

A vertical light painting of a plant stem with leaves and small flowers against a dark background. The light trails are bright yellow and orange, creating a sense of movement and depth. The stem is the central focus, with several leaves branching out to the sides. Small, delicate flowers are visible along the stem, each with a tiny flame-like tip. The background is a gradient of dark blue and black, which makes the glowing lines stand out prominently.

ONION RIVER REVIEW

2021

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river run by

Madeline Walker de Hughes

Ellen Arvidson

Rosemary Marr

Addie Bigelow

Dedicated to Will Marquess

English Department Professor, writer and guide
(1954-2020)

☞ ONION RIVER REVIEW ☞

2021

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Persephone's Fruit

Elizabeth Bigelow



digital photography

For Every Season ...

We here at the *Onion* have many thanks to give. This volume is a culmination of numerous individuals and communities who have continued to grow in the face of adversity. While the Covid-19 pandemic has presented us with enormous challenges over the past year, it has also given us something we don't find very often in our otherwise busy lives: time. Time to create, time to exist, time to try new things. For this time, we are grateful.

Rather than start at the beginning of the creative process, our first 'thank you' is to the printers, George Goldsworthy and Summer Drexel. We thank them for producing the finished publication of our collective works. Without their professional efforts, our prose, pictures, and poems would remain a random collection of works stuffed in a virtual shoebox.

Our small and wonderful family of students, faculty, and staff have given the entirety of themselves to Saint Michael's during this challenging past year. We are incredibly grateful for all of them who sacrificed and worked tirelessly to provide us a safe, healthy and nourished place to live and study.

We hold immense gratitude for the Saint Michael's administration who has kept us aligned and informed in this unparalleled time and works to keep us on the road to academic success. Special thank you to the Student Government Association who has provided us with the financial means to create this year's *Onion*, as well as all in the St. Mike's family who contributed to a vibrant and nurturing academic environment.

We thank our Master Gardener, Greg Delanty, who served as a faithful advisor and confidant in the farming of this *Onion*. His contributions are boundless, and they are deeply valued.

This *Onion* was sown in the soil of a liberal arts education. Saint Michael's College has given us and all its students the opportunity to engage with the vastness of knowledge and the world and to discover our own creativity in the process.

And finally, what would the *Onion* be with no one to peel it? Hopefully, the *Onion* provides its readers a gateway to St. Michael's College. Each submission is an invitation to the community at large to explore, learn and enjoy the authors' and artists' creativity. Perhaps you will sample a poem, bite into a bit of prose or indulge in the visual stimulus offered by a drawing or photograph. Because of you, we keep writing, drawing, creating, and yes, growing the *Onion*.

Thank you.

Alumni, Poet, and Fiction Writer

Dan Johnson

Daniel Johnson is a twenty five year old writer from New Jersey. A graduate of Saint Michael's College and University of College Cork, he lives in Cork, Ireland. His work has appeared, or is forthcoming, in publications such as *Southword*, *Reed Magazine*, *The Citron Review*, *The Honest Ulsterman*, and *Cork Words: An Anthology of Contemporary Cork Writing*.

Author's Note:

For nearly two years, I've been living in Cork, Ireland where I've completed a Master's in Creative Writing at University College Cork. Undoubtedly, my writerly foundation was laid at Saint Mike's, in Greg Delanty's poetry workshops and with the encouragement of professors and friends I looked up to and respected immensely. Now, with space to reflect post-graduation, I know, even more clearly, that the MA from UCC was an act of confirmation, not creation. It was a layering upon knowledge and skill that was kindled and nurtured first at SMC.

It's a great pleasure to be able to be involved with and contribute to this year's *Onion*. When I was an undergraduate at St. Mike's I wasn't able to participate as much as I wanted to with the *Onion River Review*. I was a four year member of the men's lacrosse team, and we always seemed to have an away game at Lemoyne when the mandatory editors meetings took place! So, my many thanks to the editors for welcoming me.

I started writing in Greg's poetry workshops in 2015. The *Onion* published some of my first work, and the first time I ever read a poem to a room of people was at one of the open-mics organized by the *Onion* crew and English faculty. I read Yeats's poem "A Drinking Song,"

which I thought was simultaneously beautiful, comically subversive, and, at six lines, the perfect length for my then-unsteady nerves.

When asked about writing, or how I write, I often turn to ideas I learned at SMC. For instance, I remember Greg's lecture about writing the universal through the specific. Inevitably I find myself reciting Kavanagh's poem, "To the Man After the Harrow," quoting, "Forget the worm's opinion too / of hooves and pointed harrow-pins, / for you are driving your horses through / the mist where Genesis begins." One doesn't have to be an Irish farmer in 1940s Monaghan to access the poem's essential truth - that the ordinary contains the extraordinary, that the infinitesimal contains infinity. And so it occurred to me, in a fit of hubris, that I could perform the same feat as well.

I often think of how well SMC prepared me for the MA journey, and of all the encouragement I received from SMC faculty, whether it was Greg, Will Marquess, Christina Root, Nat Lewis, Tim Mackin and many more. Too, I will always be thankful to Joan Wry and her family. Being awarded the 2018 John Reiss award remains a special memory, as well as a moment of encouragement and recognition that moves me to the page, still.

Parking Lot

Dan Johnson

There we are, emerging from the Trail,
as if the woodland path connecting
Erskine to the back of the Shopping Center
were a womb, suburban chrysalis imbued
with the myths of marijuana, Bud Light, blowjobs.
We're walking past the dumpsters,
through the post-apocalyptic tarmac haze
of the parking lot in summertime.
Loitering teenagers, smoking
cigarettes, kick flip off the curb.
One dressed in all black skitches
some mom's hatchback as she drives away.
Crouched on the skateboard,
he grips the underside of the bumper;
I watch his pale, pimpled face,
think how hot the gleaming metal must be.
Even then, I have a sense of impropriety,
aware of the trick as what my father
would refer to as a bonehead move.
Then the mom brakes, gets out,
blonde and furious. "What the hell
do you think you're doing!"
The kid rejoins his friends on the curb,
the sun glints violently off the car,
and I have a feeling that it's not a question
anyone in the parking lot has an answer to,
that it's not a real question at all.
On the South Gate Bridge
Coming home from work past midnight,
I walked behind a group of lads up
South Main Street. Their laughter rang
off the corrugate of the construction walls,
through the hollow of the empty carpark.

One lad stumbled in the road, drunker
than the rest, lagging behind, but
the others seemed not to notice. Perhaps
this was the usual – there he goes
again with the double whiskies and coke:
sure as the sun rises, he’s half a street behind.
The pack had crossed the bridge when the straggler
stopped in the middle and leaned over the wall.
I expected him to spew, to leave
the night’s chips and drink in the river.
But instead, he threw one leg over,
straddling the wall, then the other, sitting, dangling
his legs over the river. I watched it happen –
watched him stare, chin to chest, into
the torrent. I reached out my arm, as if
to touch the sheepskin on his collar,
but I was still too far away. Then
the lads were running – What are you doing!
They dragged him off the parapet down
onto the footpath, the boy arguing –
No, no! Let me go for a swim. When I passed
them on the bridge, I heard them say,
We’re going home, we’re going to the gaff.
I went by, looking at them crowded around
their friend, arms folded over chests with hearts
better solved in rivers. Then one laughed.
I saw it – the open mouth – but I didn’t
hear it, the river’s loud-hush in my ears,
and I crossed the street unacknowledged,
disappearing into the motion of the night,
going like a head slipping under water.

Packing

Dan Johnson

In the house on Moonhaw Road
there was a room with a wall
that was covered in pictures.
No frame was the same
and the faces that fit
inside the right angles
smiled, posed, or tried
to appear nonchalant
in the camera's examining gaze.
They were arranged
in no particular order,
yet placed with care,
a round of Tetris or a mosaic,
a full hand of generations:
faces who stood at Mass,
painted flowers, drew Yogi Bear,
smoked, drank, taught, coached,
shouldered a rifle, died early, lived long.
The intricate latticework of a bridal dress.
The somber chill of suits seen in grey.
Flowers on a blouse for a hundred years.
All in the in-between room, everyone
always coming or going from
one part of the house to the other.
But on that last day, I stopped,
lingering, looking at them,
never again to be arranged
the same way. I stood
before all the eyes, and counted
them, all their lives,
losing myself in one pair,
then another and another, until
things were packed away at last.

Boil the Kettle

Dan Johnson

I boil the kettle, again.

If the day is a sentence, the kettle is the first
capital letter, the final period,

the punctuation in between; a bladder burst
with so many commas of milky tea.

The filament is murmuring.

The tea is set ready in the mug.

I've never timed it, the boiling,

but now I ask it questions—What are you?

as if to measure the What of time, or Why,

the transitory In-Between Space

that might quantify or qualify

moments of blinks and breaths, heartbeats,

sentences and mugs of tea. I boil the kettle, again.

Oisín

Dan Johnson

He stood on the wide strand by himself, his little feet buried in the sand. The sun was nearly disappeared. He watched the light fade behind clouds whose size he couldn't put into words. Just pictures. Broad as Oisín's flank, blotchy with light too. The wind picked up off the sea and cut sharply through his jumper. Mid-September and the dregs of Summer swirling in Autumn's drain. He wanted warm milk.

Stepping forward, he started walking towards the water, unsure of what made him move his feet. The crashing of the waves was a steady roar in his ear, and the sea's fuming grew so loud that it became silence, like the wind across the fields.

He let the last bit of a dying wave wash over his feet; he'd reached the swelling tongue of the water's edge. The Atlantic was opening in front of him. He was ankle deep in the tide. It was so cold. Not like Oisín's warm tongue. Only the wind on his ear made Oisín's spit cold.

There was a demented reversal about him. There was a blackness in his eyes. The water's chill held the same Atlantic night that inked his pupils. He knew this alright, even if it was just a vague seedling of a notion. Why did the dogs in the village never fetch for him? Why did his Auntie wince when he looked at her? Why did his baby sister cry when he held her? Only Oisín was still and calm, with his deep brown eyes, when he came through the fields to the beach.

The burgeoning moon's pull was increasing. He went further. Knees, groin, waist, navel, nipples. Then neck, and he was just a head above water like some berry washed away. He could hardly keep his feet touching the seabed, but he was unbothered by the anarchic sway of the currents. He swung back and forth with them.

Would it drag him out? Hadn't his father told him a million times about the Ryan boy who had gone under last year and never come up? And

the young fella was a powerful swimmer too - Jesus, Mary and Suffering Joseph.

But he didn't mind. It would be an adventure.

Then a wave rose up before him. He saw it building, gathering its immensity. He leaned into it, kicking off the bottom, giving himself up to the water. It felt as easy as flipping a coin. It pulled him into itself, sucked him up, forced him under. The power was unbelievable. It was uncaring. No one, not even his father, would have been able to resist the wave. He was utterly calm. It didn't matter if he wasn't.

The will of God be done, like his Auntie said.

His mouth and nose filled with salt water. He lost all sense of up and down and it was euphoric.

He loved it, this letting go.

Then he collided with the seabed. The shattered corpses of seashells tore at his knees. He was thrown for one last somersault and the ocean spat him out like some cavities incisor. He was smashed face-down on the shore.

Shivering and coughing seawater, he lay there and felt his bleeding.

It would hurt to kneel at Mass tomorrow.

He lifted his head and the shade of the dunes stretched towards the sky. It was nearly full-night. He didn't need to see the dunes to know how the grass bent in the wind. He didn't need to see to know that beyond the bent grass was his father's house.

Where hurt was.

He lay in the sand, letting the tide wash over him. The sun was gone.

Wind and water remained.

Then he remembered that Oisín was out there in the dark too. His hide was warm and his tongue would clean the salt from his face. He shook with remorse. He would never leave Oisín alone.

He was selfish.

The priest was right.

His Auntie was right.

Poor Oisín alone in the bent grass.

The boy rose off the shore and started walking.

Michael Burke was ten years old.

Editor's Selection

Chosen by Dan Johnson, University College Cork MFA 2021

218 Ajar
Addie Bigelow



Dad Yells to Me: “Time to Chop Some Wood.”

Addie Bigelow

Two logs for us to rest on and a third I roll his way.
The loud crack of the wood as it breaks apart slices through the air
like the vines that slap against my window screen in the night.
The sound—like a whip—keeps me up.
Each layer of the tree, for each year it has lived, ripped apart.
I listen to the sound like a creak, or a clap, or the snap of a twig
and Dad splits the next, the next, the next.

Propagations

Madeline Walker de Hughes

i am sorry.

i know you belong on the sill, kissing the window,
sipping the sunlight.

i want

need

you closer.

i don't want to pick my head off the pillow,

or have to put my glasses on,

in order to see the details of your roots burrowing into the water.

Agape

Rosemary Marr

A butterfly flew down my throat,
I swallowed it whole.
Allowing it passage through my esophagus,
To make its home in my stomach.

It built a house,
It built a village,
My body became a garden,
The most beautiful I have ever felt;

When my veins became vines,
When flowers popped from my heart,
When the air from my lungs stopped being for me.

A Procession

Ellen Arvidson



2021 Recipient of the John Engles Poetry Award

Sam Donahue

John Engles (1931-2007) was a Professor at Saint Michael's College from 1962-2007. He was one of the most important contemporary American poets of his time.

Sam Donahue is a writer from Arlington, Massachusetts. She splits her time between pretending to write there and pretending to write at Saint Michael's College, where she studies English and French—both of which influence the writing she actually manages to do. When not pretending to write, she spends her time eating bagels, making quilts, and trying to get her roommates to care about *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. She's been a theatre kid, a radio DJ, and an ex-pat in Paris. She loves Mormons, musicals, and musicals about Mormons—not necessarily in that order—and if she were a spice, she'd be flour. After graduation, she plans to pursue an MFA in Creative Writing with the hope of becoming a college professor.

confessions of a reformed theatre kid

Sam Donahue

i used to do theatre (yes with an reeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee)

i'd **BELT** onstage

and whisper off

yet I did not quite manage to retain that level of vocal control

i've run around backstage because sorrycanttalkihaveaquickchange

and i've waited

nearly

an

h

o

u

r

in full hair and makeup because i don't go on til act 2

i've been y a n k e d and YELLED at

by well-meaning castmates

(who never shut up themselves)

and let tears

both happy and sad

drip

d

o

w

n

my face

for all sorts of reasons

which seem so petty now

Song of Walt Whitman

Sam Donahue

“I celebrate myself, and sing myself,
And what I assume you shall assume,
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.”
Which is all well and good,
I suppose,
for those lucky few who understand
whatever the fuck
Whitman is trying to say.
But for the rest of us?
Well, I am content to celebrate us, and sing us,
to assume that you are as lost as me.
I loafe and invite your soul
to celebrate and sing with me.
To celebrate confusion,
and sing to idiocy.
Let the others call us stupid
as we sing our mediocrity
and celebrate the fact
that they don’t really understand Whitman
any better than you and me.

Le Crime Ultime

Sam Donahue

I imagine myself
dragged to the Place de la Concorde
like a modern-day Marie Antoinette—
or maybe more like an American pig to slaughter—
and executed by guillotine.
“Treason,”
all because I dared
to dip my baguette in peanut butter.

La Esmeralda

Sam Donahue

*The Lord is my shepherd,
I shall not want
for another woman
to place her hand in mine.*

*The Lord is my shepherd,
I shall not want
to hear my name,
needy and breathless,
fall from her lips.*

*The Lord is my shepherd,
I shall not want
for her to place her lips on mine
so I can taste the sweetness
of her vanilla chapstick.*

*The Lord is my shepherd,
I shall not want
but I am*

I think I finally understand
that famous French archdeacon

and how he must've felt
gazing upon that Roma girl

knowing how wrong he is to want,
but wanting nonetheless

unable to help myself.

Poems Are Bridges: An Interview with Richard Blanco

Sophia Meimaris and Briar Flanders

On March 13, 2021, in advance of his appearance at Saint Michael's College as part of the Donald J. Sutherland lecture series, junior English major Briar Flanders (BF) and first-year Biology major Sophia Meimaris (SM) interviewed inaugural poet Richard Blanco (RB) via Zoom about his life and poetry. In their conversation, which addressed the pandemic's effects on experiences of human connection, his writing process, and his advocacy through poetry and performance, Blanco identified "the big question of home" as animating his thought and work, whether as a civil engineer or as a nationally recognized poet.

BF: How would you describe your writing process, and where does your inspiration come from?

RB: I think there's a lot of mystery shrouded around the idea of writing or anything in the arts, when in reality it's like any other problem-solving process. It begins with an exploration of what I'm feeling and thinking, trying to find language, trying to find a model. Then I start scribbling stuff and working things out. At some point, I find something that I feel I can hang my hat on, that I can commit to, and I start building the poem from that.

I've been a professional engineer all my life, and no two engineering projects are the same. I always begin in the same way, though: I begin with an exploration and look at the things I don't know. I figure out what my givens are and what I need to research, and then I just start. I do the first draft, and then I go back over it. I do the second draft of the plans, and then a third, and a fourth, fifth, and sixth. Even when the thing is being built I'm still out in the field revising. It is a multi-step process like anything else in life, any kind of thing that we're trying to do. Maybe you get a little better at it over time, so that you know sooner when you're going down the wrong path.

As far as inspiration, for me it's really a question of "What is your obsession? What is your focus?" As I like to say, every poet is writing one poem all their life. There's something really essential about your entire body of work. It keeps coming back to the same question. Sometimes when you answer that question or part of that question, new questions come up. For me, it's always been about the idea of home, identity, belonging. Even when I want to run away from that, I end up there anyway. Even if I start writing about a cup of water, before I know it I'm thinking, "Where's the water from, and how did it get here?" That is, in a sense, my inspiration: that big question of home, which is a big word. It's like asking, "What is love?" In some ways, it's endless inspiration, because there is no final answer.

BF: Multicultural ties and evolving identity experiences can complicate definitions of home. How do you define home for yourself, and has that definition changed over time?

RB: It's definitely changed. I don't think I've ever defined it—I just explored it. I believe good art answers questions—great art keeps on asking them. The end point of an artistic exploration is not to find a final definition or meaning, but rather to keep on proposing possibilities. Sometimes when you settle on one thing, something else shifts in your life and then you're paying attention to that. The idea of home changes, and that's been constant.

Again, it's like love. The idea of what love means to us changes over time. Especially in your age group, your sense of what love was even a year ago may be very different than what it is now. It's an endless shifting, and I've learned to sort of be okay with that. Home is the question. As the poet Basho said, "Life is a journey and the journey itself is home." More and more, I'm realizing that my art is also home. It's one of the places that I've belonged to for a long time, and I feel at home in the words on the page, and also in the performance of my poetry. My connection with community through my poetry—that's part of what feels like home to me.

SM: I really like the idea of your art being home. Both of us come from immigrant families, as well. Do you find it fulfilling to learn about your personal history through writing?

RB: Not only fulfilling; the writing is what actually led me to even asking those questions. There's a kind of general misunderstanding or misperception that children of immigrants, or maybe even immigrants themselves, adore their given culture, and you know that's not necessarily true. Especially if you're a child of immigrants, whatever your parents are is immediate grounds for rejection. If my parents were dancing salsa, I wanted to listen to AC/DC. But of course you are these stories, you are this culture, you are being imprinted by it all your life. I think there comes a time in your life when you ask that big question: "Where are you from?" It's a rite of passage. It's kind of a cultural coming-of-age story that we have within each of us where we finally learn to acknowledge and appreciate that it's very much a part of us, and then dive into it and really uncover all this history, all this heritage and cultural legacy, that you were born with but never bothered with. For me that is writing.

My very first creative-writing assignment in graduate school was to write a poem about America. We read Frost, Ginsberg, and Whitman as models, and I was like, what America is that? That assignment opened the floodgates to asking the questions I didn't know I had within me. I was 27. It was about that time when you really start thinking about those kinds of things. And also, in the evolution of that, also asking what it means to be an American. If I'm questioning what my ethnic identity is, or even my sexuality, or my identity in so many different regards, that's also to question what is American. That's where I'm at now, not only questioning my cultural heritage, but who we are as a country, what does a country mean, and how is country home. The title of my most recent book is *How to Love a Country*. That could be a question, too. It's a statement, but is also asking: How do you love this kind of place? How do we all belong to something, especially something so complex as a democracy? Writing is a vehicle for exploration of all these questions. Writing makes you think, and thinking makes you write. I'm not sure I would have bothered with

these questions—I mean, I'm sure they would have been there, but I'm not sure I would have explored them to such a degree—if it weren't for the work.

BF: That idea of exploration and questioning through writing really resonates with me. There are definitely things about myself that I would never have questioned—my gender included—if I hadn't been a writer, and I hadn't already been exploring those themes. A poem that of yours that spoke to both of us was “Queer Theory According to My Grandmother.” Would you be able to talk about how it feels to write about conflicts between core identities in your world?

RB: That's a perfect example of a poem that made me think things through—in particular my relationship with my grandmother. It was a way of having a conversation with her and with myself about my sexuality, but also about homophobia and the trauma of her verbal abuse. That poem was actually written originally in my voice, as a speaker talking about my grandmother. In the first draft, there was a lack of vulnerability and a lack of empathy for my grandmother, despite who she was. That poem let me discover that my grandmother was also my best friend. In a way, she was my primary caretaker. In a way, even her constant harassment was a form of love and attention. I was being seen. She was watching me, but I was also being seen, where nobody else was even seeing me. Even the idea that she cared enough “to make me a straight man” said something. It unraveled all those complexities. I think we all have someone in our life like this, whether in the context of sexuality or something else, who is our best friend and also our arch-enemy, someone who's always pushing against us and we're pushing back. In the process, we learn something about ourselves, about being human.

I changed it to her voice so that I would take myself out of the picture. I think not only her character, but also her vulnerability, her love, was able to shine through—however perverse that love was. The poem ends, “you will not look like a goddamn queer / I've seen you... / even if you are one.” She wasn't really trying to change me—she was trying to change my behavior, and in a way, that was to protect me. In her life and in her

generation, to be feminine or effeminate was going to cause pain. That was her way of sheltering me from pain, in a way, or from ridicule, even though she was ridiculing me. All these ironies and nuances started coming through... I never really wrote about my sexuality until that third book. That was partly because I didn't know what story I wanted to tell—and my grandmother was a way of telling that story—but also I never realized what the idea of home had to do with my sexuality. And then I was like, wait a minute: anybody who feels “queer,” regardless of sexuality, has a yearning to find community, to find a place, a group of friends or a new kind of family, where you can be proud, where you don't have to live in fear or shame. That's another kind of home, not a country or even a physical place, but a psychological place amongst people.

Again, my writing brought me there. I didn't think I would ever think about those questions to that degree, or break through from my own pain and my anger towards my grandmother to some other place. And then I also became interested in all kinds of intersections too—gender roles and heteronormativity and all that kind of stuff. In the section of the book where that poem appears, I am thinking about how the women were the backbone of my family, even as the men were the ones that supposedly made all the decisions. The men—my father and my grandfather—were very tender people, but they weren't supposed to be. My grandmother was supposed to be the little Cuban grandmother, but was rough and tumble. I was thinking about all that through the lens of my own sexuality, but then the explorations and questions became bigger and broader.

SM: I really like that way of thinking, of changing your mindset to put yourself into the other person's shoes—I think that can really help you. It's such a difficult journey.

RB: We discussed the idea that writing is a method of inquiry: it takes empathy and vulnerability to put yourself in someone else's shoes. When we first start writing, we sometimes feel as if we have to have all the answers, or that the poem is about explaining our conclusions, when in reality it doesn't have to be a manifesto. A poem is just an exploration. To be vulnerable in a poem and yet to have authority in terms of your

language and your emotions... you recognize your own humanity on the page. I love that dynamic.

SM: In your poetry workshops, you've emphasized the idea of diversity and inclusion in ways that challenge the common perception of poetry as being only for a certain kind of person. What advice would you give to student writers regarding this concept?

RB: That comes from my background. I grew up in a working-class, lower middle-class immigrant family with very little access to the arts. We weren't talking about Frost or Picasso at the dinner table. There was also a cultural divide: what little my parents did know about the arts had to do with Cuba. So my parents did not know Frost, even if they wanted to talk about Frost. My parents didn't know who the Rolling Stones were, for that matter. And then there was another kind of division that had to do with my sexuality: I was always on guard against looking at things that seemed too "sissy-like" or "queer." It's no accident I studied engineering, but that's another story.

I want to write a kind of poetry that is very generous, that is democratic. I want to write poetry that speaks to both a little boy like myself and someone at the New York Times Book Review. I've always set myself to write the kinds of poems that meet the reader wherever they are. I have made it a personal mission of mine to grow the ways in which we have access to poetry, and one of them is through my role as Education Ambassador for the Academy of American Poets. As someone who is very cognizant of some of these barriers, I help teachers create new and innovative ways to bring poetry in the classroom. A lot of it also had to do with the inauguration and realizing, as I read tens of thousands of emails, that for a lot of people, it was the first time they had ever heard a living poet speak. It was the first time they ever heard a poem that they understood, and they were scared, because they were like, this can't be a poem if I understand it. I think people just don't have access to poetry in general, and depending on sociocultural backgrounds and language barriers, they may have even less access.

BF: You've spoken in some other interviews, as well as this one, about intersections between your career as a writer and your career as a civil engineer. What advice might you give to those who were kind of looking to balance writing with another career?

RB: I guess that also relates to Sophia's question, because cognitive diversity is another kind of diversity we don't always acknowledge. I'm definitely an advocate for that kind of diversity, as well, especially for your generation. I've been to fifth-grade classrooms where students say they want to be neurosurgeons. That's scary! What do you know about that in fifth grade? Absolutely nothing! You don't need to worry about those kinds of questions yet! As much as we throw around the word "interdisciplinarity," I don't know that we really practice the idea of cognitive diversity. You can do as many things as you want and you don't have to give one up for another. Yes, you'll always have a lead horse, but that doesn't mean you don't have a team of other horses pulling you along. That team of other horses might not be your career, but it might be something that brings joy or satisfaction or some other kind of value to your life.

Maybe one of those will be the lead horse five years from now. I started as an engineer and I never dreamed I was going to be a poet. I just allowed myself to say, "Why not?" It wasn't that I hated engineering; I wasn't replacing anything. One thing led to another, and now poetry is the lead horse as opposed to my engineering. I really invite that. If you look at our history, so many poets have done other things all their lives. Wallace Stevens was an insurance executive all his life. William Carlos Williams was a pediatrician. T.S. Eliot was a banker. I think that it's important to allow and invite everyone to come into poetry. Not only as writers, either—also as appreciators of poetry. It doesn't matter if you're some science super-whiz: this is for you, too.

SM: Along those lines, as we prepared for this interview, I kept thinking: poetry is a different kind of civic engineering. It's using language to do similar work.

RB: Yeah, poems are bridges. I build poems, and I literally used to build bridges. I've realized that questions of home have driven my work in both realms. It actually merged at a point in my life because I ended up specializing in city planning and town revitalization projects. I would have to sit with communities in town meetings, sometimes for two or three years, trying to tease out a collective sense of what home meant to them so we could then translate their answers into physical reality that reflects that. We'd talk about the kind of lives there, the kind of parks they wanted, what a particular street was like, the kind of lamp posts they wanted—it all comes down to their perception of home. The design of it wasn't nearly as important, or even as hard, as getting a community to have that conversation. And then that idea of building bridges- it all came together. It was really fascinating.

BF and SM: Thank you for taking the time to talk with us.

RB: My pleasure.

Untitled
Austin Lilley



Untitled
Austin Lilley



Snow Moon

William Ellis

What hangs tonight in the sky

is more than a bitter chill

and thirst for warm tea. We told ourselves we would grow old and die
here, where others had once locked the sash and linger still

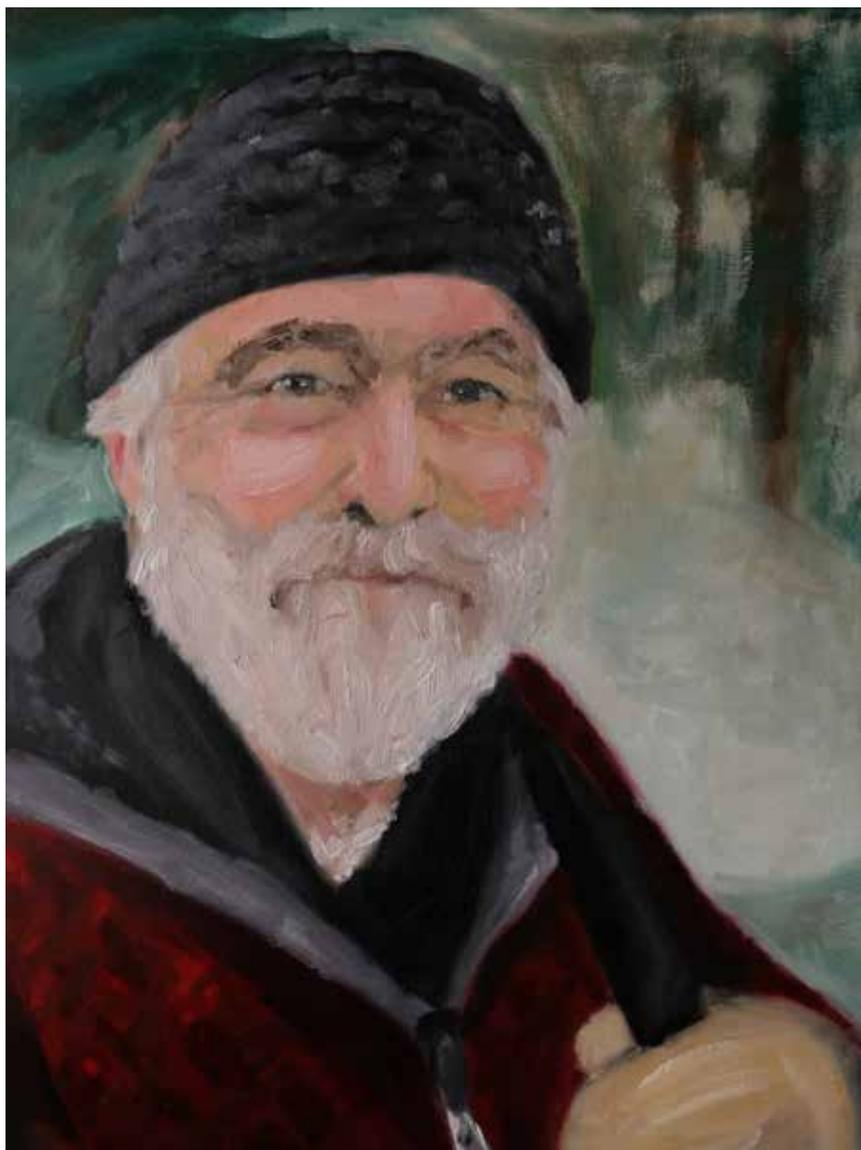
in the gelid air. Ever

keen to attest yet bare of tongue and taste, hoary spirits hunker, seeped
into the house – foundation stones –

so as we one day will be,

only to gaze on this snow moon, made to luster upon deer mice and
frozen footpaths.

Dad
Samuel Heyliger



oil on canvas

Harley Davidson Maniac

Bradley Stephenson

Comes gliding through
the brick canyon,
the sidewalks detonate
and the dog-walking couple
shake their heads.
With a single wrist flick
he releases an orgasm of
motor fuel fury
as if to say, fuck you, here's a shot of gasoline,
as if to say, you're wasting your life, not me,
as if to say, I am free and immortal,
as he glides his rumbling machine
past the heart of town to the outskirts,
hunting for death
on empty asphalt highways.

Sidewalker
Samuel Heyliger



digital photography

Inner Monologue of a Non-Musician

Faith Morgan

Lying in my bed, the wail of R&B flows,
as my tired, overworked eyes rest in repose.
Sometimes, in laze, I wish I could make
such fluid music, which talent does take.
How beautiful it'd be,
if my silly little poetry
could read atop a melody,
sighing chords spilling easily.
The whine of a silky
saxophone
drowns the envy
out of my ears,
out of my heart.

Englese: A Sonnet in Found Chinglish Sayings

Yuan Changming

You really know English? Know is know, noknow is noknow.
Every student should good good study, day day up.
You have seed. I will give you some color to see see.
You and me, we two who and who?
They are no three no four people.
You ask me, me ask who?
It is always people mountain people see there.
If you want money, I have no; if you want life, I have one!
Doing things should not horse horse tiger tiger!
Dragon born dragon, chicken born chicken, mouse'son can make hole!
I give you face you don't wanna face, you lose your face, I turn my face
You should open the door see mountain.
He has one leg with somebody, and she also has one leg with somebody.
Please take care of pubic sanitation!

Organic
Emelia Aiken-Hafne

organic



photography and photoshop

The Barrens Ballad

Connor Thurston

The nectar feeder flutters-
the hoary breeze carries her so.
Moss bits burst on the oaken trunks
towering over fen and furrowed fox while
fungus feeds of a nutrient-filled ramble rotting.
Sun's spear greets the trembling bower blushing pale red in fall
and fallen leaves wither thither to the dirt themselves.
Glass winged, multi-oculus insects survey
above the moth-dust.

meter's running

Ryan Boyd



color 35mm film

Chef de cuisine

Maddy Gemme



35mm film

ērōsiō

Addy Bourgelais

My trust in you,
broken down
and scattered.

A river
eroding rock
and turning it to sand.

“Lie”

Michael Ross

In vanity, vainly we fall;
venomous verbs that shorten the long haul.
Some say salvation will solidify our long embrace.
Though we may try to fly;
our wings have been clipped, butchered to the bone.

Untitled
Hannah Muse



Sweet Slumber

Emily Derrick

When Slumber calls
sans somber skies,
and all the stars
have yet to rise,
her soothing song
is hard to shake,
but, zowerswopped,
I let her take
me 'til my mind's
made worry-free,
her zephyr zendalet
draped over me
and, while in her arms
I swing and sway,
until my zwodder fades away.

My Inbox

Gianna Seaver

Practice social distancing
as we look
forward
to the days and weeks ahead

I hope this email finds you well.

We must
flatten

the curve.

this too

shall pass...

or fail
you can now
pass
or fail!

I hope this email finds you well.

Regardless of the circumstances
an
in-person commencement ceremony
at a future time
difficult time
world's trying time
more information soon.
May 23rd
retrieve belongings.
I hope this email finds you

Well.

is it worth the trip

Ryan Boyd



black and white 35mm film

I Still Remember the Embrace You Gave Me

Bradley Stephenson

It was after we spent a year walking past one another in the hall, the job you got me.

It was after we saw Brokeback Mountain together, and understood our love could never be.

It was after we looked into each other's eyes over cold Shiner Bock bottles at the bar with the glowing blue neon signs that read "Whisky" and "Steak", the oak tree growing through the roof.

It was after you came to me in a dream in shimmering emerald, with alabaster skin and obsidian hair, as a medieval Queen

It was after I thought about the silver turtle earrings I got you in Mexico, and the love note I sent you when you were away at boarding school and how I answered your unexpected call from Maine on my car phone on that Texas highway.

It was after I took your hand in mine in the soft orange of the campfire and you held it and squeezed.

It was after I hid her engagement ring in your bathroom and you secretly put it on day after day to see how it looked.

I pulled you as hard as I could into my puffy green parka standing behind your open car trunk, idling at the airport terminal.

I do not regret not kissing you.

I got on a plane that cold Spring day and flew to Chicago to see your sister.

Shirt
Ethan Li



digital camera, f/4.0 1/100 ISO:1000 40mm

Via Ulisse Rocchi 57

Gianna Seaver

fumbling through
her fingers hit cold metal and
she reads the grooves like Braille
she sees
the grand oak door, rich chestnut
cobblestone and running drunk uphill
heels getting stuck in the cracks
bitter bubbly aperol spritz
warm pastels dappled with sunlight
feet dangling down from high places
risks
flirting brown eyes on Fridays
clinks of glasses, clouds of cigarette
the key that unlocks another life.
The baby cries.
She closes the drawer.

Moody Julius
Maddy Gemme



color 35mm film

A Place I Named and then Unnamed

C. H. DeNegre

Only between these sheer cliffs of mossy stones and by the scent of this old orange forest,

can I find a word to speak.

An escape is the sole way to describe warm days in this gorge.

Only undocumented past lives here

and no times before can catch up to a place where the stones are older than time, a place that doesn't exist without mind.

Naming here pulls away

and I was almost foolish enough to name it after Sunyata¹,

but I know that my past too will return to the round brush stroke holding my tongue.

¹ "Sunyata, in Buddhist philosophy, the voidness that constitutes ultimate reality; sunyata is seen not as a negation of existence but rather as the undifferentiation out of which all apparent entities, distinctions, and dualities arise." - Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Sunyata." Encyclopedia Britannica, February 16, 2011. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/sunyata>.

Mid-March Singing

C. H. DeNegre

The sounds of Interstate 95

cast a long shadow over the East River, with its waterside Indiangrass, the fluffed tails doing
pirouettes in the old wind,

carrying the highway noises over the marshes

and forests of the Woodlands,

to my lap.

I sit on the stones in front of the house, assailed by the hum under local silence.

18 wheelers, motorcycles, trucks, and more, blending into one, low, dull hum.

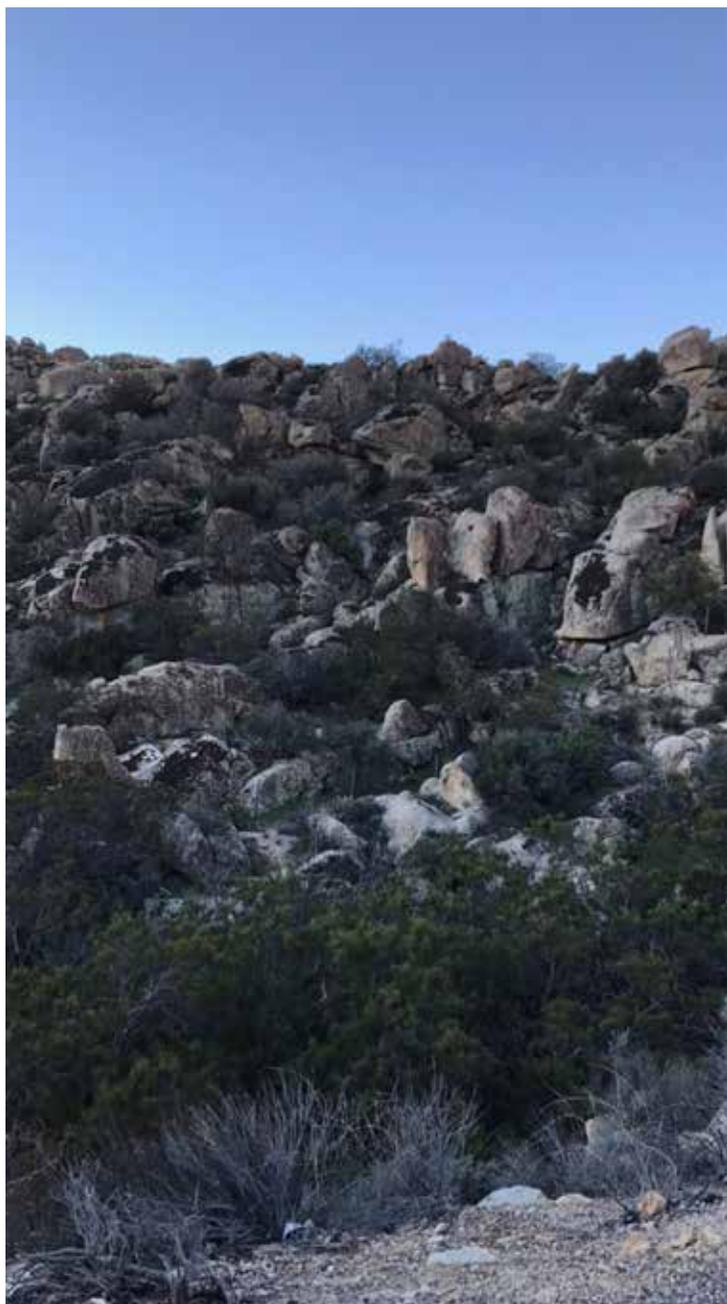
The deer and hawk have a long memory,

and they knew a time when

“indiangrass” had no such name, and when nothing had descended to our knowledge;

when the only sounds on the shores of the river were the changing tides and the breeze
overhead.

Untitled
Julia Kennedy



2 am, or noon, or 9 am, or 4:30 pm

Anonymous

the sky is lean

i

n

g

hard on me.

until it it's

not

Untitled

Elizabeth Bigelow



digital photography

Untitled
Dana Morrison



35mm film

Lone Sailor

Bill Dodge



Leander and Hero

Patrick Standen

The sun was shining when I set out
And the water was cold, but I was strong and determined,
Besides my lover waited with open arms on the far shore
Only a mile or so across the Hellespont.
I'd be in her warm embrace in less than an hour;
I've made this swim plenty of times before.
I did not see the black clouds massing in the north
Nor notice the waves grow~
I should have noticed the whitecaps
But was blinded by my strong stroke~
A swimmer only ever sees his own breath
Bubbling to the surface.
Tempest-tossed and windswept the spindrift
Danced its macabre dance over the skull grey water.
I swam so hard and don't remember my strength ebb-
The impossible must have happened: I drowned.
Must have, for I am here and Hero is not.
I remember waking to Hero's embrace
Upon some far shore, but I could not feel Hero's tears
Fall upon my face as she cried for me,
And the Sun, the sun was shining so bright.

Black Excellence

Victoria Luciano



FOOTSTEPS DREAM

John Izzi

Footsteps dream, hence footsteps breathe.

They inhale the power that propels each thing.

The bouquet enters their bloodstream.

It pumps from their heart to their outermost membrane.

The earth, too, breathes the fragrance.

From filaments of plants the perfume oozes.

The aroma lifts off the limbs of trees.

Each leaf, every shoot yields fruit.

The scent's trail fills the interlude between breezes.

Footsteps trace the path back to where they started.

To the night from where

They start anew.

At midnight, where depart and return meet,

Footsteps breathe.

Their imprint permeates the upper fields.

Their gait roves the vacant path between crops of wheat:

The open path where the wind whispers.

Lulled from their slumber footsteps dream.

Untitled
Sadie Pratt



black and white digital photograph (shot in RAW) taken with a DSLR camera

NEON DREAMS

Connor Thurston

I had a vision of a vast cityscape, much like that of New York but darker.

The Buildings are taller.

There are more signs everywhere.

There are no cars but people are driving themselves crazy.

There are people getting high off of emotions

And automated strippers.

There is a zeitgeist of Windows 95 and Windows 955.

Burlesque shows with dancers who are half machine and love that can be publicly downloaded.

We found there never were any aliens- only the knowledge of an ancient system, internet. A Center. Qua Center.

We lost it and became the machine's cousins.

And when God came falling out of the sky with all his angels they all broke their necks and spines upon impact.

This is my blood. Take of it and drink.

Press start, boot up.

And when God was dead so was science.

We killed Newton and forgot about the Ptolemaic.

There was only us, The Task Bar.

The Task Bar, a shady joint on Microsoft street. Iris goes there every Tuesday and watches the systems. A harddrive monk goes by. He takes a sip of oil tonic.

He wants to remember.

A time before.

A time of Johnny Got His Gun.

And A time of Imagine and tricky dick, and “No! No! We Won’t go!”, and Roots, and Chavez, and “Don’t You Want Me Baby”, and “Once In A Lifetime” and “Crack That Whip”, and Tasty Freeze, and lakes, and and and and and

There is no concept of self in this world only all- hivemind.

All the thoughts of everyone everywhere all the time.

They may have implants and metal plates,

They're as human as you and me.

The Local Man
Emelia Aiken-Hafne



collage

Connotations of the Chinese Character 人/Human *Yuan Changming*

Since I am a direct descendant of Homo Erectus, let me
Stand straight as a 人/human , rather than kneel down
When two humans walk side by side, why to coerce one
Into obeying the other like a slave fated to 从/follow?
Since three humans can live together, do we really need
A leader or ruler on top of us all as a 众/group?

English Spelling vs Chinese Syntax

Yuan Changming

钱是没有问题 Money is having no problem

问题是没有钱 Problem is having no money

有钱是没问题 Having money is no problem

没有钱是问题 Having no money is problem

问题是钱没有 Problem is having no money

钱没有是问题 Having no money is problem

Untitled
Dylan Waruck



digital photography

The Walking Dead

Lauren Twigg

A pair of familiar lovers aforeside.
Persistently creeping into each other's twenty four hours
Like the weeds that waltzed up the yard
Enclosed by the quintessential piece of Americana white picket fences,
Standing outside the residence of the awkward romantics
Dwelling inside blinded from the harsh reality of their tragic downfall.
One partner swallowed a gargantuan helping of infatuation with the illusion
That love was a mirror for the mesmerizing works of fiction
Priming children into unlocking happily ever after.
This enchanting facade was tarnished as the bond only began
To have her sweeping up the flutter of emotion escaping from her corneas
Rather than off her feet.
She immersed herself in oceans of sorrow as she mourned her beloved six feet under.
Sauntering through life singly only to remind herself that she was not grieving the deceased,
But the absence of the living.

Higher Ground

Bill Dodge



Double-Edged

Stu Mateo Dobles-Kunkel

I don't really smoke anymore, but there's a burning in my lungs.
Outside, there's a world that wants me dead. Some of them have guns
and all I have is this replica sword my dad got to teach me fencing
when I was going through my Greek phase. At night, I pretend I sing
with it in one hand. Natural partners, we're both stuck in the closet.

Untitled
Kiernan Pinto



Violets and Moonlight

Sophie Fenimore

The evening-colored wax melted

That was sealing the protection jar you made for me

A couple weeks before we left.

I'd stuck it in my pocket for safekeeping—

Three hours in a wooden crate, sandwiched between succulents

Sounded like a recipe for disaster

For such a small charm.

Fortunately, the potion didn't leak.

The brownish tea of violets and moonlight

Is still corked up,

Safe and content.

It sits on my shelf now,

Dwarfed by the passionate lipstick beside it.

Although I don't believe in its power,

When I roll it between my fingers,

I feel its intent.

Our imprisonment cornered us here.

I was happy to play along, for a while,

But at last I passed through the gate of horns,

Packed you up, promised to write,

And kicked you out.

You were telling me about a game you played

With your anxiously jovial coven:

“Answer me truly,

Before the gods of old and now,

Or drink.”

You were asked, “If you could go back,

To before we embarked,

And spare us Juno’s terrible wrath,

Would you?”

You paused, laughed awkwardly, and said,

“No.

How could I?

Think of what we’ve endured, yes,

But think of how it’s changed us.”

I lean back.

Tug at my hair.

A silence.

I’m full of sorrow, yes—

Grief for the moon orchid that grew in our garden

Until you made me dig her up

Because my love for her frightened you.

But I'm full of pride, too,

Because for the first time since early March

I believe Venus when she whispers to me,

Everything will be okay.

M/F

Yuan Changming

To masturbate or to fuck

To masculinize or to feminize

To mock or to fake

To manipulate or to facilitate

To mother or to father

To move down or to fill in

That is the question:

Whether it's more accurate to declare

My biophysical (or spiritual) identity by ticking

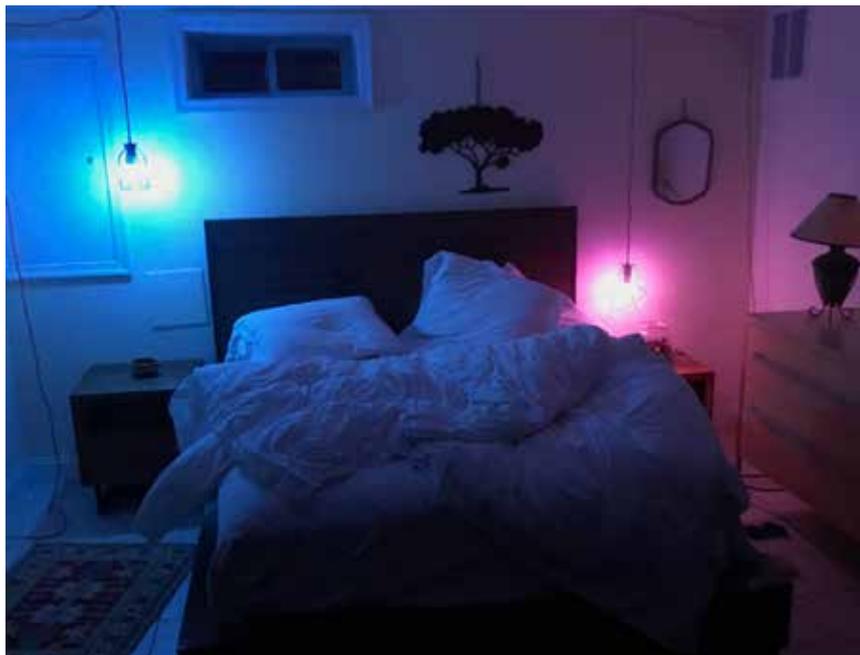
M/F in this tightly enclosed box, since I was born

With a willy, but have lost it in my mind. Hesitating

To pick my sexuality or humanity, I wonder

How it is relevant to male fantasy or female modernity?

Hideaway
Julia Kennedy



digital photography

Liz Inness-Brown, who is retiring as of June 2021, began as an adjunct running the Writing Center at St. Mike's in 1988. Two years later she was hired full time and eventually rose to the rank of full professor. In addition to directing the Writing Center for over twenty years, she initiated the Creative Writing minor, taught fiction and creative nonfiction writing as well as composition, and originated and taught the first-year seminar "The Examined Life." She is author of two books of short stories and of the novel *Burning Marguerite* (Knopf, 2001). "Blanket" is one of a series of stories she is writing about ordinary household objects. This is its first publication.

Thank you Liz, for everything that you do.

BLANKET

Liz Inness-Brown

There were many blankets in the house but only one magic blanket, one blanket that would put to sleep any person who was lucky enough to lie under it. It was a smallish blanket, as blankets go, but large enough to cover a fully-grown person from the shoulders to the feet, and what more than that did anyone need? The blanket was covered on both sides by a kind of fur, smooth and soft as a little boy's first haircut. But what made it magic was what was sewn into it, and what was sewn into it made it heavy, and the heaviness was the magic.

As soon as she was born into the house, this blanket became hers and hers alone because her mother could not bear a crying baby. The blanket, however, was too heavy for a baby and so she grew into a flattened sort of girl, with the twig-like arms of a starving refugee, or so her mother used to say. They all plied with her sweets and cakes and breads but nothing made her grow fat; she grew sideways and up but never round.

Like this she was when she went to school, and like this she was when she graduated school, and like that she was when she went on to university, and like that she was when she graduated university, a doctor of pharmacology.

The magic blanket had come with her all that time and it came with her now to her first employment as a pharmacologist.

She was happiest among her vials and chemicals and the natural things from which those chemicals come, and she spent long days and many evenings in her white coat, her spectacles either clamped to the bridge of her nose or dangling from the beaded string attached to them and looped behind her neck.

But at night when she went home and took off the white coat and the spectacles and let down her hair—it was red, very red—and spread it out over her shoulders, she would sometimes put on a blue velvet dress and dance in circles before her radio.

And it was one night when she was doing this that a young man happened to see her through the window and became obsessed with her, and began to follow her to see where she went each day. And so he learned how she would stop at a certain food cart and buy her lunch to take back to her metal desk and eat. And he learned what time to expect her. And finally, waiting for her there one day, he worked up his nerve and spoke to her, saying, "Shall we eat together?"

They sat on a rock wall side by side and he was struck for the first time by the flatness of her, which was not so visible when she was in motion. But while he might have been put off by this in another woman, in her he found it acceptable.

And so for a few days they met like this, companionably, and while their conversation was far from scintillating, it was pleasant enough, and so after that, neither of them finding the other obnoxious, they agreed to an evening out.

Many evenings out later, she invited him back to her room and allowed him to come between her legs. It was her first time but felt normal to her, his weight upon her, her body flat beneath him.

Afterward, lying in the dark, she told him, "I have a magic blanket."

He laughed, thinking it was a joke. But she rose up on her elbow and, looking at him seriously with her gray eyes, said: "Really. I do."

"All right then," he said. "Let's see it."

It was folded at the foot of the bed, on a chest she kept there, so she raised herself up and reached over him to find it. He admired the view for a moment while she struggled with it, until at last she pulled it up and over them, over their tangled legs and wrapping arms and flattened torsos and touching shoulders.

They fell asleep immediately and never separated again.

Core Editor Bios

Madeline Walker de Hughes, '21

Maddie is an English major, Chief Editor of the Onion River Review, and the 2020 recipient of the John Engles Poetry award. Maddie was born in the Republic of Panama and raised as a surfer girl in Ocean City, New Jersey. Her love of music, literature, and poetry runs deep and has influenced her aspirations. Maddie intends to pursue a graduate degree across the pond where she will focus on literature and comparative cultural studies. She is most grateful to Barry Roy, Class of 1967 (“The Bear”) who not only introduced her to St. Mike’s, but was her mentor and champion.

Ellen Arvidson, '21

Ellen is a senior English major who has been delighted to spend the past two years as a Core Editor for the Onion River Review. She has loved writing and language for as long as she can recall, and in her spare time she enjoys running, skiing, hiking, and reading the most mediocre mystery & thriller novels she can find. She was the Hamilton kid in high school but wouldn’t change a thing. After graduation, she will be going abroad to teach English in Spain and is currently panicking about her level of Spanish proficiency.

Rosemary Marr, '23

Rosemary is a sophomore English major/Creative Writing minor from Bedford, New Hampshire. She prefers beets to onions but has been training her pallet to become the best reviewer of onions she can be. She is most often found at the campus swimming pool but if one were to walk deep into the woods of Gilbrook and say her name backwards thrice, rumor has it that she just might appear.

Addie Bigelow, '23

Though born in Massachusetts, she was raised on the slopes of Vermont mountains. Seventeen years of skiing has made this state feel like home more than any other. She only recently joined the Onion, and is thrilled to help with this year's harvest. Granted, she has more experience harvesting stone fruit, but she's always willing to try anything once. Addie loves a good book, searching through thrift store jungles, and all things old or borrowed— so long as it comes with a story. She is bound to fall asleep during a movie, but will make sure to finish the popcorn long before the opening credits.

Addio, Amico Mio

Bill Dodge

(for Will Marquess, 1954-2020)

Our maestro of the *Onion*, Will Marquess,
was a muse so ethereal, so off the grid
he would sing to Saint Mike's freshmen
in his suit and white Converse,
welcoming his pale initiates
to a syllabus of pain.

Blessed with more curls
than most pre-Raphaelite girls,
this vagabond of Venice
this solitary shepherd
of Romantic verse,
enjoyed more fringe culture
than the fringe-seekers of Edinburgh.

Come friends, scribes
All you kindred travelers,
let's toast our Harvard doc,
this wiffle-baller voted Best Prof.

Our defrocked priest of poetry
was a literary magician,
he turned undergrad illiteracy
into a riverbabble
of alliteration.

What dull instruments we have agree, Will,
you're our first and last oracle,
Addio, amico mio!



SAINT MICHAEL'S
COLLEGE FOUNDED
1904