

HIRAM POETRY REVIEW

Issue #78

Spring 2017



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poetryreview@hiram.edu

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Issue No. 78

Spring 2017

Editor: Willard Greenwood

Associate Editor: Mary Quade

Editorial Assistants: Seiji Bessho, Alex Bryan, Kelsie Doran, Spencer
Goodheart, Tom Pantic, Sara Shearer

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Last year was our 50th anniversary issue, and you would expect that there might be a bit of a hangover, not so. In fact, issue #78 demonstrates how lively American poetry is with poems from expats, underground and aboveground poets, and prison poets. Furthermore, with the release of *Paterson*, a fine film by Ohio native, Jim Jarmusch, poetry is as cool as ever.

This issue also features reviews of important new books. I'd like to note that the strength of the past four issues has been due to the outstanding efforts and talents of three of my ace readers who are leaving. Tom, Sara and Alex have brought a range of aesthetic perspective to the slush pile that will be impossible to replace. However, the HPR will morph in, as yet, unseen ways. We will miss them, but they have left their marks on the HPR forever.

To our readers, writers and subscribers, thanks. We want to encourage all of you with some numbers. In the past reading period, we received over 400 submissions (we read year round). We accepted 17 poems from 15 poets. I mention this, so writers can gauge their chances, and so that readers and subscribers know that they are getting the best of the best. The poems here will keep for a long time, but if you want to share, consider passing the review on to someone who might enjoy the poems herein.

Willard Greenwood
Editor, HPR

Jack Anderson

The Big Life Downstairs

How nice to think back on
those long-ago nights when
Mommy and Daddy liked
to give jolly parties
always crowded with flocks
of relatives and friends,
and you wandered about,
nibbling pretzels and nuts
amid the excitement
buzzing all about you
until the big folks, since
such things were expected,
asked you to play a piece
on the piano filled
with tricky runs and trills,
which you did, for that was
your party duty then,
while they sat stiff and still
until that endless piece
came to a stop at last
and they sighed with relief,
and then Mommy said it
was way past your bedtime,
and you padded upstairs
and, after washing, changed
into warm pajamas
and clambered into bed,
but before turning off
the lights as you'd been told,
you read from a book you
hid under a pillow,
or listened to something
faint on your radio
so no one would think you
were still up, still awake,
being a bit naughty,
until you did turn off
the radio, yawning,
snug in your bed, hearing
party sounds still rising

up from downstairs louder
than before –and was it
because the guests were glad
that you, a little kid,
were safe out of the way,
leaving them free to do
anything they fancied? —
whatever the reason,
all that mounting laughter
made you want to grow up
so big you could stay up
with other big folk at
their big parties downstairs
until the time at last
came for falling asleep,
which is what you now do.

Jack Anderson

He Being a Lover of All Things Theatrical

the empty pill bottle
on a nearby table

came as no surprise
nor did the sight of him

neatly dressed
and seated in a chair

as if he'd carefully
arranged himself

to witness his passing
as it took place.

Douglas K. Currier

Wednesday

Wednesdays when there is no work, no early morning hopeful calls, no possibility of money, there are errands. I must take the compost to the CSWD drop-site for free. I must go to the library. I must redeem empty bottles. I must pick up the weekly shopper. I must dwell on how few days of work I have this month. I must guess at the Friday money. I must eat something for lunch. I promised to eat something for lunch. I must think about my bills. I must not drink before noon. I must search the house for meter change. I must hope that I have work tomorrow. I must not spend money. I must never spend money.

Holly Day

Christ

watching the poets out of the corner of my eye
long trench coats

carefully picking my way to the bar
one of the poets laughs loudly at something

I stand close to the group
practicing my smart and serious expressions
sophisticated hats

I slowly sidle closer to the group
on pretense of ordering another drink
pretending to be absorbed in the band on stage

thirty years past childhood
and I'm still waiting for the popular kids
to invite me to play.

Fritz Eifrig

tales of brave Ulysses

first bird songs
and distant sirens
flirt outside my open window,
dart through 3:30
waxy light
as I wake to take
another piss.
the rasping shuffling
of a snoring dog
pesters round me
as my ponderous belly
grumbles discontent,
my back groans
and my knees say their piece.
I must be too old by now
to spend these hours
visited by sirens
but there they are—
humming tales
and taunts,
carefully binding sleep
and singing of defeats,
calling down dreams
that thud across
my pillow while
I wince in recollection.
swaying murmurs reach
from that beguiling perch,
weaving stories
I could believe
enough to chance the leap;
but the charm is broken
by my doleful hesitation,
abruptly submerged
as the cold morning
air whistles in
the eager chorus
of birds laughing
at my memories
of wings.

Shawna Ervin

Packing List to Meet My Son's Birth Mother

Socks and underwear pushed into plastic bags, the air squished out, a wrinkly mass of yellow and red and blue, camouflage. An extra pair just in case.

Passports and IDs, gifts that seem insufficient, a ceramic ornament, photos from the time she missed with him, a calendar from Colorado, ambiguous, impersonal.

Say the first name he had, the name that means jewel. Say, "That is how she knows you." Try to explain what it means, hope I have it right, know I can't.

Tell stories of meeting him, a scared baby, how he still has the same smile. Does it look like hers? Wonder if they will see in each other something that was missing. Will I know what to say, offer the right amount of distance?

Share.

Toothbrushes and shampoo, lotion and Benadryl. Consider using Benadryl for the long flight. Consider not feeling guilty.

Slippers and pajamas. Won. A secret word and backup plan, in case he can't handle the meeting, in case I can't.

Enjoy my son's reaction to looking like everyone. Point out my freckles and hazel eyes, joke. Hope he can too.

Believe. Trust. Grieve. Hold. Wish.

Nice pants and sweaters, new socks, to impress what she might remember, encourage what she will forget, enforce my place as a mother, too.

The fancy camera, to see in photos later what I will miss that day, what I cannot imagine before.

Subway map of Seoul, email addresses, schedule of meeting times, contact information for adoption agency.

Don't get lost.

Give and receive gifts with two hands, a bow, a nod, thank you, thank you. Kahm sa hamida. Kahm sa hamida. Expect laughter. Say it anyway.

Questions. To begin conversations and those that don't need answers. Should I ask about the father?

Feel. All of it.

Retrieve something tangible, a souvenir, a smell. To know it was real, that it still is. Hold it.

Hope that he understands love, that it's enough for now, that he knows what to take and what to leave for another time.

Long for more time, more words in common, more of each other, more.

Resent loss, this pain, his and mine and hers, and what brought us together. Relish what brought us together.

Promise to return. Hope we mean it, that she does too.

Leave incomplete.

Michael Fessler

Fine Rain

The monsoon came, lengthened, and joined the autumn rains,
Eliminating summer. The fragrant olive had hardly a scent.
Leather goods mildewed. That morning I wrote a stack of letters,
Then napped in the afternoon. When I awoke, it was almost dark.
There was a lull in the rain and I decided to go to M.,
Two express stops away. I left my apartment
And walked through the damp and overgrown neighborhood;
Paced up and down the platform until the train came.
The cars were packed with *salarymen*.
When we reached M., I took the North Exit.
I walked down a maze of ramps, then headed for a boulevard.
It was large and reminded me of The States.
A fine rain started to fall and I took out my umbrella.
The wind was blowing and shifting in all directions.
The umbrella did no good, so I went into a coffee shop.
Décor was heavy and out of synch with the food.
I ordered a salad and tuna fish sandwich.
The table cloth was stained. The carpet smelled like a wet dog.
I ate, trying not to look around. The proprietor stood at the window.
Seemed to have something going with the waitress.
After finishing my sandwich, I left the restaurant immediately.
I walked around M., feeling nothing.
I went down a street of clubs and pachinko parlors.
It was bright and (just an opinion) ugly.
As I was looking around, and before I knew it, I was drenched.
I got back to the station around 9:30 and caught the train home.
That night always comes back to me.
Was that the night I saw that I was a middle-aged man
and that my dreams weren't going to come true?
When I learned that fine things weren't always so fine?

Dennis Finnell

The Truth

Just a few minutes ago I lied again,
this time to the check-out lady at the Big Y.
I bought butter pecan ice cream
and potato chips and told her I was going right home
and have some ice cream, along with coffee
and she said she loves coffee with ice cream
and nuts in ice cream is great too.
I told her I'd think of her as I followed
my spoonful of butter pecan
with a sip of my fresh-brewed coffee.
A lot of this is a lie. I didn't have ice cream
but I did have coffee, and I did think of her
but I was thinking how I had lied to her,
and then I thought, Did she truly love
ice cream with coffee, and nuts?
And so I began working on my theory called
The Truth, believing the ones we say we'd
die for lie daily, about how great we look
in that Hawaiian shirt, how scrumptious
our chili is. We all know this, and that doctors
lie about how long we've got, and mom and dad
lied to us and to themselves about hellfire
and God's face, and Presidents lied about puppies
and sex and weapons of mass destruction
and beautiful toddlers lie about eating Twizzlers,
and snakes lie about trees, and brothers lie
and then one kills the other. This is just
the beginning of The Truth, because for every
lie about how beautiful we are from lips
we've just kissed, there's a neighbor's mouth
going on about how we're real bastards,
and should be fed to wild dogs.
And so The Truth is a kind of average of all
lies told flattering and otherwise, The Truth
says yes there are black holes and yes
there's a big bang, there's a beautiful face
you look into and take with you everywhere,
and there are eyes at your back, guys
saying things just to say them, and women too.
For now I still have to somehow work in
the unnamed one killed for a lie

whose blood cries from the dirt and multiply
that one by billions and I have a hunch
nothing has something to do with it.

Dan Grote

This Addiction

Ten years ago,
I'd have told you
that it would never
happen to me

What a difference
A decade makes
It all started
so innocent,
so harmless.

Blake, Bukowski or
Ruefle, just to feel
cultured, hell, I'd
go to a reading
or two, but I'd
never keep that shit
around the house.

Then, before I knew it,
it was a Haiku at
night, just something
to unwind, to make
the edge off

In no time, I'm
up to a few lines
of free verse, just
to start my day.

Everyday still kidding
myself. What's the
harm in a stanza
or two? I'm only reading
the stuff, not writing it.

Until the day came when
I found myself alone,
pen and paper in hand,
Alone with a racing mind

“Just this once,” that’s
what I told myself,
I just wanna see
how it feels, just
wanna see what the
Big Deal is.

It’s true, you know,
what they say, the part
about The High you
get from the
first one,

It’s true what they say,
that you spend each day,
you write each word,
chasing that first rush.

Across the chasm of
your mind, ignoring health,
family and sanity,
just to

Try and pull all of
life’s riddles, into
stanzas while learning
how to tell a
knock-knock joke.

Pawning thoughts for
metaphors, ideas for
rhyme and feelings
for meter. Becoming a
Whore for iambic
pentameter

“I can stop anytime
I want”, just one
more sonnet, one more
villanelle, a few more
lines of feeling, just
enough to write all
my wrongs. Tomorrow is
a new day, tomorrow
I’ll get some help.

Jamey Hecht

Landscape With Tramp

On one side of the weedy trough where train tracks sleep
Sunken six feet down and nailed with eight-inch spikes
Into the floor of God's old "dry" Upstate New York,
A parking lot retards the trees, whose slow and silent
War against the asphalt's fallen wall of darkness goes
Unnoticed by the drivers of these Pacers, Gremlins,
Saabs, a hundred twenty thousand miles odometered,
But still in Puddlebury here, Pop. 667. If one guy dies,
Or moves down to the Bronx to drive a cab, the Devil
May appear in hat and threadbare cutaway tuxedo
Sitting in a burned-out dining car whose ribs, exposed,
Make prison-bars of sunshine on the desiccated grass.
This is the "Water-Level Line," that died in 1968,
Around the time the busboy held the broken Senator,
His head, whose blood and Aeschylus flowed out
Through grates and drain-pipes, copper, concrete, lead,
That bore his spirit through the sewers to the sea.
Built in 1853, the New York Central lived to age 117.
Slaves once watched it pass while glossy crickets
Sprang into the sky; while feral dogs ran from the noise;
While kids threw clods that burst against the cattle car.
On one side thrives wheat's useless distant cousin,
Measuring the wind; but opposite, beyond the tracks'
Unnatural riverbed where motes and gnats, black flies,
Mosquitoes, ride the currents of the helpless Summer air,
The parking lot (it's only early June: Fahrenheit 117)
Awaits the mercy of the starlight's cool blue trance.
Nobody's here, until the six-hundred sixty-seventh man,
Horatio ("a piece of him"), comes barefoot to the bank,
With bourbon and a fishing rod, no line at all, sits down
Dangling his birthday legs and singing the MacDonald's
1970's commercials with a dripping smile, not dead yet.
Ten towns away, a Church of steel and fiberglass is full,
Weird with futuristic arcs and knobs, a clever 1988 idea
That fairly quickly lost its charm and turned embarrassing.
There is the water tower, a day-glow rainbow on its brow.
There is the maple, shot by lightning when the tramp was nine.
He saw it strike. Late afternoon, the thunderstorm alive,
Gigantic like the one that stabbed and stabbed at Martin
Luther's heart until the fear of Dad subdued him, rain
Dumping and vanishing, dumping again, when the white bolt

Drove a rod of cinders down the maple's throat, spit ashes,
Sparks, a birdlike yellow flame that flashed and disappeared,
And one brief hand of smoke that spread away forever.

Andrea Jurjević

The Fist

I killed you. I went crazy because I was ashamed.
Language is a spectacle, and so were yours—

of your mouth and your belt and your thick fist
shoved under my nose. I was at home with that flash

of light I used to see was just lightning,
that it would never strike in the same spot twice.

It was like being reborn—suddenly awoken
under bright lights and ancestral shouts

with no concern other than going back to sleep.
I remember the sin of forgetting to clean

your ashtray. Every word of yours exact a
and essential: *Eat the ashes. Smell the fist.*

I learned the feedback and the static of your
dark tongue. The rabid dog in your mouth,

the wolverine in your pants, your tail, the basin
of your pelvis, your parental lap. And I hold

onto my silence. I hold onto the kind of love
that throws one another through wooden tables

and flings into steel ladders. The terrifically slick
red wrists, shorn bars. Dear father, I keep killing you.

Lyn Lifshin

Hair

In Brooklyn one
love's aunt plotted,
made an appointment
to have it done,
cut in a flip

a present for me
like the scratchy
nylon gowns I
never wore when I
left to marry

An uncle said before
he died he wished
he could see it
short. After

the wedding I
pulled pins out of
that stiff hive
for a week, afraid
to touch it

When I taught in
high school I had
to wear it up,
sprayed it one
gray morning
with flit as

if it was a
living, flying
thing that
shouldn't, like
my life seemed
that October,

unreal, I was
afraid to touch
it, all his family
tried to pull it

back into velvet,

twist it, pin
it choke, they said
they wanted to see
my eyes but I
know they suspected
me of being a
hippie, a witch

The college that
said I couldn't stay
on white cold paper
wrote first can't you look
more professional

and dignified. Wear
it up. The brother
in law would pull
it, sneer, ask if I'd
seen the mad

hair girl in
The Munsters. I
heard that the whole TV season.
Later I learned that

what grew out of
the dark where I
couldn't reach
like dreams or
poems was beautiful,

shouldn't be
squeezed into,
changed into
something different

But those years,
apologizing, stuffing
that sun bleached red
under my collar

straightening it in
what was ok for the
early seventies and
never letting it

go where it wanted

milkweed, wild
flowers, poems,
animals, a dream

hair like someone
who couldn't, hadn't
wouldn't admit, didn't
know it had a
life of its own

Matt McBride

Chara

I remember the neons slurring in rain,

a Tuesday
halfway across the world.

And I said :
我会买一个雨伞然后陪你回家。

And you said:
Today is a beautiful fish.

You are the ocean
And I am drunk at the helm of an oil tanker.

One picture is a doll's naked head
glued to a box of screws

another is doves, waiting in line
before a mirror.

And I said:
你有一点悲伤巴？

And you said:
I want to dance in the road.

Such a stupid language, English,
where *halfway across the world*
means *all the way across the world*.

And I said:
什么是你的最爱的颜色？

And you said:
Grey.

When you showed me your painting
of a woman crying small animals,
I understood.

Sometimes it feels like there's a circus
coming out of my eyes too.

Matt McBride

Ziyu

Perhaps we are all married to Germans
and just don't know it.

Even if Chinese is your native language
it can't be easy to write porn in
its characters all elbows and toes.

Ziyu, we are both sailors
on ships best kept in bottles.

Despite your best efforts
my Mandarin still sounds like
I'm swallowing a sock.

That summer,
I was using an American flag
as a bedsheet

and you were too young
for your first heart attack

and we both were learning
that a scar is worst type of zipper

Carlos Reyes

Bestiary

Asp. Doted on and used for nefarious proposes by Cleopatra. Related to the **aspen** as prefix. See **Quaking Aspen**. Creatures tremble, indeed quake at this snake's approach.

Baleen Whale. Biggest animal here, eats as tasty bits some the smallest animals: krill and plankton. If a baleen whale had tried to swallow Jonah, we'd have one less colorful myth from the Bible.

Bonnet Head Shark. Epitomizes the expression, Go f--- yourself. It can, it does, and successfully produces off-spring in that way.

Caribou. It has a rudder on the wrong end; in evolution it lost its boat but it is still semi-aquatic.

Dogfish. No more than a **cat** is related to a **cat fish** the **dogfish** is connected to the **dog** only by name: a **catfish** doesn't meow, a **dogfish** doesn't bark. The **dog** has, however, a star named after it. A **star fish** has nothing to do with stars except its shape, nor is it a **fish**.

Likewise, a **sea horse** is not an equestrian creature and is not to be ridden. It is an example of equality among the sexes and a great example of parenting, since progeny rearing is left to the poppa once the eggs hatch. The **dog fish** is not entirely without fame as it has a submarine named for it.

Eel. Some go along with Plato, who says eels are **snakes**, and therefore inedible (if Plato actually said that). They slither through sea weed forests and with their suction cups fasten themselves to the base of dams and boulders at the bottom of waterfalls. They remind me, however, of the **sea snake**, a dangerous and as far as I know inedible creature. It is however, not as dangerous as the vicious moray eel.

Elephant. Walking corpse of giant teak trees.

Flamingo. Thin reeds that set the pond aflame. Properly pronounced: *flaming-o*.

Garter Snake. Cleopatra's tiara was an **asp** but what Amazon would tighten a **garter snake**
around her thigh?

Giraffe. Tall enough to forage on the limbs of the highest trees of the

Serengeti, the birds are happy they are vegetarians. They walk like fashion models across the desert.

Great Irish Elk This deer hosts a giant winter oak on its head; a family tree big enough to accommodate all the ancestors of the Ten Lost Tribes.

Hammer Head Shark. Whether it's stakes, rods or nails to be driven, this shark has deadly and horrific accuracy, before the lights go out, since its eye is on the peen of the hammer.

Hippo. Never mind that ancients thought it looked like a **horse** and so named it, and though they run fast, I would never bet on one in a race at the hippodrome.

Ibis. Icon of and revered by ancient Egyptians, a bird not as tawdry as a **flaming-o**.

Javelina. He has two ivory toothpicks protruding from either side of his mouth. He has just eaten or is looking for something to eat.

Krill. Very small shrimp-like animal hunted by creatures both large and small from **fish** to **whales** and **humans**. Its name is dangerous only in the event of a misspelling.

Lobster. As punishment for some sin lost in the ages he is a **scorpion** stripped of his venom
and exiled to the depths of the oceans. Related to the **krill**.

Mosquito. Called *mag-goya* by the Yupik eskimo who credit it as the chief reason for the abundance of birds, an important food supply--the birds not the mosquitos. This pestiferous creature is one of the most deadly on the planet. It kills millions world wide. It is also a long range flyer and can be found in the swankest of resorts on isolated Caribbean and Mediterranean Islands. We have so far been unable to learn their Morse and so don't know what the buzz is all about.. . Buzz words, they have thousands.

Narwhal. In old maritime lithographs they are depicted stuck in the sides of whaling ships after attacking them. But his horn looks more like a fancy corkscrew or hat rack you would find in a Manhattan condo. It's possible he attacks whalers because of his defensiveness about his looks, angry that his tusk is off-center in such an unhandsome way.

Octopus. A healed over stump with eight roots searching for the trunk of a tree cut down centuries ago.

Porcupine. A roving creature often disguised as the barrel cactus.

Puca, Fairy, Lepracaun, the Little Folk. I have never seen one of the little people but that doesn't mean they don't exist. I have seen their trees and bushes. Their ring forts. I know many otherwise intelligent people who claim to have seen them, and those who will not talk of them at all.

Quetzal. Thankfully someone shortened its name from the longer quetzalcoatl, a queen or beautiful flower. It is actually a small bird held captive in the silver cage of Guatemalan coins. Its beautiful curled come hither tail feathers almost never exceed the rim of the circle that circumscribes them.

Rabbit. A Chinese year from time to time. Two leafless branches sprout from his head when he is surprised.

Rhino. Oops! We almost missed him. He would be an ugly unicorn were he not disqualified because his horn is not ivory.

Sloth. When you spot him in the jungle you will ask yourself the big question. Is it animal, vegetable or mineral? Is that moss growing on him or is it his skin? His view of the world is topsy turvy. Two things we know about him: he's nature's slowest, and he is one of the Seven Deadly Sins.

Tamed Shrew. Exists only in Shakespeare. I have yet to see a tamed **shrew, vole, or mole**. You expect the first one to be clever for isn't it only a "d" short of shrewd. If it were a French or Italian rodent it would be able to fly. Isn't the difference between **vole** and **mole** simply a matter of one or the other of the consonants being misplaced. Having a **mole** on your face must be terrifying.

Unicorn. Exists only in the real world as a **narwal**. A **narwhal** does not reside between the covers of fairy tale books.

Vampire Bat. It lives in cities deep in caves nowhere near Transylvania. If you awake in the middle of the night to find one perched on your big toe about to tap a new well of red gold it's your imagination, though I have a poet friend who believes in them. A creature more frightening in fiction than in real life.

Water Buffalo. It can hold the full moon between its crescent shaped horns. Its horns are icons on certain flags. It dreams of using its horns as scythes to cut down the trees that border the rice paddy.

Xylophone . It starts with “X, ” right? A xylophone is not an animal, nor is it a marimba. But how about a piano? It has more teeth than we do, some of them already black, and a toe. It’s not an animal. There is a **Xylophone Cat** though nobody has seen one. But the **Xantus** is real, it’s a yak.

Yak. Lost brother of red Scottish highland cattle.

Zebra. Misplaced bamboo forest on the run. But you can never spread those bars of the jailhouse you hallucinated wide enough to escape.

Mario Ware

Fantastic Fantasies

I get feral like a feline when I see that pussy-kitten,
and start fidgeting from a distance as I imagine how she kisses,
This condition calls for therapy to calm my ferocity,
Or slow my velocity down, if that's a possibility,
With all modesty discarded I start a lurid thought process,
That leads to obsessing about an object with an affectionate progress,
Dresses become negligée and gowns become bikinis
Pants become sheer pantyhose or mere panties in this scenery,
Whistles whisper as my sinister intentions beg attention,
and closes the distance from me to her with forgiveness for my viciousness,
my pirate is vampiric and were-wolvish wild,
my smiles more like a scowl, full man obscured by clouds,
our town becomes a towel, our castles only shadows,
The world becomes a shower as we crumble ancient scaffolding,
Pole-vaulting over pinnacles, sky-diving into the oceans,
Invading Sane's asylum while the island isn't open
Bringing down the house with shouts and noisy echoes,
As I dig her up like vegetables and hesitate to let go,
Until I leave behind a legacy without being a legend,
That she remembers in the present tense, but was ever prevalent,
Mandingo multi-lingual, my pingo Universal,
I could hurt her when I'm assertive but I'm passive so I'm merciful,
Researchable and resourceful, I orchestrate my orchestras,
On organs in the midst of orchards, black orchids in the water for her,
Box it up like chocolates and take it to my private office,
I'll offer you cigars often but not a droplet of my chocolates,
Since sharing is scarce in this realm I've barred admittance to my Di-
mension,
And I am as indifferent as the cements my impacts leave indentions,
She doesn't want another anyway after our sexual excursions,
I am the thunder-dragon dirty, other-worldly, un-earthly....

John Sibley Williams

Down by the Old Lynching Tree, A Flickering Light

& a blindness. A dark silo scribbled onto night's thin skin. A young boy who often dreams of dying waking for a change to a soft voice asking how he's been all these years. & at the end of this vein of stars, a heart. A heart that bears too many shapes. A shape no further or closer to truth. What is the truth of it? The heart? The end? A brief rain feeds seeds & from nothing, if we're lucky, some-thing we can hold on to, for now. Right now, somewhere in the world, a bird is thrashing the glass surface of a lake, coming up empty again. & a different boy, who often dreams of living into his teens, is mapping his road to the sky in metal shards held together by powder & fuse. A fuse he cannot light without help. A fuse he cannot light without fire. A fire that consumes the blindness. From this tired skin of night a rope snaps free from a burning tree.

REVIEWS

Willard P. Greenwood II

Small Crimes

Andrea Jurjevic

2015 Philip Levine Prize for Poetry

Anhinga Press

A book that chronicles the consequences of war should be of interest to a wide range of readers given that America has been at war for going on two decades. In *Small Crimes* we get a look at how war has left its mark on Andrea Jurjevic and consequently her remarkable first book of poetry.

I can't help but consider these detailed poems on the continuum of war literature that starts with *The Iliad* and whose present can now be located with, for example, Phil Klay's powerful collection of short stories, *Redeployment*. What Jurjevic adds to war literature of the moment is a poet's lyric sensibility. Certainly, the narratives of the poems get our attention, but poems such as "Too Educated" display a painful melancholy, a state of mind in which the effects of war persist in daily life. Coupled with this sensibility of a survivor is love and even more broadly, at times, human longing. The "wrecked" (as one reviewer describes them) love poems make me think of Hector despairing over the fate of his wife, Andromache, before he dies. Hector's death saves him from indignity, but he knows that he can't save his beautiful and intelligent wife from a terrible fate, a life spent as a slave in bitter servitude. There's a collective sense in this volume of a similar crisis—there is something human that neither love nor literature can save. This difficulty gives rise to such poems as "It Was a Large Wardrobe from my Perspective" and "In the Absence of Grass." They develop the narrative of melancholy, which at times, is obscene and beautiful. To quote another war writer, Tim O'Brien, a true war story must only have allegiance to "obscurity." The obscene in this collection is not to shock but is borne out of necessity.

In this way, Jurjevic follows Sylvia Plath or Sharon Olds, take your pick. The poems are pornographic, violent and while not as tragic as Plath or as comic as Olds, there is a bitter and vital kind of heroism and despair about her work that makes me want to put her in a conversation with those writers.

There are many engaging poems in this collection. A few of my favorites are: "Would It Surprise You I Don't Like Mornings," "Love Boat," and "Peeling an Orange." These poems also impart a strong sense of movement from Eastern Europe to America.

Jurjevic's eponymous poem, "Small Crimes" features a repression of

sorts that gives the poem and the rest of the collection energy. In it the speaker is with someone and gets out of a car and stands
by the roadside shrine—our black Madonna
a plastic bouquet of dirty stems at her dirty feet—

and what follows is a remembered encounter between the speaker and a lover in which they try

to absolve a peopled afternoon of a small crime
and keep it hidden, keep it safe.

What strikes me here is the mixing of love, lust and some kind of mystery about surviving. The memory portion of the poem suggests that the illicit encounter in a parking lot is taboo for social reasons. However, the fact that lover's hands are "familiar with churned earth" gives me the feeling that the lover may have been involved in a war crime and that the speaker has stopped at the shrine because it is near the site of a war crime. These are completely subjective feelings on my part and could be easily refuted by the poem itself. The point that I'm making here is that the poems in this collection create unease and suspicion.

Death in war and failure in love are often redeemed in their retellings, but Jurjevic is no sentimentalist in that regard. The active repression of the crime and the beloved's implied involvement is powerful. Sometimes things are much worse or complicated than they appear. This poem, like many others, draws attention to Jurjevic's talent with the couplet, which seems to be her signature poetic device.

Traditionally, the couplet resolves the love problem in a sonnet, and in this classical sense Jurjevic uses the couplet with remarkable expertise and sophistication. A significant number of the poems are composed in couplets, and this deep structure of (non) resolution, which we see in "Lament with Milkweed," whether it be political, sexual, personal, or cultural shows that Jurjevic is a serious poet and artist. We want the varied speakers (her protean personae are another unique characteristic of the collection) to overcome obstacles. However, her poems, like most wars today, resist resolution and leave us with a powerful sense of sadness.

Henry Hughes

The Constellations of Extinct Stars and Other Poems

Scot Siegel

Salmon Poetry, 2016

“When the power goes out / an older power switches on,” Scot Siegel tells us in his stellar collection, *The Constellation of Extinct Stars*. Siegel raises these deeper, older forces in a 1920s wind-swept western romance between a linemen “Righting poles downed by storms, / restoring light to the darkest homes,” and a pretty school teacher who feels the poetry of weather and work—“wind from the east, / like rolling pins over the dull xylophone / of our one-room schoolhouse”—and also likes dancing and other women. These tightly carved historical journeys of the heart arrive many years later, as they often do in our lives, with sweet and painful memories of what we have and what we might have had. In “Windy Writes Back,” a finely rendered poem about outward acceptance and muted regret, the lineman acknowledges the good life he has with his wife and children, but he tells us that for some time he “camped . . . on the outskirts of my life,” and heard that teacher calling him in from the cold, where, of course, she is “lovely” and they are “young again, / and it was spring.” In the collection’s title poem, the aging teacher remembers the woman she loved through images of a Portland hawk and moth that “tie loop-knots / in slow syncopation over the cityscape, and etch the cobalt / sky with a cool elegy.” The dark and bright skies of this book continue to challenge and renew lovers with the dizzy admission that

The most loved I ever felt was nearly make-believe.
The clouds had just lifted, and the pines,

weighted down with sugar snow, began to sway.

Siegel’s poetic history of passion includes varying degrees of male longing, from a man missing his wife while she attends a week-long conference, to the lyric ache of widowers—“a train disembodied from its whistle / pushes us along.” But there’s also an amusing real estate satire about a man hunting for a “home with good bones” with “catacombs” where the former owner may have “stashed his mistress’s many perfumed letters” and a porch where this new possessor could sip bourbon and chew tobacco, “squinting / across the way toward the neighbor lady’s / upstairs bedroom window.” In another gender studies poem, Siegel considers “What Was Lost” in the composition of the ancient *Kama Sutra* and its nineteenth-century translator, Sir Richard Francis Burton, a sixty-two-year-old British soldier, linguist, poet, fencer, and hypnotist. After Burton’s death, his wife burned many of his papers to “protect /

His Privacy. His reputation.”

Just like that, every facet of the Lovers’ Art,
so painstakingly

researched, translated,
annotated . . .

She burns!

The value and absurdity of endless documentation and forms is something Siegel struggles with as an Oregon town planner—his day job—and yet he brings this practical knowledge, charged with humor and insight, to a poem like “The Hysterical Preservation Specialist”:

Any Labor Day, all the diners
might burn.
You carry a light briefcase

In the shape of an antique
bellows. You do not open it.
You bill the city.

Siegel offers lots of smart, wry critiques of the Northwest in short poems like “Meth Labs in Rain” and in longer monologues, including the darkly brilliant, “The House on Willamette Falls Drive.” A butch daughter remembers a hard life after a paper mill closes in Oregon City: “The summer sturgeon washed up on the shore, and we / pickled them for winter. But the flesh tasted like mud, and over the years / father grew ill; the mercury made him weep until this throat swelled and his mouth bled.” The girl sleeps with an older woman, is raped by her school principal, and witnesses the murder of a boy pushed off a cliff into the river. There’s also a local whore the father tries to save, and something about a blackmail tape. This sketchy story with its myriad characters can be hard to follow, and perhaps that’s befitting a place where “grief / was a hole below the murk of the mill, where the falls dissolved / in a dervish of mist, where eels lived.” The perfectly phrased music, rich in alliteration and assonance, makes this a pleasure to read, regardless of plot. And like the Stamper family in Ken Kesey’s *Sometimes a Great Notion*, it is clear that these people endure. “He left no money, but taught me to fish / and fix old engines. I teach shop at the college where the mill used to be.”

The earth can be a mess under *The Constellation of Extinct Stars*, but Siegel expresses some hope that our world will turn out okay, even if the projection is out a few years. In “Gen Z” we hear the good report that

Under your watch, oceans stop rising.

All passengers wing-walk to safety. Children
in every country know five languages.

Under your watch the water is clean again,
the fish plentiful, and the rice cooked to perfection.

Generations, poets, problems, styles, solutions—even stars—come and
go, but these words of Scot Siegel will stay bright long after the cover
closes.

Irene Marques

***Only More So* Millicent Borges Accardi Salmon Poetry: 2016**

The Love that Language Tries to Conjure Up

Only More So by Millicent Borges Accardi is a lot of things and it is also a gorgeous nothingness that allows us to ponder upon the codes that we use to understand and figure out the world, our own existence, our own humanity. We have been made by and in language. We love and live and see in language. And sometimes we cry deeply because the language of the world makes no sense and our crying becomes the clean, primal code that says everything, that speaks outside of our stifled and incomplete alphabet, calling us from deep—an howl coming from the stunning sea that truly sees, which we all have, before we enter the human-made dictionary and forget how to be. The point then is to recover language: its body. The point is also to get out of the sordid body-politic as much as we can.

As the Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector puts it in *The Stream of Life*, “Each one of us is a symbol dealing with symbols—everything is a point of mere reference to the real.... Reality has no synonyms” (71). And Toni Morrison, the American writer, voices the same idea in a slightly different way in her 1993 Nobel Lecture about the powers and limits of language, “The vitality of language lies in its ability to limn the actual, imagined and possible lives of its speakers, readers, writers. Although its poise is sometimes in displacing experience it is not a substitute for it. It arcs toward the place where meaning may lie.” What we ask from language is that it is able to conjure up in our mind, our being, the most accurate idea about being, that it sums up well “the everything” that we are. We need this to feel less broken, less distant from a holistic understanding of existence.

Being aware that even the most touching words that enter us on a deeply visceral level cannot recreate fully the memory of being, the idea of being, that we, writers and poets, and readers of writers and poets, want to access, in order *to understand*, we constantly crave to fill (suspend) our ontological vacuum, always pushing language beyond its limits, wanting it to truly speak, or at least, speak more. We want to understand and soothe the ache that always pounds in us, that “lack” that we may only symbolically suspend (or at least appease) while immersed in the powers of a poetic, shifting and shamanic language, where we become seas of water receiving all possibilities of meaning, a cleansing sacred

deluge that makes us be. Be more. We want a language that speaks of something else: the unnamed, unnamable, the astoundingly beautiful. We want the magic code that tells us that there is more, that there is another way, another world, another cosmos beyond the smallness that we are, the lives that we live and make others live. *Only More So* evokes all these yearnings, powers, responsibilities and shortcomings of language and existence.

This book is a precious reminder of what language desires to attain and conjure up: full communication with the deepest sides of our consciousness(es). The poetic persona wants us to be aware of our responsibility to remember and remember well. Through powerful, living and struggling words that try to create and recreate meaning and hint at the responsibility that we all have to keep memory alive, the poet does not let us off the hook. She displays memory after memory after memory forcing us to recollect the atrocities that have plagued and continue to plague the world. It is as if she wants us to recapture, revisit the *event* by forcing us to be fully present (in body, mind and spirit), requesting our *full cognitive presence*, so that we see with all our eyes, all our consciousness(es). This seeing is important if we are to avoid repeating the error, the terror, the abuse, the oppression—the killing and the rape of souls and bodies, including our very earth, which we depend upon to eat, sleep, dream, breathe and love the other and ourselves. This seeing allows us to regain full(er) cognizance: it is a voice (a language) guiding our actions and connecting us to everything and everyone, reminding us of our existential multifaceted responsibilities and communal links.

In these poems, we are called to reconnect with our political consciousness, our communal consciousness, our spiritual consciousness, our bodily consciousness, our earthly consciousness, our ontological consciousness, all of which, if touched in the right degree, have the potential to make us all better people who will create a better world. The poem that gives title to the collection “Only more so” recreates in seemingly disjointed sentences that ask for meaning, the “whys” of our atrocious actions. Why does an army of men invade a house, demanding food, gold, sex and something else they don’t even know? Why do looters of the worse kind enter a home that is already broken, poor and ravaged by the many existential and material afflictions of its time since each era is already hunched by the weight of its own existence? Why, why, why... Have they themselves been robbed of their humanity, their basic senses and rationality and made into brutes by an unconscious and unreflective world continuously at war? These “visitors are cold as bad luck” (15). They go inside our house, where we ought to find solace and sanctuary, inflicting more misery and fear in the already wretched, the already broken, the already poor... And now, now “she must sur-

vive by owning air,/holding back the red, the full, the bare/the proud canvasses of that flat language paper/that once told her everything she needed/to know.” (16) After yet another vile catastrophe she must survive, only this time she does not have the language that can “tell” what happened to her, that can explain why people do things like that to other people. This time she wants to hold back because the hideous is too hideous for her inept alphabet to be able to voice in sentences, for her own mind and being to accept as real. She has to hold back because the memory of what happened cannot be painted accurately in the canvas that poetry is, that writing is: it is too bestial, too unlike what we think humans can be and are capable of. That in itself ought to be one of the greatest powers of these poems: a warning about that which one must not, should not, be or do, for we may not be able to then make sense of what we are and enter the condemnation of incomprehensibility. And incomprehensibility is a madness that makes us die: inside and out.

As the other poem of the collection, “Portrait of a Girl, 1942”, which is based on Jan Lukas photograph of Vendulka Vogelova, lets transpire, art serves to show us the mirror of what we are, what we are not, what we could or should aim to be:

I am the mirror for one who speaks;
these fresh gaps of life. A mirror is not much
for all of us, but if we listen for reflection,

the clear twin face of a groan behind the looking
glass, we hear the cat's hair sounds of all people
grumbling in the same manner about the air
the food the earth the sidewalk

I am the mirror for all the world's silence,
and the ones who slipped through without drawing
blood, whose suicides number nothing next
to vast doors too tall to reach heaven, locked
forever, whose breaking takes generations,
sometimes, dull copper paint on the back of a lake.

[...]

I am the mirror for all those who chose
not to speak. I crack
in the dark. I shine in the snow. (19)

What do we do in the presence of evil? Do we watch it go by without trying to destroy its straight line? Or do we throw as many stones at it

as we can because this is our world and all these people are our people? Poetry, as any good art, is our “mirror” allowing us to reflect upon and re-evaluate our actions, our being, our *beingness* in the world, our answerability toward that world. And when the mirror reflects well, through vivid, telling, ocular veins that bleed heavily into our dormant coward selves, it is hard for us to go to sleep without that voice of consciousness calling upon us, murmuring, murmuring, like a sad song—or an innocent helpless child that asks for bread with big, big, shiny eyes...

Only More So are weighty poems entangled in words that cry for more meaning, more love, that big small pulse-word of four letters that won't go to sleep, always trying to unearth a truth that cannot, won't be quite: a truth that “crack[s] in the dark” and “shine[s] in the snow” (19) and so there is no place for us to hide. This collection is all this: only more so... “It arcs toward the place where meaning may lie” to recall Morrison's words. And it is to that place that we truly yearn to go, our feet eager to feel that hard-soft, sacred terrain “where moss holds language” and “where we have a name for the things we do” (23).

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Charles Parsons

The Hatred of Poetry

Ben Lerner

FSG Originals: 2016

The Interchangeable Experience: A Review of *The Hatred of Poetry* by Ben Lerner

Clearly, anyone who is interested in poetry, who values it and makes a study of it, knows that there is an urge to try it, to understand it, to teach it, and to convert the nonbelievers. Language itself, the order of it, the expression of it, provokes new poems from generation to generation, and poetry, itself, urges some to share it and yet many others to shun it. Despite the efforts and good intentions of poets and learned teachers, many people come away with a sense that poetry is something *other*.

Even if a young person embraces the concept of *you too can write* championed by many who visit the schools, those who form a love of poetry and wish to become serious poets, often must rely on form, difficult language, and complexity to get noticed—to become, even by poetry's modest standards, a success. These efforts to write something that is new, appreciated, and publishable can strain even the most well-intentioned poet's relationship with the art.

In his career, Ben Lerner, a poet, novelist, essayist, and scholar under the age of forty, has written some rather difficult poems—a point he alludes to early in his most recent work, a book of criticism, *The Hatred of Poetry*. He has also become a verifiable success, a frequent contributor to *The Paris Review* and other, important journals, and has earned recognition as a Fulbright Scholar, and a Guggenheim and MacArthur Fellow. Yet he begins his new work not in the Ivory Tower or upon the Trojan plain, but in his high school classroom where he faced his first true poetic test: memorizing a poem. *The Hatred of Poetry* (its title an allusion to Moore's much-quoted line, "I, too, dislike it") is a slender book written for the purpose of asking, as Lerner puts it, "'Poetry': What kind of art assumes the dislike of its audience and what kind of artist aligns herself with that dislike, even encourages it? An art hated from without and within." Perhaps it isn't a surprise that Lerner begins this evaluation by looking back at his high school experience with poetry, where for so many of us, this hating, or at least, suspicion and unease, tends to begin.

Much of *The Hatred of Poetry* is a pleasure and a privilege to read, and at only eighty-six pages, it is more of an essay than a book. Certainly completable in one sitting, it has been published as a soft-cover original. It is notable that the publisher has chosen to highlight

Lerner's two books of fiction on its cover, and one might wonder if this was tongue-in-cheek or an intentional affront. After all, Lerner has written three well-received books of poems. The publishers too, it seems, dislike poetry, or at least the prospects of selling a book about poetry. As criticism, however, the book conjures up comparisons to the great essays on the subject, those undervalued critical masterworks by Sidney, Shelley, and Poe. As an American meditation, it might be read in concert with more recent works such as C.D. Wright's *Cooling Time* or Adrienne Rich's *What Is Found There*.

Since *The Hatred of Poetry* begins with a story nearly everyone can relate to, a poetry assignment in high school, before the reader finishes a few pages, it is likely that she will find herself with many onrushing thoughts (common and critical), memories (from the earliest experience with poetry to the moment she chose to pick up Lerner's book), and emotions (from pleasure to consternation: the times she has laughed or cried or nearly given up on poetry)—that she might find herself filling notebook pages with her own essay: "I, too, dislike it," she might say. Perhaps these personal observations need to be exhausted or, at the very least, exposed to the point of confabulation before giving oneself over to poetry in the way Lerner explores and discusses it.

What does he write about poetry and poets that is worth discovering? It seems a shame to ruin such a short book by going into too much detail. Thankfully, Lerner summarizes his ideas in its final pages, recapping the tensions and anxieties inherent to the genre:

There are varieties of interpenetrating demands subsumed under the word "poetry"—to defeat time, to still it beautifully; to express irreducible individuality in a way that can be recognized socially or, à la Whitman, to achieve universality by being irreducibly social, less a person than a national technology; to defeat the language and value of existing society; to propound a measure of value beyond money. But one thing all these demands share is that they can't ever be fulfilled with poems. Hating on actual poems, then, is often an ironic if sometimes unwitting way of expressing the persistence of the utopian ideal of Poetry, and the jeremiads in that regard are defenses, too.

Here Lerner articulates the difference between "poetry" with a capital "P" and the "poem," the individual artwork (and, by extension, a collection of these) that represent it. In *The Hatred of Poetry*, he debates the roles and the value of the art, but he intentionally avoids the "caution-

ary or angry harangue,” the jeremiad or rant to defend the sanctity of poetry. He does not try to guard the canon or set standards.

The Hatred of Poetry is decidedly not a book about the subject of taste. It is not a book for people who aren’t particularly interested in poetry, for people who *don’t get it*. It is not a book, either, for those who want to like poetry or who want to know how to learn to write it: not a workbook or a workshop. It is not for those who subscribe to the notion of a conspiracy against marginalized writers, or about the fabled persecution of those who would elevate the art if only certain people would get out of their way. Instead, Lerner suggests using caution before purporting gross exaggerations of poetry’s power or the many adulterations of poetry’s faults.

Lerner admits, it seems almost begrudgingly, that certain poems do create positive results: “[P]oems can fulfill any number of ambitions other than the ones I’m describing. They can *actually* be funny, or lovely, or offer solace, or courage, or inspiration to certain audiences at certain times...”. So, if at best, a poem can accomplish something valuable, but only in a limited way, for a limited time, as Lerner describes here, can a poet be blamed for having an ever-present inferiority complex even as that poet is exercising in sublime actions, attempting to do what other, vocational professions, never do: turn language into something good, true, and beautiful? To write something lasting? And what advertising campaign is championed about like Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*? What sales manual is read as religiously as Dickinson’s *Collected Poems*? Which critical, architectural, engineering theory or discursive, stands the test of time, and expands the knowledge of experience and the human condition like the work of Virgil or Homer?

These questions are, of course, rhetorical, and any number of arguments might be found or created for any number of such works and philosophies. Every thesis has its opposite, so, Lerner, in true academic form, exposes his:

The admitted weakness in the story I’m telling about Poetry is that it doesn’t have much to say about good poems in all their variety; it’s much better at dealing with great or horrible instances of the art. (And I don’t pretend to know where the art begins or ends: Another essay might look at how hip-hop, or spoken word, or other creative linguistic practices take up or bypass the contradictions I’ve been describing.)

As a genre, poetry comes in many varieties. Lerner has written this book as if its audience were exponentially democratic, and so he gains effectually by writing in different registers—for discourse communities low and high, one a lover of spoken word and the other a tweed-jacketed scholar of Beowulf. He interjects his text with insider jokes and Google-worthy name drops. For example, he says his favorite answer to

the probable question of the Q&A portion at one of his poetry readings regarding Lerner's own *favorite* poet as Cyrus Console. Hardly a household name, Console is an instructor at the Kansas City Art Institute and someone who grew up with Lerner in Topeka, KS. When the reader (audience member) expects Robert Frost, Shakespeare or Elizabeth Bishop, Lerner, not lacking irony it seems, responds with Console. In another instance, he writes that the Hypermart—the big box store, was to him as Mont Blanc was to Shelly. When discussing the writing of Sidney, Lerner's word choice is jocose, saying that "Sidney doesn't worry much about specific poems, which often suck."

These takes are fun and fresh, and yet Lerner's academically inclined readers will not come away empty-handed because the book includes unexpected marginalia: individual words, phrases, and quotes (sometimes in Latin or Greek) to highlight a point made within the text. Maybe Lerner does not want his readers to get too comfortable or he doesn't want to be criticized for writing down, so often he changes tactics completely like in this line about concrete as opposed to theoretical relationships, "The affect of abstract exchange, the feeling that everything is fungible...". Consider permission granted to look up *fungible*.

A reader might ask, when you write for everyone, do you write for no one? Perhaps, it means that you write for yourself and that is the feeling you get when you read *The Hatred of Poetry*—it's Lerner's book. It's for him and by him. For his speculation and his assurance.

But if *The Hatred of Poetry* isn't a book defending the genre, and Lerner has misgivings concerning the standard that Sidney set (conceding that there does not seem to be an argument or strategy to safeguard the relevance and success of poetry), Lerner's book proves that even the most accomplished and admired writers of today still find the desire to explain the subject, to try to clear up what poems are and aren't, what poems can and can't do.

Maybe you love poetry. Maybe you can't believe that Lerner doesn't challenge the nonbelievers. Yet, you must also know or will come to know (is there really any question?) that your experience with poetry isn't interchangeable. There is no door-to-door campaign that will persuade the doubters or make poetry more popular than prose or Netflix or PlayStation. Lerner does not write that poetry should be loved, even if it should be loved. If it were loved, the efforts by well-meaning teachers and professors would succeed and poetry would finally be embraced by the masses in all its many forms and potential roles. This current issue of the *HPR* would be the scarce item it deserves to be. And yet, like Lerner's book, this current issue will go unread by many. But that doesn't mean that there aren't hopeful prospects every year in poetry and criticism. The *HPR* is always one of them. So, too, is Lerner's book. Go get a copy. Don't be a hater.

Sara Shearer

Blackbird Singing

Paul McCartney

Norton, 2002

In honor of the re-release of *Flowers in the Dirt*, national poetry month, and my general enjoyment of the Beatles' music, both as a group and separately, I decided to review Paul McCartney's book of poetry. *Blackbird Singing* is comprised of legendary songs written by McCartney during his Beatles and solo career, as well as poetry from throughout his life. The book is also broken into chapter-like sections, containing poetry and lyrics that are thematically similar.

As a lover of the Beatles and Paul McCartney, I knew that I would have to remain vigilant for any prior knowledge flavoring my reading. Part of me wonders whether the editor, Adrian Mitchell, an old friend of the Beatles, went through the same process, because, at times, it feels as though the poems in this collection are powerful solely because of the history behind them. A poem called "Ivan" from the second section of the book (Yesterday) is one example of history trumping artistry. The poem is a sort of elegy for an old friend of McCartney's. It uses the image of two doors opening as a comparison for he and McCartney being born—and one door closing when Ivan dies—and ends with the line "Bye bye Ivy." Such an ending comes too easily and obviously. Another poem, much later in the collection, titled "Rocking On!" also has issues with forced language. One stanza I found to be particularly cringe-worthy reads:

Want to stroke
your furry kitten
Don't be shy
you won't be bitten

Although some moments in the collection do not flaunt McCartney's strengths, others make those strengths far more evident. Where "Ivan" was too sentimental and lacked power in language, "Day With George" makes up for it. This poem focuses on a visit McCartney had with the long-time Beatles producer George Martin and, rather than using details that are so "on the nose," McCartney chooses small details that do a much better job of evoking how he felt about his friend. The lines "Voice colliding notions stride / And stream bareback / Towards their home" elicits an image of the two as they make music together past their prime, and "small packets of / Butter wrapped in gold" shows rather than tells the reader the contentment that McCartney feels on having spent time with an old friend. "Day With George" makes it evident that McCartney has the ability to approach sentimentality with-

out completely succumbing to it, which has often been a criticism of his solo work; that he's just too jovial. Clearly, he can transfer the brilliance of small details that he often captures in songs like "Penny Lane" and "Junk" to his poetry as well.

Other poems of note in this collection include what Mitchell describes as some of McCartney's more impressionistic pieces, one of which is titled "The Blue Shines Through." McCartney often uses rhyme and repetition in his poems, which likely is drawn from his experience and comfort as a musician. Sometimes, the rhyme schemes he devises can go awry, as with the "kitten / bitten" lines from "Rocking On!". In "The Blue Shines Through," however, the rhyme is far subtler, and adds an additional layer to the poem rather than hindering it. The bolts, holes, and color blue create an interesting theme of how relationships with seemingly negative consequences can sometimes lead to deeper meaning or understanding, both between and within people. "Steel" is another poem that focuses heavily on the abstract, as seen in its three simple lines:

Steel yourself against the rapid fire
Confusion of events that masquerade as life
Bullet holes in time's demented curtain

The poem holds power in its simple message, lending a warning to younger generations about the dangers of life's unpredictability. It is another example of McCartney's ability to explore negative emotions, suggesting a certain bitterness in the theme of "hindsight is 20/20".

Aside from poems, *Blackbird Singing* offers us a glimpse of the broad and brilliant scope of McCartney's songwriting. Seeing the songs written on the page, looking even more like poetry with their strategic line breaks and punctuation, gave me an even greater respect for their artistry, especially "Rocky Raccoon" and "Maxwell's Silver Hammer," both of which contain folk elements of unrequited love and murder. I had not previously considered them among my list of favorites, but seeing them in the collection gave me a refreshing new angle to approach them from. It must be said that, when McCartney was under the influence of the other Beatles, he wrote pieces that were better crafted and, often, on the complicated side of emotion. The pieces included from his solo career are often goofy or light-hearted and repetitive in a way that may work in song, but becomes obnoxious to read on the page, such as the final song "Freedom," which contains the word "freedom" nineteen times (twenty, if you include the title).

The songs in *Blackbird Singing* are what created my biggest struggle when reading the collection as a cohesive unit. As mentioned above, the collection is broken into sections, but those sections contain poems and lyrics side by side, in many cases. I would read a poem and then turn the page to find an old Beatles song; I'd hear the music in my head and be unable to think of the words in any other way than how

they were originally composed. Then I'd turn the page and find myself at another poem, an eerie silence in my head. In this way, the songs stood out because I had different expectations of them—they were meant to be musical, whereas if I were faced with a poem containing musical elements, I'd become quickly annoyed by it. I also felt far more of a connection to the songs because I've grown up hearing them and greatly enjoying them. The poems, at times, fell flat in the face of that nostalgia. At other times, they stood out as impressive examples of McCartney's skill as not just a songwriter, but a poet who can pluck up an ordinary detail and imbue it with new meaning. Overall, the collection showcases some of McCartney's greatest achievements, but also frames his strengths and weaknesses as he transitions from songwriter to poet.

CONTRIBUTOR'S NOTES

Jack Anderson is a poet and dance critic, is the author of ten books of poetry, including his latest, *Getting Lost in a City Like This* (Hanging Loose Press); Hanging Loose will also publish his next volume, *The Dinosaur Problem*, in 2017. His book of prose poems, *Traffic*, won the Marie Alexander Award for prose-poetry. He reviews dance events for *The Dancing Times* of London and gives poetry readings in venues ranging from colleges, churches, and coffeehouses to a Long Island gazebo, a tattoo parlor, and a vintage subway car in a transit museum.

Douglas K Currier is a former college professor who has published in the past in *Laurel Review*, *Dominion Review*, *The Café Review*, *Black River Review*, *Fish Stories*, *Mockingbird*, *Writer-To-Writer*, *Mangrove*, *Lake Region Review*, and *Ibis Review* to name a few. His work appears in the anthology, *Onion River: Six Vermont Poets*. Daniel Lusk, ed. He lives in Winooski, Vermont.

Holly Day has taught writing classes at the Loft Literary Center in Minnesota since 2000. Her published books include *Music Theory for Dummies*, *Music Composition for Dummies*, *Guitar All-in-One for Dummies*, *Piano All-in-One for Dummies*, *Walking Twin Cities*, *Insider's Guide to the Twin Cities*, *Northeast Minneapolis: A History*, and *The Book Of*, while her poetry has recently appeared in *New Ohio Review*, *SLAB*, and *Gargoyle*. Her newest poetry book, *Ugly Girl*, just came out from Shoe Music Press.

Fritz Eifrig lives and works in Chicago and has been writing verse for over 30 years. His poetry has been published by *The Poetry Quarterly*.

Shawna Ervin is a 2017 Pushcart nominee. She is a member of Light-house Writers Workshop in Denver, where she graduated from the Book Project, a two-year intensive mentoring program helping writers generate, craft, and market a book. She is working on a memoir about adopting her two children from South Korea. Recent publications include poetry in *Forge*, and prose in *The Delmarva Review*, *Willow Review*, *Moon City Review*, and *Superstition Review*.

Michael Fessler is an American writer living in Japan.

Dennis Finnell's most recent book of poems is *Ruins Assembling*, winner of the Things to Come Poetry Prize from Shape & Nature Press. His first book, *Red Cottage*, was awarded the Juniper Prize. He makes his home in western Massachusetts.

Willard P. Greenwood II has been editor-in-chief of *The Hiram Poetry Review* since 2001. He teaches English and Writing at Hiram College.

Dan Grote is an incarcerated writer but please don't hold that against him. His work has appeared in *Coal City Review*, *Haight-Ashbury Literary Journal*, *Euphony Journal*, *Conceit*, and *Hippocampus Magazine*. He owes a lot to Gwen Macsai and the crew at "re:sound" and Julie, Beth, and everyone else who volunteers for College Guild (collegeguild.org). Having failed at everything else, he has resolved to become who he was always meant to be.

Jamey Hecht, PhD (English & American Literature, Brandeis U., 1994) is the author of four books: *Plato's Symposium: Eros and the Human Predicament* (Twayne, 1999); a translation, *Sophocles' Three Theban Plays: Antigone, Oedipus the Tyrant, Oedipus at Colonos* (Wordsworth Editions, 2004); Bloom's *How To Write About Homer* (Chelsea, 2010); and *Limousine, Midnight Blue* (Red Hen Press, 2009), a collection of fifty 14-line elegies for President Kennedy. Jamey performs Shakespeare with the L.A. troupe *The Porters of Hellsgate*, and is doctoral candidate at the New Center for Psychoanalysis. He practices as a psychotherapist (LMFT) at The Relational Center in Los Angeles. Hecht's poetry and prose have appeared in journals including *American Short Fiction*; *Tikkun*; *Marsh Hawk Review*; *American Book Review*; *Shofar*; *Isotope*; *Caesura*; *Los Angeles Review*; *Black Warrior Review*; *Rattle*; *Free Inquiry*; *Block*; *Mississippi Review*; *Sycamore Review*; *The Pinch*; *ELH/English Literary History*; *St. Ann's Review*; *The Sixteenth Century Journal*; *Progressive Populist*; *NY Arts Magazine*; *Global Outlook*; and others, and as guest chapters in several scholarly books. See www.jameyhecht.com

Henry Hughes is a professor of literature and writing at Western Oregon University. His latest book is a memoir, *Back Seat with Fish*.

Andrea Jurjević is a native of Croatia. Her poems, as well as her translations of contemporary Croatian poetry, have appeared in *EPOCH*, *TriQuarterly*, *Best New Poets*, the *Missouri Review*, *The Journal*, and *Gulf Coast*, among others. This is her first collection.

Lyn Lifshin Lyn Lifshin has published over 130 books and chapbooks including 3 from Black Sparrow Press: *Cold Comfort*, *Before It's Light* and *Another Woman Who Looks Like Me*. Before Secretariat: *The Red Freak*, *The Miracle*, Lifshin published her prize winning book about the short lived beautiful race horse Ruffian, *The Licorice Daughter: My Year With Ruffian* and *Barbaro: Beyond Brokenness*. Recent books include *Ballroom*, *All the Poets Who Have Touched Me*, *Living and Dead*. *All True*, *Especially The Lies*, *Light At the End: The Jesus Poems*, *Katrina*, *Mirrors*, *Persphone*, *Lost In The Fog*, *Knife Edge & Absinthe: The Tango Poems*. NYQ books

published *A Girl Goes into The Woods*. Also just out: *For the Roses* poems after Joni Mitchell and *Hitchcock Hotel* from Danse Macabre. Secretariat: *The Red Freak*, *The Miracle*. And *Tangled as the Alphabet*-- *The Istanbul Poems* from NightBallet Press just released as well. *Malala*, the dvd of Lyn Lifshin: *Not Made of Glass*. The Marilyn Poems was just released from Rubber Boots Press. An update to her Gale Research Autobiography is out: *Lips, Blues, Blue Lace: On The Outside*. Also just out is a dvd of the documentary film about her: *Lyn Lifshin: Not Made Of Glass*. Just out: *Femme Eterna* and *Moving Through Stained Glass: the Maple Poems*; *Degas Little Dancer* and *Winter Poems* from Kind of a Hurricane Press, *Paintings and Poems*, from Tangerine press (just out) and *The Silk Road* from Night Ballet, *alive-likealoadedgun* from Transcendent Zero Press just Out.
www.lynlifshin.com

Irene Marques is a bilingual writer (English and Portuguese) and currently teaches in the African Studies Program and the Department of English at the University of Toronto. She holds a PhD in Comparative Literature, a Masters in French Literature, a Masters in Comparative Literature and a BA (Hon.) in French Language and Literature all from the University of Toronto, as well as a Bachelor of Social Work from Ryerson University.

Matthew McBride's poetry has appeared in or is forthcoming from *Cream City Review*, *Mississippi Review*, *Ninth Letter*, and *Typo* amongst others. His most recent chapbook, *Cities Lit by the Light Caught in Photographs* was published by H_NGM_N Books in 2012. Currently, he is a lecturer in the Dept. of Rhetoric at the University of Iowa.

Charles Parsons writes in the township of Black Horse, Ohio. He recently had poems in the *Lake Effect* and *Palaver*, and a story he wrote appeared not long ago in the *Chicago Quarterly Review*.

Carlos Reyes, a translator and a poet, lives in Portland, Oregon. He is a traveler and whether he journeys to Alaska, Ecuador, France, India, Ireland, Panama, or Spain, those travels inform his poetry. In September 2015, he was a fellow at Camac Centre d'Arte in Marnay, France. His latest publications are: *Pomegranate, Sister of the Heart* (2012), *Poemas De amor Y Locura/Poems of Love: Madness* (2013). His first prose book, *The Keys to the Cottage, Stories From the West of Ireland*, was published in 2015. *Guilt in Our Pockets: Poems from South India* is forthcoming.

Sara Shearer is a soon-to-be graduate of Hiram College and has served as an editorial assistant of the Hiram Poetry Review since 2015. Her poems have been published in the University of Pittsburgh's *Collision Literary Magazine* and the Columbus College of Art and Design's *Botticelli Magazine*.

Mario Ware was born on May 10th, 1978. The 38 years old author enjoys all aspects of the fun of life. The St. Petersburg, Florida native loves the beaches, deep meditation and Tantric yoga. In addition to his poetry, the author also writes songs and ghosts write lyrics for young entertainers. With an extreme dislike for anything war-like or violent, the illumined author loves peace and tranquility. Serves the Great Mother.

John Sibley Williams is the editor of two Northwest poetry anthologies and the author of nine collections, including *Disinheritance* and *Controlled Hallucinations*. A seven-time Pushcart nominee, John is the winner of numerous awards, including the Philip Booth Award, American Literary Review Poetry Contest, Nancy D. Hargrove Editors' Prize, Confrontation Poetry Prize, and Vallum Award for Poetry. He serves as editor of *The Inflectionist Review* and works as a literary agent. Previous publishing credits include: *The Yale Review*, *Midwest Quarterly*, *Sycamore Review*, *The Massachusetts Review*, *Poet Lore*, *Saranac Review*, *Arts & Letters*, *Columbia Poetry Review*, *Mid-American Review*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Third Coast*, *Baltimore Review*, *RHINO*, and various anthologies. He lives in Portland, Oregon.

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P.O. Box 162
Hiram, OH 44234