The Hiram Poetry Review
THE HIRAM POETRY REVIEW

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THE HIRAM POETRY REVIEW

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EDITOR’S NOTE

This issue’s cover gives us the chance to consider the interests and talents of the HPR’s founder, Hale Chatfield, who explored the possibilities between computers and poetry. One issue of the HPR (issue 62) was issued in CD-Rom format. The cover of this issue shows a screen shot of Hale working on one of his poems, “The Famous Dog Explosion.” While CD-Roms have gone the way of the eight track tape, Hale had a keen sense that the future technologies would enhance our experience with poetry. In addition to technology, Chatfield also cultivated connections with prison writers. With that in mind, I’d like to draw special attention to Kenneth Greenwood’s poem, Special Housing Unit.

Charles Parsons, who has contributed reviews to us before, is now officially reviewer-in-residence. He has forgotten more about the HPR than I will ever know. Please enjoy his review of Christian Wiman’s book.

I’d also like to welcome Seiji Bessho to our staff. Seiji’s work has helped the HPR streamline all facets of the editorial process.

Willard Greenwood
Editor, HPR
Daniele Hanson

I Can’t Get Satan Off My Answering Machine

His voice lingers for days after I erase each message, as if waiting for him to retrieve it but he always stands it up. He tried once a rendezvous by becoming a neighborhood cat sneaking in through a hole in the screen but I set my German Shepherd on him, even though they were old friends from their war days. Since then it’s been incessant calls.

At first he claimed the urgency had something to do with my past life as a hangman, the great Eduardo of North Ellington who executed the governor for treason. He mentioned something about a pension. However, Beelzebub got the records mixed up again. He always was absent-minded, once he confused Jack the Ripper with John the Baptist—Heaven still can’t explain the body parts in the streets. But this time Beelzebub really messed up.

I wasn’t Eduardo, in fact, I murdered him. I was the governor’s guardian angel. Besides, Eduardo smelled like artichokes, reason enough to kill him. I know the real reason Satan wants to find me. I once owned him; he was my pet duck. Why else would the duck have given me those smiles?

He knew my five-year-old mind, we were one. That’s why he was sent to the farm and eaten by an angelic snake. He was lucky; my other childhood pet was a rabbit named Cinnamon. We ate him for dinner one night. He tasted more like chicken than his name. I never tasted Satan but my assassin told me he was delicious. He sounded almost tasty enough to return his call. He mentioned wanting to become mine again. But his persistence is annoying, to say the least. As a duck, he would follow me down the hill of our yard as quickly as possible with his anti-evolutionary legs; he could never keep up. It may not
be his fault entirely; ducks follow the first movement they see. They did studies once and had ducks following cats, roaches, even perpetually moving electric trains.

But Satan wasn’t just any duck. He hated water. Ever since the time I teased him by blessing it he was terrified to swim. He still followed me though.

The other day he called to remind me of the time we scared the children trick-or-treating. He nibbled their toes while I screamed at them about the apocalypse. I was wearing all white with wings. He told me I looked ravishing and laughed as I told him how I stole the wings from Gabriel, leaving him stripped for all Heaven to see. I didn’t tell him the truth—I earned the wings by promising favors.

I won’t mention the other one, the one which made Gabriel smile, but the snake was just my servant.
I saw a documentary on killer whales
that kill their trainers
at marine parks
and remembered
how I would put food in a box at the grocery store
hoist it on my shoulder
then walk around the cash registers, and out the front door
to picnic in the parking lot
on the tailgate of my stolen station wagon.
Michael Biehl

Sex Organ

It comes to see us, again and again, 
now ghost, now frog, now in mien of man, 
and has a famous name: Anyone.

Can be as functional as a grocery cart, 
or precious, touchy as an *objet d'art*, 
that if unadmired sulks, feeling hurt.

Fidel Castro has one in Cuba. 
It's common among sousaphones and tubas, 
and dances the juba during the Missa Luba.*

Basically, it's a type of pooka. 
In Swiss forests it appears as a cuckoo, 
in Turkey as a prizèd hookah. 

Everyone has one, like a guardian angel, 
some sillily old-fashioned, others newfangled, 
some quite circumspect, while others dangle.

* a version of the Latin Mass based on traditional Congolese songs
The freeway says it all, 
yesterday, and tomorrow 
and tomorrow and tomorrow. 
Semi-biblical, 
the eighteen-wheeler 
gears up for the fifty-mile ascent 
from plain to plateau: car carrier. 
‘It will not take much longer now to die,’ 
calculates the ten-year-old 
cancer patient from her bed of tubes. 
She listens to (no for!) the truck, 
churning like a champion paddlewheel steamboat. 
She regrets she’s never seen either a black or white 
swan, breasting a wild west wind; 
hardly any sadness other than that, 
but quite a grand melancholy for all that. 
Her parents sit beside her, 
like dwarves, munchkins, 
with giant hands and feet. 
One child; soon none. 
The truck driver’s also having a helluva day: 
hours cut, the cab hot 
(air-conditioner out), 
his girl a slut. 
Yet the highway inspires peace 
in everyone concerned. How does it do that? 
Perhaps simply by eliminating all surprise, 
every road going exactly where it says.
Monty Jones

Chickens

Melpomene, Erato, somebody, come,  
take this memory  
and deliver it to someone worthy,  
able to say what it means  
when it means nothing, as if  
it tells what happened  
to someone else,  
though it sits up beside me  
like a sleeper stirred awake  
by the noise of the wind.

Maybe it is not mine and never was.  
Maybe I was asleep in a boxcar  
with twenty other men  
jostled side by side all night  
across the jagged landscape  
and part of a memory  
broke loose from one of them  
and fell into my ear,  
memory like the flu  
in a bad season,  
so a person can come away  
the next morning having caught  
a piece of another person's life:

Visiting my cousins  
in a store in a country town.  
The floorboards give when men come in  
for a sack of feed, a box of nails,  
a roll of wire. . .for the talk,  
the jokes, the secret signs.  
A Saturday afternoon, the light  
pouring through the plate-glass windows  
and shimmering like water,  
and within the light a furious dust.

Two or three thousand yellow chicks  
are in cages in the middle of the floor,  
cheeping together to make one long sound  
like the chorus of frogs that surprises  
anyone stopping by the side of a road.
If you want to buy one or two or a hundred
you can put them in a cardboard box
and take them home and give them
food and water and try to keep them
from the dogs and snakes and raccoons
and whatever else might come sniffing
around the sagging coop at night.

Or if you want merely to stare at them,
in a kind of mute imprinting, you can.

Nothing happened, nothing
ensued from this memory with no meaning.
But the persistence of dumb memory
grows even stronger with the years,
whose shadows are now flung
far out across the fields and hills.

I did not change my view of chickens.
I did not take up their cause,
nor did I turn against them.
I did not carry one home
and raise it after school
and win a ribbon for it,
for I suppose the outstanding way
it pecked and scratched and glared,
and then turn that prize
into a scholarship and a law degree
and a miraculous start in politics
as the boy wonder of Eastland County.

Nothing so momentous followed
from those meaningless chickens.
Nothing followed at all.

I may be one of two or three
who were there and are still alive.
Certainly the chickens
would have been lucky to outlast the year.
The store is empty, of everything
except an occasional shaft of light.
The town itself could finally blow away
in any good spring storm.

The next time I drive through there
I intend to stop and get out and cross the road and look in through those dusty windows.
Jim Daniels

Fresh

Winter, and my dad was dead. My mother worked for nuns for next to nothing. Nothing itself lurked outside. Black ice and dim futures. Whiskers of exhaust flecked the roadside snow and I sang fa-ther, fa-ther against the clouded glass. She sent me to Charlie's Market down the block, pressing extra silver into my tender palm, curling my fingers around it: Fresh, she said, so soft I had to ask again. And repeat at the counter at Charlie's, his dour wife disbelieving. I know your mother, she said, she only gets the day-old. True enough. But, I said, but she said, I said. Mrs. Charlie, we called her, and she didn't seem to mind, though she had a name like my mother. We all had names. My mother now: Widow McLeod. I brought the nothing home to my mother's angry tears. I watched the little ones while she went back herself to fetch the fresh.

She sliced the loaf that night at dinner—soup, it was, watery broth from a bone. My little brother complained the bread was too soft. She smiled her sadness then at me, for we shared a secret. I, the oldest, the only one left to understand.

I know now what to label that loaf warm with the smell of bittersweet. Not French or Italian. Not rye or pumpernickel. I almost wished that I wasn't old enough for irony. The Day-Old Family, I called us, to myself, to make me smile from then ever after. I wish I knew what it was that day that made her splurge. Fresh, she whispered. Fresh.
Steve De France

PETA & Professors & Pussycats

The professor grew fat drinking esoteric wines. Neighbors inspect him as a potential 4th for bridge. He despises them their mediocrity & breeding habits—only nine month respite between litters! He snarls & eats & drinks & all folks agree he has a certain bohemian charm for a misanthrope, but no practical promise as a bridge partner.

The professor stares at his class for 45 minutes before beginning his lectures on Euclidean Errors. He yearns for spiritual escape; it comes in the shape of a new black BMW convertible. Driving home in the crush-hour-traffic he reasons he can afford $1000.00 payments since he isn’t breeding.

He lives without benefit of clergy with a female attorney—Helen— in a squalid breeding tract of Post-World-War II stucco houses. Helen tethers him there like an ancient sacrificial goat. Produces food & sex & wine. She wants children. But the professor holds fast to his no-breeding-rule. Hence, Helen elopes with the office ad hoc sperm donor.

For weeks the professor stays too drunk to notice a pallid moon flickering across the seamless rows of housing tract. One night deep in his cups—he falls from the porch landing heavily in the lawyer’s Geranium Bed. There he strokes a bedraggled cat saying, “My lawyer’s gone—off to Paris or Venice off forth seeking her silken silhouette in the sun. as the word off passes of his lips he slips into a lisping sleep—sliding beneath the foliage. There he dreamt he slept on a cold hillside playing bridge with jungle leopards who had the faces of his neighbors.
The leopards & he ate the neighbors children.  
*Then, after eating Helen & her sperm donor,*  
*The leopards & he made love on the grass…*  
In the morning—suffering a hangover in the shape of a bison— 
the professor is greeted by a hard-jawed woman from PETA  
she inspects his many cat scratches & scars  
& together the pluck fur from between his teeth.  

Both feel a quiver of excitement.
It’s Sunday and we have our usual tea sandwiches at the St. Regis Hotel. It’s nice regardless of habit or the same old in a paper bag repeating itself. I used to huff glue in paper bags but I was young and stupid. Our favorite maître-d isn’t there and we get no free-bees. I get a little antsy as I always do and talk my wife into leaving. On the way uptown she makes me stop at an outdoor café—Amaranth. She orders a blini and I get ice tea. We sit next to two women with little dogs. I pat them even though I say, “Dogs like to bite me.” They do. I must be very tasty. I get antsy again. It takes me about forty minutes to get my wife to leave. I am thinking of leaving her there myself. She wouldn’t mind. But I stay because I am worried that someone else might steal her from me. She is mine you know. I didn’t know that when I married her that I really meant, “Till death do us part.” Death will never do us part. It will join us like eternal stones letting waves beat us into the smoothness of forever.
Holly Day

The Ride Home

We said nothing, just watched the countryside slide past the windows, disappear behind the car. Sparse trees danced in waves of rippling light. Cornfields unfolded on either side of the car my father was driving.

Everything I thought I knew and who I was going to be collapsed into a black spot behind us against a flat line of horizon.

The baby cried in the back seat, tired of drive, of being stuck in the car and I wanted to cry too but grown-ups don’t do that outside the car, birch and pine bent under the onslaught of rain. my father turned the headlights on and muttered something about the weather and daughters and stupid choices while tiny pieces of hail tapped on the roof of the car sounded for all the world to me like applause.
Ron Salisbury

Miss Desert Inn

I wouldn't buy a new car, 
kept the old one because 
after the movies, last show, 
the Las Vegas summer night 
still eighty-seven degrees, 
she liked to ride twenty minutes 
up the sloped east valley side 
until the lights on the Strip 
twinkled like a miniature 
Christmas village, 
then pull off on a dirt schist 
path and fuck on the car hood, 
our flimsy summer clothes 
hung over the rolled down window, 
banging the Chevy hood flat 
in just the one month of August. 
Then everyday driving to work, 
the market, that scrunched hood 
or the memory of that hood, 
has stretched out for forty years 
before me, pulling toward 
some disappointing treacherous 
duplication ever since.
Lyn Lifshin

If I Had a Daughter

I’d be jealous of her
perfect skin, how she
would parade in spike
heels I have but no
longer wear. I’d long
for her slim body:
 tho mine is, it’s
not the same. At her
age, I was chunky,
in glasses, too shy. If
I had a girl of my own
I’d be jealous of her
pouty dark lipsticked
lips, a little Lolita
 tho she wouldn’t know
as she bloomed. I
know I’d feel my own
life shrink, my bright hair
dry out. Once I heard
you lose a tooth for each
baby. She’d be oblivious,
lost in the mirror never
imagining boys won’t
want to dance with her.
Her smile would blind,
her eyes glow, enormous.
As she moves away
out the door, in them
I see my own reflection
grow smaller
I Do Not Want You to Stay the Night

leaving the imprint of your head on the pillow.

I do not want you to stay the night
leaving the imprint of your head on the pillow.
I do not want the memory of you floating on the ceiling of my room.
I do not want to smell the dampness of the shower you just took
or look at the chair where you just sat, still warm from your long body.
I do not want to be lust-haunted.
And I do not want my empty house filled with your silence.

You without words, me with too many.

You the Nomad Man, to whom all houses are home,
for a while.
You, who haul your dwelling behind a truck.
For you, all is temporary, momentary.
For me, past, present future are melded,
I cannot separate one from the other.
They are fused.
I cannot be careless with time,
and toss the past into the shredder of things forgotten.

I will not forget you.

I do not want you to stay the night
because I cannot stay the coming of tomorrow,
Karen Hildebrand

Cleaning the Closet Suite

I

I lost my toenails to the Jimmy Choos, 
one size too small, apple-green 
high heels, out-of-season on sale. 
A bulky tunic without 
a waistline is a wasteland. 
That $900 number 
hasn't aged well—the lining bulges 
and drips below the hem. 
A length of metallic lace 
last worn by Frida Kahlo, 
stuffed in a box. 
Memory, that brittle petunia.

II

My favorite pair of capris 
have gone missing. Black satin 
embroidered with butterflies, 
lavender, peach, and chartreuse, 
mass machine filigree 
sold by every shop in Chinatown. 
They drew delight and disdain 
at the opera. I wore them 
to the sheen of a bowling ball, and 
to the dog-park mud that day we 
celebrated another year with Annie 
and I couldn't decide whether the fog 
smelled like iron or a second chance.

III

It was a sea-green dress. 
I was wearing it when I met you. 
I was wearing it when you left. 
I wore it inside out. 
I wore it upside down 
every Saturday night.
It was sleeveless and tight,  
hit me just below the knees.  
“Hurricane Hattie,” Ralph called it.  
When I wore it, I was at my best—  
big hair full-bloom red.  
I wore it on the wrong side  
as a corsage. I wore it  
the way I would the planet  
Jupiter. I wore it for you  
the night you licked it off me.  
And then I shrunk it, folded  
to a tiny square, tucked it  
in your shirt pocket. Slow-dancing,  
I can feel it pumping even now.
“Come, come inside, listen,” my mother-in-law says, her palms pressed together between her large breasts.

I step into her assisted living apartment where she now lives alone since my father-in-law died.

“Don’t you hear it?” she says, blinking at me. I hear the drip of her kitchen faucet. I hear the tick, tick of the knockoff Gustav Becker clock she got because her father had had a real one in his gift shop on Hamburger Strasse in Vienna. I hear the buzzing of her hearing aids, which she’s grown too deaf to notice anymore.

“Die Fledermaus is playing,” she says, her voice lilting. “I hear it all day and night.”

How kind that since Walter died, her brain has filled the silence with the opera that she saved her money to hear at the Opera House in the days when she was free to walk along the Blue Danube without a yellow star sewn on her sleeve.

“So beautiful,” I say. We hum along together, swaying.
Nancy Jackson

Thanksgiving Dinner(s)

I found an old Kodacolor picture of me standing at the sink,
An egg glints brightly in one hand, a knife in the other.
I’m probably making deviled eggs for dinner (my daughters insist they’re

A family tradition, a fact that delights me no end).

My hair is unbrushed, I give the camera a half-smile,
Both pleased and annoyed to be caught constructing this meal.
My daughters pop open the crescent rolls, and slice the quivering red roll of jelly,
Still marked with rings from its humble can.

Now my daughter’s daughter is walking.
My husband and I sit stiffly on the floor
And charm the baby with blocks and plastic horses
(“…here, Mom, use this pillow, you have to think of your back!”)
While Jen and her husband, having brined and baked the turkey,
Toss an exotic mix of bitter leaves and pomegranate dressing
(“Mom, tell me you’re not still using that store stuff, it’s probably five years old!”)

We sit down to dinner prepared to a tempo I neither learned nor taught.
My girl’s face gleams, harried but proud to show off her own new skills.
Listen, I too was proud of her, her carefully curated world, her poise,
And the baby who shone her smeary smile at her willing sycophants.
But my back burned like bloody hell from sitting too long on the hard-wood floor,
And I missed the antique gravy boat that somehow ended up with my brother’s wife,
And my husband warned me not to bring it up…

And somehow nobody seemed to miss the deviled eggs.
Donald Gaither

Tiny Light

a lone firefly
under a starry sky—
not yet dawn

Peripheral

out of the corner
of my eye— but no one,
no one at all.
Craig Cochran

Boy Scout Camp

My father loaned me his Vietnam shaving kit,
Black leather stiff from shore leave.
In flash lit boredom
I went through every pocket
And found the photo of my mother
Lying naked in a bath tub,
Bush like wild azaleas.
A kid named Chuck
With purple zits
Said he'd give five dollars.
Offers went as high as nine,
Half a joint thrown in.
An Eagle Scout
Put his arm around me
And calmly explained
They just want to beat off
To the photo of your mother.
Trust me, I knew.

We all started palming shells
From the rifle range.
It was understood,
No agreements had been made
Between a pothead, thief, and me
Who canoed across the lake and
Built a campfire by the dam.
Holding out our hands we counted
Seven gray and silver eggs.
READY? READY? We dared
And threw them in the flames.
Everybody ran when the shells began to pop.
I took the photo from my pocket.
The edge caught fire
And curled as I watched it
Turn to smoke.
While your insides were in knots
from too much drink, love (?), time gone,
I lay in my new lace, pushed up, ready
for a reminder that the space
between us will close
with eager hands and opened eyes.
But inside this night, the room
hung heavy as the music made you heave.
Alone singing, the air-conditioned ringing,
the flat land of my sadness sighing.
The night died with
an aggravated sleep.
I lay a cold cloth on your
clammy head and that was all
I could do.
This space is too new
to hold your head inside my chest.
Facing the wall of your back,
you were a stranger
even with eyes closed.
I observed our distance, counted
the light-years between us
as if our bodies were the stars
of Delta and Epsilon, and between us--
the immobile wing of Gamma Corvi.
This is the time to touch!
This is all we have.
But the night died with
an aggravated sleep.
I clenched the heavy night inside
my tight jaw and dreamt
of many versions of Hell—
one with an empty bank account,
another with heroin that I give
to my sister.
The third in a hospital parking lot
littered with death
and the last where I fuck other
people than you.
A colleague from the Special Education department gave you as a gift to us. So when I walk into the English Department Office filled with sample textbooks piled on shelves, large binders crammed with materials two desks, two computers, two long tables, a scantron, a temperamental multi-function, multi-user printer/copier, and boxes of paper, I see you, the paperwhites, on the table along the window. The first day, I smile. You are a reminder of approaching green--when I look outside I see the muddied snow and icy sidewalks. Your white blooms are something organic in this land of gray machinery and paper.

You grow so tall that your blooms weigh down your stems, causing you to droop--some clever soul constructs a ring of yellow legal paper and places it around your delicate stems, so you could remain upright, and not collapse like some tragic Macbeth or Creon. You are a reminder that March is a tease, as frozen spells give way to sunny days, with promises of sitting on the grass outside in the afternoon.

The second day, I notice something else. It’s not the messy pile on the desk in my office—two set of essays that should have been graded two weeks ago, four vocabulary quizzes, and a box of books to be returned to their cabinet. No, it’s an odd aroma, flashing through my mind: vinyl that has been rained on and left to mildew—earthy, mellow, with a distinct top note of plastic. I look at the Keurig machine. I sniff the two wastepaper baskets. I look under the tables. I smell your blooms.

Your white blooms of cheer are the yellow centered source of a polymer-like perfume, a whiff of wet umbrella stored too long while closed, a campsite on a dewy morning, as the fragrance tent and air mattress merge into the moisture of dawn. You are an unsettling, raincoat-scented reminder of April’s impending
proverbial deluge.

And that, dear paperwhite, is why we have moved you across the hall, to the teacher's lounge. Pardon our selfishness for keeping your beauty to ourselves—You will be enjoyed by the English department, and visual arts and foreign language department, contributing your aroma to the blend of microwaved fish, oxidizing apple cores, garlic, and salad dressing--far from our office.
Kenneth Greenwood

Special Housing Unit

There once was a prisoner who lived in the SHU,
He had quite a few charges and not a clue what to do,
He shattered his tray when he didn’t get bread,
They called in the team when he lifted his bed.

There once was a prisoner who lived in the SHU
Who tried clearing up charges but the list only grew,
He was wrote up again for something stupid he said,
They stripped off his clothes because he wished he was dead.

There once was a prisoner who lived in the SHU,
Who fought until his knuckles were purple and blue,
He reached for the sprinkler let it pop on his head,
Because he was found guilty when that’s not what he plead,

There once was a prisoner who lived in the SHU,
He begged for his freedom when his patience was through,
His future was darker from the memo he read,
The SHU is his castle until the kingdom is dead.
Michael Fournier

DIES IRAE

I was honing the adz this morning, when Hetty recalled it is your birthday, and now I sharpen my pen to tell you we all rejoice in your maturing, none more so than Ramona, who bared her tooth for joy when Hetty reminded her of the day. Our little poppet was so delighted she scuttled halfway up the ladder before Hetty hove the bulkhead shut. We were grateful for the porcelain doll last spring: you were kind to think of Ramona in this way. We keep the fragile, useless thing on the mantel and have given her instead a knotted horsetail she dotes upon, petting and pawing at it as if it were her own child (God rest its soul). Bonny (the brindle cow with the withered haunch) calved in July, and we brought in the barley and wheat before the September rains, short-handed though we were, for Uncle Buell could not thresh. I grieve, moreover, to say he cannot walk: his legs no longer support him when he tries, and he weeps for it. He is not content save when Hetty takes him out in the wheelbarrow to the hillock behind the barn, and leans him against his favorite stump where he passes most days, recalling erstwhile happiness, gazing out over the cesspool to the scrub beyond. Hetty counts it a hardship to wheel him to and fro, and fears he’ll slip, roll down, strike a rock, and so be killed, none the wiser but coyotes. She speaks this fear often, sometimes quite beside herself with it. Karl remains at seminary, and we are glad of it: he is a good-hearted lad, simple as you know, and so of small use. (Truth be told, Hetty is skittish to have him about since he tried to butcher the sow last year -- you recall it was she who climbed the apple tree to put the poor animal out of its misery.) While he no longer studies the Word, he has proven some worth by “stepping the wheel” to turn the granary mill. The good Doctor Reverend rode through not long ago and honored us by passing three days here. Hetty was grateful, as she likes nothing better than to speak in private of her sins with a man of God, as I of mine with the cabbages of the field. (We all speak of sin in our own ways, though we should not without guidance, lest we relish the speaking and so sin twice.) I was happy to take extra chores so Hetty and the Doctor Reverend could retire to the churning shed throughout the day to pray and to drive the iniquity from her. It gladdens her so, though she has grown
more certain that evil will befall Uncle Buell
as indeed it may, surprising no one. Nor should it.
When evenings are mild I stroll to the cabbage patch, sit
on the fence, smoke a pipe, and listen to the wind,
which sometimes seems to speak to me, and though this
troubled me when it began, the wind is, after all, of God,
and must be, for it whispers of a judgment that will come
to all souls steeped in vileness and the love of fancy things,
like a blunt cudgel bludgeoning fledglings.
All are abed, as I too shall be after buttermilk and prayer,
and I lay down my pen with the hope that you will visit as promised:
Hetty would take such meager joy in condemning you for a liar
if you did not visit that she will not miss it when you do.
The parcel you left us for safekeeping is hidden:
We keep it where none may break its seal.
We keep it close.
This Journey

I.
Even before it smacked my lips I knew. What did I know?
I knew enough to know what it was. It must be
Among the 4 or even 3 Foremost Classic
Safe Bet Triple-Decker Extra Crunchy Skippy
Nutela Honey Banana Granola Unskimpy
Multi Velveeta Slice Sarnies I'd created, would
Ever create, on what James Wright anyway called “this journey”
In his ultimate (if admittedly neither best nor best known) poetry.
Or is it more accurate to call it the daily prose?
I knew this one true thing to be strictly the case as I jerked
Our mottled minivan in reverse, simultaneously grabbing for the gorge,
Distracted eye partly trained on avoiding bumping the ancient Mustang
Desperate with Mary Ellen Mark Style Dirty Damm Family camped for
the day or maybe
Many days in disability slot beside my decade old already significantly dented
Odyssey in narrow lot of the Comfort Dental Care of Lafayette
(Where my employer kindly covers check ups twice a year.)

II.
At this point a Frank O'Hara would say it is 2:30 of a Tuesday afternoon.
Fairport Convention is still in harmony on CD live from BBC 1973. Do
Not fear what time shall do to familiar voices less uncommon than
Sandy Denny’s?

III.
Well, this happens to represent the soundest version of the dimensions
of my current Comprehension. (I’m not up on my astrophysical worm-
holes, dark matter, dark Energy, or Gravitational waves.) So I endured a
mini eternity since breakfast, and,
Truth to tell, who needs shame-faced gooey grub peanut butter crunch
mouth
When facing the dentist complaining over a dented molar? Plus not to
mention
I'd just barely survived 2 plus hours of outdoor singles in unforgiving
mad dog late
August heat against Sneaky Freed, by far the most agile opponent I’ve
endured in this Chunky mid-sized midwestern town where I’ve faced
every decent foe
(Sneaky trained with Davis Cup Captain Patrick McEnroe as a junior in
Queens;
Said abominable Brother John was arrogant ass even back then!). Wonder of it is I didn’t faint or vomit faintly into this air Trapped trout mouth late in the second set. I even managed To finally pull one out off the legendary Sneak, six games To three, when his final drop shot (smart choice, Mr. Freed, given I’d quit shagging short court spinny balls Games ago), wilted, and, Fate intervening, collapsed back Onto HIS side of the net.

IV.
Lickety split I distinguish desires from necessities. Chief chew Safe Bet triggered no immediate agony from overly sensitive nerve endings. My molar turned out not to have quit aching because the nerve had died, As first feared, but forceful flossing back in the cave, and thus I’d unconsciously Irritated an irritation. Supreme Scarf no Stevensian Stupefaction. No disillusion. It disappeared inside softening late middle-aged stomach. Everything Copasetic (still lexical in the known web world?) as I dine and steer one handed, My frontal cortex for once gracefully free of frequent compulsion to suddenly U-turn towards warehouse district where other desperate Mary Ellen Mark/ Tiny From Streetwise style people trade for what I don’t just now have a crave. Very OK with what is and was and all subsequent verb forms of “to be.” Surrendering to what Reinhold Neibuhr describes as being “Reasonably happy In this life” (so long as munching much more than sensible remains Among the realm of the real and the still sensible Odyssey keeps sailing At its own late middle aged pace so long as I follow the scheduled maintenance plan).

V.
Homeward to angelic crew to brag with news of no new cavities or damaged Nerve and lest anyone forget unprecedented triumph on the court, But of course everyone else near me at the moment actually somewhere else Wrapped in building the budding destiny of their own dreamy traffic. So I settle In quite contentedly for vicarious fantasy of possessing control and spin And pace under real pro pressure on the Tennis Channel I’d taped, and, like Whitman, Shamelessly admire myself for how kindly I’d praised the can’t-believe-she’s-still-working Pregnant dental tech in that truly tasteless baggy bluish pink smock half- Truth ironic surprise that Fergie from Black Eyed Peas needed a day gig (Which blushing she “used to get all the time,” but would in her advanced state Gladly take the compliment) and how I knew as deep down as I was
willing to dig
I'd spoken not so much to flirt and fantasize consequences but to make
an underpaid Expectant lady's day and how once a long time ago but
never completely forgotten by me
An emergency X-Ray Tech compared my cracked up specs to Johnnie Depp's
But I said o no no yet secretly thought o yes o yes o yes, Johnny Depp.
Arthur D. Mathews

Chex Mix

I brought a box of Chex
    Had not the slightest clue?
    It would increase my sex
    Drive keep it alive

    Kiss on, and on and on…
    Like this
    Suck on these big busty tits
    Chex or sex

I prefer her as it were
    I brought Chex
    Just for the sex

So much Chex, so much sex

First the Chex, then I’ll
    Flex
    For some good wholesome sex.
Arthur D. Mathews

Alls All

Rainfall cats can
Walk the Mall
Want it all
Big or small
Take the fall
This after all…
Is role call
For us all.
Henry Hughes

Fishing Hungover

July
morning
hungover alone
rented rowboat
jigging—
sore neck, bruised knee,
last night
how?
Mouth raggy,
head aching,
no bites,
unzipped
to piss
when a loon pops up
billing a chub,
dripping,
blinking a curious red eye,
then slicking
under my throbbing
astonished
happier
head.
Earwig

Earwigs can lay eggs in your brain.  
Ridiculous myth, right?  
But something itched under my cap,  
laddered against that dormer,  
wet paint brush in hand,  
when a dobbed-white earwig  
wriggled  
a crack.  
Funny at first,  
shaking its bright annoyance.  
Then sad  
in its enameled dying  
outside the bedroom  
where my teenage son  
slept-off his Facebook hangover—  
party pictures of a beer-soaked "girlfriend"  
between couch cushions,  
and the "friend"  
who drove her home.  
I learn at lunch from Wikipedia  
that Unlike most insects,  
earwigs care for their young,  
then I climb back up beside his window  
with a little sympathy  
and a little disgust.  
The long wet strokes  
covering nicely.
The Survival of Christian Wiman

Not an old man by any contemporary measurement, Christian Wiman has already fashioned a body of work and career that has made him well-known to the poetry community. Perhaps he is most identifiable as the former head editor of Poetry magazine, a post he held for approximately a decade. Now that he has left that job, taking a position at Yale Divinity School, Wiman might be classified as a key figure in the renaissance of American religious poetry, specifically on the embattled topic of Christianity. His first name is a coincidence, probably, and only probably, because so much of his belief system has been tangled and knotted to his early life experiences in West Texas where, as he explains in his recent memoir and devotional, My Bright Abyss: Meditation of a Modern Believer (2013), the Christian religion is the focal point. The place and circumstance that generated the beginnings of Wiman's complicated version of faith have provided the foundation for his newest book of verse.

It is difficult once you know Wiman's life story not to read each poem in Once in the West (2014) as a way to better or more fully understand the man, even if this is not the way one has been taught to read poetry, even if it is not polite to do so. In the memoir, Wiman explains that he was diagnosed with terminal cancer at the age of thirty-nine, suffered horribly for seven years, and that he has continued to be wearied by doubts that he will remain whole and healthy. The initial diagnosis was less than a year after marrying the woman he describes as the love of his life, and with whom, since he has had twin daughters. The illness, however, did not precipitate entirely his return to religion. The idea of attending church and saying prayers briefly preceded the diagnosis. Once one has read Wiman's work and criticism, it is clear that Christ and theology, the spiritual and religious in poetry and poets, have been subjects that he has never been able to isolate and separate from, despite his self-chronicled efforts to secularize and distance himself from his early experiences to better fit the mold of what one might call an enlightened artist and academic; the pipe smoker (now marathoner) so in vogue in the past century, or rather, all of the post-Darwin age. So, Wiman has not always been a believer believer, and though he seems to be one now, he has made it clear that it is a label he struggles with, even as he firmly maintains that such belief is key to the person he has become.

Those new to Wiman's work must understand that his beliefs have not been the centering influence to inform and shape his sense of art. It is difficult to imagine a person who has been so determined to become a bona fide poet as Wiman (whoever decides such things), or one
who has spent as much time reading poetry, the classics and the more recently canonized, or considered as much contemporary poetry (much of it unpublished and unpublishable, in his role at Poetry). Wiman has reported much of his poet’s life in the essays found in *Survival and Ambition* (2007). If one trusts his autobiography, and there is no reason not to, Wiman has transformed from an unlikely candidate to become a great poet, to a true devotee of the muses. He has read diligently, and he has worked unceasingly. His experiments and efforts to explore and create the craft and life of a poet are impressive. After earning his B.A. at Washington and Lee (a University he says he attended because it was so far away, not just geographically, from where he spent his formative years), he forewent graduate school for a rigorous self-training based on reading and traveling (he spent time in South America and Europe). When he returned, he plunged back into the academic world with passion, becoming a Wallace Stegner fellow, earning a Ruth Lily fellowship, and spending time on a fellowship at the University of Texas in Austin. He not only knows about poetry, but he is a poet and critic who cares deeply about the matter. If it sounds like perhaps he needs an intervention, don’t worry. He is not insane. For instance he has written that he would rather “eat a copy of the Cantos,” than read it again.

Despite all his learning and striving, or perhaps because of these efforts, writing poetry has not always come easily to Wiman. He has documented that he had a period of silence, one during which he made no effort to write any new poems. Yet, readers can be happy that he found new life for his verse. It seems worth emphasizing that in his newly rendered station as a religious poet, he is in no way naïve.

So, do not fear. *Once in the West* is not a believer’s confession. The reader is not required to sit in a booth just outside the sacristy, to put an ear to the divider, to peer through the woven mesh. Nor is the book constructed on penance or biblical pretense. Nonetheless it is not a book that requires one to think of it in any manner except that these are Wiman’s thoughts: his experiences, his history, his despair, his hope, his suggested reading material.

If this doesn’t sound appealing to you, or if you think, *American religious poetry*, and throw-up a little in your mouth, check out the poem, “Blink,” found in the first section of the book:

*We were all an oily rabble,*

*some spiritless unguent oozing out of us*

*more surely than the shine*

*on our possum noggins*

*We were all a cuddle of lean fleas,*

*bovine sundumb Sunday zombies*
chewing chewing our little cuds of God.
Jesus, even the horizon's woozy,

and the pumpjacks, galactically black,
fucking the earth; space

so supremely empty
you could hear

an extinction's
last, baffled

blink.

If this doesn't prove that Wiman's primary goal isn't to convert you to an outdated belief system, or if you are still worried that he may be going about in a pilgrim's hat and cloak ready to hand out stigmatizing labels to offenders, a demagogue whose greatest inspiration is Anne Bradstreet and Edward Taylor, don't be. Wiman frequently (too frequently?) uses swears like “shit” and “fuck,” and Once in the West could certainly make your grandmother blush (okay, maybe not some grandmothers, those who have read any poetry published in the past fifty years). The first few poems in the book feature rape and raging women. In another, men cheer at the death of a one of God’s creatures as it is flattened by a ten ton asphalt roller (God’s creature, even if that creature is a snake). Rapture pure and simmering praise is found not in the church pew, but in the back seat of an automobile (and who cannot say amen to this?). Every speaker and character seems to be taking a trip “down the drag / of that drag town.” Every life seems to be impoverished by single parenthood, infidelity, risky behavior, suicide. This not Wiman saying, praise God: if you believe in Him, everything will be okay. In fact these are poems “back of God / with his everair / assurances / and iron / injunctions . . .” where only “a few flowers / flower / out of all the years / of shit.”

Many of the poems that open the book are so raw that they sear. They are more intense than anything Wiman has written in his poetry before. Every Riven Thing (2010), Wiman’s first book after his diagnosis, includes dark and melancholy poems with gloomy titles, such as “It is Good Even to Sit in a Rotting Body.” Before that, in Hard Night (2005), he titled a poem, “Night’s Thousand Shadows.” But these are only the names of poems whose subjects seem filled with common discontent and frustration. At least compared with the ones in the first part of Once in the West. The depiction of the world found in these opening pages is as disquieting as seeing the rabbit that has been tested for cosmological purposes with its skin peeled back from its body: red,
stark, but the heart still beating, still alive. Everyone here is ensnared, hoping for a less complicated vision of sin and human, and in some cases, a simpler devotion.

Another contrast with Wiman's earlier work is that the titles of these poems are simple, often one word. Style wise, Wiman shows he is not afraid to rhyme the end of one line with the next line, and not rhyme again by the time the poem is finished. In this way, the language in these poems offer something of the stark, often defiant, lives of the characters within them. They cannot have form or freedom either, and finding a balance appears impossible. Who, exactly, the characters in these lines are addressing is equally complicated. The speakers seem caught between remembering a story for their own sake, telling a yarn to the reader, discoursing resignedly to the nether (not directly), praying with no anticipation to God (sometimes directly).

One finds out quickly that this book of poetry is no hymnal or prayer book, even if it might be considered that the italicized portions are intended to be somewhat like prayers. The title of the first section is “Sun Gone Noon,” and such a title conjures up the kind of distress one expects to find as a result of Wiman's suffering. Midday with no light is not truly midday. The memories explored in these first poems are too close to the surface to be called repressed. It appears that this is the west with a capital W that the title of the book promises.

But this conjuring does not last.

As the poems come closer to some concrete current, they grow more distant. The last two sections of the book are in different modes, and include poems that seem unalike, but not unlike various periods in Wiman's life. They are not rendered in the galvanized intensity of the first section. These are poems that connect with what Wiman has suffered as a result of his illness. In some cases the subject clearly relates to his thrust through theology, or his time as editor. In some cases the poems seem to be less satisfying, more distant, considerations on the west he has come from and the west he cannot help but return to. None of these matters are inherently wrong or ill-suited to poetry, but Once in the West is so short that its last two sections begin to read somewhat like outtakes, as a sort of collection of selected poems. At one point in his career Wiman wrote that he thinks “…there is something impersonal and austere, some cold and uncompanionable remoteness, to the greatest art.” The rest of the book is remote, but not so great.

These pages contain a bit of something for everyone. There is a growing freeness with form, lines are right justified. There are four line stanzas, five line stanzas. Poems are written after Sándor Csoóri and Goethe. Wiman takes a shot at translating lines 103-108 from Canto XIX of Dante's “Paradiso.” He writes a poem to Edward Thomas. “Self-Portrait, With Preacher, Pain, and Snow” occupies a whole page to quote three sources dealing with phenomena and God. The last poem in
the book is a long one, or several poems, with no titles, in slightly different shapes and approaches.

For those hoping for more of *My Bright Abyss*, the rest of the book returns to the territory of the memoir, but unfortunately it lacks the endearing narrative form of Part II of *The Long Home* (1998), Wiman’s first poetry collection. The portion here is a fragmented representation of the struggle to reconcile experience and theology, insecurity and spirituality. “The Preacher Addresses the Seminarians,” contains the line “I know what you’re thinking. Christ’s in this. / He’ll get to it, the old cunner, somewhere somehow…” And so, in these lines, he has.

There are no poems in *Once in the West* that are particularly hard to read, and Wiman proves that he will never be obsessed with language and method. One gets the sense that there must be a great deal of private play, choices in the white space, the number of lines, stanzas, and rhyme that borders on seriousness, but could be just as easily explained as quirky and impulsive. If the writing in the book is gritty while remaining downbeat, lacking some sense of enlightenment his readers of his prose may hope for, one can be thankful that *Once in the West* is never pedantic. There is no prescription for living found here.

All readers of poetry, regardless of the belief system they advocate for (if they hold to any, nihilist friends), must hope that Wiman continues to defy his diagnosis. Because it seems that eventually he will be able to make clear what he really thinks, that he will find a poetry worthy of his well-crafted prowess, and that he may be able to finally contribute what only he seems to be prepared and purposed to contribute. In “Witness,” another poem from this new book, he writes, “Once in the west I lay down dying / to see something other than the dying stars / so singularly clear, so unassailably there, / they made me reach for something other.” May Wiman, the poet, continue to reach, and may he give us much more to read.
CONTRIBUTOR'S NOTES

Michael Biehl has had his poems appear in some three dozen journals in the U.S. and Canada. New work is forth coming in The Texas Review and Grain Magazine. He is an ESL instructor to adults and also a freelance editor.


Holly Day was born in Hereford, Texas, “The Town Without a Toothache.” She and her family currently live in Minneapolis, Minnesota, where she teaches writing classes at the Loft Literary Center. Her published books include the nonfiction books Music Theory for Dummies, Music Composition for Dummies, Guitar All-in-One for Dummies, and Piano All-in-One for Dummies, and the poetry books “Late-Night Reading for Hardworking Construction Men” (The Moon Publishing) and “The Smell of Snow” (ELJ Publications), while her needlepoints and beadwork have recently appeared on the covers of The Grey Sparrow Journal and QWERTY Magazine.

Steve De France is a widely published poet, playwright and essayist both in America and in Great Britain. His work has appeared in literary publications in America, England, Canada, France, Ireland, Wales, Scotland, India, Australia and New Zealand. He has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize in Poetry in 2002, 2003 & 2006. Recently, his work has appeared in The Wallace Stevens Journal, The Mid-American Poetry Review, Ambit, Atlantic, Clean Sheets, Poetry Bay, the Yellow Medicine Review and The Sun. In England he won a reader’s Award in Orbis Magazine for his poem “Hawks.” In the United States he won the Josh Samuels’ Annual Poetry Competition (2003) for his poem: “The Man Who Loved Mermaids.” His play THE KILLER had its world premiere at the GARAGE THEATER in Long Beach, California (Sept-October 2006). He has received the Distinguished Alumnus Award from Chapman University for his writing. Most recently his poem “Gregor’s Wings” has been nominated for The Best of The Net by Poetic Diversity.

Philip Dugger is a former Bible college student (Florida Beacon College, Largo, FL, 1980-81), is now a convicted murderer, serving two 25-life sentence in an obscure California prison.

Daniele Hanson received her MFA from Arizona State University and now lives in Atlanta, GA. Her work has appeared in over 40 journals
including Hubbub, Iodine, and Ashville Poetry Review. She has edited Hayden’s Ferry Review, been on the staff at The Meacham Writer’s Conference, and participated in a residency at the Hambidge Center. Her work has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net.

Karen Hildebrand is a dance writer/magazine editor in New York City. Her poetry has appeared in Meridian Anthology, PoetLore, G.W. review, The Journal, A gathering of the Tribes, Fourteen hills and more, and was adapted for the play, “The Old In and Out” produced off-off Broadway in 2013

Nancy Jackson has earned her JD from Ohio State University, MA from University of Detroit and MSW from Wayne State University. After twenty-five years of practicing law, she is currently a social worker. She was also named runner-up in Brehler Essay Competition at Wayne State University in 2011, and was awarded honorable mention in the 2010 women-on-writing.com essay competition. During her free time, Ms. Jackson is a world traveler, online bookseller and an anonymous content writer on the Web for last ten years under the pen name N.Hirabayashi.

Monty Jones is a writer in Austin, Texas. His poems have appeared recently in the North Dakota Quarterly, Canary, Grey Sparrow Journal, Quiddity, Marlbero Review and other publications.

David Lawrence has published over 700 poems and several books. Some of his works include “Lane Changes”, “The Wing of White Collar Boxing”, “Obama in works with Democrats”. He has received a Ph. D and is a former CEO and pro-boxer.

Lyn Lifshin’s new books include Knife Edge & Absinthe: the Tango poems; For the Roses, poems for Joni Mitchell, All The Poets Who Touched Me; A Girl goes Into The Woods; Malala, Tangled as the Alphabet: The Istanbul Poems. : Secretariat;The Red Freak, The Miracle; Malala and Femina Eterna: Enheduanna, Scheherazade and Nefertiti. Vist her at her website, www.lynlifshin.com

Ron Salisbury is a writer who has integrated his poetry with his business life for decades. Now three wives deep, four children long, and assorted careers past, he continues to write, publish and study in San Diego where he is a student at San Diego State University in the Master of Fine Arts program, Creative Writing. Publication and awards include: Eclipse, The Cape Reader, Serving House Journal, The Sand Diego Reader, Alaska Quarterly Review, Spitball, Soundings East, etc; Semi Finalist for the Anthony Hecht Poetry Prize—2012, finalist for the ABZ First Book Contest—2014.
Rochelle J. Shapiro’s Miriam The Medium (Simon & Schuster, 2004) was nominated for the Ribelow Award. Kaylee’s ghost, her second novel, was an Indie Finalist. She has published in The New York Times (Lives), The Iowa Review, Peregrine and more. What I Wish You’d Told Me, her short story, was published by Shebooks at 2014. She teaches writing at UCLA Extension.

Catherine Q. Spingler has a Masters degree in French from the University of Michigan. She was a Lecturer in French at Clark University in Worcester MA and the Costume Designer for the Department of Visual and Performing Arts. She is the costume designer for the Ig-Nobel Awards held in Cambridge, MA. Photos of her costumes were shown in the October 19th 2014 edition of Paris Match. Ms. Spingler attended the Iowa Writers Summer Workshop and had two short stories included in their 2010 Anthology. She participates in a bi-monthly workshop led by John Hodgen, a recipient of the Donald Hall Prize.

Donald Gaither has BS Degree in Education from Indiana University 1975. He has taught high school history, economics, sociology, civics US Constitution and has also coached swimming and baseball. Mr. Gaither has also served 23 years in Army and reserve service, including two tours in Vietnam. He is retired from both military and Civil Service with 100% disability from Agent Orange.

Ashley Warren is Minnesota native and currently lives in Long Beach, CA. You can find her works in Red Rich Review, Convergence Magazine, Miller’s Pond, Elohi Caoual Journal, Full Moon Poetry Society and Quiet Lightening’s Sparkle + Blink

Mia Parviainen teaches high school English in Massachusetts, facilitating a Creative Writing elective. Her work has appeared in Burning Word, Amoskeag, and Human Architecture. She is fascinated by tea, crocheting, baking and planning adventures.

Kenneth Greenwood wrote his poem, Special Housing Unit, during his time in solitary confinement. It is to be read to the same melody as the Woman Who Lived in the Shoe. Written September 2013

Michael Fournier is Assistant Professor of English at Georgia Gwinnett College, where he teaches Composition, Poetry and the Literature of the Enlightenment

Daniel Morris is the author of Bryce Passage. He teaches at Purdue University.
Arthur D. Mathews Jr. was born on September 30th 1965, to parents Mr. Arthur D. Mathews Sr. and Mrs. Ruth Mathews. He was born at Lansley Air Force base in Hampton, Virginia. He graduated in Hartford, Connecticut in 1985. He took the G.E.D. and received a perfect score in Science, missed one or two in English, one or two in History, and just made it in Math. His father and mother used to write not for profit. His father used to sing while taping his voice in shower. He wrote his very first poem at the age of thirteen. He started writing seriously at the age of fifteen. Due to a bad incident in Ohio, his grandmother pushed him to read early, and read him Bible stories. He was published in black local newspapers, both in Ohio and in Sarasota, Florida. He went to Manatee Community College, located between Bradenton and Sarasota, Florida. He says, “When I write I put myself in another’s position to try to feel what another would feel.”

Craig Cochran writes poetry, strums the guitar, and raises his family in Kennesaw, GA. He is very proud to appear in The Hiram Poetry Review.

Henry Hughes is a Professor of English at Western Oregon University.