

April 2016

TORRID LITERATURE JOURNAL

VOLUME XVIII: THE MISSING PIECE



SPEAK YOUR TRUTH

PERFECT YOUR CRAFT

EMBRACE YOUR VOICE

Featured Interview: Yvonne Garrett

Featured Poets: Scott Thomas Outlar | Eli Miles | And Many More!

Must Read Fiction: "Creation" by Ty Spencer Vossler

TL Publishing Group LLC

PO BOX 151073
TAMPA, FL 33684

ALICE SAUNDERS

EDITOR
asaunders@torridliterature.com

AISHA MCFADDEN

EDITOR
amcfadden@torridliterature.com

REBECCA WRIGHT

EDITOR
becky@agirlwholives.com

ANNE MARIE BISE

POETRY EDITOR
ambise@torridliterature.com

HEDWIKI COX

FICTION EDITOR
hcox@torridliterature.com

TIFFANI BARNER

MARKETING & NETWORKING SPECIALIST
tbarner@torridliterature.com

AMANDA GAYLE OLIVER

CONTENT WRITER
agoliver@torridliterature.com

Official Website: <http://www.torridliterature.com> | <http://tlpublishing.org>

Facebook Pages:

<http://www.facebook.com/torridliteraturejournal>
<http://www.facebook.com/tlpublishing>
<http://www.facebook.com/tlopenmic>
<http://www.facebook.com/gatewayliterature>

Twitter: @TorridLit | @TLPubGroup

Blog: <http://torridliterature.wordpress.com>

To Submit: <http://torridliterature.submittable.com/submit>

Torrid Literature Journal - Volume XVIII The Missing Piece

Copyright © 2016 by TL Publishing Group LLC
All rights belong to the respective authors listed herein.
All rights reserved.

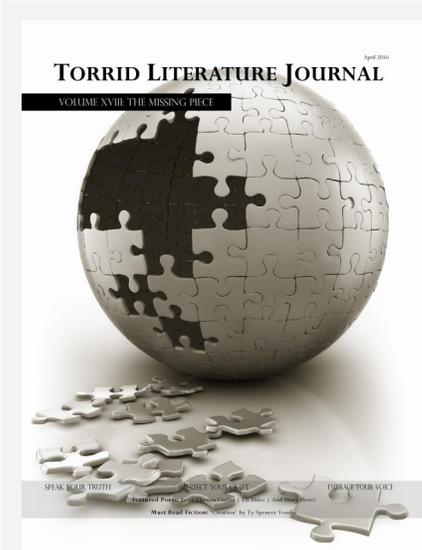
ISBN-13: 978-0692687437
ISBN-10: 0692687432

Customer Service Information: The Torrid Literature Journal is a literary publication published quarterly by TL Publishing Group LLC. To have copies of the Torrid Literature Journal placed in your store or library, please contact Alice Saunders.

Advertising Space: To purchase advertising space in the Torrid Literature Journal, please contact Tiffani Barner at tbarner@torridliterature.com. A list of advertising rates is available upon request.

Disclaimer: Any views or opinions presented or expressed in the Torrid Literature Journal are solely those of the author and do not represent those of TL Publishing Group LLC, its owners, directors, or editors. Rates and prices are subject to change without notice. For current subscription rates, please send an email to tjournal@torridliterature.com.

Letters & Comments: tjournal@torridliterature.com.



Torrid Literature Journal - Volume XVIII The Missing Piece

Print | \$11.00

Online | \$3.00

1 Year Print Subscription | \$35.00

1 Year Online Subscription | \$6.00

This issue is available at:

<http://amazon.com>

<http://shop.torridliterature.com>

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

All members of our team will be listed on the Masthead section of our website. In addition, members of our team will gain valuable experience while making an impact on the literary community. If you plan to apply for a position, please keep in mind that your time commitment will vary depending on your position and the project you are working on. However, please plan to spend a minimum of 2 hours a week with a 6 month to 1 year commitment to the position. Everyone on our team will need to be familiar with the products and services we provide, as this is the best way for people to understand our mission for the culture of literature and art.

All positions can be fulfilled remotely unless otherwise noted.

We're currently accepting applications for the following positions:

Fiction Editor

Editorial Assistant

Blogger - Interview

Blogger - Book Reviewer (Poetry)

Visit our website for detailed descriptions of the available positions.

Minimum length of participation is 12 months. Please take this into account before applying.

Questions? Please send an email to jobs@tlpublishing.org. Please visit http://torridliterature.com/Careers_Opportunities.html for more information.

FROM THE EDITOR

As a writer, everything looks like literature. Every moment and experience serves as the basis of inspiration for a new poem or story. It's like puzzle pieces appear in your mind and you can't help but put them together. Our commitment to the creative process is strong. We pull from different external and internal sources to put the pieces together. We want to know what the end result will be once we finish.

We want to know how a poem about our loved one will end. We want to know how this mystery novel will finish. We are dedicated because we have placed a sizable investment into our work. There is nothing left behind. What we have to say, what we have to speak out on is embedded in our work. It speaks for itself. We have put the pieces together to create something magical and we want to share our victory with the world.

That is our target goal for the *Torrid Literature Journal*. Inside of our latest release is a diverse collection of new literary material handpicked for our readers. We're kicking Volume XVIII off with a special interview with Yvonne Garrett, Senior Fiction Editor for Black Lawrence Press and co-author of *Split Open the Sky: Eternity Overwhelms Me*. Readers will learn about Garrett's work with Black Lawrence Press, including her tips on publishing. She also discusses her personal experiences with writing, editing, and publishing. The poems and short stories that follow are bold, poignant and inspirational. It was a pleasure working with our contributing writers to pull this volume of literature together.

Since our last release of the *Torrid Literature Journal* in January, we've been working diligently on other projects for our writers. Last March brought the return of our annual literary contest. After taking a brief hiatus, we're excited to announce its return. The *Romancing the Craft of Poetry & Fiction* contest was created to help highlight writer's efforts in crafting a well-structured literary work of art. This year we created a separate poetry category and a fiction category for our winners. Two winners will be selected for each category along with a few honorable mentions. Visit our website for complete submission guidelines.

Speaking of recognition, our newest members of our *Torridian Hall of Fame* have been listed on our website. You voted and we listened. Eight writers received membership in our Hall of Fame based on your votes. Voting for our next season of candidates will start May 1st. All writers who had work published in our journal in 2015 are eligible candidates. Visit our website and check out our newest members. Don't forget to cast your vote for our new candidates.

Our literary contest and Hall of Fame weren't the only projects that had our attention last month. We successfully hosted our first open mic of the year in March at The Bunker in Ybor City. This was actually the four year anniversary of our show and it was nothing short of amazing. A great mixture of seasoned and emerging artists graced the stage to bless our audience members with their gift. The experience was unique. Our performers were musicians, poets, spoken word artists, and comedians. Additionally, as a show of appreciation on our part, we gifted our performers and audience members with free copies of our chapbooks. These limited edition chapbooks contain sample poems that were published in previous volumes of the *Torrid Literature Journal*. They're only available during our shows. Visit our page on Facebook and check out our photos and videos from our most recent show. Be on the lookout for breaking news regarding our future shows. We are aware that our followers extend beyond the Tampa Bay area. Wherever you are located, I want to personally encourage you to consider attending an open mic show, poetry reading, or workshop in your community. If one isn't readily available then consider creating your own show or small workshop. Performing in front of a group is something I believe every artist should experience. It can become a healthy part of your desire to perfect your

craft.

Training and consistent practice is important. Seek to improve your talents and enjoy the journey. Moreover, given that April is a busy month for the literary community, it also serves as the perfect time start a new project or finish up an old one. In addition to our regular works in progress, we have two special events to look forward to over the next thirty days. First, April is widely known as National Poetry Month (NPM). Yes, poetry should be celebrated all year round but the Academy of American Poets has seen to it that April is marked as a special celebratory period where poets, teachers, librarians, publishers, editors, and bookstores join together to partake in events that give praise to past, present, and future poets. NPM also serves as an opportunity to familiarize society with the vital importance of poetry in our daily lives. There are so many reasons why poetry should be celebrated. Visit the Academy of American Poets' website to learn more about NPM and get a few ideas on how to participate in the celebration. If you're looking to challenge yourself and strengthen your craft then I encourage you to participate in the 30/30 poem challenge. Push yourself. Try new forms and techniques when you're writing poems. Strengthening your craft is much like strengthening your body's muscles. If you want your literary skills to be at their fittest then you have to be willing to put on more weight when you're working out.

In addition to NPM, April also marks the start of another Camp NaNoWriMo session. The nonprofit organization that facilitates NaNoWriMo in November also hosts Camp NaNoWriMo during April and July. During these two months writers get to choose the word count goal for their story. Many people shy away from the full NaNoWriMo session in November because the task of writing an actual full length novel can seem daunting. In actuality this is far from the truth. Writing a novel is a journey. It's a journey that should be appreciated and thoroughly enjoyed. Trust yourself and take a chance. If you have the desire to tell a story, any story, then Camp NaNoWriMo is for you. In addition, this virtual writer's retreat allows for non-novel related projects such as poetry, scripts, and novel revisions. Creating a story is like walking. Write one word then another. Soon you'll have a sentence that will turn into a paragraph. This paragraph will turn into a page and that page will grow into multiple pages. You get the idea.

My overall point is this: don't let fear be the reason you don't see an idea through to the end. Take risks. Don't put off for tomorrow what can be done today. I'm sure you've heard this saying plenty of times before but the truth never gets old. Tomorrow isn't promised and opportunities are tied to seasons. Take advantage of the time and resources that are available to you now. I'm not just speaking in terms of writing and editing. I'm speaking on life in general. On the other side of this, check your heart at the door. Make sure everything you do is for the right reasons.

Live on purpose and appreciate the things that make you who you are. Embrace your voice and the natural beauty that is you. Don't hide away in a shell. Being you is your greatest talent and gift to others.

Be you. Be blessed. Be torrid.

Sincerely,

Alice Saunders

Follow me on Twitter:
@lyricaltempest

CONTENTS

EDITORIAL CORNER

1...1 ON 1: Yvonne Garrett | Alice Saunders

POETRY

- 5...*Final Thoughts* | Jim Sutton
6...*The Only Window* | Eli Miles
7...*The Poem is Sold Out by the Horatian Heroes of the Eternal Boardroom* | Joy Roulier Sawyer
7...*The Poem is Read on the Pont des Arts Bridge, Paris* | Joy Roulier Sawyer
8...*Mermaids* | Holly Day
9...*Keats at Dover Beach* | Jim Sutton
10...*Indian Paint Brush* | Cara Vitadamo
11...*Empty* | Julia Gowell
12...*In Exile* | John Grey
13...*Incongruity* | Minass Richani
14...*The One-Eyed Bird* | Bailey Duncan
15...*Eyam* | Milt Montague
16...*Awe* | Sterling Jacobs
17...*Dear Sunrise* | Josh Seides
18...*Far out in Uzbekistan* | Peggy Aylsworth
19...*Weary From Not Being There* | Joshua J. Koczman
20...*Game Day Heartache* | Scott Thomas Outlar
21...*What I Hold On To* | Joseph M. Fornes
22...*My Sister's Himalayan Salt Lamp* | Kathleen McGuire
23...*An Ode to the Handwritten Letter* | Brianna Meeks
24...*Country Church* | Gary Blankenburg
25...*Strikingly Courageous* | *The Computer Screen* | Michelle Bayha
26...*Migration Path* | Gary Beck
27...*Never Say Goodbye (80's Ladies)* | Erren Kelly
28...*Smultronstrallet* | Anthony Ward
29...*Windows* | Heather M. Browne
30...*Masochism* | Jessica Lynn

FICTION

- 32...*Creation* | Ty Spencer Vossler
35...*The Light of Justice* | Christina Mengis
36...*The Looters* | Raymund P. Reyes

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- 38...Ad Space Available
39...Call for Submissions

1 ON 1: YVONNE GARRETT

By Alice Saunders

Yvonne Garrett has an MFA in Fiction (The New School), an MA in Irish Studies (NYU), an MA in Humanities & Social Thought (NYU), an MLIS (Palmer), and is currently working toward a Ph.D. in History & Culture (Drew). Her poetry, fiction, and non-fiction have been published in a wide array of literary journals and music magazines. Recent fiction appears in *The Reader: The Brooklyn Writers' Space Anthology* and the 2013 NYWC Leaders' Anthology. She is Senior Fiction Editor at Black Lawrence Press where she also edits the weekly newsletter *Sapling*. She taught writing at the Brooklyn Veteran's Center for several years, lives in the East Village (NYC) and hopes to one day return to the Pacific Northwest where the men are tall, the air is clean and the coffee is good. Her fifth poetry chapbook with Mary Ellen Sanger is out now on Axolotl Press. You can find Yvonne on the web at www.yvonnegarrett.com and amazon.com/author/yvonnegarrett.

Would you please tell us about yourself and your work?

My bio provides a good summary of my work and the pursuits that take up most of my time.

At what point did you realize this was something you wanted to do?

If by "this" you mean writing? I've been writing since I was little but aside from a few creative writing classes in undergrad, I never took my creative work seriously until I was in my thirties. I'd done music fanzines and rock criticism from my late teens for several years but never really thought writing creatively was something I should take seriously. Even after I did the MFA (New School – Fiction, 2008), I still don't write "full time" but instead work to find time to write every day.

What has been your biggest motivation? Where does your inspiration come from?

I can't name a "biggest" motivation really – I write because I've always written. I write like I breathe – it's a part of life. I remember a couple of moments that I could call "motivating" – reading Kathy Acker's fiction for the first time and realizing that I didn't have to write like Virginia Wolf (or Hemingway) to be a writer. Inspiration comes from all over – I listen to a lot of music when I write, I read everything/all the time, I watch a lot of movies, I study people

– how they talk/move/react/dress. Some of my writing teachers have been very motivating/inspiring: Honor Moore, Chris Offutt, Patrick McGrath, Helen Schulman, Anthony Swofford, I've learned something in every writing workshop I've been in. Teaching workshops is also motivating and inspiring. I taught a workshop for veterans for a while and that was incredibly inspiring.

What is your creative regimen? How often do you write?

I write every day – sometimes just a few lines, sometimes a whole glut of words comes out. Editing is the really hard work for me – not the initial writing.

How do you deal with writer's block? What is your advice on how to overcome it?

I'm not someone who has ever had to deal with writer's block and don't really understand that phenomenon. If I'm working with a student who has difficulty writing, I always suggest starting small – make a list of things, use some basic writing prompts. "I remember" is a great one to get people started writing.

What do you do when you are not writing? Do you have a day job?

I work a day job at The New School, part-time

as an editor at Black Lawrence Press, and I'm also in a Ph.D. program right now at Drew University. I've always had a full-time job, often with additional freelance work and I've been in grad school for almost 10 years – I'll be done soon!

Can you please tell us about Black Lawrence Press and *Sapling*?

Black Lawrence Press was started by Diane Goettel 10 years ago. I've been involved with BLP for the past 7 years or so. It's grown to be a major force in the indie press world – we release 20 titles a year, mostly poetry. *Sapling* is the weekly, subscriber-only, e-newsletter that works to be a useful resource for emerging writers looking to place their work. Every week I do a feature on a different journal, indie press, or emerging writer. I also do small blurbs each week on a contest, a journal, and a small press.

What is your role at Black Lawrence Press? What are your routine responsibilities?

I'm responsible for reading a large amount of the fiction manuscripts that come in through our contests and open reading periods. I help Diane (Exec. Editor) make final decisions on fiction submissions. I also do the curating, editing, and publication of *Sapling* on a weekly basis.

Black Lawrence Press

Black Lawrence Press is an independent publisher of contemporary poetry, fiction, and creative nonfiction.

Sapling is a curated weekly e-newsletter highlighting the best of the small press world for writers looking for new venues for their work. We believe in small press publishing and are committed to showcasing up-to-date, streamlined information on the best of the independent publishing world.

Each issue of Sapling profiles a contest, a small press, and a literary journal, and features an interview with an editor, publisher or emerging writer. Over the course of Sapling's seven years we've put out 300 + issues; a few highlights have included interviews with editors and publishers of Wave Books, BookThug, Four Way Books, She Writes Press, Write Bloody, Pank, and emerging author interviews with Shane McCrae, Ben Mirov, Nicole Steinberg, Danny Bland, and Monica Drake.

A one-year subscription (52 issues) is \$25 or a six-month subscription (26 issues) is \$15. Want to check us out before you sign up? Check out a full sample issue here: <http://www.blacklawrence.com/sapling/>

<http://www.blacklawrence.com/>

As a Fiction Editor, what are some of the common mistakes made by writers that you come across in your role?

Some common mistakes are so basic: not following submission guidelines for the contests, not double-spacing manuscripts, not checking spelling and grammar. For short story collections I always wonder why writers don't put their strongest story first – often readers aren't going to go past the first story so put the best up front!

Do you want work on editing projects independently or collaboratively with a team?

Independently. Although if I'm editing the final version of a novel with an author, of course, I want them to be an active part of the process.

In addition to being an editor you are a published writer as well. Can you please tell us about your latest chapbook, *Spllit Open the Sky: Eternity Overwhelms Me*?

This chapbook is one of a series I've been doing with Mary Ellen Sanger. We started some years ago with National Poetry Month (April) and continue to write poems (mostly) every day for a full year. Every March, we each select a group of our poems, put them together and publish a chapbook. This year's chapbook seems to be full of poems I wrote when struggling through August in NYC (too hot!) or February (too cold!). There are also some poems about illness and loss but a couple of more positive poems in there too.

Why do you think your readers are going to enjoy your chapbook?

Past feedback I've had from readers speaks to

the immediacy of the poems. These are mostly unedited and appear just as they did the day I wrote them. There can be a lot of raw emotion and people respond positively to that. I also get lots of feedback on my "nature" poems – poems about water, weather, hiking/climbing.

Can you describe one of your favorite poems that you wrote? Why does this poem stand out more than the others?

Choosing a favorite poem is sort of like choosing a favorite child but out of this collection, there are a few that I like more than the others: "(moment of) silence" is one of the few "political" poems I wrote last year that made the cut. It's a commentary on the empty gestures we make after horrific events. I also really like "we will see the boats climb & rise" mainly because, for me, it captures the rhythm of the tide.

If given the chance, would you change anything about this book? Do you have any regrets?

Always and so many! But the nature of this project is that we (Mary Ellen Sanger and I) try not to agonize over choices: which poems, what order they should fall in, cover art, titles, etc.

How do you market your work? What avenues have you found to work best for your genre?

I use word of mouth, I post to Facebook, I have a blog. This year I brought some copies to AWP and gave them out to friends and a couple of poets whose work I admire. I also always send a box to my mom – she's a big champion of my chapbooks and I have a small following at the Unitarian church in Arizona (where my parents

live). Since the chapbooks aren't the same to me as a novel would be, I don't heavily market them – it's not that kind of project.

What have been some barriers to achieving your goals of writing and/or becoming published?

Time is always the biggest obstacle. With my need to work full-time and the amount of grad school work I have, it's hard to find time to send out my creative work.

Any tips on what to do and what not to do?

If you want to get published (and not everyone does): write every day, learn to edit (take writing workshops, read a LOT), and treat writing like a full-time job not just a "hobby."

Don't blame others if your work doesn't get accepted – maybe you're not working hard enough, maybe you're submitting to the wrong places, maybe you're giving up too easily. Read the journals you're submitting to and if you're submitting to a small press – know what they publish.

Where do you see publishing going in the future?

I have no idea where publishing is going in the future. Indie publishing seems to be doing very well if the number of small presses at the Book Fair at this year's AWP is any measure of success.

What advice would you give to writers who are contemplating writing their first chapbook?

If you are looking to have your first chapbook

published and want to submit it to contests or open reading periods at the various small presses, make sure you know what they publish. Take a look at other chapbooks – find some you like and see if your writing will really work in this format.

Were you ever hesitant when it came to writing or sharing a specific poem? Why?

There are a lot of my poems that will never be read by anyone else – either because they're just plain terrible or expressing a strong emotion that I don't want to share. I try to be very honest in my writing and sometimes that can make it very difficult to share. I've written a couple of poems about my own struggles with chronic pain/injury and those are tough to share. I also worry sometimes about what I call my "I don't love you" poems - the concern being that certain people will think the poem is about them when likely it's not.

What has been the toughest criticism given to you as a writer? What has been the best compliment?

I'm a survivor of The New School's MFA in Fiction program - tough criticism is integral to the MFA process and, in hindsight, incredibly helpful. I see tough criticism as good criticism – it's how I become a better writer. However, criticism based on personal taste I don't find useful at all and rarely pay attention to.

Best compliment for my poetry: when non-writers give me positive feedback about my poetry, I find it to mean much more – I've been told there's an honesty, an immediacy to my poetry that touches some people deeply. That level of communication is very important to me as a writer.

Best compliment on my fiction: I've had some great praise from fellow writers and teachers but again, the praise that means most to me is when someone I don't know comes up to me at a reading and tells me how much they like what I've read.

Do you proofread/edit all your own books or do you get someone to do that for you?

I proofread/edit my own work. Stories that have run in journals or anthologies are, of course, proofed/edited by the editors of those publications.

What genre are your books? What draws

you to this genre?

I'm not a big believer in separating writing into "genre" – the chapbooks are poetry and/or prose-poems and/or "hybrid". My fiction is fiction and sometimes "creative non-fiction" and sometimes "hybrid." Some stories are "literary fiction," some are more akin to "horror," some could be called "magical realism" but again, genre is such a limiting term.

What is the hardest part of writing for you?

Time – just simply finding the time to think and write and edit. Getting work out there into the world is also very hard for me. I'm great at championing others work but not so good at getting my own out there.

What has been the highlight of your writing career so far?

Putting my first chapbook out into the world was pretty great. Mary Ellen Sanger (with whom I do this chapbook series) was really supportive and I think being able to publish her poems alongside mine made it a much richer experience. Other highlights would have to include having a really personal creative non-fiction piece, "Ribs," published in the New York Writers' Coalition anthology. It was a difficult piece to write and seeing it in print was very important to me.

Having the opportunity to teach writing has also been a real highlight - whether teaching undergraduates or veterans, it's been a wonderful experience.

And of course, the great writing teachers I've had the privilege of working with – so many of them have been so incredibly helpful.

What are your ambitions for your writing career?

I would like to get a full-length novel and/or story collection out into the world soon.

Are there any other genres or creative avenues you would like to explore (i.e. music, singing, painting, etc)?

I'm studying piano this semester (I used to play). Music is a big part of my writing voice and having played classical music all through my childhood/teenage years, I find it really informs the rhythm of my language. I started painting again last year but that's on the back burner until I'm done with my Ph.D. course work.

Are there any noncreative avenues you would like to explore?

I'm not sure what you mean by "non-creative"? I think everything in life has the potential to be creative. As far as career goals: I'm currently working on a Ph.D. and with the advanced degrees I already hold, I plan to either teach full-time or find an appropriate academic research position.

If you were writing a book about your life, what would the title be?

Oh Look! A Squirrel! – that's a joke I have with some friends – about the way so many of us are so easily distracted and also often try to do too many things at once.

What's next for you? What does your future hold? What are you currently working on?

That's a pretty big question! I have no idea what my future holds. Currently, I'm trying to get my novel manuscript into shape to get out to a couple of people who've expressed interest, I'm sending stories out to journals, I'm working on my Ph.D. (with all that entails), and I'm keep up with my physical therapy to try to convince my body that it can make it up some more mountains.

Do you have any upcoming projects, tours, events, or announcements that you would like to share with our readers?

I post info semi-regularly to my blog if people are interested. I'm not doing any readings right now but likely this fall will get back to that.

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview. What final thought and/or message would you like to leave with our readers?

Thanks for the interview!! Message to your readers: Keep writing, keep reading, support your local bookstore(s), read indie books and be kind to each other.

Can you tell us where people can find you? Website, social media, blog, etc.

www.yvonnegarrett.com or @yvonnePRB on Twitter
Amazon author page: amazon.com/author/yvonnegarrett

Sapling is also on Twitter: @SaplingBLP



When: Saturday, July 30, 2016
Time: 8:00 PM - 11:00 PM
Where: The Bunker (f.k.a. Tre Amici)
1907 N 19th St., Tampa, FL 33605 | P (813) 247-6964
Contact: Tiffani Barner | tbarner@torridliterature.com
www.torridliterature.com
www.tlpublishing.org

Tampa's family friendly open mic show!
Price: Free!

Join TL Publishing Group and the Tampa community as we celebrate poetry and the arts with our open mic event. Our open mic events are always family friendly and provide an open platform that welcomes all types of artists. In the past, numerous singers, musicians, bands, comedians, poets, spoken word artists, and storytellers have blessed our stage, leaving the microphone in flames.

At our upcoming event, we have R.J. Kerker as our special host for the evening. R.J. is a member of the American Song Box band and a long time supporter of the arts community in Tampa, Florida. He also co-hosted open mic night at Café Kili for several years before retiring to focus on other musical projects. Visit his band page to learn more:

<http://facebook.com/american-song-box>
<http://reverbnation.com/amersongbox>

Visit us during open mic night to learn more about the performers for the evening. There is no charge to attend this event. All performers, emerging and experienced artists, are encouraged to come out and participate.

Please visit our website and like our fan page on Facebook to receive important updates regarding this upcoming event:

<http://www.facebook.com/tlopenmic>
http://www.torridliterature.com/Open_Mic.html

If you are interested in being a featured poet at one of our events, please contact Tiffani Barner at tbarner@torridliterature.com.

ODE TO LITERATURE

FINAL THOUGHTS

By Jim Sutton

When I am gone, then will it truly seem
I never was, except within your mind
where cuttings from my soul, remaining green,
take root within the feelings that they find.
And if no more than roots of me remain,
that is enough to mark the fact I was,
enough to justify the joy & pain
that consummated how we chose to love.
But from these ancient roots, two greening souls,
engendered by love's consciousness of choice,
grow to replace us & pursue the goal
that made us one & led us to rejoice.
 Because the roots of what we are remain,
 the love I felt for you lives on the same.

Jim Sutton, a graduate of the Iowa Writers Workshop, lives in Des Moines. His fourteenth book of sonnets, *Love, God & Country*, has just been published by the White Violet Press and is available on *Amazon.com*.

Eli Miles is a middle school English teacher living in the foothills of Rome, Georgia. He is a graduate of Shorter University. His favorite writers include Fyodor Dostoevsky and Flannery O'Connor.

THE ONLY WINDOW

By Eli Miles

I walk to the only window in this decrepit house
And I press my hands against the window.
The glass made as black and opaque as smoke,
Seeking purchase enough to fling it open, I push
Against the pane,
Ancient and creaking wood groaning in protest,
I know you are in there, I know you are in there.
This window must have been sealed shut, I think.
Never to be opened again.
(Maybe for good reason.)
No.
I lean my shoulder into the effort,
With a jolt,
It budes a few centimeters,
An aperture of light floods the room in a supernova of dried paint and microscopic slivers of wood.
It's daylight outside?
Feeling more confident and curious as ever, I push harder against the rotting window.
(Maybe you are opening something you shouldn't.)
Leave me alone.
The window continues its glacial ascent,
Reluctantly illuminating more of the room.
I hear the creaking of rusted nails—
I realize if I push much harder it will rend the entire window from its dilapidated, disconsolate frame.
I feel the light from the other side of the portal warming me, so I continue to push.
(You swore you would never open this window again.)
You cannot stop me. I am letting in the sunlight.
(Think about what you're doing. You will never be happy again.)
I feel the shudder as a large crack rattles the window and I feel it start to give way.
More light breaks through, perforating the dissolving wood.
(You can never be happy again, you will never be happy again, do you hear me?)
I throw my entire body into pushing the window through the decaying wall
(Doyouhearmeyouwillneverbehappyagain)
And in an instant, it is consumed by the blinding daylight.
I watch the window tumble down to earth, crumbling into millions of jagged fragments.
I sit down and look around at the rest of the illuminated room,
For the first time in years.
I see the whole house is a monolithic carcass,
Condemned to collapse into oblivion.
I see what the sunlight has shown me.
I rub my eyes and walk outside.

Joy Roulier Sawyer received the Herbert Rubin Award for Outstanding Creative Writing from New York University, and since then has published poetry in many diverse publications, including *Books & Culture*, *Bohemian Chronicle*, *LIGHT Quarterly*, *New York Quarterly*, *Ruminate*, *St. Petersburg Review*, *Volta*, and others. Sawyer was runner-up in the 2011 St. Petersburg Review poetry contest for her eight sonnet cycle, "Following the Piper: An American Elegy." She's taught at both the University of Denver and Lighthouse Writers Workshop of Denver.

THE POEM IS SOLD OUT BY THE HORATIAN HEROES
OF THE ETERNAL BOARDROOM

By Joy Roulier Sawyer

Scorned and left roiling, ransomed, wretched lovers—
faithful to faith and fighting fear, but reeling;
burned by your branding, blistered raw and wringing
blood from my poem.

Sold out for power, priceless sacrifice of
pride, by those climbing greed's eternal ladders,
pulpits of prose, of deadness, death embroiled in
bored rooms of bizness.

Poems are not angled, plotted, coiffed, and cloying,
strategized simply, opiates of order,
powerpoint presentations, smoke machines of
heat with no heartbeat.

THE POEM IS READ ON THE PONT DES ARTS BRIDGE, PARIS

By Joy Roulier Sawyer

The spirit of the lover is not the bitter wind but a breath,
lips pressed on trembling lips, murmuring *live oh live oh live*.

The spirit of the lover is not the brash microphone but an ear,
your ear touching my ear touching ear touching. Touching.

The spirit of the lover is not the harsh accuser but a question:
Why do you flee such fierce longing, all the day long?

The spirit of the lover is not the cruel whip but a caress,
your face the treasured map, many years in the tracing.

The spirit of the lover is not the dull strategy but a poem:
these fresh, fragrant peonies blooming sensual delight.

The spirit of the lover is not the caustic cynic but a comforter,
wrapping you with downy wings, warm and graceful arms.

The spirit of the lover is not the feeding frenzy but a taste:
For lo our unforgiving winter is over. O taste and see.

The spirit of the lover is not the brassy lock but a key,
freeing you to flee, forget—or open love wide.

Holly Day was born in Hereford, Texas, “The Town Without a Toothache.” She and her family currently live in Minneapolis, Minnesota, where she teaches writing classes at the Loft Literary Center. Her poetry has recently appeared in *Oyez Review*, *SLAB*, and *Gargoyle*.

MERMAIDS

By Holly Day

we were going to take the boat out, sail
to the edge of the world, tease
the monsters waiting there with our
bare, dangling feet, toes tickling the ocean skin
like tiny pink fish

but you had to go and ruin it
chase shore-hugging mermaids instead
had to search clam-shell bikinis for pearls
find out where baby mermaids come from

we were going to become pirates
treasure hunters, world explorers
wrestle giant squid at the world's edge
find the fountain of youth

but you had to go and spoil everything
in your search for suburban normalcy
chase dreams of apron-clad mermaids
who'd give up their kingdoms for you.

Jim Sutton, a graduate of the Iowa Writers Workshop, lives in Des Moines. His fourteenth book of sonnets, *Love, God & Country*, has just been published by the White Violet Press and is available on *Amazon.com*.

KEATS AT DOVER BEACH

By Jim Sutton

Picture a snail in Mesozoic time,
meandering over mud that's soft & free,
tracing a line that follows him behind
until it's scoured away by cleansing seas—
unless some timely accident occurs
to mark the trail he incidently made
by cov'ring it with substance that preserves
the track he drew, in stone too hard to fade.
And if, by chance, that rock is cut in two
in such a way his ancient trail is seen
by someone with the feeling to renew
the size & shape of what his life had been,
 that's how the lines emerging from this hand
 were writ by one who writes his name in sand.

Cara Vitadamo is a registered nurse with poetry always on her mind. She loves reading, and writing poetry and has been published before. Her poems have been published in *Mused*, *Café del Soul*, and *Torrid Literature Journal*. However, her most recent published poems are in *Ceremony*.

INDIAN PAINT BRUSH

By Cara Vitadamo

A dark rain cloud passed by unknown to me
In a time of paramours and mothers.
During a time when my freckles were prominent
Like a constellation in a pale sky
As I skipped in a blazing sun.

I the archivist; I the collector
Of families and specimens
Come upon an undiscovered flower
With orange and dark red paint brush bristles.
Its roots deep beneath a cracked and thirsty land
In search of a well of liquid love.

A flower that should have been found
Long, long ago
By gregarious young explorers
Who grew up before time grew fast.

Now, solemn anthropologists look at the past
That could have had a cure
Or a succulent scent in a diverse garden
As the flower is cultivated for delight.

But for now-
I step into a blue and wet
Frontier of possibility.

Julia Gowell is an undergraduate student at the University of Virginia. She is from Rhode Island and has a passion for poetry and the ocean.

EMPTY

By Julia Gowell

My insides have been scooped out
so deeply that I feel them.
I can feel where they used to be.
I can feel their nonexistence.
The emptiness makes me want to hurl,
although I know nothing will come out,
because being depressed
is needing to throw up
but never getting it out.

IN EXILE

By John Grey

I am reading
about the scream in the dead of space,
imagining the sound I would make
if nothing could hear,
how, even knowing there was
not a living soul within light years,
I'd still throw back my head
and wail my human heart out,
until my voice
echoed through canyons,
ricocheted off mountains.

I'm reading
about the shack in the woods,
the empty room
but for the chair and table
and the bottle of booze
and the man with his fingers
wrapped around it
and the sweat bubbling out
of his flesh like the tears tottering
from his eyes
and the sobs growing louder and louder
though he's alone in the forest
and the trees could care less
and the night creatures, even
if they knew about blood and nerve
and bone, still wouldn't make
the connection.

I'm imagining when the screaming's done,
the indelible human residue
in the thin, cramped walls,
or out in the vastness,
the relentless wake of sound waves.
No matter how starkly, alone, we die,
we never quite let go
the resonance of our living.
I'm reading of exiles.
I'm hearing the reverberation.

Minass Richani is a young Australian poet aspiring to not tell her story but to enthrall you, to have you experience your deepest fervors within her words; to tell your story.

INCONGRUITY

By Minass Richani

Metal and bone
360 with a groan
Pain with a moan
The knife's already there
But you turn it and tear
A look of love, I see a glare

A shot of love
Caress with a glove
Affection with a shove
The after affects of a drug round
You protect yourself as I drown
You kiss me I fall to the ground

Flattery to bruise
Conflict I choose
Myself I lose
I'm pretty so I'm unfaithful
You're perfect so I'm ungrateful
I've changed when I shouldn't have to

A two-legged chair
Oxygen no air
A canvas so bare
You hold me but never support me
I'm stripped of what I can be
I'm bursting with colours you don't see

It's art without a vision
Its rebellion with a condition
It's poetry you don't live in
And I'm explaining every word
Our lack of connection is absurd
If you're my wings then I'm no bird

Bailey Duncan is a full time student, who loves and has always loved to write poetry. He lives in a small town and hopes to bring it fame with his writing. He finds inspiration from all that around him, and like the poets he favors, puts a twisted spin on it.

THE ONE-EYED BIRD

By Bailey Duncan

No one is as charismatic as the one-eyed bird.
He flaps his wings so feverishly,
Making up for his loss in dimension.
He has lost a valuable part of his body,
And he is now paying for it.

No one is as charismatic as the one-eyed bird.
The one who sings his famous song in the morning,
So lovely and so graceful,
Only to be rejected by the ones he wishes to attract.
He is no longer the handsome bird he was.

No one is as charismatic as the one-eyed bird.
The one who can't sleep soundly at night,
For fear of one creeping up in his blind spot.
He has learned to adapt to this fact,
But he will always be more wary than the others.

No one is as charismatic as the one-eyed bird.
The one who put his life on the line for the ones who hated him,
Because his life was worth sacrificing.
He was already broken, and therefore he had no reason to live.
Therefore, he died for the ones who broke him further.

No one was as charismatic as the one-eyed bird.
The one who's song was so graceful,
The one who's eye was so intelligent.
But the others only pointed out his flaw,
And flaws are what cause things to die.

Milt Montague first fell in love with poetry at 85. Now at 90 plus, 47 of his poems have been published in less than 2 1/2 years, so far.

EYAM

By Milt Montague

memorial to a small group
ordinary people
dedicated and self-sacrificing
forgotten save for the annals

cruel death was concealed
in a bundle of clothe
ordered by the village tailor
of Eyam in mid England 1661

the black plague arrived
they elected to seal off
their town to prevent others
suffering their horrification

the curse raged for a year
claiming half the residents
never past the locked gates
saving many thousands

of local country folk
from a gruesome death
by their sacrifice

to the noble citizens of Eyam

Sterling Jacobs received his Associates degree in art at Murray State College in 1999 then his Bachelors degree at East Central University in 2007. Most of his work centers on painting and ceramics ranging from pottery to ceramic figures to fine art animation mixed with poetry in a graphic novel format. Sterling Jacobs has two websites: www.fromthebottleheadbeatnick.com and www.facebook.com/sterlingjacobsart.

AWE

By Sterling Jacobs

The night was quiet...until that moment came
When the sky began to bellow!
Then the clouds hovered together
For their morning glory clash!

And from that morning clash
Spawned a symphony of sorts;
But who's to say how
That symphony would play out?

I can tell you the answer: rain...
Soft, sudden rain hitting the ground,
Not a single drop out of place;
Permeating the air with a freshness that,
Once inhaled, one couldn't help but
Relax into the breeze.

Then I smiled myself to sleep,
While being subdued in a cascade of an
Effervescent AWE....

PEN OF DRAGON

By Sterling Jacobs

Furies are forged within the ink
As torrents of flame that {(flicker)}
Against the drones of conformity
From the world itself disdained.

Passions once embraced
Become truths to be told
Bursting into cataclysms
Against the norm of society's
Rants and raves and the ignorance
Spat about by tawdry tongues.

Then come the words that break the brow
Of the devil's destructive gaze
Devouring his delusions
And deceptive ways,
Consumed in the dragon's fire
{[[[FUMING]]]} from the pen.

Josh Seides is a serial entrepreneur, startup adviser, business writer, high school senior, and, above all, a literary writer. He is the founder of the national 501(c)(3) nonprofit Technocademy, Inc. (since 2012), which teaches technology to senior citizens and veterans (www.technocademy.org), and has been featured in such outlets as US News & World Report, Yahoo!, Forbes, CNBC, and NBC News and has helped 170,000+ people.

DEAR SUNRISE

By Josh Seides

Dear Sunrise,

I dream of your iridescent embrace. Woke up to your unending tickle of penetrating warmth. The gentle creaking of boorish roosters nothing compared to your quotidian lullabies. Fades in the glow of your lingering touch.

In the short days in the height of August, I snicker as you melt the glossy ice cream of bawdy adversaries. The furtive drip slowly, solemnly creeps down like weeping water paint, defeated.

The languished days of freezing oppression are no match for you. The pounding downpours of thunderous melancholy have no way to get through. You are the veiled assassin, waiting for the slightest lick, the nervous bask, smothering my tepid anxieties one-by-one with your lethal glare.

Your lavish affection is too much at times, chiding me to retreat meekly into the barren abyss I call shade. Waiting to elude the peeling burn that stains skin. But I like that about you. We all like that about you.

I cannot help but notice you have been down a bit lately. I search. You hide. I wait. You retreat. Those devilish clouds have you cornered as they flaunt their putrid silver like a spilled painter's palette, bleak and polluted. The anemic trees bleed sorrow and the morning doves forget their jovial hymns at home. The tempered grass refuses to grow and the paralyzing rain comes uninvited.

I know it is mid-September, but I want you back. We all want you back. Do not let the surly shadows froth in the spotlight, nor the ingratiating leaves flout in your presence, nor the forlorn wind dance without a partner. So come out. Retake the ravaged homeland you call your own.

Peggy Aylsworth is a retired psychotherapist living in Santa Monica, California. Her poetry has appeared in numerous literary journals throughout the U.S. and abroad, forthcoming in *The Wallace Stevens Journal*. Her work was nominated for the 2012 Pushcart Prize. Five books of her Poetry have been published.

FAR OUT IN UZBEKISTAN

By Peggy Aylsworth

The man with the blue guitar
would have
no strings
to change things as they are if
the artist's
brush grew
hairs that painted only by decree.

But things as they are (or were)
would sneak
and change
beyond the state's decree as one man hid
the work
of artists
whose colors bolted from the law.
His gatherings
lit candles
in the desert, the images more fierce than
tired lies
of smiling
comrades. He fed the startled eyes
of those
who came
the mile on mile to hot terrain.

Joshua J. Koczman received his bachelors in Philosophy and English from Hillsdale College in 2013. During his years living in the delightful and dilapidated town of Hillsdale, something about the world spoke, and writing became a sort of listening like interpreting like translating. Joshua hopes to offer words to things in hopes of sharing what is sacred amid the common.

WEARY FROM NOT BEING THERE

By Joshua J. Koczman

I'm worn out. I'm worn out from waking
less weary than when I went to bed, of sleeping
only to wake, of eating just to feel fed,
of working merely to tug at the thread of income
and the thread of expense and see them meet
with a sort of sad vacancy, like eyes a few days
after a funeral. The sorrow of happiness past.
Blankets aren't warm enough for that sort
of cold. Only I don't want more. I don't want
more sleep or more food or a higher salary.
I want less of them, or at least I want less
the lethargy like desire for more of them,
to wake with the day and sleep with the night
and to learn what "at home" means, or else
at least to remember dearly that these are only
words, like "coffee room" and "homesick."
Only "at home" is a terribly lonely saying
when the words are just words written
in a poem out of some meager self-consolation
and not the saying of the bottoms of bare feet
on the warm cold floor before or after waking.
Waking is tiring these days, worn out and down
by the routine of it, whittled away at by the lack
of ritual of it. "At home" must be made up
of oh so many invisible pieces. Maybe we "fall
in home" like we "fall in love." I don't know.
Only somewhere, maybe, there is a carving
I don't know I'm crafting, and someday it will
happen that I might see it, and on the floor there
my bare feet will curl their smiling toes
on the warm cold wornness of a rug, for I will
have worn out that rug by being at home.

GAME DAY HEARTACHE

By Scott Thomas Outlar

The start of college football
is now less than a week away.
This will be the second season
since my Father passed on.
When UGA kicks off this coming Saturday
in the noon hour
memories from hundreds of games
we watched together
will surely be careening through my mind.
The four overtimes game against Auburn
when Robert Edwards ran wild.
The SEC Championship and subsequent
Sugar Bowl blowouts against
Arkansas and Florida State
in Mark Richt's second year at the helm.
The screw job in the 2007 polls
when Georgia was not voted into the National Title game.
The final play in the 2012 SEC Championship game against Alabama
that left Georgia within 5 yards of victory
after making a last minute storm down the field...
another near miss opportunity
that would have put them in the National Title game.
All the rivalry games against Tech
that inevitably came down to the final play,
sometimes going our way, sometimes not.
But more than anything what I'll remember
are the talks we had after games,
thrilling in victory, or agonizing in defeat.
Mulling things over and helping each other
keep the larger picture of life in perspective.
I miss those talks, as well as the others
about space, God, love, truth, ancient history,
technology, psychology, philosophy, medicine,
natural health, science fiction and fantasy books,
family, food, politics, baseball, society, friendship,
and every other damned thing under the sun.

We always wish we could have
just one more conversation...
but we can't
because death is the final goodbye;
no matter how many tears we weep,
no matter how many prayers we whisper,
there will never be another conversation.
But the memories remain,
as does the unconditional love.
I know my Father would be proud
of the efforts I'm making in my life

as I push with every ounce of energy
toward reaching the goals I set
so many years ago.

If you see me this Saturday
off alone,
please know that I'm not talking to myself...
my quivering lips
are just an effort
to try and send
a final word Dad's way.
I love you forever...
and Go Dawgs!

-In loving memory of Barry Thomas Outlar

Joseph Fornes was born to Cuban immigrants in 1973 and has been writing since the age of seven. He graduated from Lonestar College with an Associates in Arts and was published in their literary journal, *Uproar*, on 3 occasions. He then transferred to Sam Houston State University where he pursued an English degree but then transferred to the University of Houston Downtown to follow his heart and is chasing a degree in Social Work.

WHAT I HOLD ON TO

By Joseph M. Fornes

Fat legs like cinnamon rolls pumping the air
Like tiny squishy pistons gaining momentum.
That's what you did when you were excited. You'd lie
On your back, rolling left and right, and hold your stubby toes
In your tiny elfin hands. When I'd make a face at you,
or coo, or just talk to you, you'd kick kick kick
And smile this huge gummy grin as if
To say – I don't know what you're saying old man,
But I like to hear you talk.

This is what I hold on to
As my baby girl grows up.

Driving you around Houston, to the mall,
Toys 'R' Us, the book store or McDonald's, on my days off.
Not really needing anything, but this is how we bonded.
Rolling your stroller up and down aisles and aisles
Of all the things I couldn't buy you, but I
Promised them all to you, or put it on Santa Claus
To bring to you if you were good.
Of course, you were two, you were always good.
We'd get home: fed, changed, and down for a nap
While I played video games until Mom got home

This is what I hold on to
As my baby girl grows up.

You were wearing the Teletubbies PJ's
Like a champ. Resplendent. On your feet, were a pair
Of my black Doc Martens. In
Your hands, was one of my guitars. Held up
Like an upright bass. Head up, and the neck held
In your right hand. Your smile was the best part.
Wide and huge. Exquisite joy in just being a kid.
Blue eyes cast up and left as if there was someone there.
Or somewhere else to be
Looking at me
With that smile, those eyes,
That wonderful joy.

This is what I hold on to
As my baby girl grows up

Fourteen years have passed
Since that picture was taken.
Fifteen since the aisles

Sixteen since the legs and smile.
I don't see that look so much anymore; you're well past the toys.
But sometimes, rare as a white buffalo,
I see my baby girl.

And that is what I hold on to.

Kathleen McGuire grew up in a large home school family who put down roots in the Colorado Mountains, full of faith and fable. The volume, drama, intimacy and horror of a big family have significantly impacted her work. Mesmerized and inspired by the groundbreaking lost generation literary movement, McGuire seeks to bring captivating, true and relatable literature into the hands of this era. McGuire recently graduated college with B.A. in English and resides in Denver Colorado, writing about the impressions and wonder of real, raw, human experience.

MY SISTER'S HIMALAYAN SALT LAMP

By Kathleen McGuire

This is the season of poetry, green mold, and our cosmogony.
Gold-rimmed sunlight forces shadows,
At jagged angles, black reflections of building 24,
Like chiaroscuro.
Rembrandt painted the sky this morning,
The sun is the source and the subject.
I am the muted background, the half-lit foil.
God divined my coffee to work a miracle,
On my misty mind, resurrecting consciousness.
I'm visiting my sister today.
I need to be alert, an osprey surveying,
Widening ripples on the surface.
I need strength to brace her world across my aching back,
To carry another's burden, for a few miles.
My sister is spewing and walking and shouting,
Manic and melancholy in one bombastic explosion
Of personality and brain chemical.
The coffee table holds a pink, glowing piece of mineral.
She tells me it's a Himalayan salt lamp.
Its purpose... to calm.
That's a myth.
I laugh about this, first to myself,
Then aloud, to the whole apartment.
She shoots irritated looks from the artillery of her facial expressions.
No composure.
I excuse myself to the bathroom,
To be alone with my reflection,
To talk myself down from this cliff of laughter and frustration,
Verging on instability, the creeping prelude to Blanche DuBois.
A clock shifts, groans under minutes piled.
Time... the great peacemaker, smoothing edges, blending colors.
I am better, getting closer to closing the gap in the circle.
Forever is a funny word.
The shadows of the day deepen, the sun extinguished,
It is night; I am tired, aching to let down the burden of today.
A knock at the door, a happy rhythm, you are home.
It is time; our burdens are left, side by side, at the blue door.
Dinner, elbows on the table, my hand presses yours.
Smiles.
Only we are conscious of the affinity unwinding,
That epoch of intimacy unfolding.
My eyes still rain shower,
My mouth still detonates,
But belief comes easy after sunset,
When you are here,
And the burdens are sleeping

What seems a million miles away
From our lively conversation
And these steaming cups of oolong tea.

Brianna Meeks is a student at the College of William & Mary. Though she is studying biology, she has always been a word lover. One of the ways she is attempting to make the world a better place is through her blog, *A Cool Glass of Lemonade*.

AN ODE TO THE HANDWRITTEN LETTER

By Brianna Meeks

Dear handwritten letter,
You are the prized possession of many,
The remainder of days past,
The one thing we can hold onto
To remember the promises
Laid so carefully on your pages.

Darling handwritten letter,
You mean so much more
Than the dictionary definitions
Of the delights that dance on your pages,
The words,
The whispered vowels
And consonants and syllables,
The syntax and punctuation.

You are more than just words,
Looping and skipping
Across the page,
With “i”s undotted
And “t”s uncrossed,
And words that need to be
Scrutinized before they take off their disguise
And reveal their true meaning.
You are the bared soul,
Unafraid to hide anymore.

You are only paper and ink,
And yet you are so much more.
You are both the past,
When you were written,
And right now, as you are read
And all the times you’ve been read before
And all the times you will be read again.

You are words that will live on
Forever
If we let them.
And love them.
Or if we hate them,
You are a delectable meal
For a hungry flame
As tears stream down a face.

How much weight you carry,
Dear handwritten letter,

And you, such a small thing.
You cherish tears
And fingerprints
And perfumes
Because they are as much
A part of you
As everything else.
You are the tangible,
Touchable,
Tasteable, Smellable,
Vessel of the soul.

Septuagenarian **Gary Blankenburg** is a retired English teacher whose doctoral dissertation treated the confessional poets: Berryman, Lowell, Snodgrass, Plath, and Sexton. Blankenburg is the author of eight books of poetry and fiction. His most recent book, *Above All Things*, was published in 2015 by Brick House Books, and he was, subsequently, nominated for a Pushcart Prize. He was a founding editor of *The Maryland Poetry Review* and *Electric Press*. In addition, he was, for a number of years, the editor of the poetry column “Stanza,” a weekly feature of the Towson, Catonsville, Owings Mills, and Arbutus “Times” newspapers. Nowadays he reads Victorian novels and paints while gathering himself up for eternity and a meeting with The Great Perhaps.

COUNTRY CHURCH

By Gary Blankenburg

virtue: Latin: virtutem: power, strength

The service opened
with a five piece band
that played a couple
of Christian rock tunes.
Then two men
in black suits
carrying a small wand
in each hand
took a place
on either side
of a large screen
where sacred images
were projected
as the names of
each book of the Bible
were called out
from Genesis
to Revelation.
With their wands
configured this way
and that the two men
performed a choreography
to accompany the slide show.
Then the young minister
wearing an orange
and black Illinois
football jersey,
jeans. and white sneakers
took the pulpit. He
announced that the sermon
would treat the topic
of virtue. He opened
the Bible and read
St. Paul’s words—
the good I would,
I do not,
the evil I would not,
that I do. Later,

the minister explained
Paul would resolve
his perplexity
by declaring, The spirit
is willing,
but the flesh is weak.
You see, he said,
there is bad
and there is good,
but there is also
better. That is what
a Christian must strive
for—to be better.
I was lost in
thought about
Tennyson’s dream
allegory, A Vision of Sin.
In that poem
the dreamer sees
a beautiful winged
white horse trying
hopelessly
to ascend from earth
with a huge man
astride its back.
At the close
of the sermon
the minister invited
any of us who wished
to be saved
to come up
to the pulpit,
but I could not—
or would not rise.

Michelle Bayha is 22 years old, and she is a graduating senior at Montclair State University. Her major is Family and Child Studies and has minors in Psychology and Sociology. The goal of her work is to relay to others that they are not alone in their strife. Topics that she writes about include: friendships, relationships, mental disorders, soldiers and war, individuals overcoming prejudice/stereotypes, and perseverance to overcome one's struggles. Her poems have appeared in: *What If?* (Canada), *Congruent Spaces* (online), *UK poetry library* (online), *Torrid Literature* (US), and *Forward Poetry: The World at War: Poems from the Battlefield* (UK).

STRIKINGLY COURAGEOUS

By Michelle Bayha

Stratified by differences
Sadness peaking through
An unrelenting world
Misunderstanding
Stomps on one's heart
Forming an inescapable void

Struggling to find strength
Robed in despair and grief
You breathe deeply
Embracing hopelessness
Grasping ever so tightly
To the inescapable void

Inconsiderateness of others
Creates your own insanity
Escalating indecency
You never understand
Why are people so cruel?
Expanding the inevitable void

Grappling with injustice
Where does one look to?
Broken trust in others
Respect needs to be earned
Feeling isolated from all
Darkening the inescapable void

Consuming the worthlessness
Feeling the rage from within
Temptation to do evil
Wraps you in a relentless cycle
Underneath the surface
Masking identity with the inevitable void

Suddenly the individual appears
Conjuring up feelings of hope
Feeling a glimpse of happiness
Along with the motivation
Creating the light for yourself

Extinguishing the void,
Claiming your identity
For if you won't, who will?

THE COMPUTER SCREEN

By Michelle Bayha

They stare at their screens
Each one a little different
One male and one female
One depressed and one schizophrenic
One without mental ailments
All trying to make it through

Simplest endeavors are challenges
Yet do they realize how far they'd come?
Each day they wake up and get out of bed
Already a huge feat
Last night was terrible
One was in a nervous breakdown
Another hearing various voices
Struggling to make it to morning

All of them
Staring at the same screen
In different worlds it may seem
Just remembering this one thing
I care when "they" do not
We are all humans and connected
Although some shy away
I do not despise hidden fear
Never turn away from someone in need

As they glance at that screen
No matter how lonely it may seem
When everything/everyone is against you
Remember you always have me

Gary Beck has spent most of his adult life as a theater director, and as an art dealer when he couldn't make a living in theater. He has 11 published chapbooks. His poetry collections include: *Days of Destruction* (Skive Press), *Expectations* (Rogue Scholars Press), *Dawn in Cities*, *Assault on Nature*, *Songs of a Clerk*, *Civilized Ways* (Winter Goose Publishing), *Perceptions*, *Displays*, *Fault Lines and Tremors* will be published by Winter Goose Publishing. *Conditioned Response* will be published by Nazar Look. His novels include: *Extreme Change* (Cogwheel Press) *Acts of Defiance* (Artema Press). *Flawed Connections* (Black Rose Writing). His short story collection, *A Glimpse of Youth* (Sweatshoppe Publications). His original plays and translations of *Moliere*, *Aristophanes* and *Sophocles* have been produced Off Broadway. His poetry, fiction and essays have appeared in hundreds of literary magazines. He currently lives in New York City.

MIGRATION PATH

By Gary Beck

I saw a flock of catbirds
gathered in the public space
in front of Macy's,
pecking at a plastic container
of green-colored pasta
left behind out of kindness,
or neglectful schweinerai
to feed desperate birds
evicted from feeding grounds
by acolytes of concrete,
forcing the feathered few
from home without credit cards,
so they could only watch
the shoppers come and go
and wait for leftovers
to feed their nestlings.

Erren Kelly is a Pushcart nominated poet from Seattle. He has been writing for 25 years and has over 150 publications in print and online in such publications as *Hiram Poetry Review*, *Mudfish*, *Poetry Magazine* (online), *Ceremony*, *Cactus Heart*, *Similar Peaks*, *Gloom Cupboard*, *Poetry Salzburg* and other publications. Kelly's most recent publication was in *The Rain Party and Disaster Society*. He has also been published in anthologies such as *Fertile Ground*, and *Beyond The Frontier*. Kelly's work can also be seen on *Youtube* under the *Gallery Cabaret*, links. He is also the author of the chapbook, *Disturbing The Peace*, on Night Ballet Press. Kelly received his B.A. in English-Creative Writing from Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge. He also loves to read and travel, having visited 45 states and Canada and Europe. The themes in his writings vary, but he has always had a soft spot for subjects and people who are not in the mainstream. But he never limits himself to anything, Kelly always try to keep an open mind.

NEVER SAY GOODBYE (80'S LADIES)

By Erren Kelly

At the burger joint
A woman sits across from me
Arms covered with tattoos
Like they were white
Gloves
The 80's haven't called
And reported it,s big
Hair missing
Her lion,s mane looks so
Wild and free
She wouldn't be out of place
In a
Van Halen
Or any generic arena rock
Video

As she drinks her beer
Her pink and black zebra skinned
Dress
Is a certified throwback
Like something she would wear
If she was serenaded by some
Spandex-clad
Rocker
(axl rose, maybe ?)

Or, she could be a heroine in a
80's movie

As she's eating
I mentally toast her
As I pretend to be a big-haired
Rocker
We're wading in a sea of
Bic lighters as i'm
Diving head first into a
Power ballad

Singing my praises of
Her

Anthony Ward is an AutoCAD operative from the north of England who has been writing for a number of years in his spare time. The authors he admires the most consist of Kerouac, Dostoyevsky, Huxley, Fitzgerald, Joyce, Dickens, Twain and Steinbeck. However Anthony derives most of his inspiration from listening to a great deal of music, particularly Classical and Jazz, and also from film, which often invoke him to set his thoughts to rest, as it is often the mood that motivates him more than anything. He currently tends to write about the world today with a rather grave introspective sentiment towards the past, which may well be what's holding him back. He has been published in a number of literary magazines including *South*, *Word Gumbo*, *Drunk Monkeys*, *Message in a Bottle*, *Snakeskin*, and *Blinking Cursor*, *The Faircloth Review*, *The Pygmy Giant*, *Shot Glass Journal*, *Turbulence*, *Underground*, *The Bohemyth*, *Torrid Literature Journal*, *L Allure des Mots*, and *Crack the Spine*, amongst others.

SMULTRONSTRALLET

By Anthony Ward

If ignorance is bliss then so is death.
That which we call awake that rouses us from our somnambulate state
By the grief that bestows the worth we rendered worthless
When it wasn't too late
Making us aware of the world around us
Our senses more attuned to what we shut out
Trying to live the dream.

But to learn is to live.
Illuminating the darkness of self consciousness
While we're down in the underworld,
Unable to see the light
That blinds us from the mountain overhead-
The climb we have to endure in order to get a clear view of the world around us.
Knowing gives us back the sense of wonder we lost since childhood
As we continue to grow into our selves.

Heather M. Browne is a faith-based psychotherapist and recently emerged poet, currently nominated for the Pushcart Award, published in *Lost Coast Review*, *Lake, the Orange Room*, *Boston Literary Review*, *Page & Spine*, *Eunoia Review*, *Poetry Quarterly*, *The Poetry Bus*, *Red Fez*, *The Muse*, *An International Journal of Poetry*, *Deep Water Literary Journal*, *Electric Windmill*, *Maelstrom*, *Apeiron*, *mad swirl*, *Knot*, *Dual Coast* and many more. Her chapbook, *We Look for Magic and Feed the Hungry* has been published by MCI. She won the Nantucket Poetry Competition in 2014, and was a semi-finalist in Casey Shay chapbook competition. Red Dashboard released her first collection, *Directions of Folding*. Recently widowed from her love of 24 years, she lives with her 2 amazing teens, and can be found frolicking in the waves. Follow her: www.thehealedheart.net

WINDOWS

By Heather M. Browne

1.

When I open the window of my eye,
I find I wrestle to open the window of my mind.
In quieting my mind's rattle,
the window of my soul already open, feels the fresh air.

When I open the window of my mind,
I espy the dirt upon my eye.
When washed clear,
the window of my soul beholds.

When I open the window of my soul,
I see clearly the rattle of my mind and eye
not noise or view from any window.

2.

There's a mark
 on my window
 on my glasses
 or my eyes.

I pretend it's the worlds.

But when I clean my windows, it's smaller.
When I wipe my glasses it's lighter.
When I clear my vision,
it's gone.

3.

Is it the view?
Or more so, is it what I am able,
 willing,
 choosing

to see?

Jessica Lynn is a twenty-three year old aspiring poet from Randolph, New Jersey. She received her BA in English from Virginia Commonwealth University. She is inspired by the darker side of life and seeks to unearth the beauty in situations where people might not be able to see it. She currently works in social media and marketing, though she will always continue to pursue poetry. Her work has been featured in *Pif Magazine*, *Madras Mag*, and *Artifact Nouveau*, among others. If you'd like to connect with Jessica further, please find her on Twitter [@JessTheWriter33](#).

MASOCHISM

By Jessica Lynn

On the nights
when you forgot
to call, again,
I let it spill –

blood, tears,
and too much vodka –

then, sniffing,
admitted weakness
and dialed
your number.

I remember the way
you grabbed
my arms and spun me;

I was a pink-skirted
ballerina. I was a
spinning top.

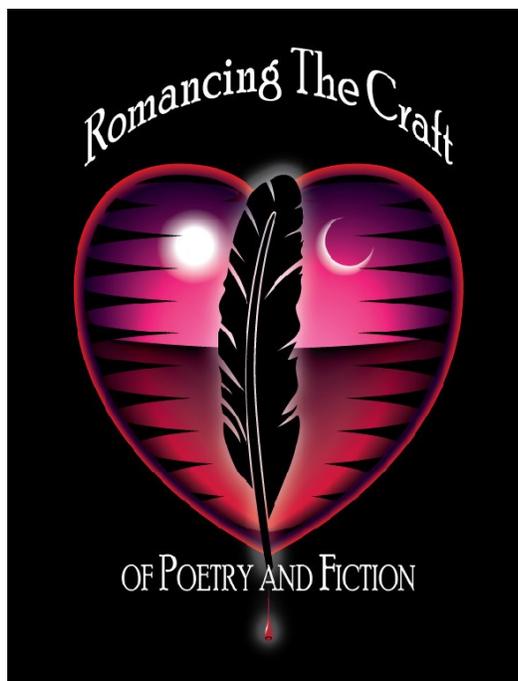
Around and around
until I lost myself
in the lull.

Stop crying,
there's no reason,

the jewelry you used
to anoint me, your goddess,
purple and wicked,
matching marks
above each elbow.

He tells me
that I'm perfect.
He tells me
that I'll be okay,
so why

am I still running
towards an open fist?



2016 Romancing the Craft of Poetry & Fiction Contest

Our annual contest has a low cost submission fee and is open to all themes and genres of poetry and fiction. Emerging and established writers are encouraged to participate.

Guidelines:

- Submission Period: March 1, 2016 - July 31, 2016
- Seasoned and emerging writers are encouraged to submit. Also, there is no age limit or geographic location requirement.
- All work must be previously unpublished.
- For each entry, please upload up to three poems or a fiction story with 3,000 words or less. There is no word limit for the poems.
 - The entry fee per submission is \$2.00 USD.
 - There is no limit to the number of entries you may submit, but each entry requires a separate \$2.00 submission fee.
 - We accept simultaneous submissions, but please notify us immediately if your poem or story is accepted for publication elsewhere.
 - All rights revert to the author after publication.
 - All entries will be considered for publication in the Torrid Literature Journal.

All entrants will receive a one-year digital subscription to the Torrid Literature Journal.

All contest submissions should be submitted through the use of our site on [Submittable](#).

Winners & Prizes: Three winners will be selected during a blind judging process. Winners and their selected work will be announced in the Torrid Literature Journal, which will be released October 1, 2016. 10 writers will receive honorable mention for their work. The prizes are as follows:

Poetry:

Second Place: 1) \$50.00 USD Visa Gift Card and 2) 1 print copy of the Torrid Literature Journal.

First Place: 1) \$100.00 USD Visa Gift Card and 2) 1 year print subscription to the Torrid Literature Journal (4 issues).

Fiction:

Second Place: 1) \$50.00 USD Visa Gift Card and 2) 1 print copy of the Torrid Literature Journal.

First Place: 1) \$100.00 USD Visa Gift Card and 2) 1 year print subscription to the Torrid Literature Journal (4 issues).

Please visit www.torridliterature.com for a complete listing of prizes and awards.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Alice Saunders at asaunders@t publishing.com.

FICTION

CREATION

By Ty Spencer Vossler

Ty Spencer Vossler (MFA) currently lives in Oaxaca, Mexico with his BMW (beautiful Mexican wife) and their daughter. Vossler has published novels, many short stories, poetry and essays. He attributes his originality to the fact that he shot his television over two decades ago.

“Peace, peace! Learn my mistakes and do not seek to increase your own.” —Mary Shelley

Mother bore me on April the third of her twenty-sixth year, and I was youngest of three.

I completed a cycle beginning with the birth of my older brother when Father was nineteen. Four years later, a sister was added, and after four years I gasped my first. Four, four, four (my poor father) four, four, four (my miserable mother).

The creature awakened within me when I was old enough to spend most daylight hours outside as Mother kept house, as Father toiled at a powdered milk factory until well after dark. My siblings felt that they’d been happier before I came along even though the progression of their lives didn’t vary. My brother and sister played together leaving me to my own devices. I was outcast. They blamed me for their joyless existence, and reveled in my every defeat.

My creation—conceived by loneliness, forged from solitude—baked in the youthful furnace of my mind to sustain me. We were inseparable. He was a soothing balm for my discontented heart. He comforted me when Father died of a heart attack. He was only forty-three. He put an arm around me when Mother turned to the bottle to forget her misery. I became invisible to my brother and sister. For them I was merely an ethereal entity that occupied the same space they did—insubstantial, disenfranchised. It is not surprising that as I matured, others perceived me as antisocial. I immersed in science, enjoying the nonjudgmental nature of the study.

My experiments began in earnest when I was nine. The garage was filled with everything we didn’t need—that packrat Mother was unwilling to part with. The faded Toyota Corolla in perpetual need of repair sat in the driveway. Our rented house also boasted a musty, cluttered basement—home for black widows, mice, and other crawly things. This is where I conducted my first experiments.

When I was nine, I put a live toad into a plastic baggy and hid him behind frozen stewing-meat in the ancient Amana freezer. A few days later I ripped the power cord from a broken alarm clock, plugged it in and touch the live end to the frozen toad. Even from upstairs my sister smelled failure.

“What the hell do you think you’re doing?” she asked.

Happy to be noticed, I answered, “I’m trying to bring a toad back to life.”

She stood halfway down the stairs, her rolling eyes dimly lit by a single light bulb. “You’re such a retard.” Then she clomped back up. Later she told my brother. That night, as we sat around the television eating macaroni and cheese, they told my mother. She narrowed her eyes at me, took another slug from her highball glass and returned her attention to the show. I was invisible to her too.

Ironically my upbringing did not translate into a life of crime, or an early suicide. I continued my study of science at the local community college and later transferred to the state college the next town over. I met my wife at the university. She was a nurse—shy by nature, a good companion. We married after graduation, created three children—one every fourth year—and lived in the same community I’d grown up in. I found a high school science teaching post at my alma-mater and she worked at the community hospital. Few of my former teachers remembered me.

I was pleased to return home each afternoon to my fatherly role—bathed in the warmth and comfort of routine, surrounded by affection. Some weekends we went camping, or drove four hours to the beach. Yet after twelve years of marriage, a restless spirit found residence within me. Laying awake into the wee hours, I listened to the house breathing.

My creation returned at two-thirty one cold November morning as I lay contemplating Brenda, an attractive colleague from work. She taught English, and recently we’d been sharing the lunch break in my classroom. She was tall and willowy, with blond highlights in her short brown hair. She liked to sit close to me while we talked and ate. We talked about students at first, and then the conversations tiptoed into our personal lives. Both of us were marriage-weary it seemed—anxious for the spark that would bring us back to life.

One afternoon, standing at the door ready to return to her classroom she kissed me, or I kissed her. My creation reasserted its presence—the pounding of his fists against the outside of the doorway gave me a headache. Yet the lingering sensation on my lips numbed the pain as Brenda’s hands slipped down off my shoulders. The bell sounded and she floated out the door like a warm breeze.

“See you tomorrow,” she smiled back even as the monster loomed over her, whimpering and trying to form words.

“Go away from here. I don’t need you anymore,” I murmured to myself.

That night my wife felt warm and safe beside me in bed. I stared at dust spilling over the blades of the ceiling fan and thought about Brenda. A part of me warned against thoughts I was having about her—you have a house, a wife, a family to think about. Yet she spun cobwebs in my brain, and imagination returned me to her web.

My reverie was interrupted by a commotion coming from the back yard. A mother opossum, I thought, or a pair of tomcats squaring off. I quietly slipped from bed. My sons shared a bunk bed. Their room had a window overlooking the yard. I sneaked in to peek through. The half-moon cast an eerie glow into the room, and the mini-blinds danced bisecting lines across my chest. On the top bunk slept my ten year old.

What does he dream? Is he climbing a tall tree, building a fortress from discarded boxes, or catching frogs in the storm drainage pond? Does music play in his dreams?

My six-year old, sleeping soundly beneath—did dreams take him fishing, turning stones over to find what was underneath?

Gazing out the window I perceived nothing out of the ordinary, so I tiptoed into my two-year old daughter's room. She slept so peacefully, tiny toes twitching against clean white sheets. It was impossible not to kiss her. I touched my lips to her forehead and backed away.

A shadow moved across the wall, and I drew a sharp breath. Staring in at me through the window was my beast, fouling the glass with his fetid breath. Standing nearly eight feet tall, he was stooped, peering in with rheumy eyes. He could easily have crashed through a wall if he chose to. Then, as quickly as the creature had appeared, he darted away.

I hurried into the kitchen and fumbled for a sharp knife. As my fist tightened over a hilt, the loathsome beast appeared at the kitchen window. Flattening a giant hand against the cold glass, he stared pleadingly. Colorless lips drew back revealing dull gray teeth, as if he meant to speak. A low mournful whine issued from his mouth. I pointed the knife.

“Go away!”

He didn't budge. He wants in. I know that's what he wants.

“What are you doing?” My wife startled me. “Is something out there?” she cringed, holding to the top of her nightgown.

“I was just thirsty.”

“Then you need a glass, not a kitchen knife.”

That's when the lying started. I constructed a seamless wall of detritus to which veracity could not secure purchase.

“It was on the counter and I was about to put it away.”

Food no longer tasted like anything without Brenda. Our lunches evolved into our first after-school rendezvous to a small hotel just outside of town. After that, if we were short on money or time, we found an orange orchard or an underground parking garage and made love in the car. The creature was always there, and a few times he broke my concentration much to my embarrassment.

The fiend presses its woeful face to the passenger side window each afternoon before I pull away from the school. He spends nights in my garage on a nest made from dirty laundry that is perpetually piled in front of the washer. He has acquired rudimentary language skills, and uses my name in a voice that is gruff and unrefined.

William stop, he is fond of repeating as he taps a finger against his temple, *stop and think*.

To rejoin would be an acknowledgement of his existence, thus opening a conduit directly to me. I purse my lips and continue to ignore him.

The night before a scheduled tryst with my lover, the brute howled and blubbered in the garage like a child fallen from a bike. Then he pressed his bulk against the door whispering, *William you must stop. We will be so lonely—please—the children*.

Resting my head against the door, my mouth opened, yet my response was sealed by a tightly clamped jaw.

William, please listen.

“Daddy?” The younger son was wearing Superman pajamas.

“Why are you out of bed?”

“I heard noises—why are you crying?”

“No, it's just an allergy. Let's get you tucked in.”

It's much harder to lie to children. He rode my shoulders back to bed—I kissed his forehead and returned to the kitchen to extinguish the light. The wretch was sobbing. I touched my hand to the door.

“Stop,” I begged, “why can't you leave me alone?”

The following morning the creature was gone. I thoroughly searched the garage, and explored the house to ensure he hadn't somehow gotten inside.

Through the living-room window I saw my wife clipping roses in the back yard. She was already dressed in her nursing whites, ready for another shift, yet she was taking a few minutes to gather flowers to place in a vase on the dinner table. Without warning, my creation arrived, towering above her, hands flaying wildly—begging notice. She passed right through him to lay fresh cut flowers in a basket. I rushed into the yard and she looked up with surprise.

“What's wrong?”

“Nothing—I just came to ask if there’s anything you need from the grocery store on my way home.”

“Can’t think of anything,” she said. Then she gazed at the ground, “Are you working late?”

“No.”

She gave me a quick kiss. “Here,” she slipped a bright red rose through a buttonhole in my shirt. “Love you.”

“Me too.”

The beast raised his great hairy fists into the air and shook them violently, producing a mournful bellow from the dank cavern of his throat. The sorrowful sound of it formed a large lump form in my throat.

That morning, my sons waited for the school bus as my little daughter slept—perhaps dreaming of her father who sometimes returns home from work with strawberry ice cream.

Brenda—this lover, this woman—how can I explain—she made me feel alive, alive, alive! I called to tell my wife of an unexpected meeting that would make bring me home late again.

“You sure you don’t need anything from the store?”

“Nothing,” she said, and hung up the phone.

That evening the phone rang once—Brenda’s signal that she was thinking of me. Later I returned the ring. We met the next afternoon, and again a few days later, and perhaps a half dozen times thereafter.

One night, as I went to the kitchen sink for water, my creation spoke through the doorway to the garage clearly, with a clarity and resolve I’d never heard before.

Passion is often mistaken for love. It is a cataract that allows dim light at the edges of the heart.

I set the glass down on the counter, lifted it again to pour the water out. Then I returned to bed.

The following morning he was gone. The garage was empty of mutterings and protests. An imprint of his body on the filthy nest was all that remained. That night as I lay next to my wife, she felt like a stranger. Even the faces of my children dimmed as my obsession for Brenda inhabited spaces that were previously reserved for them.

The wretched beast wasn’t around when my wife finally confronted me. She didn’t shout—simply slumped forward on the sofa and hung her head to let tears fall.

After a few moments she managed to ask, “What do you want to do now?”

Twelve years of marriage, three children, a home...a cheating husband—and she asked what I wanted.

I lay awake that final night on the living room couch. Early that morning, I visited each of the children. Their rooms were pungent—sheets in need of washing, carpets in need of a shampoo. They had no way of knowing Daddy wouldn’t be home after school today—unavailable for bedtime stories because he had to find an apartment. The following night they would hear their mother’s lonely sobs and not know how to comfort her.

Brenda had a husband and two children.

“This was just for fun. I thought you understood that,” she said.

There was nothing to catch my fall. I sat on the carpet of an unfurnished studio apartment, my cellphone dangling from my fingers. Then I let it drop. The stains on the burgundy shag carpet were someone else’s, the patched beige walls were blank but for stray nails left by a previous tenant. A late December breeze leaked into the room with icy fingers. On Christmas Day, two months had passed.

There was a knock at the door and I slowly made it to my feet to open.

William.

My creature shivered at the threshold—had returned just in time to catch me in my most unguarded misery.

“Come on in,” I shrugged, “what difference does it make?”

William.

“Yeah, what do you want? Can I get you something? A beer? I think there’s some Chinese takeout left.”

His huge hands gripped my shoulders, and he pulled me into an embrace.

William—why did you drive me from the family? It’s been so lonely.

“Christ—”

You called me a miserable wretch.

“Forgive—” I broke into sobs.

He began rocking me side-to-side, side-to-side.

This suffering is your creation.

“Promise you won’t leave,” I begged.

Give me a name and I will stay, he whispered.

“William,” I said, “we were always just William.”

###

THE LIGHT OF JUSTICE

By Christina Mengis

Christina Mengis lives in Oregon City, Oregon with her husband Christopher Mengis and her son Chris Jr. She has contributed to *Lost*, *Untamed*, and *Effects of Grace* through TL Publishing. This is her first published story although she is currently working on several others.

Justice could not believe her eyes. The skin on her arms and legs was melted together and charred in some spots while others places there was no skin at all. She was surprised that she was absent of pain. All her energies were set on the finding and saving not only her little brother, but their family cat. She knew both would be hiding from the rapidly spreading fire. She ran frantically with her only protection a thick wool blanket kept for this very purpose. The house was filling with smoke as the fire rapidly consumed the walls. The kitchen went first and spread to the living room. The rail that lead upstairs was just starting to burn. She knew once she got to the top part of the house she would not be able to come back down.

The house was old and made of wood, which excited the flames. She knew she only had mere minutes before they would all three be dead, if not from the fire, from smoke inhalation. As she reached the top of the stairs she heard the cat screeching. Justice knew that if she got to the cat she would find her brother. With the blanket wrapped around her, she went from room to room looking under, and behind things, all the while screaming for her brother. With fear in her eyes she had no choice but to enter the room above the kitchen that was already ablaze.

As soon as she opened the door the fire rushed towards her. She fell to the ground where she stumbled over her brother, he had passed out from the smoke and lay there dead still. She wrapped him in the blanket with no time to find the cat, and jumped out the window falling to the ground 13 feet below. She hit her head and instantly was out cold.

Justice lay in her hospital bed unconscious but she could hear people talking around her. She heard that she was in a coma and had been for two weeks. She learned that had she not jumped out of the window her, and her brother, would have fallen victim to the fire. She heard nothing of the cat. She was regarded as a hero. She was so happy if only she could wake up and reach out to her family, to see their faces, and to feel their kiss. Instead, all she could see was this blinding light, although it was beautiful, it bothered her in some unexplainable way. She wanted also to go to the light, which felt like she could, but more so, she wanted to go towards the voices of her family, which she knew she could not.

As time went by her family returned less and less, and when they were all she could hear was crying or praying. She was trapped, as if her body was a holding cell and the coma a warden. She wanted to cry out that she was still here and that she could hear them. Every time she heard anyone, whether it be her doctor, the nurse, her bed maid, or her family she tried to marshal all of her strength to at least open her eyes.

One day she thought she was on the brink of seeing her family. The light was not so bright anymore and she could see a fine sliver of shadows. The next day the shadows became darker but their voices became quieter. Eventually the shadows became a solid darkness and there was no sound at all. Justice had no idea how long she was there or even what time of day it was. She chose to believe it was always sunset in the fall. She loved the fall when the leaves on the trees were caught between life and death with their colors morphing from green to yellow, and finally brown. All the colors blended so well with the sky as the sun sunk deep leaving traces of orange, pink and purple stains until it completely set leaving the night sky dark and final. As she thought about it she couldn't help but laugh at the resemblance it had to her own life.

She was so scared, unable to hear her family anymore and not having the light that had bothered her so much to the point of comfort. One night as she lay there she heard a faint sound of a cat purring. The sound increased more and more as the days passed. She wondered if she had been moved to her home, or was she simply going crazy. If only she could wake up from this hell that kept her there in this shadowy darkness.

The purring continued day in and day out. As it got louder the light returned. But this time it was accompanied by a warm vibrating feeling. Next came the sound of a cat's meow. The light was blinding and the purring sounded like music. She longed for nothing but to be near the light. She decided she was going to once and for all go to the light. She knew the voices were gone and the shadows with them. Her family was gone to her but the light was real and it was here waiting for her. She let the sound of the cat's meow guide her to the light. As she got closer her face started to glow, her body started to shake, and she heard the cat once more.

Suddenly Justice felt the soft fur of her family cat rubbing its body up against her bare legs and begging to be picked up. As she bent down to grab the cat a warm hand touched her arm. She looked up and saw her grandparents, her best friend's mother Mary, and the face of her freshman homeroom teacher Mrs. Alder. All of them had died. Tears were running down their faces but they were all smiling. Trumpets, a violin, and a piano played softly from somewhere. Children were running in the background, and there was a smell so sweet she couldn't explain it if she tried. Justice didn't need anyone to tell her what had happened, or where she was. She knew, she had made it home.

THE LOOTERS

By Raymund P. Reyes

Raymund P. Reyes teaches English at Colegio de San Juan de Letran in Manila. He has published his poetry and short stories in Carbon Culture Review, Your Impossible Voice, Really System, Stonecoast Review, and various literary journals and anthologies in his native Philippines.

Arman counted the remaining tablets inside the box. There were five left, just enough for three days. He didn't expect the latest super typhoon to hit very hard. Typhoons regularly visit the area, about ten during the monsoon season, and their house had withstood hundreds of them through the years, but for the first time, a portion of the roof gave way to the strong wind. Even the most powerful storm that he could remember, the one from fifteen years ago, left the city without electricity and running water for an entire month, but the house remained unscathed. Arman thought that after the typhoon had passed they would easily recover and go back to their regular lives after a day or two. Now he doubted it.

The house was quiet. His wife and children were asleep on a large mat placed over the dining room floor, which had been cleared to serve as the family's temporary sleeping area. They couldn't sleep in the bedrooms upstairs the other night from the howling of the wind and the rattling of the iron sheets of the roof before they flew off their hinges at the height of the storm. The last time Arman checked, the beds and carpets were soaked by rainwater which had seeped through the ceiling. Only when the wind abated at dawn were they able to finally drift off to sleep. Arman, however, woke up after a couple of hours, couldn't go back to sleep, and gave up trying. He looked outside the window and saw some neighbors huddled in the middle of the street. He decided to join them. No one appeared to have been hurt. Mr. Romero's car had been crushed by a mango tree which was uprooted and fell through the roof of his garage. The roofs of the Santos and Manolo families had also been ripped off by the wind. The neighbors, however, were talking more about the destruction beyond the gates of the development, where the people lived in shanties and old houses which had not been renovated for decades because their owners were not as well-off as the ones inside the gated community. Mark, Arman's next door neighbor, told of how the entire highway was impassable to traffic as fallen trees, debris, and even cars overturned by the wind blocked the street. Jessie, who lived across Arman, added that all the shanties had been totally leveled to the ground. Some old houses were left intact but with damages like broken windows and doors, and walls that caved in places. Amina, the widow two houses down, reported in her quivering high-pitched voice of the dead littering the streets, most of whom were killed when their houses literally fell upon their heads. She said that she had only gone a few meters beyond the gates before she felt sick at the sight and decided to walk back.

Arman excused himself from the group, telling them that he, too, wanted to see for himself the extent of the super typhoon's damage. He had another purpose in mind, though. He slung a backpack over his shoulders and took his bike where it hanged on a hook on the wall in the garage and went out the gates of the development. But he had only pedaled a few meters when a lamp post which had toppled over blocked his path. He looked at the length of road ahead and found utility poles, snaking electric cables, and uprooted trees lying in various angles on the ground that would make cycling very difficult, so he went back home, left his bike, and proceeded on foot.

As he walked along the highway, he realized that they were the lucky ones. Piles of wooden planks, corrugated iron sheets, and *nipa* thatches were left of the houses which once stood beside the road. Only some posts and foundations which remained standing suggested that there had been houses lining the street where now simply gaps and heaps of debris could be seen. People were either rummaging through the wreckage for things to salvage or sitting down on the ground with resigned or stunned expressions on their faces. He passed a family of four crowding under a makeshift lean-to made out of what looked like a wall from their destroyed home. More than the piles of rubble on the ground, however, were the dead bodies lain on the sidewalk, with family members grieving over them. An old woman sitting under an acacia tree that had miraculously been left standing upright although its branches were completely bare of leaves, was cradling a dead child in her arms. It was already midday but the sun hid behind thick clouds and a gray tinge lit the depressing scene. Arman kept walking until, about three kilometers and an hour afterwards, he reached the mall—the only shopping complex in their town.

The mall was closed but a throng gathered outside the building. Usually, there were security guards stationed in both its front and back entrances even when the mall was closed, but this time, the uniformed men were missing. There were vehicles in the spacious parking lot in front but they were not parked in the usual orderly manner. In fact, most of the cars were crowding the wide glass entrance in front. The glass had been broken and the sliding metal security door had been forced open. It seemed that many had thought of the same thing: with the power down, their houses damaged or completely destroyed, and no respite in sight for the next days, even weeks or months judging from the extent of the devastation, the people, in their desperation, were driven to loot the mall.

Arman joined the crowd rushing into the building. It was dark inside but enough light streamed from the broken main entrance. People were going in different directions, helping themselves with whatever they could lay their hands on. The floor was covered with mud. The surge of the waves from the beach located a few meters away—the first time that anyone in town could remember the waves to have risen so high and crashed into shore so violently—had flooded the mall. The water had now receded but left an inch of muck.

Some looters were on foot but they actually had the advantage because the floor was slippery for shoes and slippers. A few were crawling on all fours. Arman saw someone pushing a television set on the muddy ground and another pushing a baby's stroller filled with DVD's. He saw a man broke the display window of an electronics shop with a crowbar and took the cell phones on display. In a woman's accessories shop, a teenager was helping herself to a rack of scarves. Still another man was dragging a sack full of clothes from the depart-

ment store. On his neck was a bunch of bead necklaces and on his arm, five gold bracelets. Each looter went on his own way and attended to his own business. Upon entering the half-darkened mall, the individual leaves behind his old self, the one that minded the rules of a society in order. The typhoon had destroyed that order.

Arman had no intention of stealing clothes or electronic appliances, though. He proceeded directly to the pharmacy by the entrance to the supermarket. It was right beside the courtesy booth where shoppers left their bags and packages. Someone seemed to have forced the sliding metal doors of the supermarket open with explosives as sheets of metal panels were scattered all over the corridor outside. Arman ignored the pack going into and coming out of the supermarket, pushing grocery carts. He was not interested in groceries, either. The family had a well-stocked larder of ramen, sardines and gallons of mineral water for emergencies. They would last for at least a couple of weeks. Even the gas tank of his sedan was half-full.

The small pharmacy comprised of a long counter and behind it, aisles and shelves of medicines and other drugstore products. A few people were already behind the counter and had begun looting the place. Arman vaulted over the counter and landed with a splash on the sludge-covered floor. He turned to his right, to a line of shelves on the wall. He knew where the boxes of the hypertension drug which his heart doctor prescribed and that he had been taking for the past several years were located. The second shelf from the top. He remembered it from the many times he had seen the store clerk reach for them every time he bought the medicine. He hoped he could still find them there and that they had not been swept aside with the boxes of pills and tablets, jars of cream, packets and tins that were now strewn on the floor. There were bottles, too, so Arman treaded carefully, afraid of stepping on shards of broken glass.

He looked up. He didn't need enough light to read the label. The orange boxes were familiar. Arman felt lucky no one seemed to have wanted the same medication he needed. They must have only been interested with the medicines for common colds and such, he thought. There were five boxes stacked on the shelf. He couldn't suppress a smile. The supply would last him months. He felt reassured. His blood pressure became his main concern in life—taking precedence even that of his own family—after the last heart attack almost left him paralyzed or dead. The doctor said they arrived at the hospital just in time to prevent one or the other from happening.

He quickly placed the stash inside his backpack. He was about to spring over the counter and get out when a young man who had been rummaging through the shelf beside him jumped up to reach a box on the topmost shelf and when he landed, slipped and accidentally hit Arman. Both fell on the floor. The man apologized profusely. Arman nodded silently in acknowledgment, stood up and wiped off the mud that clung to his clothes. Cold liquid seeped through his sweater.

As he walked back towards the mall entrance, he felt a throbbing pain in his right arm. When he checked it once he was outside, he saw a stain of red mixing with the dark gray of dried mud and a fragment of glass sticking through the cloth and into his skin. He must have leaned on it when he fell on the floor earlier. Arman winced as he removed the shard with one quick pull. He took out his handkerchief and tied it over the cut to contain the bleeding.

The wound was not deep. His wife helped him clean it right after he got home and by night time it had dried into an ugly red scar. But Arman couldn't sleep. He was worried of the wound getting infected. He remembered a story of a friend who was brought to the hospital for tetanus infection and almost died. He looted an appliance store after a fire and accidentally stepped on a nail. If God was going to punish him, Arman thought, this would be it. His wife assuaged him that it was nothing more than a regular wound. If it were infected, she said, he would have developed a fever by now.

Arman glanced at the clock on the wall. It was only nine. They went to bed early because there was nothing to do with the power still down. The moon was full and cast a bright glow through the dining room window. His wife and two children were already deep in sleep beside him. The sleeping mat could barely contain the four of them but they had to make do.

Arman decided to get up and visit Dr. Ginto, the family doctor, three blocks away. He hoped the doctor was still awake. He knocked on the front door. From a large window bare of curtains, he could see through the living room inside. A candle was lit on top of a low center table and three kids gathered around the light. A young boy, about ten years old, opened the door. Arman recognized him as Karlo, the doctor's eldest son. The boy said that his parents left after dinner but they were expecting them to be back soon. Arman insisted on waiting. The boy asked him to sit with them in the living room as their parents only allowed them to light one candle at a time.

Ten minutes later, Arman saw the doctor's van park in front of the house. When Dr. Ginto and his wife stepped inside, both jumped in surprise to see Arman there. The doctor almost dropped a large cardboard box he was carrying in his hands. The couple's hands and arms were covered in dirt. Their bare feet were caked with mud up to the ankles. The box was filled with an odd assortment of grocery items. On top of the pile Arman could see bottles of shampoo, salt, ketchup, mouthwash, toilet bowl cleaner, boxes of toothpaste, and a roll of paper towels. Mrs. Ginto also carried a box, a smaller one, filled with children's clothes. The doctor smiled at Arman sheepishly, the surprise now turning into embarrassment. The latter appeased him by telling the doctor of his own looting adventure that morning and the reason for his late night visit. The doctor and his wife shared a laugh at Arman's story and a sense of camaraderie flowed between the fellow looters. The doctor asked Arman to wait in the living room with the children, who gathered excitedly at the box of clothes that their mother had brought for them, while he lit another candle and brought it with him to the bathroom to clean up, Mrs. Ginto following in his heels.

Dr. Ginto told Arman he was lucky he had shots of the vaccine left in his store. After the doctor gave him the anti-tetanus shot, Arman was about to reach into his pocket to pay the doctor but Dr. Ginto raised a hand in protest and told him that he had decided to offer his services for free until the town had gotten back on its feet. He thought it would be his way of helping his fellow typhoon victims, he said. He hoped his acts of generosity would somewhat repay for the things he stole, and ease the guilt of a once well-respected doctor turned into common looter.

END

AD SPACE AVAILABLE

Advertising space is available
within the Torrid Literature Journal.

Visit our website today for rates and deadlines.

Placing your advertisement in the Torrid Literature Journal will ensure your advertisement gets the attention it deserves within our growing community of writers and artists. Regardless of what you need to advertise, you want your advertisement to work for you. You want readers to be drawn to the information offered. You want your advertisement to propel your audience into action. The right advertisement in the right publication will make your audience come to you, look around, and listen to what you're saying.

When you purchase ad space from TL Publishing Group, you are not only supporting your business but you are also supporting the Torrid Literature Journal and TL Publishing Group's mission to promote the culture of literature and art. That is why we award all Advertisers with a free copy of the publication their ad appears in. Advertisers also receive a free one-year digital subscription to our publication.

Our ad space is limited and it is available on a first come/pay, first served basis. To ensure you have the full advantage of our services, please note our publication deadlines listed herein. If you wish to have your ad appear in a specific volumes, please contact us at ads@torridliterature.com.

2016 Ad Deadlines:

March 15, 2016: April 2016 – Vol. XVIII

June 1, 2016: July 2016 – Vol. XIX

September 1, 2016: October 2016 - XX

Current Ad Rates for Businesses and Individuals (freelance artists, authors, writers, editors, graphic designers, etc.):

Full Page: \$170.00

Half Page: \$55.00

Quarter Page: \$25.00

Please visit our site for ad size specifications. If you have any questions, please send an email to ads@torridliterature.com.

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

TL Publishing Group is always looking for submissions. We publish 4 issues a year and our journals are available online and in print. When it comes to reviewing a submission, we don't look for a particular theme. We look at the work itself, specifically its message, delivery, and structure. We accept a variety of submissions including: poetry, fiction, and articles. We also accept requests for interviews and book reviews.

All submissions may be uploaded by visiting:

<http://torridliterature.submittable.com/submit>

We encourage everyone to become familiar with the Torrid Literature Journal first by reading previous editions. This will give writers a general idea of the type of content we look for. Our submission period for the Torrid Literature Journal is year round and our response time varies depending on the volume of submissions received.

If you have any questions or concerns please contact Alice Saunders at asaunders@torridliterature.com. We look forward to the reading experience.



Dear Reader,

The Torrid Literature Journal is dedicated to every voice. We want writers to know that their story is important. Every story, whether told through poetry, fiction, or non-fiction is important. Each piece has its own special place.

A picture isn't a picture if parts are missing. You matter. Your voice matters. For this reason, we encourage writers to continue perfecting their craft. We want our writers to embrace their unique attributes and literary voice.

We hope this volume of literature has left you, our readers, encouraged to strive for new heights in literature and life. Live on purpose and be unapologetically you.

We look forward to seeing you again in our next volume of the Torrid Literature Journal. Be sure to subscribe to our eNewsletter to receive important updates and breaking news about our publications and fellow writers.

- Editorial Staff



“The emptiness makes me want to hurl...” - Julia Gowell

“If you’re my wings then I’m no bird...” - Minass Richani

“I find I wrestle to open the window of my mind...” - Heather M. Browne

The first feature in the newest edition of the *Torrid Literature Journal* is an interview with Yvonne Garrett, Senior Fiction Editor for Black Lawrence Press and co-author of *Split Open the Sky: Eternity Overwhelms Me*. During this interview Garrett discusses her work at Black Lawrence Press. She also provides advice on writing and publishing while revealing her own personal experiences as an editor and writer.

Following this interview is a diverse collection of poems and short stories where new and familiar writers make an appearance with fresh material that captures memorable moments and dreams. All of these poems and short stories are pieces pulled from the writers’ life. They’ve gone through the task of organizing the pieces into a coherent picture. They’re ready to show readers the finished result.

TL Publishing Group is creating a stunning success through the *Torrid Literature Journal* with the vital help of contributing writers and other supporters. This work of art was created to support the writers and the overall culture of literature. New and current followers of TL Publishing Group will enjoy the beautiful pictures created by contributing writers from around the world.

Contributors: Jim Sutton; Eli Miles; Joy Roulier Sawyer; Holly Day; Cara Vitadamo; Julia Gowell; Jessica Lynn; Minass Richani; Bailey Duncan; Milt Montague; Sterling Jacobs; Josh Seides; John Grey; Peggy Aylsworth; Joshua J. Koczman; Scott Thomas Outlar; Joseph M. Fornes; Kathleen McGuire; Brianna Meeks; Gary Blankenburg; Michelle Bayha; Gary Beck; Erren Kelly; Anthony Ward; Heather M. Browne; Ty Spencer Vossler; Christina Mengis; Raymund P. Reyes



TL PUBLISHING
GROUP LLC

www.tlpublishing.org
www.torridliterature.com