

Fox Chase Review



Fox Chase Review

2010 Winter/Spring Contents

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Nathalie Anderson

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What Other Kid

Whatever you've heard, he comes by it honestly,
that reputation: the childhood desperation,
transformation, revelation. What other kid gets
a cartilage-crushing grip on the long neck
of the rattler in his cradle? gets the ball struck
halfway down the guard-dog's gullet? gets the lion's bite
snapped back, cracked open? gets hold of the jawbone
of the ass? He grew up rash, tiger-eyed and
rhino-fisted, could growl with the best of them,
no one better positioned to appreciate
the sinuous python, the mesmerizing cobra,
the quick utility of the garden garter,
so he knows just what to do with every snake
which now he handles—coil clamped round the ribs,
viper's venom milked at the eye. Ah Bluto, Bluto!
For him, it's personal, it's visceral, it's always hands-on.
Rassled him down an iron horse. Kilt him a bar.

Campus

From the first hour we knew what he was,
a stone thrown hard and sharp into our waters. Kids
who'd swanned out collegiate not five minutes previous
shrank back cowed, deflated suddenly: banty or squab.
You could track him across campus by that emptiness,

that space around him. Other thugs might sneer,
might snicker, nudge each other, eyeing the chicks,
the cocks, beaking the barnyard. He
noticed no one, shared nothing. We were landscape
to him, poky as dirt or weed or scrub, his to walk over.

Have I said how attractive it was, the campus
crackling with menace, the air around him flaring?

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Like girls at a party waiting to be used—his one hand
over her mouth to keep her shut, his other
ramming her groin to keep her open—we

couldn't keep our eyes off him, equally stunned
and shunned, weeping and moistening, readied for him
almost without realizing. You never knew
what would come from his mouth when you called on him:
Lynching. Laughing. *Tiny Tim should die*. It was my job

to sharpen his logic, strengthen ever so socratically
his justifications: *should die—why?* So blame me
if you want for where he is now—except he never justifies,
sits smug in the emptied court, cushioned by air
he's sucked from the judges' lungs, every last lawyer

breathless as we were back then.

They Say

At the last, they say, he bound himself upright,
his sword arm scything, scathing; ravens circling,
scattering and skirling, a cloudburst slewing,
settling; steel glinting; a sharpened silence.

*

Spied out, they say, like a spider by his web—
yanked out, they say, like a spider from his hole—
face filthy at the last with cobweb, beard grizzled sisal thick—
no safe anonymity, no plain white Oldsmobile.

*

As earth shook itself, a dog flinging up its fleas, he
braced open with his back, they say, the mouth of the mine,
shoulders roaring, arms pumped, joints popped—the miners otherwise
crushed as he was, the mountain over him, the fallen towers.

*

Or shrouded grandly in the heroes' tomb
force-built by traitors captured in his civil wars.
La caja o la faja? Now he gets both,
sword ready on the altar should the dead return.

*

Blinded, shorn, whipped and goaded, dumb as an ox and
grunting gutturals, neck thickened beneath the yoke, bones
straining forward the burden, at the last (they say) he
stretched out his arms, embraced the eternity closest to his hand.

*

The shirt stitched stiff with intricate stitches, crusted white
with what might have been starch; her eyes panicky, not quite
meeting his—yet they say he pulled willingly over his head

her acrid doubt, her jealousy, the voluminous ferocity of her love.

*

The Party sent to him in exile at the last
a twenty-year-old female cadre for his bed.
After the show trials, after the indictments,
not even Abishag could warm him.

*

“To keep you is no benefit, to destroy you no loss”—
beaten by hoe, beaten by bill hook so as not to waste the bullets.
“He killed my ma, he killed my pa, but I will vote for him”—
to the end he wore no glasses lest he appear intelligent.

*

How had it come to this? Live lobsters air-lifted,
silver chopsticks, platform shoes. We called him “Dear Leader,”
called him “the red and rising sun.” An ember
in the center of our hearts. A new star, constellated.

*

Fed poison like the rat he was, he could not speak
but lifted up his arm, lifted damningly his eye.
No doctor for two days. They say the poisoner
kissed the lifted hand, then when it dropped again spat on it.

*

Over a light lunch—pasta—he remarked that lipstick
comes from sewer grease, then kissed his new bride’s (lipsticked?) lips,
fed her burnt and bitter almonds. “A direct hit,” clamored
the Goebbels’ smallest boy, thinking the shot a Russian bomb.

*

They say, they say—but some say no:
his shadow vast, cast across the pampas;
on the board a bloody haunch, a blue-blood’s rack of ribs;
colossal still, a sickle or a hammer in his hands.

The stanzas refer to events—typically culminating events—in the careers of Cuchullain, Saddam Hussein, an invented strong man, Federico Franco, Samson, Hercules, Pol Pot, Pol Pot and Charles Taylor, Kim Jong-Il and Mao Tse-Tung, Joseph Stalin, Adolf Hitler, and an archetypical strong man.

- “La caja o la faja”: “either a coffin or a general’s sash”: what young Spanish officers like Francisco Franco would supposedly earn—that is, death or early promotion—posted to Morocco in 1912.
- “To keep you is no benefit”: said to those exterminated by Pol Pot’s Khmer Rouge in the early 1970s.
- “He killed my ma”: an election slogan in support of Charles Taylor in Liberia in 1997.

Nathalie Anderson’s first book, *Following Fred Astaire*, won the 1998 Washington Prize from The Word Works, and her second, *Crawlers*, received the 2005 McGovern Prize from Ashland Poetry Press. Her third collection, *Quiver*, is scheduled for publication with Penstroke Press in the spring of 2010. Anderson’s poems have appeared in such journals as *APR’s Philly Edition*, *Atlanta Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, *DoubleTake*, *Inkwell*

Magazine, Journal of Mythic Arts, Louisville Review, Natural Bridge, The New Yorker, Nimrod, North American Review, Paris Review, Prairie Schooner, The Recorder, Southern Poetry Review, and Spazio Humano. Her work has been commissioned for the Ulster Museum's collection of visual art and poetry titled *A Conversation Piece*; for the catalogue of the retrospective exhibition *Sarah McEneaney* at the Institute of Contemporary Art of the University of Pennsylvania; and for the artist's press book titled *Ars Botanica* published by Enid Mark of ELM Press. Her work appears in *The Book of Irish American Poetry From the Eighteenth Century to the Present* (Notre Dame), and her poems have twice been solicited for inclusion in *The Year's Best Fantasy and Horror* (St.Martin's). She has authored libretti for three operas—*The Black Swan; Sukey in the Dark*; and an operatic version of Arthur Conan Doyle's *A Scandal in Bohemia*—all in collaboration with the composer Thomas Whitman and Philadelphia's Orchestra 2001. A 1993 Pew Fellow, she serves currently as Poet in Residence at the Rosenbach Museum and Library, and she teaches at Swarthmore College, where she is a Professor in the Department of English Literature and directs the Program in Creative Writing.



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Nathan Graziano

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Listening to “Desolation Row” in Back of Jim’s Car on the Way to Bar in Buffalo

Again, I’m tangled in my own uncut hair, too drunk to dice the differences between “desolation” and “decision.” They might be homonyms.

Outside a convenience store, a man has been shot; a Samaritan’s coat covers his torso. The shot man’s legs twitch and his feet kick as the ambulance approaches in a holy glow of red lights.

Jim describes the place we’re going to as “ironically seedy,” a cesspool of hipsters. “The *artistes* stand at the bar and pose like basement mannequins,” he says. Jim is a painter; I’m a poet. What are we doing?

Bob Dylan sold out, eventually.

A man is dying, his head resting on a curb.

I can’t stop drinking.

Men with Mustaches

A man with a mustache must be watched closely,
like a storm cloud concealing lightning in its coat.

A man with a mustache might be a porn star,
a scrawny guy with three legs sweating pools of fuck.

A man with a mustache might sell you a used car
and promise it will change the way you drive. It will.

A man with a mustache might wear his shirt unbuttoned,
his chest hair screaming like a room full of pop-fans.

A man with a mustache might sell tickets
for The Ferris wheel, piss behind the dunking booth.

A man with a mustache might try to write like Hemingway
but only succeed in drinking himself to sleep.

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A man with a mustache might, in fact, be me
before I shaved it off after scaring myself in the mirror.

A man with a mustache must be watched closely:
I guarantee he's looking at you, chewing on a toothpick.

Nathan Graziano resides in Manchester, New Hampshire with his wife Liz and two children. He teaches English at The Pembroke Academy. His work has been published widely to include a collection of fiction, a full length collection of poetry and seven chapbooks. Nathan can be found at www.nathangraziano.com.



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Tracy Greenlee

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How I Knew I Knew...

I didn't know what you knew,
I just didn't know you.

I couldn't have known this was the last car ride,
in your new-blue Cadillac, with smooth-white leather seats,
automatic windows and me.

I didn't know it would be our last drink, together,
at the bar named the Brandy Iron on the
south side of the Roosevelt Boulevard in Philadelphia.

I should have known the car wash and the promise
of a sugary-cinnamon treat as a reward was our last stop,
while waiting patiently for you to finish your full gin drink.

I didn't know what you knew,
I just didn't know you.

It was me on Saturday morning that sat with you,
you and I in our Lucky Strike and sulfur filled room,
maraschino cherry juice trapped under clear bubbles.

You made me memorize the wisdom of football
life never stayed the same, health and wealth,
your time played the odds on your mysterious game.

And you died leaving a bereaving family,
crying icy tears, year after year,
an ephemeral question of impending trust.

I didn't know what you knew,
I just didn't know you,

as we cruised your yacht down the Chesapeake River
with so called friends wiping memories from your children's
wind burned fears, Frank Sinatra's sorrowful plea

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echoing over your cremated skin and bones.
Your charred vessel coating the top of a quiet Still Pond
tempting the bellies of hungry fish.

I will never forget the whisper of your last I love you,
a full moon lulled me to sleep in my four poster bed,
I was hugging my worn-brown, warrior teddy bear.

I didn't know what you knew,
I just didn't know you,

Visceral memories revisit through the weight of one
cherry, sinking so slowly to the bottom of my tall glass,
your drink is finished, memorial red roses long wilted.

And...
All I could think of as a child,
was...
I knew you were food for a
tiny starving fish.

And...
All I can think of as a woman
is..
I didn't know what you knew, and
I don't think you knew either.

Rebecca's Room

I find myself as a young girl,
lying on my stomach on the floor
of a pristine crystal-violet room;
dark, plush, purple carpet that
my fingers need to dig deeply in.
White wood frames the window as
perfectly placed ferns sway
with the warm, inviting breeze;
a vast meadow fills the distance.

A girl—an almost grown
woman to me—stands
in front of emerging,
falling innocence.
She talks to me as if I am not
there—through her reflection—she
begins to share.

She tells me how this bedroom
is her castle paradise;
her mother wanted it to be nice,
for her.
She stands in front of
her mirrored vanity looking,

admiring her new firm
breasts growing

under her pink t-shirt.
She smooths palms to fingers
from her collar bone to her waist;
her elbows create empty space and
I fear she will remember
I am breathing here—
in the same room. I am scared.
I think to escape.
Slowly
through her, I bloom.

She removes her shirt—still
with her back to me
and tells me a secret—
sometimes,
I stand in front of
the open window
and slowly move
my hips.

I gasp, a small unnoticed gasp.

I am pained by the beauty of her,
the beginning of the telling shape,
an elegant back bone, ribs in perfect rows,
skin unmarked, skin unknown.
I wished
my hands were hers—
her skin mine.
Hidden in our violet glow,
new flowers grow
in the distance, framing my
frozen pose.

Tracy Greenlee is a life-long Pennsylvania resident. She has spent the last 20 years traveling, loving, working and raising three inspiring children and one bad-ass fish. Always a long-term planner, she considers this research for her poetry. Her exuberance for writing is only matched by the enthusiasm she brings to her life. For Tracy, an un-lived life is not worth writing about. She uses the themes of truth, kindness and passion to take a deeper look at her own life and the lives of the people she loves.



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George McDermott

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Helen's Garden

There is no word
for this at all. It rises
with the thunder,
it rides on the lingering rain
in the wind, through the daffodils and iris
growing under your touch,
it comes in with the fragrance
of columbine and roses,
dripping with ginger,
to lie in the sun-bleached grass around my heart.

It fills the night.

It brushes
against the far edge of summer, where the weather
softens, and the red dust turns rich and fertile.

Apollo 11

The flag waves in no wind
over dead tides and ashen silence.
A space-suited man whose name
we've forgotten stands with the flag
beside him, faceless yet human and almost
saluting, and this is more than just
a snapshot, more than me or you
stiff and smiling at Plymouth Rock
or the Liberty Bell.

This is one
of the famous pictures, one that proved
something we almost remember, the one
we find as we search in our turned-out pockets
for heroes, for lightning, for echoes of trumpets

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and the muffled drums that ended
the glory that might have been.

George McDermott's poems have appeared in such journals as *Pivot*, *Poetry Continuum*, and *Philadelphia Stories*. A recovering copywriter who is currently doing penance as a high school English teacher in center-city Philadelphia, he is also a poetry editor of *Philadelphia Stories*.



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Bruce Niedt

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Monster Accosted by Telemarketers

They assail me from all sides,
like the biplanes did to poor Kong.
They try to sneak in through my mailbox
and my internet cable, but mostly
through the phone lines. They know
where I live, and they know my number.
They know when I'm just getting out
of the shower, or sitting down to dinner,
because that's when they always call.
They know I have a timeshare,
that I want to reduce my mortgage rate,
that I bought theater tickets last year.
They try to lure me out with cheap cruises,
zero percent interest, free trial offers.
They want me to take a survey,
donate to a police organization,
my alma mater, environmental groups.
It's scary what they know. Yeah, it scares me,
imagine that. Fortunately, my growl
always drives them away, but it's almost
too much to take. I wish I could just
swat at them or absorb their assaults
like Godzilla does with missiles.
But I have to tell you, I miss the days
of the door-to-door salesmen.
They were delicious.

Dream

In your dream, a blond-haired boy
who looks like your grandson
hands you a pair of roller blades.
Try 'em, he says. You let go of your walker,

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sit on the curb and strap them on.
In later life you'd said, *I used to ice-skate.*
Those look like fun.
If only I were young enough to try.

And in your dream, you do.
One hand behind your back,
the other oaring the air,
you rumble and glide over pavement,
the wind blowing back your wispy gray hair.

And you skate for all your life was worth –
past your grandsons, your dear departed wife,
past your daughter's wedding,
past your metal shop smelling of hot steel and oil,
past a table of maps from the war,
past your saxophone on the chair amongst your bandmates,
who are white-tuxedoed and ready to play,
past your father's milk cart, your mother's infirmity,
past your baseball-uniformed brother,
who left too young and too soon.

In your very last dream,
you reunite with your buddies,
all bundled and red-cheeked, aged ten to twelve,
at the frozen pond.
Your skates have turned to silver,
and your loved ones line the banks,
marveling at your calligraphy on ice.

Bruce W. Niedt is a southern New Jersey native and "beneficent bureaucrat" whose poetry has appeared in *Writers' Journal*, *ByLine*, *The Fairfield Review*, *US 1 Worksheets*, *Mad Poets Review*, *Journal of New Jersey Poets*, *Schuylkill Valley Journal*, *The Wolf*, *paper wasp*, and many others. His awards include the *Byline Short Fiction and Poetry Prize* (2003), first prize for poetry at the *Philadelphia Writers Conference* (2006, 2007), and a *Pushcart Prize* nomination (2005).



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Tamara Oakman

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Snatched

What did it mean
to be in the parking lot,
a bending weed under ocean
retrieving a bag of frozen peas
from the ground and then
gone,

divorced from her life,
forced into a new marriage where
"CROATOAN" was carved into a tree?
Now, she is Stone Henge,
a group of lonely stones
thrusting mystery into sky.

She said, she said, she said,
It won't happen to me—
But there are
300 victims a year,
300 men hiding in the bush
invisible as wind,

six foot seven dog catchers
nets, raised guillotines.
Silly to face the needle all life long
and not know it,
wagging a happy tail
till the death serum stops the wag

mid-beat.
The frozen peas slipped from her hand
returned to the concrete
rattling their tale to the melting tar,
She never saw him coming—
and the dog catcher hulled her off

leaving the trunk open

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driver's seat empty
and her purse
a spilled drink
all over the shivering ground.

Walden Pond

Sunlight painted the faces of leaves
round children giggled

pulled fish from the pond's open mouth
Picnickers lay on the grass

autumn beside them
Thoreau snored quietly

Emerson and Alcot droned on
Yellowing grass gossiped to tree rings

flowers opened and closed like fireworks
On the commuter rail from Concord

you got down on your knee
As the overpass shadowed the train

the last wish of the dying sun
doused our faces orange

and in a small black box
you offered me eternity

Tamara Oakman, a graduate of Temple University, has completed her Master's thesis in English—a book entitled, *Snatched*—at Arcadia University; won awards in poetry, fiction, creative non-fiction, and drama. She has been published by *Many Mountains Moving*, *Philadelphia Stories*, *Mad Poets Review*, and other journals. She is the executive director of *The Light of Unity Arts Association* and currently lives and loves in Philadelphia.



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Ellen Peckham

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Bad Day

I anticipate a bad day when, saying "good morning,"
you answer "What?" Told I may create negative exchanges
by my dire prognostications, I know otherwise.

Today, for whatever reason, the synapses are off.
Today you will muddle more, have more accidents,
be terribly missing, stare blankly, manifest anxiety.

I come from six hours of medical tests, stressed, subjected,
wanting concern; some interest at least. You greet me –
if so it's called - "The TV's broken again."

Confirming that even masked so that your remote choices are
On, Off, Volume Up/Down, Channel Up/Down it is too much for you.
Masking pain, I hug and soothe, find a show

(any one: you do not care) make supper, get into the shower
and scream and scream into the waterfall
which is very safe because, remote myself now,

even if you should hear me,
it will seem to you a laugh track: nothing to do with my
neediness, desolation, loneliness, despair.

Another Spain

This Spain doesn't touch me.
It's hardscrabble bare earth no longer
abrades under my breastbone as before.

Coming this way, also by train, thirty-odd years ago
raw with discovery, scarred as though
I had been dragged over it,

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that Spain entered into me. Now it seems
time, loss, experience have leached the passion out –
out of the place and out of me.

And passion was the point of it.
I am just another tourist, aged,
dried, too dull to glory as once I did,

my attitude in tune with this modern,
cool, demythacized place.
Another it. Another me.

Ellen Peckham has read, published and exhibited in the U.S., Europe and Latin America. She frequently uses both art forms in a single work, the text decorating and explicating and the image illuminating. Her archives of drafts, edits and art are collected at the Harry Ransom Center For The Humanities and a seven minute visual biography, *Parallel Vocabularies*, is available on DVD and via her [Web site](#).



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Elijah B. Pringle, III

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Chicken Soup Confession

Simmering underneath regret
Right as the little bubbles form
On the side of the new soup pot

Before it becomes crowded with
The carcass and the vegetation
Seconds before the steam appears

When the liquid is perfect, well
Almost perfect, OK, perfect enuf
Bubbling beneath each mistake

Is a promise to free my self
Along with the harsh realization
That to not love you makes me sick

Yet to love you sickens me still
And chicken soup isn't what I need
I need to walk when the water

Is not broth cluttered with
Dead things
Thrown in by your hands

Miss Page Takes Attendance

Miss Yvonne Page calls out strange names
Ginorio, Malik, Jamaal, Tavoy, Dong Tang
She's learning to master a brand new language
The changing neighborhood asked her to do so

But her passion for teaching still translates 'good'
Into the fresh new vernacular, the flava is saffron
The words are foreign, an unfamiliar flavoring

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Awaking her palate and renewing her taste buds

Miss Page calls out strange new first names of
Beverly's, Pearlene's, Barbara's and Jeanette's
Sons: who have given names that are chosen
To reflect family: heritage, aspirations and trust

Their names appear on her computer screen
With red squiggly lines underneath, until she
Right click and then adds them to her dictionary
Accepting their names is just that easy to do, so

Her new pupils speaking fluent I-am-boldly-me
As they all clearly announce to Ms Page "present"

elijah b pringle, III, works in the insurance and banking industry and has held several positions mostly in training and quality. He has facilitated business and creative writing workshops and was the past editor-in-chief of IMPACT, a business periodical. To his credit are the editing and publishing of several chap books by other poets. His work will soon be published by the *Edison Poetry Review* and the *River Poets Journal*. He has already appeared on-line in "The God's Are Bore." He is also the former on-air host of *Panoramic Poetry* at OctoberGallery.com.



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Tree Riesener

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Onset

In this place little ease
except I have space to pace,
like a footbound woman
within the encircling arms
of an old husband.

A whisky-and-gin-filled
Wurlitzer glass harmonica
sets my teeth to vibrating,
blurs my air like gasoline.

Some decaying corpse's
rich juicy swamp gas
treats me to a room-visiting
will o' the wisp
dressed in never-before-seen
glossy bruises.

In the middle of taser shock,
laden with iron and nonstop decibels,
I befriend phantoms in my witches' sleep,
close my fingers around a muted leper's bell

But I can wait until the current fails,
and the pills run out,
in silence or howling wake my soul
until the chains fall off,
scream through gags
until the walls come down,

until not one stone is left standing
and I go free to hallelujah.

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Christmas Eve at Midnight

At midnight on Christmas Eve,
you go down to the corner bar for the miracle.

This is the hour the drunks talk.

Bums with bristly chins,
women with blurry lipstick,
they look like your mom and dad
but for this one blessed hour,
you'll speak the same language.

You drink your first one at the bar
while you gather up courage,
think about your questions.

Why don't my kids come around?
When did the United States stop caring?
Why does God let stuff happen?
Did you love me?

You buy an offering,
and start over to their table
sticky with glass rings and acrid with butts.

But then somehow it's one o'clock.
The bartender calls over
next round's on me, guys,
it's Christmas already.
And as they lift their glasses in thanks,
you realize they're laughing and talking,
but the sounds break over you
like the night noises of animals
and you don't understand a word they're saying.

Tree Riesener has published poetry and short fiction in numerous literary magazines. Her achievements include three first prizes for the Short-Short Story and the Literary Short Story at the Philadelphia Writers Conference, Finalist for Black Lawrence Press's Hudson Prize, Finalist in PANK magazine's Fiction Chapbook Contest, Semi-Finalist in the Pablo Neruda Competition, three short stories staged in the Writing Aloud productions of InterAct Theatre, Philadelphia, a Hawthornden International Writing Fellowship, two Pushcart nominations, and the William Van Wert Fiction Award. She is the author of three poetry collections, *Inscapes*, *Angel Poison* and *Liminalog*. Visit her [Web site](#) and her [blog](#).



Fox Chase Review

Lori Romero

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Salt

When Aunt Lia died, childless,
mother put salt in my coat pocket,
bid me take my younger sister
and tell the cows. As to the salt:

Evil spirits lurk everywhere and hate
that dash over the left shoulder
into the face. One can torment a fiend
no end with simple seasoning. As to the cows:

Securing our fortune or not, I was fourteen
and you wouldn't catch me nattering to livestock
with the likelihood of being spotted, particularly
by the Randal brothers. As to my sister:

She took the opportunity to heart, telling one black
heifer about Auntie's tendency to rock in her chair
and fart. She prattled on about how she warned
Papa not to light his pipe near the cushions.

As to the Randal Brothers, Sean and Hugh:
one year separated their ages, the Irish Sea
embodied their differences. I married Hugh,
a cause for tears—enough, I hope, to dissolve

spilt salt and reverse the back luck in my house.

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Lori Romero is the winner of the Spring 2008 Spire Spring Poetry Chapbook Contest. Her first chapbook, *Wall to Wall*, was published by Finishing Line Press. Her short story, *Strange Saints*, was a semifinalist in the Sherwood Anderson Fiction Award. Lori's poetry and short stories have been published in more than eighty journals and anthologies. She was recently nominated for her second Pushcart Prize.



Fox Chase Review

Paul Siegell

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04.26.07—Jon Gutwillig—North Star Bar, PA

—for Doc F

wrest [eccentric]
music incredibleria

freed [dreaming]
dig what a song can lead you to see

calloused slides [over strings]
scratches from chord to chord

a certain [sign language]
shapes swept over by a pick

acoustic [truisms]
briquettes of plastic explosives

music of let's-not-just-kick-it-to-the-chorus,
baby, but of fret-board finger painting

and then, the wonderful

08.10.08—Wilco—Grand Opera House, DE

it's how i keep listening.

one's letting me know
what happens

when strings of certain
tautnesses

are made to shiver
for specific licks

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[*04.26.07—
Jon Gutwillig—
North Star Bar,
PA*](#)

[*08.10.08—
Wilco—
Grand Opera
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and distances.

[from some]
[came some]

another uncovers
what puddles are muddled

when tubs become
percussed.

it's how i keep dancing.

but from some
thought

came some through:

for it's how
it all gets translated

into how i keep singing,

with how the music
gives me

something to reveal—

something i didn't
even know

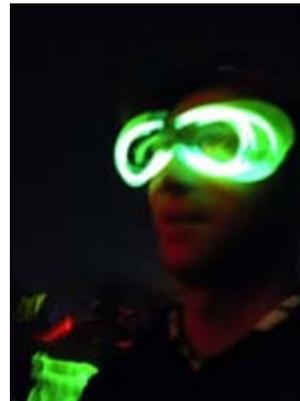
i wanted to put into words,

that makes it all so

[thought]
[through]

it's how i keep writing.

Paul Siegell is the author of *jambandbootleg* (A-Head, 2009), *Poemergency Room* (Otoliths Books, 2008) and the forthcoming *wild life rifle fire* (Otoliths Books, 2009). He is a staff editor at *Painted Bride Quarterly*, and has contributed to *The American Poetry Review*, *BlazeVOX*, *Coconut*, *Rattle* and other fine journals. Paul has also been featured in the *Philadelphia City Paper*, *Paste Magazine*, *Relix Magazine* and *Bookslut*. Kindly find more of Paul's work at [ReVeLeR @ eYeLeVeL](#).



Fox Chase Review

Catherine Staples

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A Curving Line

Same bird I heard as a child—

Knees to the wall, patterns in the wood.
Wind in the pine boughs shaking
Out light, sunspots, the shaky mirrors of the world.
Beyond the window, before the horses
Or even tree forts—this is first light
Morning, my socked heel
Sliding a celestial arc
Cross the bedroom wall
When from the fence post
It comes again—

Chickadee, says my mother, and it is, is.

Juncos

Eight degrees with wind chill, the dog
takes the rug by the sun's best window
her statued stare, transfixed by these birds
emerging from a corner row

of boxwood, long gone iris
and peony—blackened and dry
as something an apothecary prized,
unlikely cure among the dead grasses.

Discrete as Quakers in grey hoods,
the juncos fan out in flawed
whorls across the frozen circle
of the garden, minding the rut of paw

and footstep, they tip, dart, list

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looking for a lost seed, something risen
as the frozen ground buckled then split.
Their progress is jittery smooth—

think of the chilly brook's first thaw
its run no more than a murmur
as it slips its broken light
over winter dry pebble and ice

or the lolling heads of narcissus
in a lost wood in northern Virginia.
their frilled cups subject
to unseen wind, infinitesimal shifts.

Thirty miles away, you grow shaky
with tremor, hate to leave the house. Proud,
erudite, charming, my dear friend's father—
How I wish you could see them:

their shuddery bright moves sheeting loose.
Once you brought me a book about horses
and a shy girl who hid among the hay bales;
it was a way of saying things—

I understood then, as you might now.
Quick, in the flush of light—
before these unlikely beauties retreat
into their evergreen rings of boxwood.

Catherine Staples' poems have appeared in *Prairie Schooner*, *The Southern Review*, *Third Coast*, *Commonweal*, *The Michigan Quarterly Review*, and others; new poems are forthcoming at *Blackbird* and *Valparaiso*. She was selected by Amy Clampitt for the University of Pennsylvania's William Carlos Williams Award and is the recipient of two APR Distinguished Poets' Residencies. Her manuscript has been a finalist for Lost Horse Press' Idaho Prize, Northeastern's Morse, Eastern Washington University's Spokane, and Ohio State University's The Journal Award. She teaches in the Honors program at Villanova University.



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Fox Chase Review

Michael Steffen

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Mirror-Touch

Alone in the kitchen, my mother
stood motionless at the stove, staring down
at a pot of potatoes boiling over.

I was sick with measles, my room
at the end of a dark hallway,
and watched through my open door

as she turned, leaned against the oven,
and slid a hand over her bald head.
She slowly opened her robe and traced

a trail of stitches across her chest—
skin pitted and sliced—a jagged red line
disappearing beneath her armpit.

For the first time, I could see her left breast
was gone. It was just
gone.

It felt hot—
the place on my chest
where I could not stop my hand from going,

trying to soothe her, cover her up

Scar

A ruby crescent, mottled, burning,
tinsels my chest,
a slim corridor raised, my days
stitched across its surface,
a sidewalk I've raced down,
a crack tripped over, chasing

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a dark ribbon of time.

News from Evergreen Commons

My mother is Bette Davis again,
surrounded by reporters, sipping a martini poured
from a sterling shaker beaded with sweat.

Eyes off-kilter, roguish, her smile v-shaped,
she speaks with the same clipped bon mot,
over-precise diction. You should neva say bad
things about the dead, you should only say good.
Joan Crawford is dead. Good.

In the cafeteria, she sits at a smoky table
glancing outside at her Manhattan,
the office towers lit, fur trotting beside fur.

Her mouth quivers with a yawn.
She toys with her cultured pearls, slips off
her glitter skull cap, tossing
her grey mane back, her lips dark as blood.

I love the blaze igniting around her
no one dares touch, her loneliness, grandeur,
how she laughs at me for reading Plath. You know
there's a history of mental illness in our family.

She fingers a cucumber sandwich made
especially for her (crust off, mais oui),
then slips another Vantage
from her beaded clutch and waves.
A passing orderly, pretending to be
cold as Cartier, conjures a blue flame.

Michael Steffen's first book, *No Good at Sea*, was published by Legible Press in 2002. His second, *Heart Murmur*, has just been released by Bordighera Press. Michael was granted a 2002 Fellowship from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts. His poems have appeared in a wide variety of journals including *Poetry*, *Potomac Review*, *The Ledge*, *Poet Lore*, *Rhino* and many other journals. Michael is a Y2K graduate of the MFA in Creative Writing Program at Vermont College and currently lives in Roseto, Pennsylvania.



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Josh Stewart

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Second Cup of Coffee

"I'm on my second cup of coffee and I still can't face the day." — Gordon Lightfoot

It's not the prospect of
interrupting my fragile solitude
or intruding on my appreciation for the sunlight
tentatively crawling across the kitchen,

nor is it weariness
from the obligations that will be placed
roughly on my shoulders,
echoing yesterday's.

And it's not quite regret
for mistakes that I have already
begun making, my stubborn ego
insisting that I disturb the universe.

Quite simply, it is reluctance
to disrupt my own stillness,
this one deep breath of bliss before
I step into the hurricane beyond my door.

Insomniac Angel

"I want to be forgotten." —John Lennon

Wired, the man who wants to be forgotten
lies still on white sheets,
contained by the four white walls
of heaven.
He lies alone,

blank face staring up
at the flawlessly white ceiling,

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each breath stirring
the wispy white hair
spilling across his face.

The dead man thinks of suicide,
mouths the comforting melody
of its syllables

every time "Imagine" comes on the radio,
but immortality
has no easy escape route.
So he lies stiffly on his back,
eyes transfixed
on this eternity of white noise,

waiting for the slow
depths of history
to envelop him,

waiting for the silence
when he is finally forgotten.

Josh Stewart is a poet from the suburbs of Toronto, Canada, who graduated from the University of Toronto. He enjoys hats, Tuesdays, and sushi. His first chapbook, *Invention of the Curveball*, was released with Cactus Press in 2008.



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Fox Chase Review

Alice Wootson

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End of the Season

Marge shoved the door closed on angry protesting winds. Another spring rain was beginning. She ignored the barely there smell of pine in the air inside and walked over to the hall table.

She removed her black hat; her funeral hat she and Charles had named it; and looked at her pale image in the mirror anchored to the wall and shook her head. This time it was Aunt Clara. Who will be next? She wondered. Hat still in her hand, she plopped into the chair beside the table.

This trio: chair, table and mirror, were her first purchases after she and Charles married; and the cause of their first argument. How he had ranted the day the furniture arrived.

"Marge, have you lost your mind?" He had roared. "The little money we have and you spent it for these?" She thought he was going to throw the furniture out of the tiny apartment they were living in then.

She sighed. She hadn't been able to explain her actions ten years ago and she still couldn't. She didn't know why she bought these instead of the sofa they had agreed to get first. Enough.

She couldn't change the past no matter how much she wanted to. She stood.

As she walked past the living room, she refused to look in.

She didn't want to face the accusing sparkling thing in front of the window. Why did people put lights on a tree when the tinsel itself was so bright?

Here it was spring and she still hadn't taken down the Christmas tree. In all its splendor, it glared at her each time she passed the living room. The middle of April and the angel still perched on top of the tree with its trumpet poised for proclaiming.

Marge went into the too-large kitchen and put the kettle on. She thought of her life with Charles. Charles. Always Charles; never Charlie.

"Our first home," he had said as he carried her over the threshold of this apartment and into their new life.

"It's perfect." Her wide smile had beamed on him.

"Just like the rest of our lives together," Charles had said. The kiss that followed sealed the statement.

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The years that came later were like a strange country road: sometimes smooth and straight and sometimes rocky and unpredictable. But that was life. Their life. Together. And they were happy, weren't they? Then why did he leave her?

The kettle demanded her attention. She filled a dainty English china cup, a gift from Aunt Clara. The aroma of Earl Grey tea, Aunt Clara's favorite, filled the air. Fitting, Marge thought. Aunt Clara. She had understood about the tree.

Aunt Clara had spent ten years waiting for Uncle Henry to return after he walked out on her. Every night she set the table for two and cooked for two. Every night she washed two place settings: one dirty and one still clean.

Marge had seen her aunt change the clothes in Uncle Henry's closet with the seasons.

"So it will be right when he comes back," she had told Marge. Aunt Clara talked about him as if he would be home any minute. Even when days turned to months and months to years, she had waited for him to return. He never did. What a waste. Marge shook her head and took a sip of tea.

Was what she was doing so different? Yes, she answered her own question. Aunt Clara never gave up. And, by some miracle, Uncle Henry could have returned. He still could. But Marge knew Charlie would never be back. She had a little white card with stark black letters telling her where he was: the location of the granite headstone marking the place. As if she would forget; as if she could forget.

She sighed. Even the mountains must change with time.

She stood and went into the living room. For a few seconds she stared at the tree. Stubborn needles still clung along the branches. The tree was still dressed in holiday finery. Still ready for the celebration. The celebration that never happened. Charles would have loved the way the tree looked if he had come home that day. He would have loved the gifts still waiting in their bright wrappings under the tree.

Marge stared at the scene for a long while. Then she took a deep breath, walked over to the tree and reached for the angel.

Just a Job

The SH Bus was crowded like usual for 8:30 in the morning. I have no problem to find a seat, though. I never do. It's like I'm surrounded by a glass shield a many yards all around me. I don't even notice much any more that folks act like I'm carrying an epidemic worse than the plague.

Every night I shower, soak in the tub, and shower again. My water bill looks like I am paying for the whole city. Still I can not get rid of the smell that seems to ooze out of my skin instead of being poured into it. (At the slaughterhouse we call it the 'aroma', but changing what we call it don't change what it is: the smell of death.)

I get off at my stop and I swear I hear the whole busload inhaling like a blue light just flashed a special price on air.

I walk through crowds that part like Moses' Red Sea. I don't care. They are all a bunch of losers. Five years from now they will still be going to their same-no-way-to-move-up jobs while I will have it made.

I have been working at the plant for twelve years, and I swear, at the end of a busy day, when the scales are weary and blood shines on the pens like a fresh paint job on a fire engine; I swear I can see that death cloud hanging up at the rafter waiting like, if there was not more pigs, it would settle for a

man instead.

My Uncle Valagda got me this job. I got tired of hanging around school so I quit going. Papa said, "You don't go to school you get a job. What you think? This is back in Rigova? Here, everybody works."

After he hears Papa, Uncle Valagda, he tells me he has job for me.

"Good money," he says. "All you got to do is whack the dumb pigs in the head. They come to you hanging on a hoist. The hardest thing you have to do is lift the heavy kill-stick and keeping it from knocking you into the slime on the floor when it kicks back. You ain't gonna find no better paying job nowheres."

"I'll take it," I say, "but just until I find better. I ain't spending my life whacking pigs. I got bigger ambitions."

It took twelve years but today I get my chance at better.

I walk into the plant and the smell hits me like a wave in rough surf. It always does. I know that death cloud is up there, just waiting. I change my clothes. Today I ain't gonna look up.

I ain't gonna see the blood or the death. Today I think only of the man I will meet after I finish my day's killing. He will help me so I won't have to spend the rest of my life turning pigs into pork. He has a job for me.

My cousin, Chonsev, he come to my house Friday and tell me this man was looking for somebody to do an important job.

"You crazy or something?" Papa roared at me when I told him I am quitting here. "You give up a good job for something you don't know nothing about?"

I try to explain how I want to better myself, but Papa, he don't want to hear it.

"Where you learn to give up a good job for a 'maybe'? You don't hear it from me. I teach you better."

Papa, he keep yelling and all I can do is stand and take it like I ain't got no words to throw back at him. I don't throw words or nothing at Papa. I ain't ready to die yet, so I just take it 'til he gets tired and goes downstairs to watch the game.

When we were sure he couldn't hear us, Chonsev, he goes back to talking about the man with my new job.

"You do real good," he says, "and it could lead to something permanent. It takes a special talent to do the work the man has," Chonsev told me. "You got that talent. You can do it."

Tonight I meet with Mr. Smith for myself. I do not care if it is his real name or not. I will convince him I can do this thing he wants done.

Today the pigs come in, I hit them a shot to the head and they hang like sacks of potatoes. It goes perfect today__ like a dance after it is practiced over and over. (I lose count of how many hits I have since I come here.) I am in a rhythm a drummer would be proud of. Each pig takes me one closer to the last one I have to do.

At last lunchtime comes. Before I pull out my roast beef hoagie, I put bits of last night's dinner in an old pan for the one-eared tabby that adopted us about a month ago. We thought she'd help keep the place clean, but she only eats cooked meat. Who will feed her after today? I'll ask Jake. He sometimes

brings her scraps from home.

The first month I work here, I cannot eat. Every bite tasted like the pig's fear was mixed with their blood and poured over my lunch like oil. I tried going outside to eat, but the morning's smell was all over me. I do not remember when it happened, but now I can eat like my nose is missing. Funny how you get used to something. I guess you get used to anything if you have to.

For once I am glad when lunch is over. I am closer to the end of the day. As I meet each pig in turn, I think of how I will spend the money from my new job.

I always wanted a cabin at the edge of the woods on a lake. It will be quiet there. The only sounds will come from birds and fish jumping to grab insects that fly too close. Deer will tiptoe from the woods. I'll sit on my porch and watch them. Maybe in the winter I'll put out hay for them. Other animals will be there, too, but never pigs.

I go back to work and find my rhythm like it was waiting for me. I feel like a pendulum on a big clock.

Chonsev says the money is good. I believe him. Look how good he lives. I plan my house as the pigs swing up, I hit them and they swing away.

The quitting bell clangs. I have my plastic breeches off before the sound is swallowed by the air. I hose them down and hang them in my locker like I will wear them again. Then I leave without looking back.

I catch the L 20 to Second Street and the D 10 after that. I walk three blocks to Fleming Street and go to the end of a row of what used to be houses. Plywood covers some windows like it is keeping something from escaping. The street is filled with silence so loud it hurts my ears.

Any minute I expect somebody to spring from one of the hollows that used to have doors, and jump on me. If I thought pigs could feel, I'd think this is how they felt riding the hoist chain coming to me.

I walk faster like, maybe, if I go fast enough, I can become invisible. I pass a man leaning against the steps nodding, although I know he ain't sleep. Nothing else moves on the whole street that feels as long as the beach at Margate. I stop at 1726 painted in yellow on a wall that looks like paint is all that's holding the bricks in place.

When a black car pulls to a slow stop I hold my breath. I don't let it go until the window rolls down and a voice escapes.

"You Jack Hunisko?" I am glad the answer is 'yes'. "Come here," he says. I go. "Take this." He hands me an envelope poked out on the sides like a lady's stuffed purse. "Mr. Smith says to tell you, you do this right and he'll have a lot more business for you. Screw up...." He shrugged. "You don't want me to tell you what happens if you screw up. Just don't. You understand?"

"Yes, sir." I nod.

I want to look in the envelope, but I know to wait until the car disappears. Quiet as the street is, the car still seems to glide on air. It melts around the corner.

I wait five minutes like he told me, then I rip the top off and turn the envelope upside down.

A plastic bag falls into my hand. The gun inside is heavy, but not as heavy as the stick I used on the job. I rip it from the plastic and put it into my pocket. The street seems friendlier now. I reach back into the envelope and pull out a paper. I read the directions and then tear them up.

I pull out a picture of some man. I look at it and imagine a red circle with a line through it drawn over him. I slide the picture back inside the envelope and tug out the packet hiding way at the end like it's

shy.

Beautiful green greets me. Government ink has a better smell than stinking, squealing pigs.

I walk back to civilization. I'll get used to following orders from somebody else like I did the foreman on the pig job.

I wonder how long it will take the death smell to leave me if I don't keep adding new layers? I don't want to stink up the new car I'm going to get. I want a red convertible, but I guess I'd better settle for something plain black; one of those 'you know, it was just an ordinary black car I saw' deals.

I pass the guy still nodding like that's his job. I don't look back as I go to get started on my new job.

Alice Wootson grew up in a suburb of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She attended Cheyney University which is located outside of Philadelphia. She remained in the area after graduating with a BS Degree in Elementary Education. She earned a Masters Degree in Education and a Principal's Certification from Cheyney University as well. Alice earned a Reading Specialist Certification from the University of Pennsylvania.

She retired after teaching for thirty-one years in the public schools of Chester, Pennsylvania first and then Philadelphia.

As a reading specialist Alice was responsible for conducting writing and reading workshops for teachers. She is the award-winning author of ten romance novels.

Alice Wootson has conducted writing workshops for chapters of Romance Writers of America in various areas of the country, for the Philadelphia Writers Conference, the Romance Slam Jam conference in Dallas as well as for adult and children's writers groups in the Philadelphia area.

Alice Wootson spends any spare time she can find reading, traveling and enjoying her three grandchildren. She lives in Philadelphia with Ike, her husband of forty-nine years. Alice is also an award-winning poet and a member of the Mad Poets Society. She has been featured at several local venues.



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