

# Poetry South

Issue 10 2018

The **W** Mississippi University  
for Women  
FOUNDED 1884 COEDUCATIONAL SINCE 1982

# Poetry South

Editor Kendall Dunkelberg

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Ted Haddin, *University of Alabama at Birmingham*  
John Zheng, *Mississippi Valley State University*

Assistant Editors Diane Finlayson  
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Tammie Rice

Poetry South is a national journal of poetry published annually by Mississippi University for Women (formerly published by Yazoo River Press). The views expressed herein, except for editorials, are those of the writers, not the editors or Mississippi University for Women. Poetry South considers submissions year round.

Submissions received after the deadline of July 15 will be considered for the following year. No previously published material will be accepted. Poetry South is not responsible for unsolicited submissions and their loss. Submissions are accepted through Submittable: <https://poetrysouth.submittable.com/>

Subscription rates are \$10 for one year, \$18 for two years; the foreign rate is \$15 for one year, \$30 for two years. All rights revert to the authors after publication. We request Poetry South be credited with initial publication. Queries or other correspondence may be emailed to: [poetrysouth01@gmail.com](mailto:poetrysouth01@gmail.com). Queries and subscriptions sent by mail should be addressed to: Poetry South, MFA Creative Writing, 1100 College St., W-1634, Columbus MS 39701.

ISSN 1947-4075 (Print)

ISSN 2476-0749 (Online)

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Indexed by EBSCOHost/Literary Reference Center

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Will Cordeiro

AUGUST SONG

One day the end  
of summer nears:  
all heat is spent.

Geese disappear.  
Leaf-litter covers  
water. Whitecaps

break. Clouds over  
waves collapse  
with wind's caress.

Sky's luminous,  
faint light is left  
to smudge across

far hills. In haze,  
such distance turns  
bright greens to grays.

The evening burns  
some far, lean edge.  
A star appears—

another age.  
Stray fog has cleared.  
The sun recedes.

Gold fades; is gone.  
The lake still beats  
its metronome.

John Sibley Williams

TACIT AGREEMENT WITH DUSK

The wind-smoothed surface comes alive,  
delivers its sermon of sand & want.

Flotilla of cottonmouths, blister beetles, what slept  
beneath us all this time

praying  
for the sun

that we pray to to fall.

Shadows fill with lust. Saying its name three times  
doesn't make the desert  
unfold any slower. Unseen

skins graze our ankles.

All sung out, our awe goes hoarse.

Things dislocate. Eventually, we knew the world  
would forget our place in it.

Even my name emerges from beneath  
a creosote bush

ready to strike

like my father's before me.

That we were never holy,  
only briefly lit;

never safe, only here; grateful

when it seemed nothing apart from us hungered.

Pauletta Hansel

ELEGY

All things break  
away.  
Paper loosens  
from its spiral bindings,  
the music box's key  
is overwound, even the good  
fountain pen lets loose black  
rivers. Parents divorce  
or die or both. Cells divide  
and spread inside our  
secret caves. Children scatter  
continents beyond.  
Some days  
there are miracles:  
missives, remission, clay armadillos  
lost then found  
under our Christmas trees;  
tea tins, coasters, a father's army tags  
retrieved from that vast *somewhere*  
our once precious objects reside.  
But mostly not.  
Mostly it is up to us to speak  
of ancient things, to bring  
to our neglected pages  
the smell of lavender  
remembered  
in the pillow  
where my mother's head  
once lay.

George Drew

TOAST IN TEXAS: A TRIPTYCH, IN MEMORIAM

*Here's to Paul. All told, he didn't do half bad.*  
—Paul Ruffin, 1941-2016

1. *Death, You've Done it Again, in Texas*

Death, you've done it again, in Texas,  
streaking in behind my back and snatching  
a good man—a colleague, an editor,  
a fellow poet, and though we never met face  
to face, a friend, a brother in the art.

Like so many times before, I never had  
an early warning; as always, you were cloaked,  
a scythe-armed Klingon rocketing  
in at warp speed and beaming him up,  
his atoms split into their cosmic constituents,  
an invisible rendering.

Hear me, Death—

I could curse you roundly, beat my chest,  
not because I hate you for being what  
you are, but for the way you operate,  
your *modus operandi*. I could, but I won't.  
Rather, I thank you for outfoxing fear,  
defanging dread.

Death, I thank you

for the only act of mercy you're capable of:  
a terror-snuffing last gasp of absolute surprise.

2. *Him in Texas, Me in New York*

Not long ago, as measured by a puny human sense  
of time, a man I never met in person died,

thereby depreciating the actual physical distance  
between us—him in Texas, me in New York.

Measured by an infinite space beyond all measuring,  
that smaller space, two thousand miles, could

easily be bridged, which come November, I was  
going to do, the Delta or United or American airliner

I would dream my way to Texas on deftly  
shrinking an already shrunken distance to hours

instead of days required to continentally divide  
New York and me, to meet the man who died.

How the word distance, no more than markings  
on a map, no more than a dactylic sibilance

equally pleasing and off putting, once faced  
with a specific diminution expands until

there is not one but two—two distances,  
the smaller one abridged to nothing by the other.

### 3. *Not for a New York Minute*

Like Keats, I knew something was keeping me  
from sleep, some phantasm I couldn't grasp,  
some dread. I dozed, but fitfully, and I  
woke fully informed of peril at exactly two  
past two. Only, the peril wasn't mine.  
It was his, and it claimed him at exactly two.  
In the window above my bed the moon  
smirked. The wind sneered. In Texas breath lifted  
from him like a helicopter from its fleshly  
landing pad, and not even taking time  
to hover, disappeared, all that was him  
strapped in for its long flight. I didn't laugh,  
not for a New York minute, and I'd long ago  
held out my hand to him. And he'd taken it.

Cyn Kitchen

WHEN NIGHT IS BLACKEST

waxing moon  
waxwing sliver  
silvered behind thin clouds  
flanked by Mars & Saturn  
Jupiter cradled  
in the fulcrum of Libra,  
Scorpio's poison tail  
curled in my southern window.  
I hear the owl's rhythmic  
harmony calling from  
an ancient tree. doubtful  
he knows I hear his song  
but then again  
maybe it's just for me.

IS LIKE

the whump of a cardinal colliding  
with plate glass is roughly  
equivalent to the startling news  
that mother is dead, the news  
that reverberates through me,  
reversing blood flow, screech & halt,  
then backward grinding. roughly  
akin to the shock of a two by four  
square to the forehead, that uncreateable

synapse between now & then, then  
& now, the moment her red body  
plummets, but has yet to hit the ground.

## A PERIODIC SLUG OF NOSTALGIA

spent, flattened from impact  
against hardened steel plate  
no longer recognizable  
as the before  
report, then expansion,  
expulsion, spin  
down rifled ridges  
pushed into flash  
a memory I dare not  
trigger but that anyway  
comes, your face in my hands  
your face, my hands.

## PRAIRIE SCHOONER

abandoned bathtub  
at the edge of a cornfield  
near the fallen fence  
listing ship on a black  
ocean of dirt. bleach bone  
dinghy glistening white.  
who sailed it this far  
before it ran aground?  
some green deckhand's attempt  
at following orders while captain,  
below deck, slept off a hangover?  
its leaden treasure chest  
sank & broke open against the hard  
seafloor spilling its booty now covered  
in fathoms of silt.

Carol V. Davis

EVERY NIGHT SHE BARRELED DOWN A HILLSIDE

The choices as to cause:

Column 1

The accelerator stuck  
She tried to pry it off the floor  
but it would not budge

Column 2

The brakes failed  
Her foot pressed harder  
It did nothing

Quaint houses stacked like teeth perched on one side of the road.  
The next night only scrub brush, pale as the moon.

On Wednesday the car was a convertible; Thursday a Ford truck stick shift.

Choose carefully.

In one ending, the damage to the house was great but  
the passengers survived. In another it was too late by the time the  
ambulance pulled up.

Suing the car company will not

bring back the dead.

## THE FIRST NIGHT

in someone else's house is like being with a new lover.  
His grinding teeth not yet traceable to an unreasonable boss;

the whistle of his breath circling skates on a concrete rink.  
You try your best, but sleep smirks at you through frosted windows.

The stretching and contracting of floorboards familiar, but  
unsettling, the wheeze of the fridge startles.

You wonder on what travels the small stone on the mantle  
was collected, resting on a velvet cloth with five cigarette burns.

Grateful to be lent a house, you hesitate to question the ghost  
that lingers in the photos tucked in well-worn paperbacks.

Red fleece jacket in the closet, was it hers?  
The mold of her body about to stretch, flinging wide the arms  
to shoo you away so she can have her house back.

Morrow Dowdle

SURFACE

A snake swims near the water's surface  
where I am wading, skirting my calves.  
I watch it navigate rocks, moving easily  
against the river's flow. It slips beyond view  
and I let it go. What good would it have done  
to scream, run, disturb the current?  
I have already lived too much out of fear.

I lie down in the riverbed, its hardness  
holding me like a spare-fleshed lover.  
My bones against its bones, these stones  
carried and laid down by seasoned logic.  
Complex as the metacarpus,  
so many small parts set together  
to make what carries and holds,  
what grips this world with all its strength.

There is a river within the river,  
a swath that shines more brightly  
for being less broken by turbulence,  
untumbled by obstacles in its path.  
The copperhead of my imagination  
later turns out to be a brown water snake.  
When frightened, it may strike,  
but holds no venom in its bite.

Stacy Bustamante

## BACKSLIDING

I have a memory of being good at things—  
like reading books and cataloguing good and evil.  
Distributing love, hate, death, life;  
two slender columns traveling down the page  
eternally.

But I've begun to backslide.

Things look grey, and slate—indistinct.  
Now I'm afraid to speak at all. I have lost  
myself in the paleness of love and hate.

Things are so temporary, and so permanent all at once.  
I am not sure that the sun will rise tomorrow.  
I no longer think that love is easy.  
I am afraid of myself.

I remember once, the line between  
right and wrong was taut and firm.  
But now it seems to shimmer and dance;  
waves of heat rolling down midsummer highways.

The only thing I can set myself upon  
is the fact that I am breathing  
and so are you.  
The lines sliding back and forth before our eyes.

Ted Haddin

## LEAVING THE FARM

Now they are sold,  
the farm is gone,  
the catfish are cold  
in the bottom of the pond.  
You say they were getting  
old, anyway, and ate  
too many of the other fish.  
I wish we had saved  
some of their bones to  
remember the days we tried  
to fool them. But they got  
strength from all that food  
you threw to them, and  
the body behind the head  
was bigger than any man's  
arm. When hooked, it thrashed  
back and forth to pull you in,  
and cut lines under the dock.  
The head, as hard as rock,  
could nail another fish  
or kill a leaping frog.  
We're ignorant of what  
catfish can really do.  
It woke me up, far from  
the farm, to feel this strength  
again, so deep and dark  
under the pond.

## THREE MEN

They all stand there looking at you  
as if they want to say good-by  
but don't know anywhere to go.  
Bill invites us up to his place,  
up the hill he can no longer climb  
and tells us he can't be keeping things,  
there's too much to leave behind.  
Carl calls to tell me I left a white phone  
in his kitchen, and he'll get the phone  
company to come. He knocks instead  
at my back door, gently at first, then  
all insistence and banging till I come.  
Andy prowls his hallway perfectly certain  
He'll find the door to the basement  
where he keeps his manuscripts and books  
now only reminders of a past no longer there.  
They turn to ask you where you've been,  
and when you ask *them* they can't remember,  
they're just three standing men. Just when  
things closed off for them they don't know.  
One is gone now, it was Bill, his house  
upon the hill swallowed as if by snow.  
Carl and Andy coast their rooms and call  
as if someone were there to answer back,  
but there's none to tell anymore,  
who could explain what their quizzical  
looks lack.

## Frederick-Douglass Knowles II

### HIS LAST NAME MINE

I enter Cedar Grove's office  
and extend the slit of sunlight  
peering through a cracked door  
lock eyes with an old sexton  
inscribing names of fallen souls.  
I stammer *hello*. Utter the silent  
"K" in my last name. He flips  
through an index of ancient files  
brushes a layer of cumulus dust  
from 1974, and engraves 56 R7 HK  
onto the yellow surface of a Post-It.

I thank him for his time, slowly  
exit his office and descend down  
the hillside studying each pillar  
in search of my father's marker.  
I pause in front of a pallid row  
of ancient stone, flap the Post-It  
over a cluster of ants, to unveil  
the worn plaque of a Negroid  
sailor. His last name mine.

Clouded tears recall the legacy  
of an Airman recruit rigging chutes  
for the USS Wright. A *Native Son*  
swaying to Coltrane in Korean cafes  
with cinnamon women, who never  
choked on the plume of black smoke  
sewn into his skin. Debating Truman's  
liberation of Yongsan that would churn  
5 million *Seouls* into Korean dust.

## MASON FREEMAN CUT JENKINS DOWN

He hung from an old hickory tree along the Mississippi  
*A uppity Nigguh* seared in a Red Summer flame  
His *Oh Lawd!* forsaken for a swig of moonshine  
A sun god wrung for eyeballin' the sun

*A uppity Nigguh* seared in a Red Summer flame  
His innard ate earth under a disemboweled sky  
A sun god wrung for eyeballin' the sun  
Charred loins stick-poked by children cloaked in Christianity

His innard ate earth under a disemboweled sky  
Mothers cast quilts riverside to keep close eye  
Charred loins stick-poked by children cloaked in Christianity  
Minions mimicking their ghost-hooded inheritance

Mothers cast quilts riverside to keep close eye  
A crow psalmed the blues to a metronome of cracked bone  
Minions mimicking their ghost-hooded inheritance  
While I gripped my shiv in the shallows of a stream

A crow psalmed the blues to a metronome of cracked bone  
He hung from an old hickory tree along the Mississippi  
While I gripped my shiv in the shallows of a stream  
His *Oh Lawd!* forsaken for a swig of moonshine

Ryan Lally

REMEMBERING THE BODIES TAKEN BY LYNCHING

*We who take the beaten track,  
Trying to appease  
Hearts near breaking with their lack,  
We need elegies.*

— Countee Cullen, “Threnody for a Brown Girl”

Because I want to see your faces as more  
Than a genre of pain and smoldering dreams,  
I’ll hold my hand to your pulses and speak  
Your resonances to the stars  
That shined on all of us.  
History calls us to slow burning embers  
And the placid riots against the body,  
The absolute zero of fact, so here it is:  
We have darkened the native pathways  
Of broken bodies and human life  
And we have soaked our feet in dead gray coals  
And become old and forgetful  
With memory like a two lane road—repaved into disbelief.  
You crave a fact:  
Well, beneath my feet lay the unknown  
Ashes of those who breathed smoke to protect white air.  
We bottled our histories with silence  
And bounced them in the boughs of young poplar trees  
To whisper for the dead disposed.  
Yes, it’s true, we need elegies  
For us bodies still walking the masquerade,  
The ones with bones collecting dust  
On our mantles. Yes, it’s true too,  
I cannot forget you.

## FOR THE BAKERS, TWO LYNCHED IN SOUTH CAROLINA

Have you seen the marker in Lake City,  
the reprinted mourning  
dependent on footnotes,  
and did you stop to wonder  
how long it took Lavinia to stop  
setting a place at the table for her husband,  
for her daughter,  
for each little life she grew  
until they collapsed like dreams in the morning light

Have you traced the pathways of the moon,  
that swirl of stars pounding relentlessly  
over the earth, and gulped all that absence  
between two points of life, knowing that the stars die  
slower, that someone, anyone, could have snapped  
their necks waiting for a God who was more than stone  
and the suffusion of mirage and seen nothing  
but the same stars that you see

Have you ushered their negligible decay  
into the pages of your amygdala,  
or have you measured your distance between them  
Yes, you say that history is black and white  
while you live in color. Now they are fading;  
you are indulging in forgetfulness,  
and you are happy you are happy you are happy.

Ryan Lally

AFTERMATH

I stare at this sum of subtraction:  
"4084 lynched" catches the throat

with words that won't come out, clinging  
to the dorsum of the tongue, cleaving

like a soft punch  
Pushed gradually into the stomach

until it slices  
like rope into skin.

I stare at the number  
until you become

conversations, until your eyes are no longer burned  
out photographs.

I calculate all of you;  
I am greedy with vision

and I wonder  
if this multiplies your pains.

You are dead and unchained  
to this crisis of clarity

and I am a rag spun from unknowing and  
like a town of witnesses

I am saturated with the guilt of all this knowing  
and I look at your charred bodies made

sacred and sanctified  
and your eyes are uncrossed infinities

unmaking me.  
I fear truth and I fear

forgetting anything about you,  
but your silence tells me

I will die  
with all the questions

still half-formed in a tomb  
I will die

without answers.  
I am incurably prone to hyperbole,

but believe me:  
I love you all,

so I will take these clippings of your souls  
And remember you.

Simon Perchik

\*

Empty and the sand  
follows you along Broadway  
as if some dampness

was left for shoreline  
moves the IRT up  
then down the way clammers

use their feet to rake  
--you walk on tracks  
careful not to miss

while the train underneath  
breaks open its doors  
all at once --no, you don't jump

nothing like that  
--these shells are the same  
the mad feel for

though their sweat takes the place  
water grieves into  
and their mouths are the same

let you yell down  
and not a mark inside your body  
to call you by.

\*

This slope broken loose  
cracks the way all ice  
rises from a single stone

though below the tree line  
just her grave  
already has a twin

–two mouths, easy to spot  
not yet the mountain range  
she would sip if it was water

could leave the hollow  
the underbrush, mouthful  
over mouthful, talk

sit across from you  
while her words no longer move  
are in the way and colder.

\*

And though the Earth lets you dig  
it's your tears that heat the ground  
already growing stars

once the darkness covers it  
to lure these dead here  
with stones scented with shorelines

returned not as rain but grass  
just as it was, closing in from all sides  
the way this shovel is warmed

by your hands kept wet, pulled  
closer –you cling to this dirt  
as if it once was an afternoon

knows only the slow descent  
hand over hand into stone  
that no longer opens to hear the bleeding.

\*

Leaning against the wall  
it becomes a death bed  
the way a name on paper

flattens out to take hold  
for which there is no word  
only a room where no one noticed

you didn't ask for help  
so close to the corners  
with the light still on.

\*

You fold this sweater the way a moth  
builds halls from the darkness it needs  
to go on living –safe inside this closet

a family is gathering for dinner, cashmere  
with oil, some garlic, a little salt, lit  
and wings warmed by mealtime stories

about flying at night into small fires  
grazing on the somewhere that became  
the out-of-tune hum older than falling

–you close the drawer and slowly  
your eyes shut –with both hands  
make a sign in the air as if death matters.

William Cullen Jr.

JUST PAST EARLY SPRING

The creek is flowing fast  
having shed its ice  
like a snake unbound  
by its own skin.  
There's just enough warmth  
to hear a bird somewhere upstream  
but getting fainter with each call.  
Perhaps it's pulled by a memory  
wing beat by wing beat  
back to an old habitation  
nestled somewhere deep in the hills  
where an animal love  
can renew its compact  
with the course of the seasons  
and the simplest things.

Peter Grandbois

THERE IS NOWHERE TO BEGIN

Except in snow

stretching across a field  
in late March,

A crow in the branches

standing against  
the long riffs of wind.

\*

In a few weeks time

the rapture of alder, ash, and elm,

the almost forgetting of galanthus

bloom

and hawks

soaring with sun-forged feathers,

mapping the secrets

of the invisible world—

\*

Why are we always

Leaving,  
Or being left?

And how do we clear away

This winter we carry

Inside?

\*

Today, for example, I was thinking

that I wasn't  
anyone,

That I don't know when it's time to stop

pretending.

\*

The calculus of light  
    that holds us  
                    keeps shifting,  
even the fox standing wary  
                    at the edge  
                            of the clearing,  
or the squirrel dancing  
                    around that tree,  
                            gathering what little it can,  
are no longer the same.

\*

We move so  
    slowly,  
Like steam  
    rising over the high grass,  
waiting to see what face  
                    we bring  
                            home.

Morgan Blalock

TO THE PYTHIA AT DELPHI

Black cliffside rooms you  
entered up  
into, hoarse enough to be

believed. There was a  
fee; we were  
alone. I could not begin.

You told me, before  
I spoke, of  
my family: you knew them

by their roots, two small  
plots barren,  
calcified. Of my mother

and father, you told  
their failure  
to take light in, to produce.

Of my learned fear  
of tilling  
old soil, of myself, of

the dogwoods, their loose-  
ning, my hands  
shoved in the dirt to save them,

you knew. The long hallways  
of bark my  
birch-mother would tread to reach

me: these you foretold.  
Finally,  
you spoke of the winds, in which

my father would lift  
high his leaf  
hands and sway until evening.

*Do not believe that  
a thing is  
sown deep enough not to be*

*undone.* Years later,  
watching the  
fall of the dogwoods, I felt

the earth rock rootlength  
to rootlength.  
Inside the storm, I held out

my arms to catch my  
mother's limbs,  
frailing, father's leaf flutter.

Ashley Cundiff

SEPTEMBER

Why is it that September brings a sense of promise?

Despite the leaves, yellow rimmed and hungover, despite the spent  
flower heads, eaten by bugs and disease, despite the nation drowning in  
still and running waters...

Even so, its signals of surrender are welcomed with anticipation.

Perhaps it is the desperate optimism that comes with death—that the  
heady excess of midsummer wasn't the end after all.

That the spent leaves will cede to the sleeping buds, that the soil will rot  
into richness.

That the receding waters will reveal magnificent fossils long forgotten...

After all, in entrusting sleep to the black of the night, don't we all  
believe in resurrection?

Lorna Wood

ETHEREE FOR HEATHER HEYER

One  
Person  
With freckles  
And hazel eyes  
Helped bankrupt people  
Get in their paperwork  
And showed us love is simple,  
Like falling while crossing the street,  
But rising again, reaching toward hate  
With arms and heart made infinitely strong.

H. M. Cotton

LIBRARY: THE WEEK AFTER MY FATHER'S DEATH

Halfway between Flagg and Lee, I find  
the spine my daddy checked out once  
a year since 1943. Gap-toothed the row  
of balustrading books, I pluck it  
from the others: brothers diving spikes

along the mineral rail line. Winding through green  
and red, coal mines and soot, these words etch  
the history of my father's side. I birdsmouth  
its hardback binding, the book swallow -nesting  
lightly in my hands. A page shudders

as a man with Capote passes by, while, outside,  
bricklayers kneeling by a broken wythe  
butter culls for a Dutchman's repair  
with clinkers darker than the rest. Now, alone,  
I cosset the due-date card from its front flap

fold. The numerals line up like mantrip cars  
battening down the page, the first half-  
handwritten with curly 2s and 5s, the latter  
stamped in iron red. I slip it in my pocket  
to shadow box with his marriage license

and engineer's watch, then fingering the book's  
corner between its mates, I button it back  
till it fits like a steel tongue in its striker plate.

## PLAY THE LINE

Our empty boat slip needled toward Panama.  
Across the bay, embalmed in brackish  
backwash and sand, pilings fingered up like broken  
masts. At low tide, a heron high-stepped

among them, looking to gullet a speckled trout.  
Clutched against the breeze, we shivered through our  
last day on the water, back when the barm of dawn  
sloughed off. We kayaked the cypress knees,

and when I cast my line, I caught nothing  
but the flesh along my upper arm. You kneaded  
the kahle through, nipped the barb, and pinched me free.  
Now, I try and recall your hands and how many turns

you used to cinch the leader to hook. Maybe you will return  
with the pitcher plants' bloom. Tonight, the sun sets in layers  
of annealed steel. Minnows whirligig in the shallows,  
the heron still stalking their wakes. I have learned to wait.

Sandy Green

HARDENING OFF

A tomato plant buried  
up to its ears  
set outside to harden off

Like me  
firmer in the stem  
a little ruddier,  
less sway in the breeze

Patient, like a squirrel  
waiting for the inevitable bread  
or crust appearing in a row  
on the railing

Bored, like the dogs that don't bark at me anymore  
when I walk past their property,  
They loll their heads on their paws  
No need to watch me skim by the road  
I wave

Like me  
roots reaching out  
grasping the soil  
filling the pot  
Ready to be transplanted.

## I TURN MYSELF AROUND

I turn myself around  
spotting you  
spinning into your path

The moon keeps one side to us

You catch my rising tides  
scooping them  
soaking me

The moon chips away its own face

I'm saturated  
gurgling  
sloshing

The moon hides behind its breath

I unwind  
whirling  
uncorking

The moon is ashamed

You join me  
we spin  
two blurs dissolving into one

We mock the moon.

Claire Scott

LANDSCAPE WITH DROWNING WOMAN

Go Fish you say  
grinning at your six pairs  
to my one

I sink to the bottom of the sea  
*starfish circle*  
somewhere my son floats  
in a sea of cells  
his fish-body blue  
somewhere he breathes  
through tiny gills

I feel the force of your mother  
slipping through my legs  
I hear her piercing cries  
protesting exile, preferring  
the warmth of the sea-womb  
*jelly fish float by*  
I hold her to my breast, stay little one

Go Fish you repeat

I hear your voice far above  
I drift in the ocean current  
linger in sea grass and  
long strands of kelp  
looking for my first born  
still at seven months  
*angel fish with blue stripes*

Go Fish Grammy

the sea grows deep as I rise  
a pinch of salt in my hand  
seaweed woven through my hair  
*lantern fish light the way*  
my lips spew bubbles  
I reach for a card  
with webbed fingers

## AT EIGHTY

webs stitched  
with tar  
nished moments  
emptied  
of light  
spun with mum  
bled strands  
of prayer to  
missing gods  
shape  
less days  
stalled-out  
nights loop  
mobius  
my heart's  
tongue silent  
my soul with  
ered weight  
less while  
orphic wasps  
hiss &  
the ferry  
man taps-taps  
his time  
worn foot  
beside a bar  
ren boat  
my fur  
rowed face  
seeks  
a thread of  
light to  
linger over  
the little  
that is  
left

Jim Ferris

DON'T TELL ANYONE

I don't say this out loud  
to anybody, ever,  
but every day I think  
of dying, death,  
checking out, that state of how  
the hell should I know,  
not of killing myself  
or of getting someone  
else to do it – cracker –  
but of not  
having to do all this  
anymore,  
that's all. Is that bad?  
It's just a thought,  
well then why don't you  
say it to people,  
what are you afraid of?  
Obvious –  
people will flip out –  
can I pray for you?  
Call in the authorities,  
my god  
is an awesome god, suicide  
risk  
assessment, how are you  
feeling today,  
threat to self or other,  
you have  
so much to live for, that  
could do it right there.  
Don't look for the sequel.  
Or the explanation.  
We all should have known,  
I just  
talked to him last week  
and he sounded  
great, upbeat, why didn't  
he say something?  
You know what, now

I'm getting angry,  
he should have told me,  
damn it,  
he should have told me.  
Make up  
something if you need –  
the police  
are here, I must go. Don't tell  
anyone.

## EVERYTHING HAPPENS FOR A REASON

he died  
because his heart stopped, because  
our big forebrains thirst for answers,  
as if this exam were multiple choice  
after all – he died  
because he could no longer  
make fine distinctions – are you waiting  
for an example, you too, child,  
are implicated – he lived here, now  
he doesn't, his tense and time are past,  
but what lives on lives on, we tell us,  
and we are grateful to hear, thank you,  
and to believe, the snow is waist-high  
tonight, bitter cold, getting colder,  
but it won't last, summer will be hot  
and it won't last, the moon is almost  
full, tonight I am almost

Kristin LaFollette

STORIES

Here, we are hunters and  
gatherers—  
I don't eat meat, but my teeth  
are sharper than most—

There's a boat upside down  
in the sand, and because I can't see

land across the water,  
I think it  
must be able to take me to the  
other side of the earth.

Our words, songs from a  
hymnal,  
lift like woodsmoke as our  
hands collect moths from  
the air—

Around a fire, I smell eucalyptus  
and  
lemon oil and

I think I was made for the plants,  
the cinnamon fern and  
junegrass—

While taking shelter from the rain,  
someone asks how the funeral was,  
my sister, their friend.  
I want to say, I *wish* you  
had been there

as we talked  
about her love of oranges,  
told stories over trays of  
vegetables and cold salads—

Instead:

The music was loud and beautiful,  
just as she would have wanted.

I think of how her body would  
have thrived in this heat, skin

like an apple absorbing water,

our hymns lifting her up out of the  
fog & wildness inside of her—

Kristin LaFollette

THE WASHING OF THE BODIES

I watch you and listen  
for subtle changes in  
your  
voice,  
altered expressions on  
your face,

signs of the aggression  
I've known and  
witnessed.

You speak to your boys  
with soft  
tones, and when  
you hold them,  
you are held.

All these years,  
I didn't know about  
your creekbed body—  
Like your brother,  
you've been rootless,

subsisting on scraps  
dropped from the table.  
Whatever you both

went through before  
I knew you is lost  
in bone.

After all this time, we  
no longer argue with  
wrong  
words.

Here, in this  
house, we drink  
water.  
Here, we break bread.

Kali Lightfoot

WILDERNESS RANGER

*[haiku]*

ice axe  
in the snow with  
columbine

snow frosts  
reds and golds  
of autumn

steaming pile  
of berry-stained scat—  
bear ahead

*krumholz* lean  
away from the wind  
at timberline

*[senryu]*

*krumholz*  
wood like living rock  
at timberline

walking all of the  
switchbacks shows maturity...  
or sore knees

bannock  
hard salami macaroni trailmix  
cheese repeat

one layer  
of ripstop nylon between  
me and the dark

*[tanka]*

ten days in wild air  
my nose wrinkles  
smelling oiled and dusty  
logging road half a mile  
ahead of me.

Jessica Goodfellow

HEARTBREAK CENTO

The body is the vehicle of a wish,  
commanded. Here I am making, unmaking, doing, undoing,  
and I'm dizzy, frescoed to the wall  
of a kiss. The world is repeatedly stained,  
was a different color for each of us. My shadow  
accepts the weight of birds  
each morning. Each evening hands them back.  
Wind and the sound of wind—  
am I really better at being crushed than I was before?

Sources: Liz Waldner, Gail Mazur, Henrietta Goodman,  
Allison Smythe, Pamela Alexander, Mary Cornish, Charles  
Wright, John Loomis, Fanny Howe

## SUICIDAL CENTO

Praise to life though it tightened like a knot—  
but instead I've been thinking  
of the gash God made in me.

Who hasn't been tempted by the sharp edge of a knife,  
the invisible tug on the knot  
of the river? Winter, Wintering, listen: I think of you.

I was thinking of you when, distracted, I cut my hand—  
wound leaping evergreen to evergreen / Imagine  
a blade that gleams and remains.

I saw my life as a wolf loping along the road,  
along the snow, to keep the motion steady  
once the snow has stopped. Thinking *then let it begin*.

Sources: Adrienne Rich, Jon Loomis, Francesca Bell,  
Chris Abani, Andrea Hollander, Joseph Fasano, Kevin  
Prufer, Shane McCrae, Patty Paine, Anne Carson, Elizabeth  
Whittlesey, Karin Gottshall

Sarah Brown Weitzman

A BACKWARD GLANCE

We're not told her name  
only that she looked back

not what it was she had to see  
one more time.

Certainly she's been warned,  
a punishment story to keep

women in their place, thwart  
curiosity, head off disobedience.

Still it was home to her and home  
is where you will always go

back to in your thoughts. Like  
the home I've dreamed about

every night for over seventy years,  
the home I was taken from at two

Too young to know enough  
to take a backward glance

at whoever was there  
hiding behind a window shade.

Matt Morris

STILL LIFE WITHOUT GRAPES

A banana, some apples,  
& a couple pears

in a wooden bowl  
sit by a blue vase, droopy

with tulips atop  
a lacey linen

tablecloth bespattered with  
the varied shadows,

including such shapes  
which suggest a large cluster

of grapes not found else-  
where on the canvas.

Mistake? Or is it akin  
to the notes in jazz

that one doesn't play,  
resonant only in their

absence? The missing  
grapes show a world rife

with temptations so juicy,  
dark & delicious,

no one, not even  
the artist, can resist them

all the time. Well, then,  
let's now consider

the Jeroboam of wine,  
also not pictured.

Esther Johnson

SUNDAY AFTERNOON IN THE VILLA BORGHESE,

runners streak by on cobbled paths,  
dogs bark, off-leash, racing through pines,  
lapping from fountains old as emperors  
whose broken busts line the boulevard.

Music from the carousel celebrates  
a cloudless day as parents push  
babies in strollers, and old men  
rest on benches in stippled sun.

From the shore, a violinist serenades  
lovers on the lake rowing a shaky boat.  
The man in tux props up the oars,  
pours champagne and fills two flutes.

The girl, demure in little black dress,  
drinks a sip, looks deep into his eyes.  
He directs the show, hand signals to the shore  
where a photographer captures the scene.

Inside the Borghese, former palace of popes,  
Bernini's statue dominates the gallery,  
lit by spotlight, focal point of every eye—  
*The Rape of Proserpina*

Pluto's fingers push deep into the thigh  
of the girl he's stolen away,  
her marble flesh pulsing beneath  
the violent, grasping hand.

Proserpina's face contorts into a howl  
for help that does not come.  
She is dragged into the Underworld,  
damned to wed the god of darkness,

thrown into a never-ending cycle—  
rising to sunlight once a year,  
falling again back to the pit,  
doomed for eternity.

Outside on the lake, the man presses  
a ring onto the finger of the girl.  
Music dies, and the blood-red sun  
drops low behind the Roman ruins.

Abayomi Animashaun

PULLING WEEDS

Not the tired thought  
Of thistle and thorn

As metaphors  
For lost loves

That when cleared  
Allow a glimpse

Into how  
The aching heart leans

When pried  
From the pull and clutch

Of a past now lost  
And wounds quietly borne

Nor discourse  
On the virtue of distant ideas

Artfully held or  
Carelessly joined

No dressed-up language  
In heels and lace

For the gratitude  
Roiling your chest today

Despite the clot  
And dialysis

Months-long spasm  
And throbbing knees

To again from the waist  
Yank each staggered weed

Tossed in a pile you'll dump  
At the public works  
West of the city

Gratitude this evening  
For this brown mulch  
Beneath your feet

The rest and rustle  
Of light and wind

Upon the thick green bush  
And frail thin trees

Gratitude  
For the wide staccatos  
Of croaking frogs

The burrow and buzz  
Of mice and bees

Abayomi Animashaun

AFTERNOON IN AUGUST

Today  
There's no music  
Within me.

Outside  
Rain is falling.

Trees pull  
And lean  
In the wind.

No noise  
From school girls  
And boys

Laughing  
Arguing  
And tossing rocks.

No knock on the door  
From Sidi  
The mango girl

Trying to sell me  
Five unripe fruits  
At twice the cost.

Just this silence  
With its gray *buba*  
And non-music

Peeling unripe mangoes  
For the school boy  
Within me.

Note: Buba is a loose blouse or garment worn by adults and children

Barbara Lawhorn

## GOAT STORY

The sound silk against silk  
makes.

The scandal of the particular—  
how we turn it, this way and that—the anchored blade  
of fish hook that catches our cheek. The shard of cow bone  
we extract from our gum; what causes us pain and thrills  
us alive both. How small they look in expanse of palm.

I am the cloud, rain heavy and full of prisms.

I am the weather vane, trembling, and the roiling bruise  
of storm, looking for someone to hurt. These lips

have sung babies to sleep as they suckled, have sucked  
men off in lust and curiosity and confusion and love, have clasped  
my mother's cheek and hand in prayer, and exalted salted, buttered  
summer corn. I am a ravenous glutton. I have been apologizing  
for it my entire life. Each time I disrobe, I know, carnally

my own insignificance and insufficiency. I am a constant  
problem to myself. Suffering is the mirror and the reflection,  
both. I am no Saint Francis—he, who kissed the leper  
and was able to see the hidden  
world, gloriously; within himself too. The terror  
of God's  
face  
everywhere.

Maybe,

I'm the leper you need to kiss. The disfigured  
skeleton key to a door leading to your broken  
self. I'll be the stone you dash your foot upon.

I'll teach you the proper, tragic sense of life.

Thai-Lynne Lavallee-McLean

KISS-FLAVORED TEA

She is called Gran;  
a simple word known  
as far as any scabby-kneed ten-year-old  
could throw a baseball.  
In their shorts  
and torn sneakers  
they run up and down the dirt road,  
kicking up dust clouds that glow  
red in the late afternoon sun.  
Gran sits alone watching them,  
her muscles less limber  
than those they use  
to run and bend.  
She pulls her woollen shawl  
closer around her shoulders  
even though the cicadas sing  
in the hot afternoon air,  
which is still, and drips  
off fat banana leaves.  
In her hands is a mug  
of spicy orange tea,  
the steam joining its cousins  
pregnant particles in the damp air,  
filling her nostrils  
with spicy sweetness.  
The milk clouds swirling within  
turn it the colour of her palms  
which bleed into her honey chocolate skin,  
wrinkled and wizened  
giving her the textured look  
of an old oak tree,  
the wise man stretching  
his gnarled boughs  
over the old stone graveyard.  
“When I was a girl,” she used to say,  
while hands, creased and lined  
with years of clasping  
together in prayer,  
clutch her worn cherry-wood rosary beads,

cool and solid in her tired fingers,  
“we gathered by the fire every night,  
and the little girls sat hugging their knees  
while the boys roasted marshmallows  
and all listened to Great Aunt Rose  
talk about the plantation  
before it was overgrown  
with vines and flowering weeds  
and ravens circled in the sweltering heat.  
And when Billy pulled me  
‘round the stables  
and tried to kiss me  
in the light of the moon  
and stars and fireflies,  
I came undone  
right down to my fingertips.”  
At this the little girls sighed  
just as she had when Great Aunt Rose  
spoke of poetry that Uncle Henry whispered to her  
under the cotton-picking moon,  
while the boys fight over  
the best marshmallow stick for a sword.  
She pauses,  
her smoky voice husky  
and tired from storytelling.  
The spicy orange and sugar kiss  
her aged lips,  
flowing inconspicuously over teeth and tongue,  
that reach for the sweet liquid  
as if it were a lover  
about to crawl into bed  
beside her.  
“And I didn’t realize  
until my hair was much whiter,  
that I didn’t need a man  
if I had kiss-flavoured tea.”

Carmi Soifer

CENOTE

the green reflection—limestone—  
makes immersion seem inevitable  
along with fish  
in Mayan bath water  
met clearly  
by the sea

PLAYA DEL NORTE

when you swim out  
in the full light of afternoon  
nothing is foreshortened

but clear  
lines against sky  
and lean

horizon  
appear closer  
than an hour ago

are closer  
as you swim the same distance  
alight

## WOMAN

You showed up in a poem once—  
the way you walked  
and swayed  
all breasts and hips  
the red shoes  
you chose to wear.

What didn't happen  
is the story of the darker woman  
walking her narrow way back from work  
her dull blue suit  
in a warm and rural place  
where the kids get hit.

She's in another country  
and I'm walking the other way  
toward her  
toward dinner, really  
toward town  
and we pass

in the high grass  
on the same path  
although it may seem  
there is really only one of us.

Margarita Serafimova

THE LAST DAY OF AUGUST

Summer passed,  
treading the voices of Asia Minor cicadas,  
as free souls pass themselves.

Ο ΑΠΟΛΛΩΝΑΣ

(Apollo)

The seas were as high as the heavens.  
Their white manes included the sun.

Wendy Elizabeth Ingersoll

THE DOE

When it breaks from road's border,  
catapults my windshield: glass empty,  
then full,

I'm eating a plum and humming an aria,  
fingers curved around the steering wheel  
as if to mime ripe. What does it mean

to meld red with blue, succulence with delicacy,  
Butterfly with Turandot:

purple wonder just to breathe Puccini, leap across asphalt  
like that doe.

Alan Johnston

STEPHENSON BRIDGE ROAD

*Near Davis, California*

The Coast Ranges are burning.  
Nut-brown plumes of brush fire smoke  
rise to north and west.  
To the east, invisible,  
the Sierra Nevada  
are marked by wads of thunderhead.  
In the valley, between fire  
and rain, the world is different —  
dreamy, green and yellow,  
hot with the snap-dry air.

As we bicycle,  
we turn south on the road  
to Stephenson Bridge —  
tough WPA work  
spanning Putah Creek.  
Over the years, graffiti —  
faces, pictures, signs —  
have spread across it —  
angled, illegible words;  
strange, random sashes  
of color on concrete,  
making this place a stony  
throwback to the sixties.  
The bridge almost seems  
to outshine the bright,  
flowing zucchini field  
bursting with golden flowers  
where the road angles in:  
sharp, dangerous curves,  
swastika-like, beside  
the bank, a bleak, depressing  
purple spilled down pillars  
to the creek: car parts. Tires.  
Cans. A clear jar.  
All the relentless trash  
of humanity  
on the creek bank and roadside,

and above, the bridge:  
the gang signs, the sexual  
boasting, sworn endless love  
in a homogeny  
of delirious colors,  
all these shades and juices  
so intently rendered:

the names flow  
mad and sensual  
color explosions  
interwoven

erasing each other against horizons  
marked by smoke and clouds.

KB Ballentine

EDGED WITH FIRE

Because maples have burst into flame,  
morning flushes long before the moon  
slides from her wide perch,  
stars stippling the bluing sky.

Towhees sheltered in the Rose of Sharon  
tempt the sun with song,  
and wrens blend with fallen leaves  
drifting into edges of the yard.

Too early for frost, steam lingers  
over the birdbath where a squirrel sips,  
tail flirting the air, starlings  
stenciled on oak branches.

Chrysanthemums crisp the lawn,  
echo dawn's gold, Venus murmuring  
goodbye.

## FAITHFUL, EVEN AS IT FADES

Last splendor of leaves spool like gypsy moths  
from mountain ash, from oak sparking gold orange red.  
October now, even Virginia creeper folds into shadows  
that sever the edges of our yard, fields furrowed  
and empty after the harvest. You are closer somehow  
under this bright blue sky, North Star still smoldering.  
Apples peeled and simmering tang the air,  
and thoughts of warm cider make my mouth water.  
It's hard to be sad in the clean sweep of clouds,  
evergreens teasing this softer light. A wren lifts his throat  
in song, notes you would have mimicked to give him answer,  
the two of you in tête-à-tête until he flew away —  
melody suspended, echoing in unexpected silence.

Gina Malone

AT BUTTERMILK CREEK

The crow on a bridge railing  
in this city park presides  
over Autumn.  
Knife-carved letters  
are hieroglyphs beneath  
his deliberate feet.  
He gathers wordless promises.

Winter is coming, he knows.

The heat from the sun  
is waning, light slants  
to soft.  
Woodsmoke signals  
are borne by breezes.  
Acornfall taps a code  
of warning.  
Trees drop dry leaves  
like quiet notes  
into the shy creek  
that will pass them on  
to bigger waters.

Winter comes, they say.

He turns his head, this sentinel  
crow, to watch a caret  
of vehement geese  
point itself away  
from here.

I turn for home  
mindful of the word  
of winter's coming.

## BEGINNING AGAIN

She could not recall  
ever having ironed  
while angry before,  
    but how cathartic

to push hot metal hard  
    against the soft cotton shirt  
    with its pretty pattern,  
    clusters of muted cherries;

to be startled  
    by the metallic groaning  
    of the ironing board  
    as it gave way beneath her resolve,  
    then straightened itself again;

to hear the sigh of steam escaping,  
    echoing her own deep-dredged  
    breaths of ragged frustration;  
    and how satisfying

to solve the only problem  
    the cloth had—wrinkles  
    after a washing;

to know she would get over  
    the stomach-sunken despair as soon  
    as the shirt was smooth  
    and his hand was touching  
    the still-warm fabric at her back  
    as they walked out into the world  
    to begin again,

while the iron,  
    unplugged,  
    cooled in the quiet room.

David Radavich

BEHIND THE CHICKEN TRUCK

Feathers drift  
right and left across  
the windshield,  
reminder that  
life moves fast  
and the cages  
that keep us  
stay mainly closed  
in this transit.

I am eager  
to get around  
this narrow road.

Nonetheless,  
I admire those wings  
beating against  
the wire,

eyes turned up

all that vibrancy  
destined to arrive

not far from  
where I am going.

David M. Harris

DEAD LETTER OFFICE: WILLIAM HARRIS (6)

For several weeks, my daily workout was cycling  
up Tenth Avenue to Amsterdam to the hospital  
to visit you. Sometimes I'd stop off for a quiet  
moment in the cathedral across the street before  
what I refused to believe was the death watch.  
I remember talking and watching sports --  
Borg vs. McEnroe at Wimbledon, good enough  
to capture two men who didn't care about tennis --  
and waiting for the only possible resolution.  
I spent a night in the waiting room, without drama,  
and a few hours on the sidewalk, days later,  
waiting for Shelley to drive up from Maryland.  
Then we were busy through the shiva. Cleaning out  
the safe- deposit box, the house, the long-unopened  
drawers of memories, secrets, and surprises.  
Old pictures, ID cards, a Nazi Luger, war booty.  
The file cabinets. The few letters you had saved.  
The letter from your sister, around the time  
of my bar mitzvah, reassuring you  
that I really was your son.  
Under Jewish law -- not that that was important  
to you -- the man who raises the child  
is the father. I don't have the Harris nose,  
but I got the curiosity, the Sunday Times  
crossword, the love of history, the love of the Yankees.  
Forget about genetics. Everything important  
came from you.

Jeffrey Hannah

## ESTATE SALE

Four houses down from me an Estate Sale begins.  
I watch through my window the pickups line up curbside, and  
strangers entering what was once a home. A lamp, a couch, appliances...  
Truck beds being filled and harnessed down with bungee.  
The closing sound of rusted tailgates.

Only days ago was that house haunted with the living.  
I didn't know him. I didn't know his loves or displeasures.  
But I do know there were days I passed, walking the dog,  
and saw him perhaps working in the yard or maybe even  
carrying in some of the things that have now been auctioned.

So for the experience, I go and pose as if I was in the market.  
A blonde woman, professionally dressed, answers a collector's  
question on the age of a grandfather clock. Strangers, uninvited,  
moving methodically throughout a house not their own  
telling themselves things they want to hear.

## IN A LOSS OF POWER

Late July in Central Arkansas, the Delta  
commanding her presence. Clouds rolling in dark and darker,  
and the wind and sound of rumbles took over what we knew...  
or whatever we thought we knew. The Blackjack Oaks in the  
backyard littered their leaves not unnaturally, but unseasonal.  
The power out for four to five hours... and no place to go.

The rain, with rhythmic change, felt as if a metronome led its fall.  
Our doors open to let in the summer evening's fading light.  
You on the couch, reading... taking what was felt the  
best use of time. Me sipping my drink, feeling a new  
darkness coming on. Both feeling the turn of a world.  
You and Me Alone. Together.

Jay Vera Summer

CHICAGO PARKS

Where Irving and Portage cross  
the men play dominoes on concrete  
tables the women sell mango  
dipped in chili powder  
the children run after churro and snow cone  
carts, the cats hide under bushes,  
but you see them  
from the other side of the black fence  
you see them.

Robert Farrell

ON HABITS

Silt clouds of the western Gulf the water dull the  
Mississippi soil suspended before derricks standing  
in said water while mothers wipe tar from children's  
feet in a house that also stands on stilts where the  
elderly crack shells and pick at meat where a shirtless  
boy holds a Roman candle where other children wash  
the beans and break them wondering why they come  
here since on the other side the water's clean the  
dolphins not just mullet leap why it's only here they  
come to die the jellyfish the men of war the horseshoe  
crabs the ancient creatures they will not eat

Susan Ludvigson

ON FEROCITY

I'd like to tell you I'm a lioness, eating  
when I'm hungry and any time I can—  
roaring when I'm outraged, rolling  
on the ground when I want cool grass  
against my skin. I'm guessing you think this  
doesn't sound at all like the small  
old woman you know I am.  
Think again. There are things  
you might not altogether understand—  
how fast we can shift, rolling over  
at a murmur from a man  
who knows how to stroke  
the bristle from a cat.

Derek Annis

BEFORE AND AFTER PICTURE

What will I write about now that the house  
is clean and filled with children? Now that my  
yard is trimmed and the garden's gone purple  
and red with fruit? The dog chases her ball  
trots across the lawn, drops it at my feet;  
the mail carrier always leaves a treat  
in the box. I go to work and I write.

Sometimes I fight with my wife, but there's no  
shattered glass or fist-hole; we don't even  
work ourselves up enough to yell and risk  
waking the baby. Now what will I write  
about? The children sleep all through the night.

I ate breakfast today. Showered in warm  
water. Sang softly with daughter in arms.

Jacob Hall

IN WHICH I AM SEGMENTED

I give my bones to the window. I commit to the break  
of birch that peels against the courthouse reciting its whim  
through the now thickening morning. There's no relief  
in the floorboard, no tone of gravity as I trace the fates  
of the sparrow flitting over the power line above the home  
and the child waking too close to the highway's edge, hands  
outstretched towards that eventual heaven. The house  
stills in the distance between breath and the measure of self  
it becomes. I can't tell the bricks scattered along the sidewalk  
from my fingers draped over Pike and Prospect as the cold  
eases its light into a throat. I can't place the morning's body  
or the conflict it denotes within the trees, the subtle gaps,  
the texture of a wholly dissipated sound. I know the ground  
I give as my eyes slide through a limestone arc, the space  
between them a puncture of thought, a vague segmentation.

## ON PROVIDENCE AVE

I'm without a means of confronting  
what commits me to breathe

as a window drafts its fingers across my skin  
and the living linger like a slipstitch  
wedged in exodus

in the edges of a heart. I'm walking a street  
where heaven is the mark of a zero-sum game.

Ricocheted prayer skirting the edges  
of a bullet's name, an impenetrable row  
of blankets draped across the sidewalk

to mourn the unclaimed dead.  
I don't think I know what it means

but the day draws its curtains  
through the trees and a television  
feeds the woods a violence that can't be

mapped, a backlash wrapped around cotton  
stalks, a continuous knot that gives way

to each common act. The city slope  
as it holds its back in a rumor of war, insects  
grown familiar as a child drags a bicycle

into the crop field chanting I don't care  
I don't care who sees me.

Bill Brown

KNOCK, KNOCK

*In the green morning  
I wanted to be a heart.  
A heart.*

— Lorca

Wake to a sunrise  
in the old farm house—

in the orchard,  
apple, pear, peach,

glow spring green  
as creek willows.

You, beside me asleep,  
breath, a hush, a snooze,

how words I learned  
as a child,

consonants, vowels  
whispered,

quiet dawn,  
teach a heart

to pump  
smoothly,

as dew drops glisten  
tops of grass

before crow calls  
knock

a waking day's door  
to open.

## ALWAYS

*“Always, These gigantic inconceivables.”*

— C. K. Williams

How they plant themselves  
in fear’s closet, unexpectedly  
expected, even half-desired,  
knowing along with life, you  
will lose the things you worship:

gold finch and chickadee,  
deer herd and fox kits,  
April green and October blue,  
heron flight and creek sparkle—  
your soft hair-tangle when I wake

at night so all alone. And isn’t  
this why love and fear of love  
always look over our shoulders  
to see what isn’t coming  
and what is.

Outside the pulse’s  
carnival ride and the price we  
pay for a seat, one can choose  
to argue with the world or to be  
amazed at small hours.

Cool breeze surprises  
a June morning. Even chickadees  
choose to share instead of squabble.  
A candle shines in a human heart,  
however short the wick.

Clare Brennan

HERO

She is Beatrice  
Shakespeare's, not Dante's  
Tall, tanned, loud, and alive  
Not watched and dead  
Looming quietly in another's tale  
She carries sunshine pinned  
In her lion's hair  
Her heels the rhythmic pat  
Of a fiddler's keeping beat  
She moves in music, always  
I conjure her among trees  
Her frame camouflaged in trunks  
Her earrings mistaken for leaves  
Or reclined in soft grass  
Passing secrets at sunset  
At cusp of winter she droops as flowers do  
The Amazon queen growing small  
She was not forged for solitude and sweaters  
Forced to watch her playground freeze over  
Too heartbroken to hibernate  
Have patience, my summer friend  
Your kind are but a whistle away  
The well-worn tracks remember your feet  
The faeries await your command  
To follow your laughter into the day

Jason Gordy Walker

VILLANELLE IN BLUE

I always hear the color blue at night  
(our waltzing feet, my drowsy hands upon you)  
before I down my pills and flip the light.

Obscured with moss, the trees encircled a dike,  
like early years of sleep. I hate—like you—  
to always hear the color blue at night:

the foaming waterfalls or waves that strike.  
I almost touched a planet or star (or you?)  
before I downed my pills and flipped the light.

The smartest man I've ever known, unlike  
the wisest man you knew, will never know you  
had always heard the color blue at night.

I laugh at a void that lingers within sight;  
my life returns to dust (and where are you?)  
before I down my pills and flip the light.

An aura—white and overarching—a weight  
prevents my dance from reaching God or you,  
and still I hear the color blue at night  
before I down my pills and flip the light.

Paul Freidinger

SEE IF I CARE

It is summer and the air has the mass  
of an elephant. Every day is a slow day  
and time grinds its grist mill of oblivion  
through the hours. The palmettos shake  
their weary heads in the hot wind,  
yet the water doesn't register waves,  
only ships of cumulus hovering within  
easy listening distance. *Just because*

*your eyes be closed, don't mean  
you're sleepin'.* This is no-time being  
cleared for contemplation. You  
shut me out, but that face feigning  
serene gives you up. No escapin'  
the condition we're in. No runnin' away  
for good. Wouldn't do no good.  
You'd be lost and here in your heart.

*Just because you say good-bye, don't  
mean you're gone.* Nothing disappears,  
least of all, the blues in the drone of flies  
and bees' buzz around the honeysuckle.  
Ain't no disguise for the hard life,  
the blood, bone-ache and heart-pound  
around the body. This is a slow day,

and I think too much. Wish you was  
way down the road. Wish I never met  
you, trouble that you bring. Go ahead,  
close those eyes. See if I care. Won't hide  
your pain. Won't spare me none, neither.

\*italicized phrases are Gullah aphorisms

## WHEN EVERYTHING IS OVER

Aftermath: the umber hour,  
cool, still, without revelation,  
shielding damage from dawn,

from eyes to see the half-life  
of hurricanes leaves effects  
humans can barely surmise.

If it took the whole island and left  
a slow wake, it would have been kind.  
Instead, houses slant in surrender,

shingles torn away, chimneys  
crumpled, glass shattered, expose  
the secrets of a bedroom: what

should have remained hidden.  
Along the road pines, oaks,  
snapped off at the base,

brittle bones that could not bend  
enough; psyches cinch  
their mourning to the late rose

blooming its arrival. Petals anoint  
the light. Is it innocence  
that stirs survival, red announcing

their presence, nodding in the breeze?  
This we know and are dumb,  
in October when everything is over,

and we sit silent among the ruins.

## CONTRIBUTORS

**Abayomi Animashaun** is the author of two poetry collections, *The Giving of Pears* and *Sailing for Ithaca*, and editor of two anthologies, *Others Will Enter the Gates: Immigrant Poets on Poetry, Influences*, and *Writing in America and Walking the Tighrope: Poetry and Prose by LGBTQ Writers from Africa*.

**Derek Annis** is a poet from Spokane, Wash., who holds an MFA from Eastern Washington University. Their poems have appeared in *The Account*, *Barrow Street*, *Colorado Review*, *Crab Creek Review*, *Fugue*, *The Gettysburg Review*, *The Missouri Review: Poem of the Week*, and *Spillway*, among others.

**KB Ballentine's** fifth collection, *Almost Everything, Almost Nothing*, was published in 2017 by Middle Creek Publishing. Published in *Crab Orchard Review* and *Haight-Ashbury Literary Journal*, among others, her work also appears in anthologies including *In Plein Air* (2017) and *Carrying the Branch: Poets in Search of Peace* (2017). Learn more about KB Ballentine at [kballentine.com](http://kballentine.com).

**Morgan Blalock** graduated from Hollins University in Roanoke, Virginia with degrees in classical philology and creative writing. Her fiction and poetry can be found in *The Adroit Journal*, *CutBank*, *Appalachian Heritage*, *New Plains Review*, and more.

**Clare Brennan** is a Chicago-based theater artist and writer. Using spoken word, performance poetry, devised theater, and text adaption, her work focuses on the transient, evolving nature of isolation, home, womanhood, and identity. Recent credits include *Alter Ego* (Writer and performer, The Frontier), Anthony Neilson's *Stitching* (Director, BlackLight Theatre Company, Dublin), and *Home of Love* (Devising concept and direction, Wall to Wall Theatre Festival). [clarebrennancreative.com](http://clarebrennancreative.com)

**Bill Brown** is the author of ten poetry collections. New work appears or is forthcoming in *Tar River*, *Atlanta Review*, *Potomac Review*, *Worcester Review*, *Evening Street Review*, *Louisville Review*, *POEM*, *Southern Poetry Review*, and *Columbia University Journal*, among others.

**Stacy Bustamante** is a poet and editor who lives in Northern Colorado with her husband and three kids. She is affiliated with *Ruminate Magazine* and spends her spare time hiking and climbing in the Rocky Mountains.

**Will Cordeiro** has recent or forthcoming work in *DIAGRAM*, *The Moth*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Fifth Wednesday*, *Sycamore Review*, *Terrain.org*, *The Threepenny Review*, *Zone 3*, and elsewhere. He lives in Flagstaff, where he is a faculty member in the Honors College at Northern Arizona University.

**H. M. Cotton** is on the staff of *Birmingham Poetry Review* and is poetry editor for *Nelle*. Her work appears in *Birmingham Arts Journal*, *Smokelong Quarterly*, and *The F. Scott Fitzgerald Museum*. She is an M.A. scholar of the 2016 Sewanee Writer's Conference and completed her M.A. at the University of Alabama at Birmingham where she now teaches freshman composition.

**William Cullen Jr.** is a veteran and was born in Petersburg, Virginia. He lived in Alabama, Georgia and Germany before settling down in Brooklyn, New York, where he works at a social services non-profit. His work has appeared in *Canary, Concis, Gravel, Gulf Stream, Heartwood, Pouch, Spillway, Swichback* and *The American Journal of Poetry*.

**Ashley Cundiff** is a musician, teacher, and writer living in the woods of rural southwestern Virginia with her husband and young daughter. She can be found at [ashleycundiff.com](http://ashleycundiff.com).

**Carol V. Davis** is the author of *Because I Cannot Leave This Body* (Truman State Univ. Press, 2017), *Between Storms* (2012) and winner of the 2007 T.S. Eliot Prize for Poetry for *Into the Arms of Pushkin: Poems of St. Petersburg*. Her poetry has been read on National Public Radio and the U.S. Library of Congress and Radio Russia. Twice a Fulbright scholar in Russia, she taught in Ulan-Ude, Siberia, winter 2018 and teaches at Santa Monica College, California and Antioch Univ. Los Angeles.

**Morrow Dowdle** is a poet from Hillsborough, NC, where she is daily inspired by the Ocooneechee Mountain and Eno River. Her recent poetry publication credits include *Panoply, NonBinary Review, and River and South Review*. She previously studied at Emerson College's creative writing MFA program. In addition to poetry, she also writes graphic novels, most recently in collaboration with the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences. She currently works as a physician assistant.

**George Drew** is the author of *The View from Jackass Hill*, 2010 winner of the X. J. Kennedy Poetry Prize, Texas Review Press, which also published *Down & Dirty* (2015), and his *New & Selected, Pastoral Habits* (2016), winner of the Adirondack Literary Award for Best Poetry Book, and a Finalist for *The Lascaux Review's* Poetry Book Prize. His eighth collection, *Fancy's Orphan*, is due out in 2017, from Tiger Bark Press. He is the winner of the 2014 St. Petersburg Review poetry contest, the 2016 The New Guard's Knightville Poetry Contest, and is First Runner Up for the 2017 *Chautauqua Literary Journal's* Editors Choice Award, his poem appearing in this year's issue.

**Robert Farrell** lives and works in the Bronx, New York and is the author of *Meditations on the Body* (Ghostbird Press, 2017). His poems have appeared in *Posit, The Brooklyn Review, Regarding Arts and Letters, The Santa Fe Literary Review, Leviathan: A Journal of Melville Studies* and elsewhere. Originally from Houston, Texas, he's a librarian at Lehman College, CUNY.

**Jim Ferris** is the current Poet Laureate of Lucas County. He is an award-winning poet and performance artist, author of *Slouching Towards Guantanamo, Facts of Life, and The Hospital Poems*. Ferris, who holds a doctorate in performance studies, has performed at the Kennedy Center and across the United States, Canada and Great Britain; recent performance work includes the solo performance pieces "Is Your Mama White? Excavating Hidden History" and "Scars: A Love Story." He has won awards for creative nonfiction, mathematics, performance and poetry. Ferris holds the Ability Center Endowed Chair in Disability Studies at the University of Toledo.

**Paul Freidinger** is a poet residing in Edisto Beach, SC in the heart of South Carolina's Low Country. After digging out from two hurricanes in the last year, he can attest the ocean is rising. That thought keeps him awake at night. He has published over 200 poems and has poems recently published or forthcoming in *Atlanta Review*, *Bayou Magazine*, *Cold Mountain Review*, *Florida Review*, *Folio*, *Grist*, *Isthmus*, *New Plains Review*, *Potomac Review*, *Portland Review*, *Roanoke Review*, *Santa Fe Literary Review*, *South Carolina Review*, *SubPrimal Poetry Art*, and *Triggerfish Critical Review*.

**Jessica Goodfellow's** books are *Whiteout* (University of Alaska Press, 2017), *Mendeleev's Mandala* (2015) and *The Insomniac's Weather Report* (2014). Her work has been included in *Best New Poets*, *Verses Daily*, *The Writer's Almanac*, and was made into a short film by Motionpoems. She was awarded the Chad Walsh Poetry Prize from *Beloit Poetry Journal*, and has been a writer-in-residence at Denali National Park and Preserve. Recently, her work has appeared in *Threepenny Review*, *The Awl*, *The Southern Review*, and *Best American Poetry 2018*. Jessica lives with her family in Japan.

**Peter Grandbois** is the author of nine previous books, the most recent of which is *Kissing the Lobster* (Spuyten Duyvil, 2018). His poems, stories, and essays have appeared in over one hundred journals. His plays have been performed in St. Louis, Columbus, Los Angeles, and New York. He is a senior editor at *Boulevard* magazine and teaches at Denison University in Ohio. You can find him at [petergrandbois.com](http://petergrandbois.com).

**Sandy Green** writes from her home in Virginia where her work has appeared in such places as *Bitter Oleander*, *Existere*, *The Northern Virginia Review*, and *U.S. 1 Worksheets*, as well as in her chapbook, *Pacing the Moon* (Flutter Press, 2009).

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

**Jacob Hall** was raised outside of Atlanta, Ga. and is currently a PhD student in English at the University of Missouri. In the past, he has worked as the assistant poetry editor for *Mid-American Review* and he currently acts as audio editor for *Missouri Review*. His poetry has appeared in *Carolina Quarterly*, *Madcap Review*, *Santa Ana River Review*, *Stirring*, *Origins Journal*, *Menacing Hedge*, and elsewhere.

**Jeffrey Hannah** holds a BS in Psychology and a minor in English from the University of Tennessee. He works in Law Enforcement. He currently is stationed in Little Rock, Arkansas.

**Pauletta Hansel** is author of six poetry collections, including *Palindrome* (Dos Madres Press, 2017), winner of the 2017 Weatherford Award for best Appalachian poetry book. She served as Cincinnati's first Poet Laureate (April 2016 - March 2018) and leads writing workshops and retreats in the Greater Cincinnati area. She is co-editor of *Pine Mountain Sand & Gravel*, published by the Southern Appalachian Writers Cooperative. [paulettahansel.wordpress.com](http://paulettahansel.wordpress.com)

**David M. Harris** had never lived more than fifty miles from New York City until 2003. Since then he has moved to Tennessee, acquired a daughter and a classic MG, and gotten serious about poetry. His work has appeared in *Pirene's Fountain* (and in *First Water*; *the Best of Pirene's Fountain*), *Gargoyle*, *The Labletter*, *The Pedestal*, and other places. His first collection of poetry, *The Review Mirror*, was published by Unsolicited Press in 2013.

**Wendy Elizabeth** Ingersoll is a retired piano teacher. Publications include her book *Grace Only Follows* (National Federation of Press Women Prize), two chapbooks, and poems in various journals. She was a finalist for the 2015 Dogfish Head Poetry Prize. She serves as reader for *The Delmarva Review*, and can be found online at [wendyingersoll.com](http://wendyingersoll.com).

**Esther Whitman Johnson** is a former high school counselor from Southwest who travels the globe volunteering on five continents, often writing about her travels. Her poetry and prose have been published in over two dozen journals and anthologies, most recently *Forgotten Women* and *Black Lives Have Always Mattered*. She is currently working on a flash fiction collection.

**Allan Johnston** earned his M.A. in Creative Writing and his Ph.D. in English from the University of California, Davis. His poems have appeared in over sixty journals, including *Poetry*, *Poetry East*, *Rattle*, and *Rhino*, and his translations and co-translations of French and German poetry have appeared in *Ezra*. He has published two poetry collections, *Tasks of Survival* (1996,) *In a Window* (2018), and three chapbooks *Northport* (2010), *Departures* (2013) *Contingencies* (2015), and received First Prize in Poetry in the Outrider Press Literary Anthology competition (2010). He teaches writing and literature at Columbia College and DePaul University in Chicago.

**Cyn Kitchen** is an Associate Professor of English in the Program in Creative Writing at Knox College. Her short story collection, *Ten Tongues*, was published in 2010 by MotesBooks. Her work also appears or is forthcoming in such places as *Midwestern Gothic*, *Spry*, *Still* and *K'in*. Cyn writes and makes her home in Forgottonia, a downstate region on the Illinois prairie.

**Frederick-Douglass Knowles II** is a poet, educator and activist involved in community education. He is the inaugural Poet Laureate for the City of Hartford. His works have been featured in the *Connecticut River Review*, *Sinkhole Magazine*, *Poems on the Road to Peace: A Collective Tribute to Dr. King Volume 2*, *Lefoko*—a Botswana, Southern Africa Hip-Hop magazine—and *Fingernails Across the Chalkboard: Poetry and Prose on HIV/AIDS from the Black Diaspora*. Frederick-Douglass is currently an Associate Professor of English at Three Rivers Community College. His collection of poetry, *BlackRoseCity* was featured at AWP in 2018.

**Kristin LaFollette** is a PhD candidate at Bowling Green State University and is a writer, artist, and photographer. Her work was featured in the anthology *Ohio's Best Emerging Poets* (Z Publishing, 2017) and she is the author of the chapbook, *Body Parts* (GFT Press, 2018). She currently lives in northwest Ohio. You can visit her on Twitter at [@k\\_lafollette03](https://twitter.com/@k_lafollette03) or on her website at [kristinlafollette.com](http://kristinlafollette.com).

**Ryan Lally** is a recent graduate of Samford University, where he majored in English. He has been previously published in Samford's *Wide Angle* publication and resides in Auburn, Alabama.

**Thai-Lynne Lavallee-McLean** writes from home while caring for her three children. Part time, she is working on her Bachelor of Arts degree with a Major in English at Vancouver Island University. Her work has appeared in *Borrowed Solace Magazine*, *Dodging the Rain*, *Anti-Heroine Chic*, and *The Hunger Journal*. Her short story, "Beyond the River Crossing," was published in Zimbell House Publishing's anthology, *River Tales*.

**Barbara Lawhorn** is an Assistant Professor at Western Illinois University. She's into literacy activism, walking her dog Banjo, running, baking and eating bread, and finding the wild places within and outside. Her most recent work can be found at *The Longleaf Pine*, *BLYNK!T*, *Nebo: A Literary Magazine*, and *Naugatuck River Review*. Her favorite creative endeavors are her kids, Annaleigh and Jack.

**Kali Lightfoot's** poems have appeared in journals and anthologies, been nominated for a Pushcart Prize, and won Honorable Mention from the Science Fiction Poetry Association. Kali has been a gym teacher, wilderness ranger, therapist, the national Director of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institutes, and delivered singing balloongrams in a chicken suit.

**Susan Ludvigson** has published eight collections with LSU Press, most recently *Escaping The House Of Certainty*. Her poems have appeared in *Atlantic Monthly*, *Poetry*, *The Georgia Review*, *Gettysburg Review*, *Southern Review*, and many other journals. She served as poet-in-residence at Appalachian State University in the fall semester of 2017.

**Gina Malone** is a native of South Carolina and now writes in the mountains of western North Carolina. She is pursuing her M.A. in creative writing at Lenoir-Rhyne University's Thomas Wolfe Center for Narrative in Asheville. She was a winner of the Sidney Lanier Poetry Competition, and, she won a North Carolina Press Association award for feature writing. Her poetry has been published in *Kalliope: A Journal of Women's Art*, *Anuran*, and *Kakalak*.

**Matt Morris** attended the University of Southern Mississippi's Center for Writers at Hattiesburg many years ago. Since then, he has appeared in various magazines and anthologies, for which he has received multiple nominations for the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net. *Nearing Narcoma*, his first book, won the Main Street Rag Poetry Award. Knut House Press published his latest collection, *Walking in Chicago with a Suitcase in My Hand*.

**Simon Perchik** is an attorney whose poetry has appeared in *Poetry South*, *Partisan Review*, *The Nation*, *The New Yorker* and elsewhere.

**David Radavich's** recent poetry collections are *America Bound: An Epic for Our Time*, *Middle-East Mezze*, and *The Countries We Live In*. His plays have been performed across the U.S., including six Off-Off-Broadway, and in Europe. He has served as president of the Thomas Wolfe Society, Charlotte Writers' Club, and North Carolina Poetry Society.

**Claire Scott** is an award winning poet who has received multiple Pushcart Prize nominations. Her work has been accepted by the *Atlanta Review*, *Bellevue Literary Review*, *Enizagam*, and *Healing Muse*, among others. Claire is the author of *Waiting to be Called* and the co-author of *Unfolding in Light: A Sisters' Journey in Photography and Poetry*.

**Margarita Serafimova** was shortlisted for the Montreal International Poetry Prize 2017 and Summer Literary Seminars 2018 Contest, and long-listed for the Erbacce Press Poetry Prize 2018 and the Red Wheelbarrow 2018 Prize, as well as nominated for the Best of the Net. She has three collections in Bulgarian. Her work appears in *Agenda Poetry*, *London Grip New Poetry*, *Trafika Europe*, *European Literature Network*, *The Journal*, *A-Minor*, *Waxwing*, *Orbis*, *Nixes Mate Review*, *StepAway*, *Ink*, *Sweat and Tears*, *HeadStuff*, *Minor Literatures*, *The Writing Disorder*, *The Birds We Piled Loosely*, *Orbis*, *Chronogram*, *Noble/ Gas Quarterly*, *Origins Journal*, *miller's pond*, *Obra/ Artifact*, etc. Visit: <https://www.facebook.com/MargaritaSerafimova>.

**Carmi Soifer** is a poet and writing teacher who lives in Suquamish, Washington, where she can see Mt. Rainier from her mailbox. Her poems have appeared in anthologies and journals, most recently or forthcoming in *Healing Muse*, *Avalon Literary Review*, *Tule Review*, *Passager*, and *Main Street Rag*. She was Artist-in-Residence at Rocky Mountain National Park.

**Jay Vera Summer** is a Chicagoan living in Florida. She writes fiction and creative nonfiction, and co-founded *weirderary*, an online literary magazine, and *First Draft*, a monthly live literary event in Tampa. Her writing has been published in *marieclaire.com*, *Proximity*, *LimeHawk*, *theEEEL*, and *Chicago Literati*.

**Jason Gordy Walker**, a staff member of *Birmingham Poetry Review*, teaches English at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. His poems have been published in *Measure*, *Confrontation Magazine*, *Hawai'i Pacific Review*, *Think Journal*, *Town Creek Poetry*, *Cellpoems*, *Birmingham Arts Journal*, and others. He has received scholarships from the West Chester University Poetry Conference, Poetry by the Sea, Auburn Writers Conference, and the University of West Georgia National Graduate Creative Writing Conference. He was born in Brookhaven, Mississippi.

**Sarah Brown Weitzman**, a past National Endowment for the Arts Fellow in Poetry and twice a Pushcart Prize nominee, was a Finalist in the Academy of American Poets' Walt Whitman First Book Award contest. She is widely published in hundreds of journals and anthologies including *New Ohio Review*, *North American Review*, *The Bellingham Review*, *Rattle*, *Mid-American Review*, *Poet Lore*, *Miramar*, *Spillway* and elsewhere.

**John Sibley Williams** is the author of *Disinheritance*, *Controlled Hallucinations*, and *As One Fire Consumes Another*. He lives in Portland, Oregon, where he serves as editor of *The Inflectionist Review* and works as a literary agent. Previous publications include: *Yale Review*, *Sycamore Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Saranac Review*, *Atlanta Review*, *TriQuarterly*, *Columbia Poetry Review*, *Mid-American Review*, *Poetry Northwest*, and *Third Coast*.

**Lorna Wood** is a violinist and writer in Auburn, Alabama, with a Ph.D. in English from Yale. She was a finalist in the *SHARKPACK Poetry Review's* Valus' Sigil competition, and her poems have been positively reviewed on New Pages. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in various places, including *Five:2:One (#thesideshow)*, *Poetry WTF?!*, *Malevolent Soap*, *Unstitched States*, *Gnu*, *shufPoetry*, *Cacti Fur*, *Birds Piled Loosely*, and *Luminous Echoes*, an anthology of poems shortlisted in Into the Void's 2016 poetry contest. Lorna has also published fiction, creative nonfiction, and scholarly articles, and she is Associate Editor of *Gemini Magazine*.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**Poetry South** is produced by the low-residency MFA program in creative writing at Mississippi University for Women. Cover photograph: "Horton, Alabama" by Kendall Dunkelberg. We wish to thank the College of Arts and Sciences and the Department of Languages, Literature, and Philosophy of Mississippi University for Women, as well as Theodore Haddin, Bill Spencer, Carolyn Elkins, and Angela Ball for their generous support. We also thank Jianqing Zheng for his help and advice and for founding the magazine and creating our first seven excellent issues. We strive to continue the legacy.

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