

ECOTHEOREVIEW



SPRING 2019

WELCOME

This publication heralds the beginning of a new season for EcoTheo after a two-year hiatus. In this exhilarating spirit of renewal and rededication, we are pleased to present our readers with our Spring 2019 issue. Additionally, we are delighted to welcome a new team of editors who are committed to furthering the ecological mission to which we have been devoted for the last six years. In his essay "It All Turns on Affection," Wendell Berry memorably proposes that the solution to our current ecological crisis is to cultivate an attitude of affection toward our planet. We hope the poetry, visual art, and prose writings contained in this issue move you to love the only home we all have in common.

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

Enlivening faith & ecological communities
through writing, arts, and education.

We invite submissions of original writing or visual art for consideration in forthcoming issues of the EcoTheo Review, including fiction, poetry, creative nonfiction, photography, and visual art done in various mediums. We also publish work to our website in an ongoing manner, and you may send us your work for online publication at any time. EcoTheo strives to put faith and ecology in conversation through arts and writing and we hope your work will reflect this. Please see ecotheo.org/submit for further details and submission guidelines.

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FROM THE EDITOR

Hilary Marie Scheppers

Amidst the dense layers of the rain forest, there is a plant, the epiphyte, which is dispersed by birds or other mammals to sprout at the top layer of the canopy where sunlight is plentiful. Only after landing on the backs of other tall trees does the plant then begin to shoot its roots through the darkness toward the ground.

Just as the epiphyte begins life “up in the air”, so too has our culture felt alive and unrooted: a tumultuous political scene, violence of guns in schools and neighborhoods, combined with the heightened climate crisis. Our communities are suffering not only from a loss of physical space, as many move into virtual realms, but also from a disorientation of home. When asked about home in our interview with him, Li-Young Lee observes, “What can ‘home’ mean to anyone these days except crisis?”

This time last year I underwent my own crisis as I spent months hiking the muddy rainforests of Peru, assisting in conservation research *and*, secretly, seeking total escape from my American life; I was much like the hanging roots, longing to be grounded. But in what? It wasn’t until I returned to my childhood home that I found what I didn’t know I was needing: my faith. A stranger at a wildlife nature reserve shared the gospel with me: “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.” (Luke 15:5-6) And I was struck with how I needed to abide in “the vine”, and that was enough reality to ground me.

Since then I’ve found a literary refuge with EcoTheo Review, which has clearly rooted itself in two things: faith and ecology. But with this third print edition, our editorial team has planted itself further to the mission. Through the combination of efforts and talents across different time zones, our team combed through submissions, looking for writing that displaced the dirt, writing which

determinately forced its tendrils into the darkness and worked underneath to reshape the landscape. A demonstration of true beauty formed in the collaboration.

Inside you will find the nourishment of an interview with poet Li-Young Lee, the intriguing narratives of wildlife encounters in the wild and urban settings, poetry which contemplates “there is no half-life of sorrow when our children / inherit this toxic legacy” (Craig Santos Perez, page 36), and poetry which brightens our sense of wild like CT Salazar’s lines (page 52) “Even in the shape of a boy I can /wear the morning. Daisies behind my ear.”

We are called to remember what is possible when we take urgency and carry a light heart because we trust in God’s word and abundance. So I ask our community of readers and writers, how will you help us reassemble the landscape to make our habitat that heavenly ideal, to craft the writing that delights in creation and “orients” us to the light?

Where will you find your ground? How will you root down as a writer, educator or artist? Will you root yourself back to faith or an ecological community? Will you root yourself in the identity of Christ?

If you are feeling a little like the epiphyte, growing in multiple directions desperate for a nutrient-rich foundation, acknowledge that you sprouted first from the light. The light is your anchor, the first bind, without which you would never grow.

I hope you feel empowered by the words of encouragement enclosed: “listen harder / for the leaf / to twist, / to cut the air,” (Karen Leona Anderson, page 48). May this journal help you reconnect. There is space for you, there is space for everyone. Welcome home. The birds—and all of us—are waiting for you to root.

Spring 2019

ECOTHEOREVIEW

VISUAL ARTS

- 5 (In)imitable Art: "Amano" by Frank Relle/Jack Bedell
- 11 Boxed World
William Hicks
- 26 The Earth, The Body
Sandy Coomer
- 54 Capturing the Landscape
Billy Moore

PROSE

- 8 Bear Country
Kelsey Lahr
- 35 Bloody Mess
Daniel Stulac
- 46 Death of a Red-Tailed Hawk
Carole Giangrande

INTERVIEW

- Where the Light is Born:
Li-Young Lee
- 16 Interview by Shao Wei &
Jason Myers

POETRY

- 13 Two Poems
Rebecca Nelson
- 14 Ash Wednesday, Offshore
Marlene Muller
- 15 American Cavewall Sonnet
C. T. Salazar
- 22 Refractive Errors
Leah Falk
- 24 Three Poems
William Woolfitt
- 30 Claude Monet, *Argenteuil*,
1875
Adam J. Gellings
- 33 Nuclear Family
Craig Santos Perez
- 39 Two Poems
Bishnupriya Chowdhury
- 42 Poem Beginning with a
line from Wordsworth
Brian Simoneau
- 43 Two Poems
Allison Wilkins
- 44 Three Poems
Karen Leona Anderson
- 49 Panthalassa
Michael Metivier

REVIEW

- Maya Jewell Zeller and Carrie
DeBacker's *Alchemy for Cells
& Other Beasts*
- 51 Reviewed by *Kasey Jueds*

(IN)IMITABLE ART

INSPIRED BY FRANK RELLE'S PHOTOGRAPH "AMANO," JACK BEDELL
COMPOSED HIS EKPHRASTIC POEM OF THE SAME NAME

Alexandria Barbera

"In claiming that I write ekphrastic poetry, I find myself wanting to explore a process that draws on a manifold range of subjective positions and actions of mind... ekphrasis facilitates the process of creating the verbal text or poem to incorporate a dynamizing of the object."

Marcelle Freiman, "Ekphrasis as Enactment." *Axon Journal*, Issue 7.2.

If you consider yourself a reader, especially a reader of poetry, it is likely that you've read John Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn." Even if you consider yourself neither one of these, there's still a good chance you've come across a phrase or two of this beloved poem.

I remember reading "Ode on a Grecian Urn" during my undergraduate. I was nineteen, far too young to comprehend the poem's melancholic soul. Still, I was enthralled, partly *because* I didn't fully understand it. At the time, I read it as a lament-laden contemplation of the inevitability of death, decay, and their merciless stranglehold over every living thing. Worse than the inevitability of death and decay is their collusion with time: if death does not arrive abruptly like a thief in the night, it claims us incrementally, exerting its influence minute by minute. But that's not true for art; *ars longa, vita brevis* as the maxim goes. "Beauty is truth, truth beauty," concludes Keats' speaker. That's all us humans know, we're told, and that's all we need to know.

This cryptic advice comes at the end of a poem that is composed almost entirely of questions that appear rhetorical but are covertly earnest. Keats' interrogation methods remind me of God in Job

38, who bombards Job with a relentless series of weighty cosmological questions he could never hope to answer. But the point of questioning in both "Grecian Urn" and Job 38 is that the answers we're looking for are beyond our mortal comprehension. Job is finally silenced, after pages and pages decrying God's injustice. In Keats' poem, however, it is the urn that gets the last word, and while it offers us *something* of a response, its meaning is as impenetrable as God's fury, and as rigid as his refusal to impart divine wisdom to suffering humans. Neither work offers anything resembling existential solace.

The Grecian urn's indifference—I speak here of the actual, physical urn that prompted Keats to write his ode—is a function of its inanimate essence, its silent and still nature. Keats' speaker wants the art object to do what only language can do: fashion experience into something called history; furnish passion and lust, time and desire,

Ars longa, vita brevis, as the maxim goes.

with consequence and rationale. But the visual image—the decorated vase, the painting, the photograph—can't gift us with these luxuries. It's no wonder scholars have theorized ekphrastic production as a competitive practice riddled with anxieties and territorial struggle about which artistic medium can best do what. But this strikes me as a particularly masculine notion, and while it might apply to Keats, it's certainly not true of all ekphrastic engagement. As Laura M. Sager Eidt notes in *Writing and Filming the Painting*, ekphrasis can function as "a useful tool to explore many of the issues at heart in the relationship between words and images." Likewise, Marcelle Freiman understands ekphrastic poetry as a way to "dynamize" the visual object. In that same spirit of mutual vitalization, we invite you to experience Frank Relle's photograph "Amano" alongside Jack Bedell's ekphrastic poem of the same name.



"Amano" by Frank Relle. Relle is a photographer born and raised in New Orleans, Louisiana. He graduated from Tulane University with degrees in Cognitive Science and Philosophy. His photographs have been featured in The New York Times, The New Yorker, National Geographic, The Southern Review, and The Oxford American. His website is www.frankrelle.com.

AMANO

Jack Bedell

— Frank Relle Gallery, NOLA

Even what's left of this broken cypress tree
hasn't given up reaching for the sky.

Busted dead center, and toppled over
into the lake, its branches still climb

toward the stars bursting over this swamp.
The sun has surrendered its sky, glowing

just under the horizon line, the lake's surface
stilled to exhaustion absent any breeze.

Even herons have tucked in for the night.
This old tree, though, standing tip-toed

on its roots, just won't cede to the pull
of water, the notion that all things

must go to ground patiently. As long
as there is light somewhere, it's worth the reach.

BEAR COUNTRY

Kelsey Lahr



I have been thinking lately of going feral.

Once or twice each season I briefly leave the comforts of my home in the front country of Yosemite National Park in order to spend several nights in the solitude of the Sierra Nevada wilderness. With each excursion I become more tempted to stay out there. I would wander farther and farther from the trail, abandoning my tent to sleep under the stars, waking at sunrise with wild, tangled hair, soaking with dew. Why couldn't I learn to live on grasses and berries and grubs, the change of the seasons, and the occasional trout? Creatures far more powerful than humans live on these and nothing more.

Next I would give up wearing clothes, roaming the peaks bare and peeled before the sky, my skin turning gradually to leather. By autumn I would perhaps have forgotten the sound of my own voice as the remembrance of language is grown

over by more immediate necessities. I would busy myself instead with finding and gorging on berries, and in the winter I would den up with some generous

bear, to wait out, curled, the harshest days of an untamed life. Come spring I would have forgotten the appearance of my face, and of the human form altogether, until I emerge from the den to greet the wet, vernal world, and see my shadow in front of me.

I have yet to take the plunge. Once wild, there is no going back.

And apparently it works both ways; you don't come back from being tamed, any more than you come back from going feral. I learned this when I woke up one night to find that a bear had ransacked my kitchen cupboards, looking for chocolate.

It was late, around midnight, when I awoke to the sound of banging and clattering in the house. I assumed that it was my noisy housemate Amanda, drunk or high again after another night of partying. When the commotion didn't subside,

I rolled groggily and irritably out of bed to remind this feckless housemate of mine that some of us had to be at work early the next morning. But I didn't find my housemate in the kitchen—I found chaos. There was trash everywhere, shreds of plastic and cardboard packaging strewn all over. In the middle of the kitchen floor was a lake of chocolate milk. A can of chocolate frosting had been ripped apart and licked clean, and a chocolate chip bag lay mangled and empty on the floor along with an empty package of chocolate cookies. Across the kitchen, the screen door was in tatters.

Then I saw Amanda. She was pacing back and forth on the porch, shaking all the keys on her key ring. My only thought, which surfaced through a thick fog of sleep, was, What kind of Satanic ritual has just happened here?

“Amanda!” I hollered, staggering through what had been our screen door. “What the hell is going on?”

“There was a bear!” said Amanda, still breathless.

“No,” I said flatly. “We don't have bears in Wawona.”

Amanda whipped out her phone and pulled up a photo of a giant, cinnamon-red bear butt exiting our house through the self-same shredded screen door I had just come through. I examined it in silence.

“How...?” I asked finally.

“I was doing laundry,” said Amanda. “And the bear was going out that side door as I was coming in the front door. Now I'm making noise so he doesn't come back.”

Questions floated through my head one after another: Why was Amanda doing laundry at midnight? How was there a bear in our house, if we didn't have bears here? How did it get in?

Answers came to me slowly, in succession: First: there was never going to be an explanation for

Amanda's habits. And then: I had left the sliding glass door open that night to let in the cool air, leaving nothing but a flimsy screen between my kitchen and the wildlife. And finally: Oh my word, there are bears here!

I, of all people—a park ranger—should have known better. Of course there are bears in Yosemite. They break into the homes and campsites of unvigilant humans in search of our calorie-laden food on a nearly daily basis. I had repeated this cautionary message a thousand times. And yet I had always said it without entirely believing it. Over a decade had passed since the last bear break-in here, in our tranquil community of Park Service employees in the relatively un-peopled south end of Yosemite, and I had quietly come to suppose that there were no bears in our area, not really—or at least no bears in danger of being tamed.

Tamed is the shorter way of saying “no fear of humans.” Bears, when exposed to the human way of life, have a tendency to want what we have: a quick fix, an easy subsistence. The quick fix—packaged food—is at least as bad for the bear as it is for the human, but more addicting for the bear. Once a bear has a taste for human food, he will stop at almost nothing to get it, unhesitatingly shredding screens and coming right into houses, peeling the doors off of cars to get at coolers, gorging on the synthetic stuff we call food until his teeth rot and fall out and he starves to death, or until he is found breaking and entering into one too many houses, getting a little too brazen, and is euthanized. Such are the dangers of being tamed.

I called the park dispatcher to notify her of the break-in. By the time I got to work the next morning, with craterous dark circles under my eyes, the bear had broken into three more houses. He was a wanted animal now. A team of bear biologists came and set

traps out all over the area.

The following night I sat outside on my porch, reading a book. I paused to turn the page and was abruptly aware, as I have never been before or since, of another's presence. I looked around, knowing already what I would find. Sure enough: there, two feet off, was the bear—my kitchen bear. He sat back on his haunches, remarkably dog-like, and regarded me knowingly. My breath drained out of my chest and I tumbled into those endless black eyes of his and could not move or make a sound or blink, and I didn't want to. I was his, willingly skewered by his gaze. We might have sat there, frozen, engrossed, for hours, had I not found myself needing to inhale. The tableau cracked when I breathed in, and instinct filled my lungs and animated me, and I waved my arms and shouted, "Get out of here, bear!" and then looked away from those liquid eyes, ashamed for scaring him off as I had been trained to do, ashamed at my need to breathe, at my humanness, at my stupidity in leaving the door open the night before. The bear shambled off down the road, and gave me one rueful backwards glance. I dialed the dispatcher and reported the bear's location. I saw a parade of law enforcement vehicles blare down the street in hot pursuit of the bear, their evening's boredom finally ended.

They caught him eventually, of course. They tranquilized him and put an acid-yellow tag through his ear and followed him around, tallying up his nightly break-ins. Each evening I sent out a psychic call to the bear, begging him to go back home to the forest, to remember how to find berries and root for grubs in fallen logs, to fall asleep in pine needles under glassy stars. I thought perhaps he might hear my thoughts from afar the way I could have sworn he did that night on my porch. I phoned the bear management office weekly asking for updates on my totem bear, Yellow 23, they called him, after the color and number of his ear tag. That autumn they said he wandered out of the area and into the nearest

town, where tolerance for vandal bears is even thinner than it is in the park, and euthanasia of "problem animals" all the more common. The bear management office had no more updates for me after that. The bear never sent out a reply to my nightly calls to him.

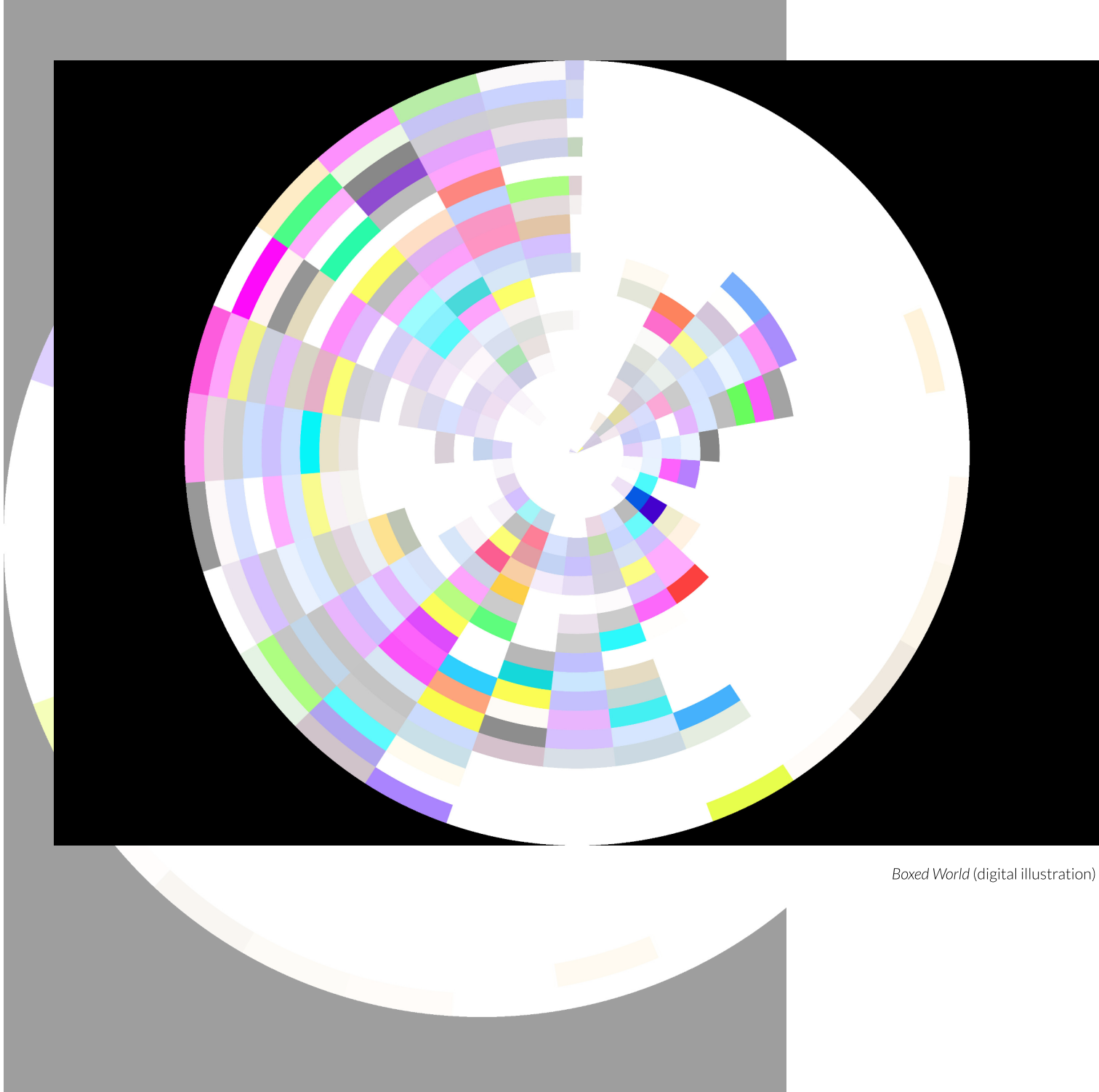
A few months after the break-in I went for an evening run around the meadow. I rounded a bend in the trail and heard an audacious crashing sound, the kind of sound only made by creatures at the top of the food chain, creatures with no need for fear. I came to a screeching halt just in time to see a giant, cinnamon red bear lumber across the trail in front of me and then go thundering into the underbrush along the edge of the meadow, twigs snapping like gunshots as he went. I watched as he tore into a fallen log, shredding off long strips of bark in search of grubs, sending wood chips flying.

This was not my bear. This was no one's bear—he was a wild creature. He knew I was there. He must have; bears have a sense of smell nearly seven times greater than that of a bloodhound, and I, sweating and jogging, was putting off perhaps more scent than usual. But this bear didn't care. This bear didn't want me, didn't want the chocolate in my house. He had absolutely no use for me. He had grubs on his mind.

Standing there, statue-like, I weighed the option before me. Why couldn't I follow him, disappear into the woods, root through logs, graze on grasses? Who needs roofs, hot meals, baths? Who needs language or human company? I took a step toward him. He looked up, startled, having apparently forgotten I was there. He retreated and let out a warning grunt. So this was his answer: Get out of here, human! I could not argue. I heaved a sigh and turned down the trail. When I passed by the meadow again, the bear was gone, having disappeared into the wilderness to carry out his unknowable, wild life.

BOXED WORLD

William Hicks



Boxed World (digital illustration)

William D. Hicks is a photographer who lives in Chicago. These works explore the interrelationship between natural subjects and technology. In *Night Lights*, the leafless tree makes a half-hearted appearance, modestly occupying a small portion of the frame. In *Boxed World*, we don't see the literal earth at all, only ghostly attributes we might associate with an image of earth after its digital deconstruction: its spherical shape, its pixilated colors.

Hicks is also a poet and a humor writer. His poetry has appeared in *Horizon Magazine*, *Breadcrumb Sins*, *Inwood Indiana Literary Magazine*, *The Short Humour Site (UK)*, *The Four Cornered Universe*, *Save the Last Stall for Me* and *Mosaic*. His cover art is forthcoming in *Anti-Poetry* and *Sketch*.



Night Lights (photograph)

TWO POEMS

Rebecca Nelson

WALKING THE ARROYO

I kneel at the altar of stone,
quartz-veined and creek-cut
to trace volcanic memories.

The urgency of cicadas
sings through the pines.

I listen to approaching footsteps,
only to watch deer walk
away through the wash.

The flies buzz at my breath
like winged heartbeats.

I hold a belonging
in water-churned pebbles
and refuse to let go.

RESCRIPT

What my mind divides,
water accepts as one,
whirling leaf and rock.

The creek's backbone
striates pebbles.
Ripplemarks etch sand.
How to translate this?

A stump's dendritic scroll
records breath in
the rings of past rains.

Fresh tracks and
and cast-off sticks
suggest mule deer.

ASH WEDNESDAY, OFFSHORE

Marlene Muller

We cordoned the bay from the ocean and it did not contain the spill.

O God, who created the earth,

We used napalm and explosives to breach the freighter's tanks
and discovered more fuel on board than we originally believed.

whose spirit hovers over the water,

Daily we counted the dead or injured grebe, sanderling,
and snowy plover. We knew that soon some would have built nests.

who said, *Let it teem with living creatures,*

We began an investigation. We said,

Oil-spill prevention has become good business.

and let birds fly above the earth,

The predicted storm arrived. Twenty-five knot winds
blew across twenty foot seas. We waited for the water to calm.

forgive us.

We towed the mangled vessel two-hundred miles
to where the ocean drops six-thousand feet. Coast guard
and naval ships fired at the bow to sink it, and it sank.

Grant that these ashes,

The pressure and cold sea water turned the remaining thousands
of gallons of bunker fuel viscous.

the mark on our foreheads of your suffering,

be to us a sign. Amen.

The facts and quotation regarding the "New Carissa," grounded near Coos Bay, Oregon, are extracted from February issues of *The Seattle Times*; in particular, February 17, Ash Wednesday, 1999.

AMERICAN CAVEWALL SONNET

C.T. Salazar

Wolf milk and wilderness America.
Romulus and Remus built a city
but it couldn't hide the animal in
their hearts: a river-child discovers blood
when he searches for a blessing. Hold your
motherland in your mouth, all marble and
doomed, a single lozenge of loss. Heaven
fell into the pond and killed all the fish.

Even in the shape of a boy I can
wear the morning. Daisies behind my ear.
Minutes thin gold arm hairs. Blackberry vine
tied around my wrist. Under this field is
the only battle my father lost. Place
your ear right here if you want to listen.

WHERE THE LIGHT IS BORN: AN INTERVIEW WITH LI-YOUNG LEE

Shao Wei and Jason Myers



Li-Young Lee was born in Jakarta, Indonesia to parents who were, as he discusses in this interview, scapegoated by the Chinese government and forced into exile. They were soon driven out of Indonesia as well, eventually ending up in Pennsylvania, where Lee's father became a Presbyterian minister. In five collections of poems, including the Lamont Poetry Selection, *The City in Which I Love You*, and last year's *The Undressing*, as well as a memoir, *The Winged*

Seed, Lee documents the progress of a soul (his) toward Love. His work has attracted readers drawn to the mystical and illuminating sense of the Divine moving through powerful poems such as "The Cleaving," in which he writes: 'Was it me in the Other/I prayed to when I prayed?' In another interview, Lee describes poems as being 'descendants of God.' Here he explores those descensions and ascensions that make up his days and nights.

EcoTheo: What are your current practices that might fall under the definition of spiritual or religious? How essential are these to your creative practice?

Li-Young Lee: I write daily. I meditate daily. I contemplate daily. I practice Taiji daily. I pray for illumination and guidance daily. I find these essential to my life. Let me take a moment here and say a few words about what the Chinese call The Taiji Principle, that principle they define as the dynamism of opposites. Practitioners of Taiji believe that it is precisely this principle which underlies all manifestations—material, spiritual, mental, and psychological—and that the study and practice of Taiji is the study and practice of the polarities of yin and yang in their different stages of separation and reconciliation. Now, interestingly, Heraclitus also believed in such a founding principle, which he called The Logos, and which he defined as the strife and harmony of opposites which underlies all reality. It is this very Logos which the writer of the Gospel of John referred to as The Word, which is the founding principle of all things. So the practice of Taiji is essentially an embodied practice of The Logos, and I find such practice powerfully revelatory as a path

to understanding ultimate reality, or God. I'd also like to point out that at this moment in history when we are witnessing division and escalation to extremes, whether between men and women, left wing and right wing, East and West, or rich and poor, the understanding of The Logos, The Taiji Principle, has never been more important, and any ignorance of the true significance of this Logic, consigning what is a principle and logic of the separation and reconciliation of opposites to a merely male idea or only a physical activity that yields health benefits for senior citizens, is regrettable.

The practice of Taiji is essentially an embodied practice of The Logos, and I find such practice powerfully revelatory as a path to understanding ultimate reality, or God.

from God's or Love's inmost heart to some object of resistance must lead eventually to confusion or disaster for the one practicing. I consider that a form of dis-orientation, rather than orientation. And let's keep in mind the word 'orientation' comes from 'orient', where the sun rises. Any practice aimed anywhere else other than where the light is born is not an orienting practice, it seems to me.

EcoTheo: What role do you think religious communities have/should have in political discourse? In response to war and other man-made tragedies and disasters?

EcoTheo: In "Changing Places in the Fire" you write 'I sang/in a church choir during one war/North American TV made famous.' Do you still sing in a church choir? Do you consider worship, or singing as part of a spiritual community, to be an act of resistance?

Li-Young Lee: I no longer sing in a church choir. I consider worship or any other spiritual practice as fundamentally orienting, compass-like, pointing the soul toward its primal source and its most meaningful destiny. If such orientation, if aiming at knowledge of God, has the tertiary result or collateral effect of resistance to the latest ideology or political slogan, the latest academic fad, the most recent intellectual fashion trend, etc., so be it. I've no issue with that. But personal experience leads me to believe that the practice of worship or singing or poetry for the primary purpose of resistance is to define such practice in terms of the object of resistance, and not the object of adoration. Such practice places the object of resistance at the heart of the matter, and that shift of aim

Li-Young Lee: I think Jesus Christ, The Buddha, and Lao Dze all defied every call and plea from those around them to become political actors. If politics is war conducted by other means, which I more and more believe to be true, then to ask a religious person to participate in politics would be to ask that person to engage in war and the practice of violence. And yet, one of the revolutionary injunctions of any cult of Love, which I believe Christianity, Daoism, and Buddhism to be, is to relinquish violence. Aren't all states and policies of state maintained by violence, after all? Aren't all laws maintained by use of force and threats of violence? Which leads me to wonder what kind of citizenry would make it possible, what level of evolution must our species have achieved, in order to create a state maintained by love, good will, and visionary wisdom? Would that be the only possible New Jerusalem?

But let me say something else in regards to politics. For me, the smallest, seemingly most insignificant individual person exists and has value beyond the definitions of any

demography, any group, even any community invented by any human power. Political perspectives always reduce a complex, multi-valent human individual to a generality, a member of a group. Political perspectives of personhood usually require a reduction of the mystery and complexity of a human being to the single dimension of group identity. Most, if not all political discourse proceeds along lines of group identity. But I'm interested in poetry as a way to reveal or discover more comprehensive definitions of essential human nature. Thinking of persons as members of a group never arrives at comprehensive or essential enough definitions for me. More complete definitions would necessarily include the socio-political dimension, of course, but they would also include the personal, and the psychological, and the metaphysical, each of these orientations in turn corresponding to what I've imagined to be, at the risk of over-simplification, a public self (the face and voice we unfold to strangers), a private self (the face and voice we unfold to our intimates), a secret self (the face and voice we unfold to ourselves), and an unknown self (the face and voice we only sometimes glimpse or overhear when the previous three orientations are abandoned or in recession). It's possible that my having been the victim of inadequate definitions of the human and the violence that such poor definitions engender, definitions which are less than comprehensive and derived from non-essential terms, has moved me to seek out more comprehensive definitions of the essentially human.

In answer to the second part of your question, "Love thy neighbor" comes to mind. "Forgive 7 x7 fold" comes to mind. "Love thy neighbor," comes to mind again. Yes, love thy neighbor.

EcoTheo: How do you think about the word 'home'? What are the topographies that reside in your imagination, your body?

Li-Young Lee: 'Home,' like any word, is subject to a paradox all words seem subject to, a paradox I find interesting for a number of reasons, including its correspondence to certain principles of yin and yang. The logic of that paradox goes something like this: the fewer definitions a word has, the more definition it commands, the more defined that word is, and the less likelihood that crisis surrounds the meanings attributed to that word. But also the less likelihood that subtleties and potentialities might congregate about that word. On the other hand, the more definitions a word has, the less defined that word is, the less definition that word secures and, subsequently, the greater the number of possible meanings that accrue to that word, the greater the number of subtleties and potentialities that buzz about that word, and the greater the likelihood that crisis attends that word. Of course, I'm thinking in general, and about a word in isolation, and these conditions are mediated by context and use, by a word's entering into relationship with other words. It turns out, for me, the word 'home' is not very well defined by a country or place or any particular structure, and therefore that word is the site of immense subtlety, potency, and crisis for me.

Maybe it is so for everyone, but I wouldn't know. The fact is, my siblings and I basically grew up knowing that our parents were completely unable to protect us from harm. Whatever 'home' they might have provided for us, God bless them, was completely vulnerable to

spontaneous, wanton, and unjustified violence, from which we had no legal or other forms of protections. You see, I was born to scapegoats. My mother and father and the families they came from were violently scapegoated in China, where my parents were born. After escaping China, my parents started a family from scratch in Jakarta, Indonesia, where I was born, and where my parents found themselves to be the open targets of violent scapegoating yet again, this time with their own children at hazard.

After escaping Indonesia and finally arriving as refugees in the United States, a country at war at that time with an Asian country, we were scapegoated here, in less murderously violent ways, but still undeniably subjected to that particular practice of victimage from which my parents, being themselves victims, could in no way shield us. So, what might 'home' mean in such circumstances? Neither safety nor security. And certainly not membership that confers privileges or protections or sanctuary. I think that anyone who hasn't experienced being scapegoated would have no inkling of what I'm talking about. And yet, when I look at the world we live in today, I see that my family and I don't constitute a special case, but are standard and the majority.

Globally speaking, all I see is the sign of the scapegoat. There are scapegoats everywhere on this planet. We live under the sign of the scapegoat, everyone scapegoating everyone. What can 'home' mean to anyone these days except crisis? Our earth-home itself is suffering massive crisis. Maybe the word 'home' is more

important than ever to contemplate. But I can't seem to get my head around it.

EcoTheo: In your poem "From Blossoms" you write about moving 'from joy to joy to joy.' What brings you joy these days?

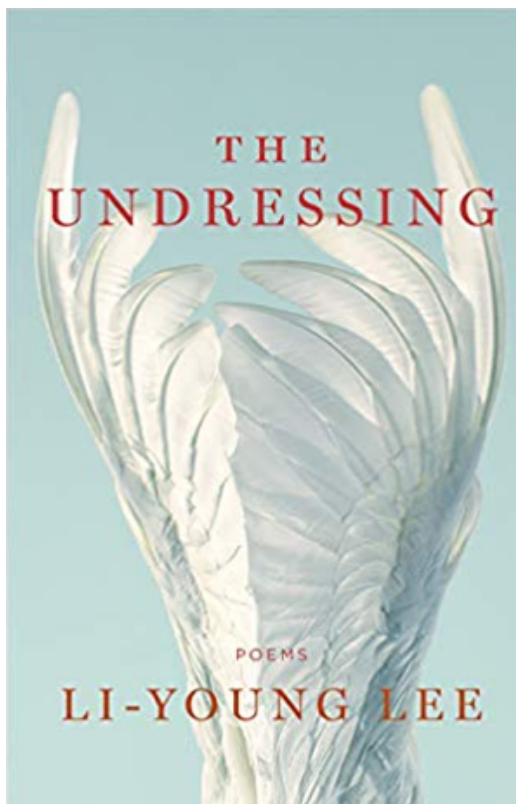
Li-Young Lee: My wife. My children. Friends. Books. Trees. Birds. Flowers. Bugs. Mushrooms. Taiji. Food. Music. Sleep. Dreams. Writing. Time. Rain. Sunshine. Dawn. Dusk. Stars. Solitude. Being in a body. Thinking about God.

EcoTheo: What brings you anguish, anger, dread?

Li-Young Lee: Ignorance of God. Not fulfilling my mission. I feel I'm an arrow loosed from The Hand of God, but I fear missing the target. Maybe the wood I was carved from was crooked, or wormy, or has too many knots, or wasn't weighted or fletched right.

EcoTheo: Many of your poems have a longer, often serial form. Why do you think you're drawn to the long poem? When do you know what length a poem will be? Is a poem finished or abandoned?

Li-Young Lee: Well, we know that light is both a wave and a particle. I think of long poems as a way to study and think about the wave function of the soul, while short poems are a way to understand the particle-manifestation of the soul. I never know what length a poem will be. Long poems grow and accrue their lines and



The Undressing (2018) is Lee's most recent collection.

stanzas around some center of gravity that seems to increase naturally. For me, poems are abandoned before they're finished.

EcoTheo: If you were writing letters to a young poet, what would you want to tell her?

Li-Young Lee: I'd tell her to read Rilke's "Letters to a Young Poet" and, if at all possible, keep her contact with academia and the business side of publishing to a minimum. Business, like politics, is war conducted by other means, and academia is a business. And while one cannot altogether avoid academia or the publishing world in this day and age, one can try to be in those worlds without being of those worlds.

EcoTheo: In your memoir, *The Winged Seed: A Remembrance*, your father became one of the first Chinese American pastors serving a displaced community in this country. How did his religion become yours?

Li-Young Lee: My father was a member of a cult of Love, Christianity. I spent years straw-manning it in debates with my father while he was alive, and even after he died. I eventually understood that Love is the most simple and rigorous path any person could embrace. I embrace it now, but I'm a poor lover, my passion intense but unstable, childish, wayward, characterized by confusion, petulance, ego-gratification, you name it.

EcoTheo: How have faith and love of God shaped you as a writer?

Li-Young Lee: I don't have faith that God exists, since I experience God enough to know that God exists, haunting both my inner and outer worlds. But I sometimes have to remember that God's Logic is not my logic. I keep forgetting that the Logos of God, otherwise named The Dao, is not the logos or dao of

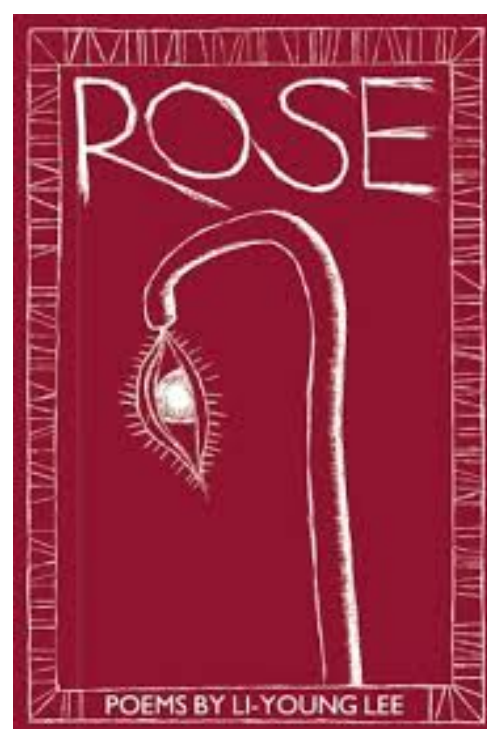
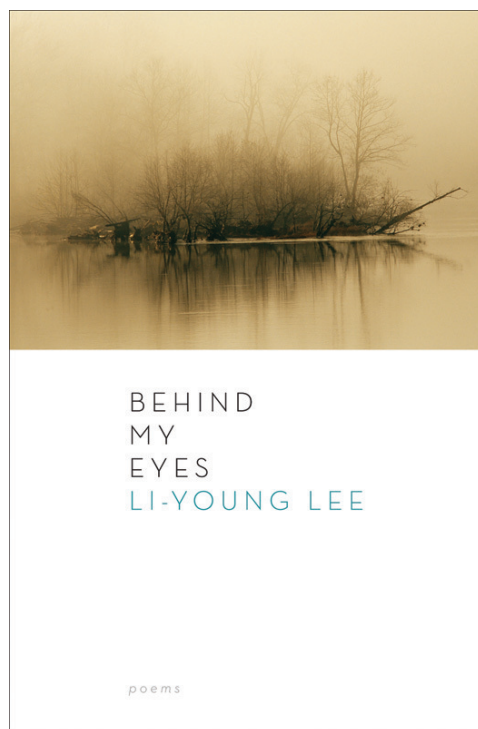
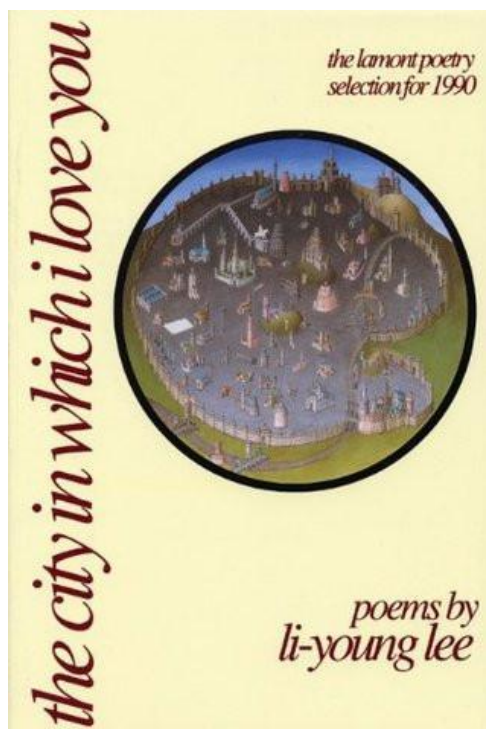
human beings. For that matter, for me, a poem must, first and foremost, possess spiritual authority, not just temporal power. In other words, a poem must reveal a logic beyond human logic. In fact, for me, among all the temporal power structures invented by human beings, the state included, a poem is one which must play host to something beyond the human. Unless a poem speaks to my spirit, I find it a noisy cymbal.

EcoTheo: Do you think that poetry can be a form of religion, too, another form of Word?

Li-Young Lee: I do, and I once believed that poetry was synonymous with The Word, that the practice of poetry was nothing less than the practice of The Logos, that the logic of poetry was the Logic of God. But while I still feel that poetry can become a form of religion, I don't feel it is a true religion, marked as it is by obsession, personal ambition, competitiveness, rivalry, and other symptoms of enslavement, while a true religion is characterized by liberation. One could practice poetry as a practice of The Word, The Dao or Logic of God, a practice of The Word made Flesh, but I see now that one could also religiously practice poetry as a practice of words, the practice of words-made-more-words. Poetry, I've come to see, is not necessarily, in and of itself, the highest or deepest or most meaningful destiny of words. A poem might possibly be that, but not inevitably. Meanwhile, I'm interested in the most meaningful and deepest destiny of language, and I don't believe such a destiny lies in more language. A poem that inspires others to write poems, a poem that gives rise to hundreds, even thousands of other poems is a poor second to a poem, or any work of art, that inspires even one person to change his or her life to turn toward greater meaning, or the quest for greater meaning.

EcoTheo: If you had to describe your poetry in just a few words, what would they be?

Li-Young Lee: Meh. But I did my best.



The City In Which I Love You (1990, BOA Editions), *Behind My Eyes* (2008, W.W. Norton & Co.), and *Rose* (1986, BOA Editions).

REFRACTIVE ERRORS

Leah Falk

March birch: whose rags appear at first as roses,
at least in my loose vision where brain often arrives
before eye and so makes trash or groceries
of a sleeping infant clutched to a cyclist's chest,
reads grackle or rat in a black plastic bag pirouetting
(how I wish I could bring wind to the back of me like that).
Easier to imagine than to see and so I tie a knot
at the place where I once grew There skin refuses
to be smooth The birch's once-fat band of summer
peels in a single spiral from the body, the way doubt
untwists from faith's tight grip a hypnotizing curve
until I find I've driven down, around a mountain

Until whatever's caught in the prison of my vision
could be either my love or my love ending
Or some new animal that counts on the seasons
to change it Or my own flesh
out walking its ghost Forgive me, at first pass
I didn't recognize myself I mistook the places

I'm coming apart for a froth of viburnum
This too happens often approaching my body at dusk
I sometimes see only that tree on the Schuylkill banks
who, it's true, bends something like I do
both away from and toward its face reflected in the river

THREE POEMS

William Woolfitt

CHORUS FROG

The season of cracking open, bloodroot,
egg strings. My grandmother chops the cloddy
ground. Many years without him. Onion sets,
new moon peas. Frogs in the pond they sank in,
shearing cattails below the waterline. Frogs
an inch long, a blue-ash color, dark stripes,
sunning on sunken logs, *on tussocks, swimming*
among floating debris. Pour out, swell up,
jewelweed and monkey flower. She hears frogs
calling, a rattle that rises, recedes, *a scraping*
coarse-toothed comb. Waiting to follow him.
How many. She lists, snags, thins. All the time
she tries to catch a ballad, plaint, what he sings
from the next, the after.

AMERICAN TALIBAN: TWO PHOTOGRAPHS

This photo is *official, surveillant, the A-team's*
routine effort, taken after he was seized with
a bullet in his thigh, hooded, stripped naked,
duct-taped to a gurney, sealed inside a metal
shipping box, let out when the team pressed
him for truth: he'd renounced San Anselmo,
the redwoods, his hip-hop CDs, he'd taken in
like food the surah, the rhythmic prose, gone
to a language madrasa, a training camp,
hidden in a basement that the Alliance flooded
with a diverted irrigation ditch. Another photo,
printed out, pinned to my wall, his fervent eyes
on me as I sit on the floor, his robes the bright
of bleached sand. I try to pray with my pulse,
my guts stirring, not the same old speech.
The distance between us shifts. I listen for
his breaths, ragged and uneven.

SUNDAY MORNING AT GRASSY BEACH

after "Sunday Morning, 1950" by Irene McKinney

And now, tongue and groove, the lifting up,
yield, heads back, those who holler, let go.
Lard in the half-moon pies, two cups of flour,

self-rising. Sandals, steel-toes, crickets
under joists, ivy linoleum, Deward kneels,
swelling from the heat, wallboards shaven,

beaded joinings, curly maple, knotted pine.
Irish potatoes in the ridged-up earth,
eyes moving through the dark. The amen

caught in Hazel's throat, prayer language,
blood of the lamb, spirit touching spirit,
gush of vowels. Sweat inside a shirtsleeve,

an itch, tears blinked back, bearded iris bulbs
by the slab steps, greening the stony earth.



Growth Rings, acrylic pour painting on 12 x 12 wood panel.

THE EARTH, THE BODY

Sandy Coomer

"I believe that when we can perceive with our imaginations and not rely on literal interpretation, our world becomes more meaningful to us."

The definition of mixed media is this: a technique involving the use of two or more artistic media," explains Sandy Comer on her website. By nature, mixed media art affords its practitioners a greater degree of creative experimentation. Comer has clearly thought explicitly about this freedom and the mediums she has chosen to use for her art.

They are numerous: Comer works with acrylic, watercolor, and mixed media, utilizing an eclectic combination of materials and substances—beads, buttons, flowers, metal artifacts, and more. This allows her to create visual works that are detailed and intricate, but also infused with her signature child-like wonder. Her creations are positively exuberant.

In addition, Comer has been a prolific maker of acrylic pour paintings, creating over 100 in total (three of which are shown here). On her website, Comer addresses the need to look closely at each of her paintings; she's provided some commentary on this medium too, framing her acrylic work as an "invitation to view." An invitation to view what, exactly?

The focus of Comer's acrylic work is ecology. It is ecology in color, each shade of a particular natural scene swirling and dripping into one another. Her guidance is helpful: she advises us to interpret each design in terms of "land, water, sky, body, natural elements and phenomena." Her aim in creating this collection, she explains, "is to present unusual and alternative views of

creation in order to inspire viewers to widen their world."

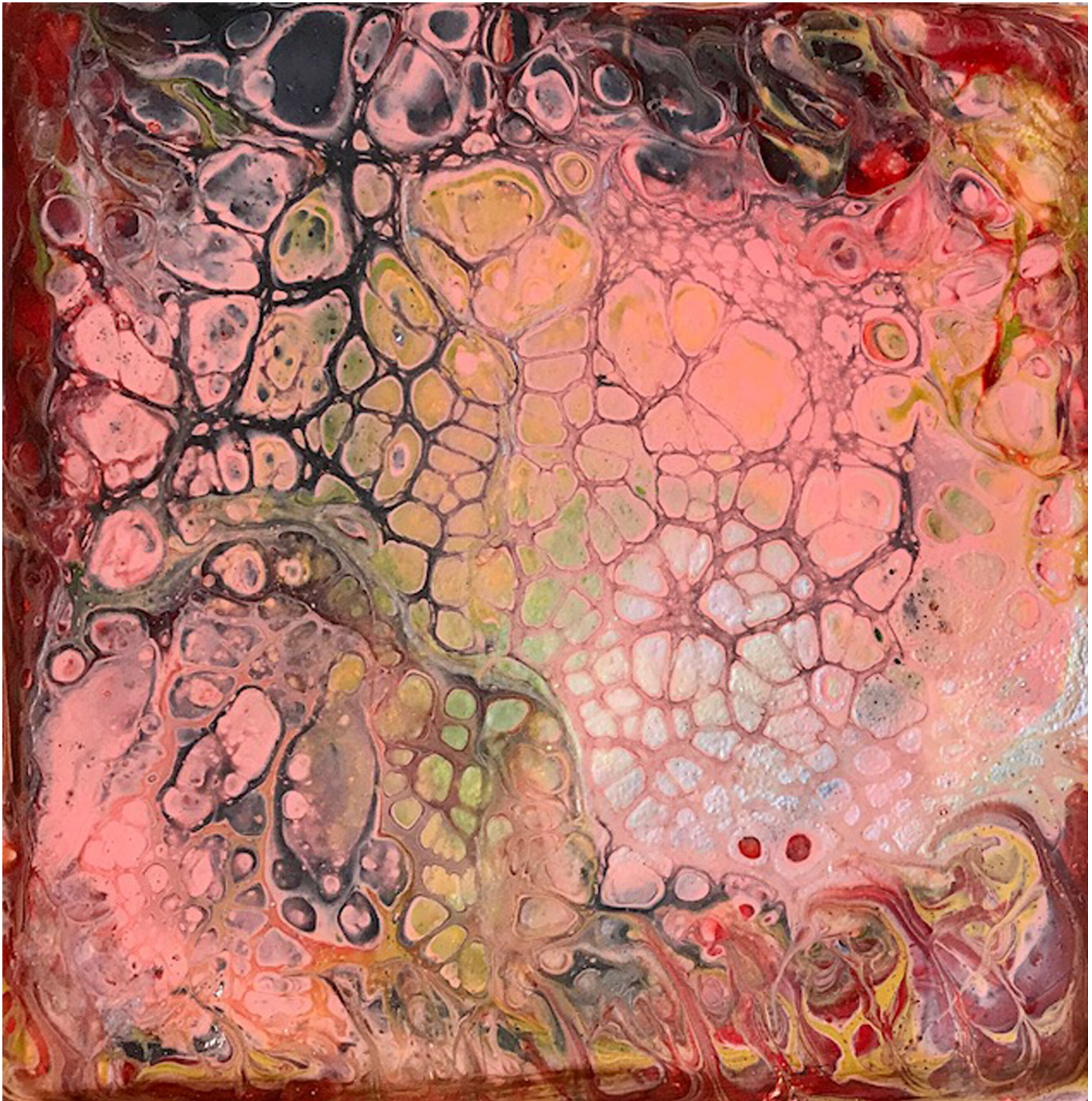
These pieces are created by combining acrylic paint with various substrates and silicone oil. The layers of paint react within the mixture according to their density, and form an abstract design. The resultant patterns and formations are the byproduct of these mixtures and reactions.

In a sense, they create themselves, being shaped by Comer's hand, yes, but also by the principles of chemistry and motion. By embracing the randomness of the mixing

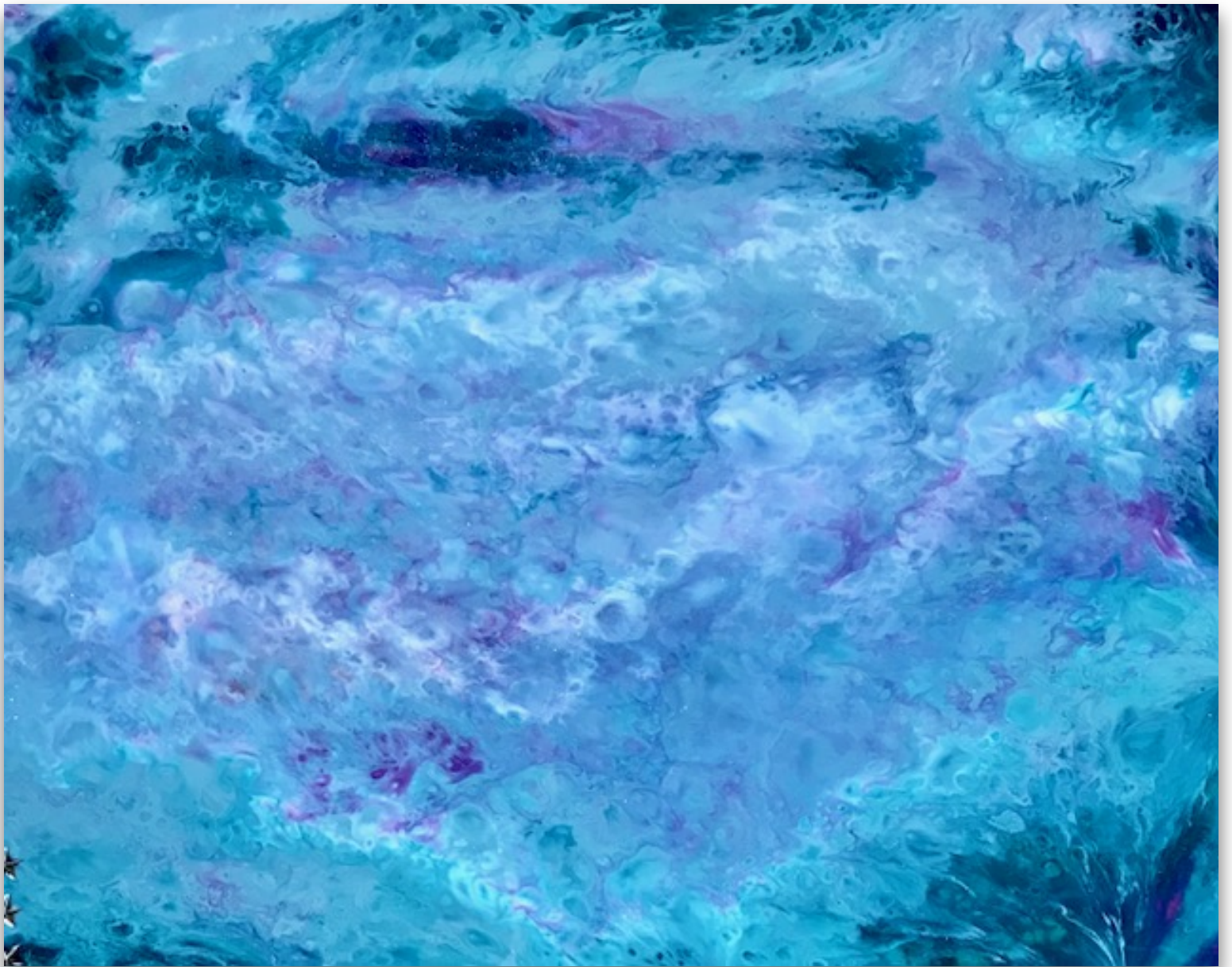
"My aim is to present unusual and alternative views of creation."

process, she is the steward of a natural process that is perfectly fitting for her subject matter.

Here's Comer in her own words: "The way the paints interact with the substrates is solely science-based (think specific gravity) but what is produced is random and unique. Our understanding of the earth, the sky, and the body opens on other levels when viewing this art and our appreciation for our world grows. Perhaps in this awakening, we might be inspired to better protect and conserve what we so often take for granted." Visit Sandy's website at www.sandycoomer.com.



Quiet Morning, acrylic pour painting on 6 x 6 claybord.



Heavenly Skies, acrylic pour painting on 16 x 20 claybord.

CLAUDE MONET, ARGENTEUIL, 1875

Adam J. Gellings

It was a lot of things.

It was the algae blooms swimming against the tide.

It was the convent of masts, making partial signs

of the cross

across the sky's chest.

The eyes & brow suspended in clouds passing.

You could almost feel the dew on the nose

of the bows

quivering.

I know the sun,

tinged red, sat somewhere above the blue, burning

into the day.

*

It was a thousand miles ago,

& now I can only imagine

those deep December nights in Ohio.

Selling the house. Coming to visit you, frail

& fevered pressing your cold hands together & together

watching the dancers across the street

in the one room studio.

Each night, the same couple

curving over the hardwood, knees bent bending

lead & follow, chest to chest, smooth

then slow slow.

I think of the night you whispered
how you wanted just one more
summer. Just one more chance to see the geese
floating through the ravine. The deer
in the middle of the rain-kissed leaves.
The tiny Monet postcard in white frame on the
nightstand.

"I'd like to go there," you said. Your hand crumpling
around a tissue.

*

Calls were made. Come now.
Come get your goodbyes. Come touch
each light blue bead of the rosary with us,
passing it gently
through the calm of our fingers.

*

That night,
I stepped outside onto the wet black brick of the patio,
blew smoke

 under the glow of the yellow bulb & noticed him
across the street, locking the front door of the studio.

 He turned,

looked me in the eyes
offered a short nod as I stood
still as a fawn
scarved in the steam of its own breath.
The snow staring back into us
like white on a cloud.



Red Boats at Argenteuil, Claude Monet, 1875

NUCLEAR FAMILY

Craig Santos Perez

“The militarization of light has been widely acknowledged as a historical rupture that brought into being a continuous Nuclear Age, but less understood is the way in which our bodies are written by these wars of light.”

--Elizabeth DeLoughrey, “Radiation Ecologies and the Wars of Light” (2009)

7

In the beginning, Izanagi and Izanami stood
on the bridge of heaven and stirred the sea
with a jeweled spear until the first island was born.

Then one day, men who claimed to be gods
said: “Let there be atomic light,” and there was a
blinding flash, a mushroom cloud, and radiating fire.
“This will end all wars,” they said. “This will
bring peace to the divided world.”

6

In the beginning, Áłtsé Hastiin and Áłtsé Asdzá’ą́,
ascended from the First World of darkness
until they reached the glittering waters
of this Fourth World, where the yellow snake,
Leetso, dwelled underground.

Then one day, men who claimed to be gods
said: “Let there be uranium,” and they dug
a thousand unventilated mines. They unleashed
Leetso and said: “This will enrich us all.”

5

In the beginning, Lova spoke the islands into being and created four gods to protect each direction. The first people emerged from a wound in Lova's body.

Then one day, men who claimed to be gods said: "Let there be thermonuclear light," and there were countless detonations. And they said: "Bravo! This is for the good of mankind."

4

In the beginning, Fu'una transformed the eyes of Puntan into the sun and moon, and his back into an island. Then her body transformed into stone and birthed my people.

Then one day, men who claimed to be gods said: "Let there be bone seeker," and trade winds rained strontium 90 upon us, and irradiated ships were washed in our waters. And they said: "This is for national security."

3

In the beginning, Wolf created earth from mud. Then his younger brother, Coyote, carried a woven basket full of the first people to the Great Basin.

Then one day, men who claimed to be gods said: "Let there be plowshare," and the desert cratered, and white dust snowed upon the four corners. And they said: "This is for peaceful construction."

2

In the beginning, there was no contamination. Then the men who claimed to be gods said: "Let there be fallout," and our sacred homes and bodies became proving grounds, waste dumps, and tailings. "Let there be fallout," and there was

a chain reaction of leukemia and lymphoma, miscarriages and birth defects, lung and liver cancer,

breast and uterus cancer, thyroid and bone cancer.

And we learned that there is no half-life of grief when a loved one dies from radiation disease. There is no half-life of sorrow when our children inherit this toxic legacy, this generational and genetic aftermath, this fission of worlds.

1

In the beginning, there was peace. Let there be peace for Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and the Marshall Islands. Let there be peace for the Navajo and Shoshone Nations. Let there be peace for Mororua, Fangataufa, In Ekker, Kirimati, Maralinga, and Amchitka. Let there be peace for Malan, Montebello Islands, Malden Island, Pokhran, and Ras Koh Hills. Let there be peace for Chagai District, Semipalatinsk, Novaya Zemlya, Three Mile Island, Chernobyl, Punggye-ri, and Fukushima. Let there be peace for the downwinders, from Guam to Utah to every radiation ecology and every irradiated species.

Let there be the safe disposal of waste and the cleaning of abandoned mines. Let there be the disarmament of the violent nucleus within nations. Let there be a proliferation of peace across our atomic cartography.

A BLOODY MESS

Daniel Stulac

Betty Sue is fixing a roast, in honor of Wynette who died last Tuesday. The meal will be a stick-to-your-ribs affair—beef with potatoes and gravy, the last of the asparagus, and two raspberry rhubarb pies for dessert. I arrive early, before her husband Lee and son Mark have come up from the barn. It is a chance to pick my old friend’s memory for stories from the dairy farm where she has lived and worked for the last forty-five years.

Sipping leftover coffee, I am wedged between the wall and the kitchen table while Betty Sue rolls out the dough for the two pies. One evening, she tells me, twenty-some years ago, Lee and the boys put the cows to bed as usual. The second milking, the spreading of hay, the fresh bedding—everything was routine. But after they left, one of their prize-winning Holsteins managed to nick its milk vein on a splinter that had fallen in with the sawdust. When Betty Sue awoke at first light to feed the calves, the cow was already dead, sprawled out on the barn floor in a river of blood. The memory wells up in her eyes. “My uncle Al used to say, “There’s just no end to the number of ways a cow can find to kill itself.””

Another cow, she goes on, died with twins in her womb. The calves were breeched, and the mother’s condition deteriorated rapidly. Intent on saving the offspring, Betty Sue raced from the field to the kitchen to fetch a carving knife. Then, kneeling in the pasture, she sliced into the mother’s belly and reached inside to pull them out. The surgery failed. Soon three lifeless animals lay side-by-side on the slick grass, leaving Betty Sue a sobbing, bloody mess. With Wynette’s passing, death is on the mind.

Betty Sue’s experiences are not unique. Blood is a

part of life on a farm, despite marketers’ efforts to screen this reality from consumers. White, boneless protein is packaged in plastic, then stacked in sanitized, grocery store cases. Even where suburban chickens are in vogue, these are slaughtered more often by hawks and foxes than by their human caretakers, whose appetites, ironically, give the domesticated red-crested junglefowl its one and only reason for being. “Food conscious,” in other words, does not automatically mean *blood* conscious. At the

same time, industrial culture’s obsession with sterility has seemed to go hand-in-hand with an insatiable appetite for pornographic violence. What horrors the frozen-food aisle suppresses, film impresses through elaborately contrived scenarios of ever-increasing brutality. We do not eat without disinfecting our food, yet we do not fantasize without imagining an orgy of blood-soaked revenge.

Given such pervasive confusion around blood,

Christians may find themselves equally confused and even embarrassed when considering that our sacred text, especially the Old Testament, is such a bloody book. No reader stumbles upon the story of Ehud and Eglon, for example, and goes away unsullied. When the Israelite judge plunges his sword into the obese king’s belly, which swallows up the blade past the hilt and then oozes fecal matter onto the floor (Judg. 3:21-24), the reader may find it difficult to apologize for the lofty spiritual principles that such a tale engenders. Is it just a primitive form of grindhouse media, titillating its audience in the guise of historical record? Biblical gore can feel incompatible with the Christian God of love; perhaps the Old Testament is better left behind.

Other readers are wary of tossing out four-fifths of



the Bible, even if they are equally uncomfortable with some of its content. Evangelicals often find themselves caught in this quandary, deeply committed to the canonical text but perplexed by many of its stories. Their solution is to sanitize the Bible, line by line, converting it into a kind of pre-Christian code. What begins to matter about the Old Testament is not its actual language, but the way in which that language can be refashioned to align with their particular set of cultural norms. Such readers may steal a nervous laugh when Eglon's guards suppose their master is defecating, allowing Ehud to escape (Judg. 3:24-26), but unconsciously suppress the story's lowbrow humor as extraneous to its point. The word of God can't really be that gross, can it? Ehud's supposed moral high ground, Eglon's moral turpitude, or some bland combination of the two is inferred instead.

Like it or not, the Bible is unsanitary. On the other hand, even a story such as Ehud and Eglon's is not gory in the pornographic sense. The text's interest in blood derives from its genesis within an agricultural environment, a society where the vast majority of people were engaged in food production. The Bible is a book written by farmers, about farmers, for farmers. Its olive orchards and sheep pastures are not bucolic parklands infusing its pages with the nostalgic aura of days gone by. Rather, they locate biblical content within the daily grind of a workforce scratching its living from the earth. The Bible's "implied reader" is a person like Betty Sue—someone who has soiled her clothes with a dying mother's dying calf. It is written for people who know and care for their animals, whose lives are materially bound up with animal bodies, who understand what it means to bring an animal into the world and what it means, when the time comes, to take an animal out of it. Eglon, not by accident, means "calf" in Hebrew. Like life on a dairy farm, the Bible is not gory, but it is bloody.

Tacit avoidance or outright misconstrual of the Old Testament's material interest in blood poses a substantial theological danger because its blood language furnishes the conceptual framework for understanding Jesus' crucifixion. When Jesus says, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood" (Luke 22:20), he is citing Jer. 31:31, not starting a new religion. He is situating his imminent death *within* Old Testament tradition, not disabusing himself of it. At all costs, we must not allow industrial culture's schizophrenic disgust and obsession with blood to

interpret the crucifixion for us. Let the Bible do this work instead.

The book of Genesis is a good starting point, if only because the Bible assumes that its readers will begin on page one. As it happens, however, Genesis is also a story about blood. It is a twisting family saga in which the characters lie, cheat, steal, murder, manipulate, and terrorize their relatives. They also trust, obey, worship, reconcile and forgive. The key to Genesis lies in its bloodline, in the supra-generational perspective it grants to the reader as he or she encounters the messy events of each character's life in succession. Why, for example, should the Bible place the story of Judah and Tamar in between chapter 37, where Judah and his brothers throw Joseph in a pit (Gen. 37:34), and the rest of Joseph's story, where he is imprisoned and eventually exhumed from a second "pit" (Gen. 41:14)? In other words, why should the Bible nest Judah's story inside Joseph's? Moreover, none of these events should be considered apart from the child-bearing competition that takes place earlier between Leah and Rachel (Gen. 29:31–30:24), which is a direct result of Laban's plot to deceive Jacob on his wedding night (Gen. 29:22-23). Jacob, meanwhile, is living with Laban only because he fled from Esau (Gen. 28:5), who intends to kill him (Gen. 27:41) only because Jacob did as his mother—Laban's sister—advised, tricking his father Isaac out of Esau's blessing (Gen. 27:1-29). And so on.

Genesis is a book that moves "from fratricide to forgiveness." The first person born in a post-Garden world kills his own brother; Abel's blood, the text notes, cries out to God from the ground (Gen. 4:10). Generations later, Joseph's brothers sell their younger sibling into slavery, and then deceive their father by dipping his coat in the blood of a goat (Gen. 37:31). When eventually the tables turn in Egypt, Joseph like Cain wields the power (and the motive) to take revenge. Just when the dramatic tension reaches its climax, Judah throws himself at Joseph's feet and cries, "Take me instead!" (Gen. 44:33). The ringleader of Joseph's "murder" offers his own life in place of Benjamin's. Only now does Joseph unravel in tears; only now does reconciliation begin. Such self-sacrifice is ultimately rooted in chapter 38, where Judah realizes that his Canaanite daughter-in-law "is more righteous than I" (Gen. 38:26). A woman from outside the bloodline prevents the bloodline's demise.

On one hand, the plot summarized above fits snugly under American Christianity's cultural roof. Judah's self-sacrifice in particular may suggest the cross. On the other hand, Genesis's "higher" ideals find expression only through the seedier aspects of human living. In surprising detail, the text relates how Judah's second son, Onan, performs *coitus interruptus* with Tamar (Gen. 38:9). The story of Lot's daughters reads as an ancient form of transgender burlesque, in which the two women "get up" and "come into" their inebriated father (Gen. 19:33, 35). When Rebekah arrives in Canaan for the first time, she encounters Isaac in the field; the Hebrew is unclear, but one good explanation is that Abraham's pride and joy has gone outside "to take a dump" (Gen. 24:63). When Rebekah witnesses this activity in progress, she literally "falls off the camel" (Gen. 24:64)!

Do the Old Testament's bodily fluids embarrass us? Shall we sanitize them with moralisms or refashion them as metaphors? Shall we discard them as the pulp fiction of a primitive society? Shall we sweep them discreetly under the rug while pretending biblical content is compatible with the enlightened principles of modern living?

That the Bible's matriarchs and patriarchs are all agriculturalists in one sense or another is not an inconsequential feature of the text, a mere accident of history. In fact, the agrarian context in which this family's convoluted bloodline takes shape is essential. It provides the language through which Genesis asserts that *God's promises cohere in the literal, material world in which his creatures work and eat*.

At the epicenter of this daring claim is a man named Abram, a farmer whose life story takes a dramatic turn in chapter 15. In order to understand how this pivotal episode works, however, some context is needed. Genesis tells us that Abram and his wife Sarai and their animals emigrate from Ur to Canaan, far away from their friends and relatives (Gen. 11:27–12:9). Notably, Sarai is incapable of conceiving a child (Gen. 11:30). When famine strikes, they push on to Egypt where Abram instructs Sarai to lie about her identity (Gen. 12:11–13). After all, she is barren, and thus expendable. As a result of their deception, Sarai is absorbed into Pharaoh's harem—long enough for Abram to benefit from the transaction (Gen. 12:16) and long enough,

presumably, for Pharaoh to test out Sarai's barrenness for himself. But while the story's menfolk trade in female bodies, God does not. He reveals the truth to Pharaoh, who then delivers Sarai to her real husband along with a well-deserved eviction notice (Gen. 12:19). Soon after returning to Canaan, Abram's proxy heir, Lot, leaves for Sodom (Gen. 13:10–12).

We therefore encounter in Genesis 15 a man of limited prospects. "What can you give me," he asks God, "since I am childless?" (Gen. 15:2). The reader should not be tempted to construe these words as skepticism or impertinence, regardless of Abram's prior dealings in Egypt. His concern is valid. In following God to Canaan, he has given up any chance of inheriting his family's ancestral holdings in Ur. He is an alien in a foreign land, a man of the earth with no patch of ground to call his own. The future is bleak.

In response, God swears a promise to Abram—both for children and for land, for posterity and for place (Gen. 15:4–5, 7). God gives farmer Abram a reason to hope.

Abram, for his part, takes God at his word (Gen. 15:6). But God is not quite finished. "Get me a heifer, a goat, and a ram, along with a turtledove and a young pigeon." Abram obeys, and then cuts the four-legged animals in two and arranges their halves opposite one another (Gen. 15:9–10).

"Really?" the startled reader may ask. Abram fetches a cow, a goat, and a sheep, and then *cuts these animals in half*? What volume of fluid does such butchery entail? Why should a loving God require this slaughter? In what condition of filth did Abram find himself after the fact? Did he use a cleaver or a carving knife? It is precisely this level of hyperbolic gore that sends the reader running to the New Testament or out of the Bible altogether. Could Abram not have pricked his finger and signed some sort of fidelity contract instead?

He might have, if the idea behind this text were a test of his loyalty to God. But a test is not what the Bible has in mind. Hope, not merit, is the principal concept driving Abram's story forward (cf. Rom. 4:18–25). The implied reader remembers that when an agreement is formalized in this manner, the lesser party must walk between the animal parts, submitting to the prospect of similar mutilation if the terms are not kept. In a stunning

reversal of expectation, however, a smoking furnace and a blazing torch move between the animal pieces instead (Gen. 15:17). God, not Abram, submits himself to the strictures of the pact. Even in the midst of Egyptian slavery, says God, I will maintain my promise to your offspring. I will hang as a broken animal in the midst of all your transactions and lies. I will keep my promises even when you and your children do not.

The carnage of Gen. 15 is necessary not because God must satisfy his bloodlust, nor because Abram must prove his loyalty to God through ritual violence. Rather, it is necessary because Abram's human genome is bathed in blood already. If Genesis is a book about a particular family's all-too-human capacity for intergenerational sin, then it is equally a story about God's resolve to stand by that family when the chips are down. The book's overarching trajectory—from fratricide to forgiveness—is made possible because God promises to “get bloody” with Abram and his children after him. God gets involved in the farmer's mess.

In the same way, when Jesus bleeds to death on a rocky outcrop near Jerusalem, God is not licking his chops in heaven, eagerly satisfying his appetite for pornographic gore. Neither is Jesus' blood a magic potion, a syrupy, sanitized elixir to be bottled in platitudes and dispensed at religious ceremonies. Jesus' blood is no more and no less than *real human blood*, shed by the Creator himself. It embodies God's near-inconceivable choice to throw in his lot with human beings, despite our bloodstained record. It is the culmination of God's durable promise to a family tree stretching back to the deepest recesses of our ancestral memory. But most importantly, it locates God's overture toward humanity within the fabric of our material existence. Jesus' blood cannot be understood apart from the real spasms of pain that shoot through his wrists and ankles when the stakes are driven through, just as the covenant God makes with Abram cannot be understood apart from the animals he slaughters and then lays out upon the slick, matted grass. Crucifixion is horrendous; a dairy farmer knows this. In both theological perversions described above—the sadist Father and the commodified Son—Jesus' death mutates into something good, something to amplify and celebrate. The mob agreed—“Let his blood be on us and on our children!” (Matt. 27:25). The scandal of Christian faith, by contrast, is to amplify and celebrate the *resurrection* of Jesus Christ, not his

execution, and to trust in God's promises even when the amplification of his life leads the believer to a similarly unjust and excruciating demise. Christian faith is not about getting out of this world of blood; it is about falling ever deeper into the care of a God who became a bloody mess on our behalf.

The roast is out of the oven and the pies are in. The aroma of braised beef fills the kitchen and, I imagine, begins seeping out onto the porch. Before long, Lee and Mark can be heard stamping and scraping their boots on the boards outside. This routine is more a gesture to Betty Sue than an effective method of manure removal. The two men enter, speckled and streaked with sour milk. They quickly wash up, grab two beers from the fridge, and with tired grins on their faces, squeeze into the bench seat curving around the table to my left.

Mark's wife Elaina arrives with their two small children. While the meat rests, we discuss which mothers will soon give birth, the health of the newborn calves, the market for cheese, and of course the weather. Lee spends at least five minutes educating me on various types of bull semen. Betty Sue cuts him off only because it is time to pray—“Lamb of God, make us thankful for the food we are about to eat, and may it strengthen our bodies to your service.”

At last the meal is served. Betty Sue reaches over her grandson's bobbing head to set the roast on two crocheted trivets at the table's center. Brandishing a long knife, she slices into the meat, exposing its pink interior and pooling its red juices in the dish below. A hungry murmur of anticipation ripples from one side of the table to the other. Betty Sue passes me the first plate and says, with matter-of-factness only a farmer can summon, “Eat up—this here's Wynette.”

“A Bloody Mess” is the last in a 3-part series Daniel has written on ‘theology and the farm.’ Find parts 1 and 2 at Plough.

Footnotes:

1. Matthew R. Schlimm, *From Fratricide to Forgiveness: The Language and Ethics of Anger in Genesis*, Siphrut: Literature and Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures 7 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011).
2. Joel S. Kaminsky, “Humor and the Theology of Hope: Isaac as a Humorous Figure,” *Interpretation* (Oct 2000), 363-75 (369).

TWO POEMS

Bishnupriya Chowdhury



Watercolor painting by Bishnupriya Chowdhury

TREE STORIES

Her small leaves yellowed at the first touch of chill. Then as the northern wind roamed waking the hairs on the little girl's skin, they butterflied out from the branches and dotted the afternoon verandas and streets with a certain kind of magic. A magic without reason and few audiences.

Winters were when she bled most painfully. Barks cracked and thick red resin oozed from the wound. In the house across the street, the girl lay on the roof—
menstrual song raging. The two friends burned under noonday sun.

Whenever the boy came to see the girl, now almost a woman, her
breathless

branches would burst with round little leaves. He saw those leaves on his way to her home from station and knew it was spring. All their moments together in the hundreds of years before and after a shoal of yellow leaves followed.



Watercolor painting by Bishnupriya Chowdhury

WATER-BODIES

The mud settles after the monsoon opening the water-world. Sun illuminates the shallow bottom like a mountain stone. The kind you may only chance upon on a trip to the mountains and then keep it forever. Shoals of tilapia swim up and nibble at the air every few minutes and glide. Airplanes fly by in a sky distant and blue. She watches the bird-ish shadows trail over the mystery and geography of things lost and resting and hides her princess in a secret chamber beneath that silt-covered head shape. It could be a skeleton or a ball of gold who knows what else and she waits for a glimpse of her when she comes out to casts a spell. But the princess only shows up in the stories and songs and huge oceanic shells of sleeps. She reads each a thousand times and once more.

An aged Mrigel turns up swimming alone into the clearing near the wall that separates their narrow backyard from the pond. “Is that you?” She asks, leaning from the other side. The fish burrows into the emerald spread without answering.

Every few months, the pond owner’s fisher folk arrives. They move the water, loosening the mud that spreads like smoke over the kingdom. As the net draws in, her heart throbs like the fishes trapped inside. She waits by the window the rusty grille presses hard on her girly flesh. She wishes for the princess to escape, she waits for her to get caught.

The men leave when their iron drum is full. Sometimes they leave one or two at the spoiled bank. Sun shines on fish-bodies, fallen leaves and mud.

POEM BEGINNING WITH A LINE FROM WORDSWORTH

Brian Simoneau

It is a beauteous evening, calm and free,
and the neighbor has shoveled his horseshit
in the garden, bucket after bucket
dumped from rusting pickup to veggie beds,
tomato plants staked with splintered handles
of rakes, cucumbers vined through chicken wire
strung from nail-studded two-by-fours braced
by scrap leather, by snapped fan belts, even
the cinder-blocked Charger sprouting lilac
through its shattered windshield, oil drums halved
for onions and carrots, coffee cans hung
to gather rain in apple-heavy limbs
above the swing where he sits with his wife
when evenings are beauteous, calm and free.

TWO POEMS

Allison Wilkins

TABLE 2

After Milosz

An empty table, an empty tavern,
that image haunts her departure.

Everything else is cheap silverware, finger-marked
wine stems. Like an overburdened ghost, she moves

among broken plates in the direction of the port.
She doubts that stacked tablecloths will suffice.

Some dances are already piles of ash on cobblestone.
And after she leaves, distance is resurrected

in the body of a god, broken on this altar,
because even beauty cannot hide the loss

of song, or this rough table's heavy wood.

EXCAVATION

That June the marble quarry slept.
The pine trees made no sound
except their sighs, their nymph breath

diluted by a reef. Archilochus burned
fragments of words in the evening bonfire,
and the goat sacrificed himself.

Animals do not mind such burdens.
It was months after that the monks
learned what the goddess already knew:

the island is raw, *garlanded with wild woods*.
Without marble, without a slab to rest on,
we couldn't ram belly to belly, thigh to thigh.

We hoped the marble would open again,
create a fissure for two bodies. And so,
we brought up the nets, tossed the bad fish

to the gulls, tried to summon a god.
It was hard to get his attention. We dragged
the boats to the quarry. The ancient poets

had explained: we were lost. The goats made room
for us to sleep. The sea stayed
quiet, embraced its marble.

THREE POEMS

Karen Anderson

CAVE CRICKET

Belly-up, splay-legged,
bow-backed to the things

in the dark: my mother
will die, my father, my kid.

Licked with dread. What
I can do when you smile

at my limp and crawl,
my see-through legs

rickety and thin.
What else is there

to do. What else.
With no sharp mouth.

No poison. No blades
or fingers. Bullets. Think.

This. Fling myself

from under the steps,
and there are more of us

and more, a rush of sticky
legs and heads so strange,

so big with pain, so afraid
it looks like fearlessness.

BAD GARDENER

He's a stinker, my grandfather
would say of con men in soaps,

and true, I am: slime mold
has run over my stakes,

and my sweet peas rot.
A thin green opera of self.

An operetta? Let's be
real. I'm feeding no one.

Fooling, I mean. Grandpa's
groundcherries and truths

are now weedy feet of earth
darknetting between plants,

plots. Half-facts. A failure,
a farce. Force. An odor bad

with broken fungus,
weird growth twirling

the wrong way, half diva, half
tech. Breathe in. It sucks.

Breathe out to the straggler
shoving for the sun anyway,

turning the air and water and me
to itself, making it up.

ASPEN

Fear is golden, a cold
fire on the hill. Its

spread and glitter
in the wind, clones,

women's tongues
set to shiver—

*I'll do something, I
will—*

The wind. *You
won't. You'll bend.*

You'll fall.
Listen harder

for the leaf
to twist,

to cut the air,
the flat of the knife

all bright edge,
sure: *bring fire*

next time

DEATH OF A RED-TAILED HAWK

Carole Giangrande



I

*

By mid afternoon the hawk was ill and by late in the day, she was dying. She had dropped from the sky like a knife-blade, slicing a pigeon's neck; hungry, she ate but did not finish. Her eyes became as clouded as a winter sky and she did not move from her bough. Ebbing away was a hawk's life, precarious and beautiful, wings singed with the wild air as they collapsed around her like the tent of night, and from within her, the eggs she would never lay began to die, along with her body's memory of a soft, feathered mate, the tug and pull of lengthening days, the sun that ladled morning into the bowl of the new-built nest. As time passed and evening fell, her body slowed, then grew as still as a stopped clock.

*

There were witnesses. Others, like myself, read the reports online. We could not turn away, could not escape asking why it matters.

*

**"The whole universe is
aflake."**

**Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Le
Milieu Mystique*, (1917)**

The young hawks had made scant attempts to build a nest in the knot of lanes and buildings south of Canal Street in Lower Manhattan, but the she-hawk could feel the first frail egg trying to separate itself from the warm enclosure of her body. Not yet knowing how to protect it, she glided upwards, lighting upon a square metal protrusion where the egg escaped her, then rolled off the a/c unit and smashed on the sidewalk below.

Downward she peered at the accident, lifted her wings, and flew south. There she and her mate, urged onward by the pull of light and lengthening days, began in earnest to weave a nest of twigs and leaves, setting it on another metal cube above the Health Department entrance. They would have mated once again, perhaps in that spectacular dance in which their talons grip at life itself, locking together as the whirlwind seizes them whole.

Red-tailed hawks are not sociable creatures. They mate for life, and while both co-operate in the warming of eggs and the nurturing of young, they are for the most part solitary beings. Likewise, falconers' hawks appear to regard the human arm as a branch, the hand as bearer of food, the keeper's presence as safety. Apart from these clear demarcations, it is said that raptors cannot relate to us, that they are not wired to understand human touch, that they may regard affection as a threat.

Experience teaches that this truth does not foreclose our mammalian instinct for tenderness, nor does it penetrate the mystery of how the raptor perceives it. Carry one tethered on your gloved fist and you will meet the depth of enormous eyes, cloudlike weight, the span of extravagant wings, an utter strangeness. It is a mystery that even in their fierce enormity, raptors are capable of calling forth the deepest of protective instincts. Yet they are not at all like us.

*

The sombre public building where the downtown hawks built their nest was a quick glide to a small green space — Collect Pond Park, two blocks south of Canal Street. Perhaps the young raptors knew in the spiraling depths of their genes that hawks once glided across centuries to find this place, lighting in an elegant sweep of wing on the ancient Munsee settlement at its southwest border, and maybe the young pair carried in the gravity of nerve and bone the lure of its vanished underground spring, the one that hundreds of years ago quenched the thirst of the settlers of New York. The spring is gone, the park space an austere concrete landscape spiked with pin oak and ailanthus trees bordering a replica pond.

Yet the hawks had found home; perhaps by dead reckoning, as if they bore the contours of the place within their bodies' memory. In the park they cavorted, found prey to eat, saw smiles on delighted faces, city employees on lunch break with kindly eyes and smartphones raised in blessing.

They had been mating, the two of them, her partner gathering twigs, fortifying their nest, preparing it for a clutch of eggs, while below the female hunted down her fateful prey, then appeared unwell, remaining on her perch for the rest of the day. Too weak to groom or preen, her mouth still bloodied from her toxic meal.

*

There were people who took time to note her fate.

Everyone has a camera now. Everyone bears witness. Yet it is what we choose to see that matters. Also, what we choose to deny.

We do not know why the world unfolds as it does. We do not even know what we know, or when it was we awoke from the sleep of childhood, or how it was that a flame lit the lantern of our body, or how it is that the world is lit by the same extraordinary fire. Only that one day, our eyes began to open.

II

On Easter Sunday in the tenth year of my life, my parents gave me a Brownie Hawkeye camera. I have no idea why. Easter is not a time when we give gifts. Yet from that day onward, my life began to imprint itself on the silver light of film and in the deeper light of the writer's imagination. Through the camera, the world grew radiant with hope, and, in e e cumming's words, "the eyes of my eyes (were) opened." Over sixty years later, equipped with a camera and telephoto lens, I spend my spare time photographing birds. Much of the rest of my life is consumed with writing.

I took joy in that first camera, its exquisite resonance; given on a feast of light, of spring and rebirth.

The date was April 10th, 1955. On that Easter Sunday in New York City — not far from our suburban home — the great Jesuit paleontologist and philosopher Pierre Teilhard de Chardin left this world. Think of ecology, evolution, the sacredness of matter, the spirit indwelling in creation. His thought

scrapes the tip of the match, lets loose the flame. By happenstance he closed his eyes just as I was opening the shutter to the light.

For a writer, all things connect. I choose to tell my story in this way because of its metaphoric beauty, and because at the age of ten, I knew with inchoate passion that I was meant to live with open eyes. I wanted to be a photographer then. And I wrote.

*

Here is what happened in Collect Pond Park: In the morning, the male hawk did not understand how it was that his mate was slumped over, talons locked on the branch, one wing collapsed and drooping downward like an avian flag of surrender. Yet not being a creature of thought or word, he was driven by his body's memory of who she was — and who is to say that this drivenness is not a form of love? And why not ask ourselves if love is as much the raw tug of instinct as it is a cognitive and elevated passion, a generous concept that asks of us a generous use of the word?

The male wanted his mate alive. He tried to rouse her by tugging at her feathers. Then, in confusion, he offered her twigs he'd been collecting for the nest. It took time before he understood that she was gone.

One knew that the gift of instinct would allow this hawk to accept another mate. Yet there are photos of his tender and innocent attempts to rouse his companion, images that evoke a deep and abiding sadness.

It is recorded that bystanders were distressed, that a policeman wept as he took pictures with his phone.

*

A necropsy report stated in clinical but honest language that rodenticide had killed the young hawk. Her demise was

unintentional. Yet to grieve her death is to understand what we have lost when we ignore wild parents and their tender young, magnificent nonhuman creatures with spectacular wings and feathers, the dinosaur remnant that holds our ancient days, the clock that tells us where and how we began.

*

It may be that some wept for the hawk because they sensed that we do not have to choose between the suffering of humankind and the pain inflicted on the rest of the living world. In this realization lives an energy, an indivisible bond, the mysterious drive that draws the self into a reality beyond the self, that knows we are formed of clay and bone and the raw energy of love.

Perhaps it is that simple.

We dance at the tip of a match.

Author's note: I would like to acknowledge the work of Laura Goggin, whose photo blog documented the story of the hawk pair in Lower Manhattan and the female hawk's death on 31 March 2016.

PANTHALASSA

Michael Metivier

The light that hummed in the amniotic sea
The algae that latticed itself into Tokyo-sized mats in the shallows
The moment the world became a benediction

it started snowing in the old quarry

The sky hymned

and I felt wee, owlish

The endless tinkering of subduction
The blueprints for teeth
The syrinx, cirrus, the skate egg case

staring out over the valley from cut rock

The psalms of Tethys and Mirovia

to the smoke of my own chimney

The wet heaven tinged with the stink of love
The stink of growing beyond oneself—

///

Strata of the roadcut, candelabra
of sumac, the ox-
shaped hills of the penepain

The gills of the gar
of the estuary's brackish
shelf, breathing all tides

The veery slowed down sounding
like Sunflower Slow Drag
like Weeping Willow

When I'm wary
of weariness each feels the very
crux of somethings more

The very depth of the glacial lake,
the very first kiss,
very scattered-to-the-winds—

///

—one night in Truro on the wrist of the continent a twitch of my eyes sent them to the Bight of Benin, to Svalbard, to Gaul, to the horse latitudes, through the emphatic and not-so-emphatic geographies of the night, to everywhere I was before being born in this place, bundle of musculature wet and off-guard, wisps of hair and bone, length and weight, reverse-ghost like snow just starting to fall, the luck of it all—illumination—

///

The river swelling like a flock of altos mid-verse in *Misteriou joaius*
The river sidling and consuming the bluff
The moment it disappears forever

two yearlings spy me from across the frosted traprock

The whole configuration may reverse

and retreat into multiflora rose

The endless plains become endless plains of ocean
The borders dissolved
The lignin, the leaf, the heartwood

though their breaths remain in the freezing air

The vespers of the clades

that burns in my lungs too

The named returned to namelessness
The song the same

Note: The phrase, “wee, owlish” comes from “The Ballad of Geeshie and Elvie” by John Jeremiah Sullivan, *The New York Times Magazine*, April 13, 2014.

REVIEW OF ZELLER & DEBACKER'S ALCHEMY FOR CELLS AND OTHER BEASTS

Kasey Jueds

Halfway through Maya Jewell Zeller and Carrie DeBacker's luminous and revelatory *Alchemy for Cells and Other Beasts* (Entre Rios Books, 2017), I looked up "alchemy" in Merriam-Webster. It's a word I thought I knew, but it turns out I had only a vague idea of its meaning. Alchemy means both "the medieval chemical science and speculative philosophy whose aims were the transmutation of the base metals into gold" and "the discovery of a universal cure for diseases"; more broadly, "a great or magic power of transmutation."

The collection's title is beautifully apt. Zeller's poems and DeBacker's paintings tap into a power that might *seem* magical to our everyday logical minds, inviting us to consider the ways in which that power is already present in the worlds around and within us. At the same time, the paintings and poems conjure *more*: more transformation, more recognition of our interrelatedness. There's alchemy, or the desire for it, in the longing the speaker feels to heal disease suffered by a particular human body, a longing especially present in the three poems titled "little spell with chest x-ray." There's the desire for alchemy for the wider natural world—to heal and transform in the midst of political and climate-related crisis. And there's the recognition that these experiences, these desires, are inseparable, one and the same.

The rest of the book's title also does important work. The invocation of "cells and other beasts" points inward and outward, toward the cells of the particular human speaker facing illness and depression, and toward the myriad others inhabiting the book. In the world of *Alchemy for Cells and Other Beasts* – which is our world – the sense of inward and outward breaks down as the poems and paintings rearrange our understanding. "if you watch in slow motion / the flecked kestrel / on YouTube," Zeller asserts in "little spell for kestrel hovering / for x-ray & mothering," "you'll watch your own lungs fanning out against the sun."

How open this book is: permeable, inviting. "I said, sure, America, come on in," Zeller's narrator offers at the end of the book's first poem, "Upon Finding Out They Were Wrong, the Scientists Had a Good Long Chuckle." The poems and paintings open to the wide world of beings and things – paper airplanes, pomegranates, roller derbies – as well as to the wide emotional and spiritual realms within each of us, with a radical even-handedness. Zeller and DeBacker invite us to consider how things might look, might feel, were we to recognize how deeply we are connected: with each other, with milkweed, finches, history. And while the poems never oversimplify this connectedness, or take it lightly, they call us to open, too, as the speaker is opened in "Dirge for a Temporary God":

& when I was ripped apart
by creating other winged beings
with invisible wings,

it became possible to admit things
& still it took years & years
to imagine what I could open into
if I'd found these seams earlier –
when I was a girl, I tore my foot
on a ripper

in a carpet
Oh
my mother said
you found it
thank you

now I can make those floral pants
you really wanted

& my blood was everywhere, the wound
stardust flailing into the form of petals, of waves
(34-51)

Here is the body, both a particular female body and a body that morphs into and meshes with other bodies as it experiences illness, childbirth, depression, love, memory; the body as it overlaps and communes with children, butterflies, and boars, as it is born and broken down into stardust, petals, and waves.

At first, I felt tempted to call the book “surreal,” given the whale heads and hammers perched on top of human bodies in DeBacker’s glowing watercolors, and given the way Zeller turns her careful and pointed attention equally toward the everyday and the dreamlike. Take, for example, these lines from “The Waiting,” which fuse the recognizable and the deeply, radiantly strange:

I put on my black mask

and walked into the mountain. I pushed right through the stone.

I wore a necklace of furred insects, emerged in a forest, stepped into a boat, I rocked inside with seismic proportions.

I drew a knife from my belly, plundered the lake. I put on my wolf head,

my girl arms, my quiver of bodies.

Though I wanted to use the word, I wondered: is it correct to call this poem – to call any of these poems or paintings – surreal? It seems to me now that to the poet and artist, this blurring of people and insects and fish and stone is, instead of more or other than, simply *real*. This is how things *are*, the poems seem to say. Listen. Look.

Other descriptive words that came to mind when I was planning this review also felt off. Zeller’s poems are both deeply personal and adamantly political and global: so quirkily, movingly, newly so that none of those words seems right. The poems consider the physical world and the invisible interior, but move so delicately between the two that the lines between them seem to dissolve, if they ever really existed. Here’s a rich example from “Spell for transcendence /for conjuring finches”:

here in the suburbs / park
swings rusted for extra months / puddles in their saggy
middles / this has nothing to do with my uterus / it
is the longest winter since that one long before this
winter / so long we cannot remember the feel of the

earth then /everything it is was the world we barely
remember /

& I start to whisper things like *reuptake*
inhibitor / not knowing the meaning of my own chemicals
/ I can barely function / I like to mouth things like
monoamine transporter / picturing them floating between
synapses / like unpollutable balloons /

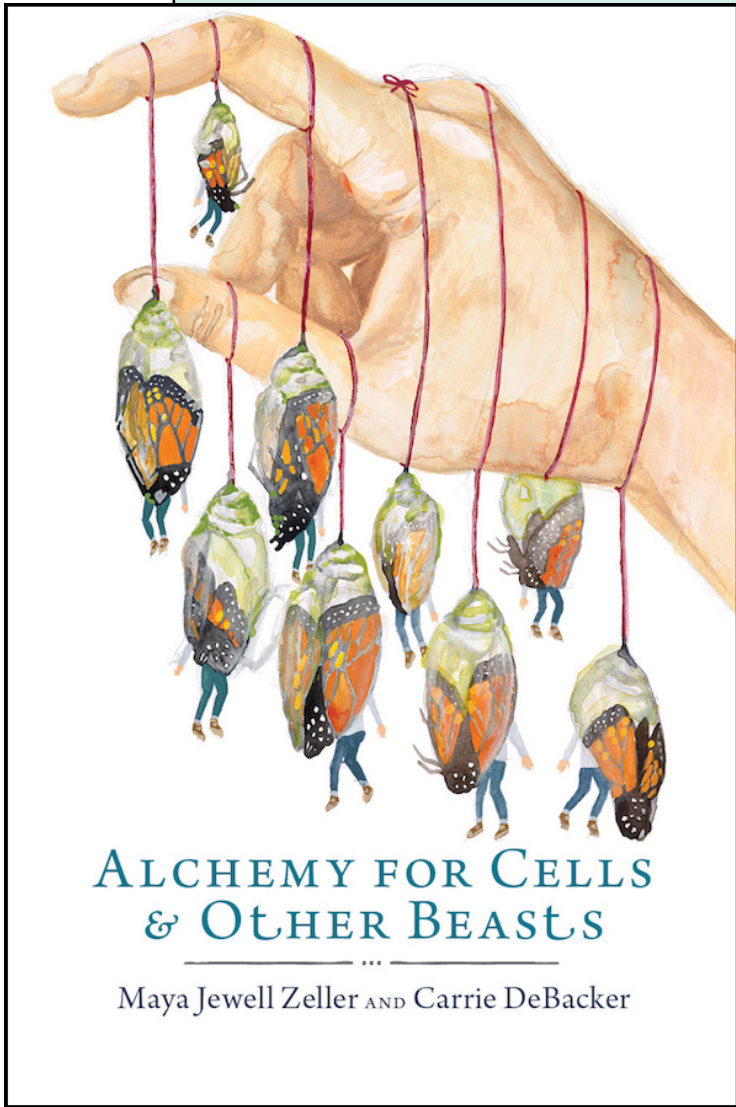
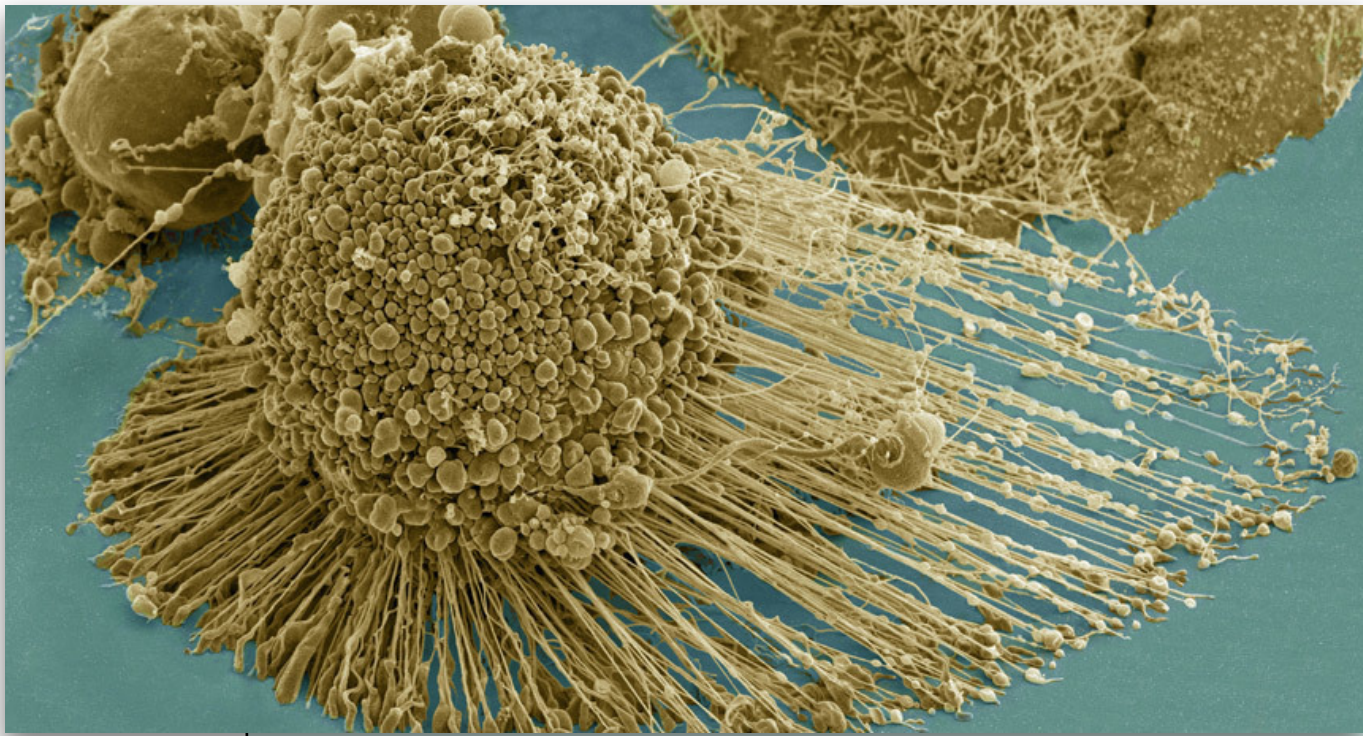
I say *remember when*
& “Ray LaMontagne” / You say I am “being nostalgic” / say
I am “being hyperbolic” / as if hyperbolic is not the new
curved beak / meant for prying insects from bark / (4-19)

Brain chemistry, extreme weather, memory, relationship, and birds are folded seamlessly into these lines: no way to separate one from another. In resisting dichotomies and binaries, the poems aim to upend what we think we know about where “we” stop and “everything else” begins.

Alchemy for Cells and Other Beasts balances wildness – in the form of associative leaps and startling correlations – with steadying order, present in the book’s recurring images, titles, and forms. Many of DeBacker’s paintings depict human bodies with non-human heads (bones, knives, hummingbirds), and the artist often repeats images, with slight variations, within each painting. A series of “little spells” – many of which are formatted as prose poems employing back slashes to separate phrases – anchors the written text, providing an emotional and verbal spine, reminding us that the book, too, is a type of body.

(Side note: I love how much I learned, reading this book. “Chert,” for example, is “a hard, fine-grained sedimentary rock,” and to “knap” is “to break with a quick blow” – both of these from the wonderfully titled “i need large electric oven roaster, around 20 qt. If you have one taking up space, get back to me. I’m using it to heat alibates chert for knapping.”)

“The world is such a place of light, had we eyes,” writes Mary Rose O’Reilly in her collection of essays, *The Love of Impermanent Things*. Zeller’s poems and DeBacker’s artwork have such eyes, and they beckon us to a new and potentially healing, alchemical way of seeing: they look beyond received ideas of “human” and “animal,” “inner” and “outer,” into the heart of our connectedness, and they aim to startle and dazzle us into doing the same.



"my blood was everywhere, the wound stardust flailing into the form of petals, of waves."

Alchemy for Cells & Other Beasts, Entre Ríos Books (2017).

CAPTURING THE LANDSCAPE

Billy Moore

The EcoTheo Review is delighted to welcome Billy Moore as its new visual arts editor. Billy has an M.F.A. from the University of Colorado and has worked as a photographer for over four decades. Read on to learn more about his artistic philosophy and the important role photography plays in fostering ecological enchantment.



Dog Canyon (2018), Big Bend National Park

Human beings are a product of the landscape. They depend on it to survive, and it has long been the basis of belief systems, history, and religions that underscore the vital role that the land has played and continues to play in our existence.

It is defined in our perception as the various elements that constitute the landscape, the physical world we inhabit. Our perception of these elements define our humanity.

The landscape is the result of natural forces, man-made activities, and time. As such, it is the living record of these processes and a reflection of the state of the world and, for that matter, humanity as well.

Photography is like reality, but it isn't.

The basis of photography is the act of pointing, of showing in a photograph the many decisions made by the photographer of selecting a place—a segment of the visible world—and freezing it in a moment in time.

The nature of photography ties it to the physical world since it is a record of light being reflected from a surface responding to illumination.

But there is even more of an abstraction that takes place in substituting the camera's mode of operating for direct human perception of the scene photographed.

Camera work isolates a portion of the subject and contains only the visual information that the photographer selects. It then utilizes the camera's mechanical nature to further control the manner in which the light from the subject is recorded on photosensitive material.

The basis of photography is the act of pointing, of showing in a photograph the many decisions made by the photographer.

When we perceive the camera's recording of a scene as identifiable subject matter that looks, at least to some extent, the "way it is supposed to" from the perspective of the viewer, it becomes a believable representation of the subject, one that can contain meaning beyond the surfaces it portrays.

While engaged in perceiving an image, if there is sufficient inspiration and execution in the process of its creation, the possibility of metaphor can show more than what's visible in the image.

The presence of the unseen is the culmination of the experience of a photograph for viewer as well as photographer.



*Old and New Church (1987),
Redford, Texas*



*Cypress Roots (2018),
McKinney Falls, State Park*



Mission Pentecostal (1987), San Elizario, Texas



*Untitled (2018),
Colorado River*



*Christmas Trees (1986),
3rd Street, Austin*

CONTRIBUTORS

Karen Leona Anderson is the author of the poetry collections *Receipt* (Milkweed Editions) and *Punish Honey* (Carolina Wren). Her work has most recently appeared in *Little Star*, *Alaska Review Quarterly*, *ZYZZYVA*, *The Best American Poetry*, and other journals and anthologies; her poems have been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and she is the recipient of a Maryland State Arts Grant. She is an associate professor of English at St. Mary's College of Maryland.

Jack B. Bedell is Professor of English and Coordinator of Creative Writing at Southeastern Louisiana University where he also edits Louisiana Literature and directs the Louisiana Literature Press. His latest collections are *Elliptic* (Yellow Flag Press, 2016), *Revenant* (Blue Horse Press, 2016), and *No Brother, This Storm* (Mercer University Press, Fall 2018). He has currently been appointed by Governor John Bel Edwards to serve as Louisiana Poet Laureate 2017-2019.

Bishnupriya Chowdhury is a Bengali artist and writer trying to find her roots across continents and oceans. She weaves hybrid pieces about memory, women and bodies, using what is often awkward if not unsavory tangle of Bangla and English. She holds an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Central Florida. She is a collector of girl-names, pretty pebbles and family-recipes.

Sandy Coomer is an artist and poet living in Brentwood, TN. Her art has been featured in local art shows and exhibits, and has been published in journals such as *Lunch Ticket* (Antioch University Los Angeles), *Gravel*, *The Wire's Dream Magazine*, *Up the Staircase*, *Taxicab*, *Spider Mirror* and *The Magnolia Review*, among others.

Leah Falk is a writer whose poems and essays have appeared or are forthcoming in *Best New Poets 2018*, *The Kenyon Review*, *FIELD*, *Thrush*, *Los Angeles Review of Books*, and elsewhere. She's received support for her writing from the Yiddish Book Center, the Vermont Studio Center, Asylum Arts, and the Helen Zell Writers Program at the University of Michigan. She lives in Philadelphia and runs programming at the Writers House at Rutgers University-Camden.

Adam J. Gellings is a poet and instructor from Columbus, Ohio. His previous work has appeared in *Ovenbird Poetry*, *Post Road*, and *Salamander*. You can find him on Twitter @adamgellings.

Carole Giangrande is a novelist and the author of nine books, including the award-winning novella *A Gardener on the Moon*. Her most recent novel, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air* won the 2018 Independent Publishers Award Gold Medal for literary fiction. She's worked as a broadcast journalist for CBC Radio (Canada's public broadcaster) and her fiction, poetry and essays have appeared in both Canadian and U.S. journals. Her new novel, *The Tender Birds*, will be published in Fall 2019.

William D. Hicks is a writer who lives in Chicago, Illinois. Hicks will someday publish his memoirs, but most likely they will be about Bill Hicks' life. His poetry has appeared in *Horizon Magazine*, *Breadcrumbs Sins*, *Inwood Indiana Literary Magazine*, *The Short Humour Site* (UK), *The Four Corned Universe*, *Save the Last Stall for Me and Mosaic*. His cover art will appear on *Anti-Poetry* and *Sketch*.

Kasey Jueds' first book of poems, *Keeper*, won the 2012 Agnes Lynch Starrett Prize from the University of Pittsburgh Press. Some of her recent poems have been published or are forthcoming in *American Poetry Review*, *Narrative*, *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Provincetown Arts*, *Colorado Review*, *Pleiades*, and *Crazyhorse*, and her reviews appear in *Salamander*, *The Rumpus*, and *Jacket2*.

Kelsey Lahr is a writer and professor residing in Santa Barbara, CA. She spends her summers working as a ranger in Yosemite National Park. Her literary nonfiction has appeared in *Blue Lyra Review*, *The Copperfield Review*, *Gold Man Review*, *Saint Katherine Review* (forthcoming), and elsewhere. Her essay *Cranes* was the first runner-up for the Green Briar Review's 2016 Nonfiction Prize. Kelsey's work has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and publication in the Best American Science and Nature Writing series.

Li-Young Lee is the author of five collections of poetry, and a memoir, *The Winged Seed*. *Breaking the Alabaster Jar* is a collection of his conversations.

Michael Metivier is a poet whose works have appeared in *Poetry*, *Washington Square*, *North American Review*, and *African American Review*, among other journals. As a musician under the name Oweihops, he has opened for such artists including Kristin Hersh, Red Heart the Ticker, and Elephant Micah. He is an editor at Chelsea Green Publishing in White River Junction, and lives in Vermont with his wife and two daughters. You can find him on Twitter @grouse_hollow or visit his website at www.michaelmetivier.com.

Billy Moore has worked in the field of Photography and Fine Arts for over 4 decades. He has led photo workshops in Texas and the Southwest and has been active in education in his local community. His landscape photography work has been collected by the Humanities Research Center at UT, the Center for Creative Photography in Tucson, and other galleries and collections in the Southwest.

Marlene Muller is the author of the chapbook *White Ocean Motel*. Her work has appeared in *Commonweal*, *Cistercian Studies Quarterly*, and elsewhere. She lives and teaches in Seattle.

Rebecca Nelson studies ecology and creative writing at Stanford University, where she researches coexistence in different species of ants. Her writing has appeared in *Moon Magazine*, the *Weekly Avocet*, and the *Stanford Daily*. She grew up in Chicago as part of an interfaith family, being raised with elements of Judaism and Catholicism.

Craig Santos Perez is a native Chamorro poet from the Pacific Island of Guam. He is the author of four books of poetry and the co-editor of three anthologies. He is an associate professor in the English department at the University of Hawai'i, Manoa.

Frank Relle is a photographer born and based in New Orleans, Louisiana. His work is included in the public collections of the Smithsonian Museum of American History, the New Orleans Museum of Art and the Museum of Fine Arts Houston. Relle's

photographs have been featured in *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, *National Geographic*, *The Southern Review* and *The Oxford American*, and he is the recipient of numerous awards, including a 2007 International Photography Award, and was one of the Photo Lucida Critical Mass Top 50 Photographers in 2006 and 2011.

C.T. Salazar is a Latinx poet and children's librarian from Mississippi. He's the author of the micro-chapbook *This Might Have Meant Fire* (Bull City Press), and the editor-in-chief of *Dirty Paws Poetry Review*. His poems are forthcoming in *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *The Cincinnati Review*, *RHINO*, *Grist*, and *32 Poems*.

Brian Simoneau is the author of the poetry collection *River Bound* (C&R Press, 2014), chosen by Arthur Smith for the 2013 De Novo Prize. His poems have appeared in *Boston Review*, *Cincinnati Review*, *Colorado Review*, *Four Way Review*, *The Georgia Review*, *Mid-American Review*, *Southern Indiana Review*, *Third Coast*, and other journals. Originally from Lowell, Massachusetts, he lives in Connecticut with his family.

Daniel Stulac is an adjunct assistant professor at Duke Divinity School in Durham, North Carolina, where he lives with his wife Danielle. He worked as a campus minister and farm manager before travelling to Rwinkwavu, Rwanda, to build an agriculture assistance program for families suffering from HIV and malnutrition. He is also the author of several articles and one monograph, titled *History and Hope: The Agrarian Wisdom of Isaiah 28-35* (Eisenbrauns, 2018).

David B. Such is a left-handed mechanical engineer with nearly four decades of experience with turbines and other machinery. His essays, poetry, and drawings have appeared in *South 85 Literary Journal*, *Stonecoast Review*, *The Doctor T.J. Eckleburg Review*, *Gulf Stream Literary Magazine*, etc. Visit David at dbsuch.wordpress.com.

Allison Wilkins is the author of *Girl Who*. Other poems and essays have appeared in *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Birmingham Poetry Review*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Superstition Review*, and *The Lyric*. She is the assistant director for Writing Workshops in Greece.

William Woolfitt is the author of three poetry collections: *Beauty Strip* (Texas Review Press, 2014), *Charles of the Desert* (Paraclete Press, 2016), and *Spring Up Everlasting* (Mercer University Press, forthcoming). His fiction chapbook *The Boy with Fire in His Mouth* (2014) won the Epiphany Editions contest judged by Darin Strauss. He edits *Speaking of Marvels*, a blog that features interviews with authors of chapbooks, novellas, and books.

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