

RHUBARB

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The AMERICAN ISSUE

Questions of travel and homecoming

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INSIDE ART

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ERIN COLEMAN-CRUZ (page 32)
KEITH MILLER (pages 34, 35, 38, 40)

Rhubarb

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Artist Statement: *Chris Janzen*

Painting occupies a vital space in my life. Through it, I am able to simultaneously investigate myself and the world around me. I learn about myself by stepping away from the canvas and evaluating what my choice of subject-matter implies. I learn about the surrounding world by keeping my eyes and ears open as often as possible, comparing what I observe to what I paint.

One major inspiration for my work comes from the mass-media advertisements of television, radio, magazines, and the internet. Every day, our capitalist society is flooded with advertisements designed to make us feel empty. Remedies for this emptiness are presented in many forms (including: clothing, hair products, fast food, prescription drugs, and many others) in order to convince consumers that they have not consumed enough.

Rather than duplicate this trend, however, my paintings recycle the subject-matter of advertisements into new visual contexts. Some images are inserted like collages in new arrangements, changed proportionally or chromatically to highlight different areas than the source material. Some are abstracted beyond immediate recognition, emphasizing shape, texture, or color. As a result, my paintings create pictorial spaces which are more accurately reflective of the human experience than the content of capitalist mass-media imagery. Life is complicated, containing multiple moments of both confusion and clarity, both of which are vital elements in my work.

The process used to create each composition is influenced by the creative musical act of jazz improvisation. I apply oil to canvas during time-periods of "performance," like a musician in a recording studio, painting forms according to interests that arise in the moment. Often, the painting starts off with a specific direction, only to lead into visual directions I never considered. Each layer of paint is like another instrument being added to the sound recording, reacting to the colors and shapes like a pianist whose job is to complement an improvising saxophonist.

It is this improvisatory exploration into the unforeseen that continually energizes me about art creation. My work is a reflection of the cluttered commercial landscape that surrounds us, full of excitement, mystery, and confusion.

For more information, please visit www.chrisjanzen.info

Rhubarb is an independent magazine designed to provide an outlet for the (loosely defined) Mennonite voice, reflect the changing face of the Mennonite community, promote dialogue, and encourage the Anabaptist tradition of reformation and protest.

Rhubarb is looking for contemporary art and writing of excellence. Writing should be clear, stimulating and persuasive without being didactic. *Rhubarb* publishes poetry, drama, creative non-fiction and short fiction (generally, 2,000-2,500 words or less), and black and white artwork and high-contrast photographs that reproduce well. *Rhubarb* also publishes humour, book reviews, commentary and articles related to theme.

Send submissions electronically or by surface mail to:

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QUESTIONS OF TRAVEL AND HOMECOMING

By Ann Hostetler
Dresden, Germany,
October 29, 2009

When I accepted the invitation to edit an all-American (USA) issue of *Rhubarb* magazine, I was in the midst of packing up my household in Goshen, Indiana to spend a year abroad with my family. Lines from “Questions of Travel,” by the American poet, Elizabeth Bishop, kept coming to mind:

*Think of the long trip home.
Should we have stayed at home and thought of here?
Where should we be today?*

Although during peaceful times many Mennonites have stayed at home as the “quiet in the land,” they have also been travelers, whether by choice or force of circumstances-- persecution, service, education, a calling as a missionary or artist--or just simple curiosity. North American Mennonites all came as immigrants, but today many of us are prosperous enough to travel the world to visit children in far-off lands, or to make trips for business, study, recreation or pilgrimage. Many Mennonites have a calling to help those in need of material aid or education, or to witness for peace, which takes them to the other side of the globe. The internet has also made it possible to be simultaneously at home and abroad.

My first trip to Europe, back in the early 1970s when I was sixteen, long before the internet made virtual travel possible, honed my sense of home. As I adjusted to life in a gray and rainy autumn in Vienna, Austria—I was overwhelmed by a longing for the intense color of Pennsylvania maples in fall, a desire to hunt down ingredients for such American foods as oatmeal raisin cookies, and a passion for writing letters. Through these letters I came to know my friends in ways I would not have, had I stayed home in Willow Grove, Pennsylvania. Yet the purpose of the trip for my parents was to explore sites of Anabaptist memory—and through their travel itinerary I discovered the strange notion that castles (albeit the dungeons), riverbanks, bridges, and even Czech pottery could provide historic emblems of my cultural past. In addition, I encountered new places I wanted to adopt as artistic homes—Venice, Florence, Rome, Paris, Prague, and the Dürer

Museum in Vienna—whose magical auras I captured as best I could in notebooks through the scrim of my teenage longings.

To focus an “American” issue of a Canadian magazine on questions of “travel and homecoming” runs the risk of exacerbating a sense of American imperialism. Along with the American traveler Ralph Waldo Emerson, today’s American traveler might well say, “I pack my trunk, embrace my friends, embark on the sea and at last wake up in Naples, and there beside me is the stern fact, the sad self, unrelenting, identical, that I fled from My giant goes with me wherever I go.” But if, as Emerson suggests, we take our selves—and our passports—with us when we go abroad, we can also travel inside the mind.

I hope that the thematic focus of this collection of American writing and visual art will tease rigid notions of national boundaries, as well as provincial Mennonite stereotypes, and invite us to consider how art thrives on conversation across borders. As Jeff Gundy said in a recent poetry review in *The Mennonite Quarterly Review*, “To go beyond borders means to cross them, not to obliterate them, after all. In doing so we may meet, befriend and even marry citizens of other nations, without forgetting our homelands or their ways” (Oct. 2009, 659-662). And Jeff should know, not only because he is married to a Canadian, but also because he recently spent a Fulbright semester in Austria, which provided the subject matter for an essay and several poems featured in this issue. Julia Kasdorf, who has recently traveled to Anabaptist sites throughout Europe, reflects on a visit to Bern, Switzerland in the opening poem of this issue, and Katherine Arnoldi reflects on a sabbatical year in Paraguay in the closing essay.

In between readers will visit many places—from the American woods to the ancient world of Arabic poetry—through the words and imaginations of a wide variety of 18 American writers. They will encounter the work of American artists whose images play with the reframing of traditional subjects. The greater part of the submissions I received was in the genres of poetry and creative nonfiction, which is

reflected in the selections here. American Mennonite writers have some distance to go before matching the productivity of Canadian writers in the genre of fiction. Some of the writers in this issue will be familiar to *Rhubarb* readers and some new voices, such as those of Becca J. R. Lachman and Jesse Nathan who are just beginning to publish their work, or of Keith Miller, an American fiction writer and translator who has spent a large part of his life in Africa, will find their place in the conversation.

Perhaps after immersing yourself in these artistic adventures you will be able to frame your own answers to the closing questions of Bishop's poem:

*and then a sudden golden silence
in which the traveller takes a notebook, writes:*

*"Is it lack of imagination that makes us come
to imagined places, not just stay at home?
Or could Pascal have been not entirely right
about just sitting quietly in one's room?"*

*Continent, city, country, society:
the choice is never wide and never free.
And here, or there . . . No. Should we have stayed at home,
wherever that may be?"*

As much as we may be part of a local scene, whether social or literary, our interconnections with other places around the world are inescapable. The world is our home, as long as we are traveling here. Many thanks to *Rhubarb* magazine for extending a hand across the border and asking me to edit this "American" issue. **R**

Return to Bern

By Julia Spicher Kasdorf

Cobblestones slant to the Aare's urgent, green surge
where St. Christopher stood at the gate tower,

shouldering a child over the river, patron of travelers
who meet here, where our forbears were scourged

in that tower, sentenced to row galleys, or marched
to the border and branded with the sign of a bear.

They always returned to their children and cows
in the mountains, declaring The earth is the Lord's,

until at last they were forced from this stone landing
onto boats, some meekly, some boldly demanding whether

they sailed away, captive or free. A Bernese who swallows
a nail will shit a screw, they still say in this place where rain

turned my hair into a coarse mane. How do things change
yet still retain their own natures? When Saint Christopher

planted his staff on the far shore, it rooted and grew into
a beautiful tree. The child clinging to his neck weighed

so much because He already bore the sins of the world.
Here, bears still pace in a stone pit by the river,

morning glories drape sandstone arcades with mantles
of green and heavenly blue. At night, delicate bulbs

illuminate silent street car lines, and lovers drift past
expensive shop windows by a square—can it really be there?—

where our last martyr's head rolled, laughing, into his hat
and sun and water turned red? Yes there, where we spoke

of love, the hardest emotion to know, the sort of thing
one says only to a stranger. And our faces flickered

and shifted under the force of the other's gaze,
the way bodies always move in passion or pain.

Belmullet

By Betsy Sholl

To see where I came from I'm looking at stones,
at the Johns and Marys, the twenty-eight Nearys
in a County Mayo graveyard, each with a pot
of primroses, a plot with white chips of gravel.

If the Irish love talk, my family's silence
seemed to say, Who wants to go back
to rotten potatoes and patched-up boats,
horse thievery and peat? Who needs long roots

and old wars? Those sealed lips clearly said,
Better to shrug it all off, scrap the sod
from your boots and glad hand the new world,
let mild winds drift above gravity's grip.

But what wind doesn't come from elsewhere?
Now that those Nearys are nearly gone,
and there's no one to ask whose history
is swelling my knuckles, crimping my face,

I want to be part of a line tethered somewhere,
if only by sea swell, by gusts I love best
when they batter. So I stand among stones
cut deep with my name, not knowing

if the bones rusting here in this ground
are related. But since my family left
no word, I tell these Nearys, if they'll have me,
I'd be pleased to be ghosted by them

in their wellies and wool, their prayer beads
and pints, their eyes creased by sea glitter
and those minor chords with bent notes
piercing the soul. I'd be pleased

to root myself in this town, where tides rise
and sink into sludge, this river mouth littered
with bike frames, clumps of mussels,
and plastic paint buckets—my roots in this junk

the water will nudge and cover again,
as it pours through the inlet, swirling with foam.
Is this where I come from? I kneel down
to finger those gouged letters and half-think,

half-say to this long line of Marys and Johns,
these twenty-eight Nearys: If we all come
to the same end, surely it's not just malarkey
and lark song spiraling up, then plummeting
silently down, surely, by sun glint and gull,
by that long-ago swallowed sadness,
by sea gut and gravel and the wind-wild sky,
these stones that name you name me as well.

Alms

By Betsy Sholl

Small as a fly bump, the little voice
behind me calling Miss, Miss, wanted
a dollar, maybe for food as she said

in that voice of mist, so plaintive
and soft it could have come from inside
my own head, just a notch above whisper.

Voice of pocket line, frayed buttonhole,
voice of God going gnat small, humming
over ear hairs, so I shivered and stopped.

Something that small, quiet as fireflies
wafting through church one summer night,
entered the ear of our county's meanest

landlady, who walked up to the altar
and upended her purse, shaking out rent checks,
eviction notices, big wads of cash,

then sat down in the aisle and laughed,
waving off the well-dressed man who tried
to stuff those debts back in her bag.

Miss—I heard it again, so light it wobbled
on air, up from a bare trash-filled recess
beside the post office steps.

I gave the dollar. But I had seven
in my wallet, so clearly the voice wasn't
small enough, was still someone else's

easy to shut out, since after all Miss
isn't my name. But later that night,
in bed, I heard it again, smaller—

miss, miss—little fly strafe troubling sleep,
not a name at all, but a failure, a lack,
a lost chance.

Immigrant

By Juanita Brunk

I left. I wanted to find a new way to live, a better way, for me, and for him, and for our son, and so I crossed a river and I waited for him to follow. I crossed a river and I waited for him to come, but he didn't. He never came. After awhile I heard that he had started a whole new family. I got word that my father had died, and then my mother. I would never be able to hold her body close to me again, small and soft as a bird's.

I had crossed a river and I could never go back. The land was vast and empty and there were no people anywhere. It was different from any place I had ever been. There was only sand for miles and miles with nothing green or growing. There were piles of jagged rocks jutting out of the sand, some of them as high as full-grown trees. But they were only rocks.

The days were the worst, when the sun beat down with an unforgiving light.

In the beginning, when I still had hope of his coming, I imagined that there might be a new way of living in this country. I thought that when he came we would discover things together, important things, that we hadn't figured out before. Later, when I saw that he wasn't coming, that he would never come, I didn't know how I was going to survive. I didn't know how I could stay alive in such a place, or endure such loneliness.

I didn't know how I could survive here, or if I wanted to. But I could not go back, you see. I could never go back.

Eventually I found myself living in a city just like the one I had left behind. There were shops for things like handbags and furniture. There were sidewalks, and streets, and people eating outside on summer evenings. There was the tinkling of cutlery and the murmuring of voices. There were taxicabs, and glasses of wine glowing in the late afternoon sun, a deep translucent red.

My house is a mirror image of the one I left so long ago. There is a room where I sleep, the same size and shape as the old one. There is a garden in the back. Mornings, I sit in the garden and drink my coffee from a white cup that looks exactly like one I used to have. Even the neighbors look the same.

But I am a stranger, in a dream that doesn't end.

Climbing the Mountain to See Mountains

By Jeff Gundy

Here in Salzburg there are mountains in every direction, and behind the mountains are bigger mountains, but you can see them only by going up a mountain. The green, rounded Gaisberg, almost 1300 meters tall, is nearly on our doorstep, and my wife Marlyce and I contemplated it almost every day—until one sunny April Sunday, two months into our stay, when we abruptly decided that it was time to climb it. We filled some water bottles, layered our clothes, and set off from our apartment along the streets that lead to its lower slopes.

We were not sure of the best route, but we could see the top, and this is Austria, we said, the trails will be marked. They were, sort of—only once, when we decided to take a rugged, direct trail rather than going around on one of the little paved roads, did we end up bushwhacking our way up a steep slope for a few hundred yards before we came out to another road. Mostly, to climb a mountain like this you just keep going up, and mainly it takes persistence, frequent pauses, and sturdy walking sticks we picked up along the way, though I tried three before finding a good one. We panted a good deal, and stopped to rest a lot, but we kept pushing on.

Just above the hotel and restaurant called Zistellalm, not too far from the top, an old couple coming down stopped to make fun of our sticks—everybody here carries slick aluminum things like ski poles—but then spoke cheerfully *auf Deutsch* of the *schönes Tag* and the *schöne Bergen*, and by the time the woman was done spreading her arms to the glories of the day and the mountains and the man had warned us it was still a good piece, forty-five minutes, we knew we'd make it. Of course many people were zooming past us in cars or on bikes (barely faster than us up, as fast as the cars going down), entirely unconcerned about walking sticks or the state of their shoes or the feet inside them.

Weary as we were, reaching the top revived us, as it does everyone who makes it to the top of a mountain, even a small one like the Gaisberg. It's less than spectacular in itself: a rounded, gravelly ex-

panse, with two restaurants, various monuments and shrines, a place where the hang gliders can launch, the emblematic radio tower that can be seen from every part of the city below. It's the views that make it: to the south the whole twenty-mile massif of the Untersberg, stretching into Germany, and many other mountains we could not name. To the north the scene was less dramatic but almost as beautiful, foothills and broad valleys with houses and farms sprinkled across them, the visible presence of an old culture that had achieved considerable harmony—at least aesthetic harmony—with its landscape.

For the first time since we'd come to Austria, the country had recently been in the international news. In a small town on the train route from Salzburg to Vienna, a man had locked his own daughter in the basement twenty-four years ago, raped her repeatedly, and made her bear him seven children. He brought three of them upstairs to be raised by his wife, who seems never to have figured all this out. And somehow I found it easier to believe that a randomly horrible man would do such a thing, than that he managed to pull it off for so long. When did he shop, for God's sake? Didn't his wife wonder where he was all the time? Did he say "I'll be in the dungeon, honey, call me on the cell"?

But what do I know. I'm the guy who thought for years that pretty women had it easy. How do we keep track?

I thought about this disjunction as we climbed up the mountain, but I will admit that mostly I thought about the glorious scenery, the burning in my lungs, and how far it was to the top. I know that I spent less time thinking about the horrifying behavior of the man from Amstetten than about whether we should try to get the bus from the top and skip the walk down. We tried to ask about where to catch the bus and when it ran, but the server in the restaurant on top seemed impervious to all language, including "Bus," though that word is emblazoned on the side of the buses, and we said it every way we could think

of. At last we muttered *Danke* in disgust and went to the other restaurant, where we ate pretty good bratwurst with potatoes and sauerkraut and beer, too cowed even to ask about the bus. Five minutes down the trail we saw it roar by up the road, and ten minutes later it roared back on the way down.

Still, we were OK—the food revived us, and going down is almost easy, except on the knees and quads. We filled up our water bottles at Zistelalm and took the long, easy way along the narrow little blacktops that connect the quaint hillside dairy farms. Near the bottom we ducked down the path along the brook, crossed the new little footbridge, and by dusk we were snug and safe and smug in our living room, checking the email and downloading the day's photos of the mountains.

No one we know has locked anyone up, so far as we know. We could see for miles from the top, but only some things. What happened inside all those houses strewn so picturesquely across the landscape was hidden from us. What we saw was glorious, grand enough to make anyone with an ounce of sense or sensitivity fling arms wide in praise, but it did not help anyone escape, or come home, or set

anyone free from a windowless basement room. We ate a little, mostly feeling weary and satisfied that our middle-aged bodies had carried us up and back down again.

Our upstairs neighbor, an eccentric woman we have only glimpsed briefly once or twice in the months we have been here, poured water over the edge of her balcony, onto our balcony, just after dark. She does it every night, for reasons no one can explain; we have talked about her many times with our landlords, who live next door, and the state is aware that she needs help, but it all takes time, and in the meantime she keeps pouring water from her windows, sometimes three or four times a night. Is she trying to cleanse something? To offer some kind of sacrifice? It is always clean water. We speculate about her a lot, talk about ways we might get her to stop. We have tried crying out in objection, but that seems to have no effect. Between times we forget, and then are startled again when the next splash begins, a minor but unsettling intrusion into our quiet evenings. There seems nothing we can do for her. We look at each other, shake our heads, and take another drink. **R**

Corpus Christi

May 22, Salzburg

By Jeff Gundy

1.
It's quiet here in the Aigner Au, where I ran along the river, through the woods, stopped to sweat and cool on a bench.

No rain, but gray all day. How can I celebrate such a holiday, at odds with my whole anti-sacramental tradition?

I woke this morning to the bathroom sink suddenly leaking everything it took in, like an incontinent elder.

Then I sat around for hours, thinking it was Ascension Day. But now the bikers and walkers and runners pass me by.

The birds seem willing to praise. A Salzburg matron in black dress, gloves, and boots looks sideways at me.

The river is green and strong and steady.

2.
There is a language for this world, but it is so difficult that even the birds and the river speak only local dialects.

They barely understand each other. Neither remembers how to say this is my body to the trees, but since the spirit

came down the words are just dressing anyway. Jesus went up alone and splendid, all at once,

but we keep walking the curving earth, millions and billions of paces. Sometimes I look for him,

sideways or straight ahead. Sometimes I just breathe hard and set the feet down, swing the arms, keep on the way.

The Eight Sounds

By Jeff Gundy

1.

A heavy door with a round metal seal attached, me on the other side
in the easy dark. I drove a few hours, took a room in another house,

took a few steps out. Left and right, two frogs--not contending,
just singing, and women laughing & cleaning in the kitchen.

There are eight sounds, the monks told us last week. They are hard
to name in your language, but they include frogs, wind, hands clapping.

If I could learn to paint with sand, tip it carefully through the bronze
cones bit by bit, I'd be thankful, but would I be happier, or closer

to abandoning desire? After the monks spoke I went home, tuned up
the 12 string and played "Water of Love" twice. It felt so good I did

"Peggy-O" and "Satisfied Mind" to boot. Nobody heard me, and
I put the guitar away and made supper, but maybe you can catch

an echo, deep in the ground, carry that water of love to you.

2.

"Seven Bridges Road" and "She Loves You" revolve in my head
as I walk the quarry floor--jumbled stone, straggly firs, rubble.

Interior music is one sound, a well of nervous joy, enemy
of contemplation. I slept well in a bumpy sort of way, kept waking

to find that the arm I wasn't sleeping on had lost all feeling. Fallen
asleep, we say--a phrase both true and wrong. Like an old quarry

with a shallow new lake at one end. Like a monkey mind chattering
and romping among the wrecked rocks, catching on wind in leaves,

traffic, crows, startling, gaping, losing itself moment by moment.

3.

I believe in the good life, or at least my right to name its attributes:
today it starts with open water and sunshine, with petroleum

and late capitalism. The goldenrod sways with the butterfly's landing.
A small plane flies right overhead. In my dream the border agent

was grilling my Canadian wife: did you even get a degree?
what have you made of your life? The fourth sound means

one thing but holds something else, as when X said
Steak and eggs, please and meant Only those who take Jesus

as their personal savior, as when Y says Of course I understand
instead of Eternity is not long enough for you to suffer.

4.

The fifth sound is the monks rubbing the ridges of one sand cone
with another, sending a thin stream of color from the fine tip

to the surface. They lean close. I am allowed to do the grass, which is green
and smooth, explains the monk with good English: it is easiest, but still

very difficult. The largest sand mandala took 26 days to make. It was
swept up quickly: impermanence is essential. There is a photo, which

the monk with good English shows us, but it is impermanent too.

5.

The sixth and seventh sounds, I think, can only be explained
in a lost Tibetan dialect, and the eighth has never been named,

though the monks have argued it for years in the courtyard,
staying up past two though they must rise at five for prayers.

6.

The monk said: twenty years sleeping, twenty years working,
ten cooking and eating, five in the car, and your life is gone.

He didn't even mention football, surfing the web, changing oil,
or making love. He didn't mention walking the North Shore Trail

alone, contemplating Lake Erie from a solitary rock, waves thumping
gently. The black arrow of a cormorant, two feet above the water.

In the mornings we study and memorize, said the monk,
in the afternoon we read and argue. Maybe in twenty years

we are ready to teach. Another cormorant still faster, still lower.

7.

The small waves murmur against the rocks. They have been arguing
almost forever, and love the quarrel more than anything.

I don't much like to argue. I have excellent boots and a fair sense
of balance. I intend to return and tell the tale. I mean to keep God

out of it for now. The little islands hold up their trees and houses,
alone together in the sunshine. Everything I need for now fits

in my pockets, and my hands are still free. The seagulls rest on the waves, fly when they please. Above, a great stretch of sky,

a scrim of cloud, then not much for a very long way.

8.

All eight sounds carry near the earth. The last sound carries everywhere. Choose any path, keep going. There will be a star.

SLEEPING IN THE CELLAR

By Jean Janzen

I am inside Mother Earth in this northern midsummer, shivering under wool blankets, wearing two sweaters over my pajamas. This is Saskatchewan in July. I'm almost fifty, and have returned after forty years to the place of my birth. Cousin Susie has offered me a guest bed in the basement of her house.

My mother will sleep upstairs where she and Susie are sharing memories of playing with cousins on summer evenings—homemade ice cream, the chunks of ice stored in a dry well on Uncle John's farm. The light still lingers in late evening, cream fresh from the cows, my six brothers and sisters take turns churning the ice cream maker. This fertile farmland to which my Grandfather Schultz brought his entire family—seven sons and three daughters—in 1902 is the place of our family reunion. This land where some of my ancestors are buried. Do their bodies ever thaw after the long winters, I wonder.

My earliest memory is about warmth. I am sitting in my older sister's lap, and we are rocking close to the wood cookstove. My mother is frying potatoes. Nine of us in a small teacherage, which we later find preserved and moved from the country to the little town of Langham. But it is the cold that dominates—the tubs of piled-high snow dumped into a black hole under the porch floor for household water. The window my mother melts out of ice with a flatiron so that I can watch the school kids circle on the skating rink, my father joining them. My baby brother's small coffin which my older brothers carry over the late April snows. The covered sled rides with the neighbors, horses pulling us to church over

drifts, a small stove jiggling, heavy wool blankets to our chins.

Here I am, underground, remembering. Or am I rehearsing for burial under this ceiling, floorboards creaking above me as the two older women reminisce and walk about? Tree roots drink around me, aspen, willows, the tunnels of moles. I could stay awhile, open a jar of applesauce or beans, be nourished by Susie's canning labors stored in the next room. Potatoes from last September's dig. Enough blankets to see me through another winter. Insulated from my duties of wife, mother, volunteer, I could hibernate in the dark.

What lies buried here, however, wants to rise, to live. Fertility of the subconscious waits. Teilhard de Chardin writes that the whole earth is lit from within. I am, after all, sleeping closer to the original fire of this planet, the magma below, here where no volcanoes have erupted in recent millennia. Here where language waits, even first memories of arms, rocking chair, stove moving the imagination toward meaning, toward trust. Someone hearing me when I cry out to be held.

My baby brother Stanley who lived only twelve days lies nearby in the local cemetery, his grave unmarked. I want to buy a marker for him, for his name, the same cemetery where Great Grandfather Klassen lies, the one who buried his sister en route from Prussia to Ukraine almost two hundred years ago. His daughter, Anna, my grandmother, lies nearby beside her husband Peter Schultz. Grandfather Peter, farmer/pastor whose pulpit I stood behind for

a photo, his Bible in my hands, the one he took with him on his visitation rounds. He would interrupt the farmer's plowing, suggest that they let the horses rest as they sat down together to read the ancient poems: "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the earth proclaims his handiwork," lifting their weariness into the lightness of immensity.

Handiwork around me now, intricacies of roots and animals in a rich embroidery. Will I awaken in time to see the aurora borealis? Not until harvest, Susie says. But she is wrong this time. I sleep through a fine display, stay grounded in earthly dreams in language which seeks the rhythm of seasons and fertility. Here my father stepped off the train from Quebec, a fifteen-year-old orphan, walked across a

field to his older brother. His passport is in Russian, his spoken language a Dutch dialect. He will labor on the Buhler family farm near here, to pay back his ship fare. He will study Chaucer, become a teacher. He will marry the darling of the village. After six children, my mother will ask the doctor for birth control advice, and he will answer that he cannot give it; he is Catholic.

I, the seventh child, will visit Rome. I will see where the martyr, St. Peter, is buried, and hear the stories of Christians hiding in cellars and caves. I will see the words on the walls, symbols becoming words, becoming life. My name is Jean, feminine for John, meaning grace of God. I am walking upstairs. I embrace my mother. **R**

Three poems

By Jean Janzen

That Deep Tone

Imagine them tangled in embrace,
our parents, and the ones before—
the fevered rush, the letting go,
as though they gave us up to chance.
What order in that path of cells
when all began in nonchalance—
a brush of lips, ignited, flared
into crescendo, and then they slept.

And here we are, unplanned or planned,
a harmony of heartbeats pulsing now
within us from a thousand hands.
We are a miracle of touches, that deep tone
which thrums us toward the other,
that pulses under all, and sings us home.

Never Say No

My mother's only marriage advice,
Never say no, adding, Comb
your hair, and wear a clean apron.

Only an apron! he exclaimed,
leading me back to bed. This
after years of say no, say no,

what I repeated to my children,
waiting for the late click of the door,
waiting for the vow before

the sudden flood of yes, yes.
My mother turns in her bed.
Ninety-five years and she
gazes past me. Yes.

Rempel Electric

The brand was Hotpoint, rows
of appliances in white silence
as customers were bound
to ripened wheat fields.

Among stoves and washers
I kept the store, still as a cemetery
except the sound of my hand
turning another page

in the Christian romance novel—
man meets woman, plugged in
and ready in July 1951.
No touching, the book said.

Temperature control at harvest-time,
deep-freezers waiting for purchase,
their lids raised above the shining
vault, ready for cuts of prime rib

and breast of chicken. Hopeful
bride-to-be waiting for field
work to end, so that customers
would walk in to examine

the clean, empty refrigerators,
and I could say, "fill," "preserve,"
"defrost," as I stroked the smooth
lines, as I opened the door.

Last Mile

By Kirsten Beachy

The last mile before you get home is the hardest.

You've been quiet for half the afternoon, paddling, saving up the words, watching him in front of you, his arms bending to the steady motion. It's as you suspected all week through a succession of dismal canoe partners—ploughers and splashers and speeders: you two are perfect together. You intuit each other's rhythms, slicing through the water as smoothly as that trout he released from the rock shore at last night's campsite. Together, you watched the water where the trout dissolved from sight, stood a moment too long before you turned back to the group by the fire.

In that last mile, you resent the pace Twila and Rory are setting in their canoe, wishing for the right words to come before you reach the take-out point and the trip is over. But Twila's been talking about hot showers since Tuesday so up ahead they're whacking their gunwales with hasty strokes. The other couples are closing in behind.

His hands are enormous, almost too big for the paddle grip. You've watched his hands all week, patting bannock to fry over the fire, straining to raise the bear bags out of reach, presenting you with a half-dozen tiny blueberries. He held that extra trout so gently as he eased the hook from its lip, cradled it almost, the way he holds his baby girl at church.

By the fire last night, you caught him watching your hands, too, shredding that bit of birch bark into a pile of fiber, left hand naked without the gold band. You stashed your ring in the salvage drawer at

home so it wouldn't get lost in the lakes. It's waiting behind the straightened twist-ties.

Some moments, you're sure he feels a magnetism, too. Others times, you figure it's your own chemical cocktail, has nothing to do with him. From your perch in the stern of the canoe, you try to find a way to ask, in code, so that he can answer, in code, without changing anything.

This is how it's been all week: the two of you zipped into your solo tents while the couples murmured together behind canvas. You reserved your spots for the couples' small group trip last year, before his Laura's cancer and your dad-in-law's run of bad luck on the farm. Your husband's trying to help salvage the harvest. Laura, a few months free of chemotherapy, decided to visit her sister, insisted he come anyhow since he loves the lakes.

Ahead, Twila whoops. One more bend and this trip is over. There's nothing to say.

You hope that somehow he knows you love him for the way he holds his child, the strength he gives Laura, that you love his little family as inextricable from himself.

"Look," he says, pointing with his paddle. "Ducklings." A merganser shelters her babies in the reeds. Twila and Rory splashed past without noticing.

He turns to catch your smile.

"Beautiful," you whisper, but you barely see the duck.

His gaze slips over you, then past, like a fish returning to deep water. **R**

The **M**ennonite **L**iterary **S**ociety declares:

YOU ARE A MENNONITE IF...

...YOU THINK YOU ARE

...YOU WANT TO BE

...YOUR FRIENDS THINK YOU ARE, EVEN IF YOU DON'T

...YOU'RE FIGHTING IT TOOTH-AND-NAIL, BUT CAN'T QUITE SHAKE IT

IF THIS MEANS YOU, PLEASE SEND RHUBARB YOUR WORK. THANK YOU.

See *Submissions* (p. 2) and *Coming Up* (p. 47) for what's new in **Rhubarb**.

Three poems

By Nathan Bartel

Leagues

Dissoluded, we, we gathering
in the backwater whatnots,
eddies &
catches & snags, meeting
each other & the waters

at the groin, it's plain: everyone everywhere's
getting saved all the time,

& how growing green & clear the pool
at once becomes

once the wind has quieted.
Exclamations taper like the usefulness
of the washboard.
An extended pause
suffocates the city.
These houses

open themselves
to our scrutiny,

they assume modern postures,
standing on one foot in the shower.
This is the purity we've
been working for.
Here is the late morning
& here is the watery
rock, & here are our oaks.

Here, sun. Here is a righteous
stem-ridden tomato,
here on our soaking settees,
the inland sea otters.

But do I swallow this ink?
If one, one artist, gathers all
the just together & death
dies easily, like a wren

gasping beneath the bay window,
what then? Are you fireman or father?
Because you can't be both.

Our proximity to each other &
to the water & other matters,

volunteers in heroic postures,
backlit by falsified suns—

whatever cleverness was here
has run
in streams down the nature trail
sidewalk separator troughs

& out into the mangrove grove,

& out into the estuary.

Now the waterfowl wear boots
made of their own skins.

[Untitled]

Where is the psalm of shine
For I lay waste
to the wilderness shards. For I am bound
& intimate
with my family the Field
Father shrugs toward the ocean
He wants to burden only a small plot in the waves
& he wants to be alone with his thoughts
He is a natural auger
he moves & encourages me every day
Having fashioned a vessel
worthy of our future, though small
I am directed, my feet
like tines divide
Let's float mutually
My desire has no weight
but does induce direction
psalm of trepidation, & finding you
is half the slaughter

Paths

No bird I know has ever been alone.
Repugnant by themselves, & together, woven by
an invisible cicatrix of nerve—together, together—
they cause a natural brain,
which we do not understand.

The hive they make is terrible.
It requires a sustained spangling attention
to comprehend, eyes, a network,
& a fanatic's eternal bullet.
From whence comes their command

to turn? They turn & do not forget
what occurs when they tell their feet
to ground. Automatic & glistening &
not evil, they practice permissible violence.
Their shadows

making lanes across ours are swaths we cling to
& are forgiven for our need.
& the cries that come—from shearing
air or mulching, tangibly, mindless,
paths where we walk—

split an alien register.
Ghost-tongues & essays of flame...
& in its speech, what did the paraffin-colored pupae
tell us? Its world differed only in immediacy:
rot: nothing soaks like rot.

& you haven't seen orange
until you've seen it in the dark.

Cosmonaut Girl Lost in Space

By Linda Wendling

I have a little mole by my knee shaped like the state of West Virginia, a place I have never been. When I was ten years old I sneaked out of a dark, empty house late one night to sit on a curb, outside the Bowl-A-Rama in Cheyenne, Wyoming, and traced my finger around the little map of West Virginia and made myself this promise (I spoke it out loud): "All your life, wherever you go, this little map of West Virginia will always be with you. It will never leave you."

Of course, I did not take into account the possibility of an amputation.

The point is I was establishing a small private universe to pull into, to wrap up in for protection like some sort of ultimate fleece blanket: a solid because tiny, because portable, universe of my own establishing.

It's still there. My knee, having evolved over the past four decades, is not of precisely the same shape (or size), so West Virginia has shifted east a bit. But she's still there, a smooth pale brown promise winking up

at me, saying, "I'll be here as long as you are."

(Again, we two discount the prospect of amputation.)

When we were twenty-three, my husband Ken and I slept near the rim of Mount Bromo, an active volcano in Java. We planned to wake up and climb the rest of the way to the top at 3 a.m., the perfect time to peer over the rim to glimpse the seething lava through all that steam. The Shinto priests still sacrificed goats every year to Bromo, but we had been promised that this was not the time of year for that. We woke in the dark, rolled up our sleeping bags and began the tricky journey the rest of the way up the volcano, two sixties kids fumbling along in the dark.

"Follow the iridescent white rocks the priests have laid to the precipice," were our instructions. This was not a courtesy; these rocks were necessary. The resident steam and fog that filled our noses and mouths also

filled our vision, making it easy for the hapless hiker to step one way too far and slip over the edge, plummeting who knows how far.

As we walked in the dead silence, it was beautiful, but the steam and smoke were thick enough that we needed our flashlight to find each next white rock, to keep us on the path.

We had not gone very far when a man in a long wool blanket, a sort-of poncho, stepped out of the clouds and appeared all of a sudden beside us.

“Bromo?” he said. He pointed to himself.

“No thank you,” Ken said. “We’ll just follow the rocks.”

The man shook his head no and pointed to himself again. He stepped up closer, towering over us, determined to be our guide. I stepped back behind Ken. It was too dark to see the man’s face, but he smelled distinctly as if he had been smoking something he shouldn’t have.

It took some doing, but we finally convinced him that we did not want or need a guide. Our research had told us the rocks were all that we needed and that because—at that time—tourists were scarce, the guides were a mixed lot, and some of them could be pretty unscrupulous.

Fortunately, the guide faded away into the clouds, or smoke, or steam—whatever this volcanic air around us was made up of—and we were once again fumbling away in the dark, following the white stones which would lead us to the sacrificial rim.

Then, in quick succession, two things happened: first, the white rocks came to a dead-end. They just stopped. We whipped the flashlight around us and saw just a few dark impressions in the soil—enough that there could be no doubt: someone had moved the rocks and they ended here on an isolated slope, and worse still, they had led us *away from the rim*. We were alone and unsure where to go.

And then came the second disaster: suddenly our flashlight went out.

Now it was unwise to move. Unpredictable drop-offs were tucked in and hidden all around us.

We stood still and silent for a moment in all that darkness, knowing two things only: *one*, someone had deliberately moved the rocks, no doubt while we were sleeping; and *two*, we were in the dark and should not move for fear of falling over an edge.

And all of a sudden I could smell that smoky blanket of our unwanted friend, emerging again from his place in the fog, approaching me from behind.

* * *

I should explain about the map on my knee.

It has everything in the world to do with the Soviet cosmonaut who was rumored to have drifted off orbit, some nice man, his hands on his knees in a little capsule, who floated off out of Earth’s reach, turning over and over slowly, as we became a tiny dot out his window and ice formed forever on the rim of his lip.

This news—or Cold War rumor of news—was bad enough (the pictures it made in all our ten-year-old heads that year!). And then a closer disaster struck, and I wondered if gravity meant anything at all anymore: my mother died. And that map on my knee? I made a pact with it, designated it as the thing I could rely on.

This was in the sixties before Kubler-Ross and her friends told us how we can help children who grieve. But at that time, no one knew anything about that, and it was deemed best by well-meaning relatives and friends that I should eat their macaroni casseroles, the lemon chiffon funereal pies, and promise not to talk about my mother.

They were not being cold. This was Wyoming, and we were Danes. This was the modern solution to such a stark, stripped-naked fact as a motherless ten-year-old.

But every disaster brings its own adventures. Mine was independence at ten—not all bad. We lived, after all, just a block from the magical Bowl-A-Rama, a place that smelled enchantingly of hamburgers, cigarettes, beer, and feet. It sounded like thunder and pinball machines. Like I said, magic.

My dad worked days as a sheet metal worker, then taught the same thing at night. He was already gone when I woke up in the morning, and I was expected to have been long asleep by the time he got back. It was up to me to get up in the mornings, get to school, come home, do my homework, eat supper at my aunt’s house, and go to bed—sometimes at her house, and sometimes at mine. On the nights I was home alone, I could walk to the Bowl-A-Rama after my bedtime, and buy a coke and chips and if an employee looked at me sideways, I could sidle up beside a group of bowlers, cheer at no one in particular, and everyone thought I was someone else’s kid.

Someone else’s kid. I thought this was pretty funny, me pulling the wool over everyone’s eyes, till I stopped and thought about it. Then I felt for the first time an open window that is always looking out over fields of potential starry, moonless loneliness that I’m not sure has ever successfully left me.

So one night I went outside and sat down on the still-warm pavement under the Bowl-A-Rama’s blink-

ing neon martini and looked at the sky and blinked. I didn't cry. I'd been trained out of that, but I felt keenly how easy it is for people to just become unanchored in this world.

To float out there somewhere and not be seen again.

Like the unnamed Cosmonaut, any one of us could career wildly off course, just be cut loose, untethered, and float off frozen, lost in space forever among the stars.

I looked at the sky. I shuddered to think of him, this unnamed, once-loved family man now floating forever, his frozen icicle hands rolling over and over, somersaulting in a capsule alone up there, his frozen eyes and mouth open to cheer at no one in particular, forever.

Such things could happen.

Men could be lost in space, waving back at the rest of us for eternity.

Mothers could die, little girls be cut loose.

Anything, everything was possible.

I looked up at the crisp cold stars and could not breathe. I gripped the curb beneath me to try to find an anchor in case I too should suddenly go spinning out of earth's orbit.

And then I saw the map of West Virginia on my knee.

What a relief.

Yes!

Here was my anchor. I sprinkled the soft dry dirt over my knee. I see now this was a sort of baptism. And then I made myself that promise: an oversized freckle on a girl's knee is in her very skin. So it should be something she can count on staying with her forever.

Right?

A map in a girl's own skin. She should never be lost again.

Right?

But outside of that, nothing changed. We all spoke as if she had never existed. And if she didn't, what of me, her girl?

I looked up at the stars again.

The cosmonaut and me with no home to go to.

We develop other homes, other maps like West Virginia. The curve of my husband's shoulder, the place on his chest where I lay my cheek, just below the clavicle, that solid, rounded, hard muscle that smells for some reason like sage or fresh thyme—this, I have claimed as my home. The laughing eyes of my oldest daughter, the snorting laugh of the younger one, my son's warm

voice and deep, kind eyes—I am no fool. These are my home. These are the maps, the markers, the tethers that keep you from drifting off out of orbit, the white rocks on your private volcano to tell you, "Yes, you are home. You are not quite floundering alone in outer space. You are not quite a stranded cosmonaut just yet, rounding the farthest corner of Andromeda. Here is your tether. Your guide. Your home.

When I was thirty-seven, my father brought me a green shoebox full of old photos. In among them was a small, flimsy, almost cardboardy phonograph record, something disposable out of the forties.

"What's this?" I said.

He shrugged. "It's nothing now," he said.

My silent smile was insistent.

He grew quiet. "When I was in New Guinea in World War II, your mom made a recording of her voice, reading her latest letter from home. She sat in this little booth. A lot of the GI's wives did that then, and someone recorded her reading her letter onto a little phonograph record. She sent it to me and I took it to the USO and they played it for me. It's just a letter from home."

Just a letter from home!

I tried to keep my breathing normal.

"So," I said, fighting to keep my voice even, my nostrils from flaring. "Can I hear it?"

He shook his head. "It's just a cheap disposable thing, honey. And it was made in the forties."

"And?"

"So it doesn't work anymore." His voice irritated now. "It's gone all to scratches. That's it."

We ate French toast before he left, and he stood and made sure I scrubbed the pan before I could wipe my hands and hug him good-bye. Everything in order. Affection after. We are forever Wyoming Danes. We hugged good-bye, he got in his pickup, and I waved as he headed back to Texas.

Then, my husband at work, all three kids in school, I couldn't resist.

For reasons I still can't explain, I tiptoed to the shoebox. (Why did I tiptoe?) I lifted the flimsy record out from among the curving black-and-white snapshots and carried it gently to the stereo. I looked around once. The cat was watching, but she didn't look like she objected. I smiled like we were doing something we shouldn't, and I gently placed the needle on the little 78.

I crouched on the living room floor beside the speaker.

Dad was right.

Static.

Only static.

But then—what was that?

A soft ghost-like murmur behind the scratches.

I turned up the stereo and lay back on the floor again, ear up to the speaker now.

There it was: lilting voice, that gentle hint of a laugh rising up behind it.

It was my mother, floating back to me, her voice like a cosmonaut returned, pulled back into orbit to laugh in my ear. Her actual voice at twenty-three.

I was *home*.

Beneath the scratches, too buried to hear what she said, it didn't matter. It was her voice. The words were nothing; it was that musical lilt, her presence, here in the room with me, across a distance of thirty-some years.

I was home. I cried. I smiled and I cried.

Home.

Home.

I didn't touch it, left it right where it was, but I turned off the record player, keeping it cooled.

What a miracle. Lost to my father, my mother's voice had come back just for me.

I stood and covered my mouth.

I didn't dare move.

I would wait till after supper, then tell my family.

The night we got lost on Mount Bromo, we didn't dare move, no stars could come out to guide our steps; not even the moon could penetrate all the foggy air we were lost in. We just stood still.

That old Cosmonaut-Lost-in-Space feeling hit me again.

But there was something more.

More than just situational fear, this was something bigger. It was that same, moonless Wyoming loneliness, a being cut off from the universe, out of my little world's orbit, lost in space in Java. It was the idea that should we fall from this place, no one who loved us could ever find us again.

As we stood, puzzling where to step to avoid plummeting over an edge, all of a sudden I could smell that smoky blanket of our unwanted friend, the strange man emerging again from his place in the fog, approaching from behind.

"Bromo?" he said, his question endlessly patient.

Of course he is patient, I thought, fury growing within me. *Of course. He knows we are his captives now.*

He has known it all along. I felt utter contempt, and not a little distrust.

And of course, he led us with impeccable skill up to the rim of Mount Bromo. On the way up to the top, I gripped Ken's arm and whispered, furious, "I'll just bet you he's the one that moved the rocks! What a mean little trick!" We arrived just in time to peer over the edge to glimpse beneath the steam the smallest glow of molten lava, very far away.

We paid him, of course. And as a Dutch couple arrived with their guide and sat down together some distance away, the sun began to rise and the steam to burn off, and we sat down too, our arms around each other. As the cloud that had enwrapped us was burnt off by the rising sun, we looked up to see for the first time on that mountaintop—stars. Already fading in the rising sun, it comforted me to remember they had been there all along.

Later I was telling the other couple how the stones had been moved. I don't remember anymore whether I went so far as to accuse our guide of doing it—though I might have. I had certainly hissed it to Ken.

"Yes," they said, "the Shinto priests had to move the rocks to the prayer circle off over there," they said, pointing. "A funeral."

Apparently, Ken and I had missed the memo. But our long-suffering guide had known he'd be needed, long before we knew we needed him.

We had never really been lost at all, in danger of falling out of orbit, lost forever in Java. The one I had thought was my enemy was there to save me, waiting patiently for me to see him and to follow.

The night my father left me that little 78 rpm record of my mother's voice, I set it carefully aside, breathless at the miracle. I made chocolate chip cookies to keep myself busy, keep my hands off that record till my family came home. I waited until we were all at the supper table, then I told them what I'd heard. My mother's voice across the decades, shooting across the threshold between here-and-not-here.

They all stood up. We left our plates with their remnants of meat loaf and corn and pears and filed into the living room.

I put on the record.

Nothing. Just scratches. We played it all the way through.

"You have to press your ear to the speaker, like this," I said.

They all four crouched and pressed ears to each of the two speakers.

We played it all the way through.

Nothing.

"I think if we lie on our sides...." I said.

We lay on our sides.

We lay on our backs.

The cat looked sagely in at the window.

But my mother was gone. There was only the static.

Upstairs, I drew a deep purple bubble bath and traced my West Virginia and had a good, hard, silent cry. Ridiculous. Ridiculous. Hadn't it been a great gift that the record, by some miracle, had worked one more time? Shouldn't something that amazing be enough?

When I emerged, all pruny, Ken had put the children to bed, singing his usual "Rocky Raccoon" (a questionable lullaby, yet always effective). Pulling on my pajamas, I slipped from bed to bed, put my cheek on each child's pillow, one by one, close enough to catch their warm breath on my face. Then I curled myself up in the cave of that round, hard muscle beneath Ken's collarbone.

This spring Ken and the kids surprised me. Apparently there is some place back east that can take such damaged old World War II war bride recordings and

try to restore them. By some miracle, they lifted my mother from out of pure static and caught her little jokes, her teasing her soldier husband. I shivered before I even pushed the CD into my computer.

And then. There she was.

And there she is.

She has never been lost for good beneath the static.

Her daughter sits in this room right now and hears the letter she read when she was twenty-three.

And now this weekend my oldest child and his bride came home to show me photographs of their vacation. We crowded around the kitchen table, a moth beating in at the window. Greg opened his laptop, the photos flickered during the upload, a sort of visual static.

And then there they were.

My children.

On a volcano.

Not lost at all.

In Java.

And we are all here. We are home. **R**

Call for submissions!

WANTED: Surprising pieces that elicit laughter, weeping, tooth-gnashing, and/or wonder.

Poetry, fiction, and creative nonfiction for an anthology of work inspired by the **Martyrs Mirror**.

Contact: Kirsten Beachy at martyrsanthology@gmail.com or
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Deadline: March 15, 2010.

Three poems

By Becca J.R. Lachman

Will there be Pianos in Africa?

I come home late to mother singing with her fingers, the tune loud and running—not even perfect—but the song itself hasn't changed. Finally, I am reminded of things that last as father belts high notes beside her, throws back his head, mouth wide—a baby bird calling to each lyric like flight. The scales are sour, giving in to summer damp, but the piano will not be tuned again.

Soon they will eat their supper cooked over coals, lay down to rest in a pyramid of mosquito netting. Africa calls to them, away from this well-lit living room, from my mother's mahogany baby grand. Will her fingers trill in her sleep? Upon her sheets, will they drum out ragtime, hymns, or Mozart?

Tonight, my parents sing fiercely without tears, without knowing they have an audience. I listen, make them a promise: that I will stay and do what they have taught—how to sing a line like a silver circle, how to end a phrase like coming home. When I can no longer talk to life, Mother, don't you worry—I will sing.

What Should I Wear for the Journey?

I.
Ridiculous, really, to fear these miles soon to divide what is known and loved, the maps that are so hoped for. We live a growing distance whether we know it or not. Change will come in deep, rich furrows, in the way every living thing defies stillness, reaches for something, anything to lead it forward: a root for its thirst, a stem for its sky, thread for the very top of a loom.

II.
Drape your love around me like a sari. You pick the colors—green for my eyes, gold thread for my hair?—the pattern, even the length. Drape it tightly; I know it will hold, even with no pins, with no strings or fancy buttons. I trust your love, am comforted, emboldened by the way it conforms to curves. Look at the beauty. Look at the flowing steps! Cloth that holds such grace, once stitched by needles of bone.

III.
Children are made to outgrow their child bones, but mine refuse to be forgotten. They carry me; they are hot and blue as stars. Sitting at the loom... Together, the pattern comes faster. Spool. Needle. Thread. Daughter. Hands. Open daughter. Thread. When you are gone, I will try to remember.

Old Order

Nothing new: in my childhood sin sang
out in color, and we always named it black. Fear
too made clear its inky mark. A town, one
thousand faces pale as cheese.

One of our oldest settlers made a chair for his pale
God. It sits in our museum, never
used. Dressed in white, he waited for the second
coming, for more visions on which
to carve: spiraling fire, talking doves.

We never thought we'd be the type to stare
at a black Amish boy in line at the Fire-
men's August barbeque. Swiss lips kept in
those hot and silent questions.

Even the soles of their feet were hot, those lovely
West African daughters poured into long-

sleeved cape dresses. The covering got them
in and fed. The black ink did the rest.

They fear the albino inked in white, the girl pursued
by witch doctors. Her eyes, worth a full wagon
of rice. Her heart? A year of schooling. At night, she
hides in sheets of black the color of their hair.

Black trees on the page, old words still root us. The poet—
you know the one—decked all in white, who carried hungry
lilies. We hold her hymn-rhythms in secret, word-minnows
wriggling, black ink rising. White words of fire and God,

nothing new. Sin-minnows rise singing, but we catch them
in our clear blue stream. A town, marked and lovely,
one thousand faces tilted towards hot sun, and a high wooden
chair built for vision, waiting on the dove.

The Road to Amish Country

By Rachel Yoder

The road to Amish country, like Heaven, was narrow and winding, and my dad drove our rusty yellow Datsun fast, so that it felt like an amusement park ride. I'd often traveled with him up north to restaurants where we ate raisin pie served by Amish women of notable girth, or to the weekend farmer's market and auction where they sold caged red chickens with crazy eyes. But the fact that we were going to the Amish schoolhouse where he taught meant that I would be in an enclosed area with a maximum density of Amish kids. The thought, frankly, made me a little nervous.

My dad had been hired the summer after my third grade year to teach at this one-room Amish schoolhouse in Holmes County, about twenty miles north of where we lived, in the grassy bosom of Ohio Amishdom. He had grown up Amish, spoke Pennsylvania Dutch fluently, and had a teaching degree. The job, then, seemed a logistical fit.

It was usual, however, for an Amish school to have an Amish teacher, and most often a young woman at that, but my dad had somehow fast-talked his way

into the position. The Amish guy in charge of hiring him had first accused him of being English, even though they debated the authenticity of my father's Amish credentials in Pennsylvania Dutch, the language of the Amish that a full-blood English would never speak. My dad tried to explain: no, not English, but Mennonite. Yah, the Amish hirer shrugged, just about the same thing. Autumn was fast approaching though, and they needed someone for the school. My dad was there and wanted the work. His last name was right: Yoder. And at least he'd grown up Amish and been a Mennonite minister. They figured he would do.

Perhaps propelled by similar desires for my educational and aesthetic enrichment as he had been when he pulled me out of school for a day in first grade to attend a crashing, amateur musical production of *Peter and The Wolf* (rife with the honks of barely-tuned oboes), my father insisted that I accompany him to the Amish schoolhouse and miss a day of fourth grade. I'm sure he saw this opportunity for me not only as educational and aesthetically

enriching (with his driver's seat didacticism: "Holmes County is the site of the densest concentration of Amish people in the world," followed by: "The aroma of manure enhances the soul," barnyard nostalgic the aesthetic my father was proposing here), but also an event of contextual consequence for me. That is, I would finally enter into, if only for one weird day, the current of history and culture out of which my ancestry was spawned.

Here's the thing: I'd always been intimidated by Amish kids. I'd been raised Mennonite, but I always thought of Mennonite as "watered-down" Amish, you could say, or Amish lite. Mennonites were not as hardcore as the Amish. Sure, they loved Jesus and all that, tried to lead a simple life, washed each other's feet at church in dishpans of warm water, but there was a feeling that we were, fundamentally, softer than the Amish, more coddled, motoring around in plush, upholstered cars, thoughtlessly flipping light switches on and off, flaunting our zippers and buttons. As a Mennonite kid, I had chores, but dusting the living room and washing the dishes didn't really compare to shoveling mountainous piles of shit, which I imagined Amish kids were doing pretty much round the clock. Our Mennonite world was cushier, centered inside, around electronic appliances. The Amish kids were physical, bred on fresh air and hard work and the meat of bleating cows they'd slaughtered with their own hands. As we drove deeper into Amish country, white-washed houses and barns arranged neatly throughout the tidy countryside, I wondered what the Amish kids were doing at that very moment—probably sewing their outfits to wear to school.

This schoolhouse was on a sunny country road, as you might imagine, plopped in the middle of endless cornfields, just beyond a proverbial babbling brook. We pulled into a grassy clearing beside the yellow cinderblock building, the only car that would arrive there that day, and disembarked. Beyond the building were a simple swing set and a ball field. That was it. It was nothing like my public school playground, with four-square courts and teeter totters and a multitude of swings all centered around the coup d'arte we called The Big Toy, constructed of what looked like gigantic Lincoln Logs, a behemoth of a play thing—two stories, with a thick blue pirate ship net on one side, monkey bars, swinging loops, three slides, a fireman's pole. We had two ball fields, a basketball court, a soccer field, overflowing boxes of jump ropes and kickballs. The Amish kids had three

swings dangling in the wind and grass, the waving cornfields. They could make fun out of nothing. Comparatively, The Big Toy seemed like a monument to our lack of ingenuity.

We entered the mudroom, my father hefting his black satchel plugged with stacks of paper, and immediately the temperature changed. It was cooler, and smelled like, well, *Amish*, or at least the smell I'd come to associate with Amish from my one or two visits to Amish farmhouses: milky cow-ness mixed with bleach.

My dad showed me the black, potbellied stove that he and the Amish kids would load with coal in the winter, then the length of thick rope dangling from a hole in the ceiling. "For the bell," he explained, pointing up. He let me tug on it a couple of times, which produced a satisfying *ding-dong*.

The main room had lots of windows but still maintained a certain shadiness with its lack of overhead lighting, and even in the late summer, the place was chilly. About thirty old-fashioned wooden desks—with bench-like seats attached to the desk via curlicued wrought-iron fixtures, just like on the TV show *Little House on the Prairie*—ordered themselves in neat rows facing my father's desk and the long expanse of blackboard. I dropped my book bag on the wooden bench under the windows, just inside the entrance from the mudroom.

As 7:30 approached, Amish kids started appearing as dark, distant dots growing larger on the road. Soon, there was a conglomeration of children outside, waiting for my dad to ring the school bell. I stood just to the side of a mudroom window, trying to spy on them as nonchalantly as possible. I didn't want it to seem like I found them a curiosity, as if I were just another rubbernecking tourist snapping clandestine photos of the quaint Amish kids. These were, after all, supposed to be my people, all of us coursing with the same, Anabaptist blood.

But I could not distinguish them. To me, these kids were not individuals, but rather generic reproductions of each other, of every other Amish kid or adult I'd ever seen. In their standard Amish-issue uniforms of black ankle boots, trousers and suspenders for the boys, pastel dresses and white caps for the girls, there was nothing distinct. Sure, this girl had braids and that boy was wearing a turquoise shirt. What came to mind, however, were the faceless, hand-sewn Amish dolls piled in a bin at the Berlin General Store.

The thing was, I hadn't ever known any Amish

kids specifically, and my exposure to Amish kids in general had been very limited. I guess there was Judy Raber—a little girl in my class at Lake Center, the Mennonite elementary school I attended through the second grade—who wore a little white cap, lavender dresses, white ankle socks, and black shit-kicking shoes, but now that I really think about it, she was probably conservative Mennonite. (It doesn't seem like a bona fide Amish girl would have been allowed to attend our English-speaking school.) I'd also run into some Amish kids once at an extended Yoder family reunion on a fly-infested farm of some distant relative, but my Mennonite cousins and I mostly just stared at them from across the picnic area, chewing mouthfuls of lard-rich doughy things and wondering if they would be up for letting us practice our limited vocabulary of Pennsylvania Dutch cusswords. After we ate, we jumped on the trampoline with an Amish kid, but he was little and wiry and stone-faced, his bowl-cut hair standing straight out from his head as he floated down from each bounce. Again, all we could do was stare at him, nothing to say, especially since we didn't speak the same language, except for, as I mentioned, a few choice swears: *Shiza!*, *Fuc da!*, and the most atrociously titillating Amish catcall, *Shurne ditza!*. All our possible offerings of verbal communion weren't appropriate.

After my dad rang the school bell, the Amish kids filed in. I sat on my bench by the window, and each child considered me, sometimes stoically, sometimes with a smile, as he or she passed by. I tried to maintain a pleasant countenance, despite my growing anxiety. What did they think of me? Were they smiling because they knew that my Mennonite gallivanting—with all its worldly conveniences and cushy ease—had already doomed me to an eternity in Hell? Or was it that they could smell the vanity of the hairspray that shellacked my fastidiously curled bangs?

There was a range of kids in the school, from kindergartners to the eighth grade. My dad worked through lessons for each level, speaking in Pennsylvania Dutch and writing on the board. As he taught the three or four third-graders their multiplication tables, the same thing I was learning at public school, all the other students worked on their own assignments, filling out worksheets or reading and, when that got boring, fidgeting in their seats. Sometimes a pair of students would start mumbling, and my dad would bark their names with an indistinguishable

command: *Ben! Noah! Gerble blah dee!*

My dad had advised that it would probably be a good idea for me to wear a skirt instead of jeans, and so I had, but as the day progressed it felt too synthetic and flowery. My dangly earrings, too, began to feel conspicuous, gaudy even. Pierced ears were a new thing, something that my sister and I had only been allowed once we moved and started attending public school. We'd fought long and hard for them, constructing dinner-length arguments that downplayed the worldliness of our desired self-adornment and emphasized the pierced ear's innocence relative to, say, tattoos or idol worship. I had been proud of my hard-won pierced ears, but in the Amish schoolhouse they suddenly felt excessive, even damning. I surreptitiously pulled my earrings out and shoved them in my pocket.

There in the schoolhouse, it kind of felt like I and the Amish kids were on two different sides of a piece of glass staring at each other, as if this really were a field trip to a museum, another one of my father's educational outings. But who was on display? And exactly which side of the glass was I supposed to be looking in, or out? I knew that most people would consider the Amish the items of interest, anthropology come to life before our very eyes, oddity encased behind glass, curious and distant. And while I understood this—while I too had bought my ticket and filed by the display—I could also imagine how I must look from their perspective: just another Any Girl *Englishe* in the passing crowd. Where exactly was I in this stare-down contest, looking in or looking out, ticket holder or display? If anything, it seemed I was the glass divider, a transparent wall between two worlds.

Nothing really exciting happened during my day at Amish school. I mostly read, my father's foreign drone quickly fading into background noise. There was recess, during which I stayed close to my father's side. "Why don't you play?" he encouraged, to which I silently shook my head. At the end of the day, my dad dismissed the children and they filed to the mudroom where they retrieved their coats and shawls from metal hooks. The day had come and gone without us exchanging a single word or meaningful moment—educational, aesthetic, or otherwise.

Years later, long after I'd moved away from eastern Ohio ("The Motherland," I took to calling it) my father sent me a postcard of an Amish girl in a purple dress driving a team of horses through a freshly cut

field, a load of hay bales on the wagon behind her. He wrote on the back of the card: “Just imagine what you might have been!” And herein lies the problem of being Mennonite: that a statement like this functions simultaneously as lament and celebration. *Look what’s been lost!* we cringe, then throw up our hands and rejoice: *Look what’s been gained!* The Mennonites—we are conflicted, destined to till the liminal plot between the Amish hirer’s shrugged *just about the same thing as die Englishe*, and the *Englishe’s* squint-eyed *you ain’t from around here neither*.

On the ride home, we passed my elementary school where the engines of the big yellow school bus fleet were just grumbling to life. Inside, my classmates were donning neon backpacks and discussing cartoons. They’d been asking me what I found to be ridiculous questions ever since I arrived at public school: So do you ride in a buggy? Do you have electricity? Does your mom shave her armpits? I answered with a toss-off of practiced nonchalance: “Why would I ride in a buggy—that’s crazy!” and “Of course we have electricity, I like totally love The Cosby Show,” and “You’re so stupid, my mom isn’t

some sort of hippie.”

Look, I’m just like you, I wanted to explain, even though I knew it wasn’t true.

At dinner that night, my dad asked me if I’d like to come back to the Amish school to visit again another day. I pushed my food around as I considered his question. My father had threatened from time to time to retreat back to an Amish farm, a simpler way of life, citing the “rat race” as the source of his disillusionment with modern society. In many ways, his heart was still on the farm, barnyard nostalgic. “Do you think I’m all that different from the little Amish boy I was at six?” he’d ask rhetorically.

And this is why the Amish kids were not just intimidating, but terrifying. They had some claim to my father that I did not, and never would. He loved them with the part of his soul still scented with the transcendent bouquet of wafting manure, an odor which caused me to pinch my nose and inhale through my mouth.

I thought about going back to the Amish schoolhouse. Did I want to return? I told him *maybe*. I still had to make up my mind. **R**

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Mail Your Name To The Barn Door

Mennonite Poem

By G. C. Waldrep

Every Mennonite poet has to write a Mennonite poem. But I am not a Mennonite, and so instead this is a poem about a frieze portraying a small band of oboe players. They are playing their all-oboe orchestration of Song of the Shoes, only of course there's no way to tell this in the frieze, because a frieze is silent. It is a visual representation of an action, which is to say a longing, and in this way a lot like being Mennonite. Which I am not.

If this were a Mennonite poem there would be some invocation of the prairie, the grasses—the insolubility of an ablative sky—but since it's not, I'm going to place it inside a forest instead, the way one places the memory of an ex-girlfriend inside a snow globe and shakes it, hard. Fortunately this is an old forest, so the trees stay put. They do, however, suffer some nerve damage and descend into a collective delusion in which they are all traffic lights. Soon all traffic in the forest is gridlocked.

Lost in the gridlock is one of the oboe players. He was on his way to the rehearsal, he was running late—his child was sick, his best shirt was dirty, he is always running late—and now he won't get there at all, ever, though of course you can't tell this from the frieze, can't tell that instead of the eight oboe players pictured there should be nine.

The oboe player's automobile is completely blocked by a line of larches and scrub ash. The oboe player hums the melody line from the second movement of Song of the Shoes and is surprised to hear the larches hum along with him. They are musical larches; they sing in four-part harmony, as they most certainly would if they were Mennonites, or at least the sort of Mennonites most likely to appear in a Mennonite poem.

For a while the oboe player fantasizes that the larches, being musical, will eventually part and let him drive on through the forest, though he knows by now that the other oboe players will have completed their silent rehearsal, will in fact have packed up their instruments and walked out of the frieze, some toward the parking lot, others toward the dunes. Perhaps, standing atop one of the taller dunes, one of them will make out the forest, blinking away, or even the missing oboe player's automobile, and this, the missing oboe player thinks, is probably a lot like being Mennonite, though whether by this he means himself, or his colleague on the dune, or the act of seeing, or being seen, or possibly his other colleagues who are by now driving home, having meals with their families, shopping, etc., things Mennonites do, or even the automobile, perfectly serviceable, perfectly stationary, engine idling, inside of which his body comfortably rests, neither the forest nor the music is sure. **R**



Above photographs by Paul Steury

Begging Bowl

By Todd Davis

Each night
the bowl
of our bodies
is emptied,
and as we wake
it begs to be filled:
resin of desire,
basin of water
into which we cup
our hands
and drink
and wash,
only to grow
thirsty and dirty
again: fingers soiled
and stained,
cherry's smudge,
grape's fleshy pulp,
so similar to a tongue
reaching after language,
after a sound equal
to this empty bowl,
this grieving bowl,
this body
we have faith
will wake
tomorrow.

The Waxen Comb of Delight

By Todd Davis

Sun slowly burns the gray tissue
of morning, and bees, who spent
the night beneath the long flower
of goldenrod, sway with the stalk's
movements, stiff with cold and fog.

Yesterday a red-tailed hawk lifted
from a tamarack to take a rabbit,
and on this walk I find owl pellets
near a downed oak: the torn limb
of a warbler, the discarded head
of a shrew.

These are the beautiful deaths
of usefulness. Imagine your life
taken to feed another, your very
being consumed in the belly's
furnace, then awaking to heavy
wing-beat as you fly above
the tallest spruce.

The best we can hope for
is to scatter our selves
across the darkest parts
of the earth: rain relinquishing
these late flowers and our passing
love, which too often lusted
only for the self, forgetting
the sweet tenacity of the bee,
the waxen comb of delight.

High on a Mountain

by Melanie Zuercher

There are seven of us, not one over thirty, some still students. All except Ann are on the staff of Pine Mountain, an environmental education center based in an old boarding school in a remote southeast Kentucky valley, and Ann lives there, as we all do. Our clothing is either hand-knit or vintage Red Door from the mission store five miles below the school on Big Laurel. The cost of Mark's and Maggie's boots and camping gear would have paid our salaries for a month, but they have put in the time—winter survival camping, Kilimanjaro and whitewater wilderness time. Pants double-patched and second-hand flannel are fine, but boots need to go the distance.

It's spring break. The fifth-graders who fill our classes in steam ecology, early settlers, Appalachian geology, local wildlife and cornshuck crafts have gone to Myrtle Beach or Six Flags for the week instead. We have a reprieve from weighing the waste after every meal before it goes into the compost, the hormonal drama of the Thursday folk dance, and night hikes. Pine Mountain can finally clean out its refrigerator, plant its pole beans and maybe even catch a nap. The young staff can go hiking in the Smokies.

We eat hot cereal cooked on Mark's camp stove. Canteens are filled, day packs loaded with apples, carrots, peanut butter, several incarnations of granola, some squirreled-away Sun Chips, the clandestine Snickers bar. We gather at the picnic table to look at a topographical map of the Appalachian Trail. With legs and experience of varying lengths, we won't stay together today, so we all need to know the proposed endpoint, the distances and the trail options.

Squinting at the map in the hemlock-sifted morning light, I see the words "Castle Rock." A point on the AT—with a view, from the name of it—calls in a memory from high school.

Somewhere near the Harlan-Bell County line in Kentucky is a piece of mountainside known to the ravens, the ginseng hunters, maybe somebody's mamaw who has made it past the age of 90 and still remembers when the best way into the Martin's Fork valley was from the Virginia side on the old logging road—and to a little withered man who has never quite stopped being a Boy Scout. He will gladly leave that sixth-floor apartment on River Street, with its collections of rocks and classical

records, its neatly bundled stacks of letters and shelves of local-color novels and Whitman and Dickinson, any time anyone asks him to show them Castle Rock.

He has done this so many times that for years no one has called him by the inexplicable name his parents gave him: Misti Ralph Smith. As a young man, he left the narrow valleys of home and went out to see the world and when he came back he looked at the landmark the locals called "Chimney Rocks," a towering piece of the mountain's limestone bone structure, pitched up by an ancient earthquake, worn clear by millennia of ice, wind and rain, and named it for the castles of Europe. At some point, he rechristened himself as well.

The man's skull shows beneath the skin like ripples in rock, and his hearing is slipping away from him. He takes his stick, polished by years of passage through jewelweed and nettles, and points his boots toward the summit.

The photo in my high school album resembles the set of a third-rate movie, with sunlight shafting past hemlock boughs to mingle with the mist of a summer morning. Two of the three young nurses who became lifelong friends at Goshen College and I—the teenager who now wants to go to Goshen because they did—stand on the path behind Castle Rock Smith as the third nurse snaps the picture.

On this day, when I'm somewhere below another Appalachian slope called Castle Rock, the man leads no hike, though many of those who have climbed with him over the years are gathered nearby. His dried-apple-doll body lies in a casket with a tie around its neck and a Presbyterian preacher praying over it. His spirit is up on his Castle Rock, so I'm going to climb to the one on the Appalachian Trail to honor the day of his funeral.

I peer at the map, trying to set the way in my mind. It's at least ten miles to where I want to go—maybe twelve. I've never walked as far in a day as I need to go to get there and back. I shoulder my daypack. I'm twenty-one—what is there I can't do?

It's early spring. Although we're still in the Appalachian ecosystem, we're several hundred feet higher than the Cumberland Plateau we left behind us 100 miles north and west. The leaves on the deciduous trees are still only whispers of green. The understory shows the first pale stars of hepatica, trout lily, bloodroot, spring beauty.

The access trail winds gently, gaining altitude by means of long easy slopes and wide switchbacks. Generations of forest compost soak up the sounds of booted feet but carry the treed conversation of south-moving warblers and vireos and flycatchers through the air as if they are all wearing tiny lapel mikes. The birders pull out binoculars and fall to the back of the line. We regroup a quarter mile further on as Scott points off the trail at the compost carpet ripped up in a wide swathe. Wild boar were here—days gone now, so the smell of musk is only in our minds.

We walk at our different paces, dissolving singly or by twos into the light that in early spring is usually just this side of rain. The morning passes. Signposts painted National Park brown with yellow lettering keep pointing me toward the Trail-with-a-capital-T by means of landmark names remembered from the map: Bote Mountain, Silers Bald, Eagle Creek, Spence Field.

Coming up to noon, the slope's pitch sharpens. A rhododendron tunnel sucks up the trail. I scramble over roots and haul myself up with the help of handfuls of huckleberry bush. And I'm there, on the fabled AT, looking south a thousand miles to Springer Mountain, Georgia, and north another thousand to Maine and Mount Katahdin, still snow-wrapped. I come out of the laurel hell, into the grassy open of the long bald that is Spence Field—until the mid-twentieth century the summer haven for cattle and sheep with bloodlines reaching back before the American Revolution, owned by the seventh generation of the Scotch-Irish who first settled among the Cherokee in the coves and hollows of the Great Smoky Mountains.

It's lunchtime. I've caught up with Barb and Susie and Maggie, sitting on rocks that hold the season's first warmth, munching apples and peanut butter. After hours of the tangle of trees and understory, Spence Field is a rush of oxygen borne by the wind piling over the ridge. This spot on the trail is at a low place in the ridgeline, so there are no mountain backbones visible—we're in a grass pocket that recalls the prairie I've met on summer visits to Kansas grandparents.

But I'm looking for a rock that someone thought resembled a castle. I eat carrots and look at the trail's northward progress. It parts the long-haired blond grass as far as I can see, definitely ascending. The map said Castle Rock was somewhere at the top of Spence Field.

When I resume the walk, the grasses murmur to each other as I pass. I begin to see other Smoky peaks poking past the horizon, along with a bank of cloud to the northeast. It fills more sky with every passing half

hour. The wind carries the scent of rain.

All these years later, I can't say if I hiked Spence Field alone, or if I had wandered so far into my own thoughts that it only seemed like it. If I was with someone who only wanted physical presence, I was good company. I was thinking of Castle Rock Smith, imagining his life and his death, remembering the handful of times I had walked to that rock and scrambled up its back side to lie prone with "head hanging over to hear the wind blow" down in the Martin's Fork valley.

By late afternoon, there are only bits of blue sky to the southwest. The sun has bowed out to make way for the advancing rain. I'm still not at the end of Spence Field and the trail keeps beckoning but my body balks. Mark, whom I haven't seen for hours, appears on the trail in front of me, heading down. How far to Castle Rock? He looks blank, the name meaning nothing. How far to the top of Spence Field? Too far, he says. He's always right. I hate that.

My romantic notion—to honor Castle Rock Smith with a solitary pilgrimage to a peak in the Smoky Mountains—wants to push on, but my body recognizes reality and prevails. I stand looking north for the space of several heartbeats, then scrub the hair out of my face, turn around and follow the receding beacon of Mark's daypack.

When at last all seven of us are back at the campsite, the wind is a thin chill rod boring in, carrying shards of rain. In sweatshirts and jackets and hats, we seek the heat of camp stove and fire. I've walked at least twenty miles and I have just enough energy left to stand upright and eat lentil curry.

Wind beats steadily on nylon all night, sometimes to the staccato accompaniment of a shower gusting past. I sleep poorly.

The next morning, I pull out the AT topo map again. Maybe I really made it as far as Castle Rock. But the map leaves no doubt I did not, because I see that I read it wrong. Castle Rock is many miles past Spence Field. At best, I reached "Rocky Top."

"Good ol' Rocky Top, Rocky Top, Tennessee"—a line from the cheesy, eponymous bluegrass song clangs in my head, sung in a hillbilly twang.

About five years later, I climbed up to Castle Rock on the Harlan-Bell County line, finding the trail without the help of Castle Rock Smith, so long gone. I brought four young Mennonite volunteers with me. One of them snapped a photo of me that makes it look as if I am clinging to the rock, just about to slide over into blue nothing. But in reality, I'm sitting in a limestone chair carved in Castle Rock by the elements, warm as

the leather seat in a luxury car, glancing back at the camera before turning once again to gaze out over the Martin's Fork valley, at the Cumberland Plateau's folds and hollows still pristine before the onslaught of mountaintop removal mining, beyond that to the prairies and endless sky, west to Kansas.

Now I'm the mother of that girl who tried and failed to find one certain Castle Rock, older than my father when his tenor belled out of the Presbyterian choir singing one of its basses home to Jesus. Relentless mining and logging surely haven't obliterated Harlan County's Castle Rock but they may well have devoured the way leading to it. I doubt I could find that old passage any more.

I know those Kansas prairies far better than the wind-whipped grassy balds of the southern Appalachians. I can tell directions by where the sun rises, and the straight-edge corners of section roads, instead of "turn up Crases Branch where the Letcher post office used to be." I no longer feel as if the plains' great sky will flatten me under its vastness. I understand why it

seems to those who come to the Appalachian hills from Nebraska and Saskatchewan as if the hollows hem them in and the sun seldom shines.

Because I've now gone to the Walnut Valley Festival in Winfield, Kansas, for fourteen straight years, I know the words to more than just "Rocky Top." A young singer from New England—a Juilliard-trained violinist, a player of Eastern European Gypsy melodies—this year called in an old favorite: "High on a mountain top, wind blowing free, thinking 'bout the days that used to be." Remembering her native western North Carolina, Ola Belle Reed wrote that one.

When I need a self-conjured sanctuary, I still go up on a ridgeline. I still sit on a sun-soothed rock that was undersea a million years ago. I bring back the tang of hemlock, mountain laurel, shoe-scuffed sweet gum leaves, and let the mist of memory fade strip-mining scars into the soft slopes of the Cumberland Plateau, gentle ancient mountains nodding off under a late-afternoon sky, the home I remember. **R**

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Preacher's Daughter

By Rhoda Janzen

The smell of armpit clean and stretched to the sun, hot grass and leisure. The tsk-tsk-tsk of sprinklers dampens paper,

droplets invisibly falling, holy vapor. The child doodles words like ants sent out as scouts in front

of other ants, each scout driven by some sense of calling, the page exploding suddenly like the sprinkler

into airy persiflage—arsey-versey, topsy-turvy. In letters tall and curly, she makes the lines march two by two,

and feels herself a god of two delicious heads, a Janus creating and created, more evidence that God exists, accelerating now,

writing faster, faith simple as clay figurines of Francis and the sparrows chattering. Soon doubt will rise like the taste

of swallowed sick tickling the gorge, queasy Nietzsche at the health resort, broadcloth in July. He sweats it out, poor

man, the intestinal turbulence, a fate so fatally flawed. Invents his gassy Übermensch and thinks, By jove, we all need god.

The Dark

By Rhoda Janzen

Across the lake the tiny lights could comfort the dead. It is a night

for reckless footprints. My peeping tom must have lingered

in the shrubs. (I know who he is, the guy who shovels my snow.)

At moonrise I went again to check the prints. They made no sense,

blurred like a chin when seen through tears. New snow began to fall,

steady as fifteen years. He must have been cold there in pine

shadow, a dark from which there is no waking. Perhaps he

watches while I draw the cork and pour my glass of grief.

On the deck motes move in winter frenzy above the glassy

lake, above this shaken globe, ice-white, flakes somehow old for snow

so new—they lick the tongue like déjà vu, firm as a hand on

the small of the back. Night after night I am whispered to.

This is the hush when the snow starts to stick, the dark above the dark.

Fugue

By Jesse Nathan

These three poems come from a book-length cycle that explores the story and state of mind of a man named Will, whose mother was a German Mennonite and whose father was a Polish Jew. Will's parents encountered one another in Germany during World War II, fell in love, and eventually had a child. Years after the unlikely intertwining of their lives, their son is still trying to sort out his relationship to his hybrid heritage. These poems are a window into the depth and joy and turmoil of his confusion.

Smoke Testimony

There is a man from Kansas named William who wears a scrubby beard. He has a small nose. He lives on a farm surrounded by wheat and alfalfa and occasionally soybeans. He is the son of a Mennonite woman from Germany. He is the son of a Jewish man from Poland. He has been to church and he has been to synagogue. He walks with a limp. He has worn his hair long and he has worn his hair short. He doubts God and he fears dogs. He travels to escape. His left big toe, sensitive because of a bunion, had been run over moments before by a cyclist when I met him in Berkeley. At the time, he was traveling the coast. He was smoking. It was 9:12 in the morning and the sunlight was sharp and white the way it is only in California. He was leaning against a Eucalyptus. We talked and talked. I told him I had lived in Kansas. That I was the son of a Jewish man. That I was the son of a Mennonite woman. These poems are forms taken by what he told me.

Bindweed

Faced with a scene of cloud white flowers
Job asks the crow, What do you see?
Sheep spreading, replies the crow,
across the earth's surface.
Convolvulus arvensis, answers Job,
common to Kansas.
Twenty feet, he says with a shrug,
is where the roots sleep.
They try to gauge how much it would take
to extirpate. Think of it, says the crow, its shocked
roots rising, its jagged strings of plant.
It'd look like sheets of ice, says Job, cracking.
God loves sheep, says the crow, beaming.
They are silent. They breathe.
Anyway it's just clouds, they say.
It's just white flowers, they say.

Last Autumn Song

No, nothing,
she says, that is not God's, and we approach
a crow ripping entrails
of a truck-crushed fox, and the crow flees
our wheels, and the wind fills and tests the trees.
She says, I'm afraid I've believed
too much,
so we climb out,
throw shut the doors,
balance on tracks, huddle like tongues, like teeth
we chatter, we hum hymns, her purple skirts
go stiff with crusts of first frost, howl
the wind, the train, we embrace, the earth shakes,
boxcars bullet past, light slides into dusk,
one-hundred and sixteen we count, the crow
returns itself to beaky work, we call it Eliphaz.
In the book that broke the reader, she says,
the angel swung a sickle
over the curvy earth, curvy steel, then gathered
the vintage, then pitched it
into the great wine press. A small book, she says,
small and compact as a heart, as a trap.

Artist's statement: Flood the Luminous Body

By Erin Coleman-Cruz

*Our sufferings do not magically end; instead we are able to wisely alchemically recycle them. They become the abundant waste that we use to make new growth possible. - bell hooks**

An inner landscape takes form through crystallized tears, maps of inner journeys appear on garments, narratives of loss and pain are shared. The terrible beauty of our longings and losses is first succumbed to and then delicately transformed into expressions of coping and keeping, mending and sorting, nurturing and holding. Here the longings to be able to nurture and love, and to be nurtured and loved, are stitched into the very works themselves. There is futility present, and yet so much is surmounted by the expression of a gesture, thought, or word.

As an artist, I find that there is the opportunity to create—via a “magical process”—using an item of little value and transforming it into something of great meaning, which is central to my work. I transform my own difficult—yet often common—experiences into meaningful expressions by selecting simple and abundant materials such as household goods, garments, plants, and salt, and transforming them via an alchemical-esque process. My use of embroidery and other traditional “women’s work” techniques along with lived-used domestic objects that have passed from one use to the next over time serves to remind us that the home is the site of our first “world,” and the objects and functions in those homes are charged with meaning.

*bell hooks. *All About Love: New Visions*. New York: Harper, 2001, 80-81.

Rhubarb & Champagne Jelly Dessert

By Elaine Lemm

Ingredients

1 lb-10 oz/750g fresh **rhubarb**, washed, cut into 1”/2cm/ chunks
1/2cup/110g fine sugar
2 pints/1 liter/ water
1/2 pint/250 ml Champagne
3 tsp/10 g or 6 sheets gelatin, soaked in a little warm water

Preparation

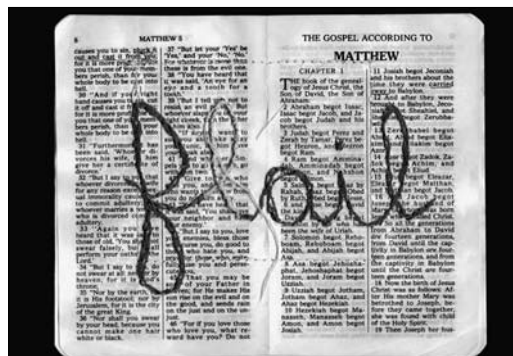
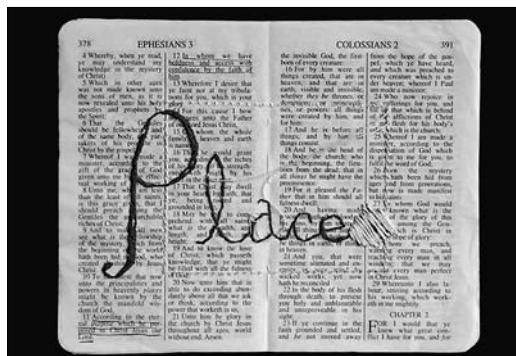
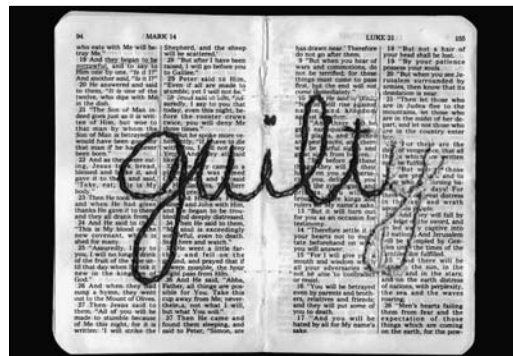
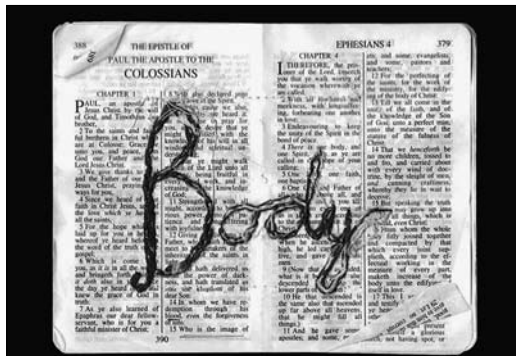
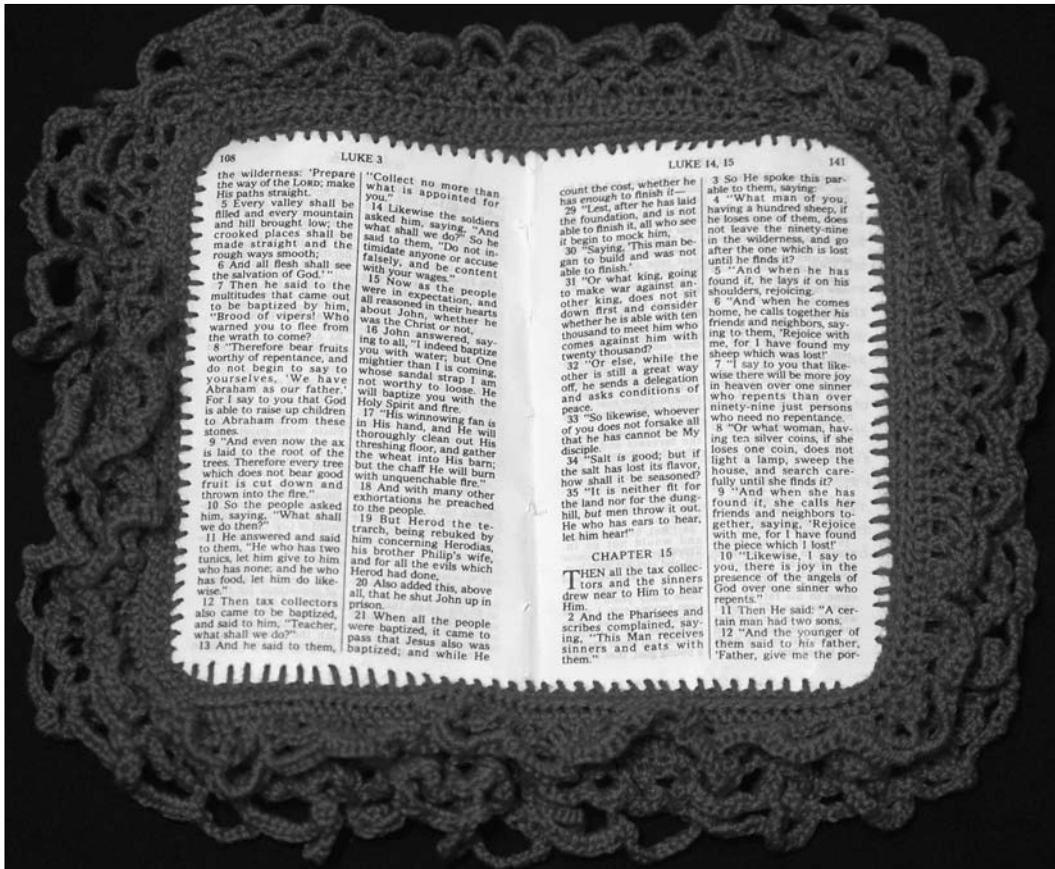
Place the **rhubarb** in a non-aluminum pan, add the sugar and water and bring gently to the boil. Simmer for 20 minutes then remove from the heat and leave until completely cold.

Pour the **rhubarb** into a fine sieve set over a large bowl. Leave the juice to drip for 10 minutes. Do not force the **rhubarb** through. Measure 500ml/1 pint of the strained juice and place into a small pan.

Dissolve the powdered gelatin in 3 tbsp water; if using leaf gelatin, remove from the warm water with your fingers, gently squeezing away any excess water. Add the gelatin to the rhubarb juice in the pan and heat gently until the gelatin is completely dissolved. DO NOT BOIL. Leave to cool for 10 minute then add the Champagne and mix gently.

Divide between four glasses and chill for at least four hours.

Serves 4; serve with Amoretti or tiny cookies.



Embroidered pieces by Erin Coleman-Cruz: Salt Loss (top), Body (middle left), guilty (middle right), Place (bottom left), flail (bottom right)

Two Translations from the Ancient Arabic

By Keith Miller

The Muallaqat

I lived for three years in a small town in northern Sudan. This was in the early nineties, before the oil boom, before Darfur. The war in the south had been grumbling along for thirty years or so, but I heard



Waterpipe (linocut) by Keith Miller

about it only through BBC broadcasts. While the rest of the Arabic-speaking world had been abruptly thrust into twentieth-century high-rises and air-conditioning by oil wealth and tourism, Sudan remained essentially unchanged. Nomads roamed on camels with broadswords at their sides. Blood feuds consumed families. Even the Sudanese dialect of Arabic was said to resemble most closely

the classical Arabic of the Quran. I loved Sudan, and its generous, proud, hot-blooded people.

Some years later, I moved to Cairo, and took a couple months of Arabic lessons to switch from Sudanese to Egyptian (the “dialects” of Arabic are as varied as the Romance “languages”). One of my teachers was a literature student, and, at my urging, began incorporating poetry in my classes. He spent the entire first class talking about the first word of the *Muallaqa of Imru al-Qays*: “Stop.” He is stopping, my teacher explained, not only his friends, not only the reader, but also time, and by stopping time, he is cheating death. Over the next nine years in Egypt I grappled with early Arabic poetry: the poet princes and the robber poets and the warrior poets. It was a world of desert treks, gory feuds, and illicit trysts, where blood and honor were celebrated above all else. Suddenly my years in Sudan came into focus: the hospitality, the violence, the fatalism, the celebration of rhetoric. I wanted to own the poems, and

so, with the help of a friend, I started translating them.

The *Muallaqat* are a group of seven poems from the pre-Quranic era. According to legend, they were chosen to hang on the walls of the Kaaba when it was first erected around the sacred stone in Mecca. They are *qasidas*, the original Arabic poetic form., written in hemistiches. The first two hemistiches rhyme, and after that they rhyme at the end of the lines. The rhyme is the same throughout the whole poem, which is much easier in Arabic than English. The poems were probably first recited as part of inter-tribal poetry competitions. A *qasida* usually opens with the poet coming across the ruins of an old campsite and remembering a former lover. He will then boast of his military and amorous exploits, and extol the virtues of his steed (camel or horse).

The most famous *qasida*, and the most famous poem in Arabic, is the *muallaqa* of Imru al-Qays, which is considered the oldest extant Arabic text, and was probably handed down orally from before the Arabic written era. Every schoolchild in the Arab world can recite its opening lines. Imru al-Qays was a prince of central Arabia who was banished by his father, but nevertheless revenged his death. After a series of sexual exploits, he seduced a princess at the court of Byzantium, and was killed when he put on a poisoned cloak given by Justinian.

While most of the *muallaqat* celebrate violence and battle, the *muallaqa* of Zuhair was written by an aged poet, and recounts an ancient peace treaty between warring tribes. Its final lines have a cadence that recalls the Jewish sacred texts and look forward to the Quran, which is itself rhymed and metered like the early *qasidas*. Both poems mention the circling of the sacred stone or house, a reference to the meteorite encased by the Kaaba, which was a holy place long before the birth of Mohammed.

Translating old Arabic poses a number of problems. Arabic possesses a dual form, nonexistent in English, so in the opening of the *Muallaqa of Imru al-Qays*, it is clear that he is speaking to two male friends. Many of the words are obscure, and the poems make reference to events lost to history. However, though the poems

probably date from four hundred years before *Beowulf*, they are easier for an Arabic speaker to read than *Beowulf* is for us, because written Arabic remains relatively unchanged.

I translated the poems with the assistance of Alaa Bahy.

Muallaqa of Imru al-Qays

Stop, let us weep for the memory of a lover and a home, in the sands between al-Dakhul and Hawmal, Toodih and al-Miqrat. These traces will not dissolve, for they are woven by the north and south winds, and the dung of white oryx lies like peppercorns in the ruined courtyards.

Standing beneath the acacias the morning my friends left, I was like a peeler of bitter *khazal*.

They stood their mounts and said, "Don't destroy yourself with sadness: be resilient as a camel."

Only falling tears can save me. Who will protect this vanishing script?

I remember Um al-Hawaireth, and her neighbor Um al-Rabab at Masal:

when they rose, their scent scattered like the scent of carnations in a breeze.

(Tears flood across my throat, descending to my sword-belt.)

I passed some days with them, and once by Darati Juljul slaughtered my camel for the virgins—why did they ever leave me?—

and they tossed the fatty meat about like scraps of silk. When I entered Oneiza's howdah, she said, "Shame on you, do you want me to walk?"

And when the howdah tilted, she said, "Imru al-Qays, get down! You're making my camel stumble."

"Loose its reins and let it stray," I replied. "Don't banish me from your paradise."

I'm the one who slept with a pregnant and breastfeeding woman and made her forget her child.

She suckled him when he whimpered, but her lower half remained with me.

One day on the dunes she grew fretful and swore she'd leave me.

Oh Fatima, stop this coquetry—you're always leaving; this time, stay.

Has your devilish love blinded you? Are you so disdainful because you know I'll give whatever you ask?

If I wronged you, fine—take your clothes and leave.

Every time you cry two arrows pierce my heart.

Once there was an egg in a hidden nest – I reached her and dallied with her.

To get to her nest I passed sentries and warriors, all thirsty for my blood.

The Pleiades appeared in the sky like a draped sash; when I arrived she had taken off her clothes and stood behind a curtain wearing only a slip.

"By God," she swore, "I won't let you come again. I can see you're blinded by desire."

We went out, the hem of her garment erasing our footprints, and when we had left her village and reached a hidden place in the dunes,

I drew her cheek to me and she leaned toward me and put her lips to mine. Her anklets clashed.

Her waist is trim, her stomach flat, her throat smooth as a polished mirror.

She is self-contained, white with a little gold, nourished with pure, unsullied water.

When she turns away I see her lovely cheek; turning back, her eyes are those of a mother oryx of Wajra looking at her child,

and her neck, when she reveals it, is like a gazelle's. Her hair adorns her back, dark and thick as clusters of dates on a palm tree;

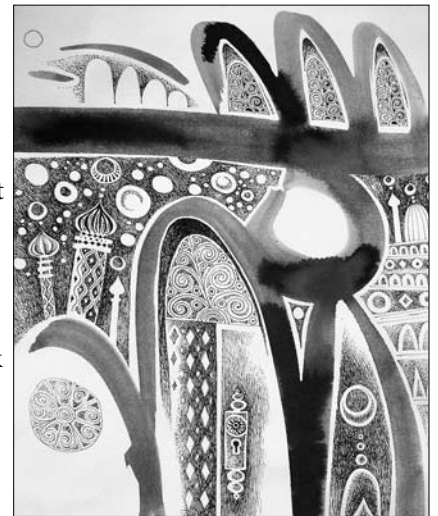
it curls in front, then falls in straight tresses.

Her waist is narrow as a silken braid, her ankles slim and pale as papyrus stems.

She sleeps late; waking, she leaves morsels of musk on the bed. She wears no sash about her waist.

She serves me with fingers slender as the white worms of Dhabi, like peeled sticks of *is-hal*. Like the lantern of a holy man, she illuminates the night.

She is taller than a maiden, though not so tall as a young woman; discerning men love women like her.



Cairo 1 (ink) by Keith Miller (top)



Cairo 2 (ink) by Keith Miller (above)

Men grow out of their youthful blindness, but my heart will never abandon its love for you.
 One day my adversaries told me to leave you, warning me about your love. I refused to listen.
 Night, like the waves of the sea, draws its blinds and summons my anxieties,
 and when the harbor of sunset has vanished and sunrise is still beyond the horizon, I say:
 “O endless night, depart and let the morning come: though morning will be no better than you.”
 Terrible night! Your stars are anchored with linen cords to a great stone.
 People place their burdens on my shoulders.
 I passed a valley bare as a donkey’s belly, where a wolf howled like a gambler, like a man who can’t support his children.
 “We have the same problem,” I told the wolf: “We’re poor and have no way to get money.
 Whatever we have we gamble away; our kind always end up penniless.”
 I wake in the morning while birds are still on their nests, and ride a swift horse, that can easily overtake the desert animals.
 He darts and turns, nimble as a stone tumbled by a flood,
 and the saddle slips from his back as someone slips from a rock.
 My bay is slim but swift, his whicker the sound of boiling water.
 Though the fleetest horses tire, their slackening hooves raising clouds of dust, my horse speeds on.
 He tosses young lads and hard-riding men, swift as a bullroarer whirled by a boy.
 His flanks are like a gazelle’s, his legs like those of an ostrich. He runs like a jackal, deft and dainty as a fox. His chest is deep, and he holds his thick tail high.
 His back is burnished like a stone for crushing musk or *khazal*.
 The blood of the animals he has hunted stains his hide as henna stains white hair.
 We saw a herd of gazelle like a group of maidens circling a sacred stone, their tails silk tassels.
 Spotting us, they scattered like a necklace of Yemeni beads
 on the throat of a wealthy youth from a noble family.
 My horse caught up with the first gazelle before the last had begun to scatter,
 and ran among them without breaking a sweat:
 the cooks grilled half the meat and stewed the rest.
 Returning home at evening, I was dazzled by my horse’s beauty and didn’t know which part to look at first.
 I couldn’t stable him; he slept beside me, saddled and bridled.

O my friend, can you see the lightning flashing like two hands in the white-crowned clouds,
 the gleam like a holy man lighting the wick of his lamp?
 I sat with my friends between Dharj and al-Adhaib,
 watching the distant cloud,
 and guessed that its right side was over al-Qatn and its left over al-Sitar and Yedhbal.
 It was raining on Kuteyfa, drenching it till the trees toppled.
 The rain reached al-Qunan and sent sand and shrubs coursing down the mountain.
 In Taima it left no palm tree standing, and destroyed all except stone houses.
 Thabair was streaked with froth and mudslides like a chieftain wearing a striped robe,
 and the base of al-Mujaymer was like a strung loom, the froth and mud around it like a spindle’s whorl.
 Like a Yemeni merchant displaying his wares, the rain unfolded shrubs and flowers,
 and in the valley of Jimaa the birds staggered, drunk on the scent of the blossoms.
 The drowned animals lay scattered about, streaked with mud like drawn bulbs of wild onion.

Muallaqa of Zuhair bin Abi Solmi al-Mazni

These abandoned homes in Hawmanat al-Darj and al-Mutathalim, darkened by dung and ash—did they belong to my lover Um Awfa?
 And those houses of al-Raqmateen, like a tattoo in the veins of the wrist, did they belong to her?
 Gazelle and oryx wander through the ruins now, and their foals stand up in them.
 After twenty years, I stand before them bewildered, and only remember them when I see the blackened fire rocks and the rainwater channels.
 Recognizing the ruins, I salute them: “A good and pleasant morning to you.”
 Look, my friend, can you see those women riding camels, carrying their burdens across this high land, and walking through the waters of Jorthan?
 Al-Qunan is on their right—how many times I have passed al-Qunan, in the months of sanction and the months of freedom. Their howdahs are covered with blood-red cloths.
 Bearing the signs of wealth and luxury, they ride across al-Souban.
 They travel before dawn, bound for Wadi Ras like a hand bound for the mouth.
 I love to look upon them, delighting in their beauty.
 The clots of wool that drop from their howdahs lie like

uncrushed berries.
Reaching a channel of clear water, they place their tethering pegs, like someone setting camp.
And they come once more to al-Souban, as if they wanted to rebuild it.
I swore by a house built by the tribes of Qureish and Jerhom, who circle around it.
I swore by the two men who help and comfort those in trouble,
who reconciled the people of Abs and Dhubyan after they destroyed themselves, placing upon them the perfume of Manshem.
If we made peace, you told us, we'd avoid destruction.
You entered a state of peace, and avoided sins and faults.
You are great gentlemen; whoever takes a treasure becomes a great man.
The wounds have been cauterized by the camels paid as reparation:
camels given by men who took no part in the killing; although they didn't spill a cup of blood, they offered the camels,
and the foals of those camels, their tails marked, run now in the families of those slain.
Send a message from me to Dhubyan, asking them to swear not to fight again.
Don't hide this vow in your chest, and don't hide it from God: whatever you hide, God will know—he will write your deeds in the Book of Judgment, or will avenge them swiftly.
War is something you tasted and tried; it's not just imagination.
When you ignite a war, it will destroy you; fuel it, and it will flame higher.
It will grind you like a millstone grinding meal, and will double, like a camel giving birth to twins.
It will produce evil children, like Ahmar of Aad.
This war is not like the gardens of Iraq, that produce vegetables and coins, but is a garden of evil fruit.
I swear that Hussein bin Dhamdham did the right thing, though his people opposed him.
He kept his intentions in his heart and didn't reveal them.
He went to his enemy, killed him, and inconvenienced no one else.
He is powerful: if someone wrongs him, his revenge is swift; otherwise, he remains confident in his strength.
This tribe has warriors maned and clawed like lions.
I'll do as I like, protecting myself with a thousand armed warriors.
They took their camels, watered them till they were completely satisfied, and returned.

They killed each other, and fed the camels with unclean food.
I swear the spears of these two men don't bear the blood of Ibn Nahik and al-Mutathalim,
and their spears weren't involved in the slaying of Nafal, Wahb, and Ibn al-Mukhzam.
I see the camels of ransom passing by a mountain on their way to the families of the slain.
This ransom was paid to save their people from the trials of war.
They are true gentlemen: if they visited a murderer, they'd spare him.
I am weary of the troubles of this life: whoever lives for eighty years will certainly despair.
I know what happened yesterday and today, but tomorrow remains a mystery.
I saw death strike at random, like a blind camel running into people at night.
Whoever death strikes will die; whoever is spared will grow old.
Whoever refuses to make peace and interact with people will be crushed by jaws and trampled underfoot.
Whoever does favors for people will be respected. Whoever curses will be cursed.
A wealthy person who is stingy will be ignored and disparaged.
Whoever keeps his promises will not be disparaged; whoever does right will receive comfort and rest.
Whoever is afraid of death will receive it, though he mount a ladder to the sky.
Whoever does a favor to those who are undeserving will be disparaged by the deserving.
Whoever refuses to accept reconciliation will face the trials of war.
Whoever doesn't protect his home with his weapon will see it destroyed, and whoever doesn't protect himself will receive injustice.
Whoever travels often will think of his enemy as his friend. Whoever doesn't respect himself will not be respected.
Whoever conceals his attributes will be uncovered.
You might admire a silent person, but when he opens his mouth you will either love him or despise him.
Half of a young boy is his tongue, the other half his heart. His face and body are of no importance.
An old man's white hair lends him his respect; the upstart youngster, when his hair turns white, will become respectable.
We asked and you replied; we asked and you replied: whoever keeps on asking will receive no reply. **R**

The Muse of Travel

An Interview with Keith Miller

by Ann Hostetler

*Keith Miller, novelist, translator, and visual artist, speaks with Ann Hostetler about his work. Miller is the author of *The Book of Flying* (2005). His latest novel, *The Book on Fire* (2009), has just been released, along with his translations of Arthur Rimbaud's *The Illuminations* (2009). You can find out more about Miller and his work at www.millerworlds.com*

AH: You have lived and traveled extensively abroad, but were educated at Goshen College in Indiana. Could you describe for us some of the places you have lived, for how long, and in what capacity? How has place shaped your perspective and imagination as an artist?



Cecil Hotel (linocut)
by Keith Miller

KM: I was born in Tanzania, but grew up mostly in Kenya. As an adult, I have lived and worked in northern and southern Sudan (six years), Burundi (a year and a half), Egypt (nine years), and the U.S. (six years). I have traveled in forty-odd countries. I have taught art and English and done peace work, as well as freelance editing and writing.

I wrote *The Book of Flying* in southern Sudan, and aspects of the book were shaped by the landscape (we lived at

the edge of the great Congo rainforest) and the people. (The Zande people, just two generations ago, were cannibals; my reading and thinking about this led to a certain, rather infamous, section of the novel.) *The Book on Fire* is influenced by the nine years I spent in Egypt.

I suppose all writers have a “place” from which they write, but I think that the real stimulation of cross-cultural experience is its virtue of “making strange”: allowing one to see oneself from the other side. I also think that the textures of another culture’s art, when rubbed onto one’s own creative experience, can create interesting results.

AH: Your first novel was entitled *The Book of Flying*, and the main character in *The Book on Fire* was raised in a library. There appears to be an obsession with books and bookmaking in your fiction. What can you tell us about this?

KM: Growing up in Kenya, I spent most of my free time reading and making books. “Making” rather than “writing” books is an important distinction to me. My books, from childhood, have always included pictures and elaborate bindings and covers. I am obsessed with the book as object (and, as a corollary, with the changing architecture of reading offered by modern digital devices).

AH: Tell us a bit about your latest novel, *The Book on Fire*.

KM: *The Book on Fire* follows the fortunes of Balthazar, debauched book thief, as he arrives in Alexandria to steal from the fabled library. From his first day in the city, Balthazar is shadowed by Zeinab, veiled prostitute, who burns the books that are her wages. Zeinab directs Balthazar to the library’s hidden entrance. Once inside, rather than stealing from the library, Balthazar falls in love with the youngest librarian, Shireen, who was born of a book and has never left the library. Balthazar entices her aboveground with his own exquisite collection. But Zeinab also has plans for Shireen. The novel investigates the natures of creation and destruction, and the relationship between the two. It is also a love letter to Alexandria, the saddest and most beautiful city in the world.

AH: Why is Alexandria the saddest city in the world? What is the climate right now in Egypt concerning books, and reading, education, and the west?

KM: At one point, a character in *The Book on Fire* says that Alexandria is a city that walks into the future with its face continually turned to the past. It is the most nostalgic of cities, and has been pining for its lost glory for close to two millennia. Unlike wealthier historic cities like Rome and Athens, which are able to preserve their cultural icons in relative stasis, Alexandria is in constant and evident decay and renewal, a state that I find charming and beautiful.

The cultural climate in Egypt is at present schizophrenic. The ruling elite, who are generally liberal, promote the arts. The Bibliotheca Alexandrina—the new Library

of Alexandria—is a cultural arena on par with similar western institutions, and presents modern dance and literary festivals. Famously, it holds both *The Satanic Verses* and *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* in its collections. However, the majority of Egyptians, both Christian and Muslim, are deeply conservative, and would be viscerally opposed to what they see as licentious western art. Several times a year scandals erupt over novels or films, which are then banned to appease the imams or bishops. The Arabic-speaking world does not, as a rule, read very much. Part of this is due to the fact that written Arabic is essentially a dead language, playing the role of Latin in medieval European society. An average novel sells around two hundred copies. A couple of disturbing stats: the entire Arab world publishes fewer books each year than Belgium, and more books are translated into Spanish each year than have ever been translated into Arabic.

AH: Both of your books use a poetic, somewhat mythic style. How would you characterize the kind of fiction you write?

KM: While I appreciate writing of various textures, what seems to emerge from my pencil is a more densely decorated species of prose. My favorite stylists, Angela Carter and Vladimir Nabokov, pay attention not only to the sense, but also to the sound and shape of words. I am trying to emulate them. I have recently discovered that my books fit into the “slipstream” genre, which includes works that contain elements of fantasy, but are closely tethered to this world. Practitioners would include Jeff VanderMeer, Kelly Link, and Catherynne M. Valente. This is, however, a postmortem realization.

AH: What kinds of fiction do you most enjoy reading? What writers have influenced or inspired you?

KM: I read voraciously, in all genres. The books I return to most often include Hemingway’s *Fiesta*, *All the Pretty Horses* by Cormac McCarthy, *Seven Gothic Tales* by Isak Dinesen, *Anna Karenina* by Leo Tolstoy, and *The English Patient* by Michael Ondaatje. Two of my favorite writers are the above-mentioned Angela Carter and Vladimir Nabokov. Borges, of course, is a major influence. I also revere Joseph Conrad, George Eliot, Lawrence Durrell, and the sublime Ursula K. Le Guin.

Many of my favorite writers (Nabokov, Conrad, Dinesen, Durrell, Ondaatje) are “in-between people,” who wrote in languages other than their mother tongue or about places other than the land of their birth. There is something about travel that seems to inspire creativity, and, curiously, a tendency toward ornate prose.

AH: Both of your novels are complemented by your own illustrations, not so unusual in the history of the book, but quite rare in today’s adult publishing industry.

What can you tell us about the ways in which the verbal and visual complement each other in your work, as well as the pragmatic aspect of engaging a publisher’s support for such a creative venture?

KM: I’ve always loved illustrated books—the Narnia series, *Just So Stories*, etc.—and desired that marriage of image and text for my own books. My own art tends to the illustrative, and my writing is very visual (and otherwise sensual). I do a lot of drawing as I write, sketching characters and places, to more fully evoke them in my mind.

The illustrations for *The Book of Flying* are a disaster. I had originally done full-page illustrations for the novel, with fancy capitals for the beginnings of chapters, but my publisher thought that was overkill. But then, at the last minute, the designer decided to use the fancy capitals as illustrations for the chapter title pages. They looked terrible! So I had one weekend to draw fresh illustrations for the book. I’m not thrilled with the way they came out.

My wonderful editor for *The Book on Fire*, Storm Constantine, actually let me lay out the whole book and insert the illustrations and decorations as I wished. I’m delighted with the interior. The cover is less successful, for technical reasons, but I had great fun doing it.

AH: You have recently published a new translation of Rimbaud’s *Illuminations*. What drew you to this work?

KM: I first read *The Illuminations* in Cairo, and was immediately struck by their freshness, strangeness, and visual intensity. I read them over and over, and then wanted to own them. They are uneven, but the finest poems seem like windows directly into a child’s imagination. Rimbaud pays a lot of attention to the look and “feel” of the French words, and I wanted to engage with the poems more fully to try to understand what he was doing, and attempt to reproduce their texture in English.

AH: What can you tell us about your Mennonite background and education, and the influence it has had on you as a creative artist?

KM: I was raised in an MCC family, and have spent most of my life in close contact with MCCers. MCCers form their own particular species of Mennonite, I think, with a heightened peace and justice ethic, thrift-store dress sense, and More-with-Less culinary habits. However, I would say that my sense of being Mennonite was a very small part of my persona growing up. Being a blond child in a rundown area of Nairobi was much more important.

I attended Goshen College, a Mennonite institution, where I spent much of the first semester in culture shock, transfixed by MTV. The library (and interlibrary loan) was a revelation. And the buckets of ice-cream in the cafeteria did not go unsampled. But I left the States as quickly as

I could after graduation, partly from a horror of winter, but also because there is a certain lack of friction to life in America. I needed more languages around me, something to rub up against.

The peace ethic seems to have entered my work in interesting ways: Pico in *The Book of Flying* is a self-proclaimed pacifist, and generally deals with the obstacles he encounters not by slashing or tricking his way through,



Abu al-Abbas al-Mursi Mosque
(linocut) by Keith Miller

as in most fantasy novels, but by listening to and incorporating the other.

The Book on Fire is, at one level, an investigation of violence, the flip side of pacifism: the violence of obsessions and addictions; the violence inherent in art, as we incorporate scraps from other works; the inherent violence of sex (penetration is one of the themes); the violence of rebellion and fundamentalism; and

the violence codified within Christianity and Islam (communion, crucifixion, sacrifice). Clearly this urge to grapple with violence and its necessity emerges from my Mennonite background, as well as from the war zones I have lived in. I will be interested to learn what Mennonites make of the novel.

AH: Do you think that there is a violent aspect to Mennonite culture? Does an ideology of peace require some sorts of violence? Or, does a tradition that draws its strength from a martyr tradition inherently incorporate aspects of violence? What motivates your explorations of violence?

KM: The ideology of peace is predicated on violence, isn't it? Without the foundation of violence, our theology just evaporates. Working with peacemakers in war zones, I sometimes got the feeling that the attraction of violence was as strong for them as it was for the warriors; it just manifested in a different way. A parallel would be the American Christian fundamentalist obsession with Satanic worship, "backmasking" etc. The attraction is extremely similar, whether the focus is positive or negative. Anabaptists possess one of the few cultures without a tradition of codified violence (ritual slaughter, self-flagellation, warrior caste, penance, etc.). I see the peculiarly Mennonite/Amish violences of incest; the deliberate exclusion from community (of gays, notably); subjugation of women, artists, voices; and the strange violence of si-

lence and omission, as a skewed surfacing of the human need for violence. I find it all very fascinating.

AH: Do you see your books as addressing--in allegorical terms-- the current tension between Muslims and Christians in the world today?

KM: While we were living in Alexandria, violence erupted between Muslims and Christians. Some Christians had performed a play in a church which depicted a Christian converting to Islam and then returning to Christianity. The play was filmed, and a DVD got into the hands of some Muslims. There were massive, violent demonstrations, and people were stabbed in several churches. That atmosphere, of fear and animosity and blood in the streets, is evoked in the final scenes of *The Book on Fire*. I did not intend the novel as an allegory for Christian-Muslim tension.

AH: Your decision to translate pre-Islamic texts from Arabic shows a commitment to language and culture from another place. In concept, it reminds me of the parallel interest in Christianity now in the Gnostic Gospels and the Dead Sea Scrolls. Is there such a movement in Arabic speaking countries now, to recover the texts of a culture that predates Mohammed, and if so, what can you tell us about it?

KM: Arabic holds an interesting and unique place among languages, as it is, for Muslims, truly the chosen language of God: the Quran was, according to Muslims, delivered verbatim by the angel Gabriel, in the Qureishi dialect. Arabic is thus a sacred language in a way that Christians have a difficult time comprehending. Interestingly, though the Quran is quite obviously rhymed poetry in the tradition of the Arabian poets of Mohammed's time, to say so is heresy: I remember my Arabic teacher literally whispering it to me during a class. All this complicates Arabic literary studies enormously. Even to query etymologies can be tantamount to heresy at times. The Arabic written language predates the Quran only by about 150 years. There is a lot of interest in pre-Quranic Arabic literature—in fact, Arabs seem obsessed with "classics" to a greater extent than the west—but any suggestion that the Quran bears the influences of external texts could be a death sentence.

AH: What does it mean to be located?

KM: People often ask me: "Where do you call home?" And I have no real answer, because I don't feel the need for "home." My craving is for movement, uncertainty, new cities, the friction of encountering the other. That said, I do have my little library of precious books that I cart from place to place, so perhaps that shelf is where I locate myself. **R**

Johnny Appleseed's Eden

By Shari Miller Wagner

She was upstairs, quilting blocks
that formed a Rail Fence.

He was sprawled near the door,
in a patch of old sunlight,
reading Swedenborg's vision
of an open-gated Heaven
from a volume he carried
against his heart.

Years later in Harper's,
the woman at her frame
described John Chapman's voice:
"loud as the roar of wind and waves,"
then soft as what "quivered
the morning-glory leaves
about his gray beard."

I like to think that someone
who looked so closely
turned from basting fence-line
to following the leaves that stirred
near his beard. Serpentine vines
drew her deep into a forest
where roving rivers were roads
and the banks of each fork
bore snowy blossoms or apples
serene as suns.

Opening her eyes,
she saw that everything was a gift
in God's astonishing garden—
hornets caught
beneath a coffee sack shirt,
the rattlesnake that struck
only in fear.

Walking in bare feet,
she felt Eternity sting
like the pierce of a needle
through blackberry and cocklebur—
all the prickly but splendid
pathways she embroidered.

Reviews

Protestant mysticism

Gundy, Jeff. *Spoken among the Trees*. University of Akron Press, 2007.

Reviewed by Maurice Mierau

“Day at the Pond without Geese” appears just over half way through Jeff Gundy’s latest book. The poem pivots on a characteristic juxtaposition of political violence with the apparently sublime world of nature:

The latest suicide bomber was nearly
done with law school. The enemy shot her brother.

Afterwards her head was found on the floor
of the restaurant in Haifa, black hair still flowing.

Like most men in such times, I want to give advice.
The pond is pretty in its small way, trees still green...

...Like most men,

I think I’m smarter than most men. I dream of women
even when I’m awake. (65)



The note of gentle self-mockery recurs frequently in this, Gundy’s fourth full-length collection. However, Gundy is clearly a nature poet, an American transcendentalist who connects the inner world of the soul or psyche and the outer world apparent through the contemplation of nature. Sometimes this is almost explicit, as in the title

“February Report on Conditions in the Interior,” or when Gundy signals his approach with epigraphs from Teilhard de Chardin or Marion Woodman.

The book’s opening poem, “Damsel fly,” is prefaced by the de Chardin epigraph, and the poem’s first stanza goes:

Consider that ant swarm on the sidewalk, like spilled brown sugar,
and the pale yellow leaves the hackberry casts free in a dry
June, pressed to the parking lot. (xi)

The sensuous and packed alliteration here, and the close observation, prepare us for Gundy’s real intention, which is to sing a kind of Protestant mysticism, a lyric not quite contained in either his Amish or Swiss Mennonite religious roots.

Although his work does not betray the anxiety about Mennonite spirituality that Patrick Friesen’s often does, Gundy’s literary influences and wit push him in directions that violate simple orthodoxy:

...Down the road
lived a courtesan of fairly good taste and a man convinced
he had a Bible in his head. The body is not corrupted
but by the soul, he insisted, painting the pickets again.
 (“An Hour,” 12)

Gundy, who teaches at Bluffton University in Ohio, is pretty good at painting pickets himself. Consider a few of his titles: “Soul Travel at the Electric Brew, Goshen, Indiana,” “The Recovery of Imaginary Friends,” and “Signature, or Jonathan Edwards and Joe Walsh Meet in the Electric Brew.” These titles are attention-grabbing, but they also point towards the intellectual synthesis going on here.

“Futurism in the Black Swamp” displays Gundy’s ironic take on politics and the history of modernist art-making, and it moves in a subtle way towards a pragmatic conclusion:

Let’s hear it for speed, said Marinetti, still buzzing
with the postaccident rush. Let’s hear it for hot cars
and bullets. War will make us clean. I’ve had
those days, too. Today my sore heel barely hurt.

Today I only heard about a few people who got
blown up. I doubt I love poetry more than my own
sweet flesh or the sound of my woman singing. (47)

For all the irony and allusions in this book, I found “Firefly” especially moving, opening with the lovely four-stress line, “I want to find the room where my father is sleeping,” and continuing in the fourth couplet like this:

The masters say all is one, but I am five hundred miles away,
studying the alphabet of broken trees

and the gorgeous dusk of the beaver marsh.
The masters say nothing is separate, but I am lost

among the lilies, the needy mosquitoes, the slow tenderness
of the fireflies. I will leave tomorrow if need be. (26)

It seems to me that Gundy has advanced artistically over his last two books of poetry, *Deerflies* (2004) and *Rhapsody with Dark Matter* (2000). The language here is

vital, and he's playing with a rich sound palette. There's also an intriguing tension between Gundy's longing for the contemplative and his recognition of the world's rejection of that Emersonian dream. "Late Psalm" puts this tension into a folksy metaphor: "Sometimes you can spray all you want and let the wipers run, but the windshield just won't come clean" (11).

"The Song of the Weed Witch" again reacts to a famous statement about art-making, this time from William Carlos Williams: "I've never figured out how to put ideas/ in things. In this simple, indescribably deep forest..." (56). This language feels exactly right: the forest of our minds is indescribably deep, but also simple, as is the diction of this poem, which concludes with an expressive half-rhyme:

... I am a native but not exactly at home,
so I listened to the nearby water and the distant water,
and a drop fell on my shoulder like a reason to turn. (57)

Maurice Mierau is a Winnipeg writer and editor. His second book of poems, Fear Not, appeared with Turnstone Press in 2008.

Seeding with wisdom

Funk Wiebe, Katie. *You Never Gave Me a Name: One Mennonite Woman's Story*. DreamSeeker Books, 2009.

Reviewed by Elfrieda Neufeld Schroeder

Katie Funk Wiebe clearly states her purpose in writing *You Never Gave me a Name*. "Harvesting one's life," she writes, "means seeding the future with wisdom by sharing the stories of life's transforming moments." She does so with candour and sober reflection.

Funk Wiebe divides her latest autobiography into four parts. In the first section, she writes about her youth. The second section describes how she learned to cope as a widow with four small children. The third part tells of a "sea change" in her attitude toward denominational and race issues, her own calling as a writer and speaker, and the women's movement and her involvement in it. Part IV describes her life as a senior. A "Photo Album" depicting the various stages of Katie's life follows the third section.

The author is not afraid to be forthright and open about all aspects of her life. She writes about the pre-

vailing attitude toward female students at the Mennonite Brethren Bible College when she studied there in 1945. "[A woman] had only one role in life—that related to her anatomy, not her mind." She is quite strong in condemning herself and other women for not realizing how trapped they were: "Group-think, not the moving of the Spirit; 'Idiots,' I say now." The emphasis in general was "to trust and not think things through. ... Human intelligence was devalued. ... Living by blind faith was the key to all." Normally a decisive and self-confident person, this atmosphere, claims Funk Wiebe, caused her to waver and become insecure.

She continued to flounder, describing her first year of marriage "as one of the most difficult in my life." Her husband was an idealist, with a vision for literature ministry in the church. She shared this vision, but it brought them little income. Although they were members of the same congregation she writes, "Walter had first-class citizenship and I had second-class citizenship." "Wives lived in their husbands shadows, praying these shadows would keep growing." It was at this time that she honed her writing skills by taking on assignments given to her husband, and writing under his name.

In 1962, just after the family, now with four children, moved to Hillsboro, Kansas, Funk Wiebe's husband Walter died suddenly. She writes very soberly about this time in her life that changed everything for her and the children. "My task now was to make a family without a husband and father at a time when one-parent homes with young children were rare."

In 1966, without a university degree or teaching experience, Funk Wiebe was hired as a part-time English teacher at Tabor College. This launched her at mid-life into a career that was very rewarding in terms of financial stability but even more so in establishing an identity. When she resigned in 1990, she had earned two degrees (BA and MA) while becoming head of the English Department and chair of the Faculty Personnel Committee. She writes that in the church, however, "the hardest stretching I had to do was to quit sorting tasks and admit that discipleship was for everyone, male or female, single or married or divorced, not just [for] a few male leaders."

For a long time Funk Wiebe denied her writing gift partly because there were no strong female models in the Mennonite Brethren Church to encourage her. She finally came to the realization that "there comes a time when one must accept God's blessing and give a blessing to one's own life."

The last section of Katie Funk Wiebe's autobiogra-



phy deals with the phase in which she, as an octogenarian, finds herself presently. Here, too, she speaks with a prophetic voice. Our society has an attitude of “dread and loathing” about old age, she says. However, God wants us to find meaning in our senior years by discovering the unique contribution we can make in this stage of our lives. She herself wrote several books as a senior.

In this, her latest book, Katie Funk Wiebe hopes that what she calls her “life review” will be one that many readers recognize as their own story, because if they do, then she will have told it right. I recognized myself in it many times and often felt that the author was speaking directly to me, discovering to my amazement that this book was even dedicated to me. The dedication reads: “To the women, and men, waiting in the shadows for opportunity to use all their gifts in service to the church.”

Elfrieda Neufeld Schroeder and her husband Hardy have recently moved from Kitchener to Winnipeg. She enjoys reading, writing, translating, and spending time with grandchildren. She honed her writing skills under Funk Wiebe’s editorship of Rejoice!, an inter-Mennonite devotional journal.

Gentle, thoughtful, honest

Yaguchi, Yorifumi. *The Wing-Beaten Air: My Life and My Writing*, Translated by Clive Collins and Yujin Yaguchi. Good Books, Pennsylvania, 2008.

Reviewed by Sally Ito

This autobiography of Japanese poet, pastor, and professor Yorifumi Yaguchi reveals much of what it is



like to be a man of letters in Japan. Born in 1932 in the northern part of the main island of Honshu in Japan, Yaguchi belongs to that generation of Japanese that experienced the war as children. Their particular legacy is an awkward one—too young to have been culpable for any of the crimes Japan committed in the war, they

nonetheless experienced the most impressionable years of their life in a country defeated and occupied. It was a generation that was made to lose its faith in a divine parent—the Emperor—and to struggle to

find something to replace him. In Yaguchi’s case it was the Christian God of the Mennonites, a God of peace whose son spoke of “loving the enemy.” The Mennonites were the one denomination of American Christianity that Yaguchi felt comfortable with because the others, in his estimation, had acted hypocritically in participating in the war.

It is Yaguchi’s abiding interest in literature, particularly English literature, that is his entry point into life as a poet. A voracious reader during his student days—“I read one book a day. Whenever I finished it, I felt like I had conquered it. Reading books was often more exciting than some university lectures”—he inevitably became a poet. He refers to himself as he must have appeared to workers in the rice paddies during those years in a wryly ironic poem called “To A Poet:”

Hey you! What are you doing?
What? You say you are writing poetry?
What a stupid thing you are doing!
You should come out into the rice paddy
and weed out.

You know we get up very early
and work till dark,
but you don’t work at all,
and are idling around
from morning to night.

Hey, show us then,
what you have written;
“The mountains are green,
The birds are chirping
And the frogs are dying ...”

Is this what you call poetry?

After converting to Christianity in 1958, Yaguchi ventured first to Tokyo to take a graduate degree at ICU (International Christian University.) While working on his master’s thesis on the poetry of Dylan Thomas, he met the New Testament scholar Howard Charles who hailed from Goshen, Indiana. While interpreting for Mr. Charles, Yaguchi determined that he would study at Goshen College Biblical Seminary in the United States.

Yaguchi’s foray into the United States would cement his convictions as a Mennonite. Studying under such well known Mennonite scholars as John Howard Yoder and Millard Lind, Yaguchi felt American student life to be far more rigorously demanding and intellectually challenging than it was in Japan. Yaguchi also made some remarkable friends and acquaintances while in Goshen. One story that struck me as particularly odd

was how Yaguchi became friends with Howard Graber, who accidentally mistook him for an aboriginal mariner from Canada's Atlantic coast! Taking absolutely no offense at this mistake in identity, Yaguchi instead befriended Graber, all the while pondering in the wake of Graber's confusion what the life of this other Asian-looking twin of Yaguchi's must have been like! The retelling of this incident made me think of the word 'guileless' in reflecting on Yaguchi's memoir as a whole. I use the word here in the sense of 'sincere, forward, frank and honest.'

Yaguchi returned to Japan and began ministry as a pastor and later as a professor of American literature at Hokusei Gakuen University in Sapporo, Hokkaido. It was during his years at Hokusei that Yaguchi's life as a poet flourished. Alongside teaching the modernist poets like Pound and Eliot and translating poets such as John Hollander and Cid Corman, Yaguchi developed his own poetic voice. In 1966 he published his first book of poems written in English: *Shadows*. Thereafter came three books of poems in Japanese, one of which won a regional poetry prize. Yaguchi's writerly career had begun. In 1976, Yaguchi became a visiting scholar to SUNY Buffalo for a year. During that time he visited many American poets such as William Stafford and Gary Snyder. Yaguchi's passages on his visit to Snyder and Ginsberg—Beat poets fascinated with Japanese culture and religion—are interesting

insofar as his own perspective as a Japanese Christian are concerned. Snyder, he says, approves of the Amish and Mennonites because, as Snyder himself puts it, "They are ecological. They don't destroy nature. And they are non-violent pacifists."

Yaguchi's ongoing dialogue with many well known American poets throughout his career has obviously fuelled his poetics and his Christian convictions. For him, poetry, faith, and political engagement on issues of peace and justice are all linked. His work as a poet and scholar, writing in Japanese and English, has made him a link between the U.S. and Japan. As a Mennonite pastor, he provides a rich tableau of experiences unique to his position as a pacifist in a country once strongly militaristic in its outlook.

The Wing Beaten Air is a gentle memoir of a thoughtful man who has dedicated much of his life as a scholar, pastor and poet to his faith as a Mennonite. The account is given in a deceptively simple tone interwoven with Yaguchi's poems that have themselves a simple and abiding clarity to them that is memorable. *The Wing Beaten Air* is a wonderful book, well worth taking time to read, especially for people interested in contemporary poetry and spirituality in Japan.

Winnipeg poet and author of fiction and non-fiction, Sally Ito, contributes regularly to the multicultural children's blog and Web site Paper Tigers.

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Nathan Bartel received his MFA from the University of Montana, where he was the 2004 Richard Hugo Scholar. He was a 2004 Ruth Lilly Fellow, and a 2005–06 Winter Fellow at the Provincetown Fine Arts Work Center. He has published poems in *Shankpainter*, *Octopus Magazine*, *The Common Review*, *NEO*, and *Fence*. He teaches in Kansas at his undergraduate alma mater, Bethel College.

Kirsten Eve Beachy lives in Briery Branch, Va., with her husband, assorted poultry, several hives of honeybees, and a cat who aspires to be a talk radio personality. She teaches writing at Eastern Mennonite University and is a contributing editor to *The Tusculum Review*. Her creative prose appears in *Shenandoah*, *The Tusculum Review*, *Relief: A Quarterly Christian Expression*, and *Dreamseeker Magazine*.

Juanita Brunk's collection of poetry, *Brief Landing On the Earth's Surface*, was selected by Philip Levine for a Brittingham Prize. She recently spent a year travelling in Asia with her teen-age son. She lives in Brooklyn, New York.

Erin Coleman-Cruz (see Artist's Statement, p 32)

Todd Davis is the author of three books of poems—*The Least of These* (Michigan State University Press, 2010), *Some Heaven* (Michigan State University Press, 2007) and *Ripe* (Bottom Dog Press, 2002)—and co-editor of *Making Poems: 40 Poems with Commentary by the Poets* (State University of New York Press, 2010). His poetry has been featured on the radio by Garrison Keillor on *The Writer's Almanac* and by Ted Kooser in his syndicated newspaper column *American Life* in *Poetry*.

Jeff Gundy teaches at Bluffton University and was a Fulbright Lecturer in American Studies at the University of Salzburg in 2008. His most recent books are *Spoken among the Trees* (University of Akron Press, 2007), which won the Society of Midland Authors 2007 Poetry Award, and *Walker in the Fog: On Mennonite Writing* (Cascadia, 2005), which won the 2006 Dale W. Brown Award, given by Elizabethtown College for "outstanding scholarship in Anabaptist and Pietist studies."

Ann Hostetler is the author of *Empty Room with Light*, a book of poems, and editor of *A Cappella: Mennonite Voices in Poetry*. She is also the Web site editor of the *Center for Mennonite Writing* at www.mennonite-writing.org. She teaches English and Creative Writing at Goshen College in Indiana and is currently on sabbatical in Germany, where she is a Guest Professor at the University of Freiburg.

Chris Janzen (see Artist's Statement, p 2)

Jean Janzen continues to live and write in Fresno, California. Her latest collection of poems is *Paper House* (Good Books, 2008). She has been published in *Poetry*, *Gettysburg Review*, *Image*, *Prairie Schooner*, and other journals.

Rhoda Janzen is the author of a book of poetry, *Babel's Stair* (Word Press 2006), and a memoir, *Mennonite in a Little Black Dress: A Memoir of Going Home* (Henry Holt 2009). Her poems have appeared in *Poetry*, *Yale Review*, *Gettysburg Review*, and *Southern Review*, and many other journals and magazines. Janzen is Associate Professor of English at Hope College in Holland, Michigan, where she teaches American literature and creative writing. In 1994 and 1997 she was poet laureate for the University of California.

Julia Spicher Kasdorf is the recipient of a 2009 National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship in Poetry. She is the author of several books of poetry and non-fiction, including *The Body and the Book: Writing from a Mennonite Life*, released in paperback with a new introduction this fall. She teaches creative writing at the Pennsylvania State University.

Becca J.R. Lachman is a "Mennolichious Quaker" who grew up in the Amish/Mennonite village of Kidron; she now calls Athens, Ohio home. Married to a Christian Peacemaker Teams reservist and the youngest daughter of missionaries, Becca's body of work often attempts to digest her loved ones' "calling" and her own role within the Anabaptist family history—and future. A published composer and poet, she has studied the performing arts most of her life and is currently a student in the Bennington College writing seminars.

Keith Miller is an American citizen, but has spent most of his life in East and North Africa. He is the author of two novels, *The Book of Flying* (Riverhead Books, 2004) and *The Book on Fire* (Immanion Press, 2009). He has also published a translation of Arthur Rimbaud's *The Illuminations* (Quinx Books 2009).

Jesse Nathan is the author of a chapbook of poems called *Dinner* (Milk Machine 2009). He is an associate editor at McSweeney's Publishing and the managing

editor of the *Best American Nonrequired Reading*. He was born in Berkeley, California, but when he was nine his family moved to a farm in rural McPherson County, Kansas. He graduated from Bethel College in 2005 with degrees in history and religion. He now lives in San Francisco.

Betsy Sholl is the author of seven books of poetry, most recently *Rough Cradle* (Alice James Books, 2009). She teaches in the MFA Program of Vermont College of Fine Arts, and is currently Poet Laureate of Maine. Her husband was interim pastor of a Mennonite congregation in Portland, Maine, for five years.

Paul Steury is a father of two energetic boys, an environmental educator, a faculty member at Goshen College, an activist for quality of life indicators (air, water, soil, food, and local economy) and an amateur anthropologist and photographer. He says, "I love to take pictures of people in cultural situations. I go to events with a camera hoping for unique people to catch my eye. When they do, I ask them if I can photograph them and the majority of time they say yes. After the photo I try to have conversation with them about why they are who they are. Being an environmental educator I know that people play big part—and can be either a big detriment or a big part of the solution to the issues that surround us. This gives me another area on which to focus my lens!"

Shari Wagner's poetry or creative non-fiction has most recently been published in *North American Review*, *Shenandoah*, *Christianity and Literature*, *Midwest Quarterly*, *The Christian Century*, and *Traces of Indiana and Midwestern History*. Her collection of poetry is *Evening Chore* (Cascadia 2005), and in 2009 Cascadia published *A Hundred Camels: A Mission Doctor's Sojourn and Murder Trial in Somalia*, a memoir Wagner co-authored with her father. She teaches creative writing for the Writers' Center of Indiana and currently has a Creative Renewal Fellowship from the Arts Council of Indianapolis and an Individual Artist Program grant from the Indiana Arts Commission.

G.C. Waldrep is the author of three poetry collections: *Goldbeater's Skin* (winner of the 2003 Colorado

Prize); *Disclamor* (BOA Editions, 2007), and *Archicem-balo* (Tupelo Press, 2009; winner of the Dorset Prize). His fourth, a collaborative volume with John Gallaher entitled, *Your Father on the Train of Ghosts*, is due out from BOA Editions in 2011. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in many journals, including *Poetry*, *Ploughshares*, *American Poetry Review*, *New England Review*, *The Nation*, *Tin House*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Colorado Review*, and *New American Writing*. He lives in Lewisburg, Pa., and teaches at Bucknell University.

Linda Wendling found the Mennonites when one running loose in her neighborhood not only hugged her, but became her best friend for life. She has been a member of St. Louis Mennonite Fellowship ever since. She has also been a Starr Novel Fellowship winner; a Laity Lodge Writer-in-Residence and a Milton Fellow in Fiction. She is a Best New Stories from the South winner; and was a finalist for the William Faulkner Prize for the Novel, the James Jones First Novel Prize, and the Bellwether Prize. She has won the Heartland Fiction Prize and was a finalist for Scribner's Best of the Fiction Workshops and the AWP Writers Award. Her stories have appeared in *Buffalo Carp*, *New Letters*, *The River Styx*, *Sun Dog*, and *With*.

Rachel Yoder grew up at the dead end of a dirt road in an intentional Mennonite community in eastern Ohio. She has written for *The New York Times*, *The Sun Magazine*, *Kenyon Review Online*, and has taught creative writing to women in drug rehab, college students in Arizona, and Midwestern retirees. She is currently an Iowa Arts Fellow in the Nonfiction Writing Program at the University of Iowa.

Melanie Zuercher grew up in the Appalachian Mountains of western Maryland and southeastern Kentucky, but since 1996 has lived on the Great Plains in Hesston and (currently) Newton, Kansas. She is a graduate of Goshen College and has an M.A. from Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Ind. For the last seven years—first as a freelancer and then as full-time staff—she has been a writer and editor for Institutional Communications at Bethel College in North Newton. **R**

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For further submission information, see pages 2 & 13.

ON RETURNING TO NEW YORK CITY AFTER A FULBRIGHT YEAR IN PARAGUAY

Katherine Arnoldi



I stood in line, holding my backpack, waiting to get off the plane.

All-nighter from Sao Paulo to Newark.

The day before I said to my friend in Asuncion, "I will probably run screaming to get back on the plane, to come back here."

But I did not feel like that at all.

I thought I would be horrified by the materialism, the commercialism, the wealth. I just spent a year in Paraguay, the poorest country in South America. "I am not the same person that left," I warned my daughter by email. I had seen so much. The effects of fields converted to soy for export. The shantytowns. People who suffer with tuberculosis, polio, dysentery, parasites. Starving families who live in the narrow strip of land between a fence and a road, beside a vast expanse of land growing food for pets in the United States. I had been in the Chaco with 120 degree heat, dust storms, drought, where the only precious water comes from the roof. I had seen the schools with no bathrooms, the homes with no walls, the children with no clothes. In spite of it all, I had seen hospitality and generosity everywhere I went: in the Mennonite community of Filadelfia where people opened their homes, shared their dinner tables, told me stories and pointed me in the right direction, in the Enlhet and Nivacle village of Yalve Sanga, on the roads, in the cities, in the buses. I had time to pare down, to see myself through the eyes of another culture, to consider the shallowness of much of what I had valued, to vow to be different.

I walked through the airport to the train to New York City. A mother and child waited on the platform with me. The little

girl with her pink backpack, her pink clothes, her pink shoes, her pink fluffy balls in her hair, her smile of braces, the mother with her hair perfect, her shoulder briefcase. There were no barefoot children selling candy, pleading, no mothers holding infants with their hands out for a coin. The train whizzed into the station and I stepped in the clean car, got a seat. Everything provided. Quick. Clean. Easy.

When I stepped off the train in New York City, I dropped to my knees and kissed the ground. Well, to be honest, I did not actually touch my lips to the floor. I knelt down, put my fingers on my mouth, then placed my hand on the gum-stained vomit-colored surface. I felt like a new immigrant, grateful for another chance.

I would help my daughter more, I vowed. I had seen devotion to family in Paraguay everywhere I went. I would work harder, buckle down, keep a job, I promised. Everyone in Paraguay worked and worked hard. I would send money and raise money for the Nivacle school outside Filadelfia that had no playground equipment, no paper, no books. I would send art supplies to the students at the high school in Yalve Sanga who treasure a pencil, could not imagine what is so readily available in the United States. I would think before I bought anything. Do I really need this? Could I do without it?

Then I got back up off my knees, adjusted my backpack and wheeled my suitcase to the stairs that led up to Penn Station. I turned my back to the direction I wanted to go, leaned over and bumped my heavy suitcase behind me one step at a time.

I was changed all right, I thought, but now we will see what I make of it. **R**