeking.

Every few poems forward  
sets you reversed a hair, another devolution  
of sorts, a very few work good  
enough to see through to the scarred bone  
and socket, to the skin-tightened contrivances  
holding the epiphanies back.

So it's a back and forth thing you find,  
mostly without thinking, as if  
catching a trace of old helpful speech  
as you fall back in trust, *there,*  
*and there.*

Finding the moment fleeing.  
*There, again.*

But to slow is to stop, which would break  
the bones holding up the hunch you've held.

And the closer you get to the memory  
of some things the better the memory  
of how a fear smelled. But you  
left out too quickly  
with no rope. No map.

Bravely. Stubbornly. Coiled back convinced  
you could re-live your mistakes, if  
for no one else just you and that those  
you wronged would somehow  
forgive you  
magically through the fabric  
of mystic universal love you think  
waits on you hand and foot through  
intentional thoughtfulness.

*Come closer,*  
the universe says. *What do you see?*

Sarah Brown Weitzman

WHAT THE HELL

“Hi, Baby! Haven’t seen you before.”  
He’s a complete surprise. I can’t quite  
place his type but I like his voice. The way  
he slurs his s’s is charming. “Hungry?”

He’s lounging against a tree juggling  
two globes of fruit. “They’re juicy.”  
He winks without eyelids. Can’t, I say.  
“You always do everything you’re told

or do you like to discover things for yourself?”  
I haven’t had much experience but I recognize  
this is a trap question like *Have you stopped  
beating your wife?* He tosses one globe

at me. Instinctively, I catch it. It’s ruby  
skin is unblemished and so fragrant.  
“Delicious,” he assures me, his mouth full.  
What the hell. What could happen?

Janet Ford

NOW I KNOW

I know what's wrong with the world she said  
leaning on her garden spade  
by the time you've learned to live, you're dead

she held a hand above her eyes for shade  
as the sun burned higher overhead  
I know what's wrong with the world she said

still it's time to turn the earth again  
(she shook sweat the way a dog shakes rain)  
by the time you've learned to live you're dead

I'll let the broad beans climb the corn this year,  
here behind the asparagus bed  
I know what's wrong with the world she said

then the girls will come for their roses and their glads  
they'll leave with armfuls of gold and red  
but by the time they've learned to live . . .

a wave of robins lifted from the lawn  
you see? no sooner here than gone  
and by the time they've learned to love this life they're dead  
and that's what's wrong with the world she said

Notty Bumbo

WEATHER PASSES BY

People die,  
And we learn of their disappearance  
On a blustery Tuesday in October,  
The geese already off to the South,  
Leaf piles smoldering on the streets,  
The stars shift with little regard for our memories.  
There is nothing to say,  
The event too long past any limits of believable grief,  
And the sense of loss less overwhelming,  
This impossible weight of absence  
A pinprick at worst.  
We go on,  
Have coffee later that same day,  
Wondering what we forgot at the store,  
Wondering where time has gone  
While we stopped to watch a cloud.  
This passing life we lead  
Will not stop because we are running late.  
Light rises, falls, the weather passes by.  
We might call our friend, later,  
If we remember.  
If we pay attention.

Meg Eden

POWER OUTAGE

My mother's washing hairbrushes  
in the bathroom sink  
with the last of our well water.

Our black plastic hairbrushes  
with little blue balls on the bristles  
drying on my mother's vanity.

My mother, the one who had me read  
missionary biographies & adoption  
catalogues, wanting me to know a glimpse

of living elsewhere—how can she forget  
right now: those girls in Africa & China  
who don't have hairbrushes let alone water?

Soon, *we* might be without water  
unless the pump turns back on, & we've gone  
a week without power before—

I ask her what she thinks she's doing,  
my voice loud & matriarchal.  
My mother, pulling out her hair & my hair

in wet clumps, kneading baby shampoo  
between empty teeth. Her fingers  
are cracking, burning red in the water.

I never asked her for clean brushes.  
I never asked for most of my mother's gifts.  
She tells me, *I'm trying to keep a level of decency.*

Maria Reynolds-Weir

MOTOR OIL CONFSSION

I parent like a piston  
Engine, jamming my power  
Down narrow throats

My children  
They throttle forward or  
Gear into reverse.

It drives me to heat  
Fueled into explosions  
In some controlled chamber,

Sparking, though,  
As engineered to convert  
The fossilized DNA  
Into a slow burn of toxic love.

Karl Plank

AS A MOTHER WHO ONCE HAD A CHILD LOVES

God loves. As a mother who once had a child loves  
the sliver of new moon that led him to cry  
“It’s like a fingernail stuck’n up in the sky,”  
so God hears the echoes of small voices and yearns,  
for God loves as a mother.

Who once had a child loves even the rain  
that falls in the graveyard when heads are bowed,  
for frail tears do not fill an emptied heart  
and so God gives the heavens to weep,  
for God loves as a mother who once had a child.

Loves, they remain on the diary’s page  
kept at night when words gather the moon,  
and the rain that pours down  
until all is planted in the eternal womb where  
God loves as a mother who once had a child loves.

Shaindel Beers

## THE SECRET RABBIT

In the story the woman hits the rabbit on the way home to her husband from her lover's. *What does the rabbit symbolize?*

*Fertility*, a student says. *Maybe she wants to get pregnant by her lover. The death of a new beginning*, says another. *Maybe*

*she can't really leave her husband and just start over. Maybe the rabbit dying means that she is pregnant like old pregnancy tests*

*used to be.* Some students look doubtful. They have peed on sticks that show lines or plus marks, kept the time on smart phones.

*The rabbit was white*, says another. It is true. In the story, it was snowing. *No way she could have seen a white rabbit.*

The student continues, *Maybe it's the death of purity.* Other students like this theory. *But the story doesn't say for sure*

*it's a rabbit. She thinks that she hit a rabbit. It might have been a cat or a dog. She looks in her rearview mirror and keeps*

*driving. It's definitely symbolic of an ending. She can't go back.*

What I don't tell them about is my own rabbit. That I had been

drinking. That at 55 mph on a country road, the rabbit panics and runs straight toward your headlights. I don't tell them

that after this you are just as panicked as the rabbit. Who can you tell about this? How to explain where you were,

what you were doing driving three beers in at that hour. Maybe the rabbit saw the light as a rabbit hole. Maybe

it reminded him of first opening his eyes at six days old. Maybe he saw it as his escape to another world, one free

of coyotes and harsh winters. The way I always saw a man as an escape hatch to another world because

I was raised to. The way girls were given by their fathers  
to a husband to a grave and that was the only story. Until

a man just became an escape hatch to another man,  
and all the worlds were eventually the same, this one

with more yelling or less than the previous one, and me  
with no way to make a world of my own because I didn't know

how to. You don't tell them this because this is your secret  
rabbit, the one you have kept hidden in the back of your

mind for years, wondering what all it could possibly mean.

Katie Hoerth

## MY SUEGRA'S MOLCAJETE

My suegra sets her molcajete out  
on the counter, tells me that it's time  
I learned to use it like a real woman.

*Mira, mija, learn a thing or two.*

She throws a toasted chile in the bowl  
along with two tomatoes, their red skin  
blistered, wrinkled, like a sun-burnt brow.

A tejolote in one hand, my suegra  
cradles the molcajete as she grinds.

She has an urgency about her movement,  
the way she teaches me as if today  
is the day I have to learn it all  
how to take her place, to fill this kitchen  
with her commanding presence and her grace.

I have a lot to learn, I'm far from perfect –  
my hands still hesitate at the comal,  
I flip tortillas with a spatula,  
and I'm afraid to skin the prickly pears  
she plucks from our backyard with bravery.

My palms are smooth, the seeds of jalepenos  
make them burn and redden like the sun.

My suegra passes me the tejolote  
She heaves a sigh of pure exhaustion, sits  
down at the bar. Her tired body sinks.

You try, mijita. I'll sit here and watch.

I grind the stone against the stone, a little  
slow at first. My suegra nods, approves,

Rapidamente, use your muscles, child.

My wrist begins to dance, the flavors mix,  
the hues of the tomato and serrano  
blend into a muted sunset red.

A liberal shake of salt, a squirt of lime,  
I finish as my hand begins to ache.

I spoon a little on a warm tortilla  
de maiz and nod my head.

Not hot,

I say and suck in air across my tongue.

This is a salsa that she'll never try.

How does it taste?

she asks, imagining  
the heat, remembering the countless batches  
she used to slather over everything  
before the chemo therapy that ravaged  
her stomach and her appetite for life.

Delicious, with a bit of garlic flavor,  
where's that from?

The molcajete carries  
with it everything, the flavors of  
the past,

she says and grins,

and now I pass  
it all to you. It's yours.

It seems I'm worthy of this basalt bowl  
that time has seasoned to perfection with  
ajo, sal, limon, the molcajete  
her grandma gave her just before she died,

the heavy, awkward thing my suegra carried  
in her arms from Torreon to Texas --

it didn't fit inside her single suitcase,  
but she couldn't bear the thought of leaving  
it behind.

I know I'm not the daughter  
she imagined with my clumsy tongue  
a nervous pair of hands, a will to work  
outside the home, a gringa from up north  
who uses blenders, orders take-out, writes,

but still I'll carry on this molcajete,  
a tradition I'll give to my daughter  
whose values will be different from my own.  
I'll explain the journey of our past,  
the nuance of the culture that we are,  
how it comes together, blends to make  
a perfect salsa – mixed together in  
the Great American Molcajete.

Lynn Sadler

SHORTLY, HE WILL KNOW

It's the nineties, and I'm being inaugurated  
as a college president in the Northeast.

My husband and I are excited;  
we operate from the misconception that  
New England is a great liberal bastion  
with Boston as its cultural center.

The delegates are in the gymnasium  
forming the processional.  
I walk down their line, greeting,  
giving my name, thanking them for attending.  
The man representing a prestigious New England university  
looks very pleased to see me.  
"How lovely of your husband to send you," he burbles.  
I smile, shake his hand, pass on.  
Shortly, he will know . . . .

Tracy Mishkin

## ALARUM

His eyes were the wordless blue  
of a fall sky, long before winter.  
I saw them shift, limestone sliding  
into dark water.

How to design a warning system,  
keep birds from crashing against glass.

When he spent too long tunneling  
through his thoughts, his face blanked  
like a book losing its letters.

## WALKABOUT

Shall I clear-cut the past?  
Or take the same path  
through the neighborhood—  
cracked sidewalks, that hole  
in the grass where I plunged  
up to my knee? Winter  
is warm this year. Some days  
I still tip toward darkness.

A tin can bangs down  
the street. Bare branches wave  
without enthusiasm over battered  
asphalt. The creek goes underground.  
Here is a small girl walking  
with her mother. Here is  
an old dog stretching. A padlocked  
playground spattered with sun.  
The child asks, "Is this a way home?"  
The muddy footprints are mine.

Julie L. Moore

TEAR

~with two lines from Gregory Orr

It's Palm Sunday, the day he tells  
his wife he doesn't love her anymore,  
that the last few years, he's been struggling.

When she asks him about the woman he claims  
is just a friend, his eyes shine like silver coins,  
his wide smile renounces his tongue.

His wife has such a longing  
to become the beloved, his beloved,  
a longing sharp as a saw & as jagged,

a saw that a Roman may have used  
to prepare crux simplex, crux commissa,  
or crux immissa, the pole, the T-shaped gibbet,

the cross itself. He's placed her every flaw  
on her head like unforgiving thorns  
that press & pierce

as their name becomes legion.  
She envisions the people spreading their palms  
onto the dusty road, Christ on his donkey

riding forward, longing for them to love him  
for who he was, not for who they wished him to be.  
She understands she's not holy like he is—she can save

no one—but as she hears him weeping for Jerusalem,  
she weeps, too, for she knows how rejoicing  
turns to sorrow, how a vow once sincere & right

can ripen beyond its glory, letting in the thing  
that slinks between the solemn words  
& the lips that formed them,

how everything then leads to rupture—  
once the tear begins,  
even the holiest of veils rends.

N. P. Franklin

## ODE TO WHAT I AM

I am the manifest existence of your darkest moment, O Great America  
I tarnish the glimmer of your glorious beginning,  
I have long been an unanswerable question, a problem unresolved a  
    cancerous festering in your bowels;  
I have been ignored in the hopes that I might heal myself, but I have not;  
Instead, I have continued to grow, festering, spreading like a malignant  
    disease; but Dutch grew up ignorant of me — ‘I grew up in an  
    America that didn’t know it had a racial problem,’ I heard him say.  
I am segregated, alienated, despised....I am Black America  
I am poverty, I am discrimination  
I am twelve percent of the populace, yet I comprise fifty percent of the  
    nation’s poverty....see the hollow black face of poverty  
I am a negative factor of an economic forecast,  
I darken the swelling ranks fo the unemployed, the underemployed and  
    the unemployable,  
I am the high school dropout, the idle veteran, the illiterate graduate  
    used for my athletic excellence and then discarded  
I am an affirmative action quota, I am resented, hated,  
I am controlled, I am enraged that I cannot break free  
I am the ignorant struggling to survive in a jungle of illegitimate means  
I am the professional, the intellectual and the bourgeois...ours is a  
    common struggle, a common barrier that impedes, challenges,  
    intensivies;  
I am frustration void of constructive venting...I am the implosion of  
    America  
I am an American, I am proud — we hold these truths to be self-evident,  
I have inalienable rights, yet I’ve had to march en masse, sit-in to  
    demonstrate, fight, bleed, die...demand my civil rights to be  
    accepted as a man, a woman, a human  
I have legislated acceptance, tolerance — my rights are enumerated  
I am free, yet, I am not free — Big Brother watches me, my freedom is  
Unchallenged as long as I stay in my social space.

Cathie Sandstrom

AUGUST RAIN, CAROLINA

On the highway between Chapel Hill and Durham,  
beyond weathered split rails, a horse canters in the rain.  
At the fence he turns abruptly, tosses his head  
in a sudden shudder unhinging  
time and space and his essence  
comes on a current so strong I am for one  
blinding moment this roan in a wet field,  
know the intake of his breath, the damp  
weight of his mane swinging out  
from the crest of his neck; his muzzle turned  
then flung up and away, then back again.

I am coming from University Hospital's  
preemie nursery where I visit my newborn,  
not thinking that weeks in an Isolette might  
make him a lonely, separate thing. Not knowing  
how this colt's fillip of pure exuberance  
will burn into me so that years later, I can still  
see it clearly, feel it in my shoulders, jaw.

Not knowing I am saying goodbye to this  
peculiar, jubilant freedom as I watch  
a young horse rush the fence,  
give himself over to his future.

Cathie Sandstrom

## HOSPITALITY

*October, Jackson County, North Carolina*

Depressed, a heaviness slung low in my body.  
I took the two-lane road off campus to anywhere-but-here,  
looking for isolation outside to match my inside;  
knew the road, a lane, a track, would take me there.

Once-cultivated fields, ripened to pale weed-straw,  
gave way to encroaching woods, an impenetrable  
mass of colored leaf and branch like some  
tightly-worked hooked rug. Autumn in the Smokies—  
a crescendo of green to gold and scarlet at the crests.  
A series of random turns downgraded the road  
to a rutted track. Forest closed in, drawing the shoulders  
of the mountain around me like a shawl. Ahead, the partly

rotted hulk of an old Ford coupe, a rusting plow.  
Beyond, on cinder blocks chicken-high off the ground,  
a cabin, unpainted planks, its pitched roof sagging  
tiredly toward the center. An old hound got to his feet,

shambled down the steps, barked hoarsely, told me  
what I already knew: *Outsider*. I'd seen the wary eyes  
of the women watching me in the dime store,  
their children twining the sides of their mothers' skirts.

Men watched with a coldness more uncomfortable  
than frank physical appraisal. Conversation ceased  
when I got near. I never knew what they were thinking  
nor how to act around them, only felt foreign.

I threw the car into reverse too late. He strode  
out from the tangled brush, lean as a cardboard skeleton  
with one brad at each joint, denim overalls loose,  
cotton shirt washed so often the threads held up the plaid.

His eyes, deep creases at the sides and narrowed  
from hard times or superstition, leached light  
from the space around him. His thin-lipped mouth  
an ungiving straight line through the stubble of his beard.

*Can I help you?* I studied his fingers curled over the open window, several nails broken, ridged; tried to remember what nutritional deficiency this was as if that were helpful information in this place where no one ever find me.

Looking for a place to hike, I told him. *Best place is up there.* He opened the car door. *Leave the car here.* His eyes and hand hitched together like a team, he drew a line up past the empty chicken coop and along the ridge,

a semi-circle. *Bring you out about here. Takes about an hour.* Obedient, I fled. From the vegetable garden, a few frost-blasted stalks leaning crazily against each other, I could see a woman with a tub of laundry at her feet, hanging out a collection of undershirts and diapers as shapeless and dull as her housedress. They hung limply,

dripped a dark line on the dusty ground where three children played. I waved when one of them looked up but he tapped the others' shoulders and they rose as one, like flushed quail scurrying for cover. An hour later, I slid down a pine-needled shortcut to the empty side yard

jubilant; turned the corner and the mountain man stood in my path, hands thrust deep in his pockets. *You go up here to the college?* I nodded. He didn't move, gestured without looking to the open screen door. She stood,

a baby on her hip, the three children flanking her as if protecting her. *I'm sorry we can't offer you anything* That's very kind I said, but I have to hurry back anyway. He smiled slowly and carefully as if out of practice.

*Maybe next time.* Yes, I said, grateful to go. *Wait...* At some unseen signal the children broke from their mother, spaced themselves evenly in front of him, reached into their pockets, their solemn eyes never leaving my face. Each drew out a handful

of gleaming chestnuts, their rich mahogany whorls burnished from careful polishing. I opened my hands to receive them, looked into the man's face, said I wished I had something to give them in return. *No, you've been **our** guest today.*

Nancy Posey

LAST CHANCE PROM AT THE DOUGLAS AVENUE  
FIRST ASSEMBLY OF GOD HONKY-TONK BAR AND GRILL

She read about it in the newspaper sold by a homeless man who chose an honest endeavor over straight-out panhandling, the one who wore a shirt announcing on which pages he was mentioned in the day's issue: Second Chance Prom, a well-intentioned scheme by warm-hearted, clueless do-gooders who had never missed a single social event since junior high.

She remembered that year. She'd been cute then, not popular perhaps, but no wallflower either. She'd bought her dress at Sears like everyone else in those days before the mall. Dotted Swiss with eyelet lace, cap sleeves in a bird's egg blue that brought out the color of her eyes. He'd waited to call and cancel until the night before, some excuse about relatives visiting from out of town. He'd gone instead with a freshman new in town. She'd stayed home. The dress had hung unworn.

Not even daring to mention to a soul her intent, she bought a gown at Goodwill, maybe not stylish but just her size and well within her nonexistent prom budget. After all, at thirty-eight, she made few plans simple or grandiose. She'd bought her own corsage, tiny yellow rosebuds, ribbon, and baby's breath. She'd practiced her dance steps alone at night in her kitchenette, sliding on the linoleum. Annette next door agreed to do her hair, imagining a date, not an awkward charity event for the life worn and lovelorn.

The family life center at the First Assembly of God was decked in tulle hot-glued on cardboard cutout pillars. Balloons floated above the expanse, and folding tables dusted with glitter held candles and fake flowers in clear glass florist vases. Arriving early, she'd waited in the car, just to be sure she hadn't fallen prey to some schoolyard joke long past its use-by date. But soon, others arrived, in suits and ties, long, full skirts, hair in up-dos, freshly manicured nails, mostly arriving singly, few in pairs, a huge relief.

When the deejay started spinning records, not hip hop,  
not Adele or Taylor Swift, but oldies' opening chords  
evoking years long past, she looked around, caught the eye  
of another bashful, lonesome soul, stepped up and asked,  
"Would you like to dance?" and he replied, "Why not?  
I'd surely hate to miss this second chance."

## CONTRIBUTORS

**Anne Anthony** is a full-time writer and photographer living in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Her short fiction, poetry and photographs have been published in *Bartleby Snopes*, *Tell Us A Story*, *Firewords Quarterly*, *The Mused Literary Review*, *North Carolina Literary Review* and others.

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**Ann Fisher-Wirth's** fifth book of poems, *Mississippi*, is forthcoming from Wings Press in 2017; it is a poetry/photography collaboration with Maude Schuyler Clay. Ann's other books are *Dream Cabinet*, *Carta Marina*, *Five Terraces*, and *Blue Window*. With Laura-Gray Street she coedited the ground-breaking *Ecopoetry Anthology* (Trinity UP 2013). A Black Earth Institute Fellow, she teaches at the University of Mississippi, where she also directs the minor in Environmental Studies.

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**Andy Fogle** has five chapbooks of poetry and poems, translations, memoir, interviews, criticism, and educational research in *Blackbird*, *South Dakota Review*, *Natural Bridge*, *Reunion: The Dallas Review*, *The Writer's Chronicle*, *Teachers & Writers Collaborative*, *English Journal*, *Gargoyle*, and elsewhere. He was born in Norfolk, Virginia, grew up in Virginia Beach, spent 13 years in the DC area, and now lives in upstate NY, teaching high school and working on a PhD in Education.

**Janet Ford** is presently writing poetry from the stories she has collected over my forty years in rural Alexander County, North Carolina, where her neighbors have shared the stories of their lives, involving details of life on the self-sufficient farms of the early twentieth century.

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**John Gosslee** was born in Mississippi, grew up in Nashville and lives in Winston Salem. His poems have been featured this year in *Poetry Ireland*, *december*, *Rhino*, *Lumina*, and many other journals. His work was also included in *Rattle's* Southern Poets edition and in the *Appalachian Writer's Anthology* from Shepard University for the last two years.

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**Cynthia Robinson Young's** poetry has appeared in the journals, *Wellspring*, *Thorn*, *The Other Side*, and *Radix*, as well as in the anthology,

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