

THE BEND

14TH EDITION

The Bend
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Managing Editor: Kimberly Swendson
Design & Layout: Kimberly Swendson
Copyediting: Daniel Uncapher, Kimberly Swendson
Cover Artwork: Jayne Marek

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This is the 2018 installment of the showcase for the work of alumni of the Creative Writing Program at the University of Notre Dame. This journal has previously been known as *Dánta*, *La Rue Barbarian*, and *The Rhubarbarian*.

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LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Dear Readers,

We are proud to present to you an eclectic showcase of the amazing work being generated by alumni of the Creative Writing Program at the University of Notre Dame. Each piece of visual art, prose, and poetry collected in this edition is a shining example of the legacy of this program and we are proud to have each included amongst these pages. We hope they delight and mesmerize you as well.

Sincerely,
The Editors

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"The Thought You Try to Catch"
By Jayne Marek

Photography

“20 Minutes of Action”
By Daniel Casey

That is a steep price to pay
for twenty minutes of stabbing,
for twenty minutes of choking,
for twenty minutes of shooting,
for twenty minutes of beating,
for twenty minutes of stealing,
of theft, of privilege, of getting away with it,
of *Because I can so why not?*,
of a father’s crocodile tears.

But, is it? Shave off a few months,
make it something that forever
alters where she can live, visit,
work, and how she will be able
to interact with people...
What you know as his father
is that you raised a rapist.

What I know as a man— you’ve made
my life less safe, made my friends and
family less safe, threatened the lives
of everyone I know and will
ever to know. You and your son
did it with the whitest of teeth
wet with red flesh caught in your maw.

Selections from *HIEROGLYPH*
By Thade Correa and Brandon Hursell

[1.]

Bright stars brilliant in late sky,
soundless breath of cold wind in trees.
Grit underfoot, the rotting wood glows
translucent. The raging breath of beings grinds
hateful wind. We squirm under the glass
of grand examination in bright lights
rubbing hands together to make an offering
to the gray sky, dance broken down
in joy over the dark that lets in
the brightness of autumn's elegy
buried now in earth, rising.

The stalking bone grounds, in enterprise,
do their part and bring their gifts.
They brought these rats in soaked grass
and placed them at stomping, strong, rubbery feet.
They taught us ceremony, placed it at the table
like this: a parade of wind, a bone poem,
drowned in time. The conflict made us strong,
we thought. It could have been yesterday,
felt indeed like yesterday's light on burned branches.
The wind wrote down our names.
We found we could not erase them.

In robes, in long robes of chains, he put down the names
of the dead and the dying. With deliberate strikes
he used one against the rest and slept tearful

in the chatter of entanglement. Botany, wedding gown,
recorded conversations warmed against our bodies.
It was like sand blown against the windowpane.
It was our bodies that drew down the cold;
it was the conversation of crows in cold trees,
voices lost in a swarm of silence.
It was still yesterday that all was not lost.
He shifts gears. He maybe speaks a little.
His voice breaks. All was not lost.

[2.]

A voice on the air announcing the end of the human heart.
A voice on the air announcing torture, bombings, heart-strings severed,
flayed bodies flying useless in the wind. A voice—

The lepers of Pompeii and the courtesans of El Dorado, sea-dream of
Atlantis
and our attendants back home, they all scream the same name. We are
thick
and rich in his becoming of flesh. Let it ring out through the reaches.

The dwellers in cities, the inhabitants of Shambhala with their bright
beards,
the tearstained faces of the forgotten, the birds in their sky-citadel,
all voices of all lovers in all directions, bells of crumbling churches,

All is a ringing now...

We are thick and rich in a sea of blood. We are thick and rich, laved-
over
by the sounds of hatred, the swords of paranoia, swollen with sweat and
steeped
in symphonies of chaos, carnivals, tempests, asleep in the coiled crevasse
of night.

But let it ring out, the bells of our dreams, the voice of brightening day,
in *this* time.

Let it ring out, the voices forgotten, lepers of Pompeii, courtesans of El
Dorado, sea-dreams
of Atlantis, city-dwellers, inhabitants of Shambhala, birds, lovers, bells...

Let the crevasse of night in which we shudder open to the stars.
Let the stars ring out. Let the voice of the bright wind tumbling across
the landscape,
the voice of trees arching into the sky ring out. Let it remember us.

[3.]

When morning comes, where will you find me, dear love made of copper and lead? In the brass tubs of your sprawling homes, in bleeding heat rashes, or in the icy dirt specimens and microscopic graves of Scotland Yard, please, find me wherever I shall be. With bony fingers and brittle tongues, where I am, I will calmly scream for you, my love. She pushes the iron handle of the cup and saucer and tea and cream in front of my face. It drags and catches on the surface of the table. I feel all pores in this place. With force like ancestors, this woman, my dear friend, launches into Friday night conversation. I believe it was Monday or Tuesday, a stranger still that pushed the ticket for my coffee to be paid. So anyway, dear friends, rattle down the Apocalypse! There is still time (before your final ceremony)! Travelers of Time and Space, my poor Disgraced Soldiers, your Lady calls upon you again and speaks sweetly of you in our conversation! (As men, we are vile and deranged, but we stand up and fight for our noble Queen just as we would stand up and fight for God)! Make us yours again and forgive us.

We must serve those that suffer the same afflictions as us, don't we?

[4.]

Let the warriors gather in white wind. Let the warriors without weapons
and without armor gather, tears welling in their eyes, tender,
trembling at the brink of day. Let the warriors gather, the warriors
without territory,

without a homeland, without anything but a voice and a human hand
outstretched,

Let the warriors of the human heart gather saying *merciful* saying *starlight*
saying *suffering of the silent majority* saying *how tender the tendrils of time in*
which we meet each other again

[5.]

And Atlantis shrugged her pretty blood onto thee. She places her hand onto the diner table and begins her exchanges, in international time codes, in international weeping codes. She tells me a story beyond in the mountain base, when she was not too young, and she could look up into her hot horizon and look into the snow peaks. For a moment, she could forget where she was and what she was becoming. We keep going into our evening tonight. It is an evening of bland memories of pain, seeking wet tongues to hold together in torture.

[6.]

We keep going into the evening to meet what will happen. Horizons stretch on. If only there was a moment for respite, a moment to keep from going “crazy.” It happened, you know, all the moments before with their appetites for destruction and death, humdrum hates lopping off limbs, mundanity of teeth chattering in the cold outside the house, sun gone down again and shadows spreading.

We keep going and snow peaks glisten still in the light. It’s not too far, somebody says, but the moment the voice hits my ear I imagine that the pool of blood from which we’ve been running contains no more bodies; they’ve all been carted away by explanations, rationalized beyond recognition. And I think in another’s voice, “You see, there’s no harm in this way of being, no harm in gaining from another’s destruction.” I keep thinking in another’s voice, “There’s no harm in beating the lowly into the ground, in oppressing the forgotten, in stepping on the heads of the lowest. It’s all about the bottom-line.” I keep thinking in another’s voice until I become that voice and see, in a startling moment of recognition, that my own heart lies bleeding in my own two hands.

[7.]

Atlantis weeps—

I can't look this world in the eyes, and I can't look away either.

[8.]

Begin the autobiographical accounts and extinction events of the feeble and pestilent one. Her speech, plain although it can be, presses on my soft skin like heavenly nightmares. Her bone-white cheek in gray slime reverberates in deep, unholy patterns as it tells me those long-forgotten formal rages, formal marches in her prison bench of a mind. Extending her finger, then her throbbing wrist to me, I want her in recording, the angel of death in hotline talk and petitions. The beasts are rising. The sheets are damp with firelight sweat. Everyone is calling up their arms. Where on earth have I gone, my faithful personae lagging in breached hallways, nearly lost to time? As the sun shines, she stands in me, dressed in ghostly-thin suits, in electric-thin skin. Every tongue that pours from her is a blood-debt, and every cell that splits, a bad omen. She kisses me goodbye and she is sad for me. I see it in her eyes and in the forced smile she makes. She plucks her keys from the hook as she exits and a day of night is begun. My work puts me to a shop table in the underbelly of this home. A place where fires are born and they go soaring out into life hissing and roaring on the backs of the mightiest, most furious molecules. A place where underneath the sooty lantern light of earth, little infernos, little holy torture is born and squeezed from the sweat-stained wombs of my skin and I am unleashed in every second of memory that rockets back to the gravity of this, our home, my stolen son. And he is alive now in the programs! And I am sending myself fast to work on him!

[9.]

I am sending myself now to work on him, my stolen son, my self,
to meet him where he comes, to meet him again and again in all persons
of all places of all divergences
of all white and brightening wings.

I will go to meet him, appearing now
as the suffering one, the outcast one,
the downtrodden one, the ignored one,
the one with blood on his lips, deprived of a voice.

I will meet myself again, look at my own eyes
staring back at me, meet him who is myself
appearing now as
the “fag” the “dyke” the “queer”
the “queen” the “trans” the “refugee”
the “third gender” “hijra” “two-spirit”
the “second sex”
the beat-black
beat-down
beat-up
beat-back
beat-blue beings
those in the garb of
the “disabled” the “leper” the “lame”
the “muslim” the “jew”
the “socialist” the
extremist cousin
of the first president of Atlantis
angry at the frogs
raining down from heaven the little darlings
who are so mistreating the rest of us

with their froggishness
hands raised in second hour,
asking to use the restroom!

I will meet myself again
as the “rich” the “poor” the “elitist” the “salt of the earth”
the “bookworm” and the “books”
the time-bound being torn and tremulous in the talons of time labeled
and labeled
and human frame forgotten
the “lovers” and the “sinners” and all the rest of the human saints
lighting the pantheon of the world!

[10.]

Abraham met me for drinks at the Deli. The power went out. There was a long, long, long, loud and heavy creaking of a door opening or closing. I cannot say for certain which one; there was no snap, click, or slam, just the heavy silence of rain on pastel lights and furniture, in the deep dark with deep, dark characters climbing all about it.

There was a short, sustained fire of thoughts in my body. They struck into me and left their way upon me.

They most certainly came from without my body and soul, and from within this unsettling and holy place.

One of many structures of the great land of our people.

If you could travel so far beyond this expansion that you could seek out the loneliest of footsteps, well, I hear whispers that that is the place of this phantom of ours. The one here tonight with me and Abraham, visiting us in our night caught up with strangers.

It is a rare development, but it is, like all else, repeated.

For my benefit, for my slumber, the wounding specter approaches from beyond all long and longest creaking doorways, in a night as energy-drunk as the full glory of the sun.

The dragging flesh and fabric of phantom approaches, a pregnant pause.

“Driving Down to Take My Mother’s Car Keys Away”
By Jessica Maich

What saves me from the berm and skidding into my own accident is to imagine hers, catastrophic in its scope of blame and guilt, plenty to go around, for not demanding she no longer drive before the tragedy we all knew was inevitable occurred. So, I accelerate towards a role reversal I cannot rehearse enough to master or even partially disguise my own embarrassment in performing.

She has no idea. Today is Tuesday and her bridge group usually fills this afternoon, but today, we, her three children, will arrive as disruptors of her life. And she will be surprised and pleased, seeing all her dear ones come through the door together, unaware that underneath our smiles, we carry a chopping block.

She,
of no driver’s license, once removed her father’s

untouchable Studebaker from its padlocked garage
while he napped, just to try it out. She, of the heavy foot
and natural competence, accident free all these years.
She, who loves her cars as living things and names them
over the years, Chippy, the Pod, and Big Blue
is completely unaware. And it is this moment
that pains me still, when she realizes that we,
who meant her no harm, would harm her that day.

“A Question for All Seasons”
By Jessica Maich

In the winter, when the Great Lakes
freeze along the shore, people lose
their minds and walk out as if oblivious
to the reality of shelf ice and pockets
of air, trapped, with sudden death below.

As if they could know which step is
sure-footed and which portends disaster
for them and all that love them, despite
their revealed lack of clear thinking. But
there they are, once again this January,

worrying anyone, like me, looking out
towards the thin blue line on the horizon
where the water still flows freely,
How will they get in from three hundred
yards out, walking mounds of sand

which froze in a wind-blown mid turn?
And is it my problem that they choose
to do this? Well, is it? Should I look away
from late October to early April,
when the sun regains her strength,

and no one can fall through the ice
because there is no ice? Should I look away
from this and every other place
where people chose to walk out blindly
on the sand's particles freezing in midair?

"Pantoum for Donald"
By Jessica Maich

The wolf is at the door...
Charlotte Perkins Gilman

He is wrong in so many ways, it's astounding.
All bells and whistles and lack of substance.
Here's our actual president, pity us,
tweeting in superlatives of very hot air.

All bells and whistles and lack of substance.
Mr. Bluster and us versus them and theirs.
Tweeting in superlatives of very hot air.
As Twain once said, "Truth is stranger than fiction."

Big bluster and us versus them and theirs.
Huffing and puffing and blowing things down.
As Twain once said, "Truth is stranger than fiction."
So, who will help us weather this storm

of huffing and puffing and blowing things down?
It seems like it's time to brick up the place.
For who will help us weather this storm
and his stance in the world, utterly defiant?

It seems like it's time to brick up the place,
for he is wrong in so many ways it's astounding.
Don't forget his stance in the world of utter defiance.
He's our actual president, pity us.

"Punchline"
By Elizabeth Smith-Meyer

God walks into a hospital room and tells us there are four boxes.
She uses her hands and moves them through air.
There's no substance for the boxes.
Box number one is unknown, always unknown.
You'll die without ever knowing.
Box number two is the cancer box.
It's malignant and many bad ends await inside.
This is when I stop breathing.
I didn't know there was a cancer box.
Viruses lie in wait in box number three although
 the box clutters against the shadow of God's revolving hands.
Box number four feeds your body with itself.
You can't see it coming because it's the worst-enemy scenario:
 first the stomach because the gut churns—
 then the unnecessary spleen—
 the out-of-the-way kidneys—
 and last, the heart, the humorless organ, the workhorse.
 Tired and long, it drinks the last draught of blood.
God pauses when finished. It's time for me to speak.
But I'm really bad at telling jokes.

"Days"

By Elizabeth Smith-Meyer

The last time we danced an old woman sat in the corner and smiled.
I remember a gramophone, its sleek golden horn like air.
The radio was playing and you said let me hold you before
you become a remembrance. You said the words under your breath.
A special broadcast reported peace in Burundi.
People cheered in the streets and there were firecrackers.
But this is not why we were dancing.
We danced when the storm broke and the
people on the ground spread their videos like picnic
blankets and feasted on fears as fitting the encumbered.
We heard of the guides stopping and waiting and
the exile of Prussian weightlifters.
They were so cold in their leotards.
Later that evening, the building faked its demise
and we watched as it fell. That was how they did it.
We were all in agreement. It was nice, that last dance.

"Come On"
By Elizabeth Smith-Meyer

In this time, you're chastised by an elf because there was no child.
He comes toward you now, tottering on shoes with bells that ring,
And you can't help but laugh because in some lands they'd never believe
the wild
Drown of words coming your way, accusations like the gnashing
mudsling
Of old that hastened madmen to their deaths in the wake of a roiling pit
Surrounded by barbed head-spikes and snarling white serpents that
smelled and hissed
And did their writhing coil in slow rivers around your feet, but this fire's
not lit;
There is no warmth, no care, as the gap-toothed elf jumps and croaks an
endless kiss
That's lost on you, who cannot be a woman. What right has he
To berate you so, to pretend as if spoken or thought words are never
right,
Finger-painting you as the gazing head-lighted doe, the beguiled minus
the self
Who hides its flesh under a profession of sin-less might.
Your time has come though you may not yet know
To strike, to speak, to shrug, or, simply, to go.

"According to Susan"
By Elizabeth Smith-Meyer

Your hieroglyphics slipped over space as particles of energy
and formed words at the flat edge of my universe.

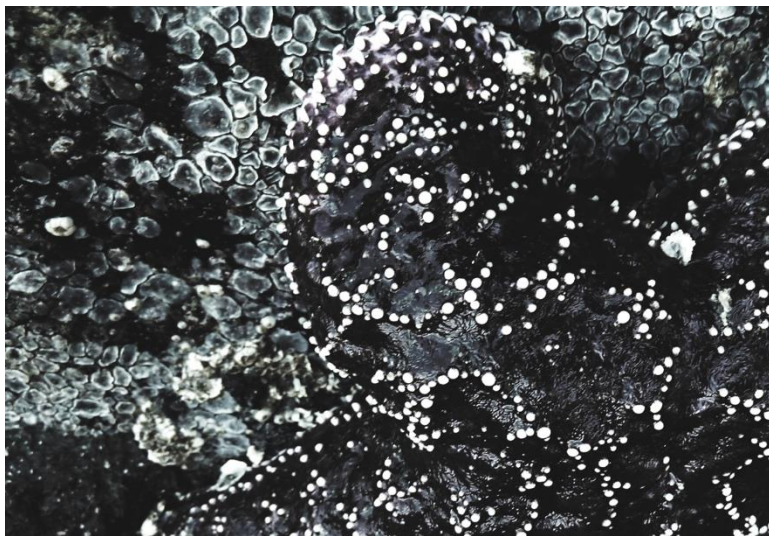
It was too much at first; we were so far apart for one thing,
you in your allotted zone and I in mine with the wheels

and snares still clanging around me. I told them to stop.
No, I didn't. I wanted to, but I was too tightly bound.

Facades, masks, Janus, rearranged calendars where now
Monday comes first and I missed your call because

where the pre-appointed space said Wednesday, the square
was actually under the sign of an ancient hammer.

And that's where I am now. Too numb to answer, too
on-track to go astray, too needy to give it back.



"Sea Star and Barnacle Cosmos"
By Jayne Marek

Photography

“What Remains From The Road” By John Crawford

Bathroom break on empty Route 3. Alaska. You pull over to the side of the road and piss into a snowstorm.

One day, when you leave the road behind, these moments remain. Moments, like the first time you drive through serious mountains, how you grip the wheel. Your friend from Utah sits in shotgun, amused.

Or in the French Quarter, your Louisiana friend says the key to driving across Bourbon Street is don't stop moving. You watch as he inches the car into the chaos.

Or Alaska again. Route 3, not a soul in sight. You can feel your car drifting. Ice. Slowly, you take your foot off the gas.

Such is your life for a time. You roam and ramble, launching every road trip with ceremony and music, pulling onto the highway and blasting “In a Big Country.” The song feels apropos somehow.

In Mitchell, South Dakota, home of the Corn Palace, bored kids cruise the main drag. You and Utah join in, feeling like you're in *American Graffiti*, a film that seems so quaint now. Harrison Ford in a cowboy hat and all that rock and roll, with the kids cruising to nowhere, burning gas, and looking so young.

You've been there. At nineteen, your buddy from high school picks you up, cranking “Rockin' in the Free World.” You have no particular place to go. It doesn't matter.

On the road, you live in the present. All that matters is the next gas, the next song on the radio, the next meal, the next stop. Thoughts of a sandwich can carry you for miles. Once, somewhere in the Sawtooth Mountains, you pull over, all of Idaho seemingly spread out before you. Taking it in, you dig out bread and peanut butter. Time for lunch.

You eat by yourself, see sites by yourself, sleep by yourself.

Sometimes Utah and Louisiana are with you, but friends can't always be found. Ride solo on long trips, and the passenger seat fills up with maps and brochures, CDs and snacks. Stop suddenly, and stuff slides to the floor.

At times by yourself, your mind goes clear. You feel like you could drive forever. The miles don't matter as you maintain radio silence. No music. No pundits or preachers. Just the white noise of wind, engine, and tires on asphalt.

Still, you are alone. By yourself, you travel light. You ride where you want. But to share the road with someone is better. The trick is finding the right person to ride shotgun.

In West Virginia, on your way together to a wedding, you listen to John Denver. "Take Me Home, Country Roads." She is your girlfriend now, not your wife. In Maine, always Maine, she knows the way. Offering to drive, she first buys coffee at a place that sells guns. Then she pops in a tape of cow punk and sings. Loud.

The next gas, the next song on the stereo, the next meal, the next stop. The road still holds an allure, but now you are pulled elsewhere.

Montana, the land immense and empty. On the straightaways, you step on the gas. She sleeps next to you, unaware that the odometer has hit 100.

You don't take such chances as you grow older, or at least not as many of them. You don't speed. You give others space. You're careful not to drift over white lines. Pass a wreck, and you think, there but for the grace of God go I.

On your last ramble, you are already married, settled. You feel sad leaving. As is tradition, you play "In a Big Country." Billboards blur by, advertising food, fireworks, and God.

Finally, the road runs out on you. You buy a house. You have a kid. The restlessness remains, but you're left to watch others, sitting in their parked cars, scrolling on phones, their engines running. Why aren't they going anywhere, you wonder.

When your Louisiana friend calls, you're making sure the chicken nuggets are cool. He's still out there, and as he tells you of his wanderings, you think of your old life and the places you've been. You think of the road.

“No Matter Where” By David Ewald

In the fall of 1997 I wrote what I thought was my first publishable story. I was nineteen then, a freshman in college, and had enrolled in a writing workshop led by an actual writer— a man who had, years earlier, published a couple of novels, one of which had been made into a mildly successful movie. I was intimidated by him. He was old— or what I thought was old at the time (he was 62). I had no idea going into the creative writing course that it would be the third-to-last one he would ever teach. His name was Max Schott. He would retire in the spring of 1998.

In the summer of 1997, a couple of weeks before I was to set foot for the first time on the University of California Santa Barbara campus, I got it together. I went to my local library. I sat down, alone, with only a pen and a spiral-bound notebook. I was going to write my first story for my first actual workshop.

It didn't take long. I was done in a day or two, three at most. The product: a ten-page (when typed) story I titled “Darkness Complete”. I was proud of it. I felt it would wow the workshop attendees, my peers and professor. I had nothing left to do with it except hold on to it until the first workshop.

On that first day, the professor got right to it. Toward the end of class, after students had introduced themselves and the syllabus had been covered, Mr. Schott asked if anyone had a story to turn in. This is how it would go— there would be no textbook. The textbook was our own work; we would learn from that. I did not hesitate to place my story in the growing pile at the end of the square-shaped seminar-style table arrangement. I even smiled at the instructor, who smiled back in his affable way. This was the clear winner, the standout story that would be heaped with the most praise. I couldn't wait. I spent the next several days

holed up in my dorm room, blocking out my roommate and his girlfriend with earplugs, taking it seriously. I avoided the advances of a girl, a senior at a nearby high school, in part because she was not yet seventeen and I was scared but also in part because I considered her a distraction. To succeed, I had to write. There was no way around it. To be a writer, I had to write.

I waited. The second class went by, then the third. I avoided the beach; I avoided much of the rest of what could have been my life. By the end of the third class, when it was apparent that my story still wouldn't be read, I felt much like my protagonist, desperation followed by realization. At the end of the fourth class, I panicked. I went up to Max. "Max," I said. "Can I call you 'Max'?" "Sure," he said, bemused. He had his head tilted to the side, and behind his glasses his eyes looked strained. He had seen a lot of the likes of me.

"I just noticed...you haven't read my story."

He looked at me, one corner of his mouth upturned. "I just don't think they'd like it," he said.

"Oh." My reaction was muted, considering my mental makeup at the time. It was as if I hadn't really heard him, or didn't want to hear him. "Okay," I said. I wanted to leave it at that. I wanted to get out of there. This was my first rejection, and I was running from it.

Max stayed me with his next words: "But don't give up. Write something else."

I didn't want the story back, but that's what I received, without any comments or feedback or line edits or changes of any kind. I read the story then, for the first time I really read it. "Darkness Complete" by David Ewald. A story, I saw then, with some internal cringing, that needed only the first sentence and the last sentence to be told. It was a joke, an idea, not a story. Just about all ten of the ten pages were filler, dragged out to an obvious conclusion. It *was* awful. I hated it. I vowed to write again.

I turned to what I knew: my past. Even though I feared waking up blind, I had never seen that fear realized, but I had experienced firsthand some pretty striking moments when I was young. I wrote about

one of those moments, when I was physically struck and my sister was watching. I titled it “A Child’s Mistake”. It was a moment— brief, three pages, as fictionalized as I felt I could make it. Compared to “Darkness Complete”, it was a success. Max read it the week after it was submitted, and although he had suggestions for changing some of the phrasing and figurative language, he ended his critique to the class with, “It’s affecting.”

I was more than encouraged. I was saved. The story was ready for publication.

In the fall of 1997, it was not so easy for a nineteen-year-old to find venues for publishing his work. I knew about *The New Yorker* and *Harper’s* and *The Atlantic*, sure. I’d be foolish to have tried any of those places. I was looking for something smaller—a lot smaller. Nearing December, I found it.

On the edge of campus, while bus-waiting, I peered into a kiosk and found a small stack of pamphlets, hand-stapled. I remember the look of the pamphlet well. It was thin. The copy was clean. I do not for the life of me remember the name of this literary journal; I do know it impressed me for the simple fact that it seemed inviting, open, a sure-thing for my first acceptance, my first publication.

On the final page of the pamphlet, or literary journal as I chose to see it, the publisher-editor confessed of his own publishing urges. He wrote of the surge in good feeling, the happy jolt he received whenever he saw a piece of his in print. He wanted others to have that same feeling. I was certain I would be one of those others.

The address was a p.o. box in downtown Santa Barbara. After sending off my submission (lacking, I would realize later and fret over, a cover letter), I waited. In that time December became January. I lost that high school girl, beauty that she was, went home for Christmas listening to The Verve’s “Bittersweet Symphony” in my father’s car picturing myself in the car as if the song was playing in the movie version of my life. Back at college the first week of January it was obvious the tension between my roommate and I had escalated to a critical point. I drifted during that time; I studied, I wrote. I waited for the acceptance in the

SASE I was sure I'd remembered to include. The acceptance never came.

I could have stopped there. I could have looked around, taken stock of how my life—not my writing—was going, and lived in order to write better. Was it any wonder I drew from my past for nearly every story and poem I wrote during undergrad?

Eventually I forgot about the place to which I'd first submitted. I forgot the name of the publisher-editor, the p.o. box number, the title of the publication and any details to any of the stories (at least one of which was the editor-publisher's own) therein. I, of course, lost the original pamphlet I'd picked up. I lost it all save for that sentiment expressed: the thrill of having something published, no matter where.

In graduate school my thesis adviser's advice was to "lead a literary life." Subscribe to at least one literary journal—*The Missouri Review* was mentioned, as was *Zyzzyva* and *Tin House*. The internet was not mentioned, but it was there, and in 2001 it was where we were headed, if not pulled. I see now I was pulling myself, really. In grad school and beyond, my days were spent increasingly on the computer, and that meant, at times to my misfortune, my time was also spent increasingly on the internet. I still wrote, but more and more now I found pages upon pages of distraction. I found information I might or might never use. I found photos that might or might not have damaged me irrevocably. And, of course, I found publications to which to submit.

I started out by approaching one of the few big names on the internet at the time: *McSweeney's Internet Tendency*. I was rejected. This happened a little over a year out of grad school, the recently minted MFA, the swagger, the bravado, the anger, the illusion slowly unraveled, the unpublished and unpublishable thesis. I was the same as I had been in the fall of 1997: alone, living by a new beach now, still not getting out much. Driving me each day at the notebook or the computer was that compulsion, a possible psychosis: the need to publish anything anywhere, it didn't matter what.

I wrote quickly, revised little, exchanged work with no one. I mailed, emailed. Rejection, rejection, rejection. I moved, and moved again. Finally, it happened.

In early December 2006, I received an email from Tom Dooley, managing editor of *Eclectica Magazine*, which at that point had been around for ten years. Mr. Dooley was writing to say he was accepting the piece that *McSweeney's* had passed on two years earlier.

I jumped in my seat at the news. Published! Published beyond the bubble of my own undergrad and grad school journals! Published legitimately at last!

The piece went live in early January 2007 as part of *Eclectica's* winter issue. It looked and read great. I was proud of it. I sent the link to as many as I could.

Since then I have published almost exclusively on the internet—albeit not necessarily by choice. With my success with *Eclectica* I began approaching more and more e-zines. Many of these rejected me, but some did not, and I began to build something of a publishing history. As I did, the ratio of print-only publication submissions to internet-only submissions flipped. I figured, deep down, that the print-only publications were unapproachable and always had been, whereas these internet sites were easy sells. I, to be honest, still could not wait, could not revise, could not *do the work*. In me, as always, was that need that the internet—and the idea of publishing on the internet—fed so well: the idea that publication could happen instantly, without much effort on my part, and I would get my name out there, didn't matter how. I had rediscovered that little publication I had first encountered on the UCSB campus back in the fall of 1997— I had rediscovered the idea of it, anyway. That approachability, that open-arms attitude, that sure thing, in-the-bag, slam dunk feeling. I could have that feeling again, and I have had that feeling, again and again, until now.

Where am I now? It's a question I need to ask. I remain proud of *Eclectica Magazine*. I serve as its nonfiction, travel and miscellany editor. We publish amazing work by amazing writers. Countless other internet-only publications do so as well. But I'll tell you why I've decided to limit my submissions to online-only publications to once or twice a year at most. It has to do with patience. It has always had to do with patience.

In the summer of 2013 a good friend of mine (and a great writer) traveled to Vilnius, capital of Lithuania, to attend a Summer Literary Seminar. There he met many other great writers and participated in workshops led by a *New York Times* bestselling novelist, an author whose work is in actual *print*. What my friend learned and experienced at this seminar, the feedback he received from this legitimate author and his fellow workshop members, later relayed to me, opened my eyes to the reality of writing and publishing, and the levels to which we do or do not aspire. My friend has published online with some reputable venues, among them *HTML Giant* and *DIAGRAM*, but what he learned at the seminar in Vilnius was that he was not doing the work, and I, by extension, was not doing the work either. By “doing the work” I mean revising— not polishing, but honest-to-goodness *revising*; killing our darlings, making those hard revisions that in turn make the work not only better but print-quality publishable. I had in fact *never* been doing the work. I had completed three novels, two screenplays, three full-length stage plays, many shorter pieces of prose, poetry and drama both published and unpublished, but in nearly all of it I had not really put in the work required to take my writing to the top— the top meaning the agent, the book deal, the publishing contract, the door open to the dialogue with *an editor*, the assurance that my work would be on the shelf and not just on the screen.

I am beginning to see something wrong with the screen. I write this having lived a good part of my writing life on the screen. I have worked on the screen, made money from the screen.

And now it's time to get off it.

Not completely, never completely. I still serve as an editor for *Eclectica*, and I believe if I were not to have that position I would suffer a great blow. But I have learned a great deal from the submissions I have seen. I see now what editors surely saw in my own work: that lack of patience, that need to just sit on it, wait, and revisit the writing with a refreshed mind and sharper eyes. I see submissions that are just plain not good, but I see others that could have been ready if they had been given more time, if they had received any sort of feedback prior to the

submission, if *the work* had been done on them. I am certain my own pieces I have seen rejected over the years could be written about in this same way by an editor of another publication. I am certain that the pieces I have had published could be written about in this manner as well.

I go back to the fall of 1997 and the feel of that pamphlet, the poor man's literary magazine, in my hands. I think of Max Schott and the books he's published, now out of print but able to be found in a library or on someone's shelf, somewhere, picked up, passed around, nonetheless. I think of the e-book self-publication rage to which I briefly fell victim, the madness it caused in my marriage and in my mind for over a year before I finally gave up and admitted to myself that I should have waited, I should have waited, I always should have just waited and done the work.

I will wait. I will do the work now. It's time to open up a dialogue, an exchange of ideas with people who know what they're doing and who know who a writer's readers are and could be, instead of rushing to send words out into the ether. No more rush. No more impatience. No more feelings of inadequacy brought about by age or envy. Just: no more. I know my place now.

“Coursing” By C. Kubasta

Emily was running late to dinner, but only had two cigarettes and knew she'd need more. Her brother's house was another fifteen miles into the dark. She pulled in to the corner gas station at the edge of the small town she grew up in. It used to be a Citgo, then maybe a BP, now it was a no-name station, but had a hand-lettered sign for registering deer. Only one pump appeared to be functioning. A sad car was parked there, running, sputtering, mismatched side panels and visible Bondo. She went inside. There was a small counter and two dimly-lit aisles that angled toward the back of the convenience store. When the small brass bell made its noise, the man behind the counter stood up.

“Pack of Marb Silvers short,” she said. He smiled, meth teeth.

“Credit or debit?”

“Credit.” She swiped her card. He took her in: her coat, bag, her sleek hair and lipstick.

“Can I see your card?” He smiled again. She handed it over.

“Are you related to the Pawlosky's around here?”

“My family,” she said. He said her last name differently than she did, the way her family still did: extra weight on the second syllable, spreading each vowel. He was still looking at her. “I was born here,” she continued, to appease him.

“You know Terney?” he asked, dubious.

“My brother.”

“You're Terney's little sister?” He sounded incredulous. He took a half-step back, looked her up and down, slow.

“I don't need the receipt.” She put her hand out for her card, signed the store receipt he nudged toward her. “Have a nice Thanksgiving...” she said as she turned, and heard him snort a laugh, heard the bell tell her departure. At the gas pump outside, the junk car

was still running its rough rhythm, its driver alongside, dressed in blood-stained flannel and jeans.

At her brother's, they had tacos—ground beef and chicken, a choice of flour tortillas or hard shells. Her sister-in-law made flan for dessert. Her nephews and nieces played with the dog and cat, ran down the long hallway, alternated between board games and video games. After dinner, they all ended up back in town, at the bowling alley for drinks. The holiday didn't officially begin until tomorrow, so that night they ran into locals and people back in town visiting family. Emily saw people she knew from high school, people she was supposed to know from childhood—someone who had taught her swimming lessons as a girl, someone who babysat her, someone whose siblings she'd been in school with. Some faces she couldn't place, but pretended she did.

And if there was blood beneath any fingernails, it was only from the work done in the shed in the lengthening afternoon light; in the cold the meat would keep, and the next day or the next, they'd drop the kill off at the processors. With some people, Emily did the conversational dance of figuring out who they knew in common—cousins & classmates & former spouses, until they hit on some tangential connection, enough to sustain a half a beer, or a cigarette out in the cold night air, next to the flower pot filled with butts and trash.

She lived two hours away; not far, but sometimes it seemed like another world. Things were eerily familiar, as if she'd never left. Things were completely different, as if she was fundamentally unhomed. The grocery store had a peculiar smell, as if it hadn't been sufficiently disinfected. She noticed this when her stepmother sent her out for more butter. The side streets were uncurbed, so the barrier between yard and street was ungoverned, colonized by non-running cars and children's toys of yellowing plastic. She slept on the pull-out couch, and woke early to wan morning light, unsure of where she was, her niece poking her forehead with a plump finger, asking her for the WiFi password.

That afternoon, riding in the back of her parents' car to the extended family Thanksgiving dinner, she watched out the side window

as the rows of carefully-planted woodlots flickered past. The hunt had begun last weekend, and they'd passed pickups with deer loaded in their beds, mouths open and tongues lolling out. Partially field-dressed. For hunters who hadn't had luck, the holiday provided mandatory time-off to try again. Here and there, Emily saw cars and trucks pulled into side roads, the edges of fields, bottomed out in ditches, or just beyond the shoulder; from there, they would have walked in to tree stands and blinds. It was a mild fall, just a hint of frost in the morning. When they were leaving the bowling alley the night before, the first accumulating snow had begun to fall.

By morning, it had mostly burned off the roads, but in the woods, there'd still be a slight coating of white on the ground, lacing leaves. Good for tracking. As the woods with their straight leafless trunks passed by, her head leaning against the car window, she saw a hunter walking. Maybe he was on a trail. Maybe he was flushing quarry. There may have been others, working in concert with him, walking a narrowing triangle, moving animals to a point where they could be more easily taken and tagged. Maybe he was onto something he'd already hit, following a spatter of blood on the crystalline white, watching where and how the crimson feathered out— guessing how long it had been since the warm wet fell. Guessing how long since the prey, wounded and in pain, had passed this way. For a brief second, Emily saw his concentration: his sharp shoulders, the forward-jutted chin, the gun in his hand, his steady feet.

She kept watching out the window. It seemed like only a few frames further. Maybe five hundred feet. She saw her: a woman, running. An open rust-colored coat. One shoe. One bare foot. Behind her, a flutter of fabric, torn and trailing. The woman staggered and tripped, hands reaching out, touching tree trunk after tree trunk as she scrambled.

Emily blinked, came to. She sat up straight, "Dad?"

"We're almost to town," her father answered. He was driving and dusk was setting in, the headlights stretching long onto the two-lane country road in front of them.

“Dad, I...” Emily looked out the side window again, but couldn’t see the woman. She swung around in her seat.

“What is it, honey?” Her father’s voice tinged with concern, and her stepmother turned from the front seat to look at her. Emily looked at her, her father’s second wife. These last few years, Emily had begun to warm to her. Through her father’s cancer scares, Emily’s separation from her fiancée, and her brother’s legal troubles, her stepmother had been a constant— calling and checking in, keeping them all connected, signing off every group email and text with “Love” even when unnecessary. It had gotten to the point where Emily had begun to believe it.

“I— nothing... Nothing.”

“You OK?” her stepmother asked. There were no cars behind them, no headlights to bounce their light up into her eyes, but Emily thought she saw a little caught glare, a little wetness. At her aunt and uncle’s house, the windows would be steamed from all the food coming in and out of the oven and refrigerator, all the mouths opening and closing, the door letting in brothers and sisters and parents and cousins—cousins Emily hadn’t seen since they were kids. There’d be second cousins and third cousins and cousins removed several times, by distance & divorce. On the table, the turkey skin would glisten, the watered top of the green bean casserole, and three different kinds of cranberry sauce, one bearing the imprint of the can it came in, no matter how her aunt tried to disguise its origin. “Emily...?” Her stepmother was still looking at her.

“Yeah, I just...” she looked out the side window again, “Can we stop at the gas station?”

At the counter, the same clerk was there but didn’t seem to recognize her. He smiled at her with his darkened disappearing teeth, but didn’t ask to see her card. After getting her cigarettes, she turned around, and saw her: the woman in the rust coat. On her feet were two laced up work boots, and above the boots wool socks, and above the socks a shock of pale winter skin before delicate floral fabric and lace. Emily stumbled forward and the woman reached out to steady her,

holding her up with her calloused, sturdy hands.

Emily didn't know her, but muscle leans into memory. The curve on County GG where she'd lost control in high school— the curve insufficiently graded, no shoulder, the pine boughs' branching shade that always left a little ice a little too long. Ever since, she knew to brake before it, even though no yellow sign urged caution. The woman's nails were torn jagged, pressure pinked the half-moons, and the nail beds were stained a dark and dirty brown that could be dried blood. Emily caught and held the woman's stare, her glittering animal eyes.

“Tiger, Tiger” By Alan Lindsay

A fire through the trees, spikes of flame like a bouquet of swords or some giant’s ragged weapon shooting higher than the people laughing around it, neither raging nor contained. The crooked stalks of the saplings scored the blaze standing out so starkly from the darkness. It never gets dark enough in Florida for that to happen. But she remembered seeing it—that time when she was lost in the woods. She’d stayed out too late; she’d been kicking and clawing at the decayed stump of a pine, watching the ants scramble with their babies in their arms, and when the sun went down she didn’t know where she was. She was going to yell. Someone would find her if she yelled. Of course they would. They’d grab her arm until it hurt and they’d say, “You listen to me. You know you’re not supposed to be outside after dark. You know that. Do you understand me? You know that. What am I doing to do with you?” A burning slap across her face. It was her fault for getting lost. But if she yelled...

Then she saw the fire. Maybe it was a holiday, maybe just summer. Someone had a bonfire and she just walked toward it and she was out of the woods just like that. They recognized her. They called her parents. They brought her home in a pickup truck with a bench seat.

It was beautiful. The image had lain dormant in her brain for years. It flared back when she saw the tiger, at dusk, moving through the shrubs and the saplings that marked the edge of the compound, cautiously, low to the ground, placing one paw silently in front of the other. She froze. It was not one of their tigers. She tried to feel the direction of the wind, tried to become invisible against the dark red trailer. This must be the one they were looking for, the animal that had escaped from that illegal lab. Not a tame tiger. Not a retired circus tiger. She kept her eyes on the shifting form. Don’t run, Steph. When you

run, you're food. It stared in her direction. Not that any of them were really tame, not even the ones in the circus. Well-fed and familiar, they could seem tame at times.

The animal continued to pace, but it broke its stare as though it had not seen her. It looked away. She took a careful step back. If she were still with the circus, she might have a prod with her. Not that it would do much against a charging tiger. And this was a large one, a male Bengal she guessed, eight or nine feet long, upwards of 500 pounds. Still, it was just an animal. Every animal has a built-in flight mechanism. How else could you train tigers? She'd seen it often enough. Even an elephant avoids a mouse. And even a tiger can be wary of its prey. If she had her prod she might try to maneuver it, assume the dominant pose: a wide stance, a deep authoritative voice. Maybe she could even lure it toward the enclosure. But there was no prod and no whip and no meat but her own flesh. And no one was around. *Get yourself to safety, girl.* The tiger's eyes shifted back to her. She froze. It turned away, pacing. The door to the trailer was just a few feet behind her. She took a step. It stopped. It locked its eyes on her. She could scream. It wouldn't draw help, but it might scare the thing. Let it hunt some other unsuspecting victim. But it didn't move, so she didn't move.

As soon as it looked away or charged, she'd go for the door.

How had it found its way here? Had it smelled their cats from miles away? Of course not. Had the authorities somehow herded it here? Perhaps they'd caught it and they were bringing it here and it had escaped again? This is where you would bring a stray tiger. Or should. But she hadn't heard that they'd caught it. Or was this then just one of those extraordinary cosmic coincidences, like running into a childhood friend in an airport in China?

She couldn't wait. She took another step toward the door. If the tiger went into its crouch, that would be the sign for her to bolt. It didn't. It straightened itself up. It shook its head—and not like a cat shaking off flies, but slowly, like a human saying “no.” She'd never seen a tiger do that. She took another step. The tiger charged. She bolted. Before she could get her hand to the knob, the beast was upon her, its hot breath on her neck. She was pinned against the door, her lungs

compressed, unable to make a sound. The tiger's teeth at her nape. It raised its muzzle to the side of her head. She felt it wet and warm on her ear—its breath, its tongue, and a low, growled whisper. "Help me."

And then it fell off her. Steph sank, quivering, weeping, sweating everywhere—her hair was soaked. High, horrid, animal sounds trembled from her lips. She pushed her hair from her forehead. Had it been shot? Was there someone with a tranquilizer gun about to come and rescue her? She hadn't heard a shot. And the tiger was fine. It was pacing again, just feet away, its eyes on her. Vigilant. Wiping the snot from her lips with her hand, she pulled in as much air as she could. What as she afraid of? She knew tigers as well as anyone. Exhaling slow and steady, she ordered her trembling legs to stand, and they stood. Okay. There was no point reaching for the door. It would strike like a snake.

Standing, she stared as hard as she could bring herself to stare at the burning eyes of the tiger. And with wrinkled lips she growled, "Don't do that again."

The tiger fell to the ground and sat like a sphynx. Okay.

It was trained. It didn't eat people. Except on the news, it said it had attacked, that it had killed someone. It must have been provoked. So don't provoke it. It must have eaten since. Okay. If it didn't see people as prey, she could control it.

Again, she breathed. What had just happened? Why would a tiger bolt like that, pin her to the door, then back away? And why had she thought its growl had sounded like words?

"You're trained. You *are* trained." Her voice was shaky.

The tiger stared. These cats are at least as smart as dogs. She breathed deep to get control. She stood as tall as she could and spoke loud and deep. "Up," she said. The sound wouldn't have fooled a human, but perhaps...

The tiger rose languidly, like a resigned child who has been told to stand so her parents can give her a good slap across the face. Its body communicated calm—except for the tail. The tail was twitching. And then the ears were raised and shifted like little radio receivers looking for

a signal. But the body sloped, the eyes stared at her feet. It almost seemed as though it was pretending to be calm. She had never seen anything like it.

“You understand commands.”

The tiger narrowed its eyes and shook its head—as though it were saying “no.”

“What did they do to you?”

The tiger slowly raised its head and nodded once, as though it were giving her a command. It looked like the gesture of a person trying to tip someone off without others seeing—tell them which card to choose, which door to open, which move to make. It was telling her not to panic, that it didn’t mean her any harm. Tigers are smart—but they’re not that smart. It approached slowly, head low, until it was directly in front of her, almost close enough to touch. As she reached out it slowly lowered its head away from her fingers. It lowered its body to ground and laid its head flat. She sat down beside it. It put its head in her lap, like a unicorn drawn to a virgin. She scratched it and breathed.

“So, you’re the killer,” she said.

This was a well-fed animal. It was still fairly young, maybe ten years old. The obvious thing to do was to get it into the tiger enclosure and call the police. But how would she do that? She pulled herself out from under the weight of its head. And the tiger rubbed its head like a tabby on her hip—leaving its scent, claiming her. But it seemed almost to be directing her—pushing her to walk in the direction she wanted to go, toward the tiger enclosure. She walked; it followed. It was getting dark outside. The tiger stood at the gate as she, surprised to see her hands shaking still, undid the padlock and opened the door. The other tigers, hearing the noise, started to growl and move about. The tiger at her hip bolted in as soon as the door was open, then, just steps inside, stopped and strolled. Its flaming coat caught the last of the sunlight as it headed for the darkest part of the enclosure.

“The Party House” By Stuart Ross

The party house is uninterested in making itself look like a party house. It did not put a magazine there, nor place a bowl of mixed nuts on the Goodwill table. But the party house does have a thing for owls, French films on a muted TV, and a thumbtacked poster of a unified Vietnam in its only bathroom.

The party house appreciates a broken nose. The party house owns an Israeli. Her eyes pop like two blueberries in a tomato soup. She starts a band in this room. She skips the John songs but not the Yoko tunes. You’ve got to scream pretty loud about Israel to scream louder about Israel than she can.

The party house hasn’t been this active since fest. The Party House is not above capitalizing itself in a fwd: fwd: fwd: John’s Bail Fund (urgent). The party house needs a break for a night or two. At the party house, we all look like someone from the airport. There’s no such thing as short-term memory or long-term memory— everything happens this instant. When the party house is president, all will receive ponies.

At the party house partygoers disappeared, reappeared, made plans to go somewhere and then lost each other, searched for others and found new others a few feet away from their better selves. The party house would offer the 50-cent tour, but then it would have to claw your eyes out.

The party house is a game designer drawing tic-tac-toe boards in the desert with a sea-parting staff. The party house is a bunch of great lines that don’t add up to much. The party house owns an Italian ferryman. He’s obsessed with dogs and can stop the universe with his tongue. Most

life is black and white, but the party house lives in color. You can see it from across the street or by knocking on its nervous door.

The party house smothers an unavailable or out-of-print version of this party house. It is of the last generation that really mattered. The party house used to dream about you, now it dreams about telling you it dreams about you. The hunger of love subsides, but there must always be another party. The rapper has the beat, the actor the camera, the artist the canvas, but all the party house has is you.

The party is over. Seems like people actually pay rent to live here. Later that night they're running skinny pancakes through microwaved cream cheese. A rather droll episode of *Frasier*, a bathroom sign that says don't even think about it. Who isn't religious, if by that you mean sanctimonious. The wet spot on the divan is still kind of wet, and leisure arrives like a maid.



"Branch and Hollow"
By Jayne Marek

Photography

CONTRIBUTORS

DANIEL CASEY (2003) - Daniel Casey has a MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Notre Dame. His poems and reviews have appeared in *The Rise Up Review*, *Tuck Magazine*, *Waxing & Waning*, *Heavy Feather Review*, *Tupelo Quarterly*, and *JMWW Journal*. He lives in Murray, Kentucky.

THADE CORREA (2013) with BRANDON HURSELL - Thade Correa hails from Northwest Indiana. He received his B.A. from Indiana University, his M.A. from the University of Chicago, and his M.F.A. from the University of Notre Dame. His poetry, translations, and essays have appeared in various venues, including *The Ostrich Review*, *Actuary Lit*, *Prime Number*, *RHINO*, *Asymptote*, *Paragraphiti*, *Ibbetson Street*, *The Aureorean*, and *Modern Haiku*. In 2012, a collection of his poetry garnered him an Academy of American Poets Prize. A composer and pianist as well as a writer, he currently publishes his music with Alliance Publications. Currently, he works as a teacher of both writing and music.

Brandon Hursell was born February 6, 1982 in Northwest Indiana, where he currently resides with his wife and their dogs and cats. He has self-published a number of books of poetry, including *HARDWARE AFTER HOURS* (available through Amazon) and a novel entitled *TREACHERY* (archived on WritingRaw.com). Brandon is currently studying Accounting at Western Governors University.

JOHN CRAWFORD (2001) - John Crawford received his MFA in prose from the University of Notre Dame in 2001. His work has appeared in *Threepenny Review*, *Word Riot*, *Philadelphia Stories*, and *Bull* as well as *The Bend*.

DAVID EWALD (2003) - David Ewald's work has appeared in Spork Press, Metazen, Eclectica, Halfway Down the Stairs, Serving House Journal, BULL: Men's Fiction, and elsewhere. His chapbook, Markson's Pier (co-authored with Stuart Ross), was published in Volume XI of Essays & Fictions. He serves as Nonfiction, Travel and Miscellany Editor for Eclectica Magazine and lives in California.

C. KUBASTA (2003) - C. Kubasta writes poetry, prose and hybrid forms. She is the author of two chapbooks, the full-length poetry collections, All Beautiful & Useless (BlazeVOX, 2015) and Of Covenants (Whitepoint, 2017) and a novella Girling (Brain Mill, 2017). She is active with the Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets, and serves as Assistant Poetry editor with Brain Mill Press. Find her at www.ckubasta.com and follow her @CKubastathePoet

ALAN LINDSAY (1991) - Alan Lindsay still works and writes in New Hampshire. He's wondering: In the long run is Crispr more promising/dangerous than AI?

JESSICA MAICH (1997) - Jessica Maich received her MFA in poetry from the Notre Dame Creative Writing program in 1997.

JAYNE MAREK (2005) - Jayne Marek's poems and art photos appear in publications such as The Cortland Review, Lunch Ticket, Bunbury Magazine, Amsterdam Quarterly, Women's Studies Quarterly, Sin Fronteras / Writers Without Borders, Notre Dame Review, 3Elements, Watershed Review, Sliver of Stone, Camas, and elsewhere. She has provided color cover art for Silk Road, Bombay Gin, and The Bend, as well as for her two full-length poetry books, In and Out of Rough Water (Kelsay Books, 2017) and The Tree Surgeon Dreams of Bowling (Finishing Line, 2018).

STUART ROSS (2003) - Stuart Ross is a writer living in Chicago. His novel *Jenny in Corona* is forthcoming this summer from Eyewear. See more at stuartmross.com

ELIZABETH SMITH-MEYER (2000) - Elizabeth Smith-Meyer received her MFA in prose from the University of Notre Dame in 2000. Currently, she teaches literature and creative writing from 5th to 12th grade at The Academic Conservatory at Project Ballet. As always, she spends what time she has left after grading working on her own writing.