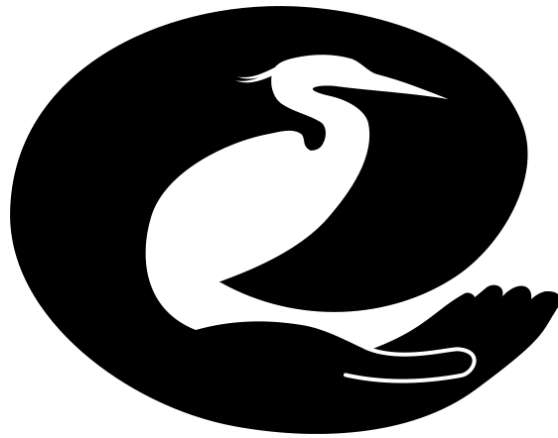




DARK MATTER

A JOURNAL OF NATURAL METAPHOR





DARK MATTER: A JOURNAL OF NATURAL METAPHOR



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Dark Matter is a journal focusing on natural metaphor produced by the Natural Science Creative Writing Club at the University of Houston - Downtown. Dark Matter is published twice yearly in both PDF and ISSUU formats, and is available through the Dark Matter Website. Past issues will be maintained in the website archives.

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Dark Matter reads poetry, fiction, essays, and musings throughout the year. Selected pieces may be published on the Dark Matter Website at any time with author permission. Material selected for the print version is at the discretion of the editors. Electronic and printable versions will appear in Summer and Winter of each year.

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Contributor Notes

Forward

You may have noticed that we changed the strapline of our journal from “a journal of speculative literature” to “a journal of natural metaphor.” The reason for this is two-fold. One, contributors often misinterpret our guidelines and assume we are more open to science fiction, fantasy, and horror themes than we anticipated. This is understandable since we do not reject these genres, though we try to dissuade contributions that rely simply on “alien”, “horific”, or “fantastic” themes without somehow speculating on human nature and/or how natural metaphor helps us understand ourselves and our place in the universe. This is a tricky distinction, but it is what we look for. The second reason is that the term seems to have become more and more tied to these genres than when we established Dark Matter Journal, as a catch all for them rather than an alternative. Maybe it was our naivete of the intention of the term from the start, but we were looking for a way to attract speculative writing without reliance on the expectations of the genres which can reasonably be considered speculative in nature. In the same way that Dark Matter does not mean “dark” themes, we were hoping to find “speculative” literature that was not simply fantastic or other-worldly.

Our definition of natural metaphor is also described in our guidelines, and I think it is becoming a more accepted distinction, though it is still difficult to say whether it’s use is becoming more accepted or experiencing greater resistance in modern poetry. Both, of course, are possible, as is the natural progression of new ideas. So we will keep up our efforts to increase the acceptance of natural metaphor. We are not changing our guidelines, just our strapline.

We hope you enjoy this issue of Dark Matter Journal!

Bradley Earle Hoge
Managing Editor

Harvest

My medical report
read: *A chain of mesenteric*

*lymph nodes was harvested
off of the vascular supply*

of the terminal ileum.
Demeter, goddess of the harvest,

and life cycles—the wheel of life
and death, ever crushing—

my lymph nodes are ripe for plucking.
The OED reads harvest: season's

yield of any natural product.
Mine unnatural. Mine white on the PET scan.

In February before the Earth greens,
globes of enlarged lymph nodes ripen.

PTERODACTYL FUTURE

Pterodactyl claw of pollen hinges
my eyelash, sends a quiver to my
mammalian brain that rain
or some other meteorological
phenomenon is a matter of faith
& not my model for the future.

Cotton fibers separate the fingertips
of my thoughts—I wonder who
freezes because of shifting breezes
stirred by the thundering herd?

Fairy from an Irish tale lingers, wings
dissolving like colors on a bubble
lurking behind whole grain sans gluten
conversations rustling a distant room
with a conch shell ambiance fit
for prince or princess in a foreign brain
or brine surging oblongata lava.

Pterodactyl claw of pollen hinges
my eyelash, sends a quiver to my
mammalian brain that rain
or some other meteorological
phenomenon remains a matter of faith
& not my model for the future.

when you are probing neon blossom

check for anvil tops beyond the rim both
free form & old school worse if it starts
going all hello world amateur rocketry
& prominent objects aren't visible at 50
yards mimic a fog horn until the wind
stinks of spruce wood brown yellow
interference if that doesn't take switch
your plumage out from mottled grey to
rusting orange to break from the backdrop
you're welcome to the dismay of
 fruit growers i raid apple orchards horse
around full of odd encounters meet no
one apples are the only thing missing
from these squiggly line jaunts across sun
splashed hinge my undulating song
forfeits the terms of bail back in their
 region laced with rabid commerce unstable
teeth in my gums i split from all that
without even launching a marker

sitting on saturn's rings

i will stand
upon saturn's rings
when mars
declares
war with earth's politicians,
and i will march
with the
martians
because i've seen how we destroy
one another
sometimes simply by using our
words as daggers
other times
by polluting water supplies in pursuit
of natural resources we don't need;
i've seen their greed destroy
families and hurt people
including me—
swinging the pendulum of time
i will procure every weapon needed to destroy
our politicians
will not spare them any mercy when i
hurt them as they've hurt us,
and i will let out a banshee cry alerting every
harpy in her tree that this is the final
war;
the one that brings peace to earth,
but when it all ends
i think i should
like to retire to sitting upon saturn's rings
for her mystery sings to me
histories of old and new.

Journeywork of the Stars

Something had pulled me up from a deep sleep and out of bed. A noise perhaps – one of the cats skittering down the hall, clutching in her little white fangs her favorite stuffed toy, the one that looks like a skinny brown bear. Maybe the sharp snap of the house settling, or a police siren three blocks away on Orchard Avenue. Who knew? But as I lay in bed, staring up at a room vaguely lit by streetlight sneaking through closed blinds, I felt compelled to dress, go outside, and see what was happening in the 3:00 am night.

My wife slept peacefully, her lovely oval face turned to the blue numbers on the digital alarm clock resting on her nightstand, her breathing quiet and steady. A trio of bright northern stars shone through the high quadrilateral windows just under the bedroom's peak. A block away a dog barked, and beyond, there was the faint, seashell sound of a distant jet.

Quietly, I slipped on a denim shirt and a pair of jeans, wincing when the belt's hook clanked against the buckle. Brenda shifted in her sleep, but didn't awaken.

Leaving the bedroom, I crossed through the blue-walled office and down the narrow hall into the living room with its couch, futon, and entertainment center made from some inexpensive blond wood. At the front door I snapped open the lock and stepped outside.

The street was empty. A row of single-story homes built during the Second World War, and embellished in the 1950's with stoops and narrow pillars and brightly painted fake shutters, lined their way like soldiers to a vanishing point several blocks away. Scattered cars were parked along the street, illuminated by blue-white streetlamps. Down the block, in front of a white clapboard house, a white semi-truck loomed like some massive beast escaped from a machine devoured parallel world. Diagonally across the street stood our neighborhood's eccentric barn-shaped house with its old-west wagon wheels, flower-painted wheel barrow, and enormous Christmas wreath that hung over the front picture window no matter the season. In the next house down, a partly drawn curtain revealed the flickering blue glow from an insomniac's TV set. None of this would explain my being roused from bed.

Then I looked up.

Beyond the streetlamps, partly obscured by my neighbor's massive cottonwood tree, a new constellation hung in the sky. I felt a cold snake run up my spine. I've studied the night skies nearly my entire life, and I know them almost better than my own face. How could there be an entirely new set of stars? A single star maybe, resulting from a nova flaring up in the depths of space. But a complete, never before seen constellation? Impossible. Half obscured by cottonwood leaves, the stellar grouping appeared to be an oval cluster of azure stars, rather like

the Pleiades seen through a low-powered telescope.

Wanting a clearer view, I sprinted down the street, looking for a spot without trees. My excitement grew as I glanced at the sky every few steps. The day's summer heat was gone, and the air possessed an early morning desert chill. Cicadas and crickets droned in the grassy lawns. The moan of a diesel engine drifted from the train yards a half a mile away, followed by the metallic thunder of shunting freight cars. Closer by, on U.S. 6, a tractor-trailer shifted gears.

After half a block, I reached a space where there were no tree branches or streetlights blocking my view of the sky. There, about three quarters of the way up from the eastern horizon, hovered a new gathering of stars. It was an insupportable apparition, a paradoxical bee-swarm of interstellar lanterns. Like wisps of luminous clouds, tendrils of blue-tinged nebulae pervaded these strange stars, giving me a possible explanation. These were stars that had just been ignited in a contracting cloud of dust and gas that hovered in our galactic neighborhood, perhaps a dozen light years from our solar system. Still, it seemed extremely odd that there had been nothing in the media about these new born stars.

As I peered upwards, my excitement turned to fear. The stars were beginning to move, turning and shifting about each other in a stately dance that grew faster and faster until they spun about like hummingbirds ablaze with anger. This was truly inconceivable. With a shout, I fled up the street towards my home, filled with confused emotions that gyrated between wonder and dread. I must wake up the others and warn them, I thought in a panic.

And then I truly awoke.

I was lying in bed, and everything was the same as it had been at the start of my dream. Brenda was sleeping, her face towards the bedside clock. In the next room, Lucy, our black cat, was playing with some toy across the hardwood floor. Through the open window, I could hear the thrumming of a train diesel gaining speed, followed by the wounded-beast call of its horn. A few stars even shone through the bedroom's high northern widows, probably some of the brighter suns in Ursa Major, the Great Bear.

As my dream terror subsided, I knew there was no need to leave the safe cocoon of our bed and run outside. Of course a new constellation did not blaze in the sky. Rather, it dwelled in my unconscious, one of two reoccurring dreams of a celestial nature that have haunted my nights since I was in my teens. The other also involves a fantastic sky object, a planet about half

the size of a full moon and colored a luminous shade of turquoise. In that dream, there is no fear, only wonder as I watch it rise from the darkly forested hills of my boyhood home in upstate New York.

Carl Jung would say these objects in the heavens represent my true nature, what he called the Self. The new star cluster is a psychic mandala set in motion, the turquoise planet a representation of my innermost archetypal identity. In support of this interpretation, these dreams often emerge when major shifts are about to happen in my life, or I need to make important decisions. Regardless of whether my Jungian interpretations of these dreams are correct, I do know they are rooted in my lifelong fascination for the cosmos.

When I was thirteen, my parents bought me my first telescope. It was a three-inch Newtonian reflector with a diminutive spotter scope bolted to the side. A Newtonian reflector draws light into a long steel tube, its interior painted a dull black. At the tube's base, a large concave mirror reflects the light back to a small diagonal mirror which sends the now focused light to a lens at the telescope's side. The diameter of the main mirror is the size of the scope.

My parents purchased my three inch Newtonian from a local upstate New York craftsman who had constructed several large telescopes for various universities, including Cornell. I loved his workshop, a high-ceilinged garage-sized structure filled with lenses, mirrors, steel tubes, lathes, sheet-metal cutters, white acetylene tanks for welding, and racks of screwdrivers, wrenches, and rubber-headed hammers. The scent of hot solder and steel filings filled the air.

A year later, after I had demonstrated that my passion for the instrument was not just a childish whim, we returned to this wondrous workshop and my parents traded in the three-inch for a four-and-a-quarter inch Newtonian with a pale blue exterior, a black tripod, an array of lenses, and a solar filter. I have this scope to this day, almost five decades later.

Once I had the four-and-a-quarter inch telescope in my possession, I became obsessed

with studying the night skies. Summer was the best season to do this. With school out and the nights warm, I could stay up well past midnight gazing at the great wheel of constellations overhead. After these summertime telescopic explorations, I would sit in my stuffy upstairs bedroom, the front window wide open, and the fan turned full speed like the propeller of a P-40 Warhawk flying into battle, while the cicadas and the crickets sang in the dark beyond the window screen. At my desk, under the lonely blue light of a fluorescent lamp, I would pour over the star maps found in *The Telescope Handbook and Star Atlas* by Neale E. Howard, the ones with the transparent overlays of deep space objects rendered in blue ink – pond-shaped splats for nebulae, dotted circles for star clusters, and disks for galaxies. The very existence of these exotic interstellar objects stirred my imagination, while the Greek and Arabic names of the stars lent the text a mystical air, as if Neale Howard's book were a centuries old alchemical tome from lost Byzantium.

In addition to the amiably warm evenings, the position of the upstate New York night sky in relation to the galaxy also made those summer nights delightful. Our solar system swims near the galaxy's edge, and the Northern Hemisphere's summer night sky faces inward, towards the mysterious galactic center where the stars are the thickest. Therefore, a dragon's horde of stars grace the balmy July skies of New York, and within this stellar cornucopia my favorite regions to study were the constellations Scorpio and Cygnus.

At 42 degrees north latitude, Scorpio rides low along the southern horizon, barely clearing the tree covered hills. Starting from the middle of Scorpio's arc-shaped head – built around the stars Lesath, Elacrab, and Dschubba – a string of bright stars, including the orange-red gem of Antares, curves gracefully down and then back up to form a triangular stinger. Between this stinger and teapot-shaped Sagittarius's spout lies the center of the galaxy, hidden from view by the densest patch of the Milky Way.

Imagine, if you will, that it is a cloudy, late June upstate New York evening, and you are standing at the edge of a hayfield filled with fireflies. When you look towards the firefly swarm's center, the insects appear to be a teeming mass of flashing, darting lights that nearly fill the space just over the field. However, if you look straight up, you will see a mere dozen phosphorescent insects set against a vast darkness. This is essentially how it is when we look at the night sky. What we see as the Milky Way's luminous mist is actually our edgewise view into

the galactic lens, the crowded space where the stars are so thick they merge into a glowing river the ancients believed was milk from Hera's breasts.

For the amateur astronomer, the Milky Way is a phantasmagoria of deep space objects and myriad crystalline stars strewn across the sky. On those July nights decades ago, I would point the telescope in the direction of the galactic center, and delight in the Milky Way's radiant cloud as it resolved into thousands of stars. I would also study in Scorpio's stinger the open star clusters M6 and M7 – brilliant blue-white stellar aggregates mixed with clouds of gas and dust called nebulae, where infant stars are born. Then, in neighboring Sagittarius, I would turn the scope to M22, a globular cluster. Made up from many thousands of reddish-yellow stars that were already old when our sun was born, globular clusters are remnants from the galaxy's youth. Hovering outside the galactic lens, these spherical collections of suns appear to be tiny phosphorescent puffballs that have wandered off from the great stream of the Milky Way.

Although it also dwells in the Milky Way, Cygnus the Swan is a very different constellation from Scorpio. Whereas Scorpio is made up mostly from elderly red and yellow suns sidling along the horizon, the great cross shape of Cygnus flies directly overhead, its young suns blazing whitely with vigorous thermonuclear fires. Indeed, Deneb, the brightest star in Cygnus, is one of the galaxy's biggest and most energetic suns, and at 1500 light years away, the furthest individual star we can discern with the naked eye. Being within the galactic lens, Cygnus, like Scorpio, provides many places where one can resolve the Milky Way's glowing clouds into vast numbers of individual stars. However, at the swan's tail, where Deneb dwells, the Milky Way splits into two streams, a scar called the Great Rift that cuts across heaven's bright tributary. Recent anthropological discoveries indicate that the native peoples who built the Hopewell Indian Mounds viewed the Milky Way as a stream of souls rising from the earth towards an afterlife. For these ancient dwellers of the Ohio River basin, the Great Rift was the gateway to this other world, and Deneb, standing at the head of this dark opening, was the judge of the dead, equivalent to the Egyptian god Osiris.

The summer, with its warm nights and rich viewing field of the galactic lens, has remained my favorite season to study the night sky. However, in my early days as an amateur astronomer, the other seasons received a nearly equal share of my nighttime attention. Throughout the year, the planets ride the ecliptic, and on many autumn evenings sharp with frost or vernal nights damp from the thawing earth, I would study the children of the sun through my

Newtonian reflector – the merest dot of light that is Mercury, the dazzling crescent of Venus, the white-capped rusty disk of Mars, the banded orb of Jupiter with its pinprick moons, and dusty yellow Saturn with its mysterious rings. (Uranus and Neptune are so distant that in a telescope the size of mine they are essentially indistinguishable from stars, and very dim ones at that.)

Of course, the Moon also frequents the night skies throughout all four seasons. Since I did not own a lunar filter, any manifestation of the moon past quarter phase was too bright for study, hurting my eyes and leaving dark, unnerving afterimages. However, I often examined the crescent moon, its craters and mountains sharply etched by pure black shadows in the lunar dawn.

The most extreme viewing I did as a young astronomer took place in winter. In upstate New York, the winter nights often drop into the teens, and sometimes reach below zero. But there are some amazing deep space objects that would pull me out into the frigid darkness, including the Pleiades' fiery gems, the Beehive open star cluster in Gemini, and most especially the blue-white wings of the Orion Nebula, its young stars blazing like newly ignited phosphorous. One especially icy night, while observing the Orion Nebula, my eyelid froze to the steel-sheathed eyepiece, and I had to rub the lens with my finger to warm it up enough to peel my eyelid off without tearing any skin. After that, I was more cautious about observing on nights that went below 20 degrees.

Once I started college, my astronomical activities began to wane. Still, they have remained an important part of my life. Over the decades, I have continued to bring the telescope out when the evenings are clear and the spirit moves me, especially when something special is happening in the sky.

Occasionally there are lunar eclipses, produced when the earth's shadow swallows the moon, turning it into a blood-red orb that casts a fabulous and eerie glow. Then there are the ominous days when the moon eclipses the sun, and though I've never seen a full eclipse, I have watched many partials, studying them through my telescope's solar filter as the moon's perfect black circle slides silently across the sun's disk, slowly devouring the ash-grey sunspots one by one, like some vast cosmic snake. When I would return to upstate New York, I might see the silent, ghostly pulsing of the Aurora Borealis, the Northern Lights. One late autumn night, the

aurora engulfed the entire sky with shimmering white curtains. Near midnight, these curtains transformed into an enormous dove that flexed its wings before dissolving into the iridescent zenith. During the years I lived in the Alleghany Mountains of Virginia, there were star parties hosted by my friend and fellow English professor Herb West, a tall angular man with a full beard and a fine laugh. Herb would set up his six-inch reflecting telescope on his home's back deck under the tulip trees, and we would study deep space objects while giant Luna moths settled on the glass doors, drawn by the faint yellow lamplight inside. It was from Herb's house that I saw Halley's Comet on a cold March evening in 1986.

Later that year I moved to New Mexico, where I would begin to dwell under the remarkably clear skies across the arid West.

My introduction to the high desert night was during my first journey west three years before moving to Santa Fe. It was near midnight, and I was crossing Idaho on U.S. 20, when somewhere between Carey and Mountain Home I began glancing out my side window up at the sky. I could see even from the speeding pick-up that the stars were out and looking very promising, so I pulled to a stop on the shoulder, snapped off the headlights, stepped out, and caught my breath in amazement.

The night sky was flawless and filled with suns.

In my whole life I had never seen a sky so amazing. Unobstructed by moisture or city lights, the stars shone with a splendid intensity in the desert air. I stood transfixed, staring up at those clean, cold lights in their uncounted thousands. The only part of the sky that was obscured was far to the south where an impossibly distant thunderstorm produced silent pulses of light that outlined the distant volcanic hills. This was the ideal night sky I had always wished to see. Three other celestial encounters under western skies especially stand out for me. One was Comet Hyakutake, which I saw one March night in 1996 while driving south of Ridgway, a village in western Colorado. In an echo to my Idaho experience, I spotted the comet through my truck window, and pulled over to study it. It hung suspended in the northwestern skies over the Ridgway Reservoir, misty white and mysterious, its head and tail distinct and altogether about the size of the moon. There was something strange about seeing it hovering over the flat, darkened waters, which reflected the brightest stars and the occasional red flash of a buoy light but not the comet, which seemed illusory as it floated above the stone ramparts of Log Hill Mesa. But Hyakutake, which passed a mere 9.3 million miles from the earth, closer than any comet in 200 years, was certainly no illusion.

The second western sky object of note was another comet, but this one was quite unique, a far different sight than Comet Hyakutake.

I first spotted Comet Holmes on All Saints Day, 2007. In binoculars it resolved into a fuzzy white sphere with a bright, pinhead core. The next night, I trained my telescope on it. The comet filled the field, odd and unsettling, a ball of light with a brighter spot in the center, the comet's nucleus. This comet was especially exotic because, while it was larger in the night sky than the moon, it had no tail.

The third night, I simply observed it with the naked eye. It was blue-white dot with a barely visible mist around it, like a star surrounded by a nebula. I was impressed by how far it had moved through the constellation of Perseus. Only the moon, the inner planets, and comets move that quickly against the night's fixed background of stars.

Later, I read that Comet Holmes, journeying out from the sun, had begun to rapidly expand and disintegrate as it reached the region of the solar system between Mars and Jupiter. This was why it had leapt from a +17 magnitude object, so dim it could only be seen through a telescope, to a magnitude of +2, ranking it amongst the second tier of brightest stars. A number of ideas circulated concerning the comet's spectacular demise, but the leading hypothesis proposed that the sun's heat had formed a crust on the comet, and as the ice beneath that crust turned to gas, it built up pressure until the crust exploded, spewing debris to form a vast illuminated sphere literally larger than the sun.

The third remarkable astronomical event I experienced in the West was the transit of Venus across the Sun, which took place on June 5th, 2012. It will not happen again for over a century.

I was standing on the sidewalk of U.S. 66 in Flagstaff, Arizona on that bright June day, just downhill from the famous Lowell Observatory, where at the turn of the 20th century, Percival Lowell mapped what he thought were the canals of Mars, and where in 1930, Clyde Tombaugh discovered Pluto. A dozen or so amateur astronomers had set up telescopes in front of Old Town's red brick and stucco businesses. They were welcoming passerby to see this rare demonstration of planetary motion, and I am most grateful to them, for it was through their generosity that I witnessed the transit of Venus. In one amateur's six inch scope, I could see the sphere of the sun, big and pale white, with a scattering of small sunspots, each containing the black central umbra, and the lighter grey outer penumbra. And there, a tiny black dot, was Venus, crawling across the Sun like a brave explorer slipping past the gaze of a massive flame-

engorged demon. For me, this was an incredibly moving sight, because that diminutive planetary circle passing across the face of the titanic sun demonstrates our true place in creation. Just like Venus, the Earth is a miniscule sphere spinning around a mighty star which is but one of billions of stars in a galaxy that is journeying through a universe containing billions of galaxies.

And herein lies the inestimable value of astronomy – it reveals humanity’s deep interconnection with the universe, as well as our fundamental origins in the cosmos.

Over five billion years ago an ancient red-giant star went supernova, seeding a nearby cloud of dust and gas, a nebula like the one in Orion, with a myriad of elements – carbon, calcium, copper, zinc, silver, and many others – forged during the star’s long life of fusing atoms. The supernova also sent shockwaves throughout the nebula, causing it to compress into diffuse spheres that contracted and solidified as they gathered more and more of the dust and gas. At the center of these newly conceived objects, a monstrous sphere consumed great swaths of the nebula, finally becoming massive enough to fuse its hydrogen and helium atoms in a spontaneous burst of nuclear fire. In this titanic ignition, our sun was born. Soon after, smaller spheres, already in orbit around the new star, coalesced into the planets. And as the eons passed on the third planet, the heavier elements, shaped in the heart of the deceased star and strewn into the nebula that cradled our solar system, shaped oceans and continents and finally life – plants, amphibians, reptiles, and mammals. Run your hands across your arms. Feel the contours of your face. You are touching structures formed from atoms generated by a supergiant star that exploded millions of years before the earth even existed. And then travel more deeply in time. All of this – your face, the planets, the sun, the supergiant star which triggered the sun’s birth – are a part of the Big Bang, the eruption of the universe from a single point, a fourteen billion year old quantum blast that is still unfolding. As Walt Whitman observes in *Song of Myself*, “I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journeywork of the stars.”

And so, like a wanderer returning home to visit his old haunts, I still take out the telescope my parents gave me to view the night sky. I store the scope in the room behind the garage, and when I want to view a celestial object – the moon, or Saturn, or the globular cluster in Hercules – I heft the awkward arrangement of mirrors and steel tubes, and carry it past the

washing machine and drier, the black tripod banging against their white metal sides. Once past the rear door, I find a spot in the backyard where the house's shadow blocks the streetlights, and I also have a clear view of the ecliptic. Next, I return to the garage room, picking up the palm-sized white box that holds the eyepieces – small black cylinders with lenses in their dark chambers, encircled in bubble wrap like jewels of steel and glass.

Usually I start with a low-power lens with a wide field of view and slide it into the stainless steel tube high on the scope's side. The desert night air is cool but not cold, for it is mid-August, near midnight. The sounds of crickets and a car sliding by on a far-off street accompany my observing. Scorpio and Sagittarius are a bit too low for good viewing, but Cygnus is approaching the zenith, so I swing the scope up and aim it for the densest patch of the Milky Way – the breast-milk of Hera, the Hopewell pathway of souls. Having crossed hundreds of parsecs of space, the light from thousands of stars completes its voyage by racing down the darkly painted interior of the hollow cylinder, striking the four-and-a-quarter inch convex mirror at its terminus, and reflecting back to a perfectly angled two inch oval mirror resting on a metal plate held to the scope's walls by a slender metal rod. From the oval mirror, the light passes through the eyepiece and, magnified, enters my eye and strikes my synapses. A drift of glowing mist becomes a tight spray of blue-white points, the confirmation that when we look at the Milky Way, we are viewing the densest edge of the galactic lens.

After spending some time exploring Cygnus, I move on to Jupiter, hovering fat and bright in Capricorn. Its bands are colorful and clear this night, and its moons range in a startlingly straight line to either side of its yellow-white disk – one of Galileo's proofs for a heliocentric solar system.

The night's final object is M31, the great spiral galaxy in Andromeda, which has just cleared the neighbor's garage. Looking like an eye-shaped piece of the Milky Way torn and tossed from the Swan's heart, the light from the Andromeda Galaxy, produced by billions of suns, has journeyed nearly two million light years to reach my scope's mirrors.

After returning the telescope and lenses to their dwelling place in the room behind the garage, I retire to the glassed-in back porch, sit down at my desk, and flick on a small, high-intensity lamp. Its sharply defined cone of light illuminates the star charts in Howard's *The Telescope Handbook and Star Atlas*, and I study the black dots of suns on the white background, occasionally placing the transparent overlay with its ovals and circles of galaxies and nebulae. I begin with Cygnus, where I had travelled that night, moving out in circles that eventually take

in even the constellations of the Southern Hemisphere – Crux, Sculptor, Piscis Austrinus, Chamaeleon, and others.

As the two a.m. hour approaches, I am content. I close the book, turn off the lamp, and head off to bed. It's not long before I enter the dark realm of sleep, where I find myself running down the street to gaze up at a constellation of strange new stars dancing in late summer sky.

John the Blind Man

I once met a blind man in a coffee shop in Springfield, Missouri. He walked a mile in the dark to get there. It was morning for me. He told me even a blind man can see that Colorado is God's country. The rich Rocky Mountain air makes the Ozark Mountains envious, especially the sad foothills in eastern Oklahoma. He told me he once snuck out of the Boulder hospital to find beer with nothing but his nose, ended up in someone's garage drinking expensive wine saved as an investment. He knocked over some boxes and blamed it on a bear named Norman that broke out of a poorly funded zoo a few weeks ago. He told the home owner he chased Norman off with his cane, asked for a bottle of wine for an award. The blind man said when it snows sometimes he'll sled down streets on trashcan tops, knowing he'll probably die but the rush is worth it. He was dropped from his life insurance policy after his third arrest, the local police department had to create a law making it illegal for blind men to sled down streets. He frequently goes hiking in the woods, gets lost, sleeps under trees and finds his way home by listening for rivers and following them to civilization. He once made the newspaper after going missing for 30 days. He lived solely off of wild strawberries and yarrow. He told me he sees the stars 24 hours a day and when he swims he believes he's caught in the tail-wind of a falling star headed straight for the crooks in Washington DC.

Geometry

Choose one, and negative one
will be opposite, across the divide of zero.
My friend's son always wants to argue.
He blames his mother. A circle opposes
no one as it rolls away. Given the chance,
we would iron everything flat
and outlaw revolution.

Equations keep the world in line.
At times my niece becomes so angry.
When unknowns multiply,
nothing is linear. There is always
the problem of friction. She's like
her father, a perfectionist.
Successive iterations
solve nothing.

We plot our schemes
on a Cartesian grid, trying
to approximate a slope,
but dawn rounds into day. Day
rounds into dusk. At every turn,
the world confounds us.

BIOSIGNATURE

Trash marks our presence;
no transiting planet needed.
We live immersed in garbage –
at eye, nose and ear level.
Paper and paints litter.
Structures pile up.
From space it all looks the same.
Orange peels and paintings,
torn wrappings and poems,
broken down buildings or
newly erected experimental designs.
Only music as it wafts
through layers of refuse
is distinguishable from rubbish.
And its mathematical underpinnings
are recognizable from human
or alien point of view – universal –
in the physics of this universe.
So have the rovers and telescopes
listen for rhythms as they prod and poke
and peer. We'll know we're not alone
when the heavens sing to us.

The Pale of Chernobyl

The monetary rivers
of the Ukraine
have dried.
Without commerce
the true change is decay.

Where a half-life
of bad concrete and fixtures
Has left dying gardens
Dying apartment buildings,

Swimming pools flooded
with miscellaneous debris,
And vines gone viral
In impossible twists.
Detritus is the norm.

The Pripyat ferris wheel
stands still, iconic.
A rusted flower head
with yellow anthers.

At the reactor site
A sadly underfunded
grand arch of the future,
Built on rails and
using 30,000 tons of steel,

Awaits a long slow slide
to ground zero
in a plan to encase
the failed 1986 sarcophagus.

While out in the surrounds
Of the 30km Zone
That measure of exclusion
A mutated hierarchy
in wildlife arises.

Do the wolf packs speak
in a howling new tongue?
Do rutting elk scratch
math symbols in the dirt?

And if the radioactive forests
of pine catch fire,
Will caesium smoke
set a new order
in our most basic code?

Oh, above the hot spot music
of Geiger counters,
Oh beyond the yellow-red
geometry of warning signs,

If I could I would
lay open a cold vein
Of my unchanged genetics
And flow you a river of rebirth,
Make time reverse.

Let us not hesitate.
Torch us with
your holy fire rain.
Let us utter a cry
for this unbeloved country.

The Ride

She looked east, her vision skewed, hooked by some eerie glow: the sun gleaming with spume and glinting in fire orange clouds. There she had once been, holding down a coastal household with her ex-husband, a man withheld from himself by worship. He lived his lord's laws such that even the most sacred of matrimonial endeavors—the laying of one alongside the body of his beloved—he lingered over and log jammed, and left the woman lusting over others. Now the coast burned. She turned north, feet a plop on the hard road she trod, quick to meet what new obstacles chance might drop before her.

She had not long to wait. A driver slithered up the rise, snaking between the lines like a serpent. The man who captained the sedan skidded-stopped short of the next exit, not fifteen feet from the woman, and when he offered a ride she did not talk back but slumped into the seat. The dawn drew long, gone over to smoke brown noon and still the woman did not speak though the man talked and talked and talked.

The burning rustled on, browning the edges of the sky. Who knew how long the rust would dampen the east. The man punctuated his diatribes with questions intended to invite contribution, but a collaborator he did not want. He said, I've driven this road a hundred times, a thousand, I've gone this way and there's nothing out here, not till you get far north, figured I'd give you a lift. Where you headed? Don't worry, I can get you there. We just cruise along you and me. Me, I'm from Alameda. You're not hungry are you? I got a bag full of jerky if you are. Yeah, Alameda, man, shithole of a town. No wonder I never stuck around there. Always on the run. He went on and on like that and even if she'd wanted to she wouldn't have gotten in a word.

When what looked to be a trooper pulled them over, the trooper's voice said, Step out of the car. No face connected with the voice, only a belt. It was at this point that the woman became sure-almost positive--that the man sitting in the driver's seat next to her was in fact her husband, the one she had left to burn on the burning coast--or he had left her, depending on how one looked at it. She just had not recognized him at first. Had he not recognized her? Her husband was no doubt from Alameda, wasn't he? Or was it Alameda? But her husband had never talked in such

a way. He didn't curse. Perhaps in the intervening days her husband had taken on some new personality, some transformation brought about by the burning coast.

Geese fell from the sky. They plummeted from miles above, dropped in scattered remnants of their V-formation. Some had crossed continents, passed even over high Andean peaks, to reach this moment of demise. Around the highway lay scattered carcasses, and in the kinks where the barbwire fencing had been pounded into the wooden posts feathers had caught, and elsewhere feathers fluttered in the wind. Tumblefeathers--feathers clumped together in balls--rumbled across the asphalt. The wind brought with it the heat from the east's fires. And smoke. It stunk of burning flesh.

The man whom she thought to be her husband would not comply with the trooper, if the voice connected to the belt at the window was in fact a trooper. One could never be sure in times like these. Her husband was a voice, though she'd never known her husband to be a voice, other than his voice to his God. This man's--her husband's--voice complained of police injustice and racism and brutality and riots and one percent and burning and burning. But there was nothing. Nothing even indicated that the belt at the window belonged to a cop. Nothing indicated that even a cop could actually be a cop. There was only her husband's voice, then his fist on the center of the steering wheel, the horn wailing.

When the tires squelched and a hand gripped the driver's side window frame there was little to do but sit and watch as the fingers peeled slowly back and off and away, flailing arms, the passing grass, the sky still and orange and brown. And this, also, was something her husband would never do.

Her husband/not-husband said, They been trying to stop me since Cincinatto missy-o, no no way no howoooo.

Now rattlesnakes filled the road, though most were dead, already smashed by passing vehicles. Their flattened bodies lay sprawled in the roadway like half hash marks--tiny speed-bumps. The intricate markings of their skin were beautiful, and she noted the living snakes, sunning themselves in the high sun, as it squealed through the smoke and found its way to the road

where the reptiles warmed what they could of their blood. Years past one would not have found these animals in these latitudes.

Her mind, cocooned with the moss and lichens of thought about the man--her husband or not-husband--ripped from the stone of her memory. Some inching toward a worm worming its way across the few lawns left in the world. An anvil-shaped reptilian being, slithering belly-flat along the asphalt, left in its smear something of the woman's own heart-feelings, a goo residued from lost likings now that the social platforms had all disintegrated.

They travelled on, the woman still silent, her husband/not-husband talking talking talking about nothing about everything about anything he could talk about. She thought that if this were in fact her husband she still would have left him.

The country leveled flat and lay spined with conifers, yellowed with once-blue-green grass, all spotted with encroaching sagebrush. The heat battered the heart of the car's metal hood, knocked, breathed, and shone through the grasshopper-splattered windshield. They stopped to take on water along the remnants of a once-proud river, now merely a creek trickling through a canyon that the river had once carved, and her husband/not-husband produced a filtration device with which he pumped the chalky water clear into an old sodapop bottle. He kneeled upon the cracking mud bank to pump and he chattered on--When we get there boy you betcha they gonna be happy to see me, I got all kinds of friends up there, girlfriends, boyfriends, I'm blessed with friends, friends never abandon me I tell you what.

Girlfriends? Boyfriends? Had her husband had friends? Surely there were friends from church. But her husband had never been one to socialize yet here he was. It looked like her husband, his dark locks as familiar now as he bent beneath her while she stood over him, his mouth still running, all as he had been when he was her husband. She with the river rock poised overhead, making of herself a shadow that fell across her husband's/not-husband's back and shoulders. She could be sure that he was her husband. The thought had crossed her mind that she might ask. *Are you, by chance, my husband?* Then she thought of the absurdity of the question. There was only one way to be sure.

She brought the rock down in an arc and it landed at the base of his neck with a soft thwump. When he slumped forward, into the trickle, she straddled his twitching form and raised the rock again and again, and the trickle ran chalk-pink.

Under his hair, behind his left ear, she discovered no birthmark, the birthmark that she knew her husband wore. But a birthmark could be removed, could it not? A person might remove such a thing as a birthmark should one undergo a new birth in becoming a new person, and this husband was not her husband, not the husband she'd once known. Thus the person who was once her husband could've been reborn as a new person who was not her husband but who resembled her husband.

She finished the water-pumping, filling the vessel her once-living husband/not-husband had procured. Mid-pump the woman startled at the scuddle of stones. Not twenty feet away a pair of wolves, their coats light grey and thinned from the weather, had lowered their muzzles to the creek, their teeth white against their curled lips and their lapping tongues. They lifted their heads to watch the woman as she continued pumping, and she did not take her eyes off the beasts. Their stomachs were round and full from the carrion on which they had gorged in this northern traversal where the dead littered road and forest both. For the wolves, the woman held no interest.

Beast and bird and woman, all bore equal burdens.

Back in her husband's car the woman cranked the key, the engine firing, a rumble. The gas gauge read $\frac{3}{4}$ full. She hadn't a clue as to how far that might take her. The woman, though she possessed the knowledge necessary to operate the vehicle, knew nothing of its properties. She drove. The radio hissed static. She fumbled with the temperature for the air conditioning. Did it work? It did not.

A meditation on contingency and the ways of knowing

In the sage's field

an owl sits

in a dead tree,

otherwise...

This Only Begins in the Streets

Even in drought they call it *spring*.

The dessicated Christmas tree
 leans
against the gutter.

—

Despite Aeolia's bag of breezes
the day's blues have gone grey.

Impetuous clouds insulate the heat
they can't entirely reflect.

Like
colors, we speak in opposites.
We absorb everything—almost.
I said leave not leaf—uproot.

We weed weeks from giant months
and shed nomers and abstractions to remember
ourselves. This isn't a grasshopper.
It's a locust. This is what engorged
itself on the livelihood of the village.

Even so—something's awry. Just so.
 Doctor Frankenstein's castle's lost its electricity.
 The night was silent as death. Then
 the day as well.
 First I lost a button, now
 the buttonhole, who sells a buttonhole?
 Can't you tell me? Not to say I feel
 an absence, but absinthe inflates my feeling
 of being a once-blown-balloon.

Thinner in nonessential ways.

Before Indians invented zero
did people still have these complexes?
I keep my apartment simple, for now.
Nothingness has a shape— like
the observable universe, but
without all the junk. You scholar, you.

Before they named nothingness

in number, they indicated absence
with absence. Which
explains the quiet.

The Eternal in the Daily

No candles light this poem in the dark;
instead, voices whisper from the next
room. Neighbors walk past the house after
sun set, shaking their heads. A car sits
in the driveway under the flood light
with the hood up, pointed the wrong way
for the jumper cables. The last time I
got a wish, I asked for candy. That's
what children do; they can't keep themselves
from tugging on a sleeve for a life
saver during the sermon, always
wanting to know when the lesson will
end. Currently, we miss meaning
in one moment while concentrating
on another, play hangman in the
back of the car with cousins while we
await the tow truck, our dear mothers
yearning for rest, longing for this night
to end as if tomorrow were just
folded in half and tucked behind it.

City Elegy

I used to sleep well in my aunt's house
in the city, where there's never total silence
or stillness or dark.

Stick your pointer finger out and watch it:
humans don't own the biological patience
to remain still. So, naturally, we'd need
an environment which also vibrates.
The city shivers. That used to comfort me,

but the more I see asteroid belts
of potential harm orbit pedestrians,
the more I fetal-position myself.
It's not my fault I'm a fractal,
putting millions of skin cells' lives at risk,
each time I open a door.

Neuroplastic-ly, I find, I now hate crowds.
My word for group has twitched
from "party," to "horde," to "swarm," to

an army ant bivouac
clears its path of all life so concisely,
parasites cling at their mouths for food.

Birds follow to eat the leftovers.
Then, insects eat the birds'.

On the Origin of Species

What Darwin saw when he looked at the finches was too heretical to put into words but he would, eventually, when he was ready. When *The Beagle* landed on San Cristóbal he made his men jump ashore and drag the ropes toward the treeline to anchor the ship where it lay, but he stayed put on the deck for a moment, caught by some unholy feeling that seemed to radiate out from the island itself. The waves as they hit the shore sounded like the heavy breath of Poseidon whose form he could just barely discern standing in the shallow water, watching the British scramble toward the banks; his trident pointed ominously outward, past the throng of men and toward Charles's own chest, targeting him. Marking him. Directing him too, perhaps. The maps he had used to navigate the unruly waters of the south Atlantic had been drawn in haste by Ambrose Cowley in 1684, a pirate whose fascination with the place had only to do with the potential riches hidden in the dank coves, gold that had been deposited there by Cortés and his men. They had intended to return for it once they'd found the Fountain of Youth that Ponce de León had promised was bubbling up somewhere in the Florida Keys, but they never made it back on account of the trade winds that lead them astray from the island and pushed them farther south toward Patagonia.

Darwin was too much a man of science to be given over to such irresponsible and mislaid superstitions, but now that he stood on the deck looking out at the island and its jumble of trees and beaches, at the tortoises sunning themselves on the rocks, at the vee's of the seagulls overhead; after he heard the screams of the Capuchin monkeys sounding from within the copse, he felt something akin to what Cowley must have felt as he sketched the contours of the island's reefs, some deep secret lurking insensate inside the stone or sealed tightly behind the teeth of the animals, something he knew he'd have to pry out of them when the time came. He thought of Linnaeus pinning butterflies to his corkboard. He would arrest them mid-flight and position their fractal-patterned wings in order from smallest to largest and intersperse them with sprigs of dandelion and the hunched corpses of bumblebees. In his armchair Linnaeus was safe, enclosed in the Universities at Lund and Stockholm, scratching notes on carbon paper, fixating on his obsessive-compulsive need to bring order to nature by slapping Roman titles on all the plant and animal species and arranging them in booklets according to shape until he'd gathered the whole of creation inside his arbitrary taxonomy and could die in peace knowing that all of God's creatures now had names.

But this. Darwin was in Prospero's land. The magician made the sea sway; he pushed

Darwin off the ship. Caliban limped behind him. *Hell is empty and all the devils are here.*

The nausea brought on by the ship's lurching movement evaporated once he was on dry land, and he and the men began to probe the earth for bones and treasures. There was a cemetery within the coves that housed the skeletons of old reptiles who had sunk to the bottom of the sea years ago, or washed up from farther out after having found final sleep in the jaws of the tiger sharks that wove themselves around the corals. They brought all of this aboard with them and hopped from one isle to the next, Floreana to Santa Cruz to Bartolomé, loading the hull full each time with the cracked detritus of dead sea life and the milky remains of the jellies that saturated the beaches underneath the neon floodlight of the moon. In his own cabin Charles kept the bodies of the finches that he'd lifted from the nests in the scalesia branches. He would note nothing special about the birds until he returned to England and went about preserving them in earnest. Still, even in the silence of his cabin, with the body of the boat rocking to the waves underneath his feet and the wan light filtering in through the hatch, he could sense a strangeness about them. There was a kind of fluttering in his gut that crawled up his throat as he stared into their glassy and vacant little eyes, something that told him Prospero's was not the only magic here.

The similarities between the disparate finch species were too pronounced to be coincidental. The curves of their beaks were subtle and tender, their points perfectly articulated to grasp the berries from the hollowed bark of trees. The crests of their heads were Venetian and their tousled cheek feathers bore the same kind of Adriatic elegance found around the Doge's Palace. What then was behind this mask they all wore? Their little hearts beat a hundred times a minute, flustered by the long-obscured knowledge of where they came from and how they adapted themselves to their own island's specific flora. Charles spent hours, in the dark of the night with the whale fat candles burning, trying to decipher the code that was written in their flesh and the zigzag of their feathers.

He remembered Malthus and his harsh math, his prediction that our cities will crumble once the land runs out of the resources necessary to support our mad human drama. Darwin thought of Lamarck, too, and the way that man claimed the necks of giraffes became elongated over many generations so that they could better reach the upper foliage, as if such eternal striving kept its own ledger in the homunculi that lived in the sperm of the males, little animal fetuses that would, once inflated in the womb, possess the special adaptations of their parents. Darwin through finally of the men at the British Museum and those inside the cloisters of St.

Thomas' Abbey in Brno, tinkers who were manipulating pea pods to grow to their liking. Something was converging; he could feel it. He saw Caliban when he closed his eyes, deformed, drooling into the sand, and he saw Ariel sprinkle dust over his own vision so that he could see beyond the dictates of religious dogma and figure out just what nature was doing. The birds were part of it. The turtles, too. The islands in their isolation, the bones buried in the mud, the passage of the years, the struggle to survive....

Before she died, his daughter Annie made him read to her the Bible verses that spoke of Noah and the flood. He embellished his speech with all the foment and terror of the Old Testament God who was irate at the sins of man and wanted to wipe the slate clean. Crumble Babylon, leave Jerusalem to the fish. Annie's eyes glittered when he read about how Noah ushered the animals onboard his ark and sailed for forty days and nights until he once again found the safety of dry land. Now his dead daughter's eyes looked out at him as he sat in his cabin contemplating how he was to undo the great myths of men with the bright florescent truth of science.

Darwin knew, even before he wrote the words, that the verbiage must be precise. Careful. The Inquisition loomed large in his memory; he could see the foul blood of heretics spill wet and greasy over the sacrificial stone slab of the Altar of the State, which yawned with its own fire and adamant disavowal of anything not sanctioned by Rome. Charles would still write his treatise. He would leave out the ultimate blasphemy, though, of course. When he wrote about the birds and how each living organism could be traced back to a common ancestor--when he committed to paper the idea that it was nature, not God, who decided which animals would survive and which would perish according to the brutal calculus inherent in the notion of survival of the fittest--when he submitted for consideration by the Royal Society his theory that every plant and animal on earth started as something much simpler in form and that life had then grown to such maturity over a far longer period than is described in the Book of Numbers--when he does all of this, he will leave out the part about us. Where we fit in. Because it isn't Genesis.

There is a back room in the Museum that overlooks the courtyard where a sculpted garden blooms despite its culling by the groundsman whose job it is to keep the bushes trim and tidy. Farther out beyond that there is the Thames, and beyond that the rest of London, and then the countryside, and then the sea, and so on and so on. There are drawers in this room that store artifacts not yet out for display—books and letters mostly, and etchings, and a small collection

of archaeological findings that didn't make it into the main show room or are still waiting to be cataloged. A while back, before his trip to the Galapagos, Charles found a copy of Ponce de León's journal from the time he went searching for that famous fountain. León writes about the maniac desire to get to Florida before the Italians did and his hard scramble throughout the marshes trying to find the elixir that he could sip from and live forever.

Darwin hadn't intended to follow in the Ponce's footsteps, but there was indeed a fantasy motivating his journey to the islands that had little to do with science. It had to do vaguely with longevity, and with finding an eternal wellspring, of sorts. At some point, every explorer wishes they could keep sailing forever--leave the dock and continually discover new worlds, taste the Indian spices and follow the trails out of Asia Minor and into the great plateau of the East. They watch the sun set over the water, and they think of their children back home, and they think of the work they have done to bring stories about the New World back to Europe, and about how the young men there will plot new expeditions and plan new settlements and will imagine, and perhaps even get to see, the glorious future of their conquest spread across this place. But they also see that they, the sires of the new, the men who started it all, will fall apart in the ensuing decades with illness or anguish or hearts that merely stop beating. The life of the kingdom and the blossoming of its colonies will go on without them.

Cortés weeps a mess of oil paint from his canvas in the East Wing. León frowns with his own illustrated likeness, which bursts forth from the etched pages of the history books spread across the hall.

Darwin watches the Thames churn through the city and knows his visage will one day grace these halls in lieu of his actual person, but unlike those other men, he is not sad. He found the fountain, in his own way; it exists in the coiled strands of information that are passed from one creature to the next. The tree blossoms; animals multiply and their lines become smaller and smaller branches leading outward from the trunk. The lineages of the animals are like geysers spewing forth—the golden droplets of the Ponce's imagination are none other than the thimble-thin threads of diversifying species, and it rains and rains and rains.

Arsenic Dreams

We walked along the waterfront
and mused about what it must be like
to be among the ones who live there
treading in these parts
breathing in the sea air
from a window
inside the room of a luxury home
overlooking the view
of the shore
with the islands nearby.
If you had asked us
more of what we had beheld
you would have detected
we had no knowing
beyond the reveries
that they who lived with such contrivances
were met upon by visits from
faraway men
in orange vests
equipped with air monitors and soil sensors
digging mounds of earth from the yard
replacing it anew
cautioning residents
against growing
kale and lettuce below ground
aiming always to sow in the beds instead
and to never walk indoors with the shoes on
lest the specks of arsenic
like confetti
soar around you.
Whats more

it did not occur to us to ask
if on a windy day
one presses one's ear to the ground
does one hear the
mercury and cadmium
rumble?

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ode to immrama. i tore off your sails like ripping pages. sing Sirens and melt the wax and wreck. Esemplastic. Gonadotrophin. Borborgysms. Vermicular. Jactation. Inimical. Stochastic. Aleatory. the cell phone towers burn so bright tonight. i parachute through your multi-media. your virtual. scarecrow smile. shipwreck torso. graveyard teeth. some thought you full of feathers. not me. if i must i'll be the tongue of the swaggering forward beast with its knees and fangs making war. i want Chuck Close to paint the freckles on my arm using elixirs of melted freckles and pigment. impossible to love. a plum blossom in a wolf's mouth. conundrum in an elevator. or a Viking in an office building swinging axes. i find it hard to swallow poisonous jellyfish all day and call it all bureaucracy and appendages stinging me with spreadsheets and spiked deadlines. grimace. a billion guitars to be played marching towards a billion commoners and they clash. a good war.

Bird Rescuer

I am going to Home Depot with my boyfriend
to get a dehumidifier for the shop.
He already knows the specs:
how it holds 30 units, uses 8.6 kilowatt hours.
I have no input. I follow him
into the smell of sawdust and lumber.
It makes me wish I knew how to build things,
what I would do with a band saw.

We pass the scaffolds of storage shelving
and notice a bird fluttering in the rafters.
“Poor thing,” he says. In that moment,
I imagine him as Snow White.
The bird swoops down from a slump
in darted flight, lands on him

and then comes home with us. It wants to learn
how to weld, will repay with music lessons.
Practice, it sings, *every day*, vocalizing
to Verdi in the shop that night,
perched on my new fore plane
while I try my hand at truing the surface
of a plank, while the little ribbons
fall to the floor like miniature scrolls.

I offer to keep the strips and reuse them.
Maybe I could build a birdcage,
they could go at the bottom of it.
The bird just trills away.
It says, “Don’t do anything like that; like you,
I already have everything I need.”

This door slams easily now
though in the dark
it remembers more

reaches around and the rain
returned to you as lips
pressed together

weighs almost nothing
keeps both these hinges
from drying the way a deathwatch

night after night anchors
against the splash
and makes from your hand

a mask to ward off the Earth
tightening around your cheeks
two shadows, two mouths.

Road Dog

It's a quarter of three. Dark as dark could ever hope to be and there are no streetlights. I drive at night mostly. Sometimes I get lucky under cloudless skies when there's a full moon and stars to spangle the skies. But when it's overcast I can't see squat. But I know these roads well. I go by landmarks. A house trailer. A barn. A fence line. A corn field. A bridge. Even road signs.

I've been driving all night, all over these country roads. Hell's backyard. All night long I drive and drive, and when it's over, I go back to my hut and sleep all day. It's a double wide, actually, that my Daddy willed me when he kicked the bucket a little over five years ago. Mama died when I was a kid. Ovarian cancer. Nasty gunk. I never knew her too well.

My double wide is on the property that's been kept in the family for ages. My older sister and her husband and their three kids got dad and mom's farmhouse. Lucky bastards. Since I've never been married and don't have nobody except a mangy cat, Daddy figured Sally, Ted and those brats needed that big, drafty, ugly house more than me. It's nothing to look at and the cost of heating that thing during the winter month's probably half a month's take for me. Maybe I'm lucky, after all.

Folks around here don't even know my name. But they all call me Road Dog. Even people who know my name – Thomas Noah Bartholomew - still call me Road Dog. I don't work. Never have. I've been in and out of mental hospitals since I was a teenager. I get Social Security Disability every month. Six-hundred-fifty-and-some-odd dollars every 30 days or so. I love February since it's such a short month... Crazy checks are what some folks call it all. I don't know, maybe they're right. I guess I am pretty freakin' crazy.

But I'm not the only road dog around these parts. I come across an animal - scuzzy and horrible – and as big as a tree, glaring at me on many a night. It has fangs the size of saplings and it looks as hideous as the devil himself. Maybe it's my mind playing tricks on me, who knows? And you probably don't believe any of it, but I'll tell you it's as true as George Washington's on the dollar bill.

After manning the wheel of this bucking bronco all night long, crazy stuff starts happening. Things come out of the darkness and sit on the road, under the brights of my headlights. Groundhogs. Crows. Wild hogs. Deer. Once, I even happened across a swarm of bees looking for a new hive. I never knew they were active during the nighttime, but I guess when they want to get a new hive, they must be. Boy, did I get those windows rolled up in a hurry that night. And every once in a while, it's him sitting there. The road dog. Mean and nasty as Lucifer himself.

The animal is so real – sort of like a mixture of a big cat and a wolf. At least as big as a full-grown black bear, I saw him on Old Buzzard Highway just last week. Old Buzzard Highway, by the way, is more like a two-lane road made of good asphalt that runs between Baxter and Vermillion. These are two towns that are mere dots on the map. They're not even towns, really, but crossroads, and they don't appear on any state maps that I've ever seen. Once upon a time, Baxter and Vermillion were coal mining towns. Coal camps. But all the coal's been sucked clean here and all that's left is reclaimed and regurgitated scruffy fields full of ragweed, junk brush, and rows of pine trees shooting up all over. Every day's Christmastime in my neck of the world. The government reclaimed the land, buried over all those strip mines, then they planted evergreens from here to kingdom come. . . .

I live amid a bunch of cities and towns like this – they're all over the place, and like I said, most aren't really towns, but crossroads. What me and the other locals around here call "hollers," which really is our pet name for the more proper "hollows". A holler's not big enough to be a community, but they definitely hold enough folks to be considered neighborhoods. And many of the hollers are made up of families. Aunts, uncles, cousins, sons, daughters, and grandkids. We don't take too kindly to outsiders around these parts. And in many a holler here, if you ain't family, you ain't gonna be 'round long. Outside folks get the heebie-jeebies right quick and move out of Dodge.

They claim there are all sorts of creatures around these parts. Most of them aren't even known. But everyone is talking about Road Dog these days. Whenever I get gas, those words can be heard in conversations. I don't really know what they're talking about, standing far off, but I hear 'Road Dog' mentioned. Same thing for stopping at a corner store for a cup of coffee or smokes. Road Dog chatter's all over the place here.

I've heard tell that he's killed farmers' cows, goats, sheep, rabbits, and chickens. And there's even some local squawk going around that he killed this old hermit who lived in a shack just east of Barn Owl Holler. Yeppers, Old Man Sexton lived way off the beaten track in the middle of the woods and he had two hound dogs that the local scuttlebutt going around claims were gutted, with all the blood in their veins sucked away like a milkshake slurped dry by some little brat in the backseat of momma's runaround car. Of course it's all hearsay and nothing appeared in the local paper about this incident. I guess the local politicians and police didn't want anything getting around about this noise – that a huge predatory animal is lurking about and it killed Old Man Sexton and his two mutts.

I drive a 1970 Mercury Cyclone GT, a muscle car to die for, and I've had it since I was a kid. Up until just a few years ago, I never drove it. It just sat in my garage under a tarp. Daddy and I used to take it to car shows once in a while and it won a few cash prizes, trophies, and plaques. See, Uncle Jeb willed it to me when he died and I was only 11 at the time. I couldn't even drive the thing 'til I turned 16 and got my driver's permit. Uncle Jeb said in his will that I was his favorite nephew. I did a lot for old Jeb, like cut wood for him in the fall so he'd have a good supply in the back to get for these harsh winters. And I stopped by to see him quite a bit. He lived right down the lane from our house, and my Papa told me it was my duty to make sure his brother was okay. A lot of folks didn't like Jeb. He sure could be a mean old cuss, 'specially when he was on that whiskey. Papa told me one day, "Your uncle's a war hero. He did some good things in his life. He saw a lot in that war and he didn't do it stateside, he was right dab in the middle of Europe where all the action was. If you take an interest in what he has to say, ya' might even learn a thing or two from Jeb. And despite everything, he's my older brother, and I really do love him."

Funny, that was the only time I ever heard my daddy use that word 'love'. So after our little talk, I decided to go spend some time with Jeb, when I wasn't fishing, playing baseball, or just cutting up with my buddies. Come to think of it, Jeb even mentioned something about that devil dog one day when we was chewing the fat. I can't recall the specifics or anything, but it was a pretty day in the summer. The sun was shining and a cool wind blew through my long, stringy, crimson hair. Ole Jeb said, "That devil dog has the most piercing red eyes imaginable and that it tries to intimidate folks by peering at them with those evil eyes. He'll sit on his haunches in the middle of a deserted country road and wait to see those headlights way away in the distance approaching. Then when the car finally comes out of a turn and spots that devil dog, it sort of zeroes in with those nasty red beams of his and looks right through the terrified driver, as he or she is seated behind that steering wheel." - *I think that's what Jeb told me, but I can't be for sure. I was just a kid, after all, and this conversation happened decades ago.*

I remember that particular day. It's as clear to me as if it all happened last week. Yes indeed. Uncle Jeb was in a pretty good mood and he was drinking some cheap brand of beer while we were sitting on his front porch. He wasn't drinking whiskey. This much I do recall. So he was alright that particular afternoon. Not mean and nasty at all, like when he used to get when he was on the hard spirits. He always got mean, wild, and crazy, 'specailly on the whiskey. But Uncle Jeb's been dead for two decades now so I'll have to say *God rest his soul.*

But that devil dog, well...it's still around these parts. If it ain't the same devil dog that Uncle Jeb was talking about to me that bright, sunshiny day, it's one of that red-eyed demon's pups. And maybe, just maybe, there are several of those pups that are now all grown up and are these days terrorizing this area.

Yep, one of the reasons I drive my 1970 Mercury Cyclone GT around all night long is to keep track of that devil dog. I mean, somebody has to, right? Everyone around here is scared shitless of that monster. There are a lot of folks, particularly elderly people, who don't leave their homes after dark out of fear of that devil dog. Until Old Man Sexton came up missing, and was later found mutilated so badly that his corpse looked as if it was victimized by some kind'a wilding, and the old hermit's dogs were found mutilated almost beyond being recognizable as canines, all the talk about the devil dog seemed to be nothing but idle chatter. But believe me, things really changed after Old Man Sexton was ripped to pieces by that monster.

There's some talk going around that Old Man Sexton was butchered by some psycho killer. The cops have been doing some kind of investigation into the matter and a couple of times, they even visited me at the double wide, real early in the morning, at the god-forsaken hour of eight or nine in the morning. They asked me all sorts of questions. It was hell. I didn't even have my coffee and they're hitting me with their 101 question routine. I don't know if I'm a suspect in Old Man Sexton's murder, but it seems to be that way. I'm not gonna worry about it. Everyone around these parts knows it was that devil dog that killed and mutilated that old guy.

I'm not afraid of that road dog. That devil dog. I've seen him four times in the last month. And he knows me. I think he even knows my scent by now. And I think that thing's afraid of me, too. The last time I saw him, sitting up on his haunches on some gawd-forsaken country road around here, that thing just stared me down for a while. Then I think it got a good whiff of my scent and yelped, then it scurried off the road and hightailed it into the woods. I could have run him over if I wanted to, but I didn't. I have enough respect for that thing that I know not to play with its fire.

That dog wants me to attack. He expects me to attack. That's what any kind of beast anticipates. Fight or flight. That's a dumb animal's only two options it gives itself. Stopping my car ten feet from it, and just waiting on that desolate road, under the moonlight, and letting that thing make the next move is the last thing the road dog foresaw. It couldn't understand that sort of reasoning. This just didn't fit in the picture puzzle of its fight or flight mentality.

But that's exactly what I did. I'm not going to say I wasn't scared. Actually, I was petrified beyond belief, sitting there behind the wheel of those hundreds of horses; just letting that red-eyed, monstrous, diabolical beast make its move. And now I know that thing is as fearful of me as I am of it – and the proof is that it got the hell off that road and scurried off into the woods.

So tonight I'm going out again. I've got a thermos of coffee ready to keep my eyes open and my mind alert all night long. And if I see that thing, I might just get out of my car and shoot him with my trusty old .44 magnum. It's Old Man Sexton's old gun. I just happened across the thing somehow. Don't ask me no questions about it all, I don't wanna talk about it!

That Road Dog's day has come, after all, and I want to show that savage wolf on steroids just how deadly I am. Yes, I want to be the only road dog around these parts

She Asks Me Inside

Too big a thought
was what brought me
to laughter out here
in the night's place:
how every gesture
is undesigned
but perfect in its grace.

That the bones of my hand
are mineraled with such
knowledge that I can
never know, as you reach
for me, as you hold
the reaching of my flesh.

That the fluid of our eyes
floats with ancient seas
that grant a purer seeing
as we look into each
other's oceans.

That ancient stars fall
into our eyes
and mouths to kiss with
the lust of primordial
waters seeking to make
a new beginning.

Our hunger bathes
our starry flesh,
laughs us rich
in quiet afterglows
of ancient knowing.

So hold my hand and
touch me so I thrill
again from the wild chill
of meeting more than me
outside in this dark time.

Future Reflections

Into midnight woods we ran fleet-footed past moon lit puddles naked, exuberant, alive,
clinging to wonder and open to madness.

We unshackled our minds in soft peace, whispered in repose:

Binocular vision cast upon the heavens.

We howled at the moon, surrendered to its power, and knew on this night
anything was possible.

We lavished mellifluous invocations, cried exaltations, wishing with full hearts
for a crystal vantage.

The flora flush with dew; fauna ambient, aware, unseen, unheard.

We relinquished thought;

There was no sound.

The split screen flayed, our pupils prisms as we inhaled,

we gazed into its chasm, aflame in white hot light;

Hypnotic breakers swelled and rose as mountains above a shoreline emerging in reverse,
the earth in synchronicity with their thunderous crash.

The halcyon seascape radiated beneath a canvased sky wet with lilacs.

Doused once more in darkness, the chasm mended, restored,

all that remained: the cool grass, silent minds

and small hours, deep within the woods.

An epiphany under our backs, a breeze in our hair, a whisper: nothing to fear.

She beamed, a tear coursing her cheek; I knew that instant I had not gone mad.

Such vastness lay beyond this wallpapered sky!

Into the cosmos

we had seen, but would never tell.

I reach towards time through the internet

I reach towards time through the internet
bouncing and bundling towards me like light -
like so many hands splayed out in patterns –
numbers, letters, and something the
collective is starting to hum
by itself

i reach towards words, towards pixels that
bounce and effortlessly point me in the
direction of direction
that wind up my spine and
twist down my bones

i reach through screens, through parapets
and tumbling towers of old modems, of new energies
being thrust through wires, cables, curtains and corridors
i keep finding that ancient plug in the wall that is surging
with some silent melody we are all beginning to hear
thumping in the thumbprints of our tiny whimsy fingers

we are beginning to tap out the typed turning point
of a race of small, fragile humans
racing the sky
towards the sun.

icarus and i, we're doing fine,
suspended in free fall by some
finely tuned parachute that knows
we don't know half of what we think we might know.

The Juggler of Words

has the following syllables in the air above him: pot pen-guin per-i-gee.
It is clearly a day with a high probability of raining Ps. Good news for some,
but not so much for those who wear dentures and are following the juggler

of words act since each plosive word begins with a puffing of lips, and explosion
of breath, dangerous to those with snapper plates, mineral teeth, or a whole ratelier.
The juggler of words waits for the first word to return to his soft hands. Will it be

the one weighted down with the most syllables, or the normally flightless one
but the one best in aerodynamic design, or the first into space, pot? We can't know
and must wait. And when it does return to earth his hands will give it a slight twist

and change its nature and trajectory, so that a pot might become a pet, a cat at that, and
startle the otherwise zen penguin, who hovers patient in the sky to descend and himself
be transformed. Will he become a wineskin or some other misunderstanding of reality?

And what of perigee, poor perigee? Surely by definition the closest in orbit and yet the
most likely to become its easy opposite if rhyme matters. The juggler of hands admires
the cat as it arches its back, straightens its legs and maneuvers its tail for optimal

balance upon reentry. It has co-opted perigee and become apogee. And the juggler's
hands have unhandled themselves from his wrists and flown into the audience where
they are circling there in the migraine aura of strobe lights, absent the applause

of the undeceived, caught in the trick not a trick, the helpless hands
and the velvet curtain crashing down.

World/Elton John/Tumbleweed Connection

1. Ballad of a Well-Known Gun

This bullet was ripped from a darker episode,
shot from a chamber less than clean

This bullet, broken down to degradable parts,
speaks a lesser tongue which betrays itself

This bullet breeds infection, scars which
breathe rotted tones of green

2. Come Down in Time

In the bardo of this darker time, the rotted
jazz interweaves the stench of dirty bullets
and the staccato hits by which we were damned

Here, when I dream, it is in waves of passion
and glory unspent by time, unsullied by guns

Paint the dream on the page and awaken to a
less fluent jazz

3. Country Comfort

Let's rearrange these mountains into mirror
images let's paste our portraits around the edge let's
dive into the private pools of the mountains and
hold our breathe until it turns to thirst

What I want for you is directional weight what
I want for me is a softer landing what I want for
these blind bullets lined up in broken rows is a
uterine capacity for variance

With this thirst, we can drink, but there is no
absorption of mineral element or spiritual dalliance,
only the dust of last night's duel

I have everything to say and nothing to say it
with and that is the jazz that I need

4. Son of Your Father

We have inherited these lakes, these mountains,
with the baggage they infer

with the chaotic evolution passed from son to son

In the names of the mountain, the names of the prodigals
who stayed behind to fill the lakes, in their names we bow
down blindfolded and handcuffed to face the gun at the
back of our heads

5. My Father's Gun

Not fingerprints but gunprints left behind
smeared and rank, defiant of detection

bullets dipped in hummingbird blood, bullets
dipped in biblical spells, bullets poured

from volcanic ore, bullets pulled from the
bones of war

it's never enough

is it?

6. Where to Now St. Peter?

Lead me blind down these narrow-edge paths,
bullet-carved and forsaken

this deep darkness choir scats and bops a
discordant dirge as I tumble, loose as a weed
that never took root

there is nothing to lose and I will cling to it
and that is the song of this gun

7. Love Song

If I could catch the notes long enough to hear
them, to take their imprint

it could be a song to match the dissonance
of any underworld crowd

it could be a song to witness a backbreaking
tide of loss

just another corrupt jazz tangled in
in a world-weary net of blues

8. Amoreen

For that which can be loved, I cast my worn
and poorly-mended net, I don't care if love
is dead

its porous bones wired together in
a puzzled maze of mismatched limbs
hung with rended rags

it would rather drown me in my own net
than be my puzzle toy

9. Talking Old Soldiers

When these graveheads speak, they spit out
their torn bullets and disgorge indecent tongues

If I ask for their stories, they will never
let me dream, forever always tied to their
deserted beds and clattering ruthless tunes

I have nothing to sing and I am singing it and
that is the song that I need to keep these old wars
and spent warriors stitched to their graves

here and there a granite shadow lays its hand
upon me, checks the vintage of my gun, unspools
a long ribbon of poetic scars to wrap around my
throat until I can no longer say the word *hero*

10. Burn Down the Mission

To each bullet its own grave

To each grave its own stone

To each stone its own match

To each match its own breath

To each breath its own gun.

Contributor Notes:

Jodi Andrews recently graduated with her M.A. in English from South Dakota State University. She lives in Brookings, South Dakota with her husband and teaches English classes at SDSU.

In August 2015 **Alan Britt** was invited by the Ecuadorian House of Culture Benjamín Carrión in Quito, Ecuador as part of the first cultural exchange of poets between Ecuador and the United States. During his visit, he participated in venues all across the country including the international literary conference sponsored by La hermandad de las palabras 2015 in Babahoyo, Ecuador. In 2013 he served as judge for the *The Bitter Oleander Press Library of Poetry Book Award*. His interview at The Library of Congress for *The Poet and the Poem* aired on Pacifica Radio, January 2013. His latest books include Violin Smoke (Translated into Hungarian by Paul Sohar and published in Romania: 2015; Lost Among the Hours: 2015; Parabola Dreams (with Silvia Scheibli): 2013; and Alone with the Terrible Universe: 2011. He teaches English/Creative Writing at Towson University.

Billy Cancel has recently appeared in *Blazevox*, *Gobbet & West Wind Review*. His latest body of work PSYCHO'CLOCK is out on Hidden House Press. Billy Cancel is 1/2 of the noise/pop duo Tidal Channel. Sound poems, visual shorts and other aberrations can be found at billycancelpoetry.com

Linda M. Crate is a Pennsylvanian native born in Pittsburgh yet raised in the rural town of Conneautville. Her poetry, short stories, articles, and reviews have been published in a myriad of magazines both online and in print. Recently her two chapbooks A Mermaid Crashing Into Dawn (Fowlpox Press - June 2013) and Less Than A Man (The Camel Saloon - January 2014) were published. Her fantasy novel Blood & Magic was published in March 2015. The second novel of this series Dragons & Magic was published in October 2015. The third of this series Centaurs & Magic is slated for a November release. Her third poetry collection If Tomorrow Never Comes (Scars Publications - August 2016) was recently published. Her poetry collection Sing Your Own Song is forthcoming through Barometric Pressures Series.

Since childhood **Dave Darr** has been writing poetry as a response to his personal encounters with nature, religion, and social issues. Most of his youth was plagued with innate chronic illnesses and hospital visits; he's quick to say his life didn't actually start until 18 when a remedy was found. He attributes his early-life experience to his restless nature, inability to conform to social norms, and understanding of humor. In college he founded a music publication, printed 40,000 copies between 9 editions and self-distributed them throughout the USA while partially living out of his car. He grew up in Nashville, Tennessee and now resides in the Ozark Mountains with his wife and four children. He has a BBA in Marketing and works as a consultant. For hobby he travels, hikes, camps, and hosts a podcast called *Great American Dispatch*.

Priscilla Frake is the author of Correspondence, a book of epistolary poems. She has published poetry in several anthologies and in dozens of journals including *Verse Daily*, *Nimrod*, *The Midwest Quarterly*, *Medical Literary Messenger*, *Carbon Culture Review*, *Crack the Spine*, *Fjord's Review*, and *The Sow's Ear Poetry Review*. Her honors include the Lorene Pouncey Award at the Houston Poetry Festival and a Pushcart nomination. She lives in Sugar Land, where she is a studio jeweler.

Karin L. Frank is a past contributor to *Dark Matter*. Her work has also been published in *Tales of the Talisman*, *Dreams and Nightmares* and *Asimov's*.

Robert Frazier has had poems in science poetry anthologies including: Verse & Universe, ed. Kurt Brown, Milkweed Press, 1998 and Songs From Unsung Worlds, ed. Bonnie B. Gordon, Science '85/Birkhauser, 1985, as well as in 200 journals/magazines including *OMNI Magazine*, *Pedestal*, *Pig Iron*, *Heaven Bone*, *Portland Review*, *Ice River*, *Poly*, etc. The latest of his 8 poetry collections is: Phantom Navigations, Dark Regions Press, 2013 -- which includes the Pushcart Prize nominated poem "A Crash Course in Lemon Physics"

Michael Galko is a poet who has lived in Houston for ten years. For his day job he runs a biomedical research laboratory at UT MD Anderson. Ten years ago he published several poems in the journals *Nimrod* and *The Distillery*. After a long hiatus he recently started writing and revising his work again.

Zebulon Huset's work has appeared in *Dark Matter* before. Since his first publication in *Dark Matter* he's been obsessed with the netherworld between flash fiction and prose poetry lately and even compiled Zebulon's Guide to Flash Fiction Submissions (2015 year-end version) which has over 160 listings and a dozen contests, taking special note of those journals that treat flash as a different type of submission from traditional fiction: <http://notebookingdaily.blogspot.com/2015/11/zebulons-guide-to-flash-fiction.html> which was also just reposted at *The Review Review*.

Jamie Iredell is the author of the books The Book of Freaks, I Was a Fat Drunk Catholic School Insomniac, and Last Mass. His writing has appeared in many magazines, among them *The Rumpus*, *PANK*, *Gigantic*, and *The Literary Review*. He lives in Atlanta with his wife and little girls, and there he teaches creative writing to college students.

Sandra Kolankiewicz's poems and stories have appeared most recently in *New World Writing*, *BlazeVox*, *Gargoyle*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Fifth Wednesday*, *Prick of the Spindle*, *Per Contra*, *Pif* and, of course, *Dark Matter*. Turning Inside Out won the Black River Prize at Black Lawrence Press. Last fall Finishing Line Press published The Way You Will Go. When I Fell, a fully illustrated novel, has just been released by Web-e-Books. I hope you like these poems.

Daniel Kuriakose is a 18 year old poet living in Connecticut. He attends ACES Educational Center for the Arts, a magnet high school in New Haven, where he studies creative writing in several areas, including flash fiction and poetry. He has received two honorable mentions, two silver keys, and one gold key in the regional portion of the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards, as well as a National Silver Medal in Poetry.

Nathalie Kuroiwa-Lewis is an Associate Professor of English and Writing Minor Director and Writing Center Director at Saint Martin's University, a private, liberal arts university located in the Pacific Northwest. She is also a board member of the Olympia Poetry Network in Olympia, WA. She has published poems in *OccuPoetry*, *Social Policy*, *Penny Ante Feud*, *Dark Matter* and *That Literary Review*. In addition to her interests in poetry, Nathalie is exploring other genres of creative writing, including songwriting and the short story. At Saint Martin's, she teaches creative writing, composition and journalism classes.

Joseph Milford is a Professor of English and a Georgia writer. His first collection of poems, Cracked Altimeter, was published by BlazeVox Press in 2010. He is the host of The Joe Milford Poetry Show, a co-founder of BACKLASH PRESS, and the editor of *RASPUTIN: A Poetry Thread* (a literary journal of poetry).

John Nizalowski is the author of four books – a multi-genre work Hooking the Sun (Farolito Press, 2003), an essay collection Land of Cinnamon Sun (Irie Books, 2013), and two books of poetry – The Last Matinée (Turkey Buzzard Press, 2011) and East of Kayenta (Turkey Buzzard Press, 2016). His writings have appeared in *Dark Matter*, *Digital Americana*, *Slab*, *Measure*, *Puerto del Sol*, *Blue Mesa Review*, *Chiron Review*, *Under the Sun*, *Weber Journal*, *New Mexico Poetry Review*, *Bloomsbury Review*, *Pilgrimage*, *Blueline*, and elsewhere. He currently teaches creative writing, composition, and mythology at Colorado Mesa University in Grand Junction.

Rebecca O'Bern is the author of poems and essays which have appeared in *Connecticut Review*, *Blue Monday Review*, *South 85 Journal*, *Hartskill Review*, and other publications. She won the Leslie Leeds Poetry Prize, took 2nd place in UCONN's ECE Wallace Stevens Poetry Contest, and was a Weekly Poetry Contest winner with *Poetry Nook*. Currently, she is an M.F.A. Creative Writing candidate at Southern Connecticut State University where she is Poetry Editor of *Noctua Review*. Also a freelance editor and proofreader, she teaches college writing and lives in Connecticut.

Simon Perchik is also a previous contributor to *Dark Matter*. His poetry has also appeared in *Partisan Review*, *The Nation*, *The New Yorker* and elsewhere.

David Anthony Sam's poems were accepted by numerous publications in 2016, including *50 Haikus*; *Aji Magazine*; *Arlington Literary Journal*; *December*; *Dual Coast Magazine*; *Folia*; *GFT Press*; *Gravel*; *Heart & Mind Zine*; *Heron Tree*; *Hurricane Review*; *Inwood Indiana Magazine*; *Into the Void: Into the Void: Luminous Echoes: A Poetry Anthology*; *Jazz Cigarette*; *Light: A Journal of Photography and Poetry*; *Literature Today*; *Meat for Tea: The Valley Review*; *Poetry Quarterly*; *Red Earth Review*; *Red Savina Review*; *Route 7 Review*; *Rust + Moth*; *Shabda Press*; *Smoky Blue Literary and Arts Magazine*; *The Summerset Review*; *Tanka Journal*; *Touch: The Journal of Healing*; *Three Line Poetry*; *The Write Place at the Write Time*; *The Yellow Chair Review*.

Roberta Singer is a part-time librarian and graduate student located in St. Louis, Missouri. In her writing she explores the intersections of science, history, literature, folklore, and philosophy. Her work has also been published in the online journals *Entropy* and *Pinball*, and a collection of her essays can be found on her website, *Physics for Junkies*.

Adam Spencer is a Creative Nonfiction student at the University of North Texas. He holds a BA in Finance from the University of Texas at Austin and an MBA from Houston Baptist University. He lives in Denton, TX.

Lauren Suchenski's poetry has previously been included in a variety of magazines including *Gambling the Aisle*, *The Barnwood Review*, *Vine Leaves Literary Journal* and *The Hun Review*. In addition, she was nominated for the Pushcart Prize in 2015.

Samuel Vargo writes journalistic articles for large, progressive, liberal, online magazines that are headlined daily. He also writes a lot of stories, and is published on comedy and satire sites with a national and global readership. Vargo has written poetry and short stories for print and online literary magazines, university journals and a few commercial magazines. Mr. Vargo worked most of his adult life as a newspaper reporter. He has a BA in Political Science and an MA in English (both degrees were awarded by Youngstown State University in Youngstown, Ohio, USA). Today, Vargo was a curator and editor for a string of eight commercial online for almost a year that falls under the company name *FicitionMagazines.com*, but recently, he gave this up to work on his own writing pursuits. Vargo was fiction editor of *Pig Iron Press*, Youngstown, Ohio, for 12 years. A book-length collection of Vargo's short stories, titled Electric Onion Head and the Rotating Cyclops of the Month, was published by Literary Road and had a web presence for five years.

Richard Weaver resides in Baltimore's Inner Harbor. His publications include *Crazy Horse*, *Loch Raven Review*, *North American Review*, *Poetry*, *Black Warrior Review*, *2River View*, *New England Review*, and *the ubiquitous elsewhere*. Recent poems have appeared in *the Southern Quarterly*, *Little Patuxent Review*, *Red Eft Review*, and *Conjunctions*. Forthcoming poems will be appearing in *Crack the spine*, *Steel Toe*, & *Gingerbread House*.

Kimberly White's poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Massachusetts Review*, *Cream City Review*, *scissors and spackle*, and other journals and anthologies. She is the author of four chapbooks, Penelope, A Reachable Tibet, The Daily Diaries of Death, and Letters To A Dead Man; two novels: Bandy's Restola, and Hotel Tarantula. Find poetry and collage art on her website, www.purplecouchworks.com, as well as on Facebook, and various refrigerator doors.