In This Issue!

Steven Leech On the Delaware Roots of the Harlem Renaissance

“How I Write” pieces by: Marge Piercy, Lyn Lifshin, Sara Paretsky, Myra Sklarew, David R. Slavitt, and others!

With poetry by Kelley Jean White, Nina Forsythe, Carey Oglesby, a. mclean, Larry Kelts, Valarie Shorter, and Michelle Yost; Fiction by Maryanne Khan, and David Alan Van Houten; Non-fiction by Erika Hoffman; all this and Literary Birthdays Too!

Why in the world are you still reading the front page? You should be reading the work inside already! You were probably one of those students who never turned over the test until the teacher said you could! Well, ladies and gentlemen, it’s time. You may turn over your tests, open your blue booklets, and begin! All responses must be in the form of a complete story or poem.

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Credo

The first short-story I wrote (as an adult who fancied himself a writer) had what I thought (and still think) was a great premise: a young man confused by his first sexual experience with a woman. In an effort to try to understand what was at the core of the sexual experience, he inquired of his parish priest why a woman would want to participate in such an experience, and why, if she had enjoyed it, as she had seemed to, she afterward seemed distant and withdrawn.

Admitting that he did not know, having had no such experience himself, the priest said, “It’s a mystery,” as if the veil of religious acceptance of the unknown was answer enough and that the young man ought to be satisfied that he had had this moment of connection with another human being.

“Bullshit!” the young man responded. The Priest’s seemingly glib response was not enough; he needed to know.

The problem with the story was that it just sat there on the page. It had no life. I was making the characters walk through the story in their pre-assigned roles, as if I were a play’s director blocking their stage movement. Just as a blocking rehearsal is not the real thing, so, too, my story was not the real thing.

I have often thought of that story; I still think the dramatic interaction between the two men — the young man looking for answers and the only-slightly older priest who had none — would make a good story but if I were to write it today it would not be the same story. It would live.

Why? Because I would give up control of the puppet strings with which I was controlling my marionettes. I would let them live and breathe and act on their own.

Despite the fact of the story’s obvious debt to F. Scott Fitzgerald’s “Absolution” — now I would call it an “Homage” to his story — even a brilliant premise alone is never enough.

Much later, once I had discovered the secret (there is a secret) and had begun teaching creative writing workshops, I once said to a young protégé that she needed to love her characters, even those she hated. That she needed to understand and empathize with them, so that when the events in her story unfolded, those events meant something to the characters, because when the characters in a story experience that epiphanic moment, those moments not only become real (because real people experience these epiphanic moments from time-to-time) but because the reader then experiences that epiphanic moment vicariously, and being changed by the experience of reading a short-story (or novel, or poem, or essay) is at least part of the reason people read in the first place.

That’s what you should strive for as a writer.

—JB
How Do You Work?

The Creative Process: What Is It? How Does It Work? How Do You Experience it?

I write at a computer. I only handwrite checks and sign books. Everything else I do at the computer. What I most love about writing on the computer is that it is so much easier to revise than on a typewriter. I can turn a poem round and round. Try different line breaks, different stanza divisions, different words. Different beginnings and endings.

In fiction I often move paragraphs around or sometimes in a novel, whole chapters. I can change the name of a character with minimal work. I can appear to know how to spell correctly....

I write at my desk. I have an office in my house. When I'm traveling on gigs, I make notes but rarely do I actually write. Everything I need is in my office. Computer, printer, reference books, dictionaries, ergonomic chair, cat companions, silence, a view out the window when I am stuck into the garden and the trees.

I write just about every day I am home except Mondays. That's when I deal with laundry, bills, interviews, correspondence, orders.

— Marge Piercy

I think about characters and plots while I'm walking Chicago's lakefront. I work them out on large artist's pads. But I do all my writing on a computer. For rewriting and editing, I have to have hard copy. The computer blurs faults of style and syntax.

— Sara Paretsky

I often jot ideas down in a little notebook before I retire in the evening. After that, when I'm at home, I do almost all the writing and revisions on my computer. I like to revise as I go along until I'm satisfied that I can go no further, then print out what I have and put it aside until I'm moved to look at it again. I might return to the draft the same day, next day or next week or never. If it has promise, I'll revise it as many times as need be until, again, I feel I'm "finished". I read each new draft aloud, to myself. I often "vet" new poems at a critique circle I regularly attend. I often use suggestions made by the other poets in the group. When does all this usually happen? Nighttime's the right time, by and large.

— David R. Slavitt

These days, the question is which of twenty projects do you turn to when the desire to make something overtakes you. I hired someone for an hour the other day to help me decide. I set out on a large table the projects: an unfinished novel set in a mountain village in Greece; a collection of poems based on science; a collection of essays about writers; a collection of poems, hopefully with original drawings by my sister based on the Biblical story of the Binding of Isaac; a major research work in progress for twenty years about memory and trauma; an extended essay based on the neurological effects of extreme isolation of prisoners. Well, that's only six but there really are twenty.

My savior discovered the answer in less than five minutes: "If you had a year to live, which project would you absolutely have to finish?" she asked. It took half a second to answer: "Memory and trauma," was my answer. So did that solve anything? No. In recent months we've begun a project to identify and archive all poets in the Greater Washington Area from 1900 to the present, including poetry movements, publications, programs, etc. It is an astonishing list even thus far. And it and taxes are consuming every waking minute.

But if you are a poet you are only half alive if you cannot write. My friend Joe, a child psychiatrist who died sixteen years ago, said that "poetry is biological," that with the coming of language we lose the wholeness of experience, that to make a poem we are "sending a message to the preverbal, inner core, a message of discovery and novelty, of mounting tension and resolution." Nothing else can substitute.

How, When, Where: I've played the piano since I was four years old. When I sit at a typewriter or a computer, it is my keyboard. It makes music. But often I start somewhere else. On a scrap of paper or an index card I always carry with me. Random notes. Images. And often the eventual poem will have nothing to do with how it started. The best place to start is often when one is in a place where nothing else requires my attention: 35,000 feet in the air, in a parking lot (not moving!), waiting (doctor's office, post office). But above all, being there. Every single day. No matter how briefly. As Bill Stafford said when he arose early each morning, went for a run, had some coffee and lay down on his couch and wrote his daily poem, being there to receive the poem. He shamed me once when he stayed here by having produced not only a poem but a translation and it was all done before 7 A.M. in the morning.

A day can't begin if some part of it isn't given over to writing. I know: there are always reasons why it's nearly impossible. Life makes many demands of us. But if we can't have this conversation, and it is our great longing, than we are not really alive. And nothing is said here about the hundreds of revisions a poem can go through. But that is another chapter.

— Myra Sklarew
How Do You Work?

The Creative Process: What Is It? How Does It Work? How Do You Experience it?

I write best in solitude, where nobody requires anything of me . . . not even words.
— LATORIAL FAISON

I am a working writer in that I “write” stories with my jewelry work these days, including actually writing text that appears with the pieces online... so that’s the form my writing is taking these days. If interested, I’d love to expound on it some. I consider my jewelry pieces to be wearable poems.
— Jodi Bloom

When does writing happen?
Whenever the quiets rule. -- Whenever a pair of hands or a hat slant make me leave the day behind.
— Hiram Larew

When I feel like writing a poem, I fill a marble notebook page with lines of phrases, images, and sometimes dialogue - most of which doesn't ostensibly fit together. Then I draw a bunch of random arrows linking one blurb to the next. Then I read a novel, eat some soup, live my life for a few days. When I come back, they make sense. I throw them up on a word doc and then punch them, letter by letter, into my phone to text to my Trusted First reader. That step tends to yield the best edits. When he gets back to me, I make about three fourths of his suggested changes. Then I send it off to a handful of lit mags. A few weeks later, I withdraw it from the mags and write the poem I wanted to write at the beginning.
— Liv Lansdale

I’ve learned to write while not writing. Visualizing when I can’t get to the page. As a result, my work has become more visual over the years.
— Julianna Baggott

I write two to three hours in the morning, seven days a week and, given time during the day, I’ll work on rewrites. I write only on the computer. My thoughts are way ahead of my manual dexterity. I often travel and that’s when I can’t keep to my schedule though I try as best I can. I should mention that while I’m not writing I think about the piece and where it is headed. That way I have an idea of what to write once I sit down again at the computer.
— Jeff Richards

How I work? I write in brief spurts working on many poems at the same time and try to stay out of my own way. Lately, I’ve found writing on unlined copy paper gives me a freedom to explore without thinking that I’m writing a poem. In these sessions, I let go and hope to get to interesting language. Then I’ll carry these pages around and work on shaping the unwieldy mess into poems. I am most fortunate, my wife is my editor, and she helps me through the final stages. As for the muse, maybe that’s my Goddess, she has spoken to me at chosen moments (“be alert”) and is a much wiser decision maker than I.
— Bernard Jankowski

Additional Advice for a Young Poet

“A writer has nothing to teach and everything to learn, at all times.” Albert Camus

1. Only one paper napkin for those six empty minutes?
Cover it with a poem.

Wipe your face on the other side.
Between the splotches: write.

2. Lose your pen?
Try a pencil. When this breaks, wears out,
charcoal till you’re black as the burnt stick worn to smudge.

Write with ash on the sea.
Write on grass,
red ink on flames,
blue on the sky,
white on snow.

When all implements disappear,
use your blood.

— Elisavietta Ritchie

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How Do You Work?

The Creative Process: What Is It? How Does It Work?
How Do You Experience it?

Daydreamer Believer: Finding—and Writing—Poetry
Janice Lynch Schuster

A few years ago, I participated in a study at the National Institute of Deafness and Other Communication Disorders. The researchers were trying, as best I understood it, to explore which parts of the brain fire during the creative process, and then to use that information to develop therapies for people experiencing a stroke, or some other traumatic brain injury.

My role was harder than I’d anticipated: I had to memorize three poems, each about dozen lines long, one by Robert Lowell, another by Marianne Moore, and a third that I’ve forgotten, as well as a list of a dozen random words.

One rainy morning, I drove to the NIH campus in Bethesda, Maryland, where a neurologist checked me out and pronounced me fit to participate. I spent the next 90 minutes in a functional MRI machine, with a cage strapped to my head, and all kinds of sound-muffling devices on my ears. A computer keyboard was positioned near my hips, and, by looking at a mirror outside the tube, I could see what I was typing. Except for my hands, I could not move—doing so would have meant starting the whole process from the beginning.

I had, at the researchers’ direction, to type the poems I had memorized; type the word list; type my own random words—or write my own poems. To coax me with that last step, they offered a phrase or two as triggers. “Tightrope” sticks in my mind, though it has gone nowhere. We went through this drill four or five times.

Despite the clinical environment, I wrote. The poems I produced were not good or worth saving, but they were full of ideas, metaphors, similes, and all the things we associate with poetry.

To my surprise, I didn’t mind being in that artificial, crowded machine. I was doing what I’ve always loved to do: Daydreaming, and putting my thoughts on paper, or on a screen. It occupies the mind.

I thought of this the other night, when I spent more time in an MRI, getting my bum knee checked out. It was early evening, and I was tired, so when the machine revved up, I closed my eyes, and drifted through my thoughts. Images came and went, phrases, things I’d heard or read, news of the day, the ephemera of living.

I’ve been writing poetry since I was a child, and I suppose, if I’m lucky, I’ll write it when I’m ancient. There is inevitably something worth observing and chronicling, some bit of the world to examine and consider. There’s the ritual of putting the words down—for poetry, for me, always on paper, with a pen that feels good in my hand. I dedicated special blank books to it, ones that are more luxurious than my everyday steno pad.

I can usually find something swirling around in my conscious mind, a juxtaposition of words and images, things I’ve heard, or done, or seen. Today, there are three of these elements: making my bed with my 11-year old, and remembering doing the same with my grandmother, when I was his age. A phone call with my grandmother, now 92, and her saying, “I never lived afraid, I won’t start now.” The sound of the wind outside my house, and my crazy dog barking at it.

How during the period when my now-adult children were small and I was single, life overwhelmed me, and I stopped writing. It evaporated from my mind, and so, from my life.

But a few years ago, driving home from a boxing lesson, I caught an NPR segment about artists whose beautiful works evolve from harsh and punishing experiences. It was a challenge to me, and within a few months, I had written a score of poems about boxing—a brutal, ugly sport—and even published my own collection.

I’ve been writing poetry ever since, and reading it, attending readings, and trying to connect with other writers. In the years when children occupied my days, such connections were impossible. Now, it seems impossible to do without them.

I have a degree in mathematics, my least-favorite subject, but something that challenged my intellect. When I was an undergraduate, we could go to our professors’ homes, and one day, I set out to find my topology professor, an older man named JR Boyd. I had no idea what he was talking about, something about trying to prove the infinite number line between zero and one, and finally, he said, “Go to your room, lie in your bed, and dream.” In a lecture one afternoon, he advised us that the key to a good life was “to find your passion and pursue it passionately.”

For me, as it turns out, that passion has been language, words, communication, inspiration, creativity: Poetry. It counts for a lot in my life, an infinity on the number line of thought.

— JLS

How I work... It has changed so much since having a little one. Now I write when she sleeps, usually during naptime or after she’s gone to bed in the evening. I always start by reading some poetry, which both inspires and helps me enter that space inside myself. I must admit that years ago I hand-wrote everything first in a journal, but now I just start typing on a blank Word doc. I don’t make any changes or edits to what comes out when it is first written. I write until the poem feels done, and then I put it away. It’s funny, because sometimes I don’t get around to working on a revision for weeks or even months, and there have honestly been times when I’ve had no recollection of what I see on the screen. I open a file and the poem is totally fresh for me. Other times, I have vague recollections, but when I write I tend to just let the voice move through me without really being very conscious of it. Poetry is weird stuff, isn’t it? Finally, I can spend (and have spent) years revising a poem. It’s so hard to say when it’s finished!

— Tina Raye Dayton
I got started writing later than many-- I did a handful of poems when very young and Robert Frost wrote something great on one so in the back of my mind I kept that. I thought someday, maybe. Ironically, I was afraid I had nothing to write about even when I wanted to write-- a summer in Cape Cod-- I remember sitting there in a white dress -- maybe 16 --with a pink velvet cummerbund wanting to make a poem and no idea where to start or what it could possibly be about. Even in college I was afraid to take a writing class. But it was not until I began: first in the quiet times at a public radio station where I edited the Scene on 17. There were always slow times when I began to read poetry, subscribed to many many mags listed in Len Fulton's directory and found each day magical, reading and writing. When I left that job, I wrote every morning on Rapple, standing at a kitchen counter. When I got into ballet on Apple-tree, I wrote in bed or at my desk over looking Chinese dogwood and wild trillium I dug up years before with my mother on the Mother's Day a week after her mother died. I lived alone and I loved it. Sadly a van blew up last summer in my driveway: destroyed all the trillium-- so rare and gorgeous and killed most of the dogwood. I have a notebook of poems abut that, still untyped but full of loss. In those days, I'd work all day-- write early and in the afternoon deal with the mail, or in typing up poems. When I was editing one of the three major anthologies I did, including the long time running TANGED VINES, that came first and I hardly wrote any of my own work. Though after reading so many mother and daughter poems (I had written very few until then) that became a major theme for many years in my own work. In the award winning documentary film by Mary Ann Lynch: LYN LIFSHIN: NOT MADE OF GLASS my typical day at work is the main thing; my basement full of news clips, the stacks of notebooks (I always have about 60 handwritten ones just waiting and waiting-- some go back to 1990...). I will never get to all of them, never get to read all I want...it's overwhelming. The film shows me in various readings, at ballet, just every day all day routines. I am very excited: the film, once distributed by WOMEN MAKE MOVIES and show at film festivals is just now coming back as a cd. It probably sows my writing life as well as anything as does a Washington Magazine issue I think in August 1997 and some articles in The Writer's Market.

Moving to DC -- I wrote around ballet-- classes in the morning, writing some on the metro, visiting museums so often -- a calendar I kept shows 5 or6 days a week I'd be at some exhibit or talk or movie and those often became what I wrote about. I wrote a little on the metro then but it wasn't until I moved to Virginia where the ballet studio is a much longer trip away. I began writing so much more on the metro-- it's almost seemed the only time I have... I remember writing poems for the anthology DICK FOR A DAY and putting a harmless book jacket over wildly erotic books I didn't feel ok having others watch me read. Since I've done a lot of series of poems, I carry heavy books on the way and the train ride always seems too short. I still write in wire spiral notebooks but I long for the old kind: with unicorn on the front: now the notebooks are either very soft backed and floppy or worse: the pages come right out-- I never expected normal nice notebooks would disappear.

When I travel I always have a notebook-- I write bits of poems-- like this late spring in Turkey-- on cramped small notebook pages. If asked to write on a topic for a collaboration or anthology, I get obsessed with that and can write full tilt anywhere: at someone's camp for 4th of July, in the car, at the kitchen table. Rarely at a desk.

Of course I can't forget the writing I did at art colonies like Yaddo, The Millay Colony and Mac Dowell-- where the days are like beaches with nothing on them and you can just walk out and everything is new and clean. Though I haven't been to Yaddo for a while, I can see in many books many poems are from those stays, especially at Yaddo where I visited three times. I miss it.

—Lyn Lifshin

So much depends on a yellow kitchen, and a retaining wall.

My house is a decidedly unromantic open-plan mid-century rambler: devoid of writerly nooks and crannies, or inviting window seats. Yet in all the time I've tried and failed to write in a coffee shop like a proper writer should, one central feature of my home has become the most natural setting for getting anything done.

Moving in ten years ago with my then-toddler and husband necessitated excising the kitchen, a 1960s monstrosity of green vinyl and brown-painted wrought iron. In the course of this excision, two duel sub-contractors mis-measured the entrances of the doorways so that it was impossible to retain the old bifold doors separating kitchen from dining room. What was created, in the end, was a long slab of wall with a bright yellow kitchen on one side, and a living and dining room on the other.

It turns out that a slab of wall placed smack in the middle of a high-ceilinged house lends itself fabulously to being encircled: by toddlers in their Big Wheels, by overexcited pets, by little children chasing one another. It also lends itself perfectly to the practice of Pace.

When I write, I pace. I pace and stop; then I pace and write at the kitchen counter; then I pace and sit, and write in my notebook or on my laptop.

"Where are you?" my son cried once, as he ran through the house looking for me. "You're not in the kitchen, walking around!"

The long, broad Corian kitchen counters are perfect for spreading out chapters and sections of a book, so I can see them all at once. As a bonus, I can chop vegetables on one side of the sink while writing on the other side.

I have a room I could use as an office, but why would I? It's only big enough for bookshelves, a desk and a chair. Once you're in it, there's nowhere to go.

When not at home, subways and buses work just as well -- sometimes better. You can sit and write while you're moving. And road trips are wonderful, too, for ruminations well -- sometimes better. You can sit and write while you're moving.

After the first draft, there tends to be less pacing and more sitting. In the end, the wheels have been set in motion. All that's left to do is catch up to wherever the piece or chapter is moving, grab hold of the wheel -- and steer.

—Bettina Lanyi
Poetry by Kelley Jean White

Christmas Bird Count

a rattling tap tap tap
I've barely time to call my mother's
attention toward the woods and
a man in a furred hat turns yes
a red head he's out counting
almost New Years and this man
is certain of it all

Dear Maple Tree

your warming blood, my sugar
and oak, how you rocked me, when I read
and birch gave me bark for scribing

where are my little ones buried?

I know the names of three poisonous mushrooms
I will tell you one: Destroying Angel
White white with a little collar of poison

where are my little ones buried?

dear maple tree, your warming blood
my sugar and oak, how you rocked me
when I read and birch gave me bark for scribing

where are my little ones buried?

Epiphany

Brother of Trinity and Union
whispers in fire, speaks tongues of flame
He speaks without riddles
He wipes the slate clean:
a child named Never, a child named Unseen
brother and sisters their hands cannot touch
They kiss their own hands
They wave to the night:
a child named Forgotten, a child named New Light

Epiphany sleeps while his sisters
draw shadows
He dreams of a morning
Not so far away
a child named Blossom, a child named Meadow
a child named Whisper, a child named Day
in sleep they are separate
in sleep they are one:
A child named Ruby, Diamond, Faith
Their hair in the new day
is braided together
Turquoise and Carmine, Marigold and Gray

Everyday I expect to stop loving

you. I glimpse you in the bathroom mirror,
body sagging and bulging—but the fine
strong muscles in your calves are still the same
that climbed the paths in the Wissahickon
back when we still woke and hiked before dawn.
I watch you brush your hair, a lighter shade—
You think it's brown. A little gray. But time
shows thinning. Bit of pink scalp. My horror
You leave piles of papers, things unfinished.
Nothing's ever crossed off the to-do list.
You don't learn. You still do everything wrong.
You cook for me. There's always too much food:
your fresh baked bread, sweet butter, taste too good.
DOMAIN OF THE LOWER AIR
MARYANNE KHAN

https://sites.google.com/site/thebroadkillriverpress/
Sideways
a short story by
Maryanne Khan

'I was quite partial to oysters,' the old lady said, eyes narrowing as she peered into the tunnel that occasionally turned itself inside out into the present even as the actual present was swallowed whole.

Her mind tumbled to unexpected locations, some of which she thought she had forgotten, as indeed she had. For a period, they had lost relevance and therefore a place in her present, amongst the daily traffic of shopping, keeping house, visiting, washing and feeding herself, until these activities on her part became redundant, performed by the nurses or no longer needing to be done.

Once, she had found herself in a forgotten nursery, reading a familiar book for the first time, or scoffing as she took up her younger sister's dare, leaning over the iron railing of the balcony to spit on the hats of passing gentlemen, so that her mother, having discovered that she had done this, (most likely from vanquished, milk-mouthed Maisie) had smacked her bottom, be it rather sheepishly, with the back of the hairbrush, and forbidden her to come down to dinner, something that had pleased her in a somewhat perverse way, as it demonstrated that her mother cared more for the hats of strangers than for herself. 'I knew I was adopted,' she had shouted at Mamma, who, having no idea how to respond other than saying, 'What nonsense,' had resorted to slamming the door in her face.

A further reminder now sat by Clarissa’s bed, a framed photograph of her youthful self, one she had given Grandmamma when she, Lady Heywood, returned to the ancestral home in England. Clarissa had later been confounded by her own egocentricity, the world arranged with herself at its centre, staring (accusingly?) out through the glass, insisting at the very least on a reminder of her insignificant presence thousands of miles away. The Solicitor handling the Estate had later returned it to Mother, and Clarissa had kept this image as a stubborn souvenir, evidence that would outlast the troubling fact of her present self.

These days, she wandered an unfamiliar landscape populated by figures both living and dead, who presented in startling combinations. She could see them, and more alarmingly, touch them. Her brain knew that this was impossible, but her mind could not translate this knowledge so as to enable her to weed out the usurpers. She now stared at the youngish woman sitting on a metal chair beside her bed. It could have been anyone, and probably was.

'But we were speaking of oysters,' Auntie continued. 'I had the proper little forks, silver tines, bone handles, so pretty,' she said, testing. 'They’re in the top drawer of the dresser, as you might remember, along with the little glass dishes for the condiments. Lemon and pepper only, oysters are best natural.'

'I remember, Auntie,' the niece said, thinking, of course lemon and pepper. Never had she tampered with ingredients in their purest state. She had made a religion of respecting naturally occurring combinations such as pheasant with truffles.

The old woman wanted to ask her outright, which child of whose child she was, but this would have revealed more of herself than she was willing to surrender. She might not have instant access to memory, but from the outset, had chosen to mask this fact with guile.

She said, 'I must tell that dreadful nurse person to get me a dozen.'

A dozen? Thought the visitor, Could you ever eat that many?

She said, 'No, I'll get them. It will be a pleasure. At least something I can do for you.'

Ah, Clarissa thought, unlike that creature Wilson, this girl was eager to oblige a whim.

She searched the eyes of her visitor, mapping the face to establish a connection along the bloodlines of family. It had to be a family member, for no one else came, just those wretched long-faced ewes who only now felt a certain obligation to subject themselves to the torture of this bare room, to natter about this and that, stare at what remained of her, and having done sufficient penance and proffering good wishes and a threadbare excuse that promised immediate release, to slink away from the stench of disinfectant, the sullenness of lino- leum and the inevitability of her encroaching demise. None of the men-folk ever showed his face. It gave her great satisfaction to put these self-sacrificing women to this small task or that, be it straightening pillows, fetching the newspapers she hoarded or a magazine she would never read, a piece of fruit she would never eat, a glass of ice-water she obligingly drank.

The magazines and fruit she employed as bribes to coax the one nurse she did like, Sister Jane, to sometimes sit with her when a curious sense of desolation seized her and the legs of the metallic furniture seemed to stab the gloom like so many stiff reeds in a frozen linoleum pond.

This visitor, she observed, had greenish eyes, tilted slightly upwards at the temples, eyes that looked directly into her own, unlike many others who chased butterflies through the air.

'Stand up straight and look people in the eye,' Papa had always said. 'Let people know who you are and that you're as good as any of 'em.'

When he had died, two of his children had gradually softened into a state of puffy, moth-like dissolution at the hands of a mother who, overnight, had turned into a pale, quivering rabbit with pink eyes. The youngest, Maisie, had decided that she was incapable of any action whatsoever, a decision she stood by even after she was married and until the babies came and she was forced to some degree, to perform, whilst still maintaining that charming, doll-like dependency on her husband. Their brother, Arthur, whom they called Bunny, eventually took up drink and pedophilia. Clarissa and the eldest, Charlie, fended manfully for themselves.
Clarissa drifted back, noticing that her visitor’s hair, quite frankly, was far too long for a woman her age, although only God Himself knew why the current trends dictated a total lack of common sense. Brownish in colour, untouched by grey. She knew that it was not a familiar face, yet one that somehow provoked a visceral tug between them—affection? Her visitor sat easy on the stiff chair, leaning slightly forward, her face gentle, but also bright. A hand rather too small for her height lay on the spread, smoothing it in delicate, feather-duster strokes.

‘Intelligence I can distinguish,’ Clarissa thought with satisfaction, ‘it’s in the eyes.’

Clarissa continued speaking, her speech slightly hampered by a drooping lower lip, ‘Not what you would call a nice person, that Wilson. Devious. And of course, they won’t have decent oyster forks in here,’ she said, peevish. ‘They have the effrontery to give you plastic cups!’

No, Wilson was a rum one. Hands of a farm labourer albeit uncalloused. Capable hands, large enough to span an octave or to handle unwieldy tools. There was nothing refined about her and certainly nothing spiritual. She was the peasant standing outside the frame of Millet’s depiction of rustic humidity, her heathen head erect, picking her nose. Yet she appeared to go about her duties with a perverse sense of religiosity, regarding her work as a set of sacred rituals that must be performed identically each day. Sister Wilson’s feet trod a predictable grid along which she motored, stolid and unflurried as a tramcar. Perhaps, her patient thought, it was not religiosity, but self-absorption. However, that other one, Sister Wood, despite the name, was made of stuff less stern.

‘But they are looking after you, no?’ the visitor said. ‘Mother chose this,’ and here her voice stumbled in selecting an appropriate term, ‘here, I mean, because it has a fine reputation.’

Clarissa now remembered a soothing ambassadorial voice assuring her that ‘the family’ thought it best. ‘Not having to worry about every little thing, you know,’ the emissary had said, ‘here, I mean, because it has a fine reputation.’

Sister Wood, despite her work as a set of sacred rituals that must be performed identically each day, was firm beneath her feet, Clarissa dozed.

As none of the so-called family felt that this duty actually fell to them, this had been deemed the solution.

The patient clenched down on her memory, forcing it to surrender a name. Marie, that was it, Marie, the elder daughter of Sylvia, who was memorable only for the fact of having conspired to remove her from all that was precious to this ignominy for no reason whatsoever.

She did not remember having stumbled half way across the parish wearing her best patent leather shoes in the rain, (shoes she would never have normally chosen to wear in wet weather) arriving and pouncing on the door of the presbytery, demanding to receive Holy Confession from the late Father Donnelly in order to absolve her of the murder of her husband.

Having identified her visitor, and satisfied that the earth was firm beneath her feet, Clarissa dozed.

Marie, becoming accustomed to these brief naps, saw that the top sheet, hospital-starched and folded over the flat chest, made of her aunt a mere wrinkle in the narrow bed.

After a few moments of semi-slumber from which she awakened geared to fully challenge her visitor, Clarissa said, ‘It was the ‘flu I had, dear, wasn’t it?’

Marie knew this was not a question but a mental game of Scrabble that the old lady played, lining up the tiles that spelled S,T,R,O,K,E, laying these down and proclaiming, ‘FLU!’ She also knew that the old woman never had the tiles to spell DIMENTIA and no one dared deal them to her.

‘But you’re much better now,’ Marie said. ‘Sister said much.’ And so she would say, Clarissa thought, as long as the bills were paid and the patient could be abandoned to solitude with impunity.

‘As I mentioned,’ Clarissa said, ‘that woman Wilson is not to be trusted. Gives herself the air of a High Priestess when actually she is made of clay—if not mud. I know for a fact that it was she who took my pearls.’ She held up fingers glittering with jeweled rings. ‘If she wants to steal these, she will have to take a knife and cut them from me in my sleep!’ which had the unexpected effect of making the other woman laugh.

‘Oh, no one would take your rings, Auntie. I expect you’ll find your pearls around about, somewhere you don’t suspect. Pray to St. Anthony.’

‘Ridiculous. Precious things don’t just walk of their own accord. Oh no, my dear, I have my eye on that one!’

The eyes were still bright, and Marie thought of the word ‘jackdaw’ without quite understanding why.

Clarissa closed her eyes, and there was an oblong velvet box tied with grosgrain ribbon, but when she had opened the drawer of her bedside table, there had been only its nest of carefully folded undergarments. In retaliation, she had tumbled its entire contents onto the floor.

Marie observed as her aunt dropped off again, that even prostrate in the dim ward, Great Aunt Clarissa retained something authoritative—perhaps in the sharp, aristocratic profile so unlike that of any other family member—or perhaps in the way she asserted her lingering presence. Such a frail body now, but it might be that the sinews binding flesh and bone together were sufficiently resilient to endure a great deal of strain before snapping.

Clarissa, she reflected, had never been the beauty. It was her pretty, plump sister who had stolen an Englishman’s heart. He had grown up in Constantinople, surrounded by ponies in silken trappings, son of a trader, a child who had smoked a hookah from the age of twelve to then run away to sea at fourteen, and thence from London to sign up for the Army—twice, under different names—who had been shell-shocked, finally emigrating to Australia to marry the charming, helpless Maisie. He had subsequently lain down his life to her in gentle, dedicated service.

On the other hand, Clarissa’s Jim was a figure prone amongst pillows, floating above a dark, creepy place under his bed where they hid gifts for Marie and her siblings when they were children. Marie remembered crawling into the shadow, deeper than the already dim room in which Uncle Jim clung to the present despite the firm grip of the wartime past. There, in the dark, she had discerned the startling pink shape of a larger than life stillborn baby doll lying on its back, curved legs lifted, arms grasping at nothing. It was too big to fit under there sitting up and it was ghastly. Chubby and bald, it had a rigid plastic body and permanently clenched fists, so unlike the latest baby dolls her friends had, dolls with soft, pliant bodies needful of cuddles.

‘Auntie means well,’ Mummy had said. ‘She doesn’t know about toys.’

It was a way of excusing her, not for the poor choice, but for the fact that she had had no children, a fact the womenfolk regarded if not with the status of a disease, then as a casualty, saying, ‘Jim, the War you know.’

Yet for decades Clarissa had ministered to her ailing husband, ordering the doctor here and there during his visits, ‘In Full Control’ as those same women liked to say, quite unkindly, behind her back. ‘Don’t you worry about Clarissa,’ they
said, ‘she rules with an iron rod.’

Marie remembered that it had once also been the authority of the perfect coat and hat, the proper forks for oysters, little glass dishes for lemon, or pickles or relish, never, never a jar on the table, and never artificial flowers. Authority was a tray set out for Father Donnelly with a crystal decanter of Scotch, a slim water carafe, ice in a silver bucket and little tongs. She knew these things because it had been she, who upon being asked to fetch Father his customary afternoon drink, had been caught red-handed in the kitchen slopping Scotch into a crystal whiskey glass.

‘Good GOD girl!’ Aunt Clarissa had scolded her then fourteen year-old self, ‘One always allows a gentleman to serve himself!’

Now over thirty and no longer prone to mishaps of etiquette, Marie remembered her own humiliation. Yet this had been the catalyst that later lead to profuse compliments after a dinner in their Brussels home. ‘Better than Le Cirque,’ the American CEO of her husband’s multinational had said after her triumphant pheasant and the truffle soup. There had been an elaborate dessert served under the hovering, watchful wings of Aunt Clarissa, but now she couldn’t remember what it was. The guests had left, gushing praise for the food and conversation, yet her husband had found fault. The usual, her having ‘domineered’ the evening, speaking of books and art, shifting the topic away from his preferred subject—Business.

She had sensed something in the CEO, something needy, oh! so awfully so, and had plucked out of her library an inspirational little book, about someone loving someone ‘...To Death,’ a book that she herself had found had illuminating and affecting qualities. That night, she had gone to bed with bruises.

Two weeks later, the CEO had committed suicide and she knew he had not made time to read the book.

Marie couldn’t find it in her heart to correct her, tell her that the title was fictitious, a nickname of sorts given by her English grandfather, and one she very much enjoyed. Far from a Contessa, she thought, and abruptly drew back from proceeding down that perilous path. Nothing had been decided yet.

‘You would think one would be given some credit,’ Clarissa said, now fully awake. ‘But no. One makes every effort, to no avail.’

Marie had noticed a pair of engraved gold compacts, the fluted silver cylinder on the raw metal table. Even in the gloom, it was obvious that the lined face had been powdered, the hollow cheeks buffed with rouge, the lips anointed with plum-coloured lip salve, as Clarissa persisted in calling it.

Yet, by all accounts, the ebbing mind was slipping back across a shifting fluid boundary between what was, what is, and what there is to be. Marie imagined her in a constant state of reinvention, of becoming, the rocky facts of life submerged for indeterminate periods of time. Aunt Clarissa swam, Marie imagined, fish-like in the timeless internal sea that was her mind. The swimmer resurfaced, coming up for air.

‘The other day,’ she confided in a low voice, ‘I heard Jackson under the bed.’

‘He must have got out,’ Marie said with kindness, remembering cream paint on walls, the beautiful furniture. That carved hallstand, and how was the main bedroom beyond? She couldn’t remember. But that paint, the substantiality of it, the soft gloss that had always aroused in her a sense of heritage, something this woman had somehow handed on to her.

There was no denying that Clarissa had always been uncomfortable around children, the untidiness of them, their rushing scramble, their selfishness and impatience. There was no room for children in the flat and they, unruly lambs, had been carefully corralled, told to behave, her sister and brother in particular. Marie remembered herself as a watchful, studious child, the eldest, whom she suspected her siblings did not much like.

Clarissa could no more have said, ‘Run outside and play under the sprinkler and take the dog with you,’ than fly. Clarissa had relinquished the ability to fly, although she had the frail, hollow bones of a bird. It had turned out in the end not to have been her lot to fly.

...Jim, you know. The War.

‘Jim’ might have been, however, had been a mystery to Marie, revealed only through the prism of Aunt Clarissa, mouthpiece for the mute, permanently wounded creature sequestered in the Other Room.

‘Poor little Jackson!’ Clarissa said. ‘They don’t bother to lock him up. It’s an utter disgrace! I asked Father Donnelly to oblige when he came by the other day, dear man that he is, and he didn’t mind a bit.’

Marie knew that Father Donnelly had scandalously made off with some prized antiques from the flat, claiming they were gifts from the widow. He had died years ago.

‘If you see him, can you put him back in his cage?’ Clarissa said, flustered by imagined flashes of blue and green feathers. ‘I never saw it. I never saw a mohair coat hung, attracting moths and silverfish with its shimmering half-light of moonstones that sifted through the parchment blind the nurses kept eternally rolled down. That business of the invalid husband and his dead budgerigar also dwelled in there, emerging and then in brief nocturnal flights. It was entirely possible in the shimmering half-light of moonstones that sifted through the parchment blind the nurses kept eternally rolled down. That boyish fool, unruly sun’ had no place in here.

‘Is it raining today?’ Clarissa asked.
'No, it's quite sunny. Hot, even. Bur it's nice and cool in here, thank god.'

She remembered Aunt Clarissa leaning over her in the car, snatching a newspaper and spreading it peevishly over her skinny childish knees, berating her brother, Marie's 'Uncle Charlie, who had insisted on driving them to the Blue Mountains and it was hot, so hot, and the sun beat relentlessly on the legs of Auntie's charge, and why, in God's name had he insisted on coming at this godforsaken midday hour when it was far too warm? Charles, deaf, had bellowed at his sister, 'Good God woman! A bit of sun never did any harm!' There had been roast chicken sandwiches, eaten in the shade of an obliging tree by the side of the road. She remembered licking melting butter from her fingers until Auntie had reached into her handbag to proffer a clean lawn handkerchief.

Marie's mother had said, breathless, 'Just imagine! For your thirteenth birthday, Auntie Clarrie is taking you to Sydney!'

This had been another Auntie Clarrie, one no longer chained to the bedside of the man who had returned partly living from the War. He had crossed over to the legitimate world of the War dead, taking at last his appointed place at the cenotaph.

Marie had, however, wondered why she had been the chosen one, the travel-companion. They boarded in Melbourne, changing trains at Albury, mismatched rail gauges requiring an inconvenient switch between twin Spirits of Progress so that first Castor, then Pollux shuttled them onwards, swaying steadily northward through the night. She had now forgotten a once-precious memory of whatever they had eaten in the glamorous Dining Car (surely, she had later bragged about it to her brother and sister?) then returning to their sleeping-carriage, giggling at one another's stumbling—she rather nervously, Auntie genuinely amused. And how had been the sleeping arrangements between the two of them, virtual strangers sharing a tie of blood, no more? She couldn't remember. She remembered only the lurching train powering towards the unexpectedly attainable object of her childish imagination—Sydney!

She might have slept—or not—but oh! what a voyage it had been, a voyage requiring the loan of a Brownie camera, a set of new clothes, new shoes, a sponge bag and small suitcase of her own. It had been the first of many voyages she was later to take without giving it so much as a thought.

She came back to the present. The nurses choose to keep the blinds down. How curious. But perhaps not. Perhaps penumbra reveals less, robs mirrors of power, leaves space undefined, blurs distance. Jim and Clarissa, Clarissa and Jim, perhaps reunited here in the gloom.

Even as she thought of nurses, Sister Wilson appeared, her face appointed with the fixed cheerful expression deemed appropriate when dealing with the doomed. She knocked briefly, a placatory tap after which she advanced, unbidden.

'Please,' she pronounced, stabbing in the wooden spoon that
Marie knew her aunt would abhor. ‘Now I’ve taken the trouble, it needs be eaten,’ Nurse said shoveling a spoonful that hovered briefly before the old face buried in the pillow.

Clarissa’s dark eyes flashed in mineral fury, ‘Sit me up, you fool.’

The nurse sucked the lemon harder, placing tub and spoon with its melting blob on the table. She loosened the sheet, raised the patient’s shoulders, (how thin she is, Marie thought, even for her!) and plumped pillows with such vigour that Marie expected her to dust her hands together once it was accomplished.

‘Are we comfortable?’ nurse Wilson said, sour.

‘I am seldom comfortable,’ Clarissa said. ‘Speak for yourself.’

And suddenly, there was Clarissa, in a perfect wool coat of the finest cut and fabric, permed hair tucked under a smart side ormolu urns.

Clinical, the nurse snuggled the patient’s shoulders,omics, she thought, ‘I’m not a complete cripple yet!’

Marie sat down and stared through the thick silence at the merciful blind.

Clarissa wiped.

Marie thought of that book in Brussels. It had been called Dale Loves Sophie to Death, the epiphany that otherwise meaningful graffiti had brought about in a man whose soul was dying. She had given it to another dying man who had not read it. Perhaps there was no redemption for the truly self-condemned.

‘Would you like a towel?’ she offered, having nothing else to give.

‘No, dear, but thank you all the same,’ Clarissa said, ‘that little sponge bath was quite refreshing. Did I mention that Father Donnelly was in the other day? He asked me to marry him, you know. Of course, I accepted.’ She put out her hands, moving them gracefully so that the jewels in the rings shot dancing sparks onto the ceiling. ‘However’ she said, ‘I do feel that a diamond would be somewhat excessive for a woman my age, wouldn’t you agree?’

Marie did not reply.

Something white hovered between them.

‘In any case, put this back before you go. You should go, dear. Father will be here any minute.’

Marie took the cloth to the basin.

‘And you mustn’t forget my oysters if you come again.’

‘Of course I will, and I won’t forget.’ She might have been lying. What she had come for had evaded her. It had been her need for some sense of belonging, something she no longer needed to run from, but rather, to. Perhaps it was too late, the link too broken. Perhaps she herself was too broken.

‘Mind you rinse it now—thoroughly.’

‘I will.’

Her face in the dull mirror above the basin shimmered in liquid reflection, sending her features back to her, the eyes shadowy, troubled, the mouth taught, because it had occurred to her, what if other, more insidious genes have also skipped a generation? She searched for a revelatory sign in the mirror.

She squeezed out the flannel that released a slow, cloudy streak into bright, clear water.

tremely mindful of the fact that the retribution exacted by those accused, particularly of those justly accused, can be very harsh indeed.

Hospital sounds welled up in the slick corridors, a squeaky wheel on a gurney shrieked.

Ashamed of her weakness and suddenly claustrophobic, Marie thought of the marble apartment in Rome, the silky parquet floors in Milan, the grand Maison de Maitre they now had in Brussels. Of herself stearing through the leaded panes of French doors looking over the vast gardens, at the disused stables with room for four horses at the far end, thinking as she took it in, how can I give up all of this? Why can’t I just let him have his lovers, endure his temper? I can learn to cope.

‘A flannel dear,’ the Aunt finally said. ‘Please fetch it for me.’

Released from paralysis, Marie jumped up and hurried to the hand basin to fill it. Squeezing warm water through the washcloth she returned, proffering it neatly folded on the palm of her hand.

‘Do you want me to...?’

‘For God’s sake, child,’ the old woman snapped, ‘I’m not a complete cripple yet!’

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I Didn't Know What I Was Looking For

When the tree embraced me
with its earthy tree scent
and its darkness

I wedged myself in
against rotting wood
among beetles and cobwebs.

Hidden God, hidden God,
I didn't call out—
I strained my ears into the dark
until I fell asleep
against the heart of the tree.

When I awoke
my cheek bore its imprint.

Statement of Disbelief

I don't believe in resurrection,
no rebirth, no second chances.
No one will come
to roll away your stone.

When Dad grounded me,
he locked the basement door.
To escape,
I had to break a window.

Heretical Midrash

The Father of All appeared to the father of no nation and said, "Take the only son of your enemy who lives in the broad valley and go to the mountain where I dwell. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering and I will make of you a great nation."

The next day, the father of none spied the son of his enemy watching his father's sheep. He enticed him away, seized and bound him, and set off for the Holy Mountain. The boy was young and frail; he did not struggle but looked at the father of none in bewilderment and fear.

When they arrived at the top of the mountain, the childless one built an altar and piled it with wood and laid the boy upon it. Comprehending his fate, the boy wept and pleaded for his life, and the father had pity on him. He unbound him and lifted him from the altar and destroyed the altar he had made. Then he and the boy walked down the mountain.

Halfway down the mountain, the angel of the Father of All appeared and said, "Blessed are you, O barren desert. Now I know you are indeed righteous, for you had pity even on the son of your enemy and did not take his life. Neither for your own profit nor for love or fear of the Father would you take the life of an innocent child; therefore, you will not inherit the broad valley, but I will bless you and you will dwell forever in my presence."

And the father of nothing left the mountain greatly troubled.

Ordinary Angels

The merciful angel of habit
kept you forking food
into your dumb mouth.

If there was a larger meaning
you'd given up
trying to figure it out.

The angel skepticism asked
whether you really believed
you were all alone,

while the angel of curiosity
woke you up
day after day after day
wondering if maybe this day
the angel of possibility. . . .

But yours was the angel
of on the other hand,
of also this,
and wasn't it his fault
you didn't trust any of them?
Batik-Making

To write a poem on a handkerchief
you need a frame
to try to contain
all that grief.

Whatever lies beneath the wax burning hot
emerges inside the boiling cauldron,
all left unwritten
does not.

Yet how can the mottled shapes and blots
in the batik of a colorful life
steaming with love and adventure and strife
be forgot?

Prompters

Silent words in my ears
trigger my fingers to write
even before I hear them. [OR; even before I think them] ???

Full-blown, my dramatis personae
hang out in the wings of the stratosphere
awaiting their cues.

They await my fingers to snarl
then untangle their problems,
settle their squabbles, petty dilemmas—

If someone or something interrupts,
if I don't cast a net and haul them in quickly,
they disappear like smoke—

They expect my ears to hear out
their petty problems, grand illicit affairs.
As if I could sort and solve all my own.
Truth’s stranger than fiction. Anybody who’s lived long enough can’t deny that maxim. No one’s imagination is expansive enough to fathom the myriad of possibilities, coincidences and weird outcomes life tosses at us. Sometimes, a person can’t know how bizarre things will turn out till years later.

For instance, I recently visited the Titanic Artifact Exhibition at the NC Museum of Natural Sciences. I’ve been a Titanic buff since I was fourteen and devoured Walter Lord’s book, *A Night to Remember*. Of course I saw the blockbuster hit, with Leo diCaprio, as soon as it came out! When in Orlando two years ago, I declined a trip to Epcot because I opted to spend my time there at “The Titanic Experience” where a thespian playing the part of a doomed passenger took us on a tour of replicated rooms of the ship, and she acted out the moments of the disaster.

Therefore, when I visited the Titanic Artifact Exhibition in Raleigh, I was a bit jaded, a tad non-chalant, and a smidgen blasé about seeing the artifacts. After all, I knew the story. I’d seen the rescued treasures from it before in Orlando. Nevertheless, I dutifully scanned the display cases in Raleigh. I noted a black bag with a huge lock, which was larger than a doctor’s black bag and not used for medicines; folks back then used it to stow their valuable jewelry, like a lock box. I gazed at the case with the restored wooden clothespins gathered at the wreck site and fathomed how they rejuvenated the soggy wood. I studied the prince-nez eyeglasses with a “C” curve to fit the nose and marveled at their pristine condition. Next, I donned the 3D specs to peer at the video of the wreckage. I read the placards discussing the passengers like the ill fated Strauss couple, the survivor Molly Brown, and the young girl, Ruth Becker. As an aside, half-talking to myself, I said in a rather ho-hum voice to a docent leaning by the door, “Is there anything here that has a North Carolina connection?” She led me over to a case in the next room. Within it was a faded yet legible document. It was simply named Form# 30240-Tel. Titanic C.Q.D.

My mouth fell open as I realized the significance of what I was seeing. Furthermore, I understood that if folks had known what they had in their possession all along down there in Hatteras, since the tragic night of April 14, 1912, it would not have taken until 1987 to locate the colossal wreck!

A C.Q.D. was received at Hatteras Station at 11:25 p.m. Titanic called giving its position as 41.49N 0.24W, about 380 miles SSE of Cape Race. Ten minutes later Titanic gave a current position as 41.46N 50.14W (a matter of five or six miles difference). The CQD acronym for “Come Quickly Distressed” read “have struck iceberg.” This entry from the Hatteras Weather Station Diary and Log is one of the earliest distress signals received from R.M.S. Titanic. On 4/14/1912 at 11:25 p.m., it was recorded by the signalman at the station. Next, Supervisor Richard Daily transcribed the signal and relayed it to NY. David Sarnoff, the future founder of RCA, was then on duty, and he didn’t believe the message thinking it “junk.” The message never was to be seen again until 2005. You see, during the subsequent renovation to the Hatteras Station the log papers were rolled up and stuffed into the plaster walls to provide insulation. About eight years ago the National Park Service restored the facility to its original circa 1900 look. The log papers were discovered. The entry is fully conserved and now on exhibit for the public to see in Raleigh.

So really, all along there was a record of the coordinates of where this ship sank when it hit the berg in 1912. In 1987, it was a bit of a treasure hunt to uncover the mysteries of the Titanic, but here in NC, we had a historical Titanic treasure too, not in the water, but instead wadded up in a wall, not unlike a wren’s nest.

— EH
Federal Daydream

I'm pretty sure she gets off at M Street, and takes the ferry to a submarine hatch where she spends her day manufacturing new water at the bottom of the Anacostia. She resurfaces at dusk, taking over for the sun.

Or else the paperwork she licks from her thighs contains the names of fellow CIA spies, that her name is Julie, and like all classic Julies, when she cusses it sounds new.

She has profound frustrations, but wears beige bras that do the screaming for her, that blast through gray clouds of Monday blouses like burning jets spinning through their own debris.

Though Julie doesn’t smoke, her landlord does, so she keeps a pack on hand and always answers when he knocks to bum one. He’s been working on a novel that ends with the sound of her hand on the other side of a doorknob.

Lately I’ve been seriously considering quitting my job, getting on her bus, sitting beside her. I don’t know much about covert operations or bioengineering, but perhaps she’d be reading, maybe a book about the civil war or the empathy of primates.

and I could ask her about it, because I’m tired of watching her through the boring standard bus stop filters of morning fog, the muffler gas ghosting off the top of my fast-food coffee, or a frosted window as it drives off toward the city.

Suburban Reverb

I’ve been trying to recall the nautical stars that hung on the hulls of unlit houses like crooked compass roses, things like the junebug porch flags that would sleep like gray suit jackets in the airless closet of autumn afternoons, or how grooves in sidewalks could be seeds of bike trails leading to ditch canyons full of hidden gold, and the way the spray of road salt felt like wedding rice if you were close enough, because lately, I’ve only had the sound of my first kiss — our church bell teeth clacking, ringing out in every strange direction, nervous laughter, loud like lawnmowers in the night — and that’s fine, but I swear there was more.
Memorandum

The Accounting Department on the thirty-third floor has fallen deeply in love with the young Puerto Rican hummingbird hovering outside. *Red rope, black squeegee, red helmet. Red and black feathers—rumors that Steve opened his window and nearly fell to his death trying to pluck one. In his tinted ignorance of the accountants, Hummingbird swings side to side, frame to frame, while they sing songs of him, staring and swaying together to the screech of his rubber/glass symphony. God bless the filthy rain!* A chorus breaks out. *God bless the city dust and muddy wind!* Joan’s desktop background is a picture of Hummingbird. Adam and Dee broke up and moved their desks closer to windows. Productivity has nearly ceased altogether – rumors that Steve fell out the window. Re: MEMORANDUM: Get back to work, accountants. It was shredded. The glass now cleaner than ever, the sun fills the entire floor. Hummingbird’s shadow seems lighter than the gray carpet it races across. Poems written on white walls in busted ink cartridges – *I love you, Hummingbird.* After the Vice President reached out from the forty-ninth floor with a pair of scissors to cut the rope, the sound of Hummingbird’s body landing on top of Steve’s was only faintly audible over the busy clack of calculator keys.
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Was a Story Set in Wilmington Among the Earliest Influences on the Literature of the Harlem Renaissance? Non-fiction by Steven Leech

Among the earliest literary figures who lived in Delaware in the early 20th century was Alice Dunbar-Nelson. She was born Alice Moore in New Orleans on July 19, 1875. Her first husband was the American poet Paul Laurence Dunbar who died in 1906, about three years after she moved to Wilmington where she had family. Probably the best and most recent example of her influence on Paul Laurence Dunbar and about their stormy relationship can be found in Eleanor Alexander’s 2002 book *Lyrics of Sunshine and Shadow*, (New York: New York University Press). Her own literary career did not end there. Her literary work showed up, both before and after her marriage to Dunbar, in places like George Jean Nathan’s and H. L. Mencken’s *Smart Set* as well as in *Crisis* when it was edited by W. E. B. duBois. While in Wilmington she married Robert Nelson and is better known today as Alice Dunbar-Nelson. Later she worked as an educator and social activist as well as publisher of the local African American newspaper, *The Wilmington Advocate*, during the early 1920s, making her a pioneer of local Black journalism. Her literary and journalistic works inspired many who participated in the Harlem Renaissance during the 1920s.


“Hope Deferred” was first published 1914 in *Crisis* 8, the main publication for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). The story was most certainly written in Wilmington and gives clues regarding its locale. Early on in the story, Dunbar-Nelson states that the city in the story is, “... if not distinctly southern, at least one on the borderland between the North and the South.” Later on in the same story she divulges that the protagonist, Edwards, is serving time at the “county workhouse.” The “Workhouse,” during a little more than the first half of the 20th century in New Castle County, was the name given to the county penal institution then located at the intersection of Greenbank Road and the Newport-Gap Pike (Route 41) near Price’s Corner. The “Workhouse” was also the place from which an uncharged inmate, George White, was kidnapped by local white citizens and lynched nearby in 1903, the year that Alice Dunbar arrived in Wilmington. The “Workhouse” was also the location, where about two weeks before the lynching of George White, several men were publically whipped and made to stand in the pillory. Delaware finally outlawed the pillory in 1905, but the state did not abolish corporal punishment until the late 1960s. One of the guard towers of the “Workhouse” still remains in the Park at Price’s Corner.

Alice Dunbar-Nelson wrote “Hope Deferred,” which is most probably set in Wilmington, at a time when the Dupont Company was about to make an obscene fortune from profits from World War I, when the United States occupied the impoverished country of Haiti, when the Ku Klux Klan in Delaware was at the height of its power and influence and when both major political parties harbored racist views. Even though the Progressive Era was in full bloom in places like New York City, and the Modernist Movement was making significant cultural advances, hope seemed to be waning for Wilmington’s African-American community. It was a bleak time in Delaware to be writing for social and cultural progress. In spite of this, Dunbar-Nelson wrote a story that was echoed in a refrain attributed to the Langston Hughes when “hope deferred” became transferred into a “dream deferred.”

Alice Dunbar-Nelson only has a small citation in Alain Locke’s monumental tome, *The New Negro: Voices of the Harlem Renaissance*, published in 1925. Perhaps she might have had a greater part in Locke’s anthology and commentary had she gone to Harlem and played a greater role in that flowering of modern African-American culture. She chose instead to remain in Wilmington, and in her later years in Philadelphia, writing and struggling for social progress. Alice Dunbar-Nelson died on September 18, 1935. She is interred at the Wilmington and Brandywine Cemetery.

— SL
Claiming Crows

I

Crows-feet on a winter’s face, perched specters lining limbs in fixed patterns, deepening space. Too many to count, splotches against the light, shiny blue-black bombardiers in chest-feathered armor stalk the land.

II

Beady eyed, lancer-beaked, poised to kill, careening, descending, competing to tear a life away, rising fragments on wings, bloodied-clawed scavengers claim remains for ever more.
How to (Not) Talk to a Writer

Writers are a peculiar bunch. Just ask anyone who knows a writer or lives with one. People who live with writers may well find that they must avoid certain subjects (or expecting normal interactions) while the writer is deep in the throes of the creative process, but people who meet a writer socially for the first time need some advice on how to interact with this particular sub-genus of human.

When you meet a writer in a social situation and you discover that they are a writer, do not ask “What are you working on?” unless you really want to know and have a half-hour or more to actually listen to the response. Cocktail parties and sporting events, dramatic presentations, movies, noisy restaurants and bars, or even a child’s school season pageant, are all extraordinarily bad places to try to do this.

If your respondent says, “A novel,” or “a short story,” do not then, under any circumstances, ask, “What’s it about?” for the same reasons, because no matter the setting, the writer will take your polite interaction not as the obligatory chit-chat it really is intended as, but as a sincere interest on your part.

They will then, if the environment is loud and clamorous, lean in close to your ear and proceed to tell you loudly exactly what it is they think you really wish to know about their work. This will be so punctuated by all sorts of tangential stories stimulated by the process of telling you what you don’t really want to know, that the writer, who by now has a hold of your elbow and won’t let go, will make you fear he or she is a mildly sociopathic sponge who soaks up details of the most trivial sort, an obsessive and compulsive (NOT, however, at the same time, as in OCD), who is a generally friendless and frequently unmarried individual who craves real interaction with living human beings.

There really are some cardinal rules which will help you avoid situations where you will have to be curt, abrupt, or even rude to the individual. Here is a baker’s dozen of some as they occur to me, now. (Do you want to talk about them?)

1) When introduced to a person, you have already begun the process of being ensnared -- because you really MUST ask “and what do you do?” of any human being to whom you are introduced politely in the first place -- and if they respond by saying “I’m a writer,” do NOT reply, “Really?” because you really do NOT want to know the reality. Do NOT say, “That’s interesting,” because you really are NOT interested, or if you are initially, you will soon find yourself like an animal in a trap who is willing to chew its own leg off in order to escape. If you nonetheless fail to heed the above advice and fall into this trap, the writer will tell you, in all sincerity, just how it is that they discovered their calling and at what age they first began writing seriously. Understand, all writers think of themselves as having been undiscovered writer-prodigies in their childhoods, and they will explain in no uncertain detail exactly how that realization occurred. And when. And where. And who was there at the time. And what their ages were. And why all of that matters...

2) Do not ask, “And what do you write?” because you will be told, along with an explanation of the fifteen or sixteen arcane sub-genres which the writer does not want you to mistakenly think he or she writes in. Then will come a careful explanation of the finer points of what they DO write. And how. And where. And what time of day. And where (again). And why...

3) Do not ask, “Have you been published?” because if they have, they will run down the entire list of little or obscure, or little AND obscure publications in which they have been published, or, worse, if not, they will then tell you all of the publications they have been rejected from and why the people who rejected their work really don’t know the first thing about the sort of thing which they, the writer, was writing about. And why...

4) Do not ask “What are you working on now?” because the writer will take your feigned interest as real and proceed to tell you ALL of the projects which they have unfinished back in their work space, and, as mentioned above, this is likely to take a half an hour or more in which they will speak to you in low tones with an intensity which may actually leave you feeling somewhat afraid that they will hunt you down and continue their monologue sometime in the middle of the night. Do NOT give them your home address, your phone number, your e-mail, or your place of work, because as far as they are concerned, you are now a close friend and confidant who would not be disturbed by the 3 AM babblings of a lunatic on their front stoop. If this happens, never, never, never let them into your home!

5) Again, if you have survived that trap, do NOT ask “What’s it about?” because they WILL tell you, in minute detail.

6) Do NOT ask “Why are you writing about THAT?” You will receive an explanation of why the sea-slug is an apt subject for a protagonist telling the dramatic story of a peaceful family of sea-slugs whose existence is threatened by Anoplodactylus evansi, a species of sea spider. With any luck, the writer will take this question, if you are unfortunate (or fortunate, as the case may be) enough to forget this prohibition and ask it, as an insult, and ignore you for the rest of the evening/afternoon/ morning. Which, come to think of it, could be a good thing.

7) Do NOT ask “Who could possibly be interested in that?” because you have already professed, through some misguided sense of social politeness, an interest in what, by extension, the writer him or herself finds interesting. Fool. Don’t say we didn’t warn you.

8) NEVER ask “And when do you expect to be finished?” because whatever the initial response, the writer will go into a long explanation of exactly how much more work needs to be done, and then change their estimation of the terminus post quem. Then they will explain why their original estimate may have been flawed. None of this do you REALLY want to know.

(continued on following page)
9) If, against your better judgement, you have survived the half-hour or more of this bloody rot, told invariably in conspiratorial tones in order to prevent anyone else from “stealing” their sea-slug idea, NEVER suggest that “I have a great idea for a story somebody should write,” implying that the person who has just monopolized your ear would be a likely candidate for the task. If you have a great idea for a story, write it yourself!

10) NEVER ever EVER say “I’d like to read that,” because you will get the work in question delivered either electronically or in a brown paper wrapper through the mails (or, worse, delivered in person), along with the expectation that you will devote a full day, if a work of “poetry” (likely a cathartic yawp that lacks any relevance to you or the real world), or up to a full week or more if “fiction” (likely just a thinly veiled autobiographical event) of your time to actually reading said work. God forbid you should not be as obsessively appreciative of the work as its author, and compulsively interested in expressing that appreciation to the writer (especially) and others!

11) Do not ask “Do you have an agent?” because you will have to sit through a harangue about what is wrong with the literary system of agents and their obvious collusion for some imagined reason (perhaps even a personal vendetta!) against the author who will by this time be ranting in your ear, and who will still have an unbreakable grip on your elbow!

12) If it is a book-length project upon which said writer is working, do not ask “Do you have a publisher?” Of course they don’t! They would be out on a book tour if they did, doing Letterman and boring HIM! This question will lead to a long diatribe about the evils of capitalism in the publishing world, and how the large publishing houses take such a large percentage of the cover price of each sale that the writer gets screwed EVERY TIME, and how the smart writers now all self-publish or e-publish so that they can keep more of the income from the sales of their work!

13) Do not ask “When will it appear?” Because of this writer’s devotion to keeping more of the money they earn from sales of the work, they are actually now in the rather lengthy process of putting the squeeze on their family and friends (soon to be former friends?) to “invest” in the publication and distribution costs of their masterwork. Run! Because you will soon find yourself having to resist the writer’s sincere efforts to add your name to the lengthy list of “co-publishers”.

These pieces of advice are the publisher’s serious attempt to help keep you from siphoning gasoline from a car outside and immolating yourself, or sticking the business end of a snub-nose .38 in your mouth and pulling the trigger.
So please! Do NOT attempt to speak with any self-identified “writer” as if they were a normal person. Talk about the weather instead!

***

The publisher welcomes your response. . . . maybe.

— JB
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I didn’t take grammar seriously until I realized publishers were not taking me seriously as a writer. So, I finally told myself that it was time that I grab hold of grammar’s steering toggles if I want one day to be able to navigate through coherent sentences and land safely among the world’s writing giants, such as Charles Dickens who built clear exaggerations from sentence to sentence and Walt Whitman who broke traditions and redefined fragments.

Once I finally had this epiphany and understood the level in which my sentences were incoherent, I found myself embarrassed. Moreover, I found myself landing light-years from Whitman and Dickens and into metaphorical shrubbery, emotionally cut and bruised. I had to find a way to turn this embarrassment around. So, I took classes at Wilmington University to learn grammar, as well as how and when to break its rules to creatively express my thoughts; in the process, I learned that on-going grammar practice is just as critical.

Because I’ve finally taken hold of grammar’s toggles, I can now avoid free falling into incoherent sentences by not “winging-it” like I did learning to become a certified skydiver in the ‘90s. In short, I found myself jumping from a plane, free falling, and landing into unwanted shrubbery - earning actual cuts and bruises.

I believed that I would eventually learn to steer my parachute before my instructors no longer took me seriously, but I didn’t. They worried I would ultimately hang myself on a tree limb or live electric wire surrounding the drop zone. They gave me an ultimatum: either clock more jumping hours per month or quit.

So I quit skydiving to try writing creatively, but I was still just as reckless with my writing skills and found myself hopelessly hung by the sound of my manuscript thrown into wastebaskets and publishers’ laughter at my writing skills. Years later and with this laughter still ringing in my mind’s eye, I’ve finally come to understand that grammar requires attention equal to that of skydiving: I must clock hours practicing all of grammar’s necessary elements; otherwise, my stories will continue to be dangerous to read for not only me, but also editors; in tandem, we could end up tangled in metaphorical tree limbs and scratched by the corners of every misplaced modifier, comma, or exclamation mark.
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Chapter 1 - Temptation

Imagine all the red tape of government bureaucracies, multiply it by seven levels of Heaven with an infinite universe to watch over, and you’ll realize angels have a lot more to do than play harps, sing psalms, and help millionaires win sporting events. You see, “Heaven” actually ranges from the First Heaven, which contains the physical world, to the Seventh Heaven, where God and His mightiest angels reside. Everyone is so concerned about getting from one to seven, not much thought is given to what goes on in the other five.

The Third Heaven is called Schechakim, which means “the sky”. This is primarily a working man’s level of Heaven. Humans who study such things believe it is made up of Hell in the northern end and the Garden of Eden in the southern end, but they would be wrong. By ninety degrees.

In the extreme western end of Schechakim lies Hell with all of its princes and rulers fighting for power, while in the extreme eastern end is the Garden of Eden. In between, you’ll find a kind of urban decay as you move westward with most of the unimportant angels and fallen angels living near the middle, often as neighbors.

Towards the very center lives the angel Lumiel, the angel of the earth, which sounds like an important position, but all he really does is work with other planetary angels making sure the planets all stay in their respective orbits. Once computers made it to Schechakim (which took a surprising amount of time as the Heavenly Host couldn’t decide if computers belonged in Heaven or Hell), the job became more of a monitoring job than anything. This led to a cut in pay and downsizing of the Planetary Division. Lumiel, once considered Archangel potential, was forced to move to a more run-down part of Schechakim.

He had never even heard of coffee until moving next door to Hell, but waking up that morning to its aroma was heavenly. He got up, showered, and headed to the kitchen where his wife, Dina, was cooking breakfast. She slid a cup of steaming java in front of him.

He grunted a thank you, but she had already turned back to the stove. “How do you want your eggs this morning?” she called over her shoulder.

“Over easy,” he mumbled.

She paused for a second before scrambling the eggs mercilessly as they cooked. A few minutes later, she slid his plate in front of him.

He glanced up to see her smirking as she turned again to cook her own breakfast. He pondered what had brought about this treatment, but as he reviewed the previous night’s events, he could find no reason for it.

As his mind wandered, Dina sat down next to him. “You do realize it was your morning to get up and make the coffee and breakfast, right?” she asked pointedly.

Ah.

“I’m sorry. I never heard the alarm go off.”

“Yeah, right.”

“No, really. I’ll make it up to you tomorrow.”

He took a few bites as she continued to fume. Finally, she told him, “It’s not like you have anything important to do.”

A low blow. “I said I was sorry. There’s no need to get nasty.”

“I’m just so tired of this. My friends all told me you were no good, but I was sure you were on your way up.”

“I was! It’s not my fault those blasted computers came along!” he pathetically whined at her. “Besides, the same thing happened with your job, so don’t put all the blame on me.”

“At least as the Guardian of the Torah, I still command some respect. Just because the humans finally learned to take care of it and I’m not needed as much is not my problem.”

“Then what is your problem?”

“My problem is that my husband is stuck in a dead-end job, I’m stuck in a dead-end house in a dead-end neighborhood, and you don’t even seem to care.”

“Angelcakes, I do care.”

“Then how come other angels have been promoted but not you?”

“Zadkiel is the angel of Divine Justice, so it made sense to elect him as the mayor of the Fifth Heaven. Besides, Jupiter doesn’t have any humans to watch over. Semiel has always been a prince of God in addition to watching over the sun. These weren’t promotions, just part of their original job.”

“But you’re the angel of the Earth! You watch over God’s favorites. Shouldn’t you be doing more?”

Lumiel grabbed his halo and stormed out the door without answering. But he knew she was right. This couldn’t be all there was to life.

Lumiel arrived at the Planetary Division building a little later. He passed Jarahel, who was on his way home after taking care of the moon on the night shift, and Gazardiel, who had just finished with the sunrise. He’d be back for the sunset, but computers had basically made him obso-
leter, too.

Settling into his cubicle, he saw the other three occupied as Sabathiel, angel of Saturn, Madamiel, angel of Mars, Nagahel, angel of Venus, and Crocell, angel of Mercury had already arrived. As they really had nothing to do, they were sitting around chatting about the previous night’s baseball games. Anahein had lost again, but at least the Dodgers had won. Naturally, every angel cheered for Los Angeles teams in all sports, but the Angels were their favorites.

Lumiel gave his computer a brief glance to make sure the Earth was still in its correct orbit before sitting down with the others. After catching up on the gossip, he asked his coworkers, “Do any of the rest of you wonder if there’s any more to all of this?”

“All of what?” Nagahel asked.

“All this angelness. It’s the same, day in and day out. There’s no change in hierarchy unless the humans deem it so, and they haven’t worried about us in centuries.”

“You don’t like this job?” Sabathiel inquired.

“It’s okay,” Lumiel admitted. “I guess. But we’ve done this since time began, and we’ll do it until time ends.”

“That’s the way it should be,” Madamiel argued. “It’s what we were made for.”

The other angels agreed, so Lumiel dropped it, but as they turned to other topics, Crocell looked thoughtful.

At the end of his shift, Lumiel said goodbye to each of his coworkers. Another day of nothing finally gone.

He arrived home and was surprised to see a woman in very short, tight jean shorts and a work shirt tied off at the waist working in his neighbor’s garden. He walked over to ask who she was. Not to get a closer look, he told himself.

“Excuse me, miss. Are you related to Belphegor?”

The young woman looked up at him. “Hello, Lumiel,” she said in a man’s voice. “I take it you like this guise?”

Lumiel stared for a second. “Belphegor?”

The petite blonde smiled up at him. “Of course. This is what I use to tempt humans while I’m walking the Earth. I didn’t feel like changing when I got home. Since you usually don’t come talk to me after work, I take it this shell interests you, too. If you’d like, you can come inside and give this body a try.”

“But...but...but you’re really male,” Lumiel stuttered.

“So? All the Sons and Daughters of Adam think we’re sexless.”

“Yes, but you know we aren’t, and you’re trying to tempt me. Going with you would definitely be adultery. It might even be homosexuality, too!”

“But you’re not sure,” Belphegor cooed, now in a female voice. “You should come find out.”

“Even if it’s not, I would become Fallen if I committed adultery. You can’t fool me.”

“Being Fallen’s not so bad,” he/she shrugged prettily. “You wouldn’t even have to move. Half of this neighborhood is Fallen. Besides, there’s way more to do, and it’s far more interesting.”

Lumiel paused. “What do you mean, interesting?”

“Well, you don’t have to worry about humans.” She/he wiggled her hips. “And, as you can see, no rules.”

Lumiel’s mind was awhirl, but he backed up hastily.

“Yes, you make a good point, but I have to go now.”

Belphegor smiled knowingly. “If you change your mind, let me know. And if women aren’t your taste, I do have other forms.” She winked lewdly at him.

After changing clothes and a quick bite to eat, Lumiel was on his way to the bowling alley. Angels love to bowl, creating thunder in the Heavens below them. Tonight, his team faced The Grigori, which was made up of ex-angels who had fallen after sleeping with Earth women.

Lumiel’s team won handily. Afterwards, he was chatting with Crocell, a neighbor and fallen angel on his bowling team, as the next team stepped up to play. This team was The Reprobates, who had been angels until Pope Zachary had declared they were not Fallen, but not angels anymore either.

It was always awkward around them as they weren’t Fallen, but they weren’t angels, either. Lumiel and Crocell greeted the team briefly, but quickly made their way out.

Outside, Crocell said, “I hate running into those guys. It shows how fickle humans can be. It’s part of the reason I never bowed to Adam.”

“But that led to your fall,” Lumiel pointed out. Better Reprobated than Fallen.

“Both are horrible fates. I keep meaning to talk to God and apologize. Do you think He’d take me back?”

“God only knows. But I’ve been meaning to ask you. Is there more to do when you’re Fallen?”

“I guess so,” he admitted reluctantly. “But trust me, it’s no picnic. Why?”

“I don’t know. It seems like I’m in a rut. My job’s pointless, Dina’s hounding me about our status, and I just feel like I should be doing more.”

“And you’re considering falling? Because you’re bored?”

“No. Of course not. I was just curious.”

“Trust me. That’s how it all begins. Don’t fall. I’m sure there’s something you could do.”

“What?”

“I don’t know either. Let me think about it.”

Lumiel and Crocell said their goodbyes. Lumiel went home where he found Dina had already gone to sleep. He lay next to her thinking, “Is this all there is?” as he drifted off to sleep.

### Chapter Two – Decision

Lumiel got up the next morning to make breakfast. Dina still wasn’t talking to him, but at least she wasn’t openly hostile.

At work, it was a continuation of the idleness of the previous day.

Around lunch, Cochabiel’s wife, Elomina, brought him a sack lunch. She was in the guise of a small youthful woman wearing green and silver clothes. In her hair was a wreath of bay leaves bedecked with green and white flowers. Lumiel had never seen her before, but apparently she had considerable power as he was totally mesmerized by her, much like humans are around powerful angels.

As she turned to leave, their eyes met. She smiled politely at him before leaving. Lumiel walked over to Cochabiel’s cubicle. As he entered it, he could smell a sweet aroma unfamiliar to him. “Hey,” he said, “What is your wife the angel of again?”

“Improved fortunes, controlled losses and money

(continued on p. 47)
Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.

~Percy Bysshe Shelley
CONQUISTADOR OF THE USELESS
by Joshua Isard


Joshua Isard’s debut novel is a hoot. Our hero Nathan Wavelsky moves into the burbs with his wife. Life is good. He’s a successful slacker. He doesn’t want to rock the boat. His definition of a good time is listening to his favorite bands on his iPod and staring at the grass and the poplar trees in his backyard. As a mid-level corporate manager, he does what his bosses tell him. If they want somebody fired, he fires them. No questions asked. But the boat does start to rock. He innocently gives a copy of Kurt Vonnegut’s Cat’s Cradle to a teenage girl and his neighbors are rightly appalled. His wife’s hormones start to tango and now she wants a baby. Sure, he enjoys sex, but that doesn’t mean he wants a baby in the house. Worse, his best friend wants him to climb Mount Everest. Nathan likes to camp and hike, but climbing the Himalayas? He could die, for God’s sake. He just wants to be left alone. But no chance.

Joshua Isard is the director of Arcadia University’s low-residency Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing program, a program that he developed. Since the program has a study abroad component, it gives him a chance to enjoy two of his favorite things at work: travel and Apple products. He lives outside Philadelphia with his wife and two cats. His short stories have appeared in The Broadkill Review, Press 1, Inscribed, Northwind, and in the anthologies The Lie of the Land and Outlandish Affairs. Conquistador of the Useless is his first novel.


For more information: www.cincopuntos.com
Publicity contact: johnbyrd@cincopuntos.com; 915-838-1625
gains. A lot of good it does me,” Cochabiel told him. “Why?”

Just then, Lumiel’s computer beeped signaling him he had mail. He went over to the off-brand computer. There had been some discussion over which type of computer to get. Windows, having obviously been designed in Hell, was out, but a computer with an apple on it seemed to be sending the wrong message. Finally, some angels had designed their own system, the Deus ex Machina.

He opened his eScrolls program to find an email from his friend Crocell who wrote, “I’ve been thinking about what you said. You want to accomplish something, and I want to be an angel again. What if we organized a huge gathering, for angels and Fallen alike, to allow them to reconcile. Then, we could finish with a second chance to come back into the fold, which should please the Almighty, and connections could be made between the angels. And the Fallen who don’t repent could maybe rejoin at a later time. It’s a no-lose situation. And if it works, you might get recognized or even be promoted to archangel. What do you think?”

He thought about this suggestion for a moment and could see nothing wrong with the logic. He realized Cochabiel was still looking at him, expecting a response. “I’m sorry, Cochabiel. What were we talking about?”

“Look, I don’t want to get into your business, but humans say if you see my wife, it means your fortunes may be about to improve. Then, you get an email immediately after. I don’t know what it’s about, but if its business related, I’d like to join in.”

So Lumiel filled him in and they began to plan the biggest party Schechakim had ever seen.

Everything went off without a hitch. Thousands of Fallen rejoined the choir of Powers, and suddenly, Lumiel, Cochabiel and Crocell found themselves in front of Michael at the Holy Temple in the Fourth Heaven.

Michael looked the trio over before announcing, “The Lord God is most pleased with your efforts to reconcile His Heavenly Host. He has asked me to bestow the following gifts upon you.”

“First, Crocell. You were one of the Fallen, but God knew your heart longed to return. He returns you to your position in the choir of Powers, where you will work with the Planetary Division to ensure all of the laws of the universe are followed.”

Crocell’s grin lit up his face. “Thank you, sir. I am very grateful.”

Michael turned to Cochabiel. “As you are already one of the seven angels who attended the throne of God, you will be renamed Kokobiel, which means ‘Star of God’. It will be your task to look after all the stars. You will continue to work in the Planetary Division, but you will be over 365,000 angels who will watch over individual stars.”

The newly named Kokobiel was speechless for a moment. “Thank you. The Lord is too kind.”

“That’s not possible,” Michael replied before turning to Lumiel. “Lumiel, you are hereby promoted to archangel. You will continue to be the angel of Earth, but you will continue to work on relations with the Fallen and organize more of these gatherings. Our Lord God is most pleased with your initiative and will continue to observe your actions in the future.”

It almost sounded like a veiled threat, especially considering the last angel with initiative was named Lucifer, but Lumiel thanked Michael before leaving the Holy Temple.

Back home, Lumiel received a hero’s welcome from Dina. “I knew you could do it. I’m so proud of you, honey.”

“Thanks, my love. We’re moving up in the world! Tomorrow you can start looking for a new house further east. I got a huge raise, too!”

Dina squealed with delight. She kissed him deeply before leading him to the bedroom, stopping only to hang her halo on the door handle.

That evening as he fell asleep, Lumiel was happy, but not content. He was already thinking about what else he could do to help his upward mobility. He was now a bright, shooting star for whom the sky was not a limitation. His mind continued in this manner until he fell asleep — without realizing that all shooting stars eventually burn out.

###

Chapter 3 – Fall and Redemption

Life continued to improve for Lumiel. Once a week, he met with Crocell and Kokobiel about what else could be done to bring in the Fallen. Many ex-Fallen were given jobs in the Planetary Division. The building that had stayed half empty for decades after the downsizing was suddenly teeming with angelic life.

Lumiel became a minor celebrity in Schechakim. He had not found a new home yet, but Dina was so happy with the star treatment the neighbors gave her that she wasn’t complaining.

Everything seemed to be going well until Kokobiel brought an unfamiliar female into a meeting one morning. He introduced her as a neighbor of his who was interested in what he did. Lumiel spoke politely to the lovely lady, but at the first opportunity, he pulled Kokobiel outside.

“What the Heaven do you think you’re doing?” Lumiel asked.

“What do you mean?”

“What do I mean? Where to begin? First, I see the looks you’re giving that girl. She’s not your wife, and you shouldn’t be looking at her like that, nor she you. Second, she’s human. No wings. She should be down in the First Heaven. Finally, you know that no one is allowed in here when we work. What possessed you to bring a Daughter of Adam into our closed meeting? Especially one you’re obviously infatuated with! Does the name Yoko Ono ring a bell?”

“Look, we’ve been friends for a while, right?”

“Yeah. So?”

Kokobiel sighed. “As the new master of the stars, I’m the angel invoked by astrologists now. Well, she invoked me, and I began to help her. It turns out she’s specifically interested in Mercury, so I continued to give her more information until I ended up telling her about our whole operation. The next thing I knew, we had slept together, and...”

“You what?” Lumiel practically screamed.

“I don’t know how it happened. I expected to fall or something, but it never happened. We’ve been sleeping together for several months now and no backlash. I realized that since God’s forgiven the Fallen, this is probably okay now.”

Lumiel groaned. “How could it be okay? It’s adultery even if you don’t consider that you’re sleeping with one of God’s Chosen. Remember the Grigori?”
“Yes, but look...all we have to do is worship them. I do worship her, in my own way. Love is what it’s all supposed to be about, right? I do love her.”

“No. This isn’t right!” Lumiel wanted to grab his friend to shake him. “This is going to get you Fallen! Forgiveness doesn’t mean you can do whatever you want.”

“I haven’t fallen yet,” Kokobiel said defensively. “Look, I’m not asking you to condone this. Just keep it to yourself. I won’t let it affect the work we’re doing. I won’t ever bring her here again. I promise.”

After much pleading, Lumiel finally decided to stay out of it. He had trouble believing it was okay, but as God was all-knowing and Kokobiel had not fallen, who was he to argue?

Things with Dina had never been better, but now Lumiel was conflicted. If his new status brought new responsibility, wouldn’t it make sense that it brought new rewards as well?

One evening he looked out his window and saw Belphegor, in his female form, and Crocell walking into Belphegor’s house arm in arm. The lustful looks on their faces left no doubt in his mind what their plans were. He looked for the inevitable lightning to strike them down, but none came. Maybe Kokobiel was right after all. Lumiel wasn’t interested in anyone but Dina, but maybe he’d pay a little visit to Belphegor’s house one day just to see what all the fuss was about.

The next day, hell literally broke loose. Right before the lunch break, he received two emails. The first said that Kokobiel was now Fallen after his astrologist friend had turned up pregnant. For the first time since before the flood, a giant would be born on Earth.

As if the first email wasn’t shocking enough, the second email stated that the pope had recently released a new list of reprobated angels and Lumiel was one of them.

He stared blankly at the screen for a few minutes. Reprobated? How? He hadn’t done anything wrong.

He turned to talk to Crocell about it, but was surprised to find Crocell and several of the ex-Fallen standing there with flaming swords pointed at him and his original planetary angel coworkers.

“Stand up and move away from your computers,” Crocell shouted. “The Fallen are taking over.”

Lumiel just stared for a second. “What do you mean? You’re not Fallen anymore.”

“Just a little trick I learned from those cursed humans. I bowed to them, but I never worshiped them. I just needed a way to get my legions in here.”

“But why?”

“We know we can’t defeat an all-powerful God, but we can get rid of what caused the problem in the first place.”

Walking over to Kokobiel’s empty station, Crocell typed in a few changes in the Deus ex Machina. “Mercury is headed towards Earth now,” he said. “The collision should be spectacular. And no more vermin problem.” The Fallen cheered.

Suddenly, a window broke and a canister rolled in releasing a gas into the room. All of the angels in the room went to their knees as Michael led a legion of angels in and quickly captured the Fallen.

With tears running down his face and coughing forcefully, Lumiel made his way over to his computer and changed the orbit of the Earth so it would avoid Mercury. Having saved his charges, he passed out – but not before seeing Michael standing over him looking grim.

As few days later, Lumiel found himself in the Fourth Heaven in front of Michael again. This time, he was pronouncing judgment on the trio who less than a year ago he was praising.

“Crocell, did you not think that since we designed the computers, we would know when anyone messed with them? You are hereby stripped of your angel rank and deemed Fallen. As you have shown yourself to be exceedingly dangerous, you will be moved to a more secure prison in the Fifth Heaven where you will rot for all eternity. Don’t expect God to have mercy on your soul.”

Turning to the next angel, Michael intoned, “For your crimes against God’s creatures, you are hereby named one of the Grigori. Your name is changed to Cochabiah as you are not worthy to have God’s name in yours. Raphael will cover Mercury until a suitable replacement is found.”

Looking at the remaining angel, Michael said, “However, Lumiel you are a different case. You were reprobated because of your association with Kokobiel as well as knowledge of his sins. However, you did not sin yourself, and you saved the Earth. So, you are restored to the rank of angel. But know that the Lord God knows your heart. Do not give in to your tempting thoughts or you will soon be Fallen, too.”

Lumiel returned to his home and the life he had before he saw Elomina. Dina was, of course, disappointed in Lumiel’s demotion and the fact that they weren’t moving out of the neighborhood after all, but her husband had saved God’s Chosen and was therefore a hero. Considering what happened to Cochabiah and Crocell, things could have been a lot worse. She still had her husband whom she did truly love, even if his status was tarnished to the humans below.

Reflecting on all he had gone through, Lumiel came to realize that his lot in life wasn’t so bad after all. He was married, with all the joys and struggles that come with such a union. His job was one that, while often dull, did carry a large responsibility and was therefore honorable. In the end, his life had not really changed, but he was far more content knowing it was exactly the life he wanted. Maybe the humans were right about Elomina’s gift, but not in the way most assumed. He may live in a bureaucratic level of Heaven, but when viewed the right way, it was still Heaven after all.
W.M. Rivera's *The Living Clock*, a handsome chapbook of poems from Finishing Line Press, looks backwards towards loss and forwards towards a sunny hazy future. Rivera’s poems recognize that sweet death is just around the corner.

The collection opens with "A Gift," a double helix narrative about an absent father, and the Belgian poet Emile Verhaeren's relationship with a poem. It manages to both be a personal poem about an irresponsible parent, and a poem about a creator and his creation. Both strands of the narrative serve as examples of the countless emotional adventures one experiences in a lifetime.

*The Living Clock* celebrates life's "mini odysseys" that show up whether the speaker is considering a washer-woman on her knees or the myriad of consciousness in a "parade of bodies" crossing the Charles Bridge in Prague. Rivera's a lyric poet, and plays with rhyme while juggling our existential landscapes in his capable hands.

Death, and love are not our only pitfalls, and Rivera's poems examine our more mundane frailties as well, lust, jealousy, failure, and aging.

The title poem, dedicated to his grandmother, encapsulates the poetic exigency of the collection, "It also gnaws at me, this/presence/absence; nothing that is/not nothing." It is here in Rivera's dialogue with Wallace Stevens' "The Snow Man," in his dialogue with his late grandmother, and in his dialogue with his own spirit that expresses what has become so essential in American letters, loss; that intangible, sometimes romantic, sometimes sad, sometimes painful in-between place in our inner lives.

Rivera's poems tease us, not in a mischievous way, but in an honest, earnest way, as if he is saying what do I know of our "diminishment?" In the poem of the same name Rivera's voice reminds us that he too cannot "work it out." But he is, like us dear reader, willing to wonder if age and loss illuminate our spirit, our inner lives. "Why else invent these reveries?"

The poems of *The Living Clock* are smartly romantic, and Rivera has a lyrical wonderful way of swooping into a poem and dropping the reader into is world. His poems skip across landscapes, the globe, and the unmapped human heart.

— SW
Journals: *So It Goes*

Scott Whitaker Reviews
the Literary Journal of the
Kurt Vonnegut Memorial Library

*So it Goes*, the inaugural issue of the Literary Journal of the Kurt Vonnegut Memorial Library, begins boldly, with "ex-Marine" a modern haiku, a contemplative moment before the journal spins and turns like a dervish across a Democratic landscape—and I mean Democratic as in all inclusive, Whitmanesque. *So it Goes* is sad, depressing, horrifying, funny, and burly all the same. Caesar, World War Two, Viet Nam, Iraq among others, coalesce into one long voice of woe. And not from just the American perspective, the Turkish poems offer a fascinating flashpoint to the western counterparts.

And they keep coming, stories, poems, cartoons on war, love turned inside out and gutted with a bayonet. And I suppose that's part of the trick isn't? A journal can keep the punches coming. They wield a different power than a single author. Editors can change texture, and leap genres without having to set the reader up. Kitrell Andis' "Clayton" rips your head around with the violent effects of war upon our character. Ed Taylor's "Flat Mommy" is a brilliant bit of subversive humor, not so much about war, but about the domestic military culture of people who probably never get used to war, or the threat of it in their personal lives. An excerpt from Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried* is juxtaposed with war fiction influenced by his landmark novel. The volume also rocks out two high school pieces, amateur authors speculating on the contents of a letter Kurt Vonnegut's father wrote him in WWII, while in Dresden, and which is supposedly the inspiration for *Slaughterhouse Five*, and on display at the Kurt Vonnegut Memorial Library.

*So it Goes* debuts as an important dialogue about war, about peace, and the human condition. It is inescapable, and profound, and funny.

— SW
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THE PHILOSOPHY OF COMPOSITION
Non-fiction by
Edgar Allan Poe

CHARLES DICKENS, in a note now lying before me, alluding to an examination I once made of the mechanism of "Barnaby Rudge," says--"By the way, are you aware that Godwin wrote his 'Caleb Williams' backwards? He first involved his hero in a web of difficulties, forming the second volume, and then, for the first, cast about him for some mode of accounting for what had been done."

I cannot think this the precise mode of procedure on the part of Godwin--and indeed what he himself acknowledges is not altogether in accordance with Mr. Dicken's idea--but the author of "Caleb Williams" was too good an artist not to perceive the advantage derivable from at least a somewhat similar process. Nothing is more clear than that every plot, worth the name, must be elaborated to its dénouement before anything be attempted with the pen. It is only with the dénouement constantly in view that we can give a plot its indispensable air of consequence, or causation, by making the incidents, and especially the tone at all points, tend to the development of the intention.

There is a radical error, I think, in the usual mode of constructing a story. Either history affords a thesis--or one is suggested by an incident of the day--or, at best, the author sets himself to work in the combination of striking events to form merely the basis of his narrative--designing, generally, to fill in with description, dialogue, or authorial comment, whatever crevices of fact or action may, from page to page, render themselves apparent.

I prefer commencing with the consideration of an effect. Keeping originality always in view--for he is false to himself who ventures to dispense with so obvious and so easily attainable a source of interest--I say to myself, in the first place, "Of the innumerable effects or impressions of which the heart, the intellect, or (more generally) the soul is susceptible, what one shall I, on the present occasion select?" Having chosen a novel first, and secondly, a vivid effect, I consider whether it can be best wrought by incident or tone--whether by ordinary incidents and peculiar tone, or the converse, or by peculiarity both of incident and tone--afterwards looking about me (or rather within) for such combinations of event or tone as shall best aid me in the construction of the effect.

I have often thought how interesting a magazine paper might be written by any author who would--that is to say, who could--detail, step by step, the processes by which anyone of his compositions attained its ultimate point of completion. Why such a paper has never been given to the world, I am much at a loss to say--but perhaps the authorial vanity has had more to do with the omission than anyone other cause. Most writers-poets in especial--prefer having it understood that they compose by a species of fine frenzy--an ecstatic intuition--and would positively shudder at letting the public take a peep behind the scenes, at the elaborate and vacillating crudities of thought--at the true purposes seized only at the last moment--at the innumerable glimpses of idea that arrived not at the maturity of full view--at the fully-matured fancies discarded in despair as unmanageable--at the precautions and rejections--at the painful erasures and interpolations--in a word, at the wheels and pinions--the tackle for scene-shifting--the step-ladders, and demon-traps--the cocks' feathers, the red paint and the black patches, which, in ninety-nine cases out of the hundred, constitute the properties of the literary history.

I am aware, on the other hand, that the case is by no means common, in which an author is at all inconsideration to retrace the steps by which his conclusions have been attained. In general, suggestions, having arisen pell-mell, are pursued and forgotten in a similar manner.

For my own part, I have neither sympathy with repugnance alluded to, nor, at any time, the least difficulty in recalling to mind the progressive steps of any of my compositions; and, since the interest of an analysis, or reconstruction, such as I have considered a desideratum, is quite independent of any real or fancied interest in the thing analysed, it will not be regarded as a breach of decorum on my part to show the modus operandi by which some one of my own works was put together. I select "The Raven" as most generally known. It is my design to render it manifest that no one point in its composition is referrible either to accident or intuition--that the work proceeded, step by step, to its completion with the precision and rigid consequence of a mathematical problem.

Let us dismiss, as irrelevant to the poem, per se, the circumstance--or say the necessity--which, in the first place, gave rise to the intention of composing a poem that should suit at once the popular and the critical taste.

We commence, then, with this intention.

The initial consideration was that of extent. If any literary work is too long to be read at one sitting, we must be content to dispense with the immensely important effect derivable from unity of impression--for, if two sittings be required, the affairs of the world interfere, and everything like totality is at once destroyed. But since, ceteris paribus, no poet can afford to dispense with anything that may advance his design, it but remains to be seen whether there is, in extent, any advantage to counterbalance the loss of unity which attends it. Here I say no, at once. What we term a long poem is, in...
fact, merely a succession of brief ones—that is to say, of brief poetical effects. It is needless to demonstrate that a poem is such only inasmuch as it intensely excites, by elevating the soul; and all intense excitements are, through a psychical ne-cessity, brief. For this reason, at least one-half of the "Paradise Lost" is essentially prose—a succession of poetical excitements interspersed, inevitably, with cor-responding depressions—the whole being deprived, through the extremeness of its length, of the vastly important artistic element, totality, or unity of effect.

It appears evident, then, that there is a distinct limit, as regards length, to all works of literary art—the limit of a single sitting—and that, although in certain classes of prose composition, such as "Robinson Crusoe" (demanding no unity), this limit may be ad-vantageously overpassed, it can never-properly be over-passed in a poem. Within this limit, the extent of a poem may be made to bear mathematical relation to its merit—in other words, to the excitation or eleva-tion—again, in other words, to the degree of the true poetical effect which it is capable of inducing; for it is clear that the brevity must be in direct ratio of the intensity of the inten-ted effect—this, with one proviso—that a certain degree of duration is absolutely re-quisite for the produc-tion of any effect at all.

Holding in view these considerations, as well as that degree of excitement which I deemed not above the popular, while not below the critical taste, I reached at once what I conceived the proper length for my in-tended poem—a length of about one hundred lines. It is, in fact, a hundred and eight.

My next thought concerned the choice of an im-pression, or effect, to be conveyed: and here I may as well observe that, throughout the construction, I kept steadily in view the design of rendering the work uni-versally appreciable. I should be carried too far out of my immediate topic were I to demonstrate a point upon which I have repeatedly insisted, and which, with the poetical, stands not in the slightest need of de-monstration—the point, I mean, that Beauty is the sole legitimate province of the poem. A few words, however, in elucidation of my real meaning, which some of my friends have evinced a disposition to mis-represent. That pleasure which is at once the most intense, the most elevating, and the most pure, is, I believe, found in the contemplation of the beautiful. When, indeed, men speak of Beauty, they mean, pre-cisely, not a quality, as is supposed, but an effect—they refer, in short, just to that intense and pure eleva-tion of soul—not of intellect, or of heart—upon which I have commented, and which is experienced in con-sequence of contemplating "the beautiful". Now I de-signate Beauty as the province of the poem, merely because it is an obvious rule of Art that effects should be made to spring from direct causes—that objects should be attained through means best adapted for their attainment—no one as yet having been weak enough to deny that the peculiar elevation alluded to, is most readily attained in the poem. Now the object Truth, or the satisfaction of the intellect, and the ob-ject Passion, or the excitement of the heart, are, al-though attainable to a certain extent in poetry, far more readily in prose. Truth, in fact, demands a pre-cision, and Passion a home-liness (the truly passionate will comprehend me) which are absolutely antago-nistic to that Beauty which, I maintain, is the ex-ciement, or pleasurable elevation, of the soul. It by no means follows from any-thing here said that passion, or even truth, may not be introduced, and even pro-fitably introduced, into a poem—for they may serve in elucidation, or aid the gen-eral effect, as do discords in music, by contrast—but the true artist will always contrive, first, to tone them into proper subservience to the predominant aim, and, secondly, to enveil them, as far as possible, in that Beauty which is the atmo-sphere and the essence of the poem.

Regarding, then, Beauty as my province, my next question referred to the tone of its highest mani-festa-tion—and all experience has shown that this tone is one of sadness. Beauty of whatever kind, in its supreme development, invariably excites the sensitive soul to tears. Melancholy is thus the most legitimate of all the poetical tones.

The length, the province, and the tone, being thus determined, I betook myself to ordinary induction, with the view of obtaining some artistic piquancy which might serve me as a key-note in the construction of the poem—some pivot upon which the whole structure might turn. In carefully thinking over all the usual artistic effects—or more properly points, in the thea-trical sense—I did not fail to perceive immediately that no one had been so universally employed as that of the refrain. The universality of its employment suf-ficed to assure me of its intrinsic value, and spared me the necessity of submitting it to analysis. I considered it, however, with regard to its susceptibility of im-provment, and soon saw it to be in a primitive con-dition. As commonly used, the refrain, or burden, not only is limited to lyric verse, but depends for its im-pres-sion upon the force of monotone—both in sound and thought. The pleasure is de-duced solely from the sense of identity—of repetition. I resolved to diversify, and so heighten the effect, by ad-hering in general to the monotone of sound, while I con-tinually varied that of thought: that is to say, I deter-mined to produce continuously novel effects, by the variation of the ap-plication of the refrain—the refrain itself remaining, for the most part, un-varied.

These points being settled, I next bethought me of the nature of my refrain. Since its application was to be repeatedly varied it was clear that the refrain itself must be brief, for there would have been an insurmountable difficulty in frequent variations of applica-tion in any sentence of length. In proportion to the brev-ity of the sentence would of course be the facility of the variation. This led me at once to a single word as the best refrain.

The question now arose as to the character of the word. Having made up my mind to a refrain, the division of the poem into stanzas was of course a co-rrollary, the refrain forming the close to each stanza. That such a close, to have force, must be sonorous and susceptible of protracted emphasis, admitted no doubt, and these considerations inevitably led me to the long a
as the most sonorous vowel in connection with r as the most producible consonant.

The sound of the refrain being thus determined, it became necessary to select a word embodying this sound, and at the same time in the fullest possible keeping with that melancholy which I had predeter-mined as the tone of the poem. In such a search it would have been absolutely impossible to overlook the word "Nevermore". In fact it was the very first which presented itself.

The next desideratum was a pretext for the continuous use of the one word "nevermore". In observing the difficulty which I at once found in inventing a sufficiently plausible reason for its continuous repetition, I did not fail to perceive that this difficulty arose solely from the preassumption that the world was to be so continuously or monotonously spoken by a human being--I did not fail to perceive, in short, that the difficulty lay in the reconciliation of this monotonity with the exercise of reason on the part of the creature repeating the word. Here, then, immediately arose the idea of a non-reasoning creature capable of speech, and very naturally, a parrot, in the first instance, suggested itself, but was superseded forthwith by a Raven as equally capable of speech, and infinitely more in keeping with the intended tone.

I had now gone so far as the conception of a Raven, the bird of ill-omen, monotonously repeating the one word "Nevermore" at the conclusion of each stanza in a poem of melancholy tone, and in length about one hundred lines. Now, never losing sight of the object supremeness or perfection at all points, I asked myself -- "Of all melancholy topics what, according to the universal understanding of mankind, is the most melancholy?" Death, was the obvious reply. "And when", I said, "is this most melancholy of topics most poetical?"

From what I have already explained at some length the answer here also is obvious -- "When it most closely allieth itself to Beauty: the death then of a beautiful woman is unquestionably the most poetical topic in the world, and equally is it beyond doubt that the lips best suited for such topic are those of a bereaved lover."

I had now to combine the two ideas of a lover lamenting his deceased mistress and a Raven continuously repeating the word "Nevermore". I had to combine these, bearing in mind my design of varying at every turn the application of the word repeated, but the only intelligible mode of such combination is that of imagining the Raven employing the word in answer to the queries of the lover. And here it was that I saw at once the opportunity afforded for the effect on which I had been depending, that is to say the effect of the variation of application. I saw that I could make the first query propounded by the lover -- the first query to which the Raven should reply "Nevermore" - - that I could make this first query a commonplace one, the second less so, the third still less, and so on, until at length the lover, startled from his original non-chalance by the melancholy character of the word itself, by its frequent repetition, and by a consideration of the ominous reputation of the fowl that uttered it, is at length excited to superstition, and wildly propounds queries of a far different character -- queries whose solu-tion he has passionately at heart -- propounds them half in superstition and half in that species of despair which delights in self-torture -- propounds them not altogether because he believes in the prophetic or de-moniac character of the bird (which reason assures him is merely repeating a lesson learned by rote) but, because he experiences a frenzied pleasure in so modelling his questions as to receive from the expected "Nevermore" the most delicious because the most intolerable of sorrow. Perceiving the opportunity thus afforded me, or, more strictly, thus forced upon me in the progress of the construction, I first established in mind the climax or concluding query -- that query to which "Nevermore" should be in the last place on an-swer -- that query in reply to which this word "Nevermore" should involve the utmost conceivable amount of sor-row and despair.

Here then the poem may be said to have its beginning, at the end where all works of art should begin, for it was here at this point of my preconsiderations that I first put pen to paper in the composition of the stanza:

"Prophet," said I, "thing of evil! prophet still if bird or devil! By that heaven that bends above us -- by that God we both adore Tell this soul with sorrow laden, if within the distant Aidenn, It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels name Lenore --
-Clasp a rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Le-nore." Quoth the raven--"Nevermore".

I composed this stanza, at this point, first that, by establishing the climax, I might the better vary and graduate, as regards seriousness and importance, the preceding queries of the lover, and secondly, that I might definitely, settle the rhythm, the metre, and the length and general arrangement of the stanza, as well as graduate the stanzas which were to precede, so that none of them might surpass this in rhythmical effect. Had I been able in the subsequent composition to construct more vigorous stanzas I should without scruple have purposely enfeebled them so as not to interfere with the climacteric effect.

And here I may as well say a few words of the versification. My first object (as usual) was originality. The extent to which this has been neglected in versification is one of the most unaccountable things in the world. Admitting that there is little possibility of variety in mere rhythm, it is still clear that the possible varieties of metre and stanza are absolutely infinite, and yet, for centuries, no man, in verse, has ever done, or ever seemed to think of doing, an original thing. The fact is that originality (unless in minds of very unusual force) is by no means a matter, as some suppose of impulse or intuition. In general, to be found, it must be ela-borately sought, and although a positive merit of the highest class, demands in its attainment less of in-vention than negation.

Of course I pretend to no originality in either the
rhythm or metre of the "Raven." The former is trochaic -
- the latter is octametre catalectic, alternat-ing with
heptametre catalectic repeated in the refrain of the fifth
verse, and terminating with tetrametre catalectic. Less
pedantically -- the feet employed through-out (trochees)
consist of a long syllable followed by a short; the first
line of the stanza consists of eight of these feet, the sec-
ond of seven and a half (in effect two-thirds), the third
of eight, the fourth of seven and a half, the fifth the
same, the sixth three and a half. Now, each of these
lines taken individually has been employ-ed before, and
what originality the "Raven" has, is in their combination
into stanza. Nothing even remotely approaching this
combination has ever been attempted. The effect of this
originality of combination is aided by other unusual and
some altogether novel effects, arising from an extension
of the application of the principles of rhyme and allitera-
tion.

The next point to be considered was the mode of
bringing together the lover and the Raven -- and the
first branch of this consideration was the locale. For this
the most natural suggest-ion might seem to be a forest,
or the fields -- but it has always appeared to me that a
close circumscription of space is absolutely ne-cessary to
the effect of insulated incident -- it has the force of a
frame to a picture. It has an indisputable moral power
in keeping concentrated the attention, and, of course,
must not be confounded with mere unity of place.

I determined, then, to place the lover in his
chamber -- in a chamber rendered sacred to him by
memories of her who had frequented it. The room is rep-
resented as richly furnished -- this in mere pursuance of
the ideas I have already explained on the subject of
Beauty, as the sole true poetical thesis.

The locale being thus determined, I had now to
introduce the bird -- and the thought of introducing him
through the window, was inevitable. The idea of making
the lover suppose, in the first instance, that the flapping
of the wings of the bird against the shutter, is a
"tapping" at the door, originated in a wish to in-crease,' by
prolonging, the reader's curiosity, and in a desire to
admit the incidental effect arising from the lover's
throwing open the door, finding all dark, and thence
adopting the half-fancy that it was the spirit of his mist-
tress that knocked.

I made the night tempestuous, first to account
for the Raven's seeking admission, and secondly, for the
effect of contrast with the (physical) serenity within the
chamber.

I made the bird alight on the bust of Pallas, also
for the effect of contrast between the marble and the
plumage -- it being understood that the bust was ab-
solutely suggested by the bird -- the bust of Pallas being
chosen, first, as most in keeping with the scholarship of
the lover, and, secondly, for the sonorosity of the
word, Pallas, itself.

About the middle of the poem, also, I have availed my-
self of the force of contrast, with a view of deepen-ing
the ultimate impression. For example, an air of .the
fantastic -- approaching as nearly to the ludicrous as
was admissible -- is given to the Raven's entrance. He
comes in "with many a flirt and flutter".

Not the least obtrusion made he -- not a moment stopped or stayed he,
But with mein of lord or lady, perched above my chamber door.

In the two stanzas which follow, the design is
more obviously carried out: --

Then this ebony bird beguiling my sad fancy into smiling
By the grave and stern decorum of the countenance it wore,
"'Though thy crest be shorn and shaven thou,"
Glady grim and ancient Raven wandering from the nightly shore --
Tell me what thy lordly name is on the Night's Plutonian shore?"
Quoth the Raven "Nevermore".

Much I marvelled this ungainly fowl to hear discourse so plainly,
Though its answer little meaning -- little relevancy bore;
For we cannot help agreeing that no living human being
Ever yet was blessed with seeing bird above his chamber door--
Bird or beast upon the sculptured bust above his chamber door,
With such name as "Nevermore."

The effect of the denouement being thus pro-
vided for, I immediately drop the fantastic for a tone of the
most profound seriousness -- this tone commencing
in the stanza directly following the one last quoted, with
the line,

But the Raven, sitting lonely on that placid bust, spoke only, etc.

From this epoch the lover no longer jests -- no
longer sees anything even of the fantastic in the Raven's
demeanour. He speaks of him as a "grim, ungainly,
ghastly, gaunt, and ominous bird of yore", and feels the
"fiery eyes" burning into his "bosom's core". This revolu-
tion of thought, or fancy, on the lover's part, is intended
to induce a similar one on the part of the reader -- to
bring the mind into a proper frame for the denouement
-- which is now brought about as rapidly and as directly
as possible.

With the denouement proper -- with the Raven's
reply, "Nevermore", to the lover's final demand if he
shall meet his mistress in another world -- the poem, in
its obvious phase, that of a simple narrative, may be
said to have its completion. So far, everything is within
the limits of the accountable -- of the real. A raven, hav-
ing learned by rote the single word "Nevermore", and
having escaped from the custody of its owner, is driven
at midnight, through the violence of a storm, to seek
admission at a window from which a light still gleams --
the chamber window of a student, occupied half in pour-
ing over a volume, half in dreaming of a beloved mist-
tress deceased. The casement being thrown open at the
fluttering of the bird's wings, the bird itself perches on
the most convenient seat out of the immediate reach of
the student, who, amused by the incident and the oddity
of the visitor's demeanour, demands of it, in jest and
without looking for a reply, its name. The raven ad-
dressed, answers with its customary word, "Nevermore"
-- a word which finds immediate echo in the melancholy
heart of the student, who, giving utterance aloud to cer-
tain thoughts suggested by the occasion is again startled
by the fowl's repetition of "Nevermore". The student now
guesses the state of the case, but is impelled, as I have before explained, by the human thirst for self-torture, and in part by superstition, to propound such queries to the bird as will bring him, the lover, the most of the luxury of sorrow, through the anticipated answer "Never more". With the indulgence, to the extreme, of this self-torture, the narration, in what I have termed its first or obvious phase, has a natural termination, and So far there has been no overstepping of the limits of the real.

But in subjects so handled, however skilfully, or with however vivid an array of incident, there is always a certain hardness or nakedness which repels the artistic eye. Two things are invariably required -- first, some amount of complexity, or more properly, adaptation; and, secondly, some amount of suggestiveness -- some undercurrent, however indefinite, of meaning. It is this latter, in especial, which imparts to a work of art so much of that richness (to borrow from colloquy a forcible term) which we are too fond of confounding with the ideal. It is the excess of the suggested meaning -- it is the rendering this the upper instead of the under current of the theme -- which turns into prose (and that of the very flattest kind) the so-called poetry of the so-called transcendentalists.

Holding these opinions, I added the two concluding stanzas of the poem -- their suggestiveness being thus made to pervade all the narrative which has preceded them. The under-current of meaning is rendered first apparent in the lines-

"Take thy beak from out my heart, and take thy form from off my door!"
Quoth the Raven "Nevermore!"

It will be observed that the words, "from out my heart", involve the first metaphorical expression in the poem. They, with the answer, "Nevermore", dispose the mind to seek a moral in all that has been previously narrated. The reader begins now to regard the Raven as emblematical -- but it is not until the very last line of the very last stanza, that the intention of making him emblematical of Mournful and never-ending Remembrance is permitted distinctly to be seen:

And the Raven, never flitting, still is sitting, still is sitting,
On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber door;
And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon's that is dreaming,
And the lamplight o'er him streaming throws his shadow on the floor;
And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor
Shall be lifted-nevermore.
Books by Some of Our Contributors
Poetry by Larry Kelts

**Water Willow**  
_after Rossetti_

Her husband slips off into the icy realms  
of reason while she searches the wash  
that sucks and sinks into muddy shores of willow  
root and sway. Wind stalks the bending reeds.

What illicit pleasures might we dare to stake  
claim to from that summer painting _en plein air_?  
Sunning and sounding the currents willows  
snap, break, and re-root in the flooded shallows.

So when the stirrings of Spring rouse them and they  
can no longer stop the buds breaking  
will you lift the curtains of yourself  
and expose my soul wound in willow.

What they might recover here on their own—  
onece forbidden—we now forbear keeping  
the silence that washes between art and life,  
and when madness stirs him she bends to root again.

**Bluebird**

A bluebird bangs against the windowpane.  
Drawn in by some reflection of the self  
see how we drop and rise and still remain  
bluebirds banging against the windowpane.  
Again, again it knocks and leaves a stain,  
or rests, a bloody mess, upon a shelf.  
A bluebird bangs against the windowpane,  
drawn in by some reflection of the self.
"Listing for a Muse" A Poem by Larry Kelts

1
Pre-pubescent Alice Liddell posed
— wanton beggar child—
on Charles Dodgson’s photographic plate.

She coxed the story he tumbled her into
—a luminous world beneath
this world—one golden afternoon.

She begs him: write the tale up. So he seeks
the innocent muse to amuse, and enthralls
Alice until her mother edits their dream.

2
Wild and flirty Hester Thrale hopped-up
Dr. Johnson, she spired his latent thoughts,
unchained his guilt-laden mind,
she urged his melancholy mood into meaningful lust.

As her family passes, he, consoling
her, stays his blossoming madness
until she remarries and narrates him.

3
Teen-age Charis Wilson stared across
the crowded room. Beyond a wake
of used muses Edward Weston stared back.

Exposed and fixed in adsorbed shadows
(swelled on edge effects) she feels underexposed
and so, exposes and frames him.

4
Two virgins, Yoko and John, seesawed love.
They inspired themselves inspiring
each other to double fantasy.

She bewitched him, and he promoted
her: fluxus bitch and horny beetle
starting over with a kiss, kiss, kiss:

then death, and Yoko,
left with no one to inspire except memory,
recreates herself creating alone.

5
Wanton Gala, ageless nymphet muse,
enticed whirlwind passion and unlocked
Salvador’s surreal vision.

A wife driven to drive loose the art
festering mind of Dali fueling her
mad manic induced disruption.

She rehearses herself, his obsession,
suckles erect instability,
she seduces a boiling mind to art.

6
Photogenic Lee Miller posed herself
naked fore and aft the lens. She fixed
herself, daughter and muse incarnate snapping
herself into Man Ray’s shutter.

Soon she takes war for musedom,
where images of destruction mingle
muse and artist in a darkroom bath.

7
Serial muse Lou Salome sought God.
She inspired, without crossing love’s threshold,
Nietzsche, and Zarathustra was born.

Andreas stabbed himself to become
her unconsummated spouse,
She commingled Rilke and angels descended.

8
Terpsichore above the floor, Suzanne Farrell
fretted George Balanchine—
her lithe movements filling his conception:

(dance until she marries another and
vanishes only to return and dance
the dance of the happy shades.

9
Beatrice incarnate Lizzie Siddal
haunted Dante Rossetti.
The sunset veil of her locks inspired
him her dying denying visage.

Dante, reluctant groom, obsessed on
the millineress and imposed her
interred rapture. Addicted to death,
she relents: a stillborn child
and herself, exhumed to release his art.

after Francine Prose
Paper

The words do not travel well
even trapped on paper
far too fragile. It's more honest
that way, though, when the truth
crosses seas from timid hands
to distant places. The eyes

of the intended, the eyes
who will then read 'all is well,'
in the labor of rough hands
Dragging against that paper,
lines held fast through time. The truth
hard and broken, is honest

the way the world is honest.
A lie, to protect the eyes
and shield the soul from the truth.
The lie waits in 'all is well,'
made permanent by paper
straightened and folded by hands.

Delivered by strangers' hands
the lie will become honest.
Words from the past on paper
unsure, but hopeful. The eyes,
when they do see 'all is well,'
will read not a lie but truth.

It is a frail thing, the truth
passed from here to there to hands
that shake to see 'all is well.'
A claim of being honest
is a warning sign for eyes
to be careful of paper

and the illusions paper
can build. By seeking the truth
it is created. By eyes
and words, and by hands
seeking a new honest.
There is no lie in, "all is well."

The question eyes ask paper,
'Is all well?' is answered with truth.
'I don't know,' hands say, honest.
RIBBON ROAD FARM
certified organic garlic - www.ribbonroadfarm.com

Commonly known as Elephant Garlic this is a monster garlic from the leek family which is the undisputed king of roasting garlic.

Tasty Tips

Roasted
Take a few monster cloves out of the bag and pop off the skins. Place into a suitable container and drizzle with some olive oil. Cover container and bake at 325° for 60 minutes. Squeeze out of skins and spread like butter on toast or crackers.

Puréed
Just pop several cloves into a food processor or blender. Add olive oil and spices and process.

THE ROMANCE OF GARLIC

One of the oldest known foods, there are records dating back over 5000 years of garlic being used as food and medicine. The Egyptian Kings fed their slaves garlic to keep them strong and healthy.

Our Monster Roasting garlic is over twice the size of its largest cousins and has a milder taste, but with a sharp onion-like edge to it. It averages five very large cloves that are somewhat golden compared to the milky whiteness of other garlic cloves. It stores very hard and clean and much longer than other garlic. Even when separated into individual cloves, it will store about a year at room temperature.

Our Chef Ready product takes advantage of this unique characteristic. We have already removed most of the waste - the roots, the stems, and most of those annoying bulb wrappers that stick to you and everything else in your kitchen. This gives you a convenient-to-use packet full of plump monster cloves - the same full flavor without the fuss and mess associated with traditional bulbs.

Our Chef Ready cloves are so mild you can slice them into quarter inch thick steaks, sauté or grill them in butter or olive oil and serve them as a vegetable. But beware! The more you chop it the stronger it becomes.

About Us

Ribbon Road Farm is a fifty-acre family-owned farm tucked in the gently rolling hills of western New York, where the winters are long and the garlic is hardy. We use strictly organic methods to grow our hand-cultivated garlics and shallots, which grow big and strong on natural foods and spring-fed water. No harmful chemicals or imported diseases. Our Monster Roasting Garlic is milder than our other Gourmet Specialty Garlics, but our New York growing season produces even these gentle giants to the right of mild. So for those who want a bit more bite in each big bite, ours is the perfect choice. We know that garlic has many medicinal uses, but we just love to enjoy its many unique aromas and flavors ...and we hope you will too!!
Roasted Elephant Garlic

Separate the monster cloves from the bulb and cut the ends off. Place into a suitable container and drizzle olive oil over the cloves. Cover container and bake at 325* for 50 minutes. Squeeze out of skins and spread like butter on toast or crackers. Elephant is the King of roasted garlic!

Garlic Scape Soup

2 tablespoons clarified butter or extra-virgin olive oil
2 dozen garlic scapes, chopped, flower buds discarded
3 large potatoes - not peeled - cut into 1/2" cubes
5 cups vegetable stock
2 large handfuls spinach leaves - remove the stems
Juice of 1/2 lemon
1/2 teaspoon - fine grain salt
Freshly ground black pepper

Heat the butter in a large sauce pan over medium heat, then add the scapes and sauté for 2 minutes. Add the potatoes and stock, cover, and simmer for about 20 minutes, or until the potatoes are cooked through.

http://www.ribbonroadfarm.com
The Lavender Cicadas
after Mahler

The lavender cicadas stitch
a rhombus of sound.
Every seventeen years we eavesdrop,
swallow their noise lackluster.
Listen: their purple orgies
flick against our ears. Little hives of cupids
drill a summer song,
a sun livid with intercourse.

So whole & ominous & louder than the traffic,
so frantic on the edge of night
they make our desire mute.
What takes them so long?
What brings them to tears?

Elegy for an Over Ripe Eggplant

Stained blue as watercolor buffalo,
and next to you on fire, an onion.
The cask of your decay apparent.

When we cut your throat, a tangle of wasps escaped
you could have stayed mute plum and lookshine
like the threads in a hummingbird’s wing.

We wanted it to last -- for you to remain shiny,
rich, metallic in the wilting, forever breathtaking
in the last second of purple pulse
now leaking on our tabletop.

The yellow heart of you throbs
like the oculus of that whipstalling bird.
The wasps blame us.

Certainty Principle
Kittyhawk P-40, Found In Egyptian Desert 70 Years After Crashing
-- News Report

The skin of God is raw umber and rubbed under it,
an abandoned knot of metal is playing hide and seek in the sand.
When it whispers, it says that the pilot’s only confederacy
is hunger.

What expression the pilot wore alone in his fall!
He greets the ground with crossed fingers
like when he asked that brown-eyed, bonny girl
he met one summer to swing with him. He remembers
her laughter and maybe it is her he blankets in that parachute
and embraces next to the fuselage.

But maybe not.
Maybe he smiles wild at this Newtonian proof,
this magic of Icarus and the absolute dark
as he tumbles out of the peach sky, on fire.

And when the pilot crawls out of the sleeve
of this craft of air, lighter now than a feather,
does he laugh himself into the night
as heavy as a stone punch?

There he is still--a man looking for an exit.
If they never found his bones, his determination
is apparent. This dentist’s son from Southend.
In the absence of footprints, his skull
is an artifact of hope a hundred miles away.

Did he decide on a direction with certainty,
to keep walking though there is no door in the desert,
though this could be the last south?

Keep walking, pilot. Keep walking forward.
You are footloose on a wild, distant coast.

He swallows hard and obeys
the laws of physics and fear and the simple gravity
of objects, he watches the majesty of an empty world,
finds only the hush of wilderness.
Two Anarchists

The town’s wildfire hazard sign reads “moderate” and has stood mossing over for years, little change, its paint chipping while two anarchists sit in a lonely bar trading a mason jar of clear liquid back and forth between their chapped lips, while the woods hover murky with a strained silence. They are playing a game of not looking directly at the television, though they can hear the baseball has been hit to left field and the woosh of the air and the crunch of the bat. For a moment, it thunders through the darkening bar, and they are tempted to look, just for a moment at the bright green field where nothing could feel alone, where no one suffocates in dark empty rooms. Instead, they study a long tradition of resistance. The evening news reports on genetically modified seeds from Monsanto. The corn is resistant to weeds, allows efficiency, Still, there is trouble coming even from this rare earth. There, the seed pushes itself against hard-headed gravity. The two anarchists at the bar abstain from the argument about batting averages, knowing something of statistic is permanent. They know when first it all truly fell apart, though they realize history is as merciless as their old girlfriends who kept their sad secrets, but left them all the same. Disagreement is in their blood. It boils, but they have agreed that people, all people, are responsible. They want their hammer loud, so it wakes everyone from their beds, sleep washed from their eyes like silt from the river, mothers and brothers joining hands next to them in the corn field, under a broken backed sun, hugging each other tightly, not apologizing for every little touch. They want a riot. They want to hold this moment, this passing the mason jar between them like communion. They want smoke gathering on the crest of a hill strung together with the loose cotton, a sound far away, under agitated skies—a stormsong dripping out of wine bottles—a new era, a blaze built on the lips and hearts of the quiet ones.
April Events from the Poet Laureate of Delaware, JoAnn Balingit

April Events
· U of DE Emancipation Symposium, US poet laureate Trethewey, Saturday, April 6
· Year of the Bard, Poetry & Painting, Delaware Art Museum, Sunday, April 7
· Youth Awards in Art, Creative Writing and Music, Dover Library, April 14
· Nights of Literary Prose, Poetry and Song, “Beds,” Rehoboth, Tuesday, April 16
· Former U.S. poet laureate Rita Dove, U of DE, April 18 and 19

University of Delaware Emancipation Symposium: Saturday, April 6, 12:30 - 4:30 pm
Speakers: U.S. poet laureate Natasha Trethewey and author and historian Brett Gadsden.
The Delaware History Museum (website) commemorates the 150th Anniversary of The Emancipation Proclamation. Talks by historians on the global dimensions of Emancipation and the legacies of Emancipation in Delaware. Copeland Room, Delaware Historical Society's Delaware History Museum, 504 N. Market St., Wilmington. Reception to follow in Wilmington's historic Town Hall. Free and open to the public; Registration required. Register for the "Emancipation and its Legacies” at https://secure.www.alumniconnections.com/olc/pub/UDA/event/showEventForm.jsp?form_id=137333. Program Information: http://sites.udel.edu/emancipationsemester/ Sponsors : UD History Department and the Delaware Humanities Forum. Co-sponsorship from the UD College of Arts and Sciences, the UD Library, UD School of Public Policy and Administration, the UD Center for Black Culture, and the UD Departments of English, Black American Studies, and Women & Gender Studies.

Year of the Bard, Poetry & Painting: Sunday, April 7, 2013 beginning at 2:30
Readings of Shakespeare’s works by professional actors David and Michelle Stradley as they move through galleries within the museum in celebration of National Poetry Month. Delaware Art Museum, 2301 Kentmere Parkway, Wilmington, DE 19806, More info: 302-351-8509 Sponsored by Delaware Art Museum

Youth Awards in Art, Creative Writing and Music: Sunday, April 14, 2013, 2-4:00 pm
1st Annual Artistic Excellence Young People's Scholarship Exhibit. Presentation, reception open to the public. Dover Public Library, Multi Purpose Room, 35 Loockerman Plaza Dover, DE. Sponsored by the National League of American Pen Women, Holly Branch serving Kent and Sussex counties, DE. Information: Joyce Hammond Lewis, nlapw.hollybranch@gmail.com

Night of Literary Prose, Poetry, and Song: Tuesday, April 16, 7:00-8:15pm
Dogfish Head Brewing and Eats, Rehoboth Beach, DE. To read, you must rsvp to (e-mail) Maribeth at fischer.maribeth@gmail.com. Original works of 300 or fewer words on the theme of Beds. Sponsored by Rehoboth Beach Writer’s Guild.

Rita Dove public lecture: Thursday, April 18, 2013, 5:00pm
Trabant University Center, Multipurpose Rooms A and B, University of Delaware, Newark

Rita Dove Poetry reading: Friday, April 19, 2013, 2:00 pm
Gore Recital Hall, Roselle Center for the Arts, UD. Both events free and open to the public.
One of the foremost poets of our time, honored and celebrated in the United States and around the world, Ms. Dove served as the United States Poet Laureate 1993-1995 and is the winner of the National Medal of Arts (2011) and the Pulitzer Prize (1987).

Events in the Transnational Encounters Visiting Writers Series are made possible through a cornerstone grant from the College of Arts & Sciences’ Interdisciplinary Humanities Research Center (IHRC). For more information about the Transnational Encounters series, see the IHRC’s website. Organized and hosted by the Department of English, the Department of Women and Gender Studies, and the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures. Additional sponsorship is provided by the Department of Black American Studies, the Center for Black Culture, and the University of Delaware Honors Program.
Literary Birthdays

March
Mar. 1, 1917  Robert Lowell
Mar. 2, 1942  John Winslow Irving
Mar. 3, 1800  Evgeni Abramovich Baratynski
Mar. 4, 1870  Thomas Sturge Moore
Mar. 5, 1922  Pier Paolo Paolini
Mar. 6, 1885  Ring Lardner
Mar. 6, 1806  Elizabeth Barrett Browning
Mar. 6, 1917  William Erwin Eisner
Mar. 9, 1892  Vita Sackville-West
Mar. 11, 1544  Torquato Tasso
Mar. 12, 1863  Gabriele d’Annunzio
Mar. 12, 1922  Jean-Louis Kerouac (Jack Kerouac)
Mar. 13, 1892  Janet Flanner (Genet)
Mar. 13, 1894  Hugh Walpole
Mar. 14, 1800  Evgeni Abramovich Baratynski
Mar. 14, 1887  Sylvia Beach
Mar. 16, 1585  Gerbrand A. Bredero
Mar. 18, 1842  Stephane Mallarme
Mar. 18, 1892  Robert P. Tristram Coffin
Mar. 19, 1933  Philip Milton Roth
Mar. 20, 1823  Edward Judson (Ned Buntline)
Mar. 20, 1828  Henrik Ibsen
Mar. 24, 1919  Lawrence Ferlinghetti
Mar. 25, 1925  Flannery O’Connor
Mar. 26, 1893  Richard Thomas Church
Mar. 26, 1842  Stephane Mallarme
Mar. 29, 1831  Amelia Edith Barr
Mar. 29, 1885  Dezso Kostolanyi
Mar. 30, 1844  Paul Verlaine

April
Apr. 2, 1725  Giacomo Casanova
Apr. 2, 1805  Hans Christian Andersen
Apr. 3, 1798  John Banim
Apr. 3, 1822  Edward Everett Hale
Apr. 4, 1785  Bettina von Arnim
Apr. 4, 1574  Gabriel Bataille
Apr. 5, 1834  Frank Stockton
Apr. 6, 1866  Lincoln Steffens
Apr. 9, 1821  Charles Pierre Baudelaire
Apr. 10, 1898  Horace Gregory
Apr. 10, 1950  H. A. Maxson
Apr. 11, 1905  Attila Jozsef
Apr. 14, 1900  Karin Maria Boye
Apr. 15, 1856  Jean Moreas
Apr. 15, 1843  Henry James
Apr. 16, 1871  John Millington Synge
Apr. 17, 1863  Constantine Cavafy
Apr. 18, 1837  Henry Francois Becque
Apr. 20, 1807  Jacques Louis Napoleon Bertrand
Apr. 21, 1837  Fredrik Baje
Apr. 21, 1816  Charlotte Bronte
Apr. 22, 1816  Philip James Bailey
Apr. 22, 1819  Friedrich Martin von Bodenstedt
Apr. 23, 1564  William Shakespeare
Apr. 23, 1926  Eva Janikovszky
Apr. 24, 1825  Robert Michael Ballantyne
Apr. 24, 1815  Anthony Trollope
Apr. 24, 1905  Robert Penn Warren
Apr. 25, 1873  Walter de la Mare
Apr. 25, 1914  Ross Lockridge, Jr.
Apr. 27, 1874  Maurice Baring
Apr. 30, 1888  John Crowe Ransom
Finding the Poem
Musings on the Writing of Poetry (#1)

Most often (for me) a poem is prodded (cattle-prodded, perhaps?) into existence by an image; less frequently by an idea that exists solely as an abstraction. I wrote a poem called “Having Known Love Once” but which wasn’t titled until after the poem was written.

The poem’s genesis was in the desire to demonstrate to my then-freshman-composition-students that English Grammar is still an inflected language; even though we have lost or abandoned those (mostly) gender-indicators in noun endings, and those pesky verb declensions that our sister Indo-European languages still share, the order of words in a sentence in English is not the only criteria for grammatical construction. I was searching for an apt subject to use in order to demonstrate this, and drumming my fingers on the surface of my college adjunct-office desk beside the keyboard.

At this point the sky outside my office window was blue, and a bird flew across it. “So lovely flew the bird an arc the sky across…” came out of my fingertips onto the keyboard of my office computer. The syntax may be awkwardly Anglo-Saxon, but the grammar and meaning is not, and the syntax is what forces the ear to actually listen, even as you were reading those words.

By itself, it would have been a fine example. I was not prepared then for the next lines, “so blue the sky so gray the rising smokey plumes/which through that blue spelled ruin to fabled Ilium…"

What?!

As a writer, you have to be prepared for those “Holy Crap!” moments when what you think you are writing turns out to be something so radically different from what you thought you were writing, from where you thought the process was leading you. You have to be ready — not resistant — to follow eagerly into the unknown. This stuff is coming out of your head, you know, so somewhere deep in your echoing, seemingly empty skull a connection has been made at a subconscious level, and you have to trust that your subconscious knows what it is doing.

So like Hansel and Gretel following the bread crumbs, even if the trail peters out and you wind up at a gingerbread house deep in the darkest parts of the forest, something is coming out of your head that you ought to follow.

How did a line about a bird flying in an arc across the blue sky become a poem whose first verse ended with, “Poseidon by whom abandoned shook their walls/Such devastation and so many young ones dead”? So now the poem (and it was a poem by this time) was clearly about the fall of Troy. Still unsure where the muse — was it Calliope, Clio, Euterpe, Thalia, Melpomene, or Erato? I was unsure yet — was leading, I thought about the players who were the pretended cause of the Hellenes’ vendetta, and the next verse came pretty quickly.

When first love strikes the daughter of the swan, star-crossed woman who, in loveless bedlock waits, assumes the Λακαδεμησίεν court an endless tedium until Priam’s golden son, Apollo-like, falls, and plucks a silken feather from her head.

Now I was deliberately crafting the lines in light of what I might have believed of Paris and Helen’s connection. I liked the syllabizing of the final “ed” in “star-cross-ed” and split the word at the suffix to render it that way. “Bedlock” for the “wedlock” echo and the combination of the marriage bed and unhappiness (for Helen), the Greek spelling of “Lacadamon” because that’s what the Spartans called themselves (it is a western effete custom to name a peoples with “our name for them” rather than their name for themselves), and reference to the “daughter of the swan” and “plucked a silken feather from her head” refer to Helen’s being Leda’s daughter, and the offspring of the union between Leda and Zeus in the form of that infamous swan. Two more verses and an envoi quickly followed.

I finished the poem’s first draft and then it occurred to me that I needed to get back to preparing for the class I was about to teach. Where does the time go? Regardless, what comes next is revision. Rhythms, in this case, needed to be tinkered with a bit, some of my initial word choices needed to be examined (in light of the fact that the words were coming out of my head, as, when you write your poetry, they come out of your head, this is not as easy as it sounds), because the poem is not just the image or emotion, nor the image or emotion the poem. They are merely the starting points for you. They facilitate your entry into the creative process demanded of you by the poem which needs to be expressed.

—JB
**CONTRIBUTIONS TO THIS ISSUE:**

**Julianna Baggott** is the critically acclaimed, bestselling author of 18 books, including the Anybodies Trilogy, a New York Times Notable Book of the Year andALA Alex Award-winner, now in development with Fox2000. Baggott also has been published in Time, The New York Times, and the Los Angeles Times, and her essays have appeared in The New York Times, Washington Post, International Herald Tribune, and London Times. She is an American Nonfic- tion, and on NPR’s Talk of the Nation, Here & Now, and All Things Considered; and her poetry is widely anthologized and has been included in Best American Poetry and Best American Short Stories. She has been awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship, and can be contacted at HLAReese@JUNO.COM. Her poetry has appeared in several journals, anthologies and in two chapbooks.

**Bettina Lanyi** in a Washington, DC-area writer of short and long-form fiction as well as nonfiction. Her writing has appeared in Gargoyle, Literary Mama, and two anthologies. She has recently completed a novel, “Seeking Georgia.” Visit her at www.bettinalanyi.com.

**Hiram Lauré** works for the federal government promoting world-wide peace and has been included in Best American Poetry and Best American Short Stories. She has been awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship, and can be contacted at HLAReese@JUNO.COM. Her poetry has appeared in several journals, anthologies and in two chapbooks.

**Johnny M. Tucker, Jr.** is a Graduate of South Carolina State University, and the recent recipient of the Evelyn Elder Award in American Literature, 1980s. He is a member of TransCanal Writers and co-founded and co-hosted M.O.T. Open Mic Poetry. He is currently studying middle-level education (English language arts) and plans to further his stud- ies in creative writing. Johnny’s works include Micro (self- published); “Winter Nights” was published in The Path to Peace (anthology); “Your Words” and “On Plato’s Stile of the Cave” were selected “Best Poems” by The Montserrat Review in 2012 student art exhibit. Johnny occasionally dabbles in essays, which “Cut and Bruised by Grammar” originated as a 360 to 400 word essay assignment in his grammar course at Wilmington University.

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**The Broadkill Review.**

**Tina Raye Dayton** grew up on the Eastern Shore of Maryland and now lives in Poolesville, Maryland. She has been published in Southern Women’s Review, Maryland Poetry Review, Ama- ranth and So To Speak. She won the 10th Annual Dogfish Head Poetry Prize in 2012, and second prize in the 2012 Rehoboth Beach Writers’ Guild contest. She works part-time as a reading therapist for children but spends most of her time caring for her one-year old daughter.

**Latorial Faison** is an African American writer from Court- house, Virginia. A graduate of the UVA and VA TRCA, she was selected to publish in Southern Women’s Review, ChickenBones, Red River Review, Stars and Stripes, Blackberry Magazine, and American Town. Faison is fluent in English, Spanish, and Chinese. She is a student at Sejong University in S. Korea where she lives with her family.

**Jamie Brown** is the Publisher of The Broadkill Review.

**Ina fitness** has been writing poetry for years. She is currently studying Creative Writing as an under- graduate at Frostburg State University in Western Maryland. She will graduate in the Fall of this year and has plans of moving to Seattle because a psychic told him so.

**Bettina Lanyi** is an African American writer from Court- house, Virginia. A graduate of the UVA and VA TRCA, she was selected to publish in Southern Women’s Review, ChickenBones, Red River Review, Stars and Stripes, Blackberry Magazine, and American Town. Faison is fluent in English, Spanish, and Chinese. She is a student at Sejong University in S. Korea where she lives with her family.

**Erik Hoffman** often writes nonfiction for the Chicken Soup for the Soul series, Not Your Mother’s Book anthologies and other collections and magazines with the same bent. She used to teach school; she used to raise kids; and she even used to cook dinner. Now she hangs the keys and pretends she’s Erma Bombeck! As far as her education goes, once-upon-a-time Duke University graduated in 1983 and has two MBAs. Lucky she in her alma mater has not yet rescinded them.


**Larry Kelts** grew up on a dairy farm in north-central Pennsyl- vania. After a career as a research scientist working in mag- netic resonance in Rochester, N.Y. he left the lab for literature and art, his lifelong passions. He took an MFA at Bennington College and now lives in Newark, Delaware where he writes poetry and follows the art scene in Delaware and Philadelphia.

**Myra Sklarew** has been writing for several years, edited a literary magazine, interned at Baltimore City Lit Panic, and is majoring in creative writing and sustainable development at Columbia University. She has been published as Recent City Poet of the Week, a Writers’ Blog Staff Pick, and her work is due to appear in The Poydras Review. She currently contributes to the best in contemporary writing.

**Michelle Yost** studied English at Fairmont State University where she served as the managing editor of Fairmont’s student literary journal, Whetstone for two years. She copypedit and helped design the professional journal, Restel. Michelle’s poetry and fiction have been widely published in journals including Exquisite Corpse, Nimrod, Poet Lore, Best American Poetry, and in several chapbooks and full-length collections; most recently Toxic Environment from Benton Poet Press. She is the recipient of a 2008 Pennsylvania Council on the Arts grant in poetry. Two Birds In Flame, poems related to the Shakepeare in Carthage, in Nantucket, MA, was published in 2010 by Beech River Bosis.