

WEST TEXAS

Literary
Review

Issue 8, Winter 2018



West Texas Literary Review

Issue 8, Winter 2018

ISSN 2573-7821

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Daughter's Spring Rite

MICKI BLENKUSH

You lead us
through freshmelt mud
down the banks of the river
on this walk we've taken every spring
before ticks and poison ivy.

Your list of imagined animals
in need of rescue
grows longer than ever
in your tenth year.
Every hollow is a home
to fox, badger, mouse, or ant.

This sand you call soil
wraps your wrists
each time you reach past roots
and stillbrown life
spliced in erosion's wash.

One by one you hand to me
invisible creatures
I've learned to carry gently
over the slip of last year's leaves.
I ask how many more
beneath the staggering weight
of orphaned bears.

To the beaver-gnawed totem and back,
you seek the narrow gate.
Trees to climb, brambles to elude,
and moss I'm asked to touch
until I can feel
each tiny forest for its own distinct life.

There's ice like salt and ice like diamonds
riding the hasty current.
A windshield-wide pane of glass
pauses in the sleeping shallow until
we find a branch just long enough for you
to loosen it away.

Whether Weather

RANDY BLYTHE

Rain is
water drumming down
while drumming up sound
that calls rain to mind.

But an -ism doesn't drip,
leaf to white-oak leaf,
till a white oak is

so big it shades out thought.
What if the idea of water
ran along the tin roof
then stair-stepped down?

Generous as a host
poor in fresh water
but ample in concern,

what if
sympathy
could quench reality's
longsuffered cottonmouth?

Forget or remember,
answer or look away,
this white oak's unfazed,

as heedless as it is big.
Construes nothing
but life
from the sky.

Chest of Drawers

TRENT BUSCH

The colder it gets, the more
trees get undressed, standing
nearly naked here on this
coldest day of the year,

while I turn their fallen
neighbors into drawers
we will use next summer
to store winter clothes.

We who see them beautiful
dead as alive, their blond
straight lines, their secret grain
revealed by careful stain,

think always of diminution
when we hug them, live,
measuring with our arms
their circumference, cocking

our eye for the felling,
imagining their rich scent
as they are ricked in shelters
to cure fair and elegant.

Coldest day of the year.
Yet then, as now, when they
dance again in loveliness
and we shuck to little

or nothing, the certain fall:
we were bred so, the ripe
nut husked by the squirrel,
the fare so pleasing to the hand.

Traveling Light

SUSANA H. CASE

The Portuguese churches are full of doves
that sound like the ghosts of crying babies
sacrificed to a colony's slavery,
plantations on the shores of the Arabian Sea.
But this evening the sea is friendly,
and it seems safe enough to sleep on the beach.
Under a full moon, skeletal dogs keep guard,
settle down near my feet until sunrise
when they greet the fishing boats,
back today with kingfish and shark.
On the main road, where I go for sweet tea,
Goa freaks in Indian dress—sari, dhoti—
line up to score hash from locals
in colorful polyester shirts.
Gregory Peck drives by in a blue Mercedes
and waves. The city is like a movie set.
In daylight, the ghosts are quiet.
I play only a small part here—I wave back.

A Mason in the Old Burying Ground

GEORGE E. CLARK

A stone mason in the cemetery
Chews his gum and shakes his flannel shirt
“Where did I put my goddam smokes?”
He’s twitchy in motion, but he’s steady with his tools
Straight brick and spirit level, slate and grave
The epitaph says:

*A farmer and scholar’s wife—
She tended the sheep.
Her twin, Ann, was captured by Indians
and killed in King Philip’s War.*

“Well shit, I have to buy another pack
And move my truck before the meter maid gets back.”

On the twelfth day of Christmas
When she lost a newborn lamb
The woman buried here
Also cursed in the presence of her ancestors

At Pehistun, in Persia

MARY CROW

Tell it to the dead stones, mention it
to the moon staring down, full as it is
tonight, and me astray among fragments.

I'll walk into the sky, tell it to the sky,
and to the undeciphered cuneiforms.
Tell it to the Euphrates streaming these ruins.

To broken palaces, now undulating mounds.
Tell it to the vast devastation
and to my solitude.

Tell it to lions crouched on a ziggurat.
Mention it to this forest where beeches
try to live under snow.

Swear it to this tiny squirrel, to the bad news
of every day. Describe it to the flock of birds,
a few wingbeats into white.

To bees choking the foxgloves soon in summer,
tell it to earth revolving the deckle edge of sunset:
Let all we have destroyed rise up and save us.

Live Alive Life Lived Lives Living

CHRIS ELLERY

for Elizabeth

In just a few days
my daughter will have
a son. Exhausted
by a walk up stairs,
heavy with life,
she looks out on winter
and awaits the solstice.
Expectancy brings her
a cup. Night is humming
to afternoon. She wonders
about the waning light,
recalling how once
when she was a girl
she teased a kitten
with a yellow string.
There was the rustle
of the live oak, a fly
on the screen, and bees
in the honeysuckle
outside her room.

Potato

ELISABETH FARRELL

How comfortable you are
in your lumpy little jacket,
silent in the dark soil.

A living stone,
an underground Buddha,
your wisdom is humility,

your advice is to grow
quietly amidst the aphids
and worms and grubs.

The Coming of Winter

WILLIAM FRENCH

It begins
with the falling of leaves,
dry leaves, dying leaves,
cascading madly to earth,
swirling as though in
a kaleidoscope of red and orange
against a backdrop of gray,
painting the ruins
of a farmer's fields,
exploding like a supernova,
caught in the frenzy
of the north wind rising,
ravaging the furrows,
stripping away the harvest
until only the skeletons remain.

Faithful

KEN GAGE

Bones of the faithful out drying in the sun
The faith of a child redeemed for division
Oh! without division the many stand as one
And without division the many shall not fall
Yet for all to see are bones of the faithful
Bleached white, scattered, drying in the sun

Drowning in the River

ROBERT RENÉ GALVÁN

Like emerald serpents,
The sinewy fronds
Drew me under,
Unnoticed,
Though the banks
Were crowded.

My ears filled
With water,
I could only sense
Echoes of the revelers
As the swift current
Swept me away
Like a weightless twig,
The grey-green depths
More obscure
Than I had dreamed.

As I calmly counted
My remaining seconds
Of breath,
I recalled what my life
Had been on the surface,
My ambulating spirit
Now freed from gravity,

But the grasp of iron rods
On the weir formed a stairway
To the sun, which seemed
To my clouded eyes
Like a distant star:

I drank the air,
Shook the heaviness
From my limbs
And looked out
At the placid face
Of the river.

Nothing had changed,
No one had seen me.

Perhaps I would have been
Missed by evening,
An empty chair at the table,
My body floating toward
The gulf.

John

DANIEL GALVIN

He told me never to look a crow in the eye
or the crow would peck mine out
and that the old glove I found down the glen
was a severed human hand. I learned
that electricity travels through
the person touching the fence
to shock the one holding their hand.
Animals lover, but at my age he drove
through the night of blue-scented smoke
with pig's blood budding the hair of his arms
to the next slaughterhouse.
Now he walks like a man
pressed into a tight corridor by life
thinning hair flat against the ceiling
with no option but to lower his gaze
and drive on, haunting the fields
that flow towards the home
like a dark gypsy,
wrinkles brightening like scars.

Apparitions in April

ELTON GLASER

Fog this morning, after rain,
A long night of trees dripping
Like the sound of darkness coming down.

Spring has cancelled the cold,
Or at least confined it
To those small hours when only the police

And lost dogs wander the streets,
The odor of wet earth
Thickening around them, in a muddy month.

The ghost of morning floats between
The unseen houses,
And nothing feels fresh, not the day

Or the vaporous light behind it,
The light that seems
A relic of itself in the dirty windows.

But what did you expect? April
Has betrayed you before.
This mist, this pall, this early shroud

Hangs in the naked trees,
With no breath
Of new wind to shake it away.

the present

B. N. GRAVES

pulling threads out of the couch
stripping leaves from
low hanging branches
tossing them in the air like confetti
let's celebrate the sun
if only for one day
my legs ache everyday
I swear it's worse when the sun is shrouded by clouds
you have a gift,
you have a gift
what evidence is there of that?
I wish everyone could see the world so that they would understand
it's all the same.

I Braved the Cold

STUART GUNTER

In Memory of Blaze Foley

I braved the cold before it was warmer
so you could sleep just a little longer.
I lit the fire and jumped back to bed,
wrapped you in my human blanket.
You said to put the coffee on.
I groaned, bit your neck. Threw
the covers off and left them. Put
the old Revere kettle on the stove,
brought back to bed some sourdough
and the last of the paw-paw jelly.
We canned it in the fall, digging out
the big black seeds, cooking up the fruit
with pectin and sugar. I slathered some
on a piece of bread, fed it to you as you woke
and sat up, licked the jam off your lips
with my tongue, kissed until we fell back
on the pillows. "Write me a song," you said,
as the kettle started to whistle and steam.

Raku

GEORGE KLAWITTER

for Shawn Ireland

I'm just beginning to understand
respect for the earth—

how the potter fashions the vase,
molds it shapeful under muddy hands,

then leaves it to the mercies of the kiln
to determine texture, color.

In goes a dream, and out
comes fulfillment by the oven-god,

who decides brown or green,
glassy smooth or bumpy rough,

sometimes a combination,
the way life wants to be.

Put the new vase in some company,
next to Roseville or Weller perfection.

Let it sing its primitive song,
there on the table in the sunlight.

Let it croon its primitive way
tough and delicate, a Cro-Magnon chant:

“Touch me. Know my dirt and water.
We came from them, you and I. Raku.”

**To the Blind Woman Who Bails
from Her Boyfriend's Car Traveling North
on Interstate 35 at 70 MPH Causing a Massive Pileup
as Cold Rain Falls in Late September**

TIMOTHY KRCMARIK

for Fred

There are a thousand ways to begin a journey.
A muffled chirping
leads you to the porch one steamy morning

where a python is curled peacefully
under a purple lawn chair,
it's belly shaped like your pet canary, Fred.

Or, boarding a ship for Ithaca, you notice
green salt waves
winedark with another city's heroes

and stop your infernal singing.
You rescue a leprechaun rooting
around your trash cans like a raccoon

and soon have a pot of gold
to get that spaceship in the garage
going again.

Or one wind-whipping Wednesday night
you leap from a pea green Trans Am,
because your love is a ham-fisted Rumi,

and the trucker who sees you
unspooling down the fry pan asphalt
like a panicked smack of pink moon jellies

or silly putty come suddenly to life
jackknives thirty tons of candy bars
bound for the children of Kentucky,

gashing his saddle tanks
and gushing a spring of diesel
unto the aquifers of life

until my best people stem it
and pull your femurs back in place
that you might wake to know

love is the python
wrapping not around your songbird
but your song.

During my dark city days

JESSE MILLNER

I drank most afternoons in smoke-filled taverns
where men boasted about the sizes of their penises
and played an aggressive kind of pinball that
rocked the machine even as it blipped
and jangled. There was an art
to shaking Sinbad but not so much
that the dreaded “tilt” would appear
ending any chance of barroom domination.
I spent weekday afternoons and evenings
hitting buttons, forcing flippers to whack
steel balls that sometimes brought a chorus
of chimes and bells but more often delivered
the silence that forced me back to a mug
of Old Style, to the high-pitched voices
of all of us trying to speak louder than
the jukebox and the pinball machine, so
that we might at last be heard, and maybe
in that way, somehow loved. I don’t go

to bars anymore, so I have no idea
what drunken games the patrons play, but I do
know what happened to me: the smooth
night of drunkenness, that feeling we think
is real love luring me to an unheated storage
room where fallen sirens awaited. I’d see
my breath rush to vapor as I shared
an angel’s embrace—angel of bleach blonde
hair, angel with blackened front teeth, angel
who wiggled and smiled and hated me, and
how I loved the hate, the feeling of failure
and sin, which grounded me in a little shame,
which allowed me to feel my heart’s
ragged beat as the hours multiplied

until last call: 2 am in the dark
city, occasional buses grinding down Halsted
Street, the moon barely aglow, quartered
in the deep night of a universe that even then
stretched out to unknowable distances like
a road in Iowa splitting cornfields, a sliver
of meaning aiming for Kansas or Minnesota,
finding a thousand lakes or a thousand fields
of golden grain, finding American meaning
beneath a million stars that shone brightly
as if they were still alive.

Chicago, 1981

At the Reservoir Days before Flood Stage

BENJAMIN MUELLER

We lie back on the concrete drainage
having flicked all the matches
into the reservoir,
hissing at they hit the surface.
They float like compass needles
trying to deceive us.
After the Springsteen song
the radio gives us the news:
A leviathan writhing out at sea
gathering a flood at its back,
the hurricane somewhere
south of us veering inland
as you lie sunning,
dampness rising from your suit.
Everything dies baby that's a fact.
You will be gone in a week,
off to live with your father.
I watch you.
Imagining how this will go.

Snakes and hares flushing from dens.
Brown water swelling the embankment.
The reservoir filling the woods and fields.
Hay bales torn open,
the silage wrap clinging to tree limbs,
ghosts hesitant to leave.
This will never work out.
In two days it will rise over our heads
to swallow us,
but we both will be gone.
You roll onto your stomach,
the tiny hairs on the small of your back,
blonde from the August sun.

Your eyes closing.
Concrete warm against you.
I can almost remember it now.

Through the Blows

JED MYERS

I've come out in a hard slant rain,
down into the ravine, and planted

my soles in the creek bed's mud
till the wet cold's inside my bones,

to learn, from where the roots hide,
how the maples and firs can stand

the years of storms, how they lean
in give with the wind, hold firm,

bear the fallen clouds in their limbs
and are never toppled to ground

till they're ancestor old. I'll need
some human kind of rootedness

to live through the blows to come,
to not have my hope thrown down.

A Winter Morning in the Texas Panhandle

MARY PRITCHARD

Along dry creek beds
wild plum bushes stained purple by frost
are darkly matted; shrunken mesquite
and stripped shelterbelts
cannot resist Dakota wind
that rakes topsoil down to rock,
scoots sand and dry snow along the road
then levels off the caprock
to stream high and straight
until it grows weary
and drops
into the Rio Grande.

There is just enough room
between overcast and horizon
for the sun to rise
orange and firm as the moon
and soften edges of the cold gray clouds
while coyotes creep along the draws
scrounging for quail or rabbit
and cattle huddle, nudge the brown grasses
and listen for the feed wagon's creaking.

A Backward Glance

SARAH BROWN WEITZMAN

We're not told her name
only that she looked back

not what it was she had to see
one more time.

Certainly she's been warned,
a punishment story to keep

women in their place, thwart
curiosity, head off disobedience.

Still it was home to her and home
is where you will always go

back to in your mind. Like
the home I've dreamed about

every night for over seventy years,
the home I was taken from at two

Too young to know enough
then to take a backward glance

at whoever was there
peeking behind a window shade.

Criticism

GABRIEL WELSCH

I write of my children
and others I love
and think of a friend
who writes his town
in plain lines straight
as a barn silhouette
casting a shadow
on his mother's ghost.

Others sniff at the sachet
in the drawers of his work
and sneer at the softness.
How may they talk
of what I write about fear
in a child's walk
or the smell at the crown
of a small head
or the clothes that will hang
in their closets long after.

If you want to sniff
and titter, go ahead,
and I'll write then
about the grubby knife
I pinch at the fat
of my thumb to pluck
the hairs one by one
from your bitter brows.



A Gentle Rain Falling

WILLIAM FRENCH

A gentle rain falling will cause a flood if the rain falls long enough. Kendall—mister to his few remaining neighbors, Uncle Clayton to his only nephew—had seen it. Now, perhaps he was seeing it again as he sat on the back porch of the house his great-great-grandfather built in 1868 and watched the large translucent drops fall from an iron gray sky, while staying dry under the wooden overhang added by his grandfather when he returned from World War I.

Kendall sat on a canvas folding chair, cane by his side, and shifted his eyes to the land stretching on for at least a tenth of a mile. He remembered a time when the land stretched all the way to the horizon, when all he could see were acres of corn, soybeans, wheat, pasture for small herds of Holsteins, a few horses peacefully grazing.

He lowered his eyes again and saw the dull sheen from the ubiquitous puddles with the occasional blades of crab grass poking through the water like tiny heads, saw the large patches of brown mud where grass used to be and would never be again, saw the spectral images of laughing children wearing black rubber boots, running, splashing, trampling the earth, leaving only their boot prints behind. He had been one of those children in what was another age, another lifetime.

He began life in the large farmhouse behind him, the house made of wood hewn from the great stands of trees that at one time—a time when a man had to be tough and self-reliant to survive and provide for his family—marked the land, trees that were felled and milled by hand. Except for his two uneventful years in the military, he had lived in the house all his life, adding a few modern touches when he could, working the tired land just as the generations before him had done.

He worked the land until either he or the land—he wasn't sure which—just gave up. One by one, he watched the neighbors he'd known since childhood surrender, sell out, move on. He watched as crews of men and machines razed houses and barns, cut trees, dug trenches, paved fields that once fed a growing nation. It was all gone now. Except for the house which was, like its lone occupant, old and worn out.

Kendall shifted in the uncomfortable chair and stretched out his legs, weakened after a lifetime of the kind of work only farmers and laborers understand. Off to his left, next to the last tree left standing on the property—a massive oak that had served as shade for four generations—was the ancient stone foundation that had at one time supported the gigantic red barn, the centerpiece of the hundred-forty-acre family farm.

On a low grassy knoll surrounded by a picket fence behind where the barn used to be was a small cemetery, four rows of unevenly spaced granite headstones growing up out of the ground like tall weeds. Nearly every member of the Kendall family who had occupied this land was there, including Kendall's wife, Betty, who had passed away a year ago last August, leaving him all alone.

He smiled when he thought of Betty. She had always been a part of this land, having grown up on the farm down the road, the farm that was now the Moss Creek Subdivision. She had been one of those laughing children who left her boot prints behind in the mud. She and Clayton had loved each other even before they knew what love was. They married young and worked side-by-side for more than fifty years to keep the farm intact, fighting a losing battle against the combined forces of time, modernity, and apathy.

They worked and they loved—both the land and each other—but were unable to produce the next generation. No more Kendalls would test themselves, break themselves, on this unforgiving land. Probably for the best, Kendall thought, as he retracted his right leg to keep it from cramping and scanned what

was left of his property.

The rain continued to fall, a good steady drizzle—a farmer’s rain they used to call it when the term actually meant something. Kendall listened to the rhythm of the rain as the drops kissed the shingled roof over his head. He closed his eyes and tried to relax in the chair, tried to block the intrusion of reality with the comfort of old dreams.

He was nearly asleep when he heard the sound of a car, its tires crunching the gravel next to the house. He opened his eyes and saw the rain, saw the mud, saw the tree and the old foundation. He sat back in the chair and waited.

“Uncle Clayton,” a voice called from behind him. “Are you out here?”

“Yes,” Kendall replied, sitting up as straight as his body would allow.

A middle-aged man appeared in the doorway that led to the porch. “Are you okay?”

“Yes.”

The man, Kendall’s nephew, stepped out onto the porch. “Everything’s packed. Are you ready?”

The old man grasped his cane and struggled to his feet. Once he was standing, he scanned the property one more time, taking it all in as he would a photograph. “Yes.”

“Do you want to go back through the house?” the nephew asked.

“No.”

The nephew nodded and helped his uncle step down from the porch, holding one hand over the old man’s head to shield it from the rain. When they got to the car, a large SUV, he helped his uncle into the passenger seat. Then, without saying another word, he got in behind the wheel and backed the car down the long gravel driveway into the street.

Two bulldozers spouting blue smoke and diesel fumes idled in the front yard, waiting respectfully until the car was out of sight.

A Personal History of Scented Things

D. E. RITTERBUSCH

I grew up thinking no one could like the smell of banana bread, the brown, speckled fruit soft as baby food, a squishable pungency the equivalent of curdled milk. But there is room in the world for those who love the smell of rotting fruit, its less than heavenly scent while baking, the lift from the oven, its reverent placement on a cooling rack awaiting that first cut, the exquisite pleasure of rot. So be it. Live and let live.

A woman I once knew, a social worker, hated the smells of her clients' houses. Pine Sol was especially repellent combined with roach spray. She thought she brought the ugly odor home with her, that it resided in her car like a homeless woman holed up in a department store doorway for the night. Later I found out she hated Febreze. Perhaps she thought it masked something terrible, a family secret. Perhaps it conjured the lilac scent in the pillows of the elderly. She swore she would never live in a nursing home.

Perfumes exact their olfactory pleasures differently on different bodies, at different temperatures. An evening scent will offend in the strong warmth of the noonday sun. And yet I remember a woman on the Gulf of Siam, the heavenly scent of jasmine on her skin, her clothes, heavy in the sun, an Ariel lightness in the evening and in her bed clinging to pillows and sheets.

What happens next is anyone's guess. I know the sense of smell diminishes over time, and things are lost amidst the accumulation of so many other things, like memories piled daily on the day's before. My wife wants no more antiques, the smell of age undesirable, and I know there is no more room for any acquisitions, and so I hold onto the aversion, the antipathy, the psychopathology of banana bread repulsion and the warm brush of jasmine upon waking long ago.

The Wedding Speech

SIAMAK VOSSOUGH

“Now, there is a lot to be said about who is getting married, about the *people* who are getting married, but if you’re going to be serious about this thing, you’re going to have to talk about *what* is getting married as well.”

My brother was driving to pick up his suit. It was the day before his wedding to Lucy Hayes.

“A bright cold day in Seattle is marrying a bright cold day in Denver. Believe it, Sahar. That’s the only way to talk about it if you’re going to be serious. And I don’t just mean today. Whatever I would have been doing on a day like this in Seattle when I was a boy is marrying whatever she would have been doing on a day like this in Denver when she was a girl. Do you understand the significance of that? I would’ve come home on a day like this and said what’s for dinner, and she would’ve come home on a day like this and eaten an apple. Those moments are marrying each other. I don’t think they understand. They think it’s just the *people* marrying each other.”

He really loves her, I thought.

“That’s just the known moments. I don’t even know about all the unknown moments that are marrying each other. How are you supposed to fit all *those* into a wedding?”

“Dahlia?” I said.

“*Dahlia?*” my brother said. “Are you listening to what I’m saying?”

I liked hearing my brother talk about the moments marrying each other. I thought about someday marrying a boy who had an older brother who talked like that.

“They think a wedding can do that? They think a wedding can get at all the things that are marrying each other? It’s insulting.”

“Maybe it can get at some of them?”

“Some?” my brother said. “It would take a lifetime to get at them. It would take a lifetime to have any kind of a real wedding. Hold on a second.”

We stopped at the tailor’s and my brother went inside to get his suit.

“Another thing,” he said when he came back. “I don’t know why we’re limiting the guests to the people we know. If we’re serious about this, we should be inviting strangers. They know a thing or two about marriage, don’t they? If we’re honest about it, we should have something they’ll recognize too.”

“Which strangers would you invite?”

“All of them.”

“All of them?”

“All of the ones who don’t have plans tomorrow.”

When I listened to him, I could almost agree with him about all the strangers who didn’t have plans tomorrow coming to the wedding.

“I might have to tell them tomorrow. I might have to tell them that I appreciate their efforts, but that a real wedding requires all our lives and it requires everybody on earth. Everybody who doesn’t have plans. Although in all honesty the decent thing for them to do would be to break their plans and make some time for it.”

It was a very happy feeling driving home and thinking about the wedding that lasted our whole lives and invited everybody on earth. So I was surprised when I woke up in the middle of the night that night and suddenly felt afraid that my brother might bolt.

What if he bolted and everybody asked me if I knew anything about it and I had to say that he had said that it wasn't a real wedding because people weren't making time for all the moments that were marrying each other and because we weren't inviting any strangers, but that I hadn't taken any of it seriously? Everybody would blame me and Lucy Hayes would cry and she would try not to show that she was crying because of me but I would still know she was. I tried to go to sleep but it was no use. I got up and went to my brother's room. He was sleeping and I felt better. But through the night I kept listening for a sign that he might be getting out of bed to bolt. I even thought about what I would say. You're right Dara, I would say, it isn't a real wedding because they aren't talking about all the moments that are marrying each other. You're right that it would take a lifetime to get to all of those. But don't make Lucy Hayes cry. It's not a real wedding but marry her anyway. I started to feel sad and happy as I thought about what I would say, and I tried to stay awake to listen for him, but eventually I fell asleep.

In the morning I woke up and went to his room and he wasn't there, and I thought that maybe he really might have bolted, but I went to the kitchen and he was making eggs. I yawned like I hadn't been worried at all.

But the funny thing was I felt disappointed, like I still wanted to do something with the speech I'd planned in my head, and I guessed it was because if somebody is going to be angry at a wedding for not being the real thing because nobody is talking about all the moments that are marrying each other, then *somebody* should tell them that they're right, that they're right but that they should go to the wedding anyway.



Google Search

GRIFFITH KIMBALL

Google “what to have for dinner tonight.”

Quick chicken dinners. Quick beef and lamb dinners. Quick pork dinners. Quick vegetarian dinners. Quick soups and stews.

A quick 2.6 million results in a staggering 0.32 seconds.

SheKnows insightfully reminds me that “sometimes it feels like the fridge is exploding with options and other times it screams at you to just dial for a delivery rescue.” It wants me to take a quiz so it can offer suggestions, but I don’t actually want to know what to eat. I just want to stew about it and wallow in the unknown of my evening meal.

I find quite a few other quizzes to ignore. Bonappetit and Magiquiz both want me to input my information so they can spit out possibilities. If I actually wanted to know what to eat, I would have clicked on one of the lists of 100 dinners and scrolled through until I found one I knew my wife would like.

The 10th website that pops up drops an F bomb in the title. Not that I have much against swearing, as my intramural basketball team can attest, but selective swearing is definitely the way to go. Don’t waste an F word over dinner. Save it for a loud post-airball exclamation or a mumbled insult directed at the guy who cut you off in traffic.

* * *

Google “what happened on March 29th 1995.” That’s my birthday, of course. Why else would somebody look up a day 23 years ago? Tragedy? Boredom? My life is easy, and I have stuff to do.

Apparently Howard Stern premiered his radio show in Chicago on that day. His is the only name I recognize in the list of “notables.”

I was born on a Wednesday, the internet tells me. But I already knew that. While importing client information into my work's database, the birthday tool pops up a month-to-month calendar. Naturally, I put in my birthday and saw I was born on a Wednesday. Makes sense. I even did the same exercise with some of my friends and tied the days of the week into their personalities like a makeshift horoscope.

* * *

Google "list of phobias." The first result is the "ultimate list of phobias." Ultimate~ at the end of a process, final. Surely there are still phobias to come, aren't there? "Selfiephobia" (look it up, it's a thing) surely wasn't listed on "the ultimate list of phobias" ten years ago.

The number one fear is the fear of spiders, and the website tells me it is prevalent in four times as many women as men. Are polled men just trying to sound macho? Maybe. It might be true though. I always have to kill the spiders in my house, even though my wife's fear surely couldn't be classified as a phobia.

She also thinks snakes are cool, and I think they are sketch. Is she crazy?

The number 5 fear listed is "cynophobia," the fear of dogs. I have wanted a dog with an enthused fervor for years, and my wife doesn't care for them. When she was a young girl, her family went to stay with some relatives who had a huge black Great Dane. When her family arrived at the house, the relatives weren't home, and the dog was loud and mean. She tells me she didn't sleep that night as the only thing between her and the dog was a foot-tall "gate." He was big enough to eat her.

* * *

Google "does god exist." Everything that pops up is a ministry ad, a philosophy forum, or an atheist blogger. One of the first results is titled "Why Does God Exist?" I'm disappointed in the filtering. That is a totally separate, albeit related, question.

Bing “does God exist.”

I would never trust the internet—the ether, almost and internet trolls—to answer such a profound question for me anyways. Mormons are taught from a young age to pray and ask God about matters of spiritual inquiry: Does God exist? Does He love me? Is there a heaven? The hope is that we search out answers in our minds, in the scriptures, the process culminating in prayer that produces a spiritual experience powerful enough to be labelled “personal revelation.” When I tell my non-religious friends about it, they seem either amazed or skeptical that God answers prayers in such a concrete fashion.

“So what, he appears to you? You hear a voice?” Probably not. You *feel* something, or maybe you have a thought pop into your mind.

“How can you trust your feelings? What if it’s just in your head?” is what a brave friend once asked me. How do you defend a feeling that you know is real, distinct, *entirely separate* from yourself that could be so easily dismissed from the outside as self-fabricated?

Google “how to trust God.”

Bing “why should I trust google.”

Flammable Grudges

LUCILLE BELLUCCI

After 18 years, I was back in the Far East. Hong Kong lay a thousand miles away from Shanghai, where I was born. Not close, though still overwhelming as events later proved. In 1952 Shanghai had exiled me at the age of 18. There was a symmetry in those numbers. On checking in at the Hilton Hotel in Hong Kong I mentioned this to Renato, my husband.

Renato had had business in the Philippines, and from there it was just a hop to Hong Kong for a week's vacation. The place in 1970 bustled like a marketplace gone mad, nothing like it was when I first arrived there from Shanghai. Prosperity had hit hard. Women wore fashionable western clothes, accessories, and hairdos. Not a single cheongsam anywhere. I was excited about exploring the shops, this time as a visitor, not a refugee.

As soon as our luggage was settled, we went up to the rooftop restaurant for lunch, or *tiffin*, as I used to call it.

"Moro And His Twelve Violins?" I said to Renato. There they were, a relic of old Shanghai days, offering a swinging "Puttin' On the Ritz."

Hong Kong was still a British enclave, I noticed. Brits sat all around us, chatting and laughing. We had been to England several times, yet this felt different to me.

A man at the next table snapped his fingers and called "Boy!" at a Chinese waiter.

I frowned at Renato. "The good old days," I said, an edge to my tone. The British colonials had enjoyed a fine reign in Shanghai until World War II.

"Better British than Communists." He said. Renato knew my history intimately.

That was certainly true, but I had already begun feeling alien, thrown back to ancient frictions between occupier and the

occupied, although the British could not be compared to the Communists. They had been efficient administering their piece of Shanghai but so *superior*, reveling in their country club enclaves in China. My sister Maria had once been ordered, by a British matron, to get off the sidewalk to make room for her large family to walk through. We were Italian-Chinese Eurasians. The Eurasian children fathered by the Brits were kept under cover. In India they were simply ignored.

After lunch we strolled downtown Hong Kong. The goods offered in the stores rivaled any I had seen elsewhere. We were enjoying the sights. We came upon a Communist bookstore. Renato said, "Maybe I can get a copy of Mao's Little Red Book," so we went in. In the middle of all the modern luxuries flaunted outside, it was like walking into the past: the two salesgirls wore cotton Mao uniforms, butch haircuts, and cloth shoes. Again, this was 1970, before the Mao look was discarded. They looked startled to see me. Renato set to searching for Mao Tse-tung's dogmatic Little Red Book which was unavailable in the United States.

I wandered over to the rack of postcards. The salesgirls began whispering and giggling. Although I couldn't understand their dialect it was clear they were making fun of me. I had had this treatment in Shanghai and sometimes acquired a train of tormentors in the streets. "Look at the funny thing you get when you cross a foreign bastard with a Chinese!" was one of the cleaner curses. My mother told me, over and over, not to turn, speak, or especially, fight. My father was ill, and would soon die.

But here, in Hong Kong, after 18 years in other countries, I was no longer so meek. A slow heat had taken hold in my chest and I stood before the postcards, not seeing them while the whispering and giggling went on. I remembered my mother being forced to her knees to beg for her exit visa so she could accompany her family out of China. They derided her bound feet as symbols of a decadent history. She was useless, corrupt, better off dead. The Communist police told me the same things while

threatening execution. Oh yes--and they confiscated our assets so that we did go out into the world penniless and better off dead.

I grabbed a card off the rack and went over to the counter and held out a ten Hong Kong-dollar note. One of the girls picked it up then flung it back at me with a sneer.

The heat exploded through the top of my head. I grabbed a handful of books and flung them at the two. I said things, lots of things in English, *satisfying* things from my congested heart as I threw whatever else I could reach. The girls crouched down behind the counter covering their heads with their hands.

Renato reached me as I was pushing the cash register down onto them. He wrapped an arm around me and strode out of the store into the street, where I screamed and flailed and insisted he let me go back inside to kill those bitches.

There we were, on downtown Queen's Street, the center of attraction for hundreds of people who no doubt were curious as well as entertained.

Back at the hotel, after having me drink a calming cup of tea, Renato took me back to our room.

"Better now?" he asked.

"Of course. What's one attempt to kill somebody?" I managed a laugh.

I looked out the window. Fifteen floors below, on a lush green lawn, a cricket game was in progress.

"Look at those Brits in their sweet white cricket jerseys," I said. The edge was back in my voice.

Never slow to see the obvious, my good husband checked us out of the hotel that day and got a flight back home.

* * *

I am much older now. I suppose age brings forgiveness and healing. Are the fires within extinguished? I don't want to have to find out.



Author Profiles

Lucille Bellucci grew up in Shanghai and lived three years under Communist rule. She has written five novels, two story/essay/poetry collections, and has won 12 first-place awards. Her home now is in Oakland, CA, with her cat, Loaner.

Micki Blenkush lives in St. Cloud, MN and works as a social worker. She was selected as a 2017-2018 fellow in poetry for the Loft Literary Center's Mentor Series program and was a 2015 recipient of an Emerging Artist Grant awarded by the Central MN Arts Board. Her writing has appeared in a number of journals, including *Gyroscope Review*, *South 85 Review*, *Star 82 Review*, *Pittsburgh Poetry Review*, *Sequestrum*, and *Typishly*. More can be found at mickiblenkush.com

Randy Blythe lives in north Alabama. His collection, *The Human Part*, was published in 2014 by FutureCycle Press. His work has appeared most recently in *Alexandria Quarterly*, *Salt Hill*, and *Pleiades*.

Trent Busch grew up in rural West Virginia and has now lived Georgia for many years. His poems have appeared in *The Best American Poetry*, *Poetry*, *The Nation*, *Threepenny Review*, *North American Review*, *Chicago Review*, *Southern Review*, *Georgia Review*, *New England Review*, *Crazyhorse*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Northwest Review*, *Kenyon Review*, *American Scholar*, *Shenandoah*, and more recently in *Notre Dame Review*, *Evansville Review*, *Agni Online*, *Boston Review*, *Sou'wester*, *Poetry Daily*, *Natural Bridge*, and *The Hudson Review*. His poem "Edges of Roads" was the first Place winner of the 2016 Margaret Reid Poetry Prize, Published by Winning Writers. He owns a small place out in the country where he builds coffee tables, night tables, chests of drawers, and other items for the house from such woods as oak, walnut, cherry, and maple.

Susana H. Case is the author of six books of poetry (most recently, *Erasure, Syria*, Recto y Verso Editions, 2018 and *Drugstore Blue*, Five Oaks Press, 2017) as well as four chapbooks. One of her collections, *The Scottish Café*, from Slapering Hol Press, was re-released in a dual-language English-Polish version, *Kawiarnia Szkocka* by Opole University Press in Poland. Case is a Professor and Program Coordinator at the New York Institute of Technology in New York City.

John Chavers enjoys working as an artist and photographer. His work has appeared in *Cream City Review*, *Whitefish Review*, *JuxtaProse*, *Camas Magazine*, *The Healing Muse*, and *Glass Mountain*. This coming June, 2019, he will be a guest artist with The Association of Icelandic Visual Artists (SiM) at Seljavegur in Reykjavik.

George E. Clark is a college librarian during the week and a hospital security guard on Saturdays. He is a former columnist for *Environment Magazine*. His poetry has been published in *The Resource*, Harvard University's human resources newsletter; *Crucible* (Earlham College), and *Lines in the Landscape*, a juried chapbook published by Fruitlands Museum and the Concord Poetry Center. George studied geology at Earlham College, geography at The University of Chicago and Clark University, where he got his Ph.D., and library science at Simmons College.

Mary Crow has published three chapbooks of poetry, three full-length books, and five volumes of poetry translation. Her awards include poetry fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Colorado Council on the Arts as well as three Fulbrights. For 14 years, Mary served as Poet Laureate of Colorado. She is now retired from the faculty of Colorado State University's creative writing faculty. Many of her poems have been published in literary magazines including *American Poetry Review*, *New Madrid*, *A Public Space*, *Interim*, *Poet Lore*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Illuminations*, *Cimarron Review*, *Indianola Review*, *Wisconsin Review*, and *Tulane Review*.

Chris Ellery is the author of five collections of poetry, most recently *Canticles of the Body* (Resource Publications, 2018). He has received the X.J. Kennedy Award for Creative Nonfiction, the Alexander and Dora Raynes Poetry Prize, and the Betsy Colquitt Award. Ellery was a Fulbright professor in American literature at the University of Aleppo, Syria, 1999-2000. He is a member of the Texas Association of Creative Writing Teachers, Phi Kappa Phi, and the Texas Institute of Letters.

Elisabeth Farrell's work has appeared in *North American Review*, *The Fourth River*, *Wild Apples*, *Literary Mama*, *Sows Ear Poetry Review*, and elsewhere. Her chapbook, *Earlier Heaven*, was published by Finishing Line Press (August 2018). She has a Masters of Fine Arts in writing and literature from the Bennington Writing Seminars.

William French is a retired health care professional and professor emeritus. He has an MA in linguistics from Ohio State, where he also studied poetry and fiction. He has published nonfiction (mostly research-based), some poetry, and quite a bit of genre fiction.

Ken Gage is a new and heart-felt writer. He is a United States Navy veteran, career problem-solver, and a student at the National Wind Institute at Texas Tech University. An avid enthusiast and researcher, his hobbies are wide-ranging from hiking and writing poetry to 3D printing and applying chemistry to creating the optimal bread recipe. Ken lives in Lubbock, Texas, with his wife and son.

Robert René Galván, born in San Antonio, resides in New York City where he works as a professional musician and poet. He has taught at Manhattan College, The College of Mount Saint Vincent and the Brooklyn Conservatory of Music. His last collection of poems is entitled *Meteors*, published by Lux Nova Press. His poetry was recently featured in *Adelaide Literary Magazine*, *Right Hand Pointing* and will appear in the Fall 2018 issue of *Hawaii Review* and the Winter 2018 issue of *UU World*. He is a Shortlist Winner Nominee in the 2018 Adelaide Literary Award for Best Poem and will be published in the anthology.

Daniel Galvin is a 23 year old writer from Co.Cork, Ireland. His writing has been published or is forthcoming in *The Moth*, *The Rose* and *Ofi Press Mexico*. He came first place in the Spoken Word Platform at Cuirt International Literary Festival 2017, and the May 2017 Sunday Slam in Dublin. Daniel has been shortlisted for the Red Line Poetry Competition, 2018. He is currently working towards his first poetry collection.

Elton Glaser has published eight full-length collections of poems, most recently two books in 2013: *Translations from the Flesh* (Pittsburgh) and *The Law of Falling Bodies* (Arkansas).

B. N. Graves is a born-and-raised Texan, currently romping around the nation collecting stories and experience in a 1967 Avion truck camper. Her work has been published in *The Windward Review*, *West Texas Literary Review*, and *Storyteller*.

Stuart Gunter is working toward a Master's Degree in Mental Health Counseling and lives in Schuyler, Virginia. He likes to paddle the Rockfish River and play drums in obscure rock bands.

Raised in Lubbock, Texas, **Griffith Kimball** attended Texas Tech University to study music and philosophy. He graduated in May of 2018 as the highest ranking graduate from the J.T. and Margaret Talkington College of Visual and Performing Arts. Currently, he is pursuing a J.D. at BYU's J. Reuben Clark Law School and resides in Draper, Utah with his wife, Holly.

George Klawitter, retired from St. Edward's University, Austin, Texas, teaches literature and creative writing at Holy Cross College, Indiana. His poems have been printed in various journals including *The James White Review*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Poet Lore*, *Evergreen Chronicles*, *Milkweed*, and *Cumberland Poetry Review*. His first book of poetry, *Country Matters*, appeared in 2001. His book *Let Orpheus Take Your Hand* won the Gival Press Poetry Award in 2002. His sixth book of poetry, *Gareth*, appeared in 2014.

Timothy Krcmarik is a 12-year Lieutenant with the Austin Fire Department. He runs downtown on Engine 1 and lives in Austin, TX with his wife and son.

Jesse Millner's poems and prose have appeared in *The Florida Review*, *upstreet*, *Conte*, *West Texas Literary Review*, *River Styx*, *Pearl*, *The Prose Poem Project*, *Tinge*, *The New Poet*, *Cider Press Review*, *Real South*, *The Best American Poetry 2013* and other literary magazines. Jesse teaches writing courses at Florida Gulf Coast University in Fort Myers, Florida.

Benjamin Mueller lives and teaches in Ithaca, New York. His poems have appeared in *Washington Square Review*, *Valparaiso Poetry Review*, *Negative Capability*, *Two Hawks Quarterly*, *Split Rock Review*, *42 Opus*, and *Euphony*.

Jed Myers is author of *Watching the Perseids* (Sacramento Poetry Center Book Award), *The Marriage of Space and Time* (MoonPath Press, forthcoming), and three chapbooks, including *Dark's Channels* (Iron Horse Literary Review Chapbook Award). Recent poems appear in *Rattle*, *Poetry Northwest*, *The American Journal of Poetry*, *Southern Poetry Review*, and elsewhere. Jed is Poetry Editor for the journal *Bracken*.

Christopher Nielsen is a writer and photographer residing in California. He is currently working on a book of PhotoPoetry. He loves to travel the backroads and feels most at home in nature. Since the death of his wife of over thirty years he has written a number of poems that deal with loss, grief, love and hope.

Chicago's **J. Ray Paradiso**, a confessed outsider, is a recovering academic in the process of refreshing himself as an EXperimental writer and street photographer. His work has appeared in dozens of publications including *Chicago Quarterly Review*, *Storgy* and *Into the Void*. He works to fill temporal-spatial, psycho-social holes and, on good days, to enjoy the flow. All of his work is dedicated to his true love, sweet muse and bodyguard: Suzi Skoski Wosker Doski.

Mary Pritchard was born and raised in the Texas Panhandle town of Wellington, but has lived, with her husband and children, for many years in the Dallas area where she taught English in high school and, for the past 14 years, at Tarrant County College SE. She has written poetry since her teenage years but is now also working on a memoir. Her other interests include watercolor painting and photography.

Maria Riley, after working for almost a decade as a social media consultant, now solely focuses on her first loves: writing and photography. Her work has appeared in *New York Family Magazine* and *Toasted Cheese Literary Journal*. She is currently working on a memoir, *Falling Waters*. Maria posts her photo journey on Instagram @lifeofriley NYC.

D. E. Ritterbusch is the author of *Lessons Learned: Poetry of the Vietnam War and Its Aftermath* and *Far From the Temple of Heaven*. He was twice selected to be the Distinguished Visiting Professor in the Department of English & Fine Arts at the United States Air Force Academy. His creative work is currently being archived in the Department of Special Collections at La Salle University.

Kristen Vander-Plas was raised in Lubbock, Texas. She graduated from Texas Tech University School of Law and began experimenting with photography right out of law school. Kristen practices law in Lubbock.

Siamak Vossoughi is a writer living in San Francisco. He was born in Tehran and grew up in Seattle. His work has appeared in *Glimmer Train*, *Missouri Review*, *Kenyon Review*, and *Chattahoochee Review*. His collection, *Better Than War*, received a 2014 Flannery O'Connor Award for Short Fiction.

Sarah Brown Weitzman, a past National Endowment for the Arts Fellow in Poetry and Pushcart Prize nominee, was a Finalist in the Academy of American Poets' Walt Whitman First Book Award contest. She is widely published in hundreds of journals and anthologies including *New Ohio Review*, *North American Review*, *The Bellingham Review*, *Rattle*, *Mid-American Review*, *Poet Lore*, *Miramar*, *Spillway* and elsewhere. Her books are available from Amazon.

Gabriel Welsch writes fiction and poetry, and is the author of four collection of poems, the most recent of which is *The Four Horsepersons of a Disappointing Apocalypse* (Steel Toe Books, 2013). His work appears recently in *Moon City Review*, *Adroit Journal*, *Gulf Coast*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Chautauqua*, *Pembroke Review*, *Tahoma Literary Review*, and *Mid-American Review*. He lives in Huntingdon, Pennsylvania, with his family, works as vice president of strategic communications and marketing at Juniata College, and is an occasional teacher at the Chautauqua Writer's Center.

