

Impost

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Impost: A Journal of Creative and Critical Work

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Submission Guidelines

Impost: A Journal of Critical and Creative Work, a peer-reviewed journal published by the English Association of Pennsylvania State Universities, welcomes submissions of scholarly essays in all fields of English studies. In addition, we welcome creative writing, including fiction, poetry, nonfiction, and literary journalism. Current and previous editions of the journal, which in the spring of 2016 changed its name from *EAPSU Online*, can be found on this page.

Please submit critical essays via email to astuart@commonwealthu.edu, with your name and the title of the work in the subject line. Attach the submission as one file in .doc or .docx format. In the body of the message, include a brief bio: your name, address, phone number, email address, institutional affiliation (if you have one), the genre and title(s) of your work, and any other relevant information. In the attached document, please do not include any identifying information. Scholarly work should follow current MLA guidelines. Creative prose should be double-spaced, and poems should be single-spaced.

Creative work can be simultaneously submitted; however, we expect to be notified immediately when a work must be withdrawn from consideration. Scholarly work should not be simultaneously submitted.

Contributors will be notified of acceptance status via email at the completion of the review process. Usually, the review process is completed six months after submissions are received. You may contact the editors if you haven't received notification of the status of your manuscript within six months.

While our submission deadline is rolling, submissions received by April 1 will be guaranteed consideration for the upcoming issue of *Impost*. Submissions received after this date will be considered for the

following year. By submitting your work, you agree that *Impost* acquires first serial rights. In addition, *Impost* may reserve non-exclusive rights to reprint a piece.

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Introduction

Anne-Dyer Stuart

Editor

Welcome to our special, all-creative issue! And, it is a beauty!

The creative nonfiction included spans from flash, meditative, lyric, and personal essays, all of which take on both the limitations of the self as well as its endless, confounding surprise. Such works investigate our complicated relationship to the past, nature, grief, translation, and travel. These pieces will take you places! Behold some snippets of intrigue:

“The winters here make me distrust myself—the layers of my life collapse until I no longer know who I am; mother, writer, teacher, addict?...Then spring arrives and I fall in love again.”
(Aurora Bonner, “Invasive”);

“After about fifteen minutes, I thought, how dumb is this? It didn’t help matters that when I got back to the house, my older brother looked me over and said, “What the hell are you doing?”
(Bill Conlogue, “Hunting Answers”);

“How does one move between and past things, honoring the source, protecting its fiber, and birthing the new thing, tending to its fresh breathing on the page?”
(Clara Burghilea, “Zuihitsu”);

“A mule, fastened to a tree high in the Atlas Mountains, bears colorful rugs. The one who placed them there has abandoned the scene.”
(Eric Daffron, “Incidents in Marrakech and Beyond”);

“Grief, for all its weight, is not a worthless currency.”
(Nick Stanovick, “Meixsell Valley Road”);

As for the astonishing poems, I cannot stop myself from enticing you with some of their lines. These poems grapple with the self in a fiery world, our longing for connection in spite of its risk, and the other side of that risk, even when—especially when—it doesn’t quite pay off:

“It’s not that we were disappointed; after all, we came for the sky—”
(David Bauman and Micah Bauman, “Dark Skies”);

“...But first I have a question:/when we jump a hole in the sky/for joy, will the night look less black/than right now....”
(Arno Bohlmeijer, translation of “Black” by Paul Demets);

“A tiny, vigorous cancer nibbling at her lit smile.”
(Clara Burghilea, “Hungry Ghosts”);

“tut-tut, look at the idiot/when a paraphrase would have sufficed.” (Justine Defever, “[sic]”);

“A white-eyed girl dreaming/of foam, a world blanketed,/lightness one upon the other.” (Laine Derr and Carolina Torres, “Bearing Blue”);

“(As you can see, this is the most important question to us. If you are a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture, circle “Y.” We still want you to answer question #2, though.” (Zorina Exie Frey, “Equal Opportunity Employer”);

“overdrawn accounts and abandoned friends, roads// not traveled, others traveled too far like fits of mad laughter...” (Michael Piero, “Melancholy: The Game”);

“And there he is/behind my back/something like God in blue Canvas.” (Tara Propper, “Pandemic”);

“and I wonder at what a poem creates and how/ thought on a poem can shape the self/independent of narrative” (Edward Wells, “3/13/2023”).

Finally, when I solicited a review of Jessica Jopp’s excellent award-winning novel, *From the Longing Orchard*, from Sarah Goulet, I knew it was going to be brilliant, but somehow, she still surprised me. Jopp and Goulet are a magical match!

I hope you enjoy this edition of *Impost* as much as we do; may it bring you what you need, whatever that may be.

Special thanks to Ted Roggenbuck for his help behind the scenes, and to Michael Downing and Tim Ray for their assistance and support.

Onward!

Anne-Dyer Stuart

Biographies

Micah James Bauman's poems have been published in *South 85 Journal*, *Whale Road Review*, *Anti-heroin Chic*, and *Sage Cigarettes*. He was a *Best of the Net* nominee in 2020. His chapbook *Mapping the Valley: Hospital Poems* (Seven Kitchens Press, 2021) is a collaboration with his father, David J. Bauman.

In addition to co-authoring *Mapping the Valley*, **David J. Bauman** has written two other poetry chapbooks: *Angels & Adultery* (Seven Kitchens Press, 2018) and *Moons, Roads, and Rivers* (Finishing Line Press, 2017). David has work published or forthcoming in *New Ohio Review*, *Valparaiso Poetry Review*, *Crab Creek Review*, *Blood Orange Review*, and *The MacGuffin*.

Arno Bohlmeijer

Winner of a PEN America grant 2021, poet and novelist published in six countries, two dozen renowned Journals and Reviews, 2019 – 2023, and in *Universal Oneness: An Anthology of Magnum Opus Poems* from around the World, 2019.

www.arnobohlmeijer.com

Aurora Bonner is an environmentally inspired writer and educator living in southern Pennsylvania. Aurora's writing has been published through the Colorado Review, *Assay: Journal of Nonfiction Studies*, *Brevity*, *Hippocampus Magazine*, *Under the Gum Tree*, and elsewhere. In addition to other past publications and exhibitions, her essay, "The York Street Diner is Closed," appeared in the anthology *Dine* in 2019. Aurora has studied at the Tin House Summer Workshops in Portland, Oregon, and at Wilkes University in Pennsylvania, where she received her MFA in Creative Writing.

Clara Burghelea is a Romanian-born poet with an MFA in Poetry from Adelphi University. Recipient

of the Robert Muroff Poetry Award, her poems and translations appeared in *Ambit*, *Waxwing*, *The Cortland Review* and elsewhere. Her second poetry collection *Praise the Unburied* was published with Chaffinch Press in 2021. She is Review Editor of *Ezra*, An Online Journal of Translation.

Bill Conlogue teaches writing and American literature at Marywood University. A native of northeastern Pennsylvania, he has written about this corner of the state in *Working the Garden: American Writers and the Industrialization of Agriculture, Here and There: Reading Pennsylvania's Working Landscapes*, and *Undermined in Coal Country: On the Measures in a Working Land*.

Based in New York City, **Eric Daffron** is a professor of Literature at Ramapo College of New Jersey. Although in the past he published traditional scholarship, his recent work has taken an autotheoretical turn with a particular emphasis on Roland Barthes.

Justine Defever resides in Michigan and is an Associate Professor of English. Her poetry has been featured in *North American Review*, *Great Lakes Review*, *Sad Girl Diaries*, and *Quarter Press*, among others. She holds a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing from Arcadia University. Read more of her work at justinedefever.com

Laine Derr holds an MFA from Northern Arizona University and has published interviews with Carl Phillips, Ross Gay, Ted Kooser, and Robert Pinsky. Recent work has appeared or is forthcoming from *Chapter House*, *ZYZZYVA*, *Hollins Critic*, *Oxford Magazine*, *Prairie Schooner*, and elsewhere.

Zorina Exie Frey is a Pushcart Prize-winning poet, educator, and poetry editor for *South 85 Journal*.

Her writings are featured in *Shondaland*, *Shoutout Miami*, *Chicken Soup for the Soul: I'm Speaking Now*, and *Glassworks Magazine*. She is the recipient of the Palm Beach Poetry Festival Langston Hughes Fellow and Martha's Vineyard Institute of Creative Writing Voices of Color Fellow. She was a semi-finalist in the TV pilot *America's Next Great Author*.

Sarah M. Goulet is a queer author and instructional designer. She lives with her wife, cats, and other critters in Danville, PA.

Mike Piero is a bisexual writer in Northeast Ohio, where he teaches courses in writing, literature, the humanities, and game studies as a Professor of English at Cuyahoga Community College. He is author of *Video Game Chronotopes and Social Justice: Playing on the Threshold* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021) and co-editor of *Being Dragonborn: Critical Essays on The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* (McFarland, 2021) among other peer-reviewed articles that have appeared in the *CEA Mid-Atlantic Review*, *Eludamos: Journal for Computer Game Culture*, *The Popular Culture Studies Journal*, *Transnational Literature*, and *MediaTropes*. His fiction has recently been published in *Moveable Type*.

He can be reached at www.mikepiero.org

Tara Propper has earned her MFA in poetry and PhD in English. Her poetry has appeared in the *Southampton Review*, *Janus Unbound*, *Literature Today*, *Ekstasis Magazine*, *Shuili Magazine*, *Taj Mahal International Literary Journal*, *Moveable Type*, *Vagabond City Press*, and *P - Queue*. Her forthcoming chapbook, *This body was never made*, is under contract with Finishing Line Press. She is currently an Assistant Professor of English in the Department of Literature and Languages at the University of Texas at Tyler.

Carolina Torres is a Biologist and Public Health researcher who enjoys the arts and literature. As a scientific author, she has published in peer-reviewed journals within the biomedical field. Her writing, mostly prose, is a practice for spiritual reflection.

Nick Stanovick is a writer and educator from the Pocono Mountains, where his father still operates a small non-traditional farm. He is an alumnus of Temple University, Auburn University, and Queens College. An International Poetry Slam Champion and the winner of the Robert Hughes Mount Jr. Prize, his work has appeared in *Nashville Review*, *Vinyl*, *The Academy of American Poets*, *Ghost City Review*, and *Drunk In a Midnight Choir* among others.

Edward Wells is a writer from the United States of America. They hold an MFA in Creative Writing and are a writing and literature instructor. They observe rituals of art and anniversaries of loss, though not all art is ritual and not all anniversaries are of grief for Them. Their poetry chapbook, *_reassemblances_*, is available through Dumpster Fire Press.

Invasive

The small, brick colonial I recently moved to is within walking distance to the university, my kids' school, the park, the river, and a few hiking trails. I'm on a quiet one-way street lined with brick homes all built in the 50s. Across from me, my neighbor's azaleas are opening, revealing magenta, pink, and white petals. I look through the side of my sunglasses, trying not to stare. My neighbors' yard is decorated for spring, with sun catchers and a forsythia wreath. But they are distrustful, like many people in this rural city, and have yet to catch my eye or return my morning wave. *Welcome friends*, say their garden flags. But not newcomers. They do not know me and do not care for new arrivals in their neighborhood.

I am renting the house across from them, and perhaps my lack of wreaths, porch chairs, or other colloquial accoutrement shows that I'm a transient—poised to leave this area as soon as the time comes. This is how I have lived most of my life: in constant flux. My therapist and I talk about this fear of commitment. A fear of commitment that seems to extend past just relationships towards my hometown—in fact, the whole state of Pennsylvania. Oh, I enjoy it here, sometimes I'm in love with it, but not enough to say I'll stay forever. Constant change keeps me moving, keeps me from getting too connected to the communities around me.

Aurora
Bonner

Apparently, I am distrustful, too.

Sometimes, especially in winter, I convince myself that I'm leaving Pennsylvania, and all of my memories here, for good. That a move will lift the fog from my eyes and clear my brain. In winter, the sky moves through shades of white and gray, as if smoke is constantly lingering, snuffing me out. The sky becomes a blanket, old and pilled and lumpy, covering me but providing no warmth or comfort. The winters here make me distrust myself—the layers of my life collapse until I no longer know who I am; mother, writer, teacher, addict? The winters here make me promise myself, over and over, that I will move away from this hellhole and never miss a moment.

Then spring arrives and I fall in love again. The sun appears. The azaleas bloom. My mood stabilizes, and I appear with them.

The first life to appear in a Pennsylvania spring, even before the azaleas, is skunk cabbage, *Symplocarpus foetidus*. Its luscious leaves unravel like plump lips kissing the earth. Skunk cabbage is one of few thermogenic plants, meaning it produces its own heat. As it builds heat within the earth, the ground around it warms and allows for early emergence. Not only

do their ability to regulate their internal temperature help the plant, pollinators like the warmth, too, and are also attracted to the smell of skunk cabbage, from which it gets its name. Bruised or ripped leaves smell astringent and skunk-like, a natural deterrent to hungry predators like deer.

Though they're named for their smell, the flowers of the *Symplocarpus foetidus* are more captivating, a blood-red to buttercup-yellow spathe wrapping around a corncob spadix, not dissimilar to calla lillies, but certainly more like cracked dragons' eggs. Skunk cabbage, once known as "dracontium" in the 19th century, was believed to have healing properties. I wonder when skunk cabbage fell from grace, its respectable past time as a healing plant forgotten, its name demoted from powerful lord-like dracontium to the peasant-like skunk cabbage.

Skunk cabbage lives in wetlands, but can be found anywhere in Pennsylvania. When I was round and pregnant with my daughter, the skunk cabbage leaves had already unfurled, the native flowers had begun to open. I loved being pregnant and loved the wholeness of having a child. It made me feel close to nature, connected as one, both creators of life. I would walk for hours around the trails, pregnant or with my child wrapped against me. For hours around the parks. For hours in the forests. For hours around the rivers. For hours around the little town where I'd grown up in, avoiding public places where I might run into people who'd known me when I was young, people who'd seen my relationship with trauma and addiction. Sometimes, when I'd run into my past, I'd feel proud that I had survived. Proud that my past had no reason to scrutinize me. But most of the time, I'd feel shame.

Along the trail, the trees filter the sun and heat. The swamp cabbage rules the forest. Native flowers are

just beginning to awaken amongst the tangles of sycamore and locust. *Sharplobe hepatica* push their six-fingered hands through a blanket of dried oak leaves. *Claytonia virginica*, the spring beauty with its delicate fuchsia penned-in petals, *Erythronium americanum*, the yellow weeping trout lily, *Trillium erectum*, red trillium, and *thalictrum thalictroides*, rue anemone, burst forth, bringing color and life to the palette of winter grey and brown.

The trail winds a few miles into the riverside forest. Each day I go out, I watch for the wildflowers' progress. As the days continue to warm, the bluebells wither, the spring beauties disappear, and the trout lilies fall, while invasive knotweed erupts in congested clusters and lifts the forest floor to knee-level. The skunk cabbage is fading into the invasive knotweed. The trail splits near an abandoned iron bridge where beer bottles and dirty blankets are abandoned near makeshift camps. I pass a woman belly up on the ground, her head rolling side to side. I slow. Her eyes were closed, but I can see her fighting a feeling between elation and damnation. I remember that feeling. She opens her eyes and yells incoherently at me. I continue on.

Our borough encourages us to report incidents like this, their general attitude one of vehemence for the impoverished, mentally ill, addicted, and homeless. Ironic, in a city that has also fallen from grace, where the average per capita income is around \$17,000 a year and unemployment higher than the national average—typical of a rural American city.

I grew up thinking that college was my ticket out of rural America. A college degree meant job opportunities, money, culture, the arts—my ticket to "the real world." But I stuck out from the other college graduates: I couldn't move in with my parents or ask them to pay my loans, my waitressing job paid for books,

Aurora
Bonner
Invasive

but was not enough to buy a car or help me move. After college, the only job offer I had gotten from the hundreds of applications I sent out was back in rural America. It paid less than \$17,000 a year, which was just enough to scrape out rent and try to drink myself to death. College had been my ticket to debt and a deep depression.

Further into the forest, an inlet wets the trail, the mud forces me onto bordering gemweed. It is rank here and I'm unable to decipher whether its decomposing algae left from the spring floods or raw sewage. It is so strong, I can no longer breathe through my nose. I continue to walk, navigating through the gemweed, my trail runners sticking in the mud, sucking and squishing in the muck. The darkness of the forest here—the mud, muck, and stench—elevate the impact of the heat and humidity. It's nauseating. I continue to look for the end of the trail and resist looking behind my shoulder for an unknown foe.

Sounds of the highway tell me the turnaround point is near. Towards the end of the trail, behind the Route 11 recreational parking area, I find the source of the smell. A dump. Trash and cans and plastic and old appliances sink into the muck. There are abandoned vehicles and uncountable Styrofoam fast food containers. Unable to take my eyes off the repulsiveness, I feel violated. The natural beauty I've been coming for is sick with disease. Like the promise of a college education, my refuge in the woods is a farce. I return home and escape to the thought of leaving, escaping, never having to face the grotesque. *I need to get out of here.*

But this must be my fear talking again. The fear that if I trust in something, it is sure to abandon me. The fear that we never actually can move beyond our mistakes,

that our mistakes are intrinsic to our personality. This fear that drives me away, but never actually provides healing, a fear that keeps me running from the pain, and running from the pain, and running from the pain, until all I have left is a series of puncture wounds throughout my soul, leaking and seeping and fogging the divide between thoughts and reality.

This fear is invasive.
*What do you hope to solve by avoiding?
 Does running away keep you safe?
 Is this what you are thinking or is it true?*

My therapist wants me to get outside for at least thirty minutes a day, so I force myself to return to the riverside trail the next week, still wallowing over the discovery of the dump. As I hike, I notice the bluebells are mostly gone. There is no sign of the rue anemone and the spring beauties. The skunk cabbage is gone. The knotweed is closing in over me, having grown to eye level and I wonder if the rustling I hear coming from its depths is a squirrel or a squatter. I imagine what I'll do if I come upon the latter. I consider turning around but remember my therapist's words and trudge on. I walk on in a huff, puerile anger swirling around in my mind.

Hiking through a sticking dump isn't going to make me feel any better, I think as I stomp through the mud. Besides, if I can see the signs of an episode, is it really an episode?

There's no one there to answer me but my footsteps.
*Left, right.
 Left, right.
 Left, right.
 The repetitive pattern is soothing.
 Like a mantra.*

*Left, right.
 Left, right.
 Left, right.
 My mind slows. My thoughts stop.
 My body relaxes.
 Left, right.
 Left, right.
 Left, right.*

A cardinal catches my eye as he swoops in front of the trail and lodges into the side of a dying ash tree. He cocks his head and lets his sweet call fill my ears. *Swee-ull swee-ull swee ull ull ull. Swee-ull swee-ull swee ull ull ull.* Suddenly, the songs and calls burst forth from the forest, rising into a deafening thunderstorm of sweetness. I am filled with that sound and sweetness from the top of my head to the tips of my fingertips and toes. The bird song follows me to the end of the trail, reminding me that beauty and the grotesque go hand in hand in this world.

Aurora
 Bonner
 Invasive

Aurora
 Bonner
 Invasive

Zuihitsu

All my childhood, I failed math. Past memorizing the multiplication table, everything became fuzzy. I used to hide in the schoolyard to avoid attending the extra lessons my mother paid for. Mother worked night shifts in the chemical lab of a research institute across town. When she hugged me in front of the school in the morning, her hair smelled of ammonia.

Zuihitsu are asking to follow the brush, trace their interplay between randomness and order. The eyes marvel at the purposeful trails, at the abandonment of the flow. A container escaping its containment, asking the gaze to move from the bristles of the brush to the coat of paint to the messiness around it. Instances of exposed language.

My heart is swollen, a deflated balloon, my tongue feels numb. A pleasurable exhaustion.

This preoccupation with carrying across. How does one move between and past things, honoring the source, protecting its fiber, and birthing the new thing, tending to its fresh breathing on the page? In translation, one word will at times become two, mutating, unfixing shape to stay loyal to meaning. In reality, meaning also gets slightly twisted, veiled, thinned.

A step-to-step guide to cleaning paint brushes tells you to wash them well in ammonia, rinse them in lukewarm water, then allow them to dry. In the sink, an unveiled residue of color, remnants of the missed, the absent, the discarded. On paper, a splash of synesthesia. To be devoured in small bites.

So many occasions when math fails us. It has been thirteen years since my mom died to cancer. My son is the same age, born three months before her passing on September 13th. Some days, I want to open my mouth to bend, crack, mangle the words. From their first yawn to the muteness that comes after hours of holding forth. Mostly, I stand on their ledge.

The night before my son's birthday, I dream myself lying in the grass, a litter of fennec foxes around me. Their white is hurting my eyes. I blink once, twice, kaboom. They are all spitting lilies from their little snouts. I start bouqueting the flowers, but they keep coming in avalanches. I wake up to the Akita's howling. I burn lavender incense yet never go to sleep.

I mean to work on the poetry collection I am translating. Give in to the painful seductions of a Manasia poem in the hope that a first draft of one stanza will inevitably cure my insomnia. It has worked in the past: "unde statuile-albite recent umilesc idea de

noapte./where freshly bleached statues shame the idea of night." More white and black, and the illusion that we can escape every binary.

Outside the window, the moon is bursting with ripe light. I hope the fennec foxes are rolling in the dark.

"A translator always betrays," says Jordan Stump. In his conundrum about the suspicion of the copy and the faith in the original, fixedness and fluidity keep troubling the waters. The invitation to anchor linguistic choices only to discard them on a second revision, the rabbit holing that word meaning entangles, the reading out loud to capture cadence, rhythm, pauses, the silence certain choices require. An act of faith. Yet sleep is also doubting my loyalty.

Humans have between ten and twenty million olfactory receptor neurons. The olfactory nerve is a funny thing. It could get damaged, for instance, by a random sinus infection, yet not impair a person's ability to smell pungent things like ammonia. The odor that filled my nostrils as I changed my mother's clothes in the morning, avoiding her embarrassed, shame-filled eyes. I cleaned her body and the outline of her own hands pulsed beneath my skin. At the end, I put my head in the hollow between her bony shoulder and the protruding collarbone, folding myself inwards.

Things math cannot help you count hungry ghosts, haunting smells, gurgling grief. Yet, every division of the heart is bound to leave a remainder.

*Ștefan Manasia is a well-known Romanian poet

Clara
Burghhelea

Clara
Burghhelea
Zuihitsu

Hunting Answers

I still have the photo of my first kill. A bright summer day: brown grass, a dusty dirt road, and behind me a fallen stone wall. I'm twelve years old, on one knee, smiling, my .243 at my side, my left index finger holding up the snout of a dead woodchuck. I'm wearing a gray T-shirt, "Property of..."

My "Wejack Special" didn't kick, and it had barrel sights and a scope. I named the rifle after the Algonquian word for woodchuck, which I found in my *American Heritage Dictionary*. When I hunted, which was almost every day in the summer, I carried a book, the .243, and a leather belt of bullets. I never used a round from my bandolier, but I wore it, just in case.

When I was thirteen, the year of the Bicentennial, I begged my parents for a muzzleloader, which they surprised me with on Christmas Eve. I was eager to be a real hunter; none of this shooting down deer with a modern, scope-fitted rifle. I'd hunt Indian-style, like Daniel Boone or Davy Crockett; I'd be a tracker, someone who really knew the woods. I soon outfitted myself with a cowboy hat and a serape, like Clint Eastwood in *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*. I walked, once, through the woods behind the barn in my getup, looking for deer, alert for movement. After about fifteen minutes, I thought, how dumb is this? It didn't help matters that when I got back to the house,

my older brother looked me over and said, "What the hell are you doing?"

I put away the hat and the serape, and turned to target practice. Mastering a .50 muzzleloader proved beyond me. I couldn't hit a thing; not tin cans, plastic anti-freeze bottles, or pieces of plywood. Squeezing the trigger wasn't enough; you had to wait for the flash in the pan to ignite the powder inside the barrel before the ball would fire. And most times a flash was all I got.

One origin story of Mount Pleasant Township turns on a hunter. In the usual telling, Samuel Stanton and his family brave a harsh first winter (1791-92), only to find their food supplies dwindling. Making matters worse, Stanton is no hunter. Facing indifferent woods and sinking into starvation, the family, now desperate, hear a dog barking, on the hunt. Stepping outside with his flintlock, Stanton follows the sound, stumbling through deep snow to the Lackawaxen River, where the mongrel stands snapping at an elk that had plunged into the water. Stanton fires repeatedly, to no effect. When all seems lost, a hunter steps from the trees, shoots the elk, and the grateful family soon feeds on fresh meat. The hunter moves on, as eventually do all the elk.¹

¹ Whaley, 16-17.

On Thanksgiving day, 1855, a Presbyterian minister told this story, and other hunting tales. A sometime school teacher, George McMullen took on a panther and a bear before crawling into a wolf den armed with a knife; he killed nine cubs and shot the she-wolf when she came home. After wrestling a wounded buck into exhaustion, John Wrighter snatched a bear cub running from its den, pinned it against a tree, and, "accustomed to these close fights," stabbed it to death.² The minister knew both men as possessing "sterling traits of character... of the utmost coolness... of indomitable perseverance and bravery."³

It was late afternoon on the last day of buck season, so I didn't expect much. My older brother and two friends were deep in the woods, yelling, driving deer my way so I had a chance at my first. Facing a barbed-wire fence, I stood beside the stone wall that edged the meadow; on the other side stretched a picked cornfield. My hands hurt, and my cheeks felt frozen. I kept kicking my boots, thankful that we'd soon head home.

The shouts came closer; other than swirls of snow, though, nothing moved.

I heard branches snapping and leaves rustling. Then: three brown spots bolted from the woods, across the field, full tilt, tails up.... Doe. Just doe.

Blaze orange moved between the trees. Another drive done.

About to join the others, I caught sight of something moving in the cornfield. A buck leading two does, single file. A spike.

I brought up my .243, found him in the crosshairs, and

² Whaley, 70-74.

³ Whaley, 67.

squeezed the trigger. He tripped, scrambled to his feet, and jumped the wall, the others scattering. Dropping to one knee, I found him again in the scope, just as he hopped the fence. The shot splintered a post.

I stood at the bloody wire; hair hung from barbs. Not far beyond, the buck lay gasping, propped against maple saplings. Trembling, I raised the rifle. His eyes focused, and turned away. My shot went high. He tried rising, but collapsed. As he struggled, I reloaded, my right hand shaking.

I jumped. Someone had fired. The deer's head rolled back, a dark splotch blooming on his neck.

Watching his eyes dim stopped me. But only for a second. My friends' laughs, their ribbing about missing the easy shot, and the need to gut and drag him to the truck crowded out my ambivalence.

I remembered those eyes when, years later, I read *All the Pretty Horses*, a novel that describes two deer killings. In the first scene, Rawlins, the sidekick of central character John Grady Cole, shoots a spike, downing him with a single shot from the hip, a "hell of shot." To show that the boys don't register, really, what Rawlins has done, the moment appears in the center of a paragraph that does little more than point to the body, which "lay dead in its blood on the ground."⁴

One sign of John Grady's wider awareness happens when, near the novel's end, he shoots a "little doe," in late fall, "in the cold blue dusk...at the last hour light enough by which to see the iron sights of the rifle." This time, he knows all too well what he's done. As she lay in "her blood in the grass," he "put his hand on her neck and she looked at him and her eyes were warm and wet and there was no fear in them and then

⁴ McCarthy 90.

she died.” He watches her “for a long time,” remembering people who had touched his life, for good and ill, until “in the dying light a cold blue cast had turned the doe’s eyes to but one thing more of things she lay among in that darkening landscape.” Witnessing her death, he felt utterly alone, “wholly alien to the world although he loved it still.”⁵

During doe season, three years after killing my first buck, I took a stand along the fence between Miller’s Swamp and the big pasture at the Other Place. My older brother Bobby and I were having no luck, and this was the second time in a week that a local hunting club had put standers on our side of the line. As their drive ended, I saw a doe, not fifty yards away. I fired. She flinched, jumped the wire, and disappeared among hemlocks.

As I waited for Bobby, drivers stepped from the woods, neighbors and friends of neighbors. One guy, in a heavy orange coat, came at me, shouting across the fence how sick he was of us poaching on his club’s drives. Red-faced, he told me to get the hell out of his sight. Inwardly shaking, I pointed out that I was on my own ground. Others stood by, watching. When someone backed what I said, the angry hunter pointed at the woods and told me that he’d have the game warden on me if I tracked any damn deer into that swamp. He stalked off, the rest following, and a few minutes later I heard doors slam and pickups pull out onto the hardtop.

Three of us tracked her into the swamp. Every half mile or so, she dropped into the snow, soaking the ground with blood. Although red darkened her tracks, she limped deeper and deeper into the woods, through stands of hemlocks and mountain laurel and across stretches of wet spots and sidehills. We

⁵ McCarthy 281-282.

followed, pausing now and then to let her stop, to bleed out.

We caught up with her twice. The first time, she jumped from a laurel stand and ran off so fast that we had no time to fire. The second time, as she struggled up an embankment, we fired away until she reached the top and disappeared.

She kept on. After a few more miles, we stood on 670, the road between Bethany and Pleasant Mount. Blood streaked the double yellow lines. As we debated whether to go on, we heard a shot. Assuming she was dead, we didn’t cross, but turned and followed the road home.

Alongside news from the school, every fall the *Forest City News* runs photos of hunters who have killed bucks. The pictures capture people in pickup beds, in fields and woods, and beside barns and houses, each person smiling at the camera, a rifle and a dead deer nearby. I recognize faces: farmers, teachers, and volunteer firemen, men from my high school class and their sons, and, sometimes, a woman. The photos testify to marksmanship—or luck—and killing.

Around here, hunting empties schools. Forest City Regional treats the traditional first day of buck season, the Monday after Thanksgiving, as a holiday. In 2022, the school again closed, even though the state allowed hunting on the Saturday and Sunday before. I heard that administrators kept the off-day in the calendar to cover a potential snow day, which didn’t happen.

And the day off is not only a rural holiday. Years ago, when the new head of a prep school in Scranton announced that classes would be held on the first day

of buck, he had to backtrack when bus drivers told him they’d be in the woods. The tradition continues.

In Dunmore, adjacent to Scranton, a twelve-point buck adorns garbage trucks, and workers get the first day of buck hunting off. The high school mascot is a buck, the majorette—Miss Buck—sports glittery silver antlers, and the Lady Bucks often contend for basketball titles. In 2016, signs appeared in borough yards: “1. God/ 2. Family/ 3. Dunmore Bucks.” The signs popped up after someone challenged a tradition of the football team praying on the field before each game. The school mascot honors Dunmore’s original name, Bucktown, a crossroads in old Providence Township, a Connecticut settlement during the Pennamite Wars.⁶ The school is closed on the Monday after Thanksgiving.

Cutting hay on the Flat one summer day, my brother Danny spooked a doe, which skipped into the woods along the creek. When he turned back to the hay, he saw a fawn curled in the timothy, asleep. He halted the JD 2950; the haybine jerked to a stop. With the tractor rumbling and the haybine clicking, he stepped to the ground. After glancing at the hemlocks and around at the field, he picked up the newborn, which didn’t resist, but shook in his arms. Back in his seat, he steered from the field, holding the fawn firmly in his lap, its heart pounding against his thigh.

One of the kids called him Deer-Deer, and Danny fed him cow’s milk from a bottle. Deer-Deer wandered between the house and the barn, and often grazed with the Holsteins in the pasture behind the garage. He roamed the backyard, under the old ash, sniffing the kids, who held their fingers out to him and giggled as he jumped back. Danny coaxed him through the

⁶“Dunmore’s original name, Bucktown”: Hitchcock, 14; “a crossroads..Wars”: Hitchcock, 1-3.

back door, into the kitchen, where they ate cookies from paper plates.

In the fall, Danny tied to Deer-Deer’s neck a red rag he had cut from a shirt. Growing into a seven-pointer, the buck wandered the neighborhood, making himself a target, especially after Thanksgiving. Hunters held their fire, and many let us know where and when they had seen him. One year, though, someone killed him. We never knew for sure who did it, but we had our suspicions.

After Thanksgiving in my senior year of high school, I wondered, what am I doing?

But wasn’t going after deer what you did on a farm? And it was a sport, a walk in the woods, and about bragging rights. My friends, an uncle, and two of my brothers hunted deer, but then again, other friends, my father, and my brother Jack didn’t. Bragging felt hollow, and walking in the woods meant cold feet.

The more I thought about hunting, the more issues it raised. I drifted from it. The further I drifted, though, the deeper my confusion; the more confused I felt, the more I separated my questions. Eventually, I stopped killing, but I kept my diet, bit my tongue, and went walking in the woods, looking for new ways to be alive.

I still have a photo of Deer-Deer. He stands in the backyard, and has velvety horns and a red rag around his neck. The garage and the barn loom behind him, and toys lay scattered in the grass. Paused in the shade of the ash, he looks a little sad, not frightened, maybe wondering. I can’t remember now, but it must have been the end of a hay day; sunlight slants from the west and the tractors, the baler, and the hay bine

are all there, uncoupled. No people are visible; it's just Deer-Deer, alone. When I take the shot, we see each other.

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Bill
Conlogue
*Hunting
Answers*

Incidents in Marrakech and Beyond

Note on “Incidents in Marrakech and Beyond”:

This piece takes its cue from Roland Barthes, who, in the last few years of his life, aspired to write a novel, but not any ordinary sort of *roman*. The narrative he envisioned would forego a sequential plot and fully developed characters. It would even resist interpretation. Such a novel—or, to be more exact, “the novelistic”—would capture quotidian occurrences and arrange them into something of a patchwork of correlated and juxtaposed fragments. Now and again, Barthes’s late work achieved the novelistic. An example is “Incidents,” a set of fragments from his Moroccan travels. Informed by Barthes, I wrote this piece in January while in and around Marrakech. Walking with notebook and pen, I noted the incidental, contingent, and seemingly insignificant and later developed my notes into incidents in the form of fragments. (Works by Barthes that especially inspired this project include the following: *La préparation du roman*, scattered essays and interviews in *The Grain of the Voice* and *The Rustle of Language*, and the editor’s note to the French edition of *Incidents*.)

The incident . . . is simply *what falls* gently, like a leaf, on life’s carpet; it is that faint, fugitive crease given to the fabric of days. . . .

Roland Barthes, “Pierre Loti: Aziyadé”

A solitary voice pierces the silence at the waning of the day. Soon that voice is joined by another and still others as they swell in thunderous invitation. Then all goes silent.

Seven cats repose, one next to the other, on the sidewalk leading to Bahia Palace. Two gaze upwards, and so do I, hoping to catch a glimpse.

Six men lean against one of Koutoubia’s ruined walls. The three crouched on the left exchange words. The two seated on the right mind their food carts. The sixth, with no apparent role, sits silently between the pair. At last, a Western woman approaches the juice cart. One of the men rises to play his part.

A woman saunters down a Kasbah side street with shopping basket in hand. Two men sit on stools, vegetables spread before them. Steps away, a man cuts a piece of fabric.

Eric
Daffron

The man who prepares the roast at Chez Lamine Hadj Mustapha takes a break. He tears lamb from a bone and puts it in his mouth. The server brings the méchoui. As I take a bite, a scrawny cat dashes under the table, a chunk of flesh lodged in its throat.

A mule-drawn cart passes down the lane. Behind the driver, an elderly couple guards the precious cargo. Flanked by pedestrians on both sides, the cart cannot budge. The motorcyclist in the rear honks impatiently.

In Jemaa el-Fnaa, three cobras stand at attention, staring stiffly and silently at five men seated on a blanket. Nearby coils a tan viper, indifferent to this minor drama.

In a plant pot outside the riad, three kittens huddle, cold and scared. I unlock the door and, before closing it behind me, turn back one last time. They look at me in supplication.

The voices come again, one after the other, fervently calling the faithful to prayer. Ensnared on a hotel's rooftop bar, with Koutoubia Mosque and the Atlas Mountains before us, we sip our cocktails and check our cellphones.

A mule, fastened to a tree high in the Atlas Mountains, bears colorful rugs. The one who placed them there has abandoned the scene.

A young Berber woman plods up the road, a heavy bundle of branches slung across her back.

On a hillside, deep in the mountains, goats forage for food, their tails lifted high. A young fellow stands nearby.

An old Berber man, bundled in coat and hat, trudges with a cane down the dusty road. Occasionally, he prods the three goats at his side. In the valley below, a man in a red djellaba tends sheep.

Water trickles peacefully through a oued. Suspended above, a cement bridge supports two stationary motorcycles.

Friday morning in the Mellah, an elderly man in a djellaba sits on a low stool with carrots, aubergines, and other vegetables at his feet. Squatting in front of him, a young woman offers some coins for her selection.

Strolling through Jemaa el-Fnaa, a young Moroccan guy drapes his arm over his companion's shoulder. A burly man wraps his arm around a police officer's. A youth embraces his friend just above the waist.

At dawn on Derb Dabachi, a woman sets bread and tea on a table. Another woman sits quietly in a wheelchair. A mule with cart in tow completes this matinal still life.

In Jemaa el-Fnaa, near a tiny restaurant, a lean cat bites a young man. Shrieking in pain, he rushes to an outdoor water basin. As he soaks his finger, women gather to offer counsel.

A mule-drawn cart careens around the bend. Standing, a hooded man drives the cart up Rue Riad Zitoun el Jdid. He disregards the throng of school children, shopkeepers, and tourists.

Before dawn, I wander through a dimly lit souk. No one is in sight. Inhaling deeply, I move forward with conviction.

Three cats laze on a sidewalk in Kasbah. Turning their heads from side to side, they survey the passing pedestrians and vehicles.

Before daybreak, it begins anew. A lone voice emerges, soon accompanied by others. For half an hour, they rise to a thrilling crescendo and then taper to silence.

Meixsell Valley Road

Nick
Stanovick

They bought the house to hold him. My mother knew once she was gone that my father would need a place to garden his grief. A place with freshwater where he could grow his fish. They found a farmhouse, that early 1900s kind of old, where for the first few months of our living there I mistook the mice for ghosts. The house sits in a valley, protected by hills rising on either side. Draping the house are smaller structures. A dilapidating barn, where my father stores his boats and firewood. In the summer, he stands beneath the dark opening of the barn and counts the bats that fly from within. There is a brooder house, in which my father cares for young pheasants after they have hatched, those little bushy bundles of sunshine. There is a trashbarn, where we keep our old croquet racquets and hide the key to the front door. He refurnished the smallest structure into his office, where after Ma was diagnosed, he was allowed to work from home, sitting with his laptop on his knees, reclining in his lazyboy. Grief, for all its weight, is not a worthless currency.

His office is where his other Work happens too--the bench where he meticulously ties his fishing flies, the pheasant tailed nymphs and muddler minnows. He seems almost too big for the space, standing by the window with his binoculars, scoping the valley for the Herons who stalk his trout, shoulders hunched in the

same way mine are. In the middle of the yard, there is my father's garden, which he has turned into a community garden, where neighbors and friends will plant in small sections and harvest their tomatoes or squash months later. And along the edges, there are the flower beds. Near the brooder house is my mother's bed, which my father sows. Each year, her memory blooms, another small eulogy.

Of course, the barns and the yard serve their purpose, but the pond is his crown. To understand my father's obsession with water, you must first know my father's father, Richard. My only vivid memories of my grandfather are of Virginia, perusing the fertile banks of Mossy Creek while the experts carved the channels. My father, if you cut him open, might bleed freshwater. On the river, he is in control. Of his lures, of his wrists. After his father died, I watched as my father and his siblings dumped the ashes into Mossy, left to mingle with the fish. While he sits by the edge, watching his mammoth trout feed, he will say absently *my dad would've loved this*. When my sister and I return from our noisier lives, we are not home until we feed the fish. We toss pellets out of an old blue plastic mug that we got from the Break Time gas station in Missouri almost twenty years ago. And when my father hands us our first scoop, he says *welcome home*, and the

water goes from placid to a war of fins. His favorite fish have names--Cheeks, Patch, Lips, Forky--and we wait to throw the last cup of feed until we see them all. There are times, when we walk the loop, where a trout is turned inside out by an eagle or hawk, and my father will lament for days like a wounded mother.

On the far end of the pond, there is a large spillway, covered by a little white bridge. My father's best friend built the bridge after mom passed. It is my favorite view of the pond, the sound of the water passing through, the hillside reflected in the glassy surface. It is hard to imagine my father selling this place, but he will in a few short years. He is bound for Missouri, for Wyoming, for elsewhere. I do not know how to reconcile this decision. How to leave behind the room where Ma finally passed, the bedrooms we painted ourselves? How to not have my own children, standing there on the white bridge, dipping their small fingers into current? I cannot think of a new home, of starting over, of learning a new yard, a new pond. Though I think of the echoes my father encounters, the marriage the house reflects back at him, the *before*. He says the move is practical and it is, the upkeep too much for his aging body, the house too big for his broom. He wants to catch a trout in every state. He wants to spend the summers in Yellowstone, where he can find my mother on the lost trails they hiked together. He will sleep amongst the natural world, the true home it's always been for him.

At Thanksgiving, we walk the perimeter of the property, left bare and dead from November's chill. Inside, like a museum, we examine furniture and trinkets. My sister and I place sticky notes on the objects we claim--the small rocking chair on the porch, the copper jello tray shaped like a fish. We tell stories, recount histories, laugh with a certain finality. We imagine the house emptied, left to its skeleton, the way it looked

before we filled it with all the parts of ourselves. The last structure to know my mother's walk. We remain internal, there in our spots on the couch, looking at all those little yellow squares. The life outside settles into their sleeping as the valley darkens, the waning sun marking us closer to our end.

Nick
Stanovick
*Meixsell
Valley Road*

Poetry

Dark Skies

“It’s just a hole in the ground,” someone said of the ice mine, an online reviewer, almost as bewildered as Billy O’Neil, the man some say discovered it, digging for silver

but finding ice instead. Enormous columns of it grow each summer from cracks in cave walls as colder, heavier air gets trapped underground. They built a shack around

it, charged five bucks for folks to peer over a little railing. Eventually, a gift shop opened up next door to sell T-shirts and bumper stickers. We arrived

in April, too soon for cave ice. Just wet rocks run through with silver rivulets, dripping water. It’s not that we were

disappointed; after all, we came for the sky—the darkest sky in Pennsylvania. We came for a clear view of space and the icy glints of ten thousand stars, more visible here than in the light-polluted towns and cities.

We scheduled a sky tour led by a guy named Snowman. When clouds cleared, we followed his coordinates over dark roads, headlights carved a tunnel of light through the forest to a half circle of benches set up in a field, like a church camp amphitheater.

We had never seen so many stars. They shimmered—brighter than any silver. We didn’t see the Milky Way. Again, it was too early, and so we vowed to come back in summer. That night we slept in an old, restored cabin on Ice Mine Road, O’Neil’s former home, and planned our return. To cave ice and the Milky Way, the underground freeze in summer, and shadows cast down from the sky.

David J.
Bauman
and
Micah
James
Bauman

The Phlebotomist's Mood

"I wonder what all these colors mean,"
I say, with a nod toward the case of vials
and the rainbow array of caps.

"Wait," you lift your hand and sit up
straight. "I've got this,"
"I had a mood ring once.
... *Yellow* means you have a wandering
mind, a feeling of creativity."

The phlebotomist comes in,
and corrects you, tells us it's for
paternity tests and DNA. Not our concern.

"But *green*," you say "means calm,
comfortable, stress free!"

She glances up at you.
"We need to check
your lithium levels. Just
standard practice."

"Relax," you reply. "You're in a good
place; you're *Light Blue*. That is to say,
you're not really blue; you're
happy, social, alert but carefree."

David J.
Bauman
and
Micah
James
Bauman

"Also, we're testing blood coagulation.
Some of your meds might interfere
with that."

"Mercury rising! *Red* might mean passion,
but not love," you say. "Your heartbeat
accelerating."

"Blood clots, thyroid issues, that sort
of thing. And the gold vials contain a gel
which severs serum from the blood cell
when it spins in the machine."

"*Gold*? You're feeling an array of emotions,
surprise, anxiety, nervousness. Hence
the spin. *Pink* could be uncertainty,
early stages of arousal and interest."

She's not even looking up now.
"But it's more likely potassium—
forming calcium salts,
binding, and clotting."

"You're frustrated, confused,
and probably bored by now."

"White can also relate to salt and calcium.
Depends on the lab—the chemistry is tricky."

David J.
Bauman
and
Micah
James
Bauman

Quake

“*Brown to Gray to Black* speaks
of your growing stress. Whirling
thoughts and restlessness
blotting out all colors.”

My eyes go back and forth between you.
“That’s a lot of calcium and salt,” I say.

“Breaking down . . .”

“And hardening,” she adds.
“But good news is we’ll look
at glucose too. Your blood
sugar might just be low.”

At last, she looks up again and smiles,
her kaleidoscope of vials
laid out next to the silver needle.

David J.
Bauman
and
Micah
James
Bauman

We thought the grinding was a garbage truck
emptying dumpsters in the alley.
But it was the wrong day for trash pickup.

“Cement mixer?” I asked. “Are they building
something next door?” I turned toward
the window, and the building worked
into a sway so that our hanging
wine glasses sang like wind chimes.

They say we don’t have earthquakes
in Pennsylvania, but fault lines lie

beneath these sturdy hills.
Later we learned the entire event
only lasted twenty-nine seconds.
Time condensed and stretched

before our screens lit up:
Did you feel that? What just happened?
The epicenter, two hundred miles to our south,
the rupture, four miles underground.

That night in the dark we heard a sound
like fractured rock and woke to a lightning-
bolt fissure down our kitchen wall.

I thought of Chris, who had set her table for two
the day after New Year’s, an hour before
she pulled the trigger; of Maria who
hanged herself in her basement stairway;
Jesse who stood at the edge
of a Christmas tree farm,
then turned the gun on himself;

our son swaying in the middle of the street,
saying over and over that we’d be better off.

David
Bauman

God

By Ank Mooren

Translated from the Dutch by Arno Bohlmeijer

Can a dike or embankment be as beautiful as vulnerable,
exposing the mad and good things?

God

For or before me,
cycling on the dike,
my path is suddenly
full of lightbeams.
I look up surprised.

Right through the cloud pile
I caught
a glimpse of God,
at least,
if you believe in him,
or else there was simply
the broken-sky chink.

Arno
Bohlmeijer

God

Voor mij
op de fiets, op de dijk
verlichten opeens
heldere stralen mijn pad.
Verrast kijk ik op.

Door het wolkendek heen
ving ik
een glimp op van god
tenminste,
als je in hem gelooft
anders waren daar gewoon
de wolken kapot.

Ank Mooren
Querido 2011

*Award-winning Art School graduate (design and drawing),
Ank Mooren is a poet, illustrator, and writer: stories, theater,
columns, and articles.*

Arno
Bohlmeijer

Black

By Paul Demets

Translated from the Dutch by Arno Bohlmeijer

To the old and young, a street can be a strong symbol
as well as real indeed, shown visibly here.

Black

In the sweater on the back of my chair
there's a sheep that wants to return to
the meadow. In my bed I may sleep
again later, with the plaid from far-

away places. But first I have a question:
when we jump a hole in the sky
for joy, will the night look less black
than right now, will the stars then

never break again like a LED light?
Could someone switch the moon on
that's climbing behind the clouds?
Dad says, "I wouldn't count on it."

Can someone light the night,
please, so that Mum will see
our house again in this street?

Arno
Bohlmeijer

Zwart

In de trui op de rug van mijn stoel
zit een schaap dat terug wil naar
de weide. In mijn bed ga ik met de spreid
uit verre landen straks misschien weer

onder zeil. Maar nu wil ik wat vragen:
als je van geluk een gat springt
in de lucht, ziet de nacht dan minder
zwart dan nu, gaan de sterren dan

als spaarlampjes nooit meer stuk?
Doet iemand de maan daar aan
die achter de wolken klimt?
Papa zegt: 'Ik zie het somber in.'

Kan iemand de nacht verlichten,
zodat mama in deze straat
weer ons huis ziet staan?

Paul Demets
Querido 2014

Paul Demets (1966) is a multiple-award-winning poet, critic, and lecturer
at the University of Ghent. He also publishes articles on theater.

Arno
Bohlmeijer

Reality Hunger

1. At times, facts weigh more than stones.
2. Migration is a behavioral adaptation that helps animals survive. There is 9515 km, 5913 mi, between my hometown and Dallas. A thirteen-hour flight. Two segments. Multiplied three times within a year. None counts as a seasonal impulse, rather a chasing of words. Sometimes, ink runs thicker than blood.
3. *Mama, don't leave. You have infected me.* There is hope this contamination will both heal and prevail. Dor*-laced cells, my son and I share. Outside the open window, a hammering of woodpeckers, each thump perforating my view. In Native American culture, the woodpecker drums in sync with Mother Earth's heartbeat. All mothers ache the same.
4. Dear Maggie Nelson, your blues are intoxicating. How is it every time I turn blue with cold, I am never blue? The needs of our body exceed the tapestry of our minds. Yes, blue has a heart and can easily die. Skies bleeding orange at the end of the day. The ipomoea indica around my window dissolving into dark pink every summer evening. Despite its heady blue, it has been listed as a noxious weed.
5. The International Dark Sky Association ranks Texas as one of the best places in the United States to stargaze. The Dallas skies are terrible in their beauty. I watch them from the window of my rented room, drunk on fading purples, pinks and oranges. Every now and then, a plane furrows their bleeding. Across the world, a little boy is getting ready to welcome another day.

Clara
Burgehelea

*dor is a Romanian word that cannot be translated yet alludes to missing.

Mom gives birth to herself

In the late afternoon, she opens the bottom cupboard drawer to take out a ragged handwritten notebook. She browses its sticky pages until her index finds a title she reads out loud: *the cake of the lazy host*. We are baking for the weekend. On the table, flour, sugar, oil, milk, eggs, and a bowl of sour cherries I have been pitting. Mom starts measuring. On the radio, Angela Similea sings about her house, a song of ample sounds. The blue mug tumbles and lifts, the wooden spoon mixes, my fingertips crush the velvety flesh of the fruit. When she is not looking, I sneak one into my mouth. Mom hums, her forehead covered with sweat beads. Occasionally, my father calls her name and reads out from the *Magazinul Cultural Științific*: ancestor alien remains have been traced in Ocnele Mari. The fruit makes my gums hurt. Mom pours the batter into an oval enamel tray. She looks like she's run out of things to think about. She glances at my red lips, smiling. One by one the sour cherries dunk

into the soft mixture, tired, bruised flesh eager to unwind. A dust of powder sugar lifts from the blender. Once the cake is in the oven, we put our feet up on a chair and start drinking up the sunlight of the quiet evening. My father's voice slips through the swung open door, warning us about the growing stones of Costești* while we keep an eager eye on the oven door from where new life is about to emerge. Little fixes are all we get.

Clara
Burgehelea

*Costești and Ocnele Mari are villages in Valcea County, Romania

Hungry ghosts

Clara
Burghlelea

All my poems are about mothers. The ones that left and the ones that do not know how to stay. Calla lilies and vanilla skies. In a word, the same shade of fading white. My mother's hair was peppered the year she started dying. Chiaroscuro. A tiny, vigorous cancer nibbling at her lit smile. Before the end of December, its silent presence had grown so deep it pulsed against our ears. On and off, on and off. That unshod light, tiptoeing down the windowsill, at times rolling into reaping shadows. We bagged everything up, not knowing how to coupon our way out. Hunger befriends grief. One day, you start baking. In the quiet, you bring things to life. You give alms for the dead, on Soul Saturday. You cannot give away before tasting it all. You gulp on absence, and no matter how full the plate is, the emptiness at the pit of your stomach is never filled. Everything wants to be unfound, spilling its convenient box. How is it God always has the stomach for it, while we surrender any lick of sense to the way pain eagerly labors itself anew?

[sic]

"intentionally so written —used after a printed word or passage to indicate that it is intended exactly as printed or to indicate that it exactly reproduces an original"— Merriam-Webster

Justine
Defever

[sic] is a loudmouth college friend
declaring *I tell it like it is*
after two shots of whiskey.

[sic] is a persnickety dinner party attendee
inducing synchronized eyerolls of guests
when interrupting— *well, actually.*

[sic] might have a superiority complex.
[sic] didn't get enough attention as a child.
[sic] makes an ass of themselves at trivia night.
[sic] wears a cape for the drama of it all.

[sic] is a typographical sigh
tut-tut, look at the idiot
when a paraphrase would have sufficed.

[sic] is not a gentle reminder.
[sic] is a derisive town crier.
[sic] could be considerate of intention.
[sic] should be used sparingly.

[sic] is left alone brooding
with all that brilliance.
Was it something I said?

An Iridescent Blush

Born from generations of sunken
chests, I only eat w/in my dreams,
blood oak lips tasting of brass -

From birth they knew I was
for the streets, a gutter girl
who sings, X marks the spot.

I am a pale child, no longer, pain
does not surprise me. Even when
lying, I moan the truth, don't you?

Laine
Derr

I'm told my privilege follows me,
an iridescent blush, comforted
by those who crawl - flesh hungry.

Waiting for the tides to break,
skies black and beautiful, I know
the locks (borne free) won't hold.

And the Giraffes Hum

I promised her I would never speak
again, so let me say, what I must -

and the boars grunt of love
and the cranes clang of elegance
and the nutria taste of wine
and the songbirds sing of rush
and the mosquitoes buzz of blood
and the giraffes hum of silence

Laine
Derr

Bearing Blue

I sailed away w/ the wind,
heart anxious like my lover's
arms, hints of golden orange.

Once my life was measured
by blocks of ice, rounded
by the sun, fading to the sea.

A white-eyed girl dreaming
of foam, a world blanketed,
lightness one upon the other.

With salt and tears flowing
down my feet, soft skin
bearing blue, a secret self,

I know my visions lie beyond,
walking on a frozen breeze -

Laine
Derr
and
Carolina
Torres

Equal Opportunity Employer

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER

Name _____ Date _____

Privacy Act Statement:

Ethnicity and race information is requested under the authority of Some Compliance Saturated with Enough Legal Jargon, You'll Need to Hire a Lawyer You Might Not Be Able to Afford in Order to Understand. This information is voluntary. Legal reasons implicate we must say this information has no impact on your employment status. So, if you don't answer, we'll assume you are Black. Since we rank and favor ethnic identity according to skin tones that most resemble White people, it would be in your best interest to check the racial category you best identify with, especially if you're not Black.

Question 1: Are you Hispanic or Latino? (As you can see, this is the most important question to us. If you are a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture, check "Yes." We still want you to answer question #2, though. Since there's a lot of interracial procreating, we like to keep track of whom we need to categorize as Black and White according to our preferential values on melanin.)

Yes

No

Zorina
Exie
Frey

Question 2:

RACIAL CATEGORY
(Check as many as apply.)

DEFINITION OF CATEGORY

American Indian or Alaska Native

A person having origins of North American people before the colonization of Europeans.

Asian

A person having origins in any of the original people of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian sub-continent including, for example Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam. Oh, what the hell! Let's throw in the Middle Eastern region! East is east!

Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander

A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific islands. We really think we can work with you guys. DeWayne Johnson is awesome! He can be White, Hispanic, Latino, or Black when it's safe.

White

A person having origins of colonizing, murdering, raping and pillaging aboriginal people. Mostly feudal peasants escaping British slavery only to inflict their colonized brand of it on indigenous people, specifically Native American and Africans, who were sold and kidnapped during the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

Not White?

European - Eh, still probably White, but on the strength you are of a people who did not align with Nazis, check this box.
 German - Very white, but on the strength that not all Germans were Nazis, check this box.
 Irish - Check this box.
 French - Check this box.
 Italian - Check this box.
 Jewish - Well, we originally threw you in the Asian category, but because of your skin color, welcome—except for Black Jews. Black Jews should check the "Black" box. Yes, we see the irony. Also, check this box.

Zorina
Exie
Frey

RACIAL CATEGORY
(Check as many as apply.)

DEFINITION OF CATEGORY

Other

Because this can go on forever. And check this box.

African - Circa 1500

You were born in Africa, and not of the origin of people who were kidnapped from their home continent during the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Also, you may, or may not be of the origin of people who sold their brother or sister into the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Not holding it against you. Just saying.

Negro - Circa 1500-1600

Pronounced "Neh-groh" for the color black in Spanish (When referring to African captives, its "Negro" for male and "Negra" for female). A person having origins in any African tribe. What tribe, you say? Hell if we know.

Nigger - Circa 1500-1800

Broken British English by American colonizers coupled with their contempt for dark melanin people. A term meant to demean slave captives and any person of African descent.

Negro - Circa 1800-1900

Early activists' attempt to sophisticate the word nigger and to make it a less insulting identifier. Used heavily during segregated times.

Nigga - Circa 1900-

Another way for the modern American Negro to take the sting out of the 1500 reference and use it as an endearing term only this specific group of people can use unless one deems a non-Negro an honorary member of the community which is usually someone who has lived in said community and personally understands the struggle. It's rare. Still, it is a controversial term that holds the psychological trauma of segregated times and often appears as a self-deprecating term to one's own community. Nonetheless, it's considered cool, and some White people are offended wondering why they

Zorina
Exie
Frey

RACIAL CATEGORY
(Check as many as apply.)

DEFINITION OF CATEGORY

African American - Circa 1900-

shouldn't say this word. Although, one may wonder why they, or anyone wants to, given the historical implications behind it.

The most non-offensive term to identify a person of color who has the origin of a people from the African continent, but recently has become controversial since it's learned some Africans and/or any person of African descent who was not born on American soil, inherently believes to be more civilized than the African American. Not all, but some. Maybe most. Because of this rejection from their ancestral homeland, many African Americans reject this identifier.

Black - Circa 2000-

A term many have agreed with because the discussion of how to identify the American descendants of the Transatlantic Slave Trade has grown exhausting. "... Black becomes a codeword, a rallying identity for all oppressed people of color. At the end of the day, if you're not White, you're Black.

African Atlantic American - Circa Now

An accurate term for American-born citizens who descend from a people of the Transatlantic Slave Trade who had been kidnapped, sold, bought, raped, beaten, forced into free labor, oftentimes to death and who was ripped away from their children who were also bought, sold, raped, and forced into free labor, oftentimes to death, and/or segregated and/or ghettoed, hunted down, lynched, shot, choked, overlooked and discriminated for the color of their darker skin, and in all

Zorina
Exie
Frey

RACIAL CATEGORY
(Check as many as apply.)

DEFINITION OF CATEGORY

I Do Not Wish to Respond

honesty, deserves reparations of some sort, whether it be land (which is kind of tricky since it's really belongs to the American Indian/Alaskan natives); still, it might help to fully restore Black Wall Street. Keep dirty cops off the beat. Baptize lakes with public apologies, restoring and atoning slaughtered African Atlanteans buried under water. Publicly acknowledge everything we've contributed to this country, what we invented and built, not just an asterisk. How about quality education discounted along with healthcare and housing. Wait a minute...

Zorina
Exie
Frey

Melancholy: The Game

Michael
Piero

game: password-protected accounts moving data here and on occasion there
Imagine moment life were for a long that all of simply a besides anthill

pages of logon credentials, a lovesick labyrinth, and scrap metal illnesses like joy pages of
and madness marble
shame, therapy, meetings, recovery, meltdown
overdrawn accounts and abandoned friends, roads

not traveled, others traveled too far like fits of mad laughter that don't last long enough
because of the funerals
not regularly attended
and occasional

bliss
like when earning a free coffee at Starbucks, a society against you, and you passionately
against yourself,
the joy
of family moments, the tyranny of family years, the yearning to flee, relocate, start over

play again
except
we have

only one token, one coin, one turn, and it's mine, and fuck you if you say otherwise: 'cuz
I

belong
to no
one, *lamentably*, but also neither to state, nor god, nor family or clan—my life
is and is not my
own, is and is
not a game.

Michael
Piero

Pandemic

What is this life
but the big fell
the intoxication of losing

There are screens that scream *loss*
is the only way
The dust of discovery accumulates

And there he is
behind my back
something like God in blue canvas

Outside, a heron takes flight, undoing
the line between us
There is so much I cannot see

as February dusk enters the room
and we convene
out of time

Tara
Propper

3/13/2023

my shoulders ache from weighted play in virtual reality
“Chasing Lights” by Giles Garnier gently plays
and I recall in the fourth-floor study room in St. Peter’s Library
how his eyes glanced toward my groin as his line, “it’s inoperable”
derailed, colliding with another train of thought
as we sat on the second floor of Edward St.

and now the words from Peter Lamarque’s chapter 3, “On Not Expecting
Too Much from Narrative”
assure me “Once we see how little
is involved in being a narrative—how minimal
the conditions are for narrativity—we will see
that the focus of interest nearly always shifts away from mere narrative
itself” (p 51)

and I wonder at what a poem creates and how
thought on a poem can shape the self
independent of narrative

Edward
Wells

Chapter 3: Uneven Vulnerability

This poem arises from a creative reading of “Chapter 3: Uneven Vulnerability” of **Part Two: Bodies in Spaces of Injury** of *Black Queer Freedom: Spaces of Injury and Paths of Desire* by GerShun Avilez. Any publication of the piece should include a note to that effect.

fully
perceived occupy
destructive
around view sexual activity
ridicule
visibility public
visibility
everything visibility just vocal
much movement
particularly nonnormative
continual
argument slavery
visibility
around
surveillance
scrutinized
visibility assures
surveillance
through
surveillance

suggest visibility
such visibility
surveillance
ubiquitous produces
ultimately
surveillance
surveillance
however

Edward
Wells

Part Two: Bodies in Spaces of Injury

This poem arises from a creative reading of “Chapter 3: Uneven Vulnerability” of **Part Two: Bodies in Spaces of Injury** of *Black Queer Freedom: Spaces of Injury and Paths of Desire* by GerShun Avilez. Any publication of the piece should include a note to that effect.

prison
the
abolition
against rights notion of progress
exploration of
undermining

prison enslavement begins
within space of
conclusion

policing two
both institutions
circuits of desire

physical
that
ascribe limiting ideas
same identity

Barbara
Sabol

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Book Reviews

Making the Most of It: *From the Longing Orchard*

By Jessica Jopp
 Quill Prose Award 2020
 Red Hen Press. 2023. 315 pp. \$19.95 (paperback)

From the Longing Orchard: a novel aptly named, as I spent much of my reading happily immersed in the lovely details of the world Jopp crafts for us, longing a little myself for my own garden waiting outside. This novel weaves a narrative that twines itself to the natural world, rooting its characters deeply into their physical surroundings – the loam and mud of the forest, the pliability of clay, the inevitable return and decay of springtime flowers. Our protagonist, Sonya, adopts a keen eye (and ear!) for the beauty of nature at a young age – a tender reverence which seeps through each chapter, Jopp’s prose invoking the earthy beauty of her father’s pottery and the greenhouses of her grandfather. However, digging past the lovely, indulgent – if sometimes lengthy – language reveals a queer coming-to-age tale that does not shy away from the grief and what-ifs it takes to find your people and your place.

People carry traces of the places they’ve lived in and loved. Jopp follows this theme like a map, crafting characters who embody something of the raw earth or of green, growing things. Sonya observes her father, sunlight falling in his eyes, and thinks, “fields of trees are here, and grey of slate and rain... a word

from her rock book is what she wanted, something tangible in her mouth. Malachite. Jade” (66). Of their grandfather, owner of several greenhouses, a young Sonya notices that “his face was smooth, as if he had an underground spring somewhere deep inside him, and it welled up now and then to wash away any lines of trouble on his face” (28). Planting and pruning, enjoying the spoils of the garden or the fields after a long day – these are people who cannot quite be diverged from what surrounds them. People, really, are not so unlike the plants they care for – and both like a steady foundation on which to grow. (Remember that word, *foundation* – I’ll come back to that later.)

The symbiosis between gardener and garden, blended with a sense of repetition, steady as the turn of the seasons – Jopp’s novel couldn’t work without these two elements. The narrative even bookends itself with pieces of the earth itself, born from Sonya’s collection of treasured stones. When pressed back into the earth, these simple objects become bookmarks, set to mark the passage from her childhood haunts into adulthood. Consider the following two quotes, each set near the close of their respective chapter:

Sarah Goulet

In the four months they had lived in Norwich she had not gathered any stones or shells for her box, nor did she leave one when they left. (68)

From her pocket she took a small piece of dark blue glass, compressed sky, that they had found swimming, worn smooth by the water, and put it into the dirt. (120)

Sonya leaves a piece behind in each childhood home, even as she carries memories away. Thus, nature (often a metaphor for transformation and flow) instead becomes, for our protagonist, a point of stability: a shoreline to return to, an accent that highlights the things Sonya will come to miss. As she reaches high school, however, what was a rich awareness and pleasure in seeing something new tips to a creeping obsession with capturing details, which she mentions to her soon-to-be love: “I can’t, Elinor, it’s too much... all those people... all those details to keep track of. I wouldn’t be any good at it” (266).

It was at this section of the book I began to feel – not quite consternation, but something akin, with our protagonist. I found myself dwelling on her two key fears: the cats that haunt her nightmares, and the withdrawal from the outside world in hope of fully capturing the details and ideas she frets over losing. The first takes what should be a friendly creature and turns its gaze repulsive; that repulsion becomes so great it begins to further restrict Sonya’s world. For some reason, though, I felt I was missing something.

She’s correct, of course, that details become hard to hold onto: time marches on, and memory is infallible. There’s far too much that happens in a single lifetime to be able to faithfully record it all. This rising dissonance Sonya experiences as her family moves, her father leaves, as things she thought certain about

people change – eventually, tidal, it overwhelms.

This kind of unease can easily tip one into obsession, something Sonya herself notices: “Now [she] wanted to take those she loved inside herself, to keep them safe. Did adults feel all the time that constant need to protect? Was it possible to go through a day and not be gripped by it?” (258). That want to pause – to preserve, frozen in time, the things you love – is the very *human* core of this novel. And, like we all must, it (and Sonya) come to this conclusion: we can’t. We can’t halt time, and we cannot pluck back the details once they’ve slipped from our grasp – not as they were, in any case. Sonya’s desktop notations, embellished with the tag “Don’t Forget,” represent the need to cling, to frame memories in the way we feel they deserve for the emotions and memories they wrought (24). But even these notes and reminders are a facsimile.

“When had she left?... Sonya did not know how long she had been sitting there, contemplating the notes above her desk” (24).

Too fixated on the past to enjoy the present: it’s a theme I’ve found myself in from time to time. Memory represents safety, comfort, hearkening back to the warm, dark earth, but it’s a fine line between reminiscence and escapism – and by framing the beginning of the book with Sonya in her bedroom, alone and surrounded by notes, we are introduced to a character who has found herself (if you’ll pardon the pun) painted into a corner.

Take this thought: “She liked to imagine them... the people for whom living was a word sung from their lip, summer, a ticket in their pocket. But not for her” (25). It’s the last part of that phrase that strikes me – *not for her*. Unconsciously, she’s begun to back herself away from the outside world, removing herself before the

experience could happen at all – and that is the pattern of someone who has experienced deep hurt.

Pondering this, I found myself returning to the passage below. It’s a line from Sonya’s mother, Marie, given at the end of a story about two women who lived in a farmhouse together near where she grew up. Marie tells this to her daughter, hoping to invoke something hopeful to rouse Sonya from her fear-driven catatonia:

... I understood her and Roselyn together. They were talking to me, they could have been right there in the room with me, wanting me to understand. But it wasn’t about corn or their garden. It was as if they were saying, ‘Look at us! Look at our lives! They are grand!’ That was how they changed me. (300)

Now, perhaps it is no surprise that this passage resonates so with me, a queer woman. Reading this, I felt that familiar mix of yearning and pride, the same butterfly-wing flutter when, out in public, I hear a woman say *my wife* or a man say *my husband* – a form of crying out, “*Yes! I’m not alone; you have been there too, all this time, and you too have found happiness.*” Then, as I reread these words, I remember my earlier claim: that people, like plants, need a foundation upon which to grow.

Here is the foundation, paradoxical in its stability: the need to believe that a future with happiness and good things is *possible*. It can’t be guaranteed. Indeed, we brush past stories filled with great hurt: childhood friends whose paths divulge from hers, her father’s restlessness, a grandmother worn threadbare by regret and mistrust, and in the unhappy fates of two teenage boys Sonya only knew as a young girl. But, for all that hurt – despite it, even! – Sonya experiences forms of love to make the experience worth it, worth

it in the ways it takes to anchor herself out of the deep well of pain she’d found herself within. That’s a challenge with no easy answer, but there is the start of a foundation in Sonya’s budding romance with Elinor, in her mother’s stories and worries, and in her grandfather’s kindness. “They knew without much discussion where they wanted to be,” Jopp says of our two young lovers (292). There is again pleasure what is *present*, an echo of the childlike wonder of the world that greeted us at the novel’s start.

At the end of the day, this tale ends with a form of pragmatic optimism. Jopp does not leave us with the assurance that things will turn out for Sonya and her partner, nor does she shy away from the underlying threat of violence so many queer people live under. No certainty, but a longing for something better: that’s what *From the Longing Orchard* leaves us to ponder.

Sonya realizes, in love and life, the mortality of things. She must, like we all must, make a choice: that it’s still worth it to anchor ourselves to others, to experience these things bittersweetly and to be able to say: *yes, imperfect as it was, it was worth it and it meant something.*

But: I think I’ve said enough. I would like to borrow one more thought, a conclusion made by Sonya herself that helps to propel her back out into the world:

“Here, in her time and place, her moment of earth, she had her own love, anger, and laughter... a life which she wanted, with its fears and gifts, more than any other” (279).

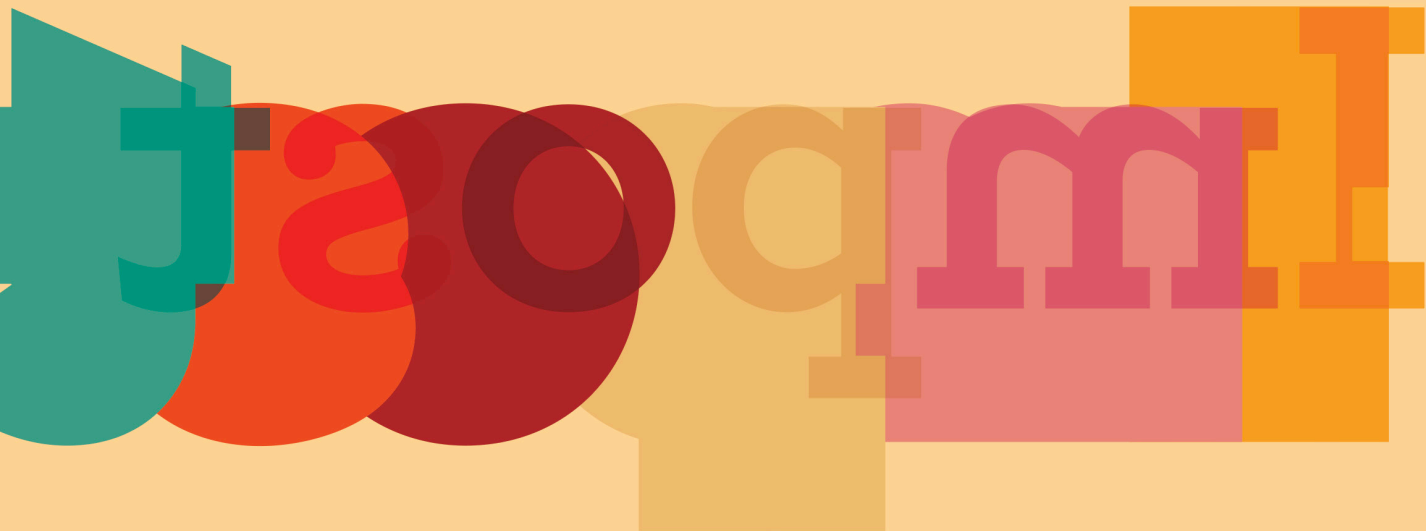
Making the most of it, indeed.

Sarah Goulet

Sarah Goulet

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