

**THE POETRY SCHOOL OF EXPERIENCE**

***NOMAD***

**&**

***LITERARY CRITICISM ESSAYS***  
***THE POETRY SCHOOL OF EXPERIENCE***

**&**

***UNSELECTED POEMS***

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A thesis submitted to University of Birmingham for the degree of  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis represents a journey of interlocked explorations on experimental themes that are rooted within the spirit of empathy on the basis of moments of the everyday. These universalities serve as my fulcrum as I make the pitch for *The Poetry School of Experience*. Also found within this thesis are thematic works coupled with a significant focus on craft as these relate to poetic techniques. I make the case through my own autobiographical approach as this relates to my being inspired by writers who share the view of poetry both as a vehicle for redemption and as a method for unification. It is also through my argument in favor of poetry being universal as well as through the introduction of original forms that I base my authorial intent as I state the critical controversies as these relate to my own writing practice and to the work of published writers. The literary criticism contained in my essays on *The Poetry School of Experience* as well as the poems found within my poetry manuscript *Nomad* oppose elitism and nepotism in the art of poetry by advocating through the poems of experience that are rooted within the elements of the human condition on the basis of addiction, war, loss, recovery, love, work, parenting, caretaking and fear that all people encounter either directly or indirectly.

DEDICATION

*For my brother Chris Greene (1977-2005)*

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Poems by Rob Greene

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## PART I

### A VETERANS DAY WISH

*This is my weapon, this is my gun.*

There is something to be said  
for a young man in the prime of his life  
who has to take meds that knock the libido back  
to those days of infantry training,  
and more to be said about the zilched out bank account  
that was grown with blood, sweat  
and a few waves of the hand  
while standing on the corner  
in a Schlotzsky's Deli bun suit  
for the weekend sandwich making shifts  
when not in the field.

There is something to be said  
for picking up an extra job or a book  
and the putting up our dukes to fistfight for our lives  
that means so much more than picking up an AR-15  
to take out the innocent,  
and there is something to be said  
for the far too easy method of picking up guns in the first place,  
I mean weapons in this country we love  
and there is something to be said for the problem  
all should have with a person like me,  
with a history of hospitalizations,  
who could easily get one,  
yet I just want to help build a place where the worst  
that can happen when the dialog  
and the use of words regresses in all this is a bare-knuckled fight,  
mano a mano, a good old fashioned ass-whooping  
then I'll feel this is the place  
where my kids will be safe and all will be well.

## MY BELARUSIAN BRIDE

When I left you and moved under the bridge,  
I took only the olive green  
dyed leather suitcase  
you brought to the states at sixteen.

Don't blame yourself for taking the vow,  
or blame yourself for worrying  
over a man who couldn't wake himself up  
in the morning,  
a man who you had to remind to eat,  
bathe and brush his teeth,  
a man too busy admiring  
those who are no good  
for you or our daughter,  
who I hope will turn out to be just like you.

## FROM MOSCOW

Six-hundred kilometers of birch trees north  
to St. Petersburg—Pushkin's steamy bride  
was picked up and rocked without mercy  
before and after he hit the dirt  
in his 29<sup>th</sup> duel,  
sparrows are still sparrows—they make  
their living as they always have—  
alcohol still isolates us as it always has,  
though we have so much more  
to choose from than the bread drink Kvass  
that smells like sweat,  
our kids—so much more to choose from  
other than vodichka, *the little water*.

## THE SCIENTIST FORGETS FREUD...

*after Reading Mina Loy's "Feminist Manifesto"*

As the son of a prostitute  
I saw the look she gave men,  
she said it's just how  
you'd greet a friend,  
she had all sorts too,  
varieties in ages, shapes, shades,  
bearded, clean cut, suited,  
uniformed, professional, dirty little  
stanza for the self-righteous brothers,  
from one son of a whore to another,  
I agree, not a noble trade, however  
there are few happy endings when  
it comes to minimum wage.

I may have seen  
guns drawn, men stabbed,  
women smacked, drugs passed,  
my mother cocked,  
poor me, my raw deal,  
lucky to outlive Jesus,  
I'll give you that, but  
ask me if I've read  
a certain novel,  
a childhood classic,  
works by Feminist authors,  
you'll notice I can quote  
the symbioses of tapeworms and their hosts,  
*Mina's the parasitic and the exploited*  
in other words, get off your moms  
and hey Freud  
get the hell off mine,  
she's retired.

## WHARF TIMES

*after Denis Johnson*

Since my voice for her has skipped off  
to a place where I can no longer speak  
I will move past Pike and Ninth  
from Broadway and Pine  
where I can momentarily replace her with house gin.  
These times of crank and wharf rats  
pilfering the night near the abandoned  
smoke stacks burrowing inside themselves  
and when they squeal  
an understanding runs through all of us  
who are lost in bottles, blow,  
strange women's thighs  
and the lies that leap out from all of us,  
lies that begin: *I never thought of her* and end:  
*I never thought*  
*of her.*

## PART II



## THE SO SO SISTERS & JAZZ

The first time in my teens with the twentyish brunette, Maureen, came after she commented on my manly creaky voice. Her twin, Colleen, was just a bottle blond who gave me weed, a hernia and crabs.

The twins together, the twins separately,  
it didn't matter, they could never  
compare to Jazz, the professional  
who did this amazing thing with hot water  
and a Dixie cup without spilling a single drop,  
she'd swoosh, swoosh, spit, ding  
and nail the corner wastebasket  
like one Jiminy Cricket.

Jazz moved me through my early twenties  
like the poem on Kissinger that forced my elbow  
into the smug ribs seated next to me  
in business class from Logan to Sea-Tac.

She saw me through trifles and drug abuse  
and taught me how to say her real name.  
She spoke of her two sons who were my age,  
and she started giving me freebies. I felt privileged.  
Then I mentioned the twins and I'm not sure why  
but we couldn't stay friends after something like that.

## FAIRBANKS 1980

When I was six Larry Holmes was my favorite  
before he took an aging Ali down,  
punching Ali and punching Ali  
while telling the ref to stop the fight  
similar to the time my overworked airman father  
punched me in the face  
when I went over to hug him goodnight  
while he was busying himself in between  
swing shifts by taping his vinyl records  
until one skipped a beat  
when I opened the stereo cabinet glass.

Those were the good days, the days  
when I took his best punch and got up without crying  
just like Ali took Holmes's best.

That summer I made a kite during a short stint  
in the Cub Scouts, a paper kite with my drawing  
of Larry Holmes and my dad on the back facing skyward  
in repentance to the Alaskan sun.

## BARKING DOWN THE HIPSTER POET

*Enjambment Extravaganza after Gwendolyn Brooks*

so you write lyrically, so  
you write narratively, so  
you've invented a form, so  
your mama's a whore, so  
her friends were perves, so  
you've slept under the bridge, so  
you've eaten curry behind convenience stores, so  
you've written since womb times so  
you've scored with women before, so  
you've written since wound times, so

you're now an editor, so  
you could've been a doctor, so  
you've needed a few lawyers, so  
you've workshopped your ass off, so  
a few were published in print, so  
you've read most of the "greats," so  
you want the legacy, so  
you shave your whiskers, so

you toe the line, so  
you cross the line, just so  
you no longer do lines, so  
you wear bowties, so  
you want fame, so  
we can all say “he was great,” because  
you’re one talented little fuck-or  
or do you catch what others miss, or  
are you compelled to speak truthful verse so  
we’ll be compelled to listen, or  
are you just wanting to impress her?

## NO SHUCK, NO JIVE

Not the time of year or even topics  
that terrify me such as the weather  
because my lips are no longer  
wrapped around the aluminum when the hiss,  
the pop after the hit  
meant more to me than what  
you saw in me, I won't pick it back up,  
I won't, even though I believe I was  
a better public speaker then when I was  
the only cat listening  
under the bridge,  
under the mist that is under the moon.



## BAND OF AIDES

while I held my baby by her shoulders  
the vaccination nurse moved towards us like an amoeba

after that first heel stick there was a silent stirring  
as she furrowed her brow and stuck out her lower lip

then she fought just like I fought  
the psychiatric aides years ago

who made me guzzle liquid charcoal  
to clear the trunks from my overdosed system

her wails make me think of how I yelled rape  
when they forced the catheter

our attempts to comfort her after the “all done” moved  
my mind to those months on the veterans' psych ward

head counts every fifteen minutes from the aides  
who woke me every odd hour in those odd days.

## SEATTLE PARK AT DUSK

*written from under the I-5*

The thin layers of haze  
light up the sky  
reminding me of South Lake Union,  
the emerald spaces,  
the American flags under which  
the brave and weak slept  
together on a bench,  
whistled for work in the park,  
got on hands and knees  
in toilet stalls, bathed  
in the rain, shot up  
under the bridge,  
toasted fallen friends,  
sought out kind eyes, waited  
in mission lines, lounged  
in Central Library, posting  
their poems in the alleys.

## CAPSULES

*for Paranoid*

*Schizophrenia*

Ninety-nine point nine percent of us have never harmed another while  
twenty-five percent  
of you have either chased your boyfriends around the kitchen isle with a  
meat cleaver or even worse used clichés such as “a-w-e-s-o-m-e” to describe  
us for productiveness and then “crazy”  
as we sit alone mumbling calming words to ourselves because we are in  
between weekly appointments and have to get through the work week so we  
can afford those appointments, and the drug co-pays.

When we're sick we know you are out to get us, and most of the time we're right when every off keynote sends us deeper into hiding, yes—most of us hide and even admit our role when we're lured into trifles and co-worker dramas rather than excuse-up like the normies.

When we're in between sick and well, we know half mean well while the others are well—you got it—mean and are suspect, and are dangerous to our careers. When we are well—we are able, and are able to work and are able to help others work through issues, we know it could be just a matter of time before we are in the woods again and they may sit alongside us.

## PART III

## BILOXI BACK BAY

We woke early  
and then peddled our Huffys off the pier  
and into the Back Bay's sour.  
We bathed with the gators  
and cottonmouths in the golf course pond,  
came out smelling like rosemary and rotten eggs.

Before mom's noontime smack,  
we'd eat free in the Denny's  
near Jefferson Davis's house,  
free concerts, festivals  
and Mardi Gras Parades.

Mom, flashing her flesh  
in between gulps of Gulf gumbo with  
bitter Old Bay broiled shrimp  
dividing most evenings.  
She'd give me and Chris weed and we'd laugh.  
She'd get us drunk on white zinfandel, we'd cry  
and pass out, she'd then slip into something tight  
and go to Oscar's to work the men and use.

Did my best that year to keep order,  
couldn't control mom's wild  
sandy blond-haired mess though.  
Couldn't protect myself and my brother  
after we lost access to the house on the air base.  
An eighth grader is no match for the bands of bored  
fifteen-year-olds who routinely kicked us  
into the bay with our clothes on  
and jacked our Huffys for days.

We couldn't let them get away,  
they were all we had,  
we'd stalk them down, take our bikes back  
where the brats hid them outside their parents'  
white ranch fences.

Mom tripping off for months,  
us sleeping under the tin-roofed piers,  
breaking into the abandoned hospital,  
we'd never steal  
much and I'd entertain  
my kid brother with hoops  
plus we had my shrimp net.



All it took was a little corn meal  
so I'd sprinkle it sparingly,  
catch a few shrimp then bait the hooks  
and cast them out for fish.

We'd spot the big moving vans  
and befriend the new kids,  
spend the night with them,  
eat dinner with parents I'd dream  
were our own, then another night and another  
until they'd begin to ask questions.

My wife now wonders  
where I learned to cuss and count cards,  
why I had to repeat the eighth grade,  
why my brother stole cars, why I don't trust cops  
and why on earth I had to wear a ward-coat in my twenties.

She wonders why I keep my eyes open during grace,  
why I smoke my Luckies under the sweet gums,  
and why I ride my motorcycle during rains.  
She wonders why I like my beer hot,  
where I learned to handle snakes,  
why I'd rather nap in the grass,  
why I lock eyes with under-the-freeway-men  
and how I can say *it's because they appreciate it.*

So, “what of your mother?”  
those who ask me are usually strangers  
or PhD’s who want to repair my mind.

“What if she reads this?”  
unconscious behind their pedigree names,  
their narrow eyes, their librarian frames,  
both questions divide the evening  
from the rest of my workday  
as I contemplate kicking the last one  
who last asked in his curious ass.  
Let me tell you something,  
let me tell you somethan,  
lemme just tell youse one goddamn thing:  
the dead skin on my fingertips and palms,  
a dead brother who was more like my son,  
a left hook, a devilish look, an omnific desire to write  
one good book, craftsman’s hands, gullible blood,  
the ability to memorize poems  
and a prawn-shelling knack is my inheritance.

With all this going for and against me,  
I still don't have the ability to lie  
to self-congratulatory chumps,  
no—never killed anyone, I still carry a knife  
though it's never been brandished,  
I just grew up as the man of the house  
on the streets of Biloxi  
where I learned to fish, cook,  
light a kerosene lamp  
and keep the fire going,  
to take a punch, to get up,  
to rig a full sail, to pray,  
and I still thank the Gods  
for that Back Bay.

## ALONE IN THE ER

Hooked to an electrolyte bag,  
the cold IV drip shivers and shakes my shanks  
under the stiff sheets,  
salmon colored upchuck tub at my side,  
pain scaling up to an 8.5.  
I'm dozing in and out of the room like I normally do,  
and focus in on an expecting mother who's  
nervously holding a urine cup. My lids fold  
and then open to her empty chair, I can feel  
the breeze from the toilet flushing,  
I shiver some more and wonder  
which bridge my own mother sleeps under.

## PART IV

## I WOULD LIKE TO HAVE KNOWN

*I measure time by how a body sways*

—*Theodore Roethke*

I would like to have known a woman  
who wasn't so mysterious in her wanton ways,  
one, if the timing wasn't quite right,  
I'd prefer to sit across from  
rather than next to  
in order to hear the fullness of her intellect  
after eyeing her tango sways.

She might have just driven me out of the room  
to dab ice cubes on my neck  
after the emphases on her  
adjectives, conjunctions and insults  
such as her *perfects*, *wonderfuls*, *that's it*,  
*right there*, *in your face*, *your mama*  
and maybe even her *fuck you*  
would be emphasized in a two  
syllable trochee as it should be  
instead of a spondee.



It would be wonderful to have known a woman,  
a feminist anomaly, maybe, who'd rather hear *Get 'cher ass over here*  
than *give me a little space*  
because she'd know  
*damnit*, I'd mean it  
and she'd know what I meant.

I would like to have known a woman  
who wouldn't have minded my tools,  
the screeches and sparks of grinding cinders,  
the sawdust from my sectioning deck timbers,  
and it would've been great for her to have partaken  
in the maritime maintenance  
of sanding down and buff coating  
each piece of teak  
from the little cabined catamaran.

I would've worked nonstop to impress this woman who, maybe just once,  
would instinctively reach across the table to silence my inflamed  
schizophrenia with the pen-holding pad of her index by silk-stroking the  
back  
of mine.

## IN A BAR, YOU'RE ALONE

stench of citrus

vodka

outlasts the smoke

signals

# GUNS—A CONCRETE SERIES

*while looking over her criminal record*

One.

I recall

the beers in her lap and her smooth transition from soft drug use to hard drug using and dealing, yet my manipulative mom has cleaned up her record, and now she wants to see my kids.

“Guns—A Concrete Series” continues with new part

Two.

This can't

be right, I remember the time when I begged my father not to allow

my kid brother to visit her over the summer,

little Chris scored four pairs

of size-five Air Jordan's

purchased from enough

sold kilos of snow

stowed away

in the empty

shoeboxes

inside his

closet.

“Guns—A Concrete Series” continues with new part

Three.

I’d always  
wished the DEA spooks hadn’t struck a deal with her, I wanted  
to see this bust on her record along with the other offenses I know about,  
not seeing them  
just exacerbates  
the paranoid  
condition  
I developed  
along with  
my PTSD

“Guns—A Concrete Series” continues with new part

Four.

because mom,

drunk and high

would go from telling everyone just how much her two boys

meant to her, then she’d fuck’em

over just

like that.

I’d taken

up boxing

as an adult,

I’d even

scored

as an

expert with

M-16’s

in the

Army, but I never picked up a small arm, these, too, exacerbate



“Guns—A Concrete Series” continues with new part

My PTSD,  
I'd seen too many brandished  
on the streets  
and every night, I check and re-check the locks in my super-standard  
highbrow neighborhood  
and watch out  
for the dealers  
she rolled on.

## TOBACCO ROAD DETOUR

*after W.B. Yeats*

*for the Grandparents who took me in*

If Uncle Odie knew  
he'd awaken now  
and leave for White Oak Mountain  
for the small pond where he met daybreak  
while the local boys spit cantaloupe seeds for practice.

As the blackberry vines smother the ridge  
Odie casts, pulls and recasts an old fly rod jig  
made by his wife, the Buxton Girl,  
the day before she toed the copperhead nest  
on her way down the knoll.

Again Odie arose to roll the pesticide-flavored leaves  
while working the fields to support his needs  
to smoke pesticide-flavored leaves.  
He worked to smoke and he smoked his work.

He will arise, he will arise  
to meet the faces of his offspring  
he would've met a century ago  
near the old leaky cabin in Wales.

After the lies, the deaths, the thefts  
and the newest version of English  
when we were tilling and tending the red clay  
for the noxious weed worse  
than blackberries covering the copperhead's nest  
and just yesterday  
every grandchild of the people caressed the heart,  
and the little tic behind our tits  
to regulate tobacco and  
offered up the unregulated weed  
to those places in need  
of a population control fix, fixing,  
fixin' to heehaw as the jenny mules kick.

## NEXT DOOR BROTHELS ARE JUST

gated home

retrofits

grey goose swirls,

clambake dips.

## PART V

## EDITOR'S BLUES

*I found blues on Nina Simone's 77th*

Maybe it's the schizophrenic in me  
who sees entitled ones every—

where, who do not need a knife  
or a gun to rob you, this land of plenty where every

banker is patron instead of  
prostitute, this land where every

plug-and-play fixture changer  
insists he's not an amateur, this land where

insurance agents—are good neighbors  
instead of air salesmen, and every

poetry attempter is poet  
when every draft is a poem, every

chunk of paper stuck with glue  
and an ISBN—a book.



## FIRST POEM TO MY WIFE

The morning you found out about  
the other one  
you cradled our daughter  
at the foot of the staircase  
as you did on all those nights  
of colic, croup and ear infections.

I'm no Johannes Kepler who had  
to be called down from the stars  
and the rooftop the night his child  
died of smallpox.

Nor a William Butler Yeats,  
and besides, she's not political enough  
to be just another Maud Gonne, but damn this,  
why can't I write even a single poem  
about every animal that roams the earth  
or the pastoral topics that are often overdone,  
the birds—not one on a single titmouse,  
the trees—not even a soft single spindly pine  
nor the crackling of a seasoned hardwood  
sweetgum being struck by lightning,  
nor is there one on the cleansing of the sea,  
or even you—my wife:  
the one who sees me off every morning,  
the one who puts the voices I hear in check  
without musing onto her as I did just now.

## PART VI

## RURAL ARTIST FELLOWSHIP

Green snakes are harmless here,  
though they are in residence on this mountain  
along with a few coming for fellowship  
as they pull off their wedding bands on the drive  
up the slope dodging the Holsteins,  
the puddles and the Jerseys nursing  
as the big bull carefully watches.

As I sit envying those who can  
do it all without remorse,  
please forgive this tailspin  
of sentimentality—though just knowing  
I'm an all or nothing type,  
and knowing my wife's carrying  
quite the load back home—  
twins due in a few months,

nightly calls from home  
about how we're going to pay the mortgage  
which just reset to a higher rate,  
my three-year-old saying she wants to go to the store  
where they sell baby sisters,  
my head's down and my mouth's mostly shut  
as I slither around this lush perimeter  
watching the train and thinking of my grandparents  
who took me in from the street  
and how they managed as kids during the depression.  
I wave another hello from a distance  
to my fellow fellows gaggled together eating lunch  
at the picnic table outside the cindered barn—

And then I notice a visual artist from  
the Cote d'Azur with a Chardonnay glass-shape  
tilling up the red clay  
in heels and in attire  
just not suited for country living.

## SECOND TRIMESTER

*for the NICU Nurses*

Your words for my preemie twins  
are like Tchaikovsky's notes  
when the cello thuds a low F  
when grading the hematomas  
to a sequence of the violin's middle C's  
you jump to when the monitors  
indicate they need to be intubated,  
to high A's when you say both are stable,  
half-day by half-day  
the ups and downs you tell us to expect  
as they ride side by side in the Cadillac of incubators.



DRUZ'YA | ДРУЗЬЯ | FRIENDS

*When water was wetter* is the phrase  
my father-in-law uses when he speaks  
of the before times, prior to the dissolution  
of the USSR—his friend Vlad and he inform me  
*friends* is pronounced *druz 'ya*, not *comrades*  
and they—both engineers—tell me to stay bourgeois  
in the makings of business rather than loose and highfalutin.  
These two blue collars, a Tatar and a Jew, can quote poems  
from sea to sea to sea—Akhmatova, Rilke, Whitman,  
and one day over a *little water*  
and during the lamb hatcheting  
the other woman came up,  
my father-in-law turns my way,  
relaxed hatchet still in hand, and tells me an editor  
is more than a wordsmith,  
he must be poet too,  
being careful with his words,  
careful with his tongue.

## EXCUSE MY DUST

*poem title after Dorothy Parker's epitaph*

This is my wish as I go under where all humans before me have gone, and  
all humans will go—  
before hospice arrives to make certain I'm *comfortable and* before I ask you  
*where'd the time go*, I want the dandelions to eat me before the worms and  
roly polys arrive because all little guys seem to have great big handshakes  
though they're cute little buggers, they are, so—turn over the rocks and  
watch them scatter for the grass.

## NOMAD REVERSED

*for the Son I fathered when I was a child myself.*

Instead of taking the McDonald's up  
on their "Now Hiring" sign,  
I made sure I could pay the support in full and on-time  
so at seventeen  
and on the cusp of a schizo collapse,  
I left the Midwest before your birth  
to sweat in sawdust where I built pallets  
and wound coax cable,  
keeping up with my studies as a rising high school junior, and then  
soldiering  
brought me back to the Midwest two years later  
though it was too late.  
Your Mom wed a guy her own age,  
I was a child, she—an adult.

Over these past twenty-seven years of psychwards,  
jobs intermittently, books, women  
and times spent under freeways,  
I hear you're good with your hands like me,  
are six foot two to three,  
a straight A stud with a university degree,  
wear my cleft chin yet as goes the deal  
of unreliable narrators with schizophrenia  
is all these traits I've heard about may or may not  
be completely true though one trait  
is for certain—you don't have my disease,  
and you have very little material to convey in poems  
and this, my Son, is a good thing.

## WHILE HOOKING THE RED WORM AT FALLS LAKE

He/she fighting, wiggling, wrapping the tail/head  
around my pinky as I slide the hook in on the opposite side  
and through the rest of the body, don't feel bad for this one,  
the next or the last because worms, well, worms win in the end.

## HERNIA

*1981 Eielson Air Force Base near Fairbanks, AK*

After bowling, a movie, a cheeseburger  
and popcorn the airman walked me to his dorm,  
the door was closed tighter than this four decade old memory that came  
back, blame it on the crank  
that did not allow me to forget,  
there that goddamn door is again,  
closed tighter than me at seven-years-old,  
roaming free and left unsupervised  
most of my life was a strength that night,  
I was feral enough to escape to the path carved out by the northern lights  
and through the birches where the grove ends and the forest begins.

## LITERARY CRITICISM

## PREFACE

In chapter one, I present the universal experiences of war, addiction, loss, and recovery with a close reading of Etheridge Knight's poem "Feeling Fucked Up." In chapter two, I focus on the universal experiences of love and work with close readings of Dorianne Laux's poem "Romance," Lucille Clifton's poem "Homage to My Hips," and Joseph Millar's poems "Dark Harvest" and "Telephone Repairman." In chapter three, I focus on the universal themes of parenthood and caretaking with close readings of Dorianne Laux's poem "Nurse" as well as Joseph Millar's "Fathers," among others. Chapter four serves as the section in which I provide a rebuttal in defense of the poetry of experience by providing deterrents to those who attack the character of the poets who view their artform as a tool for necessary societal change on the macrolevel and as a vehicle for redemption on the microlevel by providing examples from Walt Whitman and a close reading of Philip Levine's poem "What Work Is" respectively, among other instances. Chapter five serves as my conclusion as I address issues of poetry in the early twenty-first century with a look back on the history of discrimination within the field both in Great Britain and in America.



THE POETRY SCHOOL OF EXPERIENCE  
ESSAYS

## CHAPTER 1: ADDICTION, WAR, LOSS & RECOVERY

The universal struggles of trauma and addiction know no boundaries. Over the course of this essay I will examine poems that engage with genocide from the point of view of the innocent victims of war as portrayed in Andrea Jurjević's *Small Crimes*, a book of poems I have previously reviewed. I also plan to examine the point of view of the wounded veteran who comes back to his country and finds it difficult to adjust. I will also cover poems of recovery to support my proposal that addiction affects people indiscriminately while adding insights from my manuscript *Nomad*, employing a combination of literary criticism and autobiography.

Andrea Jurjević's collection *Small Crimes* follows a young Croatian woman from a homeland entrenched in war to a safer America. Moving from the Balkans of the 1990s to present-day Aleppo shows a population of people once again in peril. When I read Jurjević's collection, I wonder about the future prize-winning collections that we may see from the survivors of current-day genocides. Jurjević's collection won the 2015 Philip Levine Prize and became available from Anhinga Press in February 2017. *Small Crimes* has every element of the beautiful duende that Federico García Lorca first described nearly a century ago in his influential work first delivered in Argentina in 1933. In his essay "Theory and Play of the Duende," Lorca signifies the relation to the force of duende that cannot be defined though we all know it when we witness it. The relation to the poet and the indefinable duende is apparent in Lorca's personal struggles to be himself in his own homeland of Spain during the times of the Spanish Civil War. Lorca also wrote his stance on the punishment of hiding one's true self that can also reflect the universal pain of unrequited love as he expressed in the quote within his play *Blood Wedding*: "To burn with desire and keep quiet about it is the greatest punishment we can bring on ourselves."

In Jurjević's poem "Cinéma Vérité: A Love Story," the drama appears to include an antagonist Jurjević refers to as the "rogue" who pawns her mother's gold for joints. The poem could be self-reflective. Meanwhile, the repeating appearance of black and blue clothing seems to connect the images of the war in the Balkans at that time with black and blue being two of the primary colors of this colorless war:

I think I'll eventually forget you, cross your number, throw keys in the  
meadow by the roads you walked, dressed in black and blue.

I'll not think of two bumpkins who hitched to the cities, left their  
coastline to erode. I'm sure I'll forget you, all about you—

every drunken detail, like when you blew up, sold my records to scrape by. Also, the roads you walked off, dressed in black and blue.

Like immigrant scum stood in welfare queues, pawned my mom's gold for daily joints. You rogue, I'm sure I'll forget you, all about you—

“Cinéma Vérité: A Love Story” opens the section titled “While the Backwoods Burned” and comes prior to the section set in America. “Cinéma Vérité” (truthful cinema) is a media form that entered the mainstream via France, so the poem may take place in transit from the Balkans to America during a period of limbo in France. The subject matter of this book is deeply serious, but the language and vocabulary are nonetheless accessible even though *Small Crimes* includes a Croatian-English glossary at the end. The metaphors are advanced and are full of hardshell vehicles on the outside with extensive and layered tenors beneath the surface of each poem. However, the collection spans tonally from dark to light. In Jurjević's prose poem “When at Moonlight You Knock On My Door,” for instance, the reader meets a man holding a Kalashnikov who recites lyrics in Serbo-Croat-Bosnian as he takes the speaker deeper into a cave on the same night that bombs light up the sky like massive white chrysanthemums: “... Nema više sunca, there is no more sunlight, nema više meseca, no more moonlight.” The phrase “no more sunlight, no more moonlight” is a lyric from the Goran Bregović song “Mesečina,” which translates as “Moonlight.”

Even during this tense and violent time of war, empathy shines through as this lyric finds a new path in Andrea Jurjević's prose poem. The collection is often beautifully dark, fresh, complex, intellectually stimulating, accessible, and intelligent while featuring real historical subjects. By transfiguring traumatic experiences with keenly observed detail that translates into the art of poetry, Andrea Jurjević's collection *Small Crimes* is full of honest poems of experience.

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While it would be a tremendous mistake to try to equate my experiences growing up on the streets of Biloxi, Mississippi during the height of the War on Drugs in the mid- to late-1980s with that of those who survived the firing lines of genocide, I would argue that trauma is universal in that those who experience it have to endure extended periods of time in a state of fear while not knowing what or who is coming for them next. In one sense, a part of my childhood was erased: there was no seventh grade year for me. Due to being homeless for a year as a preteen child who was strapped with the responsibilities of having to care for, protect, and feed a younger brother, I skipped the seventh grade entirely and jumped directly to the eighth grade when my grandfather and father came to rescue my brother Chris and me from the streets of Biloxi in the

autumn of 1987. As a result, I had to go through the eighth grade twice. This happened not only because I could barely read and write at that time, but because I did not know what grade I was in after being taken from the streets of Biloxi, Mississippi and placed in middle school in the safer small town of Knob Noster, Missouri. All the administration at the new school knew was my age, as they had none of my legal records aside from my birth certificate. However, my age suggested that I belonged in the eighth grade. I continued to live in Missouri off and on until my paternal grandfather and grandmother in Virginia decided I needed structure; their care for me at a difficult time was the reason that I was able to complete high school. I was fortunate to spend a lot of time with my grandparents, who had retired just before my father and grandfather came to Biloxi to get Chris and me.

My poem “Biloxi Back Bay” begins with subtle references to my life growing up the son of a heroin addict, as shown in the line, “before mom’s noontime smack.” My hope for this poem is that it is not self-seeking by simply highlighting or simply exposing my harsh childhood; my hope for this poem is on the one hand that the sons and daughters of addicts will see from their own universal experiences of living in heightened states of fear that they do not want to repeat a cycle of dysfunction and want to avoid the cycle of drug dependence their parent(s) may have suffered before them.

My hope for this poem is also that addicts will see what they do to their children when they repeatedly turn away from working the twelve steps of recovery and will not seek to cover their own childhood trauma or their own mistakes by continuing to use. My personal hope for this poem is also that my own children will be able to see that I gave my all so that I would not repeat those mistakes so that they can understand that I was so very flawed before I worked the steps to recover. I led a life that left destruction in my path by fathering a child with an older woman when I was seventeen years old. My not staying around to raise that child, who is now a well-adjusted adult, was in large part because I left to work and send support to his mother during the early years of his life, but because of this I had no role in raising my first-born son and no role in shaping the fine man he ultimately became. My first poetry manuscript is titled *Nomad*, and my first-born son’s name is Damon (an intentional semordnilap), so the title of the manuscript refers to much more than the fact that I relocated over forty-six times in my life.

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Etheridge Knight’s poem “Feeling Fucked Up” exemplifies these themes of cyclical self-destruction. Knight was a US combat veteran who fought in the Korean War. He was injured and became addicted to narcotics. He was then discharged and came home still addicted. He was ultimately convicted of robbery and served eight years for petty theft. Knight wrote poems in prison and sent them to poets on the outside who encouraged him to continue writing.

“Feeling Fucked Up” is a poem which, if read without the disclaimer above, may be upsetting for some readers. It hits on many delicate subjects, and if not handled with care, the beauty of this poem can be lost in the harsh details that make up the core of the poem. At the same time, this is ultimately a love poem, and Etheridge Knight teaches us that one can be both angry and loving at the same time. “Lord she’s gone, done left me, done packed up and split” is the opening of this poem, and the closing of the poem is “all I want is my woman back so my soul can sing.” These lines bookend so much imagery, so much anger, and so much humor expressed in a way as to suggest that the author does not care about whatever is important to the masses but what is important to him, and someone who has never been in love or been separated from loved ones would never fully understand Knight’s sentiments. At the same time, someone who has never longed for another nor been in love at all has not lived a full life. Some people have the opportunity to have the curse of longing for someone more than once in their lives. In this poem, Knight conveys the longing he feels when his beloved either leaves and/or stops coming to visit him in prison. He allows readers to see that her leaving is a larger loss of life than his own freedom. According to Shirley Lumpkin in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* and on the Poetry Foundation Website, Etheridge Knight’s work is just as important in African-American poetry and in the African-American experience as Walt Whitman’s work is to Anglo-American poetry and Anglo-American poetics.

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I admire those who can speak freely about their mental health, yet some of us have conditions that come with too much stigma to mention because when others around us know about it, it could make the condition worse. I have made immense progress since first being diagnosed with Schizophrenia twenty-five years ago, so most of those very close to me know this about me. However, I know not all in my inner circle will be as accepting of this for cultural reasons, and that is one reason I work hard to conceal this condition which is now in remission. My hope is that once I have accomplished enough, I will feel more comfortable disclosing my condition openly. Until that time, I will keep it discreet.

In the poem “Band of Aides,” I examine the elements of severe mental illness which I experience to this day as a veteran, some twenty-five years after being first diagnosed with Schizophrenia. At the same time, the current state of treatment is much better than it was in the mid-1990s, and as a result my recovery has improved greatly thanks to good doctors who are trained specialists in the disease that took at least a decade from me while recovering. I have blocks of years when I was very ill, and that is going to make it nearly impossible for me to ever retire, though I am now working in a field I never want to retire from. “Band of Aides” provides a glimpse of my first series of

hospitalizations. Due to this illness, I ultimately lost all rights to raise my son Damon because I had to sign over all parental rights in order to make sure he had a better life than I could give him at the time.

My answer to all those who patronize me with sympathy or who blame my own mother entirely for how ill I became is the poem “The Scientist Forgets Freud, after Reading Mina Loy’s ‘Feminist Manifesto.’” After trying to write a hundred or so poems, finally this poem was the first I wrote that I could truly call a poem. It starts, “As the son of a prostitute,” and ends with a brief and choppy tercet that includes “get off your moms,” which is a call for readers to stop blaming their circumstances on their parents because, as my grandfather Jack would tell me, “One cannot help where they come from, though they can help where they are going.” This poem is not about my mother as much as it is about the disappointment that I feel when I encounter entitled but ultimately childish adults who have all the advantages many people lack or unappreciative adults who had caring mothers who were there for them as they grew up to be highly successful though highly selfish adults who treat their mothers with a distant disdain. My poem explores the sadness I feel when seeing those people. As I do my best to make sense of my own childhood, I may have forgiven my mother, though I cannot forget all she put my brother and me through. I had to forgive her in order to live and in order to not blame myself for how her life turned out, and yet I carry some guilt because I wish I could have given my brother some sense of stability; he died at 27 due to poor choices.

Considering how the sexes have been judged throughout the history of literature, Ernest Hemingway was certainly not regarded as a particularly good person. Zora Neal Hurston was falsely accused of essentially the same crime as Walt Whitman was. I will not mention these crimes here because the fabricated transgressions both Hurston and Whitman were accused of did not hold up over the decades. On the one hand, I can see how the actions of Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald might be explained away as boys being boys. On the other hand, far too many look down on the women who may have suffered from postpartum depression and other mental health crises, such as Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton. This double-standard bothers me as a father of two daughters. It bothers me tremendously that men who behave badly and then recover receive a romanticized “bad boy” status while women are labeled with insults that follow them long after their passing. As a son of someone who has struggled, it bothers me that men who behave much worse and who have even hurt others are allowed to do so while those like my mother get marked with the scarlet letter among other much worse labels.

Especially in instances of learning what not to do as parents from our own parents, parents seem to have tremendous power over their kids even once the kids grow into adults. When the children of abuse, neglect, and dysfunction grow up to be adults and then begin to speak out against their parents for not

wanting to be like them as parents themselves, it can be a powerful expression of wanting to break the cycle of dysfunction. That said, I cannot blame my mother, who gave me my first chance to live by giving birth to me when she was just fifteen years old. She did her best until ultimately succumbing to an addiction that destroyed much of her life along with my childhood. There is no way I can blame this woman who did her best in my early years of life, as the infancy stage is the most difficult stage to handle as a parent. Her adult father walked out on her when she was an infant, and that started the generational turmoil for my mother that I am doing my best to not repeat even though I initially failed in so many ways as a teenage father before getting into therapy to face the cycle of dysfunction that had plagued my family for the previous few generations.

My answer to those who judge me for the mistakes I have made as a flawed human who is working to overcome these hardships is the manuscript *Nomad*. It is with this that I write for all who have stayed by me as well as to all I have wronged, and it is with this that I write to all I have lied to while trying to hide the past harshness of my childhood, a childhood that some will see as embarrassing rather than seeing how I now reframe it in my mind: as a childhood rich with experiences. This manuscript is the most accurate account of where I have come from to the life I now do my best to live as a father, as a husband, as a teacher, as a friend, and as an editor.

Besides the necessary fistfights and the backalley scraps I had in my early years to ward off the bullies in my life, none bigger than the time I used a Louisville Slugger to knock out my mother's pusher boyfriend who went after my little witty nine-year-old brother, I did not harm anyone but myself, and that is one reason I could own my mistakes in order to work the steps thoroughly, and working the steps is the reason I am in recovery. Along with therapy, the principles of practicing the steps of recovery in all my affairs make up the maintenance required for me to continue to contribute positively to society.

I do not simply seek redemption within these chapters of poems; my hope is that this work will help others empathize with the many who suffer the effects of trauma as well as the effects of addiction either directly as addicts or indirectly as children of addicts. My hope is that the destructive pasts that so many live with will not get the best of them. Being around family can be difficult, and even now that I am in recovery, the fear of someone saying the wrong thing that will ultimately cause me a setback is the reason I opt out of attending many functions that surround my well-adjusted extended side of the family. Prior to the release of this chapter and the accompanying poems, many of those people may not have known these things about me.

My hopes in revealing my circumstances within *Nomad* and my illness of Schizophrenia are not only to remove the dynamic that some may feel the need to hold my past over my head, but to help remove the stigma associated

with diseases such as Schizophrenia so that more people can see the positive effects of mental health recovery and how those who suffer from diseases like Schizophrenia, once they recover, can still make substantial contributions to society.

My goal in releasing this information is to show the power of overcoming a destructive past and how this can help empower some to help their fellow humans recover, because when one recovers, the change can be generational; when one recovers, the change can be multidimensional; and when one recovers, the change can have a ripple effect that results in a better world.

With this in mind, I do my best to express the power of empathy through my contributions to the literary arts. Those who will not allow me to move on from my past see very little of me, and that is a necessity that I must follow in order to keep on living to raise and protect my own young kids who honor me with my most important title as their proud—Papa.



## CHAPTER 2: THE UNIVERSAL THEME OF LOVE & WORK

Romance by Dorianne Laux

I know we made it up, like god, but god  
it hurts. Like phantom pain in a leg that's been taken  
what's gone, throbs, aches. Nothing there, and still  
the pain makes a shape.

Dorianne Laux says it best in the above four-line poem in which she closes the phrase, "the pain makes a shape," because losing love is like a dent in the chest, a suckerpunch in the gut, a kick in the genitals. Those who have loved and lost love know Laux's poem very well. The poem is made up of four lines and is in the list form that propels the images to the last line. For those who have lost love, this poem is as concrete as one plus one equals two, and this is a reason many of us stay away from the television and immerse ourselves in poetry: to find the real truth. And finding the real truth is possible when the list form is employed because there is no room for ambiguity in the list form. While being a tool for accessibility, the list form allows for both an intellectually and emotionally complex structure. The list form also allows for the ability to convey a rapid sequence of precise and concise images.

In Lucille Clifton's "Homage to My Hips," Clifton considers her "big hips" that need a "space to move around in." Also in the list form, Clifton winds men up and spins herself away from slavery enacted by the colonists as well as the men in post-colonial times who may seek to continue oppressing her. She doesn't like being under the thumb of anyone, and her hips are "magic hips," and "they don't like being held back." While most lines in this poem conclude with an end-stopping period, the first letter of each line remains uncapitalized and in lowercase form. Even her "I" in the line "i have known / them to put a spell on a man / and spin him like a top!" is lowercase. This demonstrates the sheer confidence of strong women and the power of the poet to create tension within her list-forming that rests within the lines of this poem. The poem and the poet defy convention because "these hips / are free hips."

these hips are big hips  
they need space to  
move around in.  
they don't fit into little  
petty places. these hips  
are free hips.  
they don't like to be held back.  
these hips have never been enslaved,

they go where they want to go  
they do what they want to do.  
these hips are mighty hips.  
these hips are magic hips.  
i have known them  
to put a spell on a man and  
spin him like a top!

The focus of this chapter is the universal experience of love and work through poetry. In this chapter, I will be employing and drawing heavily from the interviews I conducted with award-winning poets Dorianne Laux and Joseph Millar. I shall also introduce two award-winning contemporaries who write of their experiences through work and life on the water, Sierra Golden and Tyree Daye, respectively. In this chapter, I will also analyze the Joseph Millar poems “Dark Harvest” and “Telephone Repairman” and illustrate how I see them both inspiring as well as relating to my own work.

In an interview on our first jobs and writing (Appendix I), Dorianne Laux says,

I don't think you ever forget your first jobs, the ones that got you where you needed to go, the people that touched you, or as Philip Levine says, 'marked you' along the way, the sense of satisfaction you felt at the end of a long day, your first day, your last day, days when things happened you will never forget. Those jobs, those people, those days, have made their way into my poems and continue to rise up from the past and ask to be considered. And even when not writing directly about past jobs, they are there, inside my experience, shaping my worldview.

More and more contemporary poets are writing with themes rooted within their labors as was originally demonstrated by American poet Walt Whitman in his collection *Leaves of Grass*. Whitman did not come from means, and he took on many jobs to support his real purpose in life as a poet. Going against critics' beliefs that poetry is fundamentally an academic, middle- or upper-class pursuit, Whitman pursued themes of work and the accessibility of work that is now being echoed by British poet William Letford who writes of working as a roofer. Letford spins the diction of the tools of work, the hammer and nails and the concrete, to extend the image to the paint brushes coloring the sky in Letford's poem “Worker.”

According to my University of Birmingham doctoral research supervisor, Luke Kennard, the transatlantic difference is class is a centrally important issue in the UK and the US, but in the UK there seems to be an obsession with class that tends to treat writing about work as a novelty.

Kennard goes on to state that “As an English reader, it’s always struck me that what makes American poetry so refreshing and engaging (among other things) is this genuinely democratic, clear-sighted openness of subject matter (without the trappings of a poetic canon which is largely made up of the landed gentry; Shakespeare and John Clare being exceptions).”

The first pamphlets, or what are called chapbooks in the US, from up-and-coming poets Tyree Daye as well as Sierra Golden speak to those first jobs that “mark us,” as Philip Levine says. In many of Sierra Golden’s early poems, Golden writes of her work and travels as an Alaskan Fisherwoman (Appendix III). Daye writes of his time working in a Waffle House (Appendix II). Golden won the Bear Star Press Prize in 2018, and Daye won the *American Poetry Review*/Honickman First Book Prize in 2017. Golden’s work speaks the workers’ language within the strength of her experience on the waters off the Alaskan coastlines. Daye writes of the struggles of his ancestors during colonial and post-colonial times who migrated to the rivers in rural northeastern North Carolina from the Sea Island of the South Carolina coastline. Both write of the importance of waterways in their own way, and similarly this medium is where I find many of my poems. My connection to Dorianne Laux, Joseph Millar, Tyree Daye as well as Sierra Golden is through poetry generally, and more specifically through writing poems as works of experience.

In an interview with his wife Dorianne Laux (Appendix I), Joseph Millar supports the concept of love and work in poetry by calling it,

one of the great mysteries of life, our “love made visible” as Kahlil Gibran says. So there’s something honorable to becoming what Marx calls a worker among workers. Not trying to be a boss, not complaining (too much) about the labor, trying the best we can to bring humor into a tough day, helping somebody else maybe, trying to get the job done well. Questions of character. So the workplace becomes a deep field of possibility, something realized earlier by poets like Wordsworth and Whitman and then more recently by James Wright, Adrienne Rich and Philip Levine. The state of mind of the worker, the attitude of sardonic resignation, sometimes bordering on outrage, the moments of acceptance and even triumph. In addition, craft-wise, when it comes to imagery, there’s something that happens to the tools and materials of our trades as we handle them day after day. They take on a different hue, they become sort of magnetized. Just naming them can help to imbue our poems with life.

Millar’s poem “Telephone Repairman” from his book *Overtime* illustrates these ideas through inclusion of tools and materials as images:

All morning in the February light  
he has been mending cable,  
splicing the pairs of wires together  
according to their colors,  
white-blue to white-blue  
violet-slate to violet-slate,  
in the warehouse attic by the river.  
When he is finished  
the messages will flow along the line:  
thank you for the gift,  
please come to the baptism,  
the bill is now past due :  
voices that flicker and gleam back and forth  
across the tracer-colored wires.  
We live so much of our lives  
without telling anyone,  
going out before dawn,  
working all day by ourselves,  
shaking our heads in silence  
at the news on the radio.  
He thinks of the many signals  
flying in the air around him  
the syllables fluttering,  
saying please love me,  
from continent to continent  
over the curve of the earth.

In this poem, Millar employs standard American English in conversational language that evoke a kind of dreadful distraction from our work lives, as in the lines “thank you for the gift, / please come to the baptism, / the bill is now past due.” Millar also evokes the language of the specific trade in lines such as,

he has been mending cable,  
splicing the pairs of wires together  
according to their colors,  
white-blue to white-blue  
violet-slate to violet-slate,  
in the warehouse attic by the river.

He begins with “mending cable” and then goes on to define the process in the very next phrase as he describes the action as “splicing the pairs of wires

together according to their colors.” Millar then moves from work to love with the lines,

He thinks of the many signals  
flying in the air around him  
the syllables fluttering,  
saying please love me,  
from continent to continent  
over the curve of the earth.

Joseph Millar’s style and this poem specifically have influenced my writing directly, as I explore my many trades within my own poems. The diction I use explains without giving too much explanation. Two poems in which I attempt this are “A Veterans’ Day Wish” and “From Moscow” from my manuscript *Nomad*.

In “A Veterans Day Wish,” I speak of the time I was working in a sandwich shop on weekends in addition to my primary job as a soldier in the US Army. In this poem, I return to the universal concept of work and love in that I was paid to be in uniform, during the week as a soldier and on the weekends to make sandwiches, because I had a kid to support. I then move to the larger concept of gun ownership, and my wishing Americans would revert back to fistfights or, more preferably, words, to solve disagreements.

Within “From Moscow,” I alternate between English and Russian in an attempt to explain without too much explanation, as exemplified with my use of “bread drink Kvass.” With the insertion of “bread drink,” I define what Russian Kvass is, as it has all the elements of Piva (beer) though it lacks hops and is unfermented for the most part, meaning it contains little to no alcohol. Just as Millar uses “mending cable” and juxtaposes this act with splicing wires together in the very next line, I attempt to define Russian Kvass with “bread drink” because Kvass is made with water, yeast, and bread.

The first poem I memorized during my graduate studies in Dorianne Laux’s class is a poem that has stayed with me in both trying and joyful times as I have aged, as this poem is one of mature love. Below is Joseph Millar’s “Dark Harvest,” which is also from *Overtime*.

*For Annie*

You can come to me in the evening,  
with the fingers of former lovers  
fastened in your hair and their ghost lips  
opening over your body,

They can be philosophers or musicians in long coats and colored shoes  
and they can be smarter than I am,

whispering to each other

when they look at us.

You can come walking toward my window after dusk

when I can't see past the lamplight in the glass,

when the chipped plates rattle on the counter

and the cinders

dance on the cross-ties under the wheels of southbound freights.

Bring children if you want, and the long wounds of sisters

branching away

behind you toward the sea.

Bring your mother's tense distracted face

and the shoulders of plane mechanics

slumped in the Naugahyde booths of the airport diner,

waiting for you to bring their eggs.

I'll bring all the bottles of gin I drank by myself

and my cracked mouth opened partway

as I slept in the back of my blue Impala

dreaming of spiders.

I won't forget the lines running deeply

in the cheeks of the Polish landlady

who wouldn't let the cops upstairs,

the missing ring finger of the machinist from Spenard

whose money I stole after he passed out to go downtown in a cab

and look for whores,

or the trembling lower jaw of my son, watching me

back my motorcycle from his mother's driveway one last time,

the ribbons and cone-shaped birthday hats

scattered on the lawn,

the rain coming down like broken glass.

We'll go out under the stars and sit together on the ground

and there will be enough to eat for everybody.

They can sleep on my couches and rug,

and the next day

I'll go to work, stepping easily across the scaffolding, feeding

the cable gently into the new pipes on the roof,

and dreaming

like St. Francis of the still dark rocks

that disappear under the morning tide,

only to climb back into the light,

sea-rimed, salt-blotched, their patched webs of algae  
blazing with flies in the sun.

In “Dark Harvest,” Millar begins with the line “You can come to me in the evening,” and he immediately brings the reader into a poem that examines the beauty of mature love, which is a type of love that recognizes that the lovers had mates before they met the one they were supposed to be with, though this poem ultimately dismisses those former lovers in the lines “with the fingers of former lovers / fastened in your hair and their ghost lips / opening over your body.” Love, in this case, means more than the sum of the former lovers combined because those who can last together are the ones who know they can be better than their predecessors who are often the selfish and pretentious ones that Millar labels the “philosophers or musicians in long coats and colored shoes / who are smarter than I am / whispering to each other / when they look at us.” Millar goes on to say Annie (Dorianne Laux) can bring it all and they will always have plenty to eat because he will go to work, and they both work very hard to train and support their students.

Joseph Millar’s “Dark Harvest” directly influenced my poem “Biloxi Back Bay.” In “Biloxi Back Bay,” I look back on my preteen years as a homeless youth as I fished and shrimped to support myself and my brother. In this poem I mention my wife midway through and that she did not know any of this until I wrote this poem. Hurtful words are sometimes tossed around in difficult moments and the speaker of abusive language often fails to account for the weight of those words. In my case, my wife’s generous actions in her care for me when I am ill and her care for our kids override those rare moments when she directs hurtful words in my direction.

My wife’s generous actions tell me to bring it all: all the struggles, the “former lovers,” my dead brother, my addict of a mother, the child I fathered when I was a child myself, and my mental illness, and she tells me I can bring it all to her and we will go to work. We all work, whether we care for our children and/or have one job or multiple jobs to support them. In this instance, both Millar’s readers and my readers get to know us at essentially the same time as our spouses get the chance to and, for this reason, readers can get to know poets who write of their own experiences better than their own lifelong spouses. As I stated in one of my previous *Raleigh Review* editors’ notes, there is an authenticity in the language of work, whether changing a timing belt or a tire, fishing in the Alaskan Gulf or shrimping in the Biloxi Back Bay, tarring a roof in London, slinging drinks to those who think they need them in any pub throughout the world or being told “enough” when we have had our fill, filling up fuel tanks in the rural North Carolina town of Rolesville and commuting to work together from the capital of Raleigh to the rural northeastern town of Louisville.

There is an immense amount of material that comes from workers' daily lives of getting up early or working swing shifts in order to pay the rent and keep the lights on in their homes that far exceed the onlooker who catches a whiff of the rot as they pass over a town on the bypass bridge and then get back to their comfortable big-city life and then open up their laptop to research the town so that they can put it all into a poem they can get published in *Best American Poets* because they are on the inside as the gatekeepers of the poetry publishing world.

There is something authentic about the daily life and struggles that come with living and working in a town, with struggling in that town to raise kids or care for an elderly parent or a disabled family member that far exceeds a surface-level view of that town, and this means poems of experience have no segregated boundaries by way of the demographics that have been used to separate us, and that poetry, in terms of experience, does not belong to the superstandard elite.

There is something disingenuous in the opportunistic, double-faced mannerisms and the cat smiles of the elite "poet" who travels to places without having any real connection to them for the sole purpose of mining these places for material and then leaves, weightless. All of this is to say that this type of poet fails to really capture the soul of a place if one's experience is just that of a tourist. My doctoral research supervisor, Luke Kennard, states that this type of poet may tend to not write about their own towns or cities or experiences at all, "as if they are as objective as a camera."

I will add that there is something ultimately disingenuous about taking in a natural disaster or a tragedy from the television in the comfort of one's own home. Again, I am not positing that a poet needs crises to make poems. There are plenty of poems that focus on the big three experiences most every human encounters no matter their geographic locale, their specific trade, their race, their socioeconomic standing, etcetera. I am alluding to the big three experiences of love, death, and desire. Love can be experienced as simply though ultimately as complex as that of love for a parent or a parent's love for his or her own child. Death can be multi-tiered and has the ability to strike us all if we live long enough, no matter who you are in the world. Desire, as Lorca was known to touch on, can be that of unrequited love, and many poets get the beginnings of their first poems from the loss of a loved one even when the feelings of love go unreturned. At the same time, like Whitman and scores of other poets, Lorca's desire to be accepted by mainstream society was there for very different reasons that reach outside any monetary awards and accolades of our art. Poetry is a vehicle for redemption for many of us, it is not a throne. Both Whitman (America) and Lorca (Spain) were not accepted for who they were by many during their lifetimes. I am not accepted by the mainstream because I am a schizophrenic. Two very different reasons for the lack of



acceptance though I do not see these *flaws* as all that different because the emotions of abandonment and the hatred from others feels the same. Just as Lorca and Whitman may have believed, I feel when enough is accomplished that could open minds. Lorca mentions that all that has dark has duende and dark is beautiful. I very much respect all who believe in this ideal of being vastly different from the mainstream through past experience or through current situations, diagnoses or sexuality etcetera, while our ultimate redemption may rest within the professions of our choosing.

Poem of Experience by Joseph Millar

*'I will never again write from personal experience.'*

– Lynn Emanuel

If they keep on with their unstable muttering,  
chipping away at the worn first person  
who's now pulling weeds outside in the garden  
or leaning its ladder against the garage,  
maybe no one else will show up  
in sneakers and old hat  
to water the lettuce or clean out the gutters,  
patch the fence  
next to the broken gate...  
Maybe no one will waste most of Wednesday  
driving to town and getting lost  
on the slanted black streets of Lynchburg  
amid coffee galleries and book stores, the music  
CD's glittering like badges: Hendrix, Mingus,  
the jewelry of cell phones opening  
their cheap clasps over the sidewalks  
dotted with late spring rain.  
Maybe the kitchen above the brick steps  
will vanish in a sudden postmodern ellipsis,  
along with the olive oil in its jar  
glowing like a lamp on the counter top  
strewn with the gold skin of carrots and spuds  
and the onion's translucent husks,  
the pot with a glass lid  
she bought at Goodwill,  
the stove's charred burner  
and blue gas flame even now  
beginning to stutter and rise,  
even now beginning to hiss.

From the above epigraph, “I will never again write from personal experience” by Lynn Emanuel, Joseph Millar sets the stage for *The School of Experience* to be proposed. In this poem, he includes the themes of the everyday in lines like these:

olive oil in a jar  
glowing like a lamp on the counter top  
strewn with the gold skin of carrots and spuds  
and the onion’s translucent husks,  
the pot with a glass lid / she bought at Goodwill.

Millar also speaks of those rare instances of the special times getting lost while wandering the backstreets of a place like Lynchburg, VA. Though before asserting that everyday and special moments of life can be enjoyed, Millar inserts the themes of work and experience into the poem, notably the work of maintaining a home, such as cleaning out gutters and gardening to reap the vegetables on the countertop. The epigraph sets all these images and experiences in motion as the counter-argument against the poetry of experience. Millar’s examples of experiences are here to say that the poetry of experience is about the everyday, the work and the enjoyment and the struggles of life that we all share on this rock we call earth while lapping the sun together on average eighty times in our lifetimes.

Writing through personal experience can take on many forms, though for me, the most comfortable topic in my writing is rooted in my labors of work. In my first job at thirteen, I independently fished and shrimped in the Biloxi Back Bay, and I also served as a deckhand on a number of shrimp boats along the Mississippi Gulf Coast. Other labors of mine include being a soldier before I returned to be near my grandparents who took me in again. I then went to work in a coaxial cable factory in southern Virginia before deciding to go to community college, where I had to take high school courses over again due to being passed through in grade-school because of my many relocations. There was no one teacher to blame for my being so far behind in school. Given the number of times I had to relocate as a kid and the years I did not attend school at all due to being on the move, there was no one to blame for these circumstances. My transient lifestyle as a kid happened on many occurrences because the warm welcome we were given would suddenly be worn out because my mother was an addict who used others.

When I attended community college, I worked as a gas station attendant and then as a mental health aide. While working in the mental hospital, I was able to imitate the aides who helped me during my four-month hospitalization before coming home from service. The job in the mental hospital allowed me to

come full-circle and to work on weekends to pay the rent and leave me free to study during the week. All this is just to say that unless someone is born into means, we all must work. I did my best even through my illness to continue to improve. It helped that I always tended to seek out friendships with those who were more successful than I was and who could challenge me when I took a misstep in life. It helped that I was friends with my professors and that I sought them out during their office hours, and it helped that my friends, no matter how young or old, have always called me out when I needed to be called out. I look to my friends as my confidants and as my nuclear family now. My father's parents, my grandfather Jack, and my grandmother Barbara were my best friends. My grandfather Jack taught me how to operate in society; he was my best friend and my best teacher. He always believed in me. He taught me to be someone others can count on. With lines like "say what you mean, and mean what you say" my grandfather Jack taught me to be dependable.

### CHAPTER 3: THE UNIVERSAL EXPERIENCE OF PARENTHOOD/CARETAKING

It should be stated that not every parent is fit to be a parent. It should also be stated that parenting is not for everyone, though the universal trait that binds most everyone is the ability to care for something, whether it be a car or geranium or job or pet or oneself or someone else: a child or a parent or a spouse or another family member or a friend or even a patient. There are outliers to the universal experience of parenthood and caretaking, especially among the extreme pole of selfish narcissists to the complete opposite pole who are unable to care for themselves or anyone else due to mental and/or physical disability, though those who have the ability to look beyond themselves to empathize with others also have the ability to care for someone else, no matter which category they fall under.

In Appendix I, I asked Dorianne Laux and Joseph Millar to answer questions regarding the work of caretaking and parenthood and the work of an artist, and work in this sense does not always mean working for wages; the most difficult work is raising children (or otherwise caring for someone else) during these times in which it can often take more than one income for the average household to make it and amplify our work even more so that whenever we need to, we are able to fill up the car or be waited on in a restaurant or call a tradesman over to our home for repairs. What is Dorianne Laux's and Joseph Millar's advice to the single mom or single dad who has a passion to create though has to work multiple jobs to support and raise their kids?

According to Laux, in the interview on "The Poetry School of Experience" in Appendix I, when Laux was working as a single mother, she found times between time to write: nap time, waiting for her daughter to get out of school, standing in line at the bank. Laux goes on to say in the interview that she got up early when the house was quiet, or after bedtime. "If one wants it bad enough and [is] willing and able to sacrifice, there is usually a way" (Appendix I).

Equally as affirmative is this answer from Joseph Millar from the shared interview: "I would say try to keep the art close to your person—whether it's a notebook or a sketch pad, harmonica, etc., so you can touch it when you have a free moment. I used to write poems in the cab of my telephone truck. Try to be around other artists when you can—take a class if you have to, even if you're more advanced than the other students. It can provide you with helpful deadlines and encouragement. Read (or otherwise make yourself available to) work that's currently being done in your field, stay connected to your contemporaries" (Appendix I).

In Joseph Millar's poem "Fathers," Millar examines the roles of reliable parent, protector, friend, and worker. Though still an artist, Millar provides something readers can relate to as they are outside looking after themselves with their chests rising and falling as they smoke to remind themselves that they must be alive because they can see their breath within the smoke, even though they may be tired and do not want to go inside.

### Fathers

All year they've given things away:  
lipsticks, stockings, movie tickets,  
wiper blades and cigarette money.  
At dawn they stand over our sleeping bodies  
gazing into our faces, into the future.  
Then they stay outdoors after dinner  
smoking, watching the road turn dark  
and they don't want to come back inside.

Ten thousand of them have rested later  
under a gray coat still wet with rain  
in their belt buckles and reading glasses,  
their hat bands and tobacco smells.  
When they fall asleep  
night collects in their palms,  
miles of track turn bright with dew  
and a net of stars rises  
over the river. They hear a voice  
asking for order, asking for quiet  
while the world tilts away from the sun  
and the shadows grow long at the end of fall  
over the wisps and stubble,  
over the dust and chaff.

Those who are tasked with putting their kids to bed and waking them up know the first thing they have to do before looking at their chest rising and falling is to look into their faces to see the future, as Millar puts it. In my poem "Band of Aides," I write of being the father of my first daughter, the first child I fathered whom I had the opportunity to raise.

Just as I seek out therapists with the same first name as my mother, it is no accident that when discharged from my four-month hospitalization at twenty years old, I sought out work as a mental health aide when I returned home from service because I admired those who helped me when I was sick. In "Band of

Aides,” I touch on that time before I could read and write fluently, a time when I felt a split from reality, a time when I was delusional and ill, a time of when my experiences were difficult, though rich.

Band of Aides

while I held my baby by her shoulders  
the vaccination nurse moved towards us like an amoeba

after that first heel stick there was a silent stirring  
as she furrowed her brow and stuck out her lower lip

then she fought just like I fought  
the psychiatric aides years ago

who made me guzzle liquid charcoal  
to clear the trunks from my overdosed system

her wails make me think of how I yelled rape  
when they forced the catheter

our attempts to comfort her after the “all done” moved  
my mind to those months on the veterans’ psych ward

head counts every fifteen minutes from the aides  
who woke me every odd hour in those odd days.

In the poem above, first published in *War, Literature & the Arts* in 2009, like Millar, I am looking at my infant daughter’s face as she is about to receive her first heelstick vaccination, and I spin the moment to my own struggles with the mental health aides who were there to protect me from myself by helping me get my mind back to working order. These were aides I looked up to, as they were wise despite not being much older than I was at that time in 1994. I knew they made rounds every fifteen minutes because, after serving in the military and being a patient myself, one of the first jobs I took was as a mental health aide on weekend twelve-hour shifts in a state hospital when I began community college. Of course, I did not see the aides that treated me do rounds, as sleep was one of my only escapes from an unsettling reality because, not only could I not read or write, I did not know what was real or unreal. The only way I could have gotten this information about the rounds of headcounts was by experiencing life as an aide after being the patient of several good aides, doctors and nurses. “Nurse” by Dorianne Laux gives insight into

the trade and the skill required of nurses and anyone nursing those who need help. In this poem, Laux's mother has left for her shift as a nurse and has taught her children that, as stated in the poem, when she needed help, the children jumped in to assist. Laux also employs the tool of the list form just as Millar does in the poem "Fathers" above. Laux returns to what is global through work and universal through experience in the last few lines as she overcomes the fears to operate deftly in a time of crisis to help her sister. Laux also engages the art of the image in showcasing the nervousness and nausea that come with both fear and worry involved when a loved one is injured.

As a graduate student, my preparations to teach poetry to undergraduates made me hyperfocus on craft, and I ultimately decided to begin with teaching how to make an image. This decision has paid off for at least one of my former undergraduate students whom I taught in the spring of 2011 at North Carolina State University and who now, a decade later, happens to be a world-renowned poet and friend. My full understanding of the list form Etheridge Knight, Dorianne Laux, Joseph Millar, and Lucille Clifton employ in their aforementioned poems, came after I developed what I call the devil form. Poems written in the devil form total thirteen words, including title, and must have a six-syllable title, six syllable first stanza, and six-syllable second (and final) stanza. "In A Bar, You're Alone" is an example of this form, which became one of my first published poems when it was printed in *Tar River Poetry*.

#### In A Bar, You're Alone

stench of citrus  
vodka

outlasts the smoke  
signals.

Another example within the manuscript *Nomad* is "Next Door Brothels Are Just." Poets who employ this form learn to be concise and precise with their images. I developed this form by merging William Carlos Williams's poem "The Red Wheelbarrow" with Ezra Pound's poem "In a Station of the Metro." The title of Ezra Pound's poem directly inspired the title of my poem "In A Bar, You're Alone," while the body of a poem written in the devil form is half the size of William Carlos Williams's poem.

Ultimately, the devil form is a derivative of “In a Station of the Metro” and “The Red Wheelbarrow.”

In A Station of the Metro→ By Ezra Pound	In A Bar, You're Alone By Rob Greene	The Red Wheelbarrow By William Carlos Williams
	stench of citrus vodka	← so much depends upon
	outlasts the smoke signals.	← a red wheel barrow
		glazed with rain water
		beside the white chickens.

In my lessons for my students, I create image charts for them to fill in their likes and dislikes that are specific to each of them as individuals, and I then use these questionnaire categories as a basis for images that relate to the five senses. I also include a brief rundown of Lorca’s essay on *duende* as well as Dorianne Laux’s chapter on the subject of images from *The Poet’s Companion*. My poem “In A Bar, You’re Alone” touches on the olfactory images of smell and directly relates to the nausea that I still feel to this day whenever I smell citrus vodka or rose wine, as those are the scents that would hit me as a small child directly before the fights that would break out when my parents were together. Given Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s quote on poetry as the “best words in the best order,” the devil form is a tool to help my students train early in their creative writing studies to be concise before they can get to expansiveness in their writing, because the correct words must be in place in work of varying lengths.

“Poem for My Unborn Daughter” by Kristin Robertson was first published in *Raleigh Review* and is another example of a worrying parent or, in this case, an expecting parent and her nightmares as she’s carrying her first child. With the exception of “springbok” and “suet,” this poem is an example of what we at *Raleigh Review* do well: we look for common diction to be used throughout each poem, though images in the poem carry readers through to the end. “Springbok” and “suet” are not terms we use every day, or ever, in my case, so I needed to look those terms up. Taking a closer look at this poem, the images extend through the enjambed lines,

Months now I’ve handed you over  
in my dreams. To the tall, strange man  
on the subway platform. To nuns.



To the firefighters backing down  
the ladder.

From the onset, “Months now I’ve handed you over” gets readers moving through the poem, and the very next line, “in my dreams,” tells readers this experience is one of the rough and vivid dreams encountered by those who are expecting their first child. I am not a fan of dream poems, though this poem lacks pretense because the root of the issue, the “unborn child,” is very real, and this comes across in the poem; the worry and trepidation that come with expecting a child are rooted within this poem. Two examples of the list form on parenting and caretaking are Kristin Robertson’s aforementioned “Poem for My Unborn Daughter” and Dorianne Laux’s poem “Nurse.”

#### Poem for My Unborn Daughter

Months now I’ve handed you over  
in my dreams. To the tall, strange man  
on the subway platform. To nuns.  
To the firefighter backing down  
the ladder. To the masked surgeon.  
The strongest swimmer. From evildoers  
I’ve hidden you on the top shelf  
inside a lidless piece of crockery.  
My wherewithal to stash you places  
never runs out. You fit inside the air  
duct at the Cascade Inn, which shares  
with Food City a parking lot taped off  
for the bald eagle, her nest a crown  
of thorns for the Aisle 6 streetlamp.  
I’ve weighted down a duffel bag with  
your anchor body, your anvil body.  
Instinct, it is, above all else, to save.  
When a lab rat’s given a choice to eat  
chocolate or free another trapped rat,  
a stranger it’s never seen before, it will,  
every time, again and again, lift the door.  
I’ve sewn you pinch by pinch  
into my suitcase like a kilo of cocaine.  
Mixed you into suet for grackles to smear  
onto their asphalt-rainbow wings. Away  
from me I’ve winnowed you like grain.  
Tonight I whisper to you, Please drink,  
as I flag down a river-bound springbok.

## Nurse

My mother went to work each day  
in a starched white dress, shoes  
clamped to her feet like pale  
mushrooms, two blue hearts pressed  
into the sponge rubber soles.  
When she came back home, her nylons  
streaked with runs, a spatter  
of blood across her bodice,  
she sat at one end of the dinner table  
and let us kids serve the spaghetti, sprinkle  
the parmesan, cut the buttered loaf.  
We poured black wine into the bell  
of her glass as she unfastened  
her burgundy hair, shook her head, and began.  
And over the years we mastered it, how to listen  
to stories of blocked intestines  
while we twirled the pasta, of saws  
teething cranium, drills boring holes in bone  
as we crunched the crust of our sourdough,  
carved the stems off our cauliflower.  
We learned the importance of balance,  
how an operation depends on  
cooperation and a blend of skills,  
the art of passing the salt  
before it is asked for.  
She taught us well, so that when Mary Ellen  
ran the iron over her arm, no one wasted  
a moment: My brother headed straight for the ice.  
Our little sister uncapped the salve.  
And I dialed the number under Ambulance,  
my stomach turning to the smell  
of singed skin, already planning the evening  
meal, the raw fish thawing in its wrapper,  
a perfect wedge of flesh.

The fear and worry in Dorianne Laux's poem as well as Kristin Robertson's directly influenced my poem "Second Trimester," which I wrote after my experience in the Newborn Intensive Care Unit (NICU) as the father of

twins born during the second trimester. The nurses in the NICU ward trained us as well as cared for our “preemies.” They personally gave me hope, and, despite just having stopped drinking alcohol a year earlier, I was able to be strong enough for my family.

Second Trimester  
*for the NICU Nurses*

Your words for my preemie twins  
are like Tchaikovsky’s notes  
when the cello thuds a low F  
when grading the hematomas  
to a sequence of the violin’s middle C’s  
you jump to when the monitors  
indicate they need to be intubated,  
to high A’s when you say both are stable,  
half-day by half-day  
the ups and downs you tell us to expect  
as they ride side by side in the Cadillac of incubators.

The poem is likely to change as my twins grow and mature, and I hope to push it further along, though I have also employed the list form here as in Millar’s poem “Fathers” as well as Laux’s poem “Nurse.” As with any rapid moment, the list form is the most effective way I have found to convey rapid action through images, particularly for a series of serious events that I hope to never relive. Perhaps I am seeing the elements that bind all of us when I look into the faces of my twins struggling to live in their early months, my preemie twins barely weighed one pound each when born over three months early. It could be through the diversity of my children in the NICU as they are a quarter Russian, a quarter Belarusian, and the other half made up of my multi-racial American ancestry that ranges from Western Asian, Northern African, Nigerian, European (East & West) among other locations. So yes, perhaps it is through the building blocks of our DNA that I am able to see we are all more alike than some would care to admit. Consequently, it is through my diverse experiences that allow me to identify the elements that bind us without regard to any single demographic marker. The experiences are different for all of us though it is through the elements of addiction, war, loss, recovery, love, work, parenting, caretaking and fear that allows us to relate to one another.

## CHAPTER 4: THE REBUTTAL IN DEFENSE OF POEMS OF EXPERIENCE

Before the first moonwalk by Neil Armstrong in 1969, Mina Loy sent readers to the moon and back in the 1920s with her poem “Lunar Baedeker.” First published in 1923, the poem’s title refers to Baedeker, the name of a travel guide brand, and “lunar,” which, of course, means moon, so this poem’s title translates as “travel guide to the moon.” Loy fully imagines the trip to the moon forty-six years before the actual trip took place, and she imagines the trip to the moon to be as illuminating as a trip through New York and Paris. Mina Loy was an experimental avant-garde poet of the modernist period who wrote one of the most influential works I had ever read when I was first starting out in the field of poetry. Loy’s “The Feminist Manifesto” helped me in many ways. One way Loy’s writing helped me was by helping me to more fully appreciate the struggles of women and the fact that the stay-at-home wife, in many instances, has ventured into an agreement with her spouse that borders on symbiosis and, in many occurrences, parasitism in the form of prostitution. Reading Loy’s manifesto helped me accept my place in the world as the son of a prostitute; perhaps I was trying to make sense of my hellishness of a childhood and spin that experience around, and my reading of her manifesto was helpful to me and helpful to my writing. It also helped me finally admit the harshness of my childhood through poems, to talk directly to it, and I stopped avoiding discussions of my childhood for the first time in my life. Poetry gave me this freedom.

In Ben Lerner’s essay *The Hatred of Poetry*, he states in his own rebuttal on page seventy-six that “The admitted weakness in the story I’m telling about Poetry is that it doesn’t have much to say about good poems in all their variety; it’s much better at dealing with the great or horrible instances of the art.” I am certainly not a hater of poetry, and I am not a hater of Ben Lerner; I love poetry though I am not in love with Lerner. His essay does not lift off for me until page sixty-three of this eighty-six-page book. Throughout his essay, I like Lerner at times and I dislike him at times, so in that sense his essay is doing the work of art because art must cause a reaction that can move one to react, either to get up and walk out in a huff or to shake the hand of the speaker, or in my case to make a place for it in my own essay. My words for Lerner won’t walk out on him, nor will they shake his hand. There are a few pages within the essay, especially when he turns to Claudia Rankine’s *Citizen*, that I will reference briefly below as that selection was one of the most useful in the text because it sort of redeems Lerner, in my eyes at least. Then, I shall get to some of Lerner’s thrashing references to Whitman that are indeed rebuttal-worthy.

In Lerner’s dismissive words for the avant-garde, he educated me as his reader on the history of the movement that I will explore a little more to make

sure of its accuracy. My first question would be: do those in the ranks of the avant-garde really view the poem as a bomb that will obliterate the norms into some futuristic ideal society?

Well, I doubt those who experiment with form really believe poems are weapons, even in a metaphorical sense. *Raleigh Review* may have aversions to work that is unnecessarily exclusive and works of pretension, though we publish all kinds of poems including those that experiment with form, such as Kaveh Akbar's poem "Recovery Math." In Akbar's poem, first published in *Raleigh Review*, we could see the respectful play on form from the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous and the twelve steps of recovery. Without our minds being open to new forms, we at *Raleigh Review* would have passed on this poem, and that would have been a mistake. That said, the diction of this poem is accessible, and its audience is broad as it overarches those who have worked the steps and those who continue to work the steps as well as the family members of those who are affected by cyclical dysfunction, as addiction does not discriminate based on any one demographic or any set of demographics.

And this view on addiction goes against the statements put forth in Sally Satel's essay on September 1, 2008 in *The New York Times* as she argues "Addiction does indeed discriminate. It 'selects' for people who are bad at delaying gratification and gauging consequences, who are impulsive, who think they have little to lose, have few competing interests, or are willing to lie to a spouse." We are now in the midst of the opioid crisis in 2020, and addiction is a universal experience that has affected most everyone either directly or indirectly.

So to counter Lerner, the avant-garde and experiments of form are not the problems with poetry. In my opinion, the problem I see in the literary arts is the same as with any profession, and that is the set of issues that arise out of promoting those who lack empathy and who have a pretentious nature coupled with the nepotisms and the favoritisms shown to their entitled offspring. We have depended on these types for too long to tell us what the "truly great instances of the art" happen to be. Again, poetry does not belong to the superstandard elite.

In my opinion, poetry is not cryptology and poetry is not journalism; it is somewhere in between. While I appreciate Lerner's sensibilities towards the subject while defending the art of poetry, he does the art of poetry a disservice at the same time; for example, in his wind-down on the essay, he seemed to be running out the clock with the page count that begins with his references to the Hypermart that opens in Topeka, Kansas. The most useful reference from this section from the Hypermart to the end of the essay, that I call the nonsensical ramble, is an image of the "snot-nosed" Ben Lerner as one that may have lived mostly a life of comfort as he grew up mostly in one place and really, as far as I can tell, had not experienced much in the form of struggles that a lot of us have

aside from his rather oddly placed reference to sex and substance abuse toward the end of the book that could have occurred in either his youth or during his university studies. At the same time, perhaps it is a swipe at those who write of experience, and this reference wasn't him at all who experienced what he calls on, as

[i]t is on the one hand a mundane experience and on the other an experience of structure behind the mundane, patches of unprimed canvas peeking through the real. And—why not speak of it—fucking and getting fucked up was part of it, is, the way sex and substances can liquefy the particulars of perception into an experience of form. The way a person's stutter can be liquefied by song.

Even without that experience as a supposed metaphor for graduate studies or disdain for the pursuit of middle-class life as the tenors and the all-encompassing field of poetry as a vehicle, I have no doubt Lerner has been affected by some of what I'm finding to be universal experiences of the human condition, namely addiction, war, recovery, loss, love, work, parenting, and caretaking. Lerner has at least experienced four of these elements to date from what I can gather in his forty years. I won't go into the ones I see him as experiencing because my essay isn't about Ben Lerner, and I have read very little of his work outside of *The Hatred of Poetry*. This chapter serves as a rebuttal, and Lerner serves as one of the subjects who, from what I've gathered, has experienced at least four of the eight elements that bind us as humans. I never said we had to experience all of those chapter headers, even though a lot of us have either directly or indirectly.

There are, of course, other elements we share as humans, with fear being one, as in the fear not so much for my life in adding the weaknesses I found within Lerner's essay while writing my own, but the fear that I should somehow be afraid for my career for doing so, because the absence of the American critic is there because of fear for one's career, and I am not going to cave to that pressure because I never understood the stance of reviewing only the books of poetry one enjoys enough to feel compelled to pen a positive review on. That stance smacks of being disingenuous, and Lerner, even if he lacks some experience with life (as we all do, because none of us share the same experiences), takes on difficult material, and he is not completely inaccurate in his analyses as far as I can tell. At the same time, I might be older than him by five years, and I might be more experienced with life, though he has at least ten to fifteen or more years of experience in the field of poetry than I do. I have feared for my life in real time, and I would much rather fear for my career, so that is probably why I'm not afraid to call out those who lack experience, and nor do I fear stating that those who have lived rather

comfortable existences seem to exhibit a militant, passive-aggressive resistance against those of us who have extensive life experiences.

There are those who envy those of us who have extensive experiences to reflect on and to dial up when we write. Just as the recent autobiography from Will Self alludes to him envying the abusive childhood Edward St. Aubyn endured because those difficult experiences gave St. Aubyn plenty of material, there are those from upper-middle class households or even the offspring of knights and psychologists who make their envy of those of us who have overcome impossible childhoods as a threat to their legitimacy as writers. This sense of entitlement by the elite whose suffering brings out the spoils of nepotism offers no match for honest experiences in the long run.

Will Self's lineage is that of noble stability and Ben Lerner was raised by the kind of people whom I have to pay copay after copay for my weekly reality check because of my severe mental illness. I admit that I am slightly confused by these two writers for their life of privilege, and consequently their pretentious attitudes, though they cannot tell me what it's like to have to eat calluses and palm skin for nourishment because that is all that is available for the day or what it is like to be taken from the street on a Thursday and rushed up north, cleaned up, and immediately placed in Sunday school only to be called on to read and then for everyone in the Baptist church to find out that their newest member is illiterate.

At the same time, I could not share with anyone the contributing factors of my then illiteracy, the abuse, neglect, and homelessness, because it was too embarrassing and the shame was too much, so I had to carry the "stupid" label throughout my teenage years. It took me a while to figure out how to conduct myself in public, and I was oblivious to how others saw me until I stopped drinking alcohol. When I worked the steps of recovery, the later steps I still follow to this day, I could all of a sudden see the eyes of others. Due to the paranoia that continues to this day due to Schizophrenia, I choose to stay away from crowds, and the only time I leave the house most of the time is to go to work. Some people are something else. I have seen what humans are capable of, the good and the bad, and what I have seen frightens me for the most part. All of these experiences have helped my writing, and I still have a lot more to say thanks to my experiences.

At the same time, experiences by themselves alone do not make writers successful. They may make the writing easier, though the formulaic ingredients of self-promotion, luck, and connections build careers sometimes at the expense of talent. Unfortunately, I lack the skill to self-promote, and plus, I'm not all that likeable, though those who matter to me most love me. At the same time, I wrote this essay in gratitude for the life poetry gives me as a reader and as a publisher. As with those who expect accolades that may never arrive, poetry owes us nothing, yet those of us who have been saved by the art form owe our

support to the field, so we subscribe to literary magazines and read literary magazines, buy poetry collections directly from small presses, and support them. We all can't be takers in the arts. Some of us have to give, too, and many of us give so much of ourselves to make our magazines happen and to help propel the field. My essays and my own writing are more of a defensive posture that also happen to pack a mean right cross. For me, the issue Lerner gets to happens to be that there are indeed haters of poetry out there, and particularly his admission that "... it's these stakes which make actual poems an offense: If my seatmate in a holding pattern over Denver calls on me to sing, demands a poem that will unite coach and first class into one community, I can't do it."

In this reflection that hooked me into reading Lerner's essay, I can see the point of my own work in poetry more clearly. It is not that I am advocating for poetry as being universal, nor am I aiming for a single poem that will unite all people; I know the poetry of experience is universal due to the elements of war, addiction, recovery, loss, love, work, parenthood, and caretaking, and I could toss fear onto that pile to make up its core. All humans have or will experience some if not all of these elements before the clock runs out on them.

Without going too much into the unexplored snobbery of Lerner's lines of uniting first class with coach classes with a poem, if the examples he provides in the essay are the really "great" instances of the art and they are all that Lerner had to reflect on when writing *The Hatred of Poetry*, I can see that uniting first with carriage class would be an impossible task. That said, if the truly "great instances of the art" that Lerner refers to in his rebuttal were all he had then I mean yes, this would be an impossible task, so I do not believe Lerner has been reading the right poems. He should have a look at Joseph Millar's "Dark Harvest" or his "Telephone Repairman" or Dorianne Laux's most recent poem in *Raleigh Review* called "In Any Event" or Etheridge Knight's poem "Feeling Fucked Up" or Lucille Clifton's poem "Homage to My Hips" or Philip Levine's "What Work Is" to get a sense of the poems that make us better and have the potential to bring us together, because these examples are ultimately poems of experience.

There is a lot more to be said for the divisions between high culture and low/pop culture, though poetry is neither and both at the same time because it overarches it all. Those who seek to write the poem that will unite all people should not be discouraged, as that can be a useful muse to write to. Below is one poem that is closer to uniting all people, regardless of any one set demographic that is used to separate us. "In Any Event" by Dorianne Laux starts off with this line that pulls *us* in: "If we are fractured / we are fractured / like stars / bred to shine." These lines morph the human race into the stars and their hearts into gold from earth to space to sea to dust to ultimately give readers the hope they so need right now. Here is an experience that is fully imagined because the poet, Dorianne Laux, is a keen observer who has



experienced the elements that bind us. And she is therefore able to catch everything that most miss. Thinking about the memorable line from the first celestial event of the film *Contact*, where the protagonist states, “They should have sent a poet,” I would want one with Dorianne Laux’s eye to be that poet.

#### In Any Event

If we are fractured	I shall not lament	Nothing is gone forever.
we are fractured	the human, not yet.	If we came from dust
like stars	There is something	and will return to dust
bred to shine	more to come, our hearts	then we can find our way
in every direction,	a gold mine	into anything.
through any dimension,	not yet plumbed.,	What we are capable of
billions of years	an uncharted sea.	is not yet known,
since and hence.		and I praise us now,
		in advance.

In Dorianne Laux’s poem above, first published in *Raleigh Review*, the themes that unite us are present in the constellations and in the sea. Furthermore, her poem above gives us hope that we are better than the current times and that we shall come out of this because,

If we came from dust ...  
then we can find our way  
into anything.  
What we are capable of  
is not yet known,  
and so I praise us now,  
in advance.

Walt Whitman also covered the constellations in a much longer work within his poetry book *Leaves of Grass*. In an interview published in *The Paris Review* for *The Hatred of Poetry*, Ben Lerner attempts to give Walt Whitman a good thumping for “loafing” while Whitman pursued his poetry collection as a solution to prevent the problems that war brings every time: the casualties, the wounded, and the broken. Of course the Civil War happened, and with Whitman going between the camps of the wounded to treat them as a nurse, it was stated by Lerner while referencing Grossman in the interview from *The Paris Review* that Whitman at that time did not choose a side and the reason was because that decision would have gotten in the way of Whitman’s universality. This is a shallow analysis being echoed by Lerner.

With Whitman not choosing a side at that time while a nurse during the Civil War, I personally believe Whitman was therefore able to act as I would hope that all medical professionals would act, as professionals who do no harm. It has also been stated by Lerner while referencing Grossman once again in the

interview that Walt Whitman was not able to enter into history. I am countering this stance put forth by Lerner because Whitman was a professional who helped the veterans, his fellow Americans. Lerner mentions Whitman loafed in *The Paris Review* interview because of the lines within “Song of Myself” in which Whitman mentions “lean[ing] and loaf[ing].”

Most who know and love Whitman know that is not the entire story and that Ben Lerner was not the first to accuse Whitman of a falsehood. I am alluding to the perspectives of the Whitman biographers who have accused Whitman of all sorts of falsehoods that they failed to account for. One historian named David S. Reynolds ultimately weaved a tale of an unspeakable act that supposedly happened when Whitman was a teenager. At that time, Whitman was not a legal adult by the standards of today though he was bright enough at a young age to become a teacher. I will not mention the accusation here because the cooked-up fairytale that was spurred on by over a century of secondhand information accounts for something much worse than yesterday’s rumors. The accusations from Reynolds’s source did not hold up over the last twenty or so years, yet this particular biography of Whitman may have helped the historian in his career.

Was Whitman concerned with the rumors that surrounded his life as the tailend of “Song of Myself” alludes to when he states in part 52, “The spotted hawk swoops by and accuses me, he complains of my gab and my loitering.” Was Whitman really concerned about redeeming mistakes he may have made in his youth, or was he more concerned with stopping the bloodbath of the Civil War? Stopping the absolute brutality of slavery with words would have been the ideal solution and that, I believe, was the crux of Whitman’s argument as he did his best to do so with his poems. Ultimately, it did take the Civil War to start the progress to officially end slavery.

What I most respect about Whitman is he was the ultimate idealist, he wanted the best for all so perhaps humankind would accept him for who he was, a poet with *flaws* that did not mesh well with the mainstream. It takes one to know one, and I know Whitman in this way. The dilemma of attaining forgiveness and acceptance is what Whitman may have been pondering as a prize while on earth and this is one some of us, regardless of our contributions to society, think of as our *flaws* stalk us in the shadows.

Perhaps Whitman’s early writings while a newspaperman allow us a lens to see Whitman as a constant work-in-progress, as he did his best to rally around the white working class and championed those within this class; that is, he did so until his trip to New Orleans when he observed the slavetrade first hand, and this changed Walt Whitman’s lens. The man was a constant work-in-progress, and he worked more than likely from the time he could walk because that is how agrarian societies operate. What is known about Whitman is that he worked as a teacher when he was a teenager, he worked in

newspapers for a number of years, he was the executor of his father's modest estate, he worked as a nurse, and he wrote *Leaves of Grass* and revolutionized the artform. That is a productive life, and that is Walt Whitman as a work-in-progress.

Lerner's early references on Plato's view of poets as a threat were interesting, and I enjoyed the pitch, though the most valuable lines in the Lerner essay came from the quote Wallace Stevens gave on poetry being a kind of currency as well as Claudia Rankine's excerpt from *Citizen*. Rankine's lines describe visiting a therapist's home office for the first time and the speaker in Rankine's piece being mistaken as a trespasser instead of a first-time patient because the psychologist had only spoken on the phone to the client and, from what I can gather from the excerpt, did not know the patient was a person of color. Just as discrimination on the basis of race has always been a factor in our society to date, so has discrimination on the basis of mental illness.

I have been on both sides of accusations. I have been accused of nonsense, and I have accused others closest to me of nonsense due to my mental illness of Paranoid Schizophrenia. If someone stares at my kind for too long, the chances are they will not end up in a fight, though they will likely see my fellow Schizophrenic drop his or her head and walk away. All in all, this strikes those with no experience with this mental illness to call my kind either aloof, idiosyncratic, or weak. Being aloof or idiosyncratic can even lead to ignorant gossip, and it can also lead some to be suspicious of my kind who withdraw from society. That said, I have been accused of silly falsehoods in the past by those who lack empathy. I have also accused those closest to me over the years of following me, of placing dead birds on my porch to send me a message, and of placing bats in my basement.

Given the hallucinations and paranoia that have accompanied my condition in the past, my illness is in remission at this time. From the pharmacy to my three physicians and the loyal people in my life, having those within my inner circle who provide me with reality checks on a weekly basis has made a difference in my recovery. Still, I have lost over a decade of my life to Paranoid Schizophrenia, a few career paths, and far too many friends. I am joining the endeavor of poetry late in life. I am neither a critic nor an essayist. I did launch the world-class magazine *Raleigh Review* on February 21, 2010 in my home one night during a metaphorical storm in Raleigh, NC.

What makes *Raleigh Review* special is all those who have joined me on the endeavor to this day. I attempt to write poems occasionally, and I read way more than I write, though when I see critics attacking poets I love such as Whitman, I feel compelled to defend the poet over the critic when it becomes an issue of attacking one's character, because all the poets I know who are poets worth reading as well as memorizing are works-in-progress, and all admit to having struggles to deal with in life. In other words, I prefer my poets to be

flawed because that is the most honest condition of the human experience because all of us are flawed; it is just that the poets who are worth reading admit their flaws. Time and again, readers get to know poets better than they do their own lifelong spouses.

I subscribe to the notion of “the local is the only universal” that William Carlos Williams wrote on page twenty-eight of his *Selected Essays*. I cannot speak for others and others cannot speak for me because we all have different experiences filling in those elements, those chapter headers, that all of us share. I am not insinuating that one needs to obtain artificial experiences for the sole purpose of having something to call on when writing a poem. Even those who have lived in one location and who work the same job for decades can experience the struggles, beauty, love, envy, loss, and disdain in, say, Philip Levine’s poem “What Work Is.”

Levine conveys the struggles of standing in line at Ford Highland Park in the rain looking for work, “because if you’re old enough to read this, you know what work is.” While standing in the beauty of the rain, the image of someone who looks like the speaker’s brother appears [in my case, my brother died at twenty-seven, so when reading this poem, I immediately see his haggard young face] and he is busy sleeping after his shift at Cadillac so he can get up and study German while singing Wagner, the opera the speaker hates most, “the worst music ever invented.” This poem appeals to so many from the lens of the worker, not just the white worker and not just the worker of color. Whitman may not have chosen a side when he was a Civil War nurse who initially set out to find his brother George and ended up staying to help his fellow Americans from the North and from the South. The lines below are from Levine’s aforementioned poem.

How long has it been since you told him  
you loved him, held his wide shoulders,  
opened your eyes wide and said those words,  
and maybe kissed his cheek? You’ve never  
done something so simple, so obvious,  
not because you’re too young or too dumb,  
not because you’re jealous or even mean  
or incapable of crying in  
the presence of another man, no,  
just because you don’t know what work is.

There seems to be some contempt for Walt Whitman that I do not understand. Every so often, those seeking to advance themselves take a few jabs at him. No, as Lerner writes, “[Whitman] couldn’t fight,” so it is likely he would not hit someone back because he would be too busy trying to unite people. What does that mean exactly, that he couldn’t fight? I happen to be a student of Krav Maga, and as with all the martial arts, de-escalating situations

before they get out of hand is the optimal solution. Hitting is the lowest form of communication, and Whitman was an objector to any form of violence, the man used his words, and those who know how to use their words most of the time can escape violent altercations.

I have always naturally gravitated toward defending the misfits from the masses. The most rewarding part for me as a teacher is helping my fellow misfits find their place in life, so I enjoy introducing them to Walt Whitman, who was so far ahead of his time (or our time, for that matter). For these reasons, I question not only the poetic ability of those who attack Walt Whitman, I question their labeling themselves as poets in the first place, bigtime awards or not.

The problem in the internet age is that a so-called poet can network themselves to the top of every sought-after list, and some enjoy attacking those who want to unite everyone and they attack those poets who really strive to leave their fellow humans in better shape than they had the luxury to experience while alive. If one is going to speak of the hatred of poetry by entitling their essay *The Hatred of Poetry*, why not speak of it, why not mention the ponzi-scheme of it all? JD Rockefeller's quote "the power to make money is a gift from God" may fit temporarily, though this outlook does not hold true in the eyesight of art. No scheme of the arts will ever guarantee its longevity. As Anton Ego from *Ratatouille* famously said, "Not everyone can become a great artist, but a great artist can come from anywhere." Just by looking at the university admissions scandals of 2019, we know success can be leased through the ranks of the elite, though the longevity of works of poetry cannot be purchased, as the responsibility of which works lasts throughout the centuries belongs to future generations of readers.

A renowned poet from North Carolina by the name of Betty Adcock once called me an idealist, and I took it as a compliment. She also told me as I held my daughter Maya in my arms in 2009 at my first poetry function after winning an award, "What you have right there in your hands is better than any prize you'll ever win," and Betty Adcock was so correct on that note on so many levels. My god, I love my poets honest and I love my poets so very flawed more than any other way.

As Roland Barthes mentions in *The Death of the Author*:

The image of literature to be found in ordinary culture is tyrannically centred on the author, his person, his life, his tastes, his passions, while criticism still consists for the most part in saying that Baudelaire's work is the failure of Baudelaire the man, Van Gogh's his madness, Tchaikovsky's his vice. The explanation of a work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it, as if it were always in the end, through the more or less transparent allegory of the fiction, the voice of a single person, the author 'confiding' in us.

Barthes goes on to allude to the fact that readers must weigh the times in which the author of any text has lived, and the readers of any text should not give too much credit to the “scriptor” of any writing because all cultural texts build from contexts that predate the current times and much of the credit is due to the times in which the author has lived. Now, it is the year 2020, and the critic now has a counter-critic, every fact now has a fabrication. I certainly hope we do not have to call these times the “Regressive Twenties.”

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION & IDEAS for FUTURE RESEARCH

In keeping with the spirit of empathy through experience, works of quality must prevail in order for the art to last throughout the centuries. More research may also be needed to look into the correction of poetry in the early twenty-first century. The correction of poetry in the twenty-first century has escalated in large part because the same demographic of white males has been the most represented in English language verse since *Beowulf*, so in this sense the need to actively seek out diversity in poetry is long overdue. At the same time, more research is needed to look into those publishing entities who are cashing in on the arts councils on the basis of the demographics alone rather than the need to promote diversity alongside quality works. As James Baldwin famously said, “The price one pays for pursuing any profession, or calling, is an intimate knowledge of its ugly side.” To promote on the basis of the demographics alone is a racist action and is also bad for the art of poetry. My stating this as happening, I understand, may not be advisable by those who operate on the promotion-based-only-on-demographic model, though I must say it because the overall advancement of poetry means more to me than my own career.

For those who take issue with my analyzing poems of various experiences to convey poems of experience as being universal, I offer up my essays and poems as qualifiers because the shared experiences of addiction, war, loss, recovery, love, work, parenting, caretaking and fear are universally felt across the demographics either directly or indirectly. The elements that bind us all are what I mean to address in this series of essays.

I was very fortunate to co-host the fiction writer Mohsin Hamid from Pakistan, author of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. In his talk which I had the opportunity to hear twice, he stated that when he receives questions as to why Pakistanis hate those of us from America and from India so much, he always answers through the same lens of empathy for the common people who have shared values of just being concerned about their children going to school and having enough to eat and being safe. He goes on to state that the issues with the suicide bombers and terrorists exist because those in power prey on those who are mentally unstable, and there is little to no help for the mentally ill in the developing world so terrorism is one of the only options for a purpose in life among a small percentage of the people. Still, the common people are more concerned with their families than they are of the politics of their country, and that should sound so familiar to those in all lands from the east to the west and from the north to the south. Much of the mission for *Raleigh Review* was defined after the Mohsin Hamid events. We had the controlling idea though the precise wording for our mission was hashed out after Hamid’s talk.

I am well aware of the argument and the concerns put forth by the self-described iconoclastic fiction writer Lionel Shriver as she expressed in her keynote address at the Brisbane Writers Festival,

. . . both as writers and as people, we should be seeking to push beyond the constraining categories into which we have been arbitrarily dropped by birth. If we embrace narrow group-based identities too fiercely, we cling to the very cages in which others would seek to trap us. We pigeonhole ourselves. We limit our own notion of who we are, and in presenting ourselves as one of a membership, a representative of our *type*, an ambassador of an amalgam, we ask not to be seen.

Conversely, in Sandeep Parmar's 2015 essay in the *Los Angeles Review of Books* titled "Not A British Subject," Parmar states,

It can only be a good thing that British poetry publishing is slowly becoming more racially diverse. But is it enough for poets of color to simply win prizes and appear more frequently in publishers' catalogs? Does this adequately challenge a national tradition in which so few ethnically diverse voices have been historically heard?

In the essay, Parmar goes on to state that she worries about the increased visibility of black, Asian, and minority poets as being possibly superficial and, as she goes on to state,

. . . when the dust settles, British poetry will return to a largely monochromatic, monolingual expression of sameness. The literary establishment here needs to rethink the subject matter, aesthetic modes, and assumptions about 'literariness' made about poets of color in the United Kingdom.

While I certainly do not disagree with Parmar's view of British poetry, Shriver's sentiments for fiction across the field are a little unclear, and I will add that there are indeed legitimate rules to writing in dialect and in vernacular English. In poetry, we do not share the need to randomly lift simple linguistic phrases as variants to be manipulated extensively through characters within, say, a plot of fiction. Even though the fields of poetry and fiction differ vastly, as a reader of fiction I subscribe to the notion that there are two types of fiction writers: bad fiction writers and poets. At the same time, the linguistic variety is complex, with each language being unique in and of itself.

The need to be absolutely precise and concise in poetry also means one should know some aspects of the language rather than using *Google Translate*



as a one-off experience with the language for the purposes of developing characters as a fiction writer. There is a legitimacy to writing what you know, and that is one of the main utilities we have as poets. This is one trait that separates poets from fiction writers. These lessons I learned in a sociolinguistics class in graduate school on the diverse voices within North Carolina showed me that I did not have to feel ashamed for naturally speaking both standard and nonstandard English. This training also taught me to be a better teacher and at the same time to not only be understanding of others but to be proud of my journey as I struggled to overcome the effects of illiteracy, of homelessness, of ignorance, of illness, and of the poverty of my youth. This training also taught me to not hold any judgement against anyone for how they speak even though I was once judged by the many bigots who harshly judged me for how I spoke and still speak at times. That said, even through the times when I could barely read and write, I always seemed to listen to the phonemes that make up each word within each pronunciation. I have always made an effort to follow the syntax of each sentence whether or not they are complete with a subject and a verb or fragmented sentences. Furthermore, I have always made an effort to understand all those who took the time to talk to me.

After growing up all over the United States, my travels abroad, and my growing up speaking non-standard American English, I was forced to standardize in college, and I routinely go back and forth linguistically because this is natural and this is who I am. In poetry, we are supposed to *write what we know*, and I fit within no set category, so I won't be pigeonholed into writing something that is anything other than my diverse experiences.

I make my academic home at a Historically Black College & University (HBCU). I feel safe at my home HBCU, and there is something to be said for feeling safe when one has my mental illness, and when one has experienced all that I have experienced. Yes, I grew way beyond my socio-economically disadvantaged roots after working my way through my university studies. At the same time, my kids speak English, Russian, and Mandarin Chinese, so to the super-sensitive elite, I say welcome to our global society.

The need to right the wrongs of those editors who eschewed promoting diversity in poetry is so very necessary without question. We have all lost the opportunity to read many great works due in large part to the elitism and the favoritism shown to the white male population of writers. Promoting poets who did not fit the demographic of being both white and male as well as elite did not happen for several hundred years. Besides the publication of a small number of writers such as Phyllis Wheatley and Frederick Douglass in America, Alexander Pushkin in Russia, Matsuo Bashō in Japan, Saint Augustine in Algeria who wrote his *Confessions*, and the centuries of recitations of epics such as *Manas* by the people of Kyrgyzstan, the promotion of diverse poets did not lift off in America until the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s. At the same

time, Langston Hughes did write of the paternalism that occurred during that period within his manifesto, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain." The attempt to right the wrongs within English-language poetry is one reason our field is thriving like never before. Rather than looking at this mass correction in poetry of the early twenty-first century on individual terms, this should be explored in group terms because there are entire groups of the world's citizens which were excluded because they did not fit the white male demographic of the last five to eight hundred or so years.

Race, gender and social class are the three primary demographic markers I have discussed within this section. Another avenue for an exploration with further research should include the vast demographics of the protected classes. Now, the new infusion of diverse voices in poetry is most often rich in both experience and in quality.

In other words, we cannot forget any of the injustices inflicted on any group of people since the Portuguese first explored the African coastline while taking notes of the vast resources and therefore ushering in the brutal colonial times. The white theft did not end with the colonization of other lands, as art and music have been stolen from people of color for centuries. An example of this theft is the song "Ain't Nothing But a Hound Dog." This song was recorded by Willie Mae "Big Mama" Thornton before Elvis's version. That said, we cannot forget the theft and the racism that have always been in our society, and we certainly cannot forget the slavery in America that occurred for over four hundred years, and we cannot forget the erasures that happened with Indigenous Americans whose art and language were barred from American literature.

Again, we now live in a global society, and the correction of poetry in the early twenty-first century needed to happen, yet as editors and as artists moving forward, we need to remember the quality and the experience must be there in order for the work to live on. Poems on an individual basis may not ever live up to being universal. At the same time, poetry of experience is universal. This ability to empathize with the shared experiences of war, recovery, addiction, love, work, loss, parenting, caretaking, and fear, no matter our race, religion, socioeconomic status, disability, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, etcetera through art has the ability to bring all of us together. People seem to enjoy discussing (or at least find it necessary to discuss) what separates them, and so one question to further develop and expand with additional research studies in the future includes: when it comes to poems of experience, what is the beauty that binds us, and how is empathy conveyed across barriers through poetry? Another angle for future research could be that it is all too common and quite primitive to find what separates us and to only focus on those divisions within our own boundaries, yet it is quite extraordinary and progressive to look beyond those differences to see what binds all of us and to cross the boundaries whenever the opportunity arises. Further research is

needed to capture more global perspectives of work and experience through poetics, especially during times when injustices run rampant and go unchecked. The essayists who usher in one simplistic selection within the demographic schematic to express that universality within poetry will not work are looking at one-track perspectives rather than the whole human condition.

All people share the experiences, either directly or indirectly, of war, addiction, recovery, loss, love, work, parenting, caretaking, and fear as a species. And all people share the big three life events of love, death, and desire. One cannot simply look at the universality within poetry through a one-track framework because the elements that bind us are universal. My conclusion is that these shared experiences convey an empathy through poetry that is more powerful than any extreme force from either side that wants to keep us as a human species polarized and at war with our neighbors everywhere in the world. The schools of the twenty-first century are diverse, though no matter the school of poetics, the universality of work and experience as demonstrated throughout these essays and in the accompanying interviews outline the bonds we all have in common.

# ADDENDUM: POEMS of EXPERIENCE, a RUBRIC

Score→ Parts of a Poem	0	1	2	3
Duende	No dark, no light, no angel, no muse, works have no movement and are stagnant	Some dark, some light, some musicality	Either dark or light are in the poems	Dark and light and what rides in between (Duende) from the edge of these are in the poems.
Images	Zilch images, Has no idea how to make one.	Minor images Though too much expository language.	Intermediate images	Poems have advanced images that light up the senses
Metaphor	Zilch metaphor	No tenor, no vehicle, no simile	Minor metaphors (attempts them)	Advanced & original metaphors
Emotion	Zilch emotion, or worldview-less attempts to cover the relatively insignificant day to day trifles such as dream poems, torn ACL poems, poems about poetry, etc.	Some emotion, Some experience.	Intermediate emotion, poet has experience though the poems do not move beyond the personal.	Poems have emotion (heart) and this is a significant element because the poems move across socio-economical and racial barriers.
Intellect	Zilch wit, does not ask questions of the audience, there's no attempt to challenge the audience	Obviously used a thesaurus, the poem asks questions though the wrong questions or answers the question.	Shows some complexity, and surprises and startles us in places.	Does not insult the reader's intellect while still educating the audience, surprises/startles us throughout the poem.
Experimental (Originality) ↓	Uses cliché-ish phrases and subjects, takes no risks (artistically with new forms or poems are soulless and personally gives us nothing new).	Attempts some risk with form though they fall short because the words are dancing around the page and have no significance to anything, no image, no metaphor, no intellect, no heart.	The poems are not completely journalistic and are not overly cryptic. Use of language is original with some attempts to introduce new forms.	Poems are original and have Duende, images, emotion, intellect, metaphor. They show maturity and move across what divides us as a human species.

## ADDENDUM: MULTIRACIAL DIVERSITY

### EXAMPLE - ROB GREENE

#### Introduction:

This map shows my multiracial ancestry is rooted in Northern Africa and Western Asia (NAWA), primarily known to me as Algeria and other African countries. Western Asia is primarily known to me as Iraq; Syria and Iran are also represented. Included here as well is my ancestry from Europe, the east, and the west.

#### Discussion:

Discrimination on the basis of race is very real and has always been a factor in life. Regardless of my diverse ancestry coupled with my diverse life experiences, I do not classify myself as a person of color, nor do I classify as white. Neither label fully identifies my race.

#### Conclusion:

Based on the recurring migration patterns that have always occurred, the self-classification systems of race are not black and white; there are gray areas as well. The determination of whether or not the work lasts throughout the centuries will not be based on race or any other demographic marker, as the question of longevity of literary works belongs solely to the future generations of readers.



*This map depicts the multiracial ancestry of Rob Greene as determined by family lore and confirmed by DNA analysis of chromosomal genetics by 23&me in November 2019.*

## ADDENDUM: 10 EDITOR ESSAY NOTES

Editor's Note | *Raleigh Review* Vol. 9, No. 2 (Fall 2019)

The overarching themes of the poetry found within this *Raleigh Review* issue include the human conditions of messy relationships, parenting, masculinity, and mental health in settings that are both rural and distinctly urban. Just as the characters in this issue's stories confront the unavoidable milestone of coming of age, so does our organization. The pressures for us to mature our business model frighten and excite us. There's just something legit in growing from the endeavor stage to the "business" stage. It doesn't happen very often that a literary magazine can become self-sufficient and still accomplish all the tasks we do: paying contributors, filing sales and use taxes, paying our printer, and paying our more practical expenses, including software price increases.

These are unsure times. There is no easy money out there, at least not the kind that can be obtained ethically. If a company is taking in easy money then they are likely taking advantage of the rest of us. In the last year, we have seen increases in the prices of both our accounting software (a 30% increase) and our submission management system for a 600% increase this year alone. The need to cut back our expenses is there, though we will not trim the quality of our magazine. Instead of pandering to the wealthy or even catering to those entities who counter our mission as artists, we are expanding our circulation numbers thanks to an uptick of support from readers around the globe.

*Raleigh Review* was one of ten finalists in the Community of Literary Magazines & Presses (CLMP) Firecracker Awards out of New York for general magazine excellence this year. Yes, we are honored to be nominated for this award, though still we worry for *our* community of magazines.

With the cost to produce each copy of the magazine being about the amount we take in per sale, we won't make up the cost difference anytime soon. At the same time, as long as we continue to operate without any debt whatsoever while producing our issues, and therefore putting the art first, we shall continue to exceed our goals and expectations.

*Raleigh Review* believes art must challenge as well as entertain. We also believe great literature inspires empathy in neighbors everywhere in the world. *Raleigh Review* is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that does not ask for donations. We'd rather our supporters subscribe to our magazine, or request copies of our issues from independent bookshops, and we hope you will.

Rob Greene, Editor & Publisher

Editor's Note | *Raleigh Review* Vol. 9, No. 1 (Spring 2019)

We have stated going back to our first volume in 2010 that we believe art must challenge as well as entertain, and this issue does just that. With the release of *Raleigh Review* Volume Nine, Number One (2019), we are celebrating our ninth anniversary, and Geri DiGiorno's cover image *Venus Over the Moon* sets the tone for the time in which we published this issue.

Some of the universal themes this issue's poetry brings us to are historical oppression and silencing, the distinct complications of romantic love and marriage, the challenges and hard-won joys of parenting, and both political and emotional examinations of the female body. The themes of the stories include though are not limited to coming of age during adulthood and the different shapes and manifestations that love takes and that we give to love.

We are so grateful for the ongoing support we receive, especially as we are planning even more programming in order to get to our tenth year. None of us knows what the future holds, though one thing is certain, far too many in the lay population just do not understand the concept nor the purpose of a literary magazine, so here's one for all to check out. Don't be frightened, the work in *Raleigh Review* may sting a little as we challenge you to do better by your fellow humans, though it certainly does not bite.

While the quality of poems and stories and visual art remains intact for this issue, you may notice our presentation has improved even more as we're finally moving into the twenty-first century with InDesign software, thanks to our new layout team.

After the last issue was sent in to Sheridan Press for printing, we realized it was time to reward our staff members who do the work on the magazine, so in addition to increasing the amount we're paying to our poets, writers, and visual artists by a third, we are finally beginning to take small strides to help reward our telecommuting and highly skilled editorial staff who are based throughout the country and at times the world.

Over the last year, we helped launch *Lou Lit Review* at Louisburg College, and they are planning the release of their second issue due out in 2019. And we are now assisting in the launch of two other magazines at universities: one here in America and one abroad in England. We at *Raleigh Review* look to promote accessible works of experience that are intellectually and emotionally complex. *Raleigh Review* is a 501c3 nonprofit that does not ask for donations. We'd rather our supporters subscribe to our magazine, and we hope you will.

Rob Greene, Editor

Editor's Note | *Raleigh Review* Vol. 8, No. 2 (Fall 2018)

This issue decelerates some of the turbulent times we are living in so we can all breathe and then see them for what they are—an inability to use the right words by the outliers who believe they are in charge. In an interview published in July 2018 via Sapling, our genre editors Bryce Emley and Landon Houle mention that poems and stories that lack empathy won't go very far at *Raleigh Review*.

That said, we are not into blaming, denigrating, nor degrading any group of the world's citizens, and nor do we understand the entitlement issues of the extreme sects on either side of the horizon. Using the right words is the one tool we have to combat all the greed and filth this world seems steeped in at this time.

This issue is a prime example of what we mean by poems, stories, and visual art that must ask questions and teach us without answering the questions. Finger-pointing from all sides from the top-down has brought on insults, wrongdoings, loss, bullets, teargas, riots, and fistfights.

At *Raleigh Review*, we believe in redemption and second chances. We also believe in doing right by our neighbors, and we cherish what makes us unique. We believe in promoting the best words as art that inspires empathy in our neighbors everywhere in the world, whether across the street or across the globe. At *Raleigh Review*, we believe art must challenge as well as entertain.

Rob Greene, Editor & Publisher



Editor's Note | *Raleigh Review* Vol. 8, No. 1 (Spring 2018)

Bernard Fergusson's opening line that kicks off this issue holds true for many of us personally. Though unlike Fergusson's opening line of his poem "self-portrait with nostalgia" that states "I was born once and it's been downhill ever since," *Raleigh Review* has continued to get better and better with every issue, and let me remind you that our volume one had an outstanding debut in the *Best of the Net* series back during our magazine's launch eight years ago in 2010. Starting this magazine in my old home office that now serves as my eight-year-old daughter's princess decorated bedroom was absolutely so very easy though continuing to grow, nurture and raise this magazine through its infancy and through its toddlerhood has at times been difficult, though *Raleigh Review* is so worth the many sleepless nights and the very early mornings.

Yes, *Raleigh Review* is still a work-in-progress after eight years and counting. *What kind of work?* Well, we've bussed tables together at the Waffle House, we've seined in the Alaskan gulf and shrimped in the Biloxi Back Bay, we've slung drinks to those who felt they needed them, some of us have been told "enough" when we've had our fill, we've filled up fuel tanks and commuted to work together, we've paid our taxes on time and have balanced the budget, we've generated and signed contracts, some of us are raising kids while others have already raised theirs and have had their fill with that, and we've been both students and teachers.

All this is just to say that we are working people, after all, who continue to make this magazine happen. We've been through a lot together though our mission has remained the same. At *Raleigh Review* we believe that great literature inspires empathy by allowing us to see the world through the eyes of our neighbors whether across the street or across the globe. Our mission is to foster exceptional works of experience that are emotionally and intellectually complex through a wide range of offerings though none more important than this magazine in your hands, so slide on over to the cashier; who knows, one of us might be the one ringing you up.

Rob Greene, Editor & Publisher

Editor's Note | *Raleigh Review* Vol. 7, No. 2 (Spring 2017)

Thank you to all who submitted to our inaugural poetry contest. Our poetry team whittled away at the rather large batch of approximately a thousand poems of 2017 Laux/Millar prize submissions to select a fine group of finalists. Dorianne Laux and Joseph Millar have this to say about Kristin Robertson's 2017 Laux/Millar prize winning poem, "We like the digressive nature of the poem, the many very particular places it goes, the obsessive protectiveness of it, its startling imagery and evocative and wide-ranging imagination: from anchor to anvil, from cocaine to suet to grain."

Our subscribers help us continue our mission to foster accessible yet provocative contemporary works of experience that are emotionally and intellectually complex. Just as in Kristin Robertson's prize-winning poem, we at *Raleigh Review* have our own "anchor to anvil," and that is to open a permanent writers' house one day. We are not asking for donations in these difficult times, but hope you will subscribe to our magazine if you can and have not already. Literature is the one tool that we all have in common that redeems humankind from the hate-filled rhetoric of these polarizing times.

For many of us, our budgets have no room for anything that is not a basic life necessity, and yet a number of us do tithe to the arts because, for us, this work is so very necessary. Thinking back to our temporary loft office on Fairview in Raleigh's Five Points, I remember the very first unsolicited subscription that came in from a literary agency in New York. This early support that has continued well into our seventh year really helps us realize that we are on the right path.

While we hope to continue with Geri Digiorno's beautiful collages with *Raleigh Review* Vol. 8, No. 1 (spring 2018), we feel Travis Green's gorgeous collage "Dorianne" is the perfect introduction to this issue. This issue provides two reminders for our organization:

1. *Raleigh Review* has an extremely talented staff and
2. *Raleigh Review* is honored to have the steady guidance from our life teachers, Joseph Millar and Dorianne Laux. Together, we believe that great literature inspires empathy by allowing us to see through the eyes of our neighbors whether across the street or across the globe.

—Rob Greene, Editor

Editor's Note | *Raleigh Review* Vol. 7, No. 1 (Spring 2017)

This issue notches our seventh anniversary, and *Raleigh Review* is still a work-in-progress. We've reached many goals on our run up to this milestone. A number of our staff members had some personal success. Some of us have scored jobs in our field and received promotions and fellowships—all while reading and selecting submissions to build this volume.

A number of us have our own books coming out in 2017, and one longtime editorial team member and amazing friend, Tyree Daye, won the 2017 *American Poetry Review*/Honickman First Book Prize. Tyree's collection *River Hymns* will be available this fall.

Our talented editorial teams are describing this *Raleigh Review* issue as one that captures the harmful attempts of the erasure of lineage, erasures of peoples, of civilizations, of families, of languages, of dialects as it relates the self to history and to place. The prose in this issue features a family of puppeteers, residents of the badlands, self-talkers, and those neighbors who may grow dangerously close to us. This issue also features four poetry book reviews rounded out by visual art that attempts to tie everything together.

Even in these very uncertain times, we are doubling down and rolling the dice once again by publishing works that we hope will inspire empathy among neighbors whether across the street or across the globe.

-Rob Greene, Editor & Publisher

Editor's Note | *Raleigh Review* Vol. 6, No. 2 (Spring 2016)

Our editorial staff describes this volume as one that freely celebrates humanness—through real world issues such as addiction, homelessness, immigration, mental illness, and parenting.

Many of us enter the arts as a way to heal, and the arts demand an honesty that allows us to be resilient as we work to overcome our losses. There is no handshaking your way through this “business.” The arts is not sales. This is not about awards. This certainly isn’t about money or glory. This is about real people trying to make it in the world. We hope the work in this volume guides you to a better understanding of humankind.

*Raleigh Review* believes that great literature inspires empathy by allowing us to see through the eyes of our neighbors, whether across the street or across the globe. We hope you enjoy these as much as we enjoy them.

-Rob Greene, Editor

Editor's Note | *Raleigh Review* Vol. 6, No. 1 (Spring 2016)

After five years, we've opted for a new look for our next five. This issue is a little bigger—half an inch all the way around and a few pages thicker. We hope those who are fascinated by crows and the *Apsáalooke* tribe can appreciate the care that went into this issue's cover. The stunning "Crow Chief" collage work by Geri DiGiorno really gets this issue off the ground.

Our talented staff have described this issue as one of "menace," "danger," and "the outsider's perspective." If you have international families or friends, read the story "Sad & American" first. If you have lost loved ones to violence, I recommend reading the poem "Ballad (American, 21<sup>st</sup> Century)" by Wayne Miller and then making your way through this entire issue.

We really aim for a better understanding of our fellow humans, and we'd much rather produce a magazine that puts empathy over being either too safe or even being an extreme provocateur. Yes, our writers demonstrate the ability to show respect and understanding of our fellow humans while still challenging and entertaining them.

*Raleigh Review* is a national magazine with a global scope, and this issue illustrates the redemptive qualities that all great art explores. Our main criterion for works published in *Raleigh Review* is excellence—in fiction, poetry, visual art, and book reviews. We hope you enjoy these as much as we enjoy them.

-Rob Greene, Editor & Publisher

Editor's Note | *Raleigh Review* Vol. 5, No. 2 (Spring 2015)

In this issue you will see the vulnerability of humankind and those who have no “backup plan.” You will also see the resilience of children as they overcome tremendous obstacles. Living in reality does not always come easily, yet it can also be the source for creating vibrant, powerful art—as you’ll find here.

At home in Raleigh, we’ve begun offering writing workshops to youth at The Hope Center—an organization assisting youth transitioning from foster care to adulthood. As this issue of *Raleigh Review* came together around themes of family and the difficult reality we live in—and given our mission of inspiring empathy for our neighbors—it seemed appropriate for us to share a small sample of the writing that came out of those workshops. You’ll find a sample poem from ninth-grade student Chelsey Butler on page eighty-nine. I think you’ll find it to be quite moving.

In *The Review Review*, Melissa Oliveira recently called *Raleigh Review* “a big-hearted lit mag that knows how to delight and devastate.” We hope that will ring true for this issue too, though I must say *Raleigh Review* still speaks best through the works we publish, so enough rambling from me; I’ll let you get to reading!

*This issue is dedicated to one of our earliest supporters, my grandfather, Jack, who told me, “You can’t help where you come from, though you can help where you are going.”*

-Rob Greene, Editor & Publisher

Editor's Note | *Raleigh Review* Vol. 5, No. 1 (Spring 2015)

Five years ago *Raleigh Review* started off during a metaphorical storm. I'd just completed my first semester (and ultimately my best semester grade-wise) as a graduate student, and then, like the great Bob Dylan line, "I took too much for granted, got my signals crossed." The crossing of one's signals usually leads to embarrassment and awful drama. This situation was no different, though what *was* different was the outcome—this magazine, now on its fifth volume.

Now, no matter how difficult the times, I am constantly reassured by the growing interest in *Raleigh Review*. For one of our stories to win an award and three of our poems to land as finalists out of the gate was reassuring. Receiving grant after grant has been reassuring. To have writers travel thousands of miles to attend our workshops taught by award-winning faculty is reassuring. To have a staff and a board composed of award winners themselves is reassuring.

At the same time, for our people to be as giving as they are with their time in order to promote others is surprising to many, though not to me. I know most artists are giving beings, and it is an honor to work with such great talent.

This issue marks our fifth anniversary, and I dedicate it to the staff and board at *Raleigh Review* who work to make us even better. Onward and upward!

-Rob Greene, Editor

# UNSELECTED POEMS

By Rob Greene



## SEINER

### *for a Fisherwoman*

Commercially fishing summers off the Kenai coastline  
her golden back set East seining through Alaska's Gulf—good form from  
launch to dock—she teaches

today's man to earn his keep, and she keeps me patiently angling,

never crossing the lines,

never out of line, and

the new crew who ask her

how much they can earn

in a given summer are met

with the same answer—

*that depends.*

## PHONEME

Saturday swims, Sundays spent strolling  
my daughter through the museums will  
end, you know.

If I took up with you,  
I'd be forbidden to see the one I taught  
to blow bubbles, to kick her feet,  
to reach and pull.

I introduced her to Igbo culture,  
and Vermeer and ducks  
every weekend while raising her  
as a true bilingual of English  
and Russian with plans  
for Mandarin and Cantonese.

This isn't supposed  
to happen at this stage:  
the scent of you  
taking your tea with honey,

the auditory attraction after  
the syllables rise  
from your chest  
to your trapezius  
below your oversized earrings, and  
it's unfair—these urges, as I listen.

## AN ATYPICAL RECOVERY IN FREYTAG'S ARC

*Three Poems for Pfizer for Making Risperdal*

### Poem One—Exposition to Rise

After my release, I felt I owed my kind kinship plus I didn't want to  
*be like Mike* as in Air Jordan.

I wanted to be like the psych aides who cared for me in the four  
months prior to me taking a job for the county among their kind in  
another town, and in another state.

All the flowers I sent from a distance, listening for voices of the  
women in my life crackle their *thank you's* over the receiver couldn't  
compare to the times I'd deliver flowers to the psych ward once on  
the outside.

Even six foot four inch Ralph, who they warned me about, would blush when I delivered his holiday baskets.

The first time Ralph picked up a chair from the nurses station, raised it above his head and tried to make me flinch, his brows raised when I lifted my closed fists as I did not throw my hands over my head, run away and start chanting to distract him like I'd been trained to.

## AN ATYPICAL RECOVERY IN FREYTAG'S ARC

*Three Poems for Pfizer for Making Risperdal*

### **Poem Two—Rise to Climax**

Even though I was the one being paid seven an hour to watch over  
him, Ralph and I shared an interest in sports and in words along with  
the split from reality genes.

Ralph would go from dunking on me  
in one-on-one hoop games and H-O-R-S-E  
to accusing me of going into his room and completing his crossword  
puzzles before  
he had the chance to.

## AN ATYPICAL RECOVERY IN FREYTAG'S ARC

### *Three Poems for Pfizer for Making Risperdal*

#### **Poem Three—Fall to Resolution**

During his rough times, I woke him, urged him to eat, fed him,  
bathed him, shaved him and often forgot to brush my own teeth  
before arriving so I'd brush alongside Ralph at the double sink.

After a year as a psychiatric aide, I got committed again on the  
veterans' psych ward because of the ineffective times of tranks and  
other typical drug days just prior to the atypical release of the 180  
reverse slam-dunk of Risperdal that began to change my life in 1998.

Prior to Risperdal I got to see my old friends, Bruno and Chuck, who  
still came in to flip over my bunk on a regular basis because I  
couldn't get up the courage to leave my room and join the others in  
pressing the copper plates into art for occupational therapy lessons  
on attention-to-detail.



Now, my biggest challenge  
is walking out the front door every morning,  
the voices have gone to a subdued chatter thanks to Pfizer and the  
chatter is nothing compared to that door on most days, so go  
ahead—bait, taunt, tease, sabotage and gossip about me for those  
hard fought times prior to my getting well enough to see how foolish  
I'd been while ill, I cannot worry about the ignorant normies once  
I'm outside, I have to buy groceries.

## A DOG AND PIG IN MUD

Before cloud and storm  
she staggered from  
the Red Hot and  
Blue Barbeque  
swung her leather  
purse over her  
shoulder, headed  
my way to say  
with her eye, “I  
want to ruin you,  
don’t you enjoy  
variety?”

I do, I want  
to bruise her thighs,  
to bite soft, to  
roll her in sauce  
and rock her back  
and forth, oink, oink.

## PENNY KNIFE

*for J.B.*

The droughts, lands and rancher's hands  
this pocket knife traveled to arrive  
to a place where we may not belong.

From France's Savoie region  
the stainless bladed *Opinel*,  
the clasp-knife, was crafted before Prufrock  
contemplated the peach.

Balaban put the beechwood  
handled *Opinel* in my nicked-up palm  
after the shelving was installed  
and I gave him a quarter even though  
like a cunning little wench,  
this knife new ran only a centime each.  
Friendships are done in with gifting knives,  
the blades severing ties  
and this little *Opinel* has mean ass edge to her  
but no matter how hard she tried,  
she couldn't cut that coin.

## CONCRETE WORDS

I want  
to Die,  
the wailing and gasping from a girl  
as she's led by her  
six-year-old hand  
from the bar  
to the car  
by her mom  
reminds  
me  
of  
my  
childhood, and  
that I have little ones at home.

APPENDICES: THE POETRY SCHOOL OF EXPERIENCE  
INTERVIEWS

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## APPENDIX I

### Interview with Dorianne Laux and Joseph Millar

Along with your own poems, and through your teaching of the importance of work through *The Poet's Companion*, more specifically the chapter on “Writing & Knowing” when you mention David Lee’s poem “Loading A Boar” as he

took John’s advice and wrote what he knew ‘shit young feller, you ain’t got started yet and the reason’s cause you trying to do it outside yourself and ain’t looking in and if you wanna by god write pomes you gotta write pomes about what you know and not about the rest and you can write about pigs and that boar and Jan and you and me and the rest and there ain’t no way you’re gonna quit. . .’ (*The Porcine Legacy* and *The Porcine Canticles*, John Lee)

you teach us to have resilience as poets and to take in the sights and smells of our everyday struggles with work even when we have to struggle to overlook those pigs, the micromanaging bosses, who breathe down our necks and bite us on the foot as George Bernard Shaw once stated “I learned long ago to never wrestle with a pig, you’ll get dirty and besides the pig likes it.” Among Shaw’s pigs are those in bowties who give us a tough time in our professions as either our customers or our supervisors. You show us through your work and your teaching that if it “worked for [Walt] Whitman and [Emily] Dickinson, for [C.K.] Williams and [Carolyn] Forché and [Rita] Dove,” it can work for us.

**1. Here’s my question for you both, how do work and all your past jobs still influence your own writing even in the decades after you began teaching in universities?**

DL

I don't think you ever forget your first jobs, the ones that got you where you needed to go, the people that touched you, or as Philip Levine says, "marked you" along the way, the sense of satisfaction you felt at the end of a long day, your first day, your last day, days when things happened you will never forget. Those jobs, those people, those days, have made their way into my poems and continue to rise up from the past and ask to be considered. And even when not writing directly about past jobs, they are there, inside my experience, shaping my world view.

JM

Work is one of the great mysteries of life, our "love made visible" as Kahlil Gibran says. So there's something honorable to becoming what Marx calls a worker among workers. Not trying to be a boss, not complaining (too much) about the labor, trying the best we can to bring humor into a tough day, helping somebody else maybe, trying to get the job done well. Questions of character. So the workplace becomes a deep field of possibility, something realized earlier by poets like Wordsworth and Whitman and then more recently by James Wright, Adrienne Rich, and Philip Levine. The state of mind of the worker, the attitude of sardonic resignation, sometimes bordering on outrage, the moments of acceptance and even triumph. In addition, craft-wise, when it comes to imagery, there's something that happens to the tools and materials of our trades as we handle them day after day. They take on a different hue, they become sort of magnetized. Just naming them can help to imbue our poems with life.

**2. Work in this sense does not always mean working for wages, the most difficult work is raising children in my opinion. How do the responsibilities and stressors of raising children in these times when it**

**really takes more than one income for the average household to make it amplify your work even more so whenever you need to fill up your car, visit the gas station, or be waited on in a restaurant or when you have to call a tradesman over to your home for work on your roof or to clean the gutters? How do you convey the message of empathy for those in service industry trades within your lessons and advice among the many poets you've influenced either directly (as your students) or indirectly as the messages of your poems and lessons continue on for generations to come from your students' students?**

DL

I teach an honors class called "The Poetry of Work" where students look at the history of work in the United States through the lens of poetry, art, music, film, culture, and politics. They read Stud's Terkel's groundbreaking book, *Work: People Talk About What They Do All Day and How They Feel About What They Do*. They see how much work has changed over the years, learn about jobs that no longer exist, hear ordinary people talking candidly about what work means to them, how important it is to shaping their lives. They read Joseph's book, *Overtime*, as well as individual poems, songs, and lyrics of domestic, agricultural, and industrial work, sea shanties, African American work songs, folk songs, labor movement songs, Woody Guthrie, Bob Dylan, John Lennon. They view the murals of Diego Rivera and Thomas Hart Benton, the art of Van Gogh, Jacob Lawrence, Courbet, the photographs of Walker Evans. Cultural artifacts and icons include the Farm Security Administration, WPA, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, Rosie the Riveter, Joe Hill, and the labor movement. And films such as *Norma Rae*, *Silkwood*, *Swing Shift*. We take field trips to places like a textile mill, a newspaper, machine shop, junkyard, thrift store. They write poems. One in the voice of a worker, one in the language of work, and one that imagines their dream job. As a final project, the students go out in twos into the



surrounding community and interview, ala Terkel, people who work—the bagel store owner, the cookie shop cashier, the waitress, the meter reader, the clerk. They transcribe their interview and create a presentation on these individuals and talk about what they learned. All of them walk away with a profound respect for work and workers, and often reevaluate what it is they want to do with their working lives.

JM

Anyone who does a service for me I treat with respect. I used to be one of them (“Tradesmen use rear entrance”). I tip 20 to 25% in a restaurant or taxi. I think of it as part of the cost, part of the deal. In terms of child raising, of course this is work that never ends, though the terrain may change. I’m not sure how much influence my poetry has had on my students, maybe some. Though I always encourage them to approach their own writing in a workmanlike manner: show up, sit down, start writing. I encourage them to write about what they know, images and characters, relationships they have experienced, familial and otherwise. At times I encourage them to let their imaginations go free, but mostly I suggest they keep grounded in the world of their own experience, where their deepest feelings are to be found.

**3. What is your advice to the single mom or single dad who has a passion to create art though has to work multiple jobs to support and raise their kid(s)?**

DL

When I was working as a single mother I found times between time to write—nap time, waiting for my daughter to get out of school, standing in line at the bank. I got up early when the house was quiet, or after bedtime. If you want it bad enough and are willing and able to sacrifice, there is usually a way.

JM

I would say try to keep the art close to your person, whether it's a notebook or sketch pad, harmonica, etc. so you can touch it when you have a free moment. I used to write poems in the cab of my telephone truck. Try to be around other artists when you can. Take a class if you have to, even if you're more advanced than the other students. It can provide you with helpful deadlines and encouragement. Read (or otherwise make yourself available to) work that's currently being done in your field, stay connected to your contemporaries.

**4. What is your advice to the pompous patrons of restaurants who may have forgotten their modest roots as to how much some of the servers are struggling to make it through the week when the server “gets the order wrong” or your advice to the pretentious patron who really has no clue as to the day-to-day struggles of the cafe barista who does not give the patron “enough room” in their Americano for sugar and soy?**

DL

Work alongside your crew, do what they do, talk as you work, talk after work, let them know when they've done a good job. They will respect you, be more likely to care about what they do, see it as valuable, more likely to greet customers with a smile, repay you with their loyalty. No one's job is secure, but the friendships forged in the workplace can last well beyond the job. When I go into a place of work where the workers are happy, I know they probably have a good, caring, hard-working boss.

JM

My advice to them is to learn some manners.

**5. You have mentioned to me in the past that “you can say you won't**

write about this or that though when we sit down to work, the poem that wants to be written will be written.” You both also taught me through *The Poet’s Companion* and through your own work, that I can write about anything. Do you gravitate to reading the work of those who write about the complexities of work, and when was the moment you realized you could, as Larry Levis has said, “Out here, I can say anything?”

DL

I love many kinds of poetry, am drawn to a variety of subjects and styles, but yes, am especially interested in the poetry of work. The problem is, there aren’t so many poems about work, or art, or music. It’s not usually the first thing someone thinks about when writing a poem, but it’s an un-mined river of gold.

JM

I’ve generally been open to whatever is present in my life. It’s where I’ve gotten most of my material, whether remembered or happening in the moment. By the same token, I believe that anything we can fully imagine we can make into a poem. Some of us are better at this than others. Sometimes in the process of revision, it’s happened that the poem will wander into some side street and never come back, so that its whole thrust is changed. Surprise is one of our greatest “weapons” as poets, in these days of free verse.

**6. From *The Review Review* interview that took place on December 2017 with *Raleigh Review* editors, it is clear you have influenced so many, and this magazine in particular is now contributing to the worldwide literary community. How would you like to see *Raleigh Review* grow even more so in the future?**

DL

The magazine itself has grown so much since it's first edition and has continued to grow in new and surprising ways, combining the local with the global, including art in their pages as well as fiction, poetry, and reviews. One thing we've all been thinking about is how we could create a community venue for readers and writers of all ages, artists of every stripe, to meet and mingle, take a workshop, listen to a reading or talk, view artwork, listen to music. Maybe simply sit on a couch under a lamp and read a book or write a poem. It's a dream I think every community has or maybe doesn't even know they have until they walk in and feel it.

JM

Continue on with the good work and the high level of editorial help.

## APPENDIX II

### Tyree Daye Interview

Tyree Daye is the author of two chapbooks, and the *American Poetry Review*/Honickman First Book Prize selected his collection *River Hymns* (2017). His newest collection *Cardinal* is set for publication through Copper Canyon Press in 2020. Tyree Daye started off as an intern at *Raleigh Review* in 2011, and he now helps lead the organization as a board member and he also continues to read and select poems for the magazine.

**1. How old were you when you first started working for wages, and where was your first job? How long did you keep the job? Tell us about your responsibilities and whether you received material for your poems while working in unrelated fields over the years.**

I first started working at age fourteen at Food Lion, our local grocery store. I worked at Food Lion for 8-10 years, my responsibilities were simple. I bagged groceries, cleaned spills, and pushed carts in. I've only written two poems I can remember about working at Food Lion, though labor is current in most of my poems. Most of my young poems at the time were written as I was pushing in carts or cleaning up spaghetti sauce. I remember Yusef Komunyakaa saying that many of his poems begin while doing yard work. The art of labor and poetry go so well together because we want our poems to have a physicality to them.

**2. Any other jobs that were especially fruitful when it came to material for poems?**

Though I was never paid money for doing yard work by my mother, and rightfully so, cutting the grass is still the most fruitful. I think again it's the

physical work and the solitude. I talk aloud to myself and no one can hear me.

**3. Tell me about your elderly coworker in Waffle House you told me about before, the one who cried while telling you to get out, to quit and to do something else. Did you remain in contact with her after you left?**

I haven't spoken to Dawn since the day I left Waffle House. I was working at Waffle House and finishing my undergraduate degree. I had long moved out of the dorms so to pay rent I started waiting tables. The year before I left my job of 10 years at Food Lion where I made \$7.58 an hour, that winter was a terrible one living in a rat infested house with no heat.

**4. We are all proud of you at *Raleigh Review*. Is there anything you would you like to see *Raleigh Review* accomplish?**

We have long dreamed of a writers' house, that would be great. I would love for *Raleigh Review* to host workshops again. Raleigh isn't the most friendly place for poets, but I think *Raleigh Review* could offer that safe haven that poets need.

**5. Out of all your *Raleigh Review* jobs, which one stands out as the most important for your career as a poet and teacher?**

Those days when I was an intern at Raleigh Review Bookshop really helped my poetry. I had a chance to read a different book of poems every day. Reading and discovering new poets showed me the vastness of the poetry world. Reading helped me find my voice.

**6. How hard is it to make a living as a poet? What types of work does one need to look for in order to have time to write?**

It's hard everywhere making a living as a poet. I think there are cities that promote poetry and give opportunities to poets more than others. In Raleigh unfortunately if you are not connected to a university your chances of making a living wage in poetry are slim, and even then you mostly teach English Composition to freshmen who could care less about writing a correct thesis statement. Poets have always had to find other jobs to support their writing. I have worked as a bagger at a grocery store, a cashier, a barback, waiter, I've painted houses, worked for a local t-shirt company, bartended, I've washed dishes, scrubbed toilets, cleaned piss off walls, worked as a bouncer, dug ditches.

### APPENDIX III

#### Sierra Golden Interview

Sierra Golden is Poetry Editor emerita for *Raleigh Review*, having given five years of service to our magazine before heading back to Seattle to work in communications for Casa Latina. She fished many summers in Alaska while growing up, and her new book *The Slow Art* won the contest through Bear Star Press in 2018.

**1. Please explain if there were any specific experiences you had at *Raleigh Review* that translated and help you today in your current career.**

My experience at *Raleigh Review* definitely helped me as a professional. At *Raleigh Review*, I created the e-newsletter, wrote grants, and managed the poetry selection process. These tasks were very similar to projects I later completed as an intern at Copper Canyon Press and then as the communications associate at Casa Latina. Working at *Raleigh Review* helped me build a convincing case during the job interviews for those positions and it gave the skills I needed to succeed in those positions.

**2. Please tell me about any other projects you are working on in the literary community of the Seattle area such as FisherPoets and Working Stiffs.**

For two years, I helped run a reading series called Working Stiffs. My co-curator Michelle Goodman and I liked to say that at Workings Stiffs writers shared stories and poems about jobs loved, lost, hated, tolerated, and sometimes quit in a frenzied rage. We usually had four readers and put on the event three times a year. We tried to keep the lineup very diverse in



terms of race, gender, genre, etc. We also liked to have fun. We always encouraged our audience to respond to the writers with laughter, applause, cheering, etc. Most of our events were held at the Hugo House, which was a terrific venue, and we served free donuts and sometimes spiked coffee as a humorous nod to office culture. We had writers cover everything from commercial fishing to working at Amazon—with mushroom picking, shoe sales, motherhood, and more in between. There's a fair amount of info on the series still available here: <https://seattlewageslaves.weebly.com/>

I've also participated in the FisherPoets Gathering in Astoria, OR. I think I've performed four times and emceed once. Other than emceeing I haven't participated as an organizer. It's a super fun event to perform at, though. They have maybe six venues, many of which are bars, and each venue has four or so sessions of performers. Each session has three or four performers. Basically, it's a pub crawl + poetry, only all the poetry is written by fishermen. You can't perform unless you've been commercial fishing, which creates a really wonderful vibe. It's not pretentious at all, and everyone just has a good time. Poetry for the people, by the people.

Every year at FPG, they host an onsite poetry contest—it's one of the most popular events. The way it works is that on Friday they announce a prompt and on Saturday night people perform their poems and the poem the crowd likes the most wins bragging rights for a year. Winning poems always rhyme and are usually a little raunchy!

FisherPoets occasionally go on the road too, and I've read at FisherPoet events in Seattle, Port Townsend, and Renton.

There's info about the main event here:

<http://www.fisherpoets.org/2019-fisherpoets-gathering.html> and an archive of poems here: <http://www.inthetote.com/>

**3. Now, I have witnessed you say this multiple times and you give the same response to the question of earnings in the fishing industry, and you always seem to say whenever you're asked the question of how much one can earn from fishing in a summer, "that depends." I, for one, love this answer because it goes to the root of work, skill, and some luck. At least that's what I get out of your response. Then again I've mainly fished in warm and rather calm waters. Can you please let me know if I am close to interpreting your response and expand on my simplified meaning, giving examples of the things "that depend" in the fishing industry in the great Pacific Northwest?**

You got a lot of the right stuff out of my answer. The "that depends" really depends on all kinds of factors. What gear type you're fishing and where, how big the run is supposed to be, what the price is like, what boat you're working on, who your skipper is, how hard you want to work, whether or not your boat breaks down, skill, and, as you've already said, luck. Fishing is fickle, and everything has to be working for you to have a really great season—not that that doesn't happen, it just doesn't happen all the time, and it's hard to predict when it will happen. With an office job, you pretty much know what you're going to make. Maybe that will go up if you get a bonus, but rarely will it go down. With fishing, that's not always the case.

**4. Since you've moved back to the Northwest and stepped down as our longtime poetry editor, have you noticed any changes in the issues? Might I add that you helped us tremendously in narrowing our focus**

**and putting our mission into words when you were helping us write grants in 2012.**

Well, the magazine just continues to grow and do great things! You have the contest now, and I love watching Bryce run the poetry side of things. He does a really nice job pushing the level and complexity of the poetry that's included while also making sure it's accessible to new and emerging writers.

This is happening across the publishing world, but I'm also excited to see more writers of color included in the journal.

**5. How would you like to see *Raleigh Review* grow even more? Please name specific projects that we do or could be doing that might help us better serve the literary community?**

I know one of your long-term goals is to have a writers' house. That's a big dream, but a worthy one. In Seattle, we're lucky to have the Hugo House, hosting classes, readings, visiting writers, NaNoWriMo sessions, teen zines, summer camps, all kinds of writerly activities, and it really does bring the writing community together and support us. So, if that's still on the some-day agenda, keep it there!

From someone who worked at a nonprofit for several years now, I'd say having a fundraising professional on your team someday is also an important goal. Someone who *knows fundraising* can really make things a lot easier.

In terms of what you're publishing, though, you are doing an awesome job, and I just look forward to watching the journal grow in stature and reputation.

## APPENDIX IV

Sapling Interview with Editors Bryce Emley, Landon Houle, and Rob Greene

### **1. What should people know who may not be familiar with *Raleigh Review*.**

LH

As the name suggests, *Raleigh Review* is based in Raleigh, NC, but we're an international magazine with staff and contributors who work and write from all over the world. *Raleigh Review* is staffed by volunteers, and most of us are writing and submitting our own work, so we know the importance of the relationship between writers and editors. We're motivated by a love for each other and the work and the artists who create it.

BE

On the poetry side, what we publish is both what we're looking for and what we're looking beyond. I hope that every issue reads like a cohesive whole in which every piece fits beside each other in some way, so read an issue or read our archive samples for a sense of what we're interested in and what we're missing. We'd love to keep publishing the same poets and poems we've selected in the past, but we're always looking for something new: subjects, voices, forms, and styles that expand the conversations in our body of published work.

### **2. How did your name come about?**

RG

Poetry launched *Raleigh Review*, and fiction named us *Raleigh Review*. During my second semester as an MFA student at NC State, I went to start a

blog though I didn't have much that I wanted to say about myself outside of my poems so I launched the magazine as *Rig Poetry* on February 21, 2010. I was reading a lot of literary magazines at the time so that seemed to make sense. Plus, when I find poems and stories that I love, I want to share them so that also made sense. Others began to join me on this journey the following month in March 2010, among them Will Badger and Smriti Ravindra (two of my brilliant MFA colleagues) brought in fiction so the name *Rig Poetry* no longer fit at all and I did not want the magazine named after me (my initials are RIG). I mean none of my kids are named after me, plus I really try to not be that guy. After deciding that fiction needed to be added, I then went back and forth on the name for about ten minutes while simultaneously checking for available domains. We ended up landing a few domains for *Raleigh Review* as well as a few others that were similar to *Raleigh Review* and I pointed those at what would become our eventual domain name. I was surprised that [raleighreview.org](http://raleighreview.org) was available. I then rode downtown and checked to see if the business name was available and it was so I registered the business name as *Raleigh Review*. Some have called us *The Raleigh Review* (yes, we have domains for this name too) though officially we're *Raleigh Review*.

### **3. What do you pay close attention to when reading submissions? Any deal breakers?**

LH

We're always looking for stories driven by character, image, language, and place. We like diversity of character and experience. We appreciate sharp technique, a solid structure, and a consistent pace. A lot of the stories we read tend to start strong, but a story's resolution is often the deciding factor in publication. We like a story that leaves us breathless, that makes us want to go back to the beginning. We want to feel as though the story could not

have been told any other way. In terms of deal breakers, a story that lacks empathy will not go far at *RR*. We want stories that carefully consider their characters and their readers.

BE

It's a poetry editor's cliché, but language is always first. How something is said hits me before what's being said. Could anyone in the world have written the same idea the same way? That attention tends to draw us to more lyric voices, partly because narrative poetry is really hard to pull off in a fresh way, harder than people think. Whatever approach a submitter takes, the voice, diction, rhythm, etc. have to evoke experiences or ideas, not just describe them. Smart, considered linebreaks, forms, and structures are important, too. Those are all deal breakers. Like Landon, lack of empathy is also one. If a poem blames, degrades, judges, or victimizes without complicating or considering the humanity of the subject (even if that's the speaker), we're not interested. We're not looking for poems that answer their own questions (or worse, that don't ask any).

**4. Where do you imagine *Raleigh Review* to be headed over the next couple years? What's on the horizon?**

LH

I'm always startled and excited by the next issue of *RR*. Each reading cycle, our selections are stronger and more complex, and I see our contributors going on to do some amazing things in the field and in the world.

BE

I see us publishing a wider range of work. Our poetry contest (the Laux/Millar Prize) just wrapped its second year, and I see that continuing to expand and bring more eyes on our poets. One of my favorite things about

this magazine and organization is that we're always planning and rethinking, so we'll continue to grow in scope, reach, and mission.

**5. As an editor, what is the hardest part of your job? The best part?**

LH

The hardest part of the job is making final selections. Inevitably, we have to pass on strong stories that we admire and appreciate and respect, but as with any journal, our space is limited, and there are always tough decisions to be made. The best part for me is opening the files and reading the stories. As a writer, I'm inspired and renewed by the time and the thought and the beauty that goes into writing and sharing that writing with another person. Sending your work to a journal is an act of trust and love as is reviewing that work. It's a powerful experience.

BE

The hardest part for me is always saying no. We're reading people, not just Word documents. I try to be generous in my reading, and I'm not always as generous as I would like to be. I've seen poems we passed on later get published in phenomenal magazines; "No" means "Not for us," not "This is terrible." That said, the best part for me is seeing our poets succeed outside of our pages.

**6. If you were stranded on a desert island for a week with only three books which books would you want to have with you?**

RG

Tyree Daye's *River Hymns* (APR, 2017) for the freshwater imagery, and I could always use a few more lessons on resilience over that week. I'd also want Sierra Golden's *The Slow Art* (Bear Star Press, fall 2018) close by for

the same reasons, and for my third I'd love to have Landon's *Living Things* (Red Hen Press, 2019) because along with the need for Sierra's poems and Tyree's poems, Landon's story characters would keep me company. So there's a lot to look forward to here.

LH

This is too hard. I've got about 10 books on my nightstand alone! How about a book hollowed out to hold a raft so that I could row home to all my books?

BE

Rob is sounding very partisan, but I would totally agree. Our staff is mind-blowingly talented. I'll also say *If You've Forgotten the Names of the Clouds, You've Lost Your Way*; it's short, but every page is worth thinking about. Lucille Clifton's collected poems for the same reason (though that one's a brick). *House of Leaves* because I'll probably never read it unless I get stuck with that much time.

**7. Just for fun (because we like fun and the number three) if *Raleigh Review* was a person what three things would it be thinking about obsessively?**

RG

Besides quality, *money* would be on its mind because *RR* lives hand to mouth, month to month, issue to issue and is currently sleeping in our basements though it wakes up to travel daily around the country and the world to entertain friends, so I suppose *RR*'s kind of popular in that sense. In all seriousness, *RR* has no debt and is fairly self-supporting, as in the magazine earns just enough to pay its expenses currently (print costs, sales and use taxes, advertising costs, Submittable bills, among other



miscellaneous expenses such as Quickbooks and storage fees while still paying the magazine's contributors). Though all of us who know and love *Raleigh Review*, well, we have a lot of goals for *RR* and one of those goals is for *Raleigh Review* to open a writers' house that will offer literary events including residencies to national and international writers. A wonderful friend based in Tallahassee told me the other day, "Yes, *Raleigh Review* publishes work for everyone to enjoy though rich people make the world go 'round . . . you have to learn to talk to them and it all begins with talking to them," so that's probably one thing a human form of *Raleigh Review* could do is to talk to the wealthy, because I don't seem capable thus far of doing so.

LH

Response time! We read each story carefully, and we work really hard to respond to our writers within a reasonable amount of time.

BE

1) Where to find more time for everything. 2) The intrinsic dualities of Kanye West. 3) Why we like so many poems about dead things.

## APPENDIX V

*The Review Review* December 2017 interview by Laurie Moritz with Landon Houle, Bryce Emley, and Rob Greene

Questions for the editors of *Raleigh Review*

By Laura Moretz for Rob Greene and other editors and collaborators

**1. You've been publishing for seven years. What has been the most difficult part of building the review from then until now? How did you come to be known, and how would you like to be known in the literary magazine community?**

RG

Saying goodbye to staff members who've been good for us has been the most difficult part. Then again, the staff members who have been really good for us over the years that have had to leave have left us in better shape than they found us because they bring the new staff members up to speed and they don't leave us in a pinch.

Other than that, I can't say I think about the second leg of the question all that much, if at all. All the great artists I know are generous and are selfless. We all can't be takers in the arts. Some of us have to give, and we all give a lot of time to make *Raleigh Review* happen. Focusing on the creative, one selection and one issue at a time, is more important than worrying about being known when it comes to our magazine.

**2. How has the number of submissions grown from the first year until now?**

RG

Our submission volume has grown with each open reading season. The standards are higher, of course, because our editorial teams are larger. To make for a less subjective selection criteria, we have kept up with having multiple readers on each poem and story.

BE

Our average number of poetry submissions has gone up pretty progressively over the last couple years. And then the last reading period saw a sudden jump of several hundred over our average, so we seem to be continually growing, which is great.

LH

Yeah, over the last few years, we've seen a dramatic uptick in the quantity and the quality of our fiction submissions. Every time we produce an issue, I think this is our best one yet, and as long as we can say that, we're headed in the right direction!

**3. People like to talk about an aesthetic and how every publication has one. Can you articulate the aesthetic of *Raleigh Review*?**

RG

Publishing accessible works that still challenge readers with emotional complexity has been our goal over the years. We also look to publish provocative works that can inspire empathy in readers anywhere in the world.

**4. In Marty Saunders' review of Dorianne Laux and Joseph Millar's chapbook *Duet*, the reviewer writes: "The poems in this chapbook offer up an honest, no-frills view of what life gives us: pain, humor,**

**sensuality, and song.” This seems like it might describe the kind of work that *Raleigh Review* seeks. Would that be fair to say?**

RG

That’s a good question. Yes, Dorianne Laux (Prof. Laux to me) and Joseph Millar are our brilliant teachers, and the tone I set from the start of *Raleigh Review* (from February 21, 2010 and onward to the present day) comes from Dorianne and Joseph because they are my life teachers. Marty Saunders’s brief description in his review that states “an honest, no-frills view of what life gives us: pain, humor, sensuality, and song” when it comes to *Duet* can certainly apply to our magazine as well. Yes, we look for concise wisdom on the universal themes of the human condition, and yes—we want to change those who read our magazine for the better. We want to save lives by making our readers laugh and/or sing through the pain of longing. We want to help our readers get over loss. We want to save our readers by empowering them. We want to help make our readers better spouses, better friends, better partners, better parents, better humans, better neighbors to all the world’s citizens. We also want to challenge and entertain our readers. I don’t believe that’s too much to ask.

**5. What do you want poets and fiction writers to consider as far as fit when they think about submitting to *Raleigh Review*? Is the fiction aesthetic different than that in play for poetry?**

LH

On the fiction side of things, we look for compelling and complex characters who can drive a narrative, and we also have an eye for sharply handled language and the well-wrought image. I’d ask a writer to take another look at the last page. In terms of final editorial decisions, so much depends on the

white chickens. The beginning of a story engages, and so many stories engage early on, but it's the end of the story that convinces me.

BE

I'll answer the second part first. I think the poetry and fiction tend to make sense together; they usually sort of mirror similar themes, and a decent amount of play/variation in form, language, and voice crosses over the genres.

For the first part of the question, I don't think poets should think much about "fit" aside from Rob's descriptions of our aesthetics and mission. We've never published a concrete poem, but only because we've never gotten one we like. We've never published a poem about hockey or a Petrarchan sonnet for the same reason. Read an issue and you'll see a lot of variance in forms, subjects, and styles. But I'll say the first thing most of our readers look for is language. That's something I hope is consistent in our poems, a kind of intentionality, as in an intention to disrupt a common meaning or be astoundingly clear about something very complex, to use language as a tool for asking surprising questions and not just a necessary vehicle to make a statement. If you think your poems are doing that, we'd love to read them.

**6. You have a print version and an online archive of the magazine where readers can sample the work you print. Why is it important to you to publish a print magazine?**

LH

I still love to hold books and magazines. Online publications are amazing because they are so easily accessed by so many people, but (and maybe I'm old-fashioned) the literary world still needs both forms, I think. We do most of our work for *Raleigh Review* via internet because our staff lives and

travels all over the world. It's an especially nice reward, then, to get that issue in the mail, to unwrap it, to open it, to smell it, to read it, to line it up on a shelf, and I think the writers and artists we publish feel the same way.

BE

I think the physical existence of the object also suggests a kind of conscious design. If you have an online magazine you're probably going to kind of jump around and read the stuff you think is going to be good (and probably miss great pieces by the people you skipped), and most web-based mags aren't set up to be read linearly. That's fine. It's a different medium. But we put a lot of time and attention toward the order of pieces in our issues, and hopefully people can sit with a physical copy and read it through like a book and notice the movement.

**7. In addition to publishing the magazine, you offer workshops for writers in the Triangle. Why did you begin to organize these? Now that you've offered them for several years, how do you think the workshops might make a difference in the writing community and community at large?**

RG

Our workshopers come from as far as the West Coast, New England, the Deep South, and the Midwest to study for a weekend at a time with our workshop faculty. Our workshops are generative in nature so workshopers come ready to produce new works. Our workshop faculty are proven teachers and writers. We have an application process for the new students we take in, and one key question along with the poetry or fiction (published or unpublished) writing sample part of the application is meant to screen those applying to our workshops to make sure those who attend are readers

as well. These steps make for a better educational experience for those who are selected to attend our workshops.

**8. I read that most of your editors don't live in or near Raleigh. How did this come about and does it hamper communication when people can only "talk" by email, text, and telephone about editorial decisions? Also, why have you linked the name of your review to a geographical place?**

RG

The best editorial staff members in America are located throughout America so we do not limit ourselves to just Raleigh when selecting new staff members. The answer to the geographical place question is Raleigh is home. It is a great place for life, and our hopes are for *Raleigh Review* to have a writers' house here one day that'll offer residencies to national and international writers.

LH

In some ways, our communication has to be even sharper, even stronger than if we were all living and working in one location. We have to be very clear with one another because when we're on a deadline (and we're always on a deadline), we can't afford too many misunderstandings or what we might refer to as dropped calls. And even when we're not in a pattern of constant communication, we have to trust that we're all doing what we need to do to reach the goal on time. It's pretty beautiful to see all of that come together in an issue.

**9. Do your poetry and fiction editors make final decisions about their selections, or do they pass their recommendations on to the Editor-in-Chief for final decisions as the issue is built?**

RG

Landon Houle and her team make the decisions on the fiction selections. Bryce Emley and his team make the decisions on the poems. Kat Cays selects the visual art. We (the entire staff) all vote on the cover art together. We have talented and generous artists working with us. They give so much of themselves to make *Raleigh Review* fun to run. Plus our editorial teams operate independently until we all come together to build the issues. We do stay on our editorial schedules for the most part, and we've never extended a submission deadline. We have a few weeks of play in our editorial cycle when it comes to getting the issues together. With plenty of notice, we are almost always within the range for the release of our new issues.

**10. If you had three wishes for the future of *Raleigh Review*, what would they be?**

RG

1. Our editorial teams will remain intact and will continue to operate independently for many years to come.
2. The ability to pay our writers, poets and visual artists more than \$10 per accepted title.
3. We get in our writers' house in Raleigh that'll offer national and international writers' residencies, readings, and workshops.

**11. What's the best part about editing a literary journal? The worst part?**

LH



The best part, for me, is being a first audience for so many hard-working and talented writers. Sharing a story requires a certain amount of faith, a faith that the work will be read with kindness, with generosity and curiosity, and a willingness to empathize with both the writer and, more importantly, the characters. It's a privilege to be on the receiving end of such efforts, and I don't take that lightly. I'm in Row A, Seat A of an otherwise empty auditorium, and that's pretty special. So then, of course, the worst part of editing is declining a submission that you know has taken so much time and effort and emotion. That is never easy, but we hope our submitters understand that any response from *Raleigh Review*, be it an acceptance or a decline, is sent with respect and appreciation for the writer and the work.

BE

The worst part is always rejections. I think a lot about how every poem we read was written by someone who believed in it and wanted to share it. I don't like the idea of suggesting to people their vision isn't valid; usually it's just that we can't see that vision like the writer did.

The best thing is finding poems we click with and just know people need to read. Getting those poems out in the world is why we do this. People send us poems wanting to be a part of what we're doing. Or they want \$10, which is a really terrible investment with a very low statistical probability of paying out. It's a great feeling knowing that people believe in us enough to trust us with their work. It's a better feeling to share it.

## APPENDIX VI

### A Single Image and Spontaneity: An Interview with visual artist Geri Digiorno

Geri Digiorno is Raleigh Review's official cover art artist and, in conjunction with cover designer Henry Kivett, earned a Gold Summit Creative Award for the Vol. 2 and Vol. 3 covers. Geri is not only a visual artist, but she was Sonoma Poet Laureate (2006-2007) and is founder and director of the Petaluma Poetry Walk. She studied art at College of San Mateo, Solano College, Sonoma College, and Santa Rosa Junior College, and has worked at the homeless shelter in Petaluma teaching poetry and collage. Editor Rob Greene talked with Geri about her artistic process.

**Your artwork has been featured on or in every *Raleigh Review* issue since our founding. Tell us about creating collages. How do you go about it?**

I'm usually working on three or four [collages] at a time. I'm always looking for collage material. I start with one image that I like and then keep going. I always pick a size of the board and stick with that to let it all happen. I'm inspired by certain things—the image, the colors, the patterns and themes. Once in a while I will sketch out what I'm going to do, though much like a poem is made, a collage is spurred on by a single image and spontaneity.

**All of your collages seem to come with their own story, and I love the one behind *Raleigh Review's* Vol. 3 cover collage, *Little Mary at the Playhouse Lounge*. Tell us about it.**

Both Little Mary and the Playhouse Lounge lived and thrived in Pittsburg, California, where my husband Tony and I owned the Playhouse. It was an amazing place, and Little Mary was a regular. This was a place and time where any moment you could hear a coin funnel down and into the jukebox slot, the music would start, and everyone would start dancing. The Playhouse Lounge was a place where everyone was welcome.

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