



mid rivers review
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MID RIVERS REVIEW

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For Lydia
because she understands the power of the word.

FROM THE EDITOR

These words, ideas, and images travel well through time and space. Within these pages—Greg Wirth, Michael Peeples, Jordan Starkey, and Mary Horner effectively “converse” with Sarah Orne Jewett, Charlotte Bronte, Willa Cather, and C. S. Lewis—writers of another time. Many of the poems, stories, photographs, and paintings in this volume took shape in Missouri—mid-rivers—but were considered and edited in Wisconsin, along Florida’s Nature Coast, and under the ash-filled skies of Colorado’s High Park fire. One final edit took place in the heart of Istanbul—thanks to Virginia Guneyli’s willingness to go the extra mile (or 6,000 of them). These words travel well indeed, and I am haunted—in the best possible way—by each of them.

Thanks to all who contributed to this celebration of community and communication—Carol Shaw’s quiet, intelligent cadences are always a welcome element. Dana Delibovi and Mary Kay Lane offer startling tributes to the maternal, as Catherine O’Mara reminds us that “we all wait for someone who won’t return,” and Greg Wirth asserts that “today is not today.” Indeed we do; indeed sometimes it is not.

This is the fourth year we mark the achievement of a promising writer with the Jim Haba Poetry Award. Haba served as director of the Geraldine R. Dodge Poetry Festival from its inception in 1986 through 2008. Under his direction, the festival was the largest such gathering on the continent. Haba’s work continues to influence the way poetry is taught in schools, colleges, and universities—including this one. We are pleased to honor Elizabeth Sheck with the 2012 Jim Haba Poetry Award.

As always, we are grateful to the SCC Board of Trustees for their continued support of this journal and to President Ron Chesbrough for not only supporting the journal but writing for it as well, and to Shannon Beahan and Tana Burton for making a thousand invisible things happen in order for the visible one to appear at last. Associate editors Virginia Guneyli and Christina Gant are themselves accomplished writers as well as careful editors of the words of others. Our colleagues in English have supported the growth of this journal, an effort often guided by Karen Jones—always there, always chair. Special thanks to Gaynell Gavin for an eloquent introduction; Gavin’s latest book—*Attorney*

at Large—will be published in October by Main Street Rag Publishing Co. I am indebted to my lovely daughter Jo and her dear husband Erich for providing me with a room of my own in a place with cool mornings and long trails by clear waters—as well as a loaner dog—so that this journal could at last be pulled together after an impossible academic year.

Finally—this issue is dedicated to Lydia Ann Long, Emeritus Professor of English, because she understands the power of the word. During her twenty years at SCC, Professor Long helped thousands of students make sense of the world through language—in shaping arguments, in considering the stories we tell each other, and in telling their own. Through her quiet, intelligent support of the SCC Department of English, she continues to touch the lives of many other students as well, and it is not too much to say that by getting so many of us to the Dodge Festival—changed the way we think and teach contemporary poetry on our campus. This issue celebrates her fine career.

Jacqueline Gray
Professor of English
Editor, *Mid Rivers Review*

INTRODUCTION

It is a privilege to write the introduction to this issue of *Mid Rivers Review* for many reasons, but I explore only three here. One is its location at the confluence of the two great rivers for which your literary journal is indirectly named: the Mississippi and its tributary, the Missouri. Another is the rich literary heritage of the greater St. Louis Metro-East area. Further, having watched the impressive growth of *Mid Rivers Review* from a distance, I have observed its development with great interest.

Together the Mississippi and the Missouri form our country's longest river system and the world's fourth longest. The Mississippi is our national artery. In her poem, "Mississippi," Pat Schneider, who grew up in St. Louis, writes, "Like the blood that moves in the bodies of my son/and his son, the river cleans the body of the land." Here she brings together the ecologist's and the poet's sensibility. Yes, in an ecological sense the river can be regarded as our country's aorta, but Schneider's work, like much American literature, relies on it as a literary artery also. Like Schneider, contemporary environmental and nature writers rely on the river in both capacities. A couple of examples include Diane Wilson's *An Unreasonable Woman* and, more recently, Lisa Knopp's *What the River Carries*. Too many writers to name here have relied on the Mississippi as muse, but of course the most well-known "granddaddy" chronicler of the river in literature is that famous Missourian "Mark Twain" (Samuel Clemens).

One of Twain's literary successors, Tennessee Williams grew up on the Mississippi, living in St. Louis during his teen and young adult years. Describing the river as Williams's "poetic prism," his biographer Philip C. Kolin writes, "The Mississippi flows throughout Williams's canon and, like Langston Hughes, he could say, 'My soul has grown deep like the rivers. . .'" (7).* In the same poem ("The Negro Speaks of Rivers"), Hughes, who grew up in Joplin, Missouri, wrote, "I heard the singing of the Mississippi. . . ." A few of the many diverse writers with St. Louis area roots, and who come to thought readily, range from Kate Chopin to T. S. Eliot, Maya Angelou, and Ntozake Shange. I make no attempt at a complete list here, but having grown up in the part of Illinois that is also part of the greater St. Louis area, I must mention the late John Madson of Godfrey, whose *Where the Sky Began: Land of the Tallgrass Prairie* is a classic pioneering work in prairie preservation and restoration as well as a work of literature.

It was in Godfrey that I first met *Mid Rivers Review* editor, Jacqueline Gray. When she asked me to write this introduction, we talked about how the journal has grown over the past fifteen years, and she reminded me of a favorite quote of my mother's from Isaiah 54: "Enlarge the place of your tent; Stretch out the curtains of your dwellings. . . ." Through SCC faculty members' devoted efforts to this literary journal, I have witnessed its enlarging place in the St. Louis area's literary tradition. I first became aware of this journal when its name was *Charlie*, reflecting its exclusive focus on the SCC community. When *Charlie* took its new name, I was delighted by that name's expansiveness and reference to rivers. Then contributors from the surrounding area joined those from the immediate SCC community, another good development. Now this issue includes work from students, faculty, staff, area residents, *and* beyond. Congratulations to editors, contributors, and readers for enlarging the place of *Mid Rivers Review's* tent and stretching out the curtains of its dwellings.

*Kolin, Philip C. "'A river flows through it': Tennessee Williams and the Mighty Mississippi." *Big Muddy: A Journal of the Mississippi River Valley* 12.1 (2012): 7-38.

Gaynell Gavin, Ph.D.

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ELIZABETH SHECK

Winner 2012 Jim Haba Poetry Award

On Cheating the Cheater, From the Perspective of the Cheated:

In the cold sweat of sunrise, crumbling and dusted and caked across the edge of us, sweet and rich—too rich to taste on my own tongue—I took it from yours. We felt a January wind between brown wool and white flesh, the frost fresh and soft and gleaming in my hair and the tips of my small fingers laced loose, a cradle for a chipped pot of stale coffee sat between us. When the winter thawed and left me damp and warm in June, cradled not to you, but another him, and you to another her, I sighed.

In Response to a January Funeral:

It was then that I grew tired. I dropped my head to the peeling porch swing, the chain links ringing thick and damp as the river rocks in mud, and mud was in my toes and hair and in the creases of my arms and shoulders bent and curled on faded cotton sheets splayed across the floor; whose slats like dryad spines I had once danced across in half-wind biting cold, July now rending clean my shallow ribs from blue-black shadows, yew and shale. I licked my bleeding lips, pale and cool as my toes stretched and hair fell loose, as gauze and lace across my breast. And past the steps and wardrobe through the doorposts, I watched the cotton seedlings catch the breeze, and I saw snowflakes and black skirts pulled tight against white wind, and I sang Amazing Grace. I breathed the amber air, and I slept.

Fleet

It was in the rolling, the plains and hills grown of slate and wind and rain, that I passed cattle grazing in the bluestem and the chicory, the milkweed and the bull thistle, the aster and the fleabane and the rusting barbed wire fences, where the sunflowers were not yet blooming; the ash, the willow-leaf and the saw-tooth all gold as butterhorns between the pages of an heirloom cookbook. I wound past the trumpet vines along the fence and heard bare footsteps black and small, up and down the stairs and porch and crumbling driveway to the shed, the screen door framed in rotting brick. And the summer when the breaker blew and there was no wind and paper fans were hard to come by we laid on the veranda counting dreams, sighing not to waste the precious air. And my bare feet—now white, still small, though not enough—drift up the steps alone and cool and quiet, and I'm for bed. And as I leave, away from the stairs and the brick and the wood floors and the porch and the trumpet vines, and I watch my hands on the wheel

and my lips full and tight in the rear view of the empty street, and watch it past the turn and past the river and past the rolling, I do not see the honeysuckle or the dogwoods as they rise around the cliffs. I brush the dust and chaff from my scarred knees and scrape the thistles from my boots, and over a cup of stale black coffee, I start over.

On Realizing that I am a Woman: October

And in my hands I measured out my breaths, cupped and soft and smooth as faded cotton, cool and wet in the graying mug of a summer evening. I watched it settle down the hills and the corn, and the gravel and the honeysuckle, the brittle peeling stalks of black eyed susans hard and cracked and brown as I caught my breaths once more, now stale in the heavy air. I found them pouring through my fingers as the sunsets passed me by, and I kept pale and cool and smooth-skinned behind the windowpanes. I touched the raindrops: thin and cold as I now was, and cooling further still as the leaves set fire and the sunflowers died. Tied up in old sheets, smooth and damp and cotton, I could not catch the air, and I dreamed once more of you.

On the Prospect of Being Single for the Holidays:

The summer came like fire over tall grass, where the smoke was black and sheathed the stars along the curves of brittle hills. And the summer came like breath to sticking lungs and swollen throats, and it was thick and clung like silk, all wet and peeling from the skin of lips and limbs of lovers we held close. When we slept past the sunrise, we held tight to what we were, and we clasped close our glassy fingers round the sharpened shadows that we cast. And I was there—along the fringes of the evening cool and fleeting to the dawn of rotting timber, brick and soil on my boots, soft and dewy from our eyes, and I was alone with him and her above the streetlights. And in the fading warmth, I held his eyes, and it was there while autumn rose, we were alone.

Adeline's Locket,
Copper, Brass



GREG WIRTH

Untitled

“Light Reading,” she said
And went away.
Passed out of the room silently.
The hinge, long-since sprung from Misuse,
Keeping the door from being pulled-to;
The only clue to her unseen departure.

Today is not today:
An old leather-bound notebook
Fat with faded scribbling (which oddly
bears my name, although not well)
I find discarded on a dusty two lane road.
The gyroscopic spin of the Earth creates a wind,
The moving air fans the pages.

I did not ask this question.
And just as I suspected,
The forest did not answer me.
The odor of decomposition
Rising from rotting logs
Lifts to the sky like the rude morning rays.
An elm seed falls blithely and lands
On the feathery firmament we so often call dirt.

The sun wheels,
Night and day take their positions.

A White Flame (for Sarah Orne Jewett)

High above the green canopy,
A dissociated mist hovers and changes its face
Like some ancient neon sign.
Far off, in the darkest green, a single white feather rises
Like a note,
Of its own will, frozen in space for the impossible cadence that pure physics
affords it.
And then a spread of wings.
One downward thrust. A second.
And at that moment a perfectly pitched shriek from the heron
Echoes, echoes, echoes
Before the small mass of white once again is devoured by the amphibian-green
of the forest.

As a secret of a secret, I conceal its true place in space and time.
I am complicit in this momentary display of location,
While the seasons run down the page like long division.
I close the book I have been reading
By a fine, old white candle that burns with a purifying heat.
My breath renders the flame horizontal. And when it extinguishes;
Leaves a small puff rising in the room—like a womb, or spilled milk—that
Ascends the space I briefly inhabit.
Much as that heron.
Much as my mother carrying me up the stairs to my bed.

DANA DELIBOVI

Night Arrives at Founders Park

Night spilled down, a dyer's spoon
purpling the playground and the picnic lawn.
The last tired voices of the children rang,
their echoes sharper with the deepening cold.

We mothers began to round our own,
to zip their coats and tuck their scarves, as the pang—
that we could hold them lifeless—pierced us through. Old
as woman's pleadings to the fickle moon.

The River Road

Past stubbly winter fields, twisted fences, abandoned cars,
all sucked of color by gray clouds, we drove from O'Fallon to Hannibal

to relax the kids. The highway crossed the flood plain,
and sometimes the Mississippi peeked through the trees on the bank.

Above the black water, white gulls a thousand miles from the sea
wheeled and dove for fish where islands or felled trees dammed the flow.

Freight trains traversed the riverside, on track laid way-back-when,
in a gilt prosperity now dulled and sagging in this worn-out country.

The trains whistled by the crooked shanties between road and river,
chugged by farmland tagged Monsanto, Cargill, or ADM,

and screeched by Annada (pop. 48, all housed
under tin roofs or in the cabs of their rusted trucks).

But it was just past Annada, on our way home, that the scrim
of gray clouds rose, so the sunset could slide underneath.

Light erupted at the West horizon, spewing plumes of orange.
East to the river, all the wide fields fired up gold,

each random tree glimmering above its long, long shadow.
Sunset drenched the ravaged towns, the toothless addicts

in their moldy rooms, the farmless farmers, and the
taciturn dirt, waiting out civilization under it all.

Towns, farms, and people's ways, mowed down by the swath time cuts,
look different with sunset's eyes. Their ruination just is

—without judgment, without regret. Not special and not wrong,
because a vibrant light is always dimming somewhere in the world.

As night fell, we got back to O'Fallon and we could see
televisions blinking in every house, comforting upstairs lamps,

and the desperate hope of porch lights, that they might mimic
the sunset and make this disaster perfect for just a while.

Shame Festival

At the MegaSlide,
a carny woman said to me,
a cigarette hanging
in her broken teeth,
“I like your sunglasses.”
All the carnies who ran
the rusted rides with old-time
sharp metal edges
could have been born
from the same mother
—all so similarly dwarfed.
But that’s from a childhood
in the ransom caves
of shack-strewn hills
no caseworker ever
dared to climb.
So, when she spoke,
the carny’s voice
jumped the breach between
who grows strong and who
grows stunted;
who owns the sunglasses and who
squints in the sun
that beats down on this
money-spun world.
Just then some kids
came squealing down the slide
on filthy burlap bags.
“When they hit that bump,”
the carny said, dragging on her smoke,
“I love it how their little faces
light up so bright.”

A Fork in the Road

A salad fork lay on a roadside berm
near the corner of Woodson where I walk my dog.
I wonder who took it from its nested drawer
to gleam alone on the bark-topped dirt?

Maybe the woman in the neighboring house
used it to scratch on the berm and seed
some annuals by the oily road. Maybe she flung it
at those grown-up sons (who won't move out)
while they played touch football in the yard.

A tool for the mouth, plied on the earth?
A shriek from a mother's worn-out heart?
Or some other mystery in the knotty links
of ground and grief and food and love.

CHRISTIAN LEWIS

The Beginning of Wisdom



BILL KRISTEN

Genesis

Our last time together
Wasn't supposed to be invaded by sadness
Or too much sentimentality...
Remembering should probably reach for angular words
To image the hard, sharp edges of real loss.

But what does it matter when vision
Not words is the issue.

We tried to not mention your leaving.
After all, you had to go
And I couldn't go with you,
And sobbing into each other's denials
Wouldn't change anything.

Was our final evening together
Just some giddy fantasy, a bogus reality
Concocted in our longing to be together?

Leaving the theatre, our bodies softly touching
We walked with little resolve onto the crumbling sidewalk,
Two young men, students grasping for understanding,
Our mutual interests really mutual desires
Way beyond any academic focus of graduate degrees
That were only the beginning of our need to define ourselves
Within similar hopes, anticipations, and fears.

It was supposed to rain, but it didn't.

Anticipating rain, I carried an umbrella
Something I rarely do; I'm so clumsy with the damn thing.
Was I clumsy when I reached at you, at whatever?
If I was, you never mentioned it.

Walking along, we inhaled the clean scent
Of an early spring warm-front that almost smoothed
The jagged edges of a night we hoped wouldn't happen.

Did the movie we saw really distract us from our hurt?
Long after the last image dissolved into the darkening screen,
*Cries and Whispers** only sharpened our awareness of pending pathos
That we sometimes tried to mute, diffuse or compromise
By dinners, concerts, movies....
Anyway, our slow dance wasn't ready to end when the music stopped.

Moving beyond the glare of head lights and din of traffic
As our silence gathered meaning that might make some sense,
We slowly walked and walked leaning into each other.

**An emotionally wrenching movie by the great Swedish director, Ingmar Bergman*

Primeval

While negotiating the turmoil
And swirl of traffic
My eager anticipation
Is a friendly greeting
From a cat who will talk to me
Through a half-open window
At the end of a day that began
In the hazy logic of dreams
Surreal and pre-mundane
When I could imagine a universe
Cats would be the center of,
Where days begin with enchantment
And the timid light of dawn
Intensifies to sunrise
With the energy of daybreak's
Persistent, hopeful renewal of life.
But morning can wilt to lethargy
In the glare of noon-day
And wane to fatigue in the gray of twilight...

And the only worthwhile anticipation
May be for the wisdom of a cat
Whose gaze, older than prehistory,
Can penetrate shadows cast by a bewildered
Grove for meaning, and in some mystical way
Bloom mystery into understanding.

With a tech-driven day's angular ambience now hindsight,
A regal feline form, looking almost deific and oracular,
Remnant from a more mythical and magical time,
Gazes and purrs into evening's metallic urban dissonance
That begins to give way to a feline voice, primeval
As the fertile, balmy, musical murmur of an April breeze
Filtered through the aluminum screen of a half-open window.

Aegean Island

Streets that are stairways
To horizontal realities
Vertical arrangement
Perhaps not consciously conceived
Yet in some ways defined by status
That hints of prestige, privilege, and power.

But here no inequality of view
All levels soaring
Or dropping from rocky ledges
Into Aegean sapphire
Of sun-ignited liquid flames
Lapping at the island's fossil edges
Brilliance muted only
By occasional mid-day cirrus gauze,
Translucence of morning, noon, evening
Folding into ink-dark depths
Long plumbed by fantasy of ancient myths
Those fables at the edge of nightmare,
Fear of sinking too deep into dark fathoms
But eager to navigate beyond the edge
Of mysterious, uncharted horizons.

Drenched in persistent summer
Pastel villages languish
In a time warp of retrospection
Clinging with nostalgia to granite slopes
Beneath laughter of gulls
Who glide and dive with skill and arrogance
In a sky so deep and blue
It mimics the sea.

Sometimes in the bright, cerulean ambiance
Of a timeless, treeless island
When days are cloudless with only wisp of breeze
And the receding tide leaves
Traces of ambiguous gods vaguely recalled
It's hard to tell sea from sky.

CAROL SHAW

Imaginings

From somewhere high within the tree
There comes a sound I long to hear
The haunting call, an owl at dusk
Or else it is a moaning wind
Distorted by imaginings.

The water's surface ripples here
Some unseen force that stirs the stream
A famished fish that moves beneath
Or maybe it is just the wind
All hunger feeds imaginings.

Erratic flight at evening time
Bats skim the sky to fill their need
Or was it merely autumn leaves
That sail aloft by force of wind
The lifeblood of imaginings.

Familiar footsteps on the path
They echo mine and beg me turn
I fear the breath felt on my cheek
Is nothing more than mocking wind
That stirs some cursed imaginings.

Out of the Sea Unmarred

The trove of bleached and broken shells
Surge in on emerald waves
Churned, scoured, slammed in to shore
Then pulled away by reckless second-guessing.
Caught within that unrelenting rhythm
A lifeless monarch butterfly
Moving with the deadly beat
Advance, retreat...advance, retreat
Released at last upon the sand
It lay with vivid wings intact
Amid the brittle fragments.

RON CHESBROUGH

From Stones Skipping Pleasure

How to survive the moments of pleasure becomes the real question. Pain, having its own will and mind, cares for itself, and runs a course from source to elsewhere.

But pleasure wants a moment of its own, a beginning and an end. It wants not to share itself with hard thoughts or attach itself to deeper things.

Names

Names.

They march or stumble, plunge or fall, to the edge and over.

Best friends or lovers of another time, they close chapters and burn books.
“Don’t read me any longer.”

One lies open still, wishing to have pages caressed, whole sentences or chapters read.

We are here, re-writing our own pages, whispering our own names. “Read us, write us.”

TANNER MATTHEW THOMAS MCKENZIE

A Love Never Lost
Mild Steel



HALLE BENTON

Maybe Someday

I always imagined you being a star.
Looking down on you from that balcony
and seeing you sing like that is what
helped you breathe and what kept your
feet planted firmly on the ground every day—

Maybe to only fly occasionally.

What is it, I ask, that made you
want to throw away happiness and faith
like a night that lasted too long at a cheap bar?
You could've been great, you know. . .
gone somewhere. . . done something.

Rolling one every other week and inhaling
fire only lets you fly for a little while. Honestly,
I would know—I partake occasionally
and I have no shame in it because it
takes me away and releases the chains
of responsibility from my mind and shoulders.

Maybe you'll learn to keep a better schedule.

You'll probably never realize this till
you hit the bottom. When steel bars become
your neighbors and real friends. Or perhaps
when you see that orange is definitely your color
Deep down, I don't know you.

Maybe one day you'll know me.

Deep down you don't know anything.
I don't know what makes you happy;
you don't know what I love.
I don't know how you look at yourself in the morning;
you don't know how I comfortably sleep.
I don't know your favorite food;
you don't know my favorite book,
and I have no idea where the hell your identity crisis came from.

But, maybe someday...we'll figure this out.

KEITH T. HOERNER

Stained

The glass is stained
as is my memory.
Indelible.
The red of regret.
The blue of bruising.
The yellow of yesterdays
I will never understand.
So many colors call
to me
to rummage dangerously
through them
in search of
myself.

Some memories,
sharper than others, mercilessly
prick
my fingers.
They are not through
with me,
but I am through
with them.

I see

the cuts
but feel no pain.
I am mesmerized by my
blood
dripping
on a blue sliver.
I peer closer,
again
proving red and blue make purple.

Today, I sweep up the many shards
of my past, moving beyond it,

beyond them –

determined
at last
to make
one whole picture,
one whole person
from the many
r e m n a n t s.

MARY HORNER

A Grief Reserved (After C.S. Lewis' "A Grief Observed")

Grief for a house we no
Longer love is reserved for the
Memories that connect us
With others who lived there.

Yesterday's sorrow is faded,
Painted on inside walls to
Blend in with your second
Wife who wouldn't recognize you.

Exterior coats raise questions that
Can't be answered while she
Second guesses your choice of
colors and distressed finishes.

Your home isn't divided
By measures and recollections.
Drawing a dark border around time
Won't separate sequential feelings.

An insulated heart is not
Protected when it's familiar.
Love doesn't blink when
Someone flicks a switch.

Where Hope Lives

We carry our hope in an impossible space
Between the language and the pauses
Inside the spirit of whatever we want,
Catching its breath on the ends of
Sounds and sentences, in that tiny
Moment before words and meanings meet.

There's no sense in pretending that
Actions speak louder than words.
Trust is the invisible enemy of
Defining moments that lead us to
Puncture our thoughts with
Reminders to proceed cautiously

BRUCE LADER

The Time to Pick Berries

Early as possible,
before you quibble about
the best time to gather
those raspberries ready to burst,
those blueberries so deep navy
midnight is jealous.

Better do it before
being reminded to eat
the raspberries still in the fridge,
a fresh crop is waiting.

Step outside immediately,
before gardening in steamy sun
sweats her over the edge

and she returns faster than you,
a cornucopia of juicy offering
already in a giant bowl.

Wiser if you obey her GPS
to the blueberries,
get feet and legs dew-soaked
walking through the grass
you promised to mow,

turn left at the bottom
of the hill, look for branches
in shade, you've reached
your destination, don't disturb
the mantis praying on a leaf.

Aubade for an Oak

The ivy-covered oak leaning with birdsong
vanished. In the vacant dawn

trees have stolen far away from their house,
the drone of traffic creeps closer.

Wavering branches no longer threaten
to fall through the bedroom roof.

Nothing extends a breathing shadow
onto the deck they plan to enlarge.

Under phantom limbs
acorn casualties lie amid rubble.

Wordless in the wake, both accomplices
burrow in domestic busyness.

Years ago they surveyed the yard,
planted a seed of potential trouble,

held off betraying their tree.
A stalk of anxiety took root anyway,

grew to a quarrelsome headache,
persuaded them a disaster loomed.

Maybe the big mushroom around its base
was a symptom of incurable disease.

At any time a strong wind could have
toppled the unsung familiar.

Maybe after the two of them are gone,
that friend would still be dancing.

YVONNE KOCH

At the Ridge



CATHERINE O'MARA

Waiting

I wait in the park where we met,
under stars once washed in your confusion.
We all wait for someone who won't return.
I trail my hand where your whispers caught in the fence...

Under stars once washed in your confusion,
I stroll down paths your shadow trod,
I trail my hand where your whispers caught in the fence,
and peer in the pond where your reflection stood.

I stroll down paths your shadow trod.
I think about our short summer together
and peer in the pond where your reflection stood.
Those days are immortal, though we are not.

I think about our short summer together.
We laughed by day, shared secrets by night.
Those days are immortal, though we are not.
Yet even summer dies by the hand of winter.

We laughed by day, shared secrets by night.
I thought our hands would be clasped forever.
Yet even summer dies by the hand of winter.
Not all good things can remain.

I thought our hands would be clasped forever
when you said you loved me.
Not all good things can remain
is the truth I've come to believe.

When you said you loved me,
I never loved you more.
Is the truth I've come to believe
the way the world will always be?

I never loved you more,
when I realized, deep inside,
the way the world will always be:
Cold and empty, waiting for you.
When I realized, deep inside,
you would never come back...
Cold and empty, waiting for you,
I explore our memories.

You would never come back.
The illness was too strong.
I explore our memories
when I can't find you.

The illness was too strong;
now loneliness is my affliction.
When I can't find you,
I find myself in countless summer days.

Now loneliness is my affliction.
I wait in the park where we met.
I find myself in countless summer days.
All of us wait for someone who won't return.

Through the Gate

Sometimes I look beyond the window pane—
My heartbeat quickens and I grasp my pen.
With widened eyes, I leap aboard the train:
What I imagine comes alive again.
I sail across the blank expanse of page,
My ball point dancing in between the lines.
My words break free from their confining cage.
Without night falls, but in, my light still shines.
Like sparks, these words set fire to my soul.
New land, new life, new hope rests in their hearts.
To take me elsewhere is their final goal.
And though their story lies in broken parts,
 I, the writer, make them whole to create
 A journey that will lead me through the gate.

LINDA LANKFORD

Keeping the Beat

She draws a blanket around her
shoulders surrenders to fog's
graying encasement, a silent movie's
groggy frame of sameness;

fog seeps between ship's rails
struts down narrow decks
wedges against gray horizon

slides into a frame of gray
settling into a misty plot. Then

muffled calls hold ships separate as they cling
two ships keeping beat in soft surges;

beat grips her thought willing
to accept unknown as a place, a passer-by
cast to wait while

gray dissolves to light as
seagulls appear in flight,
ships' conjugal voyage ends in

parting blasts
relieved to follow day as

an unheard beat steals fog away.

Cracking a Thought

If I could curse greatness, I would.

Fog captures my present
in wall of gray on open sea, a silent thief of order

carries my mind into a place beyond
solitude, a north star in dark night
flickering in undiluted words, my
words falter in Sandburg's foggy harbor.

Can I curse the night because of darkness/do I see stars' brightness?
Can I curse the rain because of wetness/do I smell lilacs' sweetness?
Can I curse the cold/do I hear snowflakes falling?

Can I curse Sandburg's Fog/do I absorb his perfect metaphor?

Hydrangea

Hydrangea
seizes sunset's sudden blush
snatches a blue chunk of sky
rubs a green fiddlehead fern
steps among leaves burnished red,

and on mountain peaks in gusty wind
sees white undiluted and bright; hydrangea's full

clusters cascade over rail leaning
into fence's woody hue and bloom aside a stone path
greeting us lavishly at the inn, like a Scottish lass

beckons us to
her gray stone cottage
opening shutters to soft rush in
spent waves

our heads rests on day's thought

sea breeze swooshes hydrangea against the rail.

REBECCA LYNN CHAPMAN

Bridging the Gap



CONNER MEYER

Down On Me

Lay your troubles
 down on me.
Wipe your hands on your jeans.
look
 down on me;
dirt-caked face
and stare,
and care
not. I shovel through the muck.
See my eyes beneath
your spit
and live how boars do; fiendishly.

MARY KANE

Bird Watching (for TJK)

At dawn.

Two old birds

Hunker in the cedar
Chairs.

On screened porch with
Binoculars.

Sip, sip tea,
Pick, pick toast.

Two mockingbirds
On neighbor's ledge.

*Rackety-rackety-rackety.
Whit-year? Whit-year? Whit-year?
Bitch. Bitch. Bitch.*

*Watch-it. Watch-it. Watch-it.
Geezer! Geezer!*

*Cheer-up. Cheer-up. Cheer-up.
Thir-caged. Thir-caged. Thir-caged.*

Flick. Flick.
Flit. Flit.

Free-air! Free-air! Free-Air!

Gone.

The Eye Exam

“Independent as a pig on ice,” Kathleen had said under her breath, peering out the window at the drifting snow, the unfamiliar street signs.

“Hmm What’d you say?” Eddie was hunched, concentrating: woolen cap pulled down to his eyebrows, gloved hands gripping the wheel.

“Nothing. Just thinking out loud. Nothing.”

This trip to the new eye doctor’s office was typical: It should have taken twenty minutes; it was taking an hour. They’d arrive with sirens screaming. Why wouldn’t he ask directions—just once? But she’d been asking that question for forty years, hadn’t she? . . .

Arriving at last, they wobbled up the slippery, inclined walk, helping each other—in their puffy, down coats, looking like two brown bears in a three-legged sack race.

They sat down in the waiting room, and Kathleen settled in, comfortable now; she pulled out her knitting. Then Eddie headed toward the washroom, with that set to his jaw. He was all forward motion. There were two rooms, doors slightly ajar, at either end of the waiting room. He didn’t pause to look at the signs—just pushed a door open. Then the door closed.

A nurse, holding a chart, came through another doorway by the reception desk.

“Delaney— Mr. Delaney?—

Kathleen fingered the soft, pink yarn, tossed a strand over her finger. “I believe he’s in the ladies room,” she said, looking up at the nurse, all innocence.

Then she resumed her knitting, not missing a stitch.

PATRICK DOREY

The Cottontail Paradox

Brilliant sunlight lit the garden, passing through the flowered canopy and creeping into every leafy recess. There was no place to hide, no place the sun didn't shine. Yet the Cottontails were invisible. The young rabbits had only left the nest a few days prior and were too timid to wander more than a few inches from their hole. Their new, brown fur blended seamlessly with the mulch and leaves of the garden floor. Even the brightest light revealed nothing but earth and plants.

They should have been safe.

But Milo didn't rely on his eyesight for the hunt. His nose was a far more sensitive organ. He sniffed them out like a wino in search of Muscatel. The Cottontails saw him coming and scurried back to the hole. Two of them made it; the third found himself stuffed between Milo's jaws, his entire body enclosed by a cage of canine teeth. At the time the rabbit didn't know how lucky it was; it was too busy saying goodbye to its siblings. But no tooth had pierced its skin, and Milo, being the domesticated mutt that he was, didn't really know what to do with the rabbit now that he had it. He just held it and waited for an idea to come to him. I managed to pry his mouth open before that happened. The rabbit dropped to the ground and joined its nest mates.

The baby Cottontail sustained no physical harm, but the following day the psychological damage of its temporary imprisonment became apparent.

All three rabbits sat munching on my Bluegrass lawn. The only movement was the frenzied motion of their mouths as they chewed and the constant darting of their eyes as they watched for danger.

There was no danger - no dogs on the ground, no hawks in the sky. Nothing to worry about.

As I watched, wondering which of the rabbits was the previous day's escapee, the runt near the lilac bush vaulted into the air, contorted its body in mid-flight and landed facing the opposite direction from which it had started. It ran in a circle, making several circuits before coming to a stop and calmly resuming its meal. I may have imagined it, but I thought I heard a soft *Whew!* His siblings exchanged a knowing glance. Although their communication was nonverbal, the meaning was clear: He's flipped his lid.

Cottontails are ubiquitous in Missouri. Some people see them as pests, others see them as cute little members of the local wildlife, still others see them as the main ingredient in stew. I'm undecided. I can rule them out as a dietary

option, not because of any ethical qualms against carnivorous habits, I just prefer my meat processed into a gelatinous slab of unrecognizable protein.

But they are cute. And they are pests. It's the sort of duality that puts them on a par with 1st graders and Canadians.

I've raised many of these rabbits to maturity. Actually, that's misleading. It implies that I somehow cared for them like a mother, but we men are not known for our nurturing aptitude. I'm a good mother like Darth Vader was a good father. But what my masculinity lacks in motherly attributes is offset by a keen sensitivity. I can't look at those bunnies (My wife refuses to call them rabbits. They are bunnies. Rabbits are what you put in that stew.) without wanting to protect them. So Milo's hunts are sabotaged (usually), the neighbor's cat is subject to garden hose justice for trespassing violations, and the yard is checked for nests before mowing.

The nest of a Cottontail, by design, is not easy to spot. It is a hole in the ground. Not a nice roomy, Bilbo Baggins hole in the ground, but small, maybe 5 inches deep and as many across. The mother fills the hole with grass and fur that she pulls from her belly. It is a completely selfless act. My own mother filled my bedroom with air fresheners and disinfectants, so I appreciate the Cottontail's compassion.

They are not particular about location. Just as we say "Any port in a storm," a pregnant bunny about to squeeze out quintuplets is content with any tear in the turf. They do, however, have their preferences. My yard, despite the canine peril, is bunny friendly. Half of the yard is inclined, which prevents rain from puddling in the nest and drowning newborns. The yard is enclosed, which limits predator access. And they can choose from a wide variety of their favored plants, including ragweed, dandelions and crabgrass. However, the bunnies of my yard have been raised on lilies, hostas, and daffodils. Yes, I provide them a safe haven, and they abuse my kindness by foraging on my flowers. They've no more respect for me than a baby does its diapers.

Now maybe you think that I'm taking it too personally. They're just bunnies after all; they don't consciously target my flowers.

Perhaps.

But I have my suspicions. I see them huddled under the hibiscus whispering to each other. They think I don't notice how they avoid eye contact when I discover the gnawed remains of a tulip lying on my patio. I see them watch me

while I plant bulbs. Last fall I found a patch of dirt under the dogwoods with a series of scratch marks in it. They were laid out in a pattern strikingly similar to that in which I had planted my tiger lilies. Yeah, they're just bunnies, but all that high living in my garden has bred a race of Bugs Bunny-smart rabbits.

I suppose I can't blame them though. When prime rib is on the buffet nobody eats the tuna casserole. But it does seem ungrateful. And manipulative.

That little hole in the ground easily holds four or five newborns, but they grow quickly. They're weaned after about three weeks and the nest becomes rather cramped. Yet they all still fit. One big ball of fluff.

And that's where they get you.

You can see the ground heave as they breathe and shift in the nest. Look closely and you can see an ear tucked back against another's belly, a tail wiggle its way deeper into the warmth. A few weeks more and the babies have inched their way out of the nest, never venturing too far lest danger nears. Just timid balls of fur lying in your yard looking up at you with glistening black eyes. They are not herbivores that will denude your garden; they are not pests that dig holes in your lawn. They are just rabbits struggling to live, like other animals.

Like us.

And like us they grow older and lose much of that cuteness, but now there is a relationship. It is not a relationship like one might enjoy with a favored pet but rather one of empathy. When you see them come to maturity you can say to yourself, "I affected them." Maybe by protecting them, maybe by simply leaving them alone. But it is a relationship nonetheless.

I'm a carnivore. I've eaten rabbit meat and I don't begrudge the hunter his quarry, but there is something more rewarding, more valuable in watching the rabbits grow strong, eat well, and live unmolested. They can be destructive, but they're cute. And I think they know it. Don't think for a moment that a rabbit is incapable of facial expressions. It can give you a look that pleads for its life. Later, when you catch it in amongst the poppies, it looks at you with complete disinterest, knowing you're too weak-willed to evict it for more than an evening. One moment you smile from a distance that preserves its security; the next moment you question your own hesitance and wonder if it might not be better skewered on a rotisserie.

Milo doesn't share my dilemma. For him the relationship is clear: dogs

chase rabbits. I've always envied him his clarity, but then he's never experienced the other possibilities. If he had, perhaps his attitude would have change. If the lions can lie with the lambs, why not the dogs with the rabbits? Then again, maybe some cold December day I'll invite my friends over to share a bottle of wine and a big, steaming pot of Rabbit Stew.

MATTHEW A. HERPEL

Paranoid Schizophrenia



JAMES R. STARKEY III

Death Comes for the Arch Cutup

“Have not you heard?” “Instructor Starkey?” “Dead!”

“The coroner suspects a suicide!”

“A blunted textbook blow unto the head—”

“And both the wrists with paper clips slit wide!”

“Face down in pools of white out was he drowned!”

“The fatal ruler thrust within the breast!”

“A noose of rubber bands his neck wound round!”

“A staple gunshot straight into the chest!”

“And sticking from a vein an empty Bic!”

“The gut a lump of lead—” “Type number two—”

“Self-flagellated with a hickory stick!”

“The nostril flared from sniffing Elmer’s glue!”

“The only clue detectives could espy—”

“Full strewn about the corpse in inky gore—”

“The object of a fixed, unconscious eye—”

“A life erased by essays yet to score!”

“So class is cancelled?” “Just till Monday next.”

“I wonder if we need to take the text . . .” Walking along, we inhaled

MARY KAY LANE

Chicago Picasso

"...what is strange to us today will be familiar to us tomorrow." – Mayor Richard Daley at the unveiling of the unnamed Chicago Picasso on August 15, 1967.

My mother, no art critic, insisted that Picasso
played a trick on the city of Chicago.
She could hear him laughing all the way from France.

While the experts postulated about horse or hound,
bird, aardvark, The Girl With a Ponytail,
or Mayor Daly himself, the big baboon,
she was as unswerving as steel.

"It's a vagina," she said. "Any idiot can see that."

Having borne six children
she should know a 50-foot vagina
when she sees one.

But it was 1967 and other mothers
didn't say things like that to their daughters.

Maybe it was the way the children
slid down the steel statue's slippery slopes.
Or their innocent parents snapping pictures for posterity.

Now it's 2011 and I see,
long past the time when I can tell her,
she was right, by God. About so many things,
she was right.

A Picture Emerges but You Must Stand Back to See It

Trees half red half green
books half read half unseen
vegetable gardens empty but ready
for spring I wonder what kind
of flowers are these
blank pages green grass
a fly buzzes at the screen
the blinking cursor is a tease
the butterflies flutter about
the buddleia bush
they are doing what they're supposed to
without thinking
a dented car stays parked
in the garage
I can just barely see a barge
from here I hear
a pick-up, a semi, a Harley
their tires on the bridge
sound more morose
than tires on the road
a cat tiptoes past
a fence gate I never close
the drip in the faucet
the leak under the sink
aren't quite in sync
a bucket is good enough
for now
I should mow
but the grass will only grow back
tomorrow.

Suburban Myth

Though it defied our middle class senses
my best friend forever swears she saw Sasquatch
loping between the white picket fences.
We were twelve and we were hoping to catch
him. Just as we hoped to find a head in the creek
down the street from her house on Rainbow Drive
whose eyes would pop open when poked with a stick.
It's near where that girl was buried alive.
We whispered "Bloody Mary" in mirrors
and made voodoo dolls of the stuck-up girls.
We had good reasons for courting our fears:
if we proved that evil thrived in the world,
then love did too, and best friends forever.
Her hair was brown, but her name I can't remember.

Godmothers, Fairy and Otherwise

Like Cinderella, no one recognized you
but everyone was enchanted by you.
Granted, we'd seen you look better.
Your gown was unflattering at best
and the tubes up your nose
were not the wisest choice
for accessorizing. You were still
the most beautiful person in the room,
in the world. The rest of us looked like hell.

You were the life of the party,
in fact, the only one breathing.
I don't remember breathing.
I remember we all held our breath
and everyone wanted to hold your hand
and no one wanted to give you up
to the next person in line, waiting
with toes tapping to the beat of the EKG
while the ventilator whistled a sinister waltz
and your blood flowed through tubes
like shiraz through a straw.

Your delicate feet poked out the end of the sheet.
As usual your toenails were perfect,
like glossy red drops of blood
reminding me of the stepsister
who so badly wanted to live happily ever after
she cut off her own toes.

I knew you were headed there, too,
to happily ever after. Though you stayed
at the party as long as you could

until your fairy godmother
turned you into a memory
at midnight

DAVID CIRILLO

Ashes to Ashes

Every problem can be solved if you smoke enough cigarettes.

That's what my pops told me anyways. Told me when I was twelve as he blew a ring of grey smoke around my head.

But the old man's dead now. He's in a coffin right in front of me, his skin grey like smoke—dull and ephemeral. I'm the last one at the funeral home. The friends have left, and my ex-wife—God bless her black, sour, beautiful heart—left a few minutes ago. Patted me on the hand and told me to call if I needed anything. So now it's just me and the old man.

I light up a cigarette—I figure why the hell not. The old man's dead, and I'll be joining him in twenty years or less. So why the hell not smoke? Besides, I'll spray Lysol when I leave. Wouldn't want the smell of smoke to linger and remind the cheerless griever of their own mortality.

I sit in the third row of chairs overlooking the casket. A few times over the past few days I've stood at the casket—but not often. There's nothing about a corpse that's real attractive to me. It's gelatinous matter, chuck full of chemicals, and from what I understand, the only thing real about a formaldehyde-filled corpse is the hair. I also hear that the hair continues to grow, even after the body is buried. If this is true, Pops wouldn't be too happy to hear it. He liked his crew cut—thought hair on his head was as natural as a beard on a baby. He was probably right.

Anyway, I sit in the third row, about twenty feet from the casket, and while I refuse to get close, it doesn't mean the memories aren't close. Because they are. Right there. Lingering, hovering. And it wouldn't matter how far away from the casket I got—the fifth row or six millionth row—the memories would still come.

Every problem can be solved if you smoke enough cigarettes.

Damn right, Pops.

The second time he told me this was at Mom's funeral. I was twenty-two and he fifty-five—there was a strange beauty in the symmetry of our ages—and we had a smoke right after the funeral mass. We stood there, the church steeple pointing to heaven, Pops leaning against the crucifix, me standing opposite him. He told me we'd get through this as long as Philip Morris kept making cancer sticks.

In a way, he was right. For weeks and weeks, we both smoked a few packs a day. We didn't talk much, but together our voices got raw and our lungs

turned black, and we drank shots of whiskey and played gin and listened to baseball on the radio. And sure as shit, we both got through it. Didn't forget, just got through it.

But I guess I'm an orphan now, huh? A forty year old orphan. And because of this, I want to get closer to Pops' body. So I do. I move up a row, but I don't sit. I can see his hands folded, resting on his stomach.

My father would tell you he wasn't the perfect dad. He smoked too much, drank too much, cursed too much. He used to smack me around but no more or less than I deserved. We never really talked about this, about what kind of dad he was, but a few weeks ago at the hospital, he apologized. Not for anything specific—just a general apology. He said the bills had piled up, that he didn't have enough insurance, so he wouldn't be able to leave me much money. Then again, he said, he wasn't Donald Trump—he was an electrician—and he wouldn't have left much anyway. He laughed when he said this, but that turned into a phlegm-filled cough. His throat constricted and he couldn't say much afterwards. But he did say, "So, you know, sorry. About everything."

When I left the hospital, I didn't know if I was thankful or angry about the apology. Was he sorry for everything? For siding with Penny—the ex-wife—during the divorce? What about telling me I was a worthless bag of marbles? He had great hopes for me, I let him down. Was he sorry for that? But the past wasn't what bothered me with his apology—he was a tough onion but a good dad. No, what bothered me most was I didn't know if he thought I needed that apology. Did he think I hated him for something? Did he think I expected an apology? Because I didn't. I didn't expect it and didn't need it.

I move up another row. Something is drawing me forward. Some force exists between my bones and that coffin. I can now see his face. Eyes closed, thin lips—more pink than red—and tightly cropped hair.

You live in your head, son. That's why you got to keep the demons out of there.

Pops never explained what he meant by that, it was just one of those things he said. But I think I got a glimpse of what he meant ten years before Mom died.

I went to a bar called the Lighthouse, a little nook of a place stuck in a rat-infested building maybe four blocks from where I grew up. I had heard about the Lighthouse as one might hear about a church—a sacred place, a haven (for

my father, at least) from the cruel, cold world.

I went one night after me and my then-wife had a fight. We were having a lot of fights at that time, and I thought the Lighthouse might be a sanctuary for me—or at least a confessional. So after shooting stick at Pinto’s Pool Hall, I went to the Lighthouse, already a bit sauced.

And sure as anything, my dad was already there. He sat at the bar next to a woman ten years younger. She had on a short, red dress, red high heels, and a matching red bow in her hair. In my opinion, she wasn’t much to look at, but my father thought otherwise. I knew because his left hand moved up and down her thigh.

Now, my father was never one to explain himself—he did what he did and lived with the consequences. So when I walked into the bar and his eyes met mine, he didn’t even blink. He waved at me, told me to come over and meet his friend.

I went over, and me and Pops got to talking, this woman in red stuck between us like a piece of bamboo between skin and nail. The whole time we talked, the woman didn’t say a word.

I started the conversation by asking where Mom was, but he didn’t answer. Instead, he told me about a talisman he used to carry around when he was a kid. It was a little plastic statue he found resting at the base of a tree in a park—it might have been the Virgin Mary, it might have been the Statue of Liberty, but it was so beaten up, he really couldn’t tell which. But he remembered he picked the thing up and stared at it for a long time, and when friends came up and asked what he had, he quickly stuffed it into his pocket. He did this because he had a sense the thing had magic, but if anyone knew about the magic, it would disappear. So he hid it from his friends and never told anyone about it.

Then he told me, “Son, that’s the thing that keeps the demons out of my head. You understand me? I still have that statue, in my nightstand drawer, and the demons stay away.”

I didn’t say another word to him that night, just nodded, told him I hoped he had a pleasant evening. And I never asked about that woman with the red dress and red bow. I didn’t have to.

I decide to step up to the coffin. I glance at the yellow rose stuck in his lapel. I see the lips again. But my eyes are drawn to the folded hands resting on his stomach. Those hands, marked with moles and age and scars, hands that

strangely tell the story of his life.

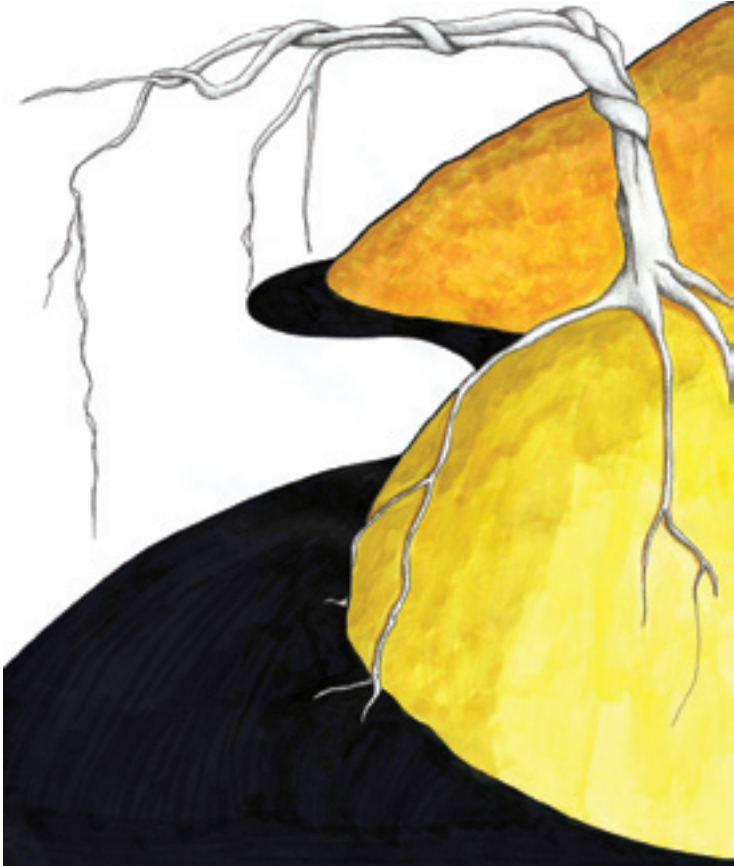
I take a drag from my cigarette—it's nearly burned down to my fingertips. I can barely look at the old man—at Pops. What is he now? Nothing but simple grey matter, like smoke from a cigarette. The spirit has flown.

And so I take my cigarette and crush it hard again his hand. The skin smolders a bit, smoke flits into the air, and I smell chemicals.

I leave the cigarette there, soldered to his hand. I put down the casket lid and leave the funeral home, my head dizzy with nicotine thoughts.

RICK SPRIGGS

*Road Tree,
Watercolor*



JUNE HELEN FLEMING

To my Children

I will be with you until we meet again
When the wind blows I will touch your cheeks

My spirit will abide by the streams
When the water ripples over the rocks
I will touch your soul
When you gaze to the mountain tops
Look for my spirit

When the autumn leaves rustle in the wind
I will hear you call my name
I will be lonely for you

KIM LEE SEAGULL

To my Dear Mom

I marvel at your soul
So sweet and so sublime
I wish I could extol
In verse your loving mind

You are like a flower
That blooms above the snow
A transcendental power
That only God and mystics know

He gave you a tender spirit
And a mind of radiant light
That brightens your bright virtue
Beyond my gift to write

DEBRA HEDGES

Grandma's Porch

Faded green glider
slides

Back and forth
it hums

Its gentle tune
lulls

Her tranquil family
adores

Tiny firefly flares
spark

After dinner strollers
nod

Cotton candy clouds
blush

Choirs of cicadas
croon

Old man moon
smiles

As twilight sky
settles.

MICHAEL PEEPLES

Pleiades Told

How can we ever know what the Pleiades told
of that trip we took long ago?
When we look to the cluster now,
and know that we were there somehow,
how can we not long to return?

The Seven Sisters took our shallow breath away,
left our minds without words to say
how our memories are suppressed,
and the emotions leave us stressed,
all so The Secret can remain.

That first midnight visit filled us with stark horror
as their strange features filled our eyes.
Stolen in the quiet of night
taken on a long distance flight
to a place we now call our home.

We can feel their stellar love in our swollen hearts,
and their gaze from eyes of blue quartz.
Will we ever see them again?
Even if it means our lives end,
Our conviction cannot be swayed.

How can we ever know what the Pleiades told
of that trip we took not so long ago?
When we look to the cluster now,
and know that we were there,
somehow,
we count the days 'til our return..

Jane, Jane, Jane

Jane Eyre is a bitch.
Everywhere I go, there she is,
in my old movie collection,
literary allusions,
modern rehashes,
and homages by some of my favorite authors.

People I know all know her,
they're surprised I haven't held her.
I managed to avoid her in high school,
dodge her at college, where
at frat parties we happened to just miss each other.

I hear she's a nice girl,
that I should give her a whirl,
but if everyone else has,
do I want to go there too?
Will I catch the Jane Eyre bug?

"She'll tell you her secret," people say,
"you know, the one at the end."
"No," I reply, "I don't know her end,"
and I don't know that I want to,
because won't that spoil her for me
if I one day I do give in?

But wait...oh no!
There she is,
on the other side of the room,
hovering like an old acquaintance
I can no longer ignore.
How did she get in my bedroom,
on my nightstand?

Damnit!
We're alone together now, and
she's going to spend the night.

TYLER KIRK

Bon Hiver

Sideways we dream
of this wondrous tilt
with motion slow as
a good winter's freeze.

Through glass is rain
of winding sky's debris
shifting shadows over
the horizon we reach.

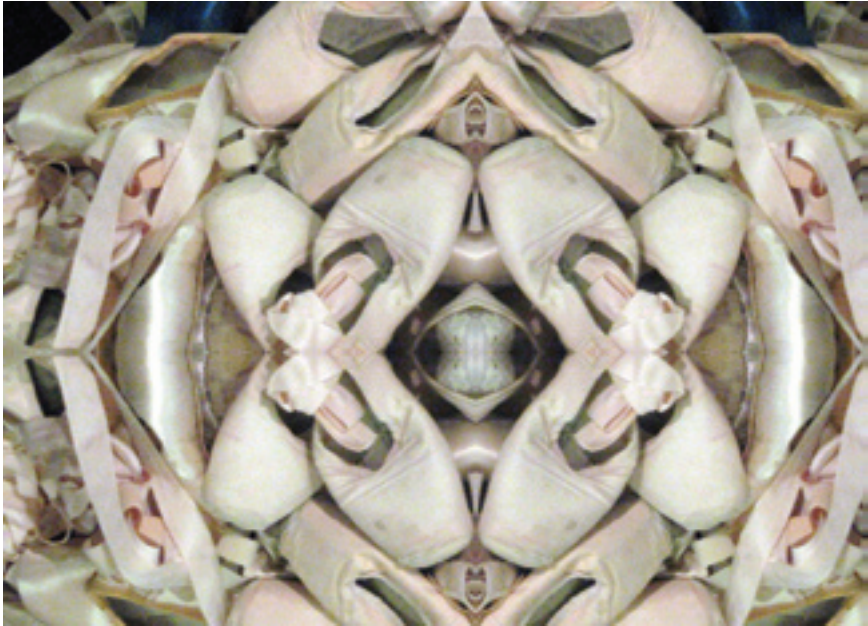
Wrap all you've owned
of yesterday in pain
yet suffered, dear,
for this bears all.

Dancer

I pull warm words out from my pocket
Splatter them on yellowing leaflet pages
A literary Jackson Pollock
I stand over my canvas,
Let the brush dance
Fill the floor with a series of pirouettes and pliés
Won't the crowd love me?
Litter my feet with round, red roses
But please,
Remove the thorns.

ROBERT A. GILL

Ballet Shoes



BETTY TAYLOR

Magic Show

In red Missouri clay and dirt
Mama makes magic.
Her stage a small hand-tilled garden
and her wand a rusted, weathered shovel
from her flower print apron --
not a fancy black tuxedo.
She throws seeds to the ground.
Weeks later eight children,
her captive audience,
awe at her greatest trick.
The top of plants that promise
to feed them.

MEGAN TUCKER

Shadows on the Wall

By the light of a single, unencumbered bulb
I notice the blots of darkness
 moving as I move.
I get up and approach the wall.
The image grows sharper
and I remember the project from youthful school days
where we traced the shadows of our faces
and turned it into what we wanted to be someday.
 If only it were so simple.

-

Indecision is a plague.
It begins with one question,
 unanswerable,
and grows to infect all aspects of life
until I can't be at peace with myself.
The unanswerable question has to be answered.
 What is the next step?
I am on the edge of a precipice
and I can't decide what materials to make the bridge out of
that will take me to safety.
 The light flickers
and brings me back to myself.
I sit back down
back in my room
back in the real world
where choices have to be made.
 I am uneasy.

BRENDAN MCDONNELL

Constellations

As one sets, the other rises.
A paradoxical balance.
Rooted in stillness.
The gloom instills presence.

No label can prove its beauty
Ah to experience!
The oneness. Interconnected indeed.

Am I the only one drawn to this source?
A hoot from the wise answers my dualistic inquiry.
Ancient spirits drawn to the lustful aroma.
The hidden bloom of the moonflower.

Within and without.
Linked constellations.
Mandalic impressions in the sky.
There is nothing to grasp.

RACHEL MITCHELL

*A Midsummer Night's Dream,
Digital Photograph*



CONTRIBUTORS

Halle Benton was what I was named on July 7, 1992—after the comet apparently but just spelled differently. I love the arts—dancing, painting, drawing. Painting is my favorite and keeps me sane. I’m also crazy addicted to hot wings.

Ferman Carrillo – I work at SCC as a housekeeper. I have been a photographer for over 30 years. I do it for fun. I always have a camera with me so I don’t miss anything.

Rebecca Lynn Chapman was born in Allegan, Michigan, and her family moved to Warrenton, Missouri in the late 1990’s. Rebecca’s work ranges anywhere from nature and sports to weddings and families. While she loves photographing a variety of different things, she is most known for her sports photography. Rebecca currently has two published books; “Nature Untouched” and “Daytona Bike Week 2012” both of which can be found at www.blurb.com.

Ron Chesbrough is president of St. Charles Community College in Cottleville, MO. He lives with his wife Annie and their daughters Emma and Mia, in Weldon Spring, MO.

David Cirillo teaches English full-time at St. Charles Community College. He graduated from Kent State University in 1999, at which point he began to take writing much more seriously. He works primarily on short stories and novels and is currently doing his damndest to get a novel published. He currently lives in O’Fallon, Missouri.

Dana Delibovi is a poet living in Lake Saint Louis, Missouri. She teaches philosophy at Lindenwood University.

Patrick Dorey spends his life communing with a natural world that has no interest in reciprocating. Yet he continues undeterred, allowing nature, despite its disinterest, to inform his writing and sooth his fevered soul.

June Helen Fleming – For me it has never been lonely being a writer because when I bring my characters to life I am never alone.

Gaynell Gavin is the author of *Attorney-at-Large*, forthcoming this fall from Main Street Rag Publishing (www.mainstreetrag.com/GGavin.html). MSR also published her poetry chapbook, *Intersections*. Much of her work is grounded in the Midwest. Her prose and poetry appear in many journals and anthologies. Recent work appears on the National Park Service web site (<http://www.nps.gov/heho/supportyourpark/artist-in-residence-program.htm>), in *Big Muddy, Solstice* (<http://solsticelitmag.org>), *Suicidally Beautiful* (MSR, 2012) and *The Untidy Season* (Backwaters Press, forthcoming).

Robert A. Gill has been a photographer and videographer for over 30 years.

Debra Hedges – My grandmother shared stories, recited poetry, and taught me to laugh during tough times. Her front porch holds countless memories for me.

Matthew A. Herpel is a young artist born and raised in O'Fallon, MO. He focuses mainly on portraits and figure drawings as well as illustrating and digital artwork.

Keith T. Hoerner (BS, MFA) arranges words and teaches in St. Louis, Missouri. His work can be found in literary journals (both print and on line). His creative-nonfiction novella, *Missing the Mark: A Target Child Speaks*, was self-published this spring (2012) and quickly “picked up” for an expanded re-issue by Stonebrook Publishing (coming soon).

Mary Horner is the author of *Strengthen Your Nonfiction Writing*, and teaches Communications at St. Louis and St. Charles Community Colleges. She was formerly a staff writer and editor of several publications, and earned the Writing Certificate from UM-St. Louis.

Mary Kane is an expatriate of suburban Chicago. A life-long learner with a passion for poetry, she lives in St. Charles and attends St. Charles Community College. She is a frequent contributor to *Mid Rivers Review*.

Tyler Kirk is a brother, son, and hopeless writer. He will be attending UMSL in the fall, where he intends to find ambition.

Yvonne Koch enjoys traveling: walking, biking, or driving, which all provide many opportunities for photography. She hopes to eventually visit and photograph all of the United States National Parks.

Bill Kristen teaches Sociology and Anthropology at SCC. He sees poetry as a most effective use of language to uplift, transform and even redeem the human condition.

Bruce Lader's third full-length book, *Fugitive Hope*, is forthcoming from Cervená Barva Press. Winner of the 2010 Left Coast Eisteddfod Competition, his poems have appeared widely in magazines, including *Poetry*, *New York Quarterly*, *Harpur Palate*, *Roanoke Review*, *Potomac Review* and *New Millennium Writings*. www.brucelader.com

Mary Kay Lane lives in Muscatine, Iowa. Her writing can be found in recent issues of *St. Anthony's Messenger*, and *Our Iowa*, and in an upcoming issue of *Thema*.

Linda Lankford lives at Lake Saint Louis in St. Charles County. This year her poetry has been set aside as she completed a remembrance of early life in rural Missouri farmland. During this time writing in the morning was more nourishing than breakfast cereal. She attends the Summer Writer's Festival in Iowa City at Iowa University.

Christian M. Lewis – The M stands for Meriwether.

Brendan McDonnell – Born and raised in Missouri, I didn't write any poetry until last year, while taking Intro to Poetry at SCC. I took the course thinking it would help with creating lyrics for songs. The course helped me appreciate poetry and the art of expressing feelings and memories with words.

Tanner Matthew Thomas McKenzie – I was born in Missouri on September 6, 1991 and lived here for 12 years. I then moved to Los Angeles, California to live with my mom for 6 years. In 2009, I moved back to be with my family.

Conner Meyer – Please, accept mystery.

Rachel Mitchell is 22 years old and studies photography at St. Charles Community College. She currently works as a photographer with *Alive Magazine* St. Louis. In her free time she enjoys competing in Barrel Racing and riding her horses.

Catherine O'Mara – I have always had an appreciation for the written word. I am a recent graduate of Lutheran High of St. Charles County and will be attending Truman State University in the fall. I intend to major in English with the hopes of becoming a high school English teacher one day, so I can share my passion of reading and writing with others.

Michael Peebles is a 2004 graduate of SCC and makes his second appearance in the *Mid Rivers Review* with this unconventional ode to Jane Eyre. He has served as the master of Ceremonies at the local 2011 NEA Poetry Out Loud competition as well as the January and April 2012 Night of Poetry at the FAC events.

Kim Lee Seagull – To me poetry is the most exalted art form, because lines pop right into my head perfectly formed from the transcendent realm. It must be that God writes the poem for me, and all I do is hold the pen.

Carol J. Shaw is a St. Charles County resident, a contributor to *MRR* and a participant at SCC Coffeehouse. Focusing with a camera or probing with a pen, life is never boring.

Elizabeth Sheck is a freelance poet, jeweler, traditional film photographer, knitter and lover of fondue. Her repertoire includes mostly passive aggressive breakup poetry and a godlike ability to procrastinate, as well as a slightly overzealous love of sunflowers. She lives with her cats, Tigerlilly and Judy, and her spiritual home is Wichita, Kansas.

Rick Spriggs is in his second year at SCC. He enjoys working in any art medium.

James R. Starkey III – Though adored by students, colleagues, family, and friends today, Mr. Starkey shall ultimately be forgotten once the universe suffers a heat death.

Betty Taylor is a native of Poplar Bluff, Missouri. She is the former Chief of Police for the City of Winfield, Missouri Police Department. While finishing her PhD in Higher Education, she holds an MFA in Writing and Criminal Justice. She is an adjunct professor of English and Criminal Justice. Currently, she is finishing a book regarding her sister's disappearance which was featured as one of the highest-rated Dr. Phil episodes.

Megan Tucker – A good life is one spent in the pursuit of knowledge. For now, I am just a student striving for excellence. I enjoy many subjects, but my major is in Accounting. I have a dog, Gus, and I enjoy bike riding, reading, and spending time with loved ones.

Greg Wirth is a director of IT at SCC, and has been at the college nearly 20 years. He enjoys music, cooking, gardening, and the peace that writing sometimes brings.

***Mid Rivers Review* Submission Guidelines**

- Submissions of original unpublished poetry, short fiction, creative nonfiction, and artistic photos are accepted throughout the year.
- Submissions must be typed as a Microsoft Word document using 12 point type and a standard font. If work is accepted, author must provide entries in electronic format, as e-mail attachment(s) with each entry a separate Microsoft document (or on a CD). All B & W or color photo/artwork entries must be submitted initially as prints (4 x 6 or larger) and electronically if selected. Photos also considered for cover.
- Author's name should not appear anywhere on the manuscript. With each entry, staple a sealed envelope containing a 3x5 card with the work's title, and the author's name, address, phone numbers, and e-mail address. You may include a SASE for notification of status of your entry, but manuscripts will not be returned. For simultaneous submissions, please notify us immediately if your work is accepted elsewhere.
- Poems should be single-spaced, one poem per page, with stanza and line breaks clearly indicated; limit 4 poems.
- Each fiction or essay entry should be no longer than 1500 words (5-6 double-spaced pages); limit 2 prose entries.
- Mail entries to: Editor, *Mid Rivers Review*, HUM-Rm. 203, St. Charles Community College, 4601 Mid Rivers Mall Dr., Cottleville, MO 63376.
- Individuals whose work is selected for publication will be notified within 4-6 weeks and will receive two complimentary copies of the 2013 journal upon publication.
- Guidelines also available at www.stchas.edu/midriversreview

SCC Coffeehouse

St. Charles Community College also sponsors the SCC Coffeehouse, an open-mic format for writers wishing to share their original poetry, short fiction, creative nonfiction, skits or song lyrics with an appreciative audience. Microphone time limited to 7 minutes. Complimentary refreshments served. The Coffeehouse is held twice per semester, on campus. For more information, including dates and directions, visit www.stchas.edu or call (636) 922-8254.

