

mississippi review *online*



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LIT MAG

at 100

MISSISSIPPI REVIEW ONLINE

JULY 2008: THE LITERARY MAGAZINE AT 100

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EDITORS' NOTE

This is a pre-publication and much shortened version of the Fall 2008 print edition of *Mississippi Review* which we are offering online as a prepublication sampler for the print issue. Many things which appear here will appear in fuller versions in the fall issue, including the Robert Fogarty interview, forty-pages of the intriguing roundtable discussion of the literary magazine by a number of new and prominent editors, additional work by writers selected and introduced by these editors, further remarks on the life and times of the literary magazine by contemporary writers solicited by the editors, more of the fascinating “oral history” of the lit mag, featuring remarks by significant participants in the history of the genre, and more. This upcoming print issue promises to be one of our best. If you like this sampler, you may advance order the print issue by clicking below.

Yes, I'd like to purchase the fall 2008 special issue of *Mississippi Review*, The Literary Magazine at 100.

INTRODUCTION: OBJECTS FILLED WITH OBJECTS

Mississippi Review celebrates the 100th anniversary of the contemporary literary magazine. We devote this issue to an investigation of what the literary magazine has become and where it may be headed. Our inspiration comes, in part, from Steve Evans's 2006 article from *The Modern Review*, in which he posits 1908 as a possible birth date for the contemporary literary magazine:

If we take Ford Madox Ford's *The English Review* as a plausible first instance of 'the little magazine' that we've since come to know, then we'll be marking the centenary of this peculiar cultural form in 2008, just the blink of an eye from now in literary time. Much about literary life has altered since 1908.... But what of the means by which those works were first delivered? the stages onto which those manifestos stormed? the form underlying all those fine (and thus bitterly insisted upon) distinctions as to policy, aim, and audience? Is the little magazine itself just a vestige of the heroic early days of the modernist project...a convention grown as stale in the digital age as the sonnet had in Williams's?

The year 1908, of course, is something of an arbitrary date. A "lit mag birth year" might just as easily be 1912, with the first issue of Harriet Monroe's *Poetry* magazine, or even as far back as 1840, with Emerson's Transcendentalist magazine *The Dial*. As with the inventions of cinema or the automobile, the literary magazine was not born at any particular time or place, but

gradually emerged from the inventiveness of those working within the field. And it has been some time since a literary magazine examined what defines literary magazines. *The Missouri Review* did such an issue in 1983, which was the second inspiration for this issue.

At the start, we are faced with a simple but daunting question: what *is* a literary magazine? Such magazines are perhaps easily defined as periodicals focused on the publishing of literature—a definition that works fine on a broad scale, but falls short when magazines are looked at individually. For example, *The Southern Review* seems to have little in common with the more stylized *Is Not a Magazine*—the latest issue of which, at first glance, resembles a poster for a college dorm more than a literary periodical. Perhaps the most widely applicable definition is that of *Esopus* editor Todd Lippy: “The magazine is an object filled with objects.”

However these magazines are defined, the history of the twentieth century American literary magazine runs hand in hand with the history of twentieth century American literature. As Ezra Pound wrote in 1930, “The work of writers who have emerged in or via such magazines outweighs in permanent value the work of the writers who have not emerged in this manner. The history of contemporary letters has, to a very manifest extent, been written in such magazines.” Though the literary magazine form reaches at least as far back as Pierre Bayle’s *Nouvelles de la République des Lettres* from late 17th century France, literary magazines are more of a 20th century phenomena than any other time, serving as a voice for the century’s literary movements and nurturing

nearly all of the century's most prominent writers. And if current trends in publishing continue, the 21st century will witness an even greater number of literary magazines, as computers and easy access to the internet make it easier for amateurs and professionals in the field to more rapidly begin new literary magazines both online and off. Is such increased productivity a boon for the literary world, or does it portend an overall decline in literary publishing?

In this issue we have asked some of the nation's most respected literary magazine editors to elucidate the nature and function of the literary magazine today, as they see it—and to gaze into their crystal balls to speculate about its future. We also asked our editor friends to recommend a new writer they have recently published whose work they find particularly compelling—a writer they feel we should pay special attention to in the years (and issues) to come. The creative work of these writers is published within, alongside the editors' commentary on the literary magazine. Taken together, what we have here is a snapshot of the current moment in literary magazine history—a history of the present, in theory and practice. As you can see in the following pages, the literary magazine is alive and well; her writers and editors continue to explore and adapt to a changing world and the exciting, shape-shifting world of literature.

GARY PERCESEPE

“I REALLY WOULD LIKE TO SURPRISE PEOPLE”
AN INTERVIEW WITH *ANTIOCH REVIEW* EDITOR
ROBERT FOGARTY

GP: I am aware that you place the origin of the contemporary literary magazine a few years later, with the first issue of Harriet Monroe's *Poetry* in 1912. How did *Poetry* differ from what came before?

RF: Monroe's agenda, which she sets out in the first issue, is to make the magazine inclusive—it's not to be a coterie magazine, it's not to be limited to a particular set of poetic instructions. And that marked a rather significant shift and remains an important issue. How inclusive are magazines? Can they maintain that sense of having what Monroe called “an open door policy”? That's an important notion in a commercially driven culture.

GP: Is there a trend towards self-promotion in independent literary publishing?

RF: Yes. We increasingly live in a celebrity-driven culture. One sees magazine editors becoming quasi-celebrities. But that's not the function of an editor. The function of an editor is to serve two audiences—writers and readers. The idea of celebrity-ness is very, very strong in American culture at the moment. I don't think it's a good thing and you try to avoid it as best you can. That doesn't mean that you don't try to get publicity for

the magazine or to try and give writers an appropriate audience.

I think that one of the difficulties is that there has been, as you know, a proliferation of, not only writing programs, but publications. On one level that's fine. But do the magazines serve literary or institutional ends? That's a very important question. If they serve purely literary ends, then that's one thing. If they merely serve as a vehicle for students at a college or a university, getting some experience, that's a different matter.

What is the magazine's audience? Why does it exist? In the case of most magazines, these are really pretty small enterprises. And they exist—like your corner drugstore, your corner grocery store—to sell things.

GP:What is your own personal history with literary magazines? Do you recall how you first became interested in reading?

RF:I had little exposure to them in college. I became aware of them when I taught for the first time. I taught at Michigan State for four years, where there was a rather significant component of writing. And several faculty members, including myself, decided that we would try to start a literary magazine. It met with a very good reception. It was interesting. It also met with certain kinds of hostilities, particularly when the editor attacked the university, which was not the wisest and most astute thing to do. But he did it. So, I had exposure to it in the sense of it being part of an adversarial culture.

GP:What led you to the position of editor at *Antioch Review*?

RF:I had no particular ambitions. I'm somewhat unusual as an editor of a literary magazine in that my background is in American studies and I'm a social historian, so that I don't come out of a particular yearning to do it. When I came to Antioch College in 1968, the *Review* was in fairly good shape. And then, as the fortunes of the college went south, the then editor took out what he considered to be a blind ad in the *New York Review of Books* offering to lease/sell the magazine without the authorization of either the editorial board or of the college itself. He thought it was a blind ad, but it was quite evident that it was the *Antioch Review* and phone calls started to come in. And then he was summarily fired.

At that point, I was going on a sabbatical, but when I returned from the sabbatical, I became the editor of the magazine.

GP:It seems that within and without the academy there is a general lack of knowledge about literary magazine history. Writers frequently submit their work to magazines about which they know little or nothing. Are there some magazines that stand out to you today as important for young writers to know about?

RF:I think one place to begin is by looking at the volumes of the best of whatever it is—the best mysteries, for example, or the best short stories. Those are pretty decent barometers. Or the Pushcart prizes, which are widely respected.

So, I would start with that. And then, from there, regularly read literary magazines of a fairly wide range. I think that one has to immerse oneself. It's like going to

museums, ultimately. If you're interested in art history, you'd better go to museums. If you're an artist, what you do is you try to see all of the work that you can to become immersed in the literature.

GP: What literary magazines make essential reading for you? Which editors do you follow to track the direction they are taking their magazines?

RF: I think that *Tin House* is a good magazine. I admire Lee Montgomery, who is one of the editors there. She's a very good writer and they've been able to push themselves.

I think *Ploughshares* is a fine magazine. It rotates the editorship, which gives it a certain kind of freshness, I think. I think there's an advantage of doing that, actually.

The Kenyon Review is a very solid magazine. Quite often, with new magazines, you have to sort of wait a while, because you don't know whether or not they're a Potemkin village. Is it real? Will it last? Is it just façade?

Robert S. Fogarty, Editor, *Antioch Review* (since 1977) and John Dewey Professor in the Humanities Emeritus. Author and editor of eight books, with articles, and essays in *The Nation*, *TLS*, *Missouri Review*, *Boulevard*, and *Manoa*. Recipient of the PEN/American Center "Nora Magid Lifetime Achievement Award" for magazine editing 2003, Fulbright Distinguished Roving Lectureship in Korea, Visiting Fellow at All Souls College, Oxford, New York University Institute for the Humanities, Lloyd Fellow, Newberry Library.

A native New Yorker, Gary Percesepe is Associate Editor at the *Mississippi Review*. He resides near Yellow Springs, Ohio, where for a time he was an Assistant Editor of the *Antioch Review*. The author of six books and numerous articles in philosophy, literary & film criticism, and religion, he has a memoir and a novel in progress, portions of which have been published in the *Mississippi Review*.

AN ORAL HISTORY OF THE LITERARY
MAGAZINE: THE BEGINNINGS

"Journals are already books written with others. The art of writing with others is a strange symptom which foreshadows a great progress of literature. One day we will perhaps write, think, act collectively."

-Novalis (1772-1801) commenting on German Romantic literary magazine *Athenaeum*

"The study of American magazine history dates from 1741 when Benjamin Franklin and Andrew Bradford published the first real magazines in the country. They were called, respectively, *General Magazine* and *American Magazine*, and they appeared three days apart—Bradford's first, much to Franklin's chagrin."

-Eric Staley in *The Missouri Review's* 1983 issue devoted to the literary magazine

"The story of the little magazine is in itself a fascinating and an important part of our history. It is a story of ideas, of experiments in style, and of personalities."

-from preface to *The Little Magazine: A History and a Bibliography*, 1947

"I consider [magazines] such easy vehicles of knowledge, more happily calculated than any other, to preserve the liberty, stimulate the industry and meliorate

the morals of an enlightened and free people.”

-first U.S. President George Washington

“The significance of the small magazine has, obviously, nothing to do with format. The significance of any work of art or literature is a root significance that goes down to its original motivation.”

-Ezra Pound, November 1930, *The English Journal*

“The value of fugitive periodicals ‘of small circulation’ is ultimately measured by the work they have brought to press.”

-Pound

“The work of writers who have emerged in or via such magazines outweighs in permanent value the work of the writers who have not emerged in this manner. The history of contemporary letters has, to a very manifest extent, been written in such magazines.”

-Pound

“When there is not the binding force of some agreement, however vague or unanalyzed, between three or four writers, it seems improbable that the need of a periodical really exists. Everyone concerned would probably be happier in publishing individual volumes.”

-Pound

“The little magazine is something I have always fostered; for without it, I myself would have been early silenced. To me it is one magazine, not several. It is a

continuous magazine, the only one I know with an absolute freedom of editorial policy and a succession of proprietorships that follows a democratic rule. There is absolutely no dominating policy permitting anyone to dictate anything. When it is in any way successful, it is because it fills a need in someone's mind to keep going. When it dies, someone else takes it up in some other part of the country—quite by accident—out of a desire to get the writing down on paper. I have wanted to see established some central or sectional agency which would recognize, and where possible, support little magazines. I was wrong. It must be a person who does it, a person, a fallible person, subject to devotions and accidents.”

-William Carlos Williams

“*The English Review* sets boldly upon its front the words ‘No party bias.’ This means to say that we are here not to cry out ‘Go in this direction,’ but simply to point out where we stand.”

-from editors' note in the first issue of *The English Review*

“The little magazines, of course, are absolutely indispensable. They give the beginning writer his first important step—a chance to see how the thing looks in print. And there's nothing as salutary.”

-Letter from Stephen Vincent Benét to Charles Allen, September 1939

“I hope (this is a personal prejudice I have had for a long time) you never go in for names. To hell with

‘names.’ If I were king and could run a magazine and, let’s say for instance, Dreiser, Anderson, and Joyce sent me some pieces I didn’t like and I thought were rotten I’d stick a one-cent stamp on each piece and shoot them back like a bad check.”

-Erskine Caldwell in a 1930 letter to Richard Johns, editor of *Pagany*

“The average magazine editor’s conception of good verse is verse that will fill out a page. No editor is looking for long poems; he wants something light and convenient. Consequently a Milton might be living in Chicago today and be unable to find an outlet for his verse.”

-Founder and former editor of *Poetry*, Harriet Monroe, in her autobiography, *A Poet’s Life*

“A review is not measured by the number of stars and scoops it gets. Good literature is produced by a few queer people in odd corners; the use of a review is not to force talent, but to create a favourable atmosphere.”

-T.S. Eliot to Ford Madox Ford, 1923-4

“In what a high-pitched anticipatory mood we ducked into this book shop once or twice a week to see what was new on its magazine rack. Here were the publications of the new movements in American art and thought and literature. Here were the reviews that were stimulating the young. Here were the magazines we wanted to write for.”

-Gorham Munson, former editor of *Secession* (1922-4)

“If I had a magazine I could spend my time filling it up

with the best conversation the world has to offer.”

-Margaret Anderson, founder and former editor of *The Little Review*

“I have none of the qualifications of the editor; that’s why I think *The Little Review* is in good hands.”

-Anderson editorial in *The Little Review*, February 1915

“You said I was
Such a terrible poet, I’d better
Do something useful and become
A publisher, a profession which
You inferred required no talent
And only limited intelligence.”

-*New Directions* publisher James Laughlin on Ezra Pound’s influence regarding his career choice, from his verse autobiography, *Byways*

“I was an adventurer; *Hound & Horn* was my passport...”

-Lincoln Kirstein remembering the national literary magazine he founded as a Harvard undergraduate, *Hound & Horn* (1927-34)

“A revolutionary and not a reform magazine; a magazine with no dividends to pay; a free magazine; frank, arrogant, impertinent, searching for the true causes; a magazine directed against rigidity and dogma wherever it is found; printing what is too naked or true for a moneymaking press; a magazine whose final policy is to

do as it pleases and conciliate nobody, not even its readers—there is room for this publication in America.”

-Printed in the masthead of each issue of *The Masses*

“Most of all, however, the editors felt that they could best serve their region by insisting on the highest possible standards of excellence for the magazine itself. The phrase ‘highest possible’ is a tricky thing here. What is ‘possible’ for any magazine is what is actually available, from issue to issue, for its pages. And what is ‘highest’ is what the editors feel to be highest. So, in a fashion, a magazine is at the uncertain mercy of the morning mail delivery and the taste of its editors.”

-Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren on their founding of *The Southern Review*

THE FUTURE IS A MAGAZINE: A ROUNDTABLE ON THE CONTEMPORARY LITERARY MAGAZINE

Jill Allyn Rosser's third collection of poems, *Foiled Again*, won the New Criterion Poetry Prize (Ivan R. Dee, 2007). Her work has appeared in *Slate*, *Poetry*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *The Hudson Review*, *The Georgia Review*, *The Paris Review*, *The Kenyon Review*, and *Best American Poetry 2006*. She teaches at Ohio University, where she edits *New Ohio Review*.

Speer Morgan teaches fiction writing and is the editor of *The Missouri Review*. He is the author of a collection of short stories, *Frog Gig and Other Stories* (University of Missouri Press, 1976), and five novels, including *The Freshour Cylinders* (Macmurray and Beck, 1998), winner of an American Book Award. He is also the co-editor of *The Best of the Missouri Review* (University of Missouri Press, 1991) and *For Our Beloved Country: Diaries of Americans in War* (Atlantic Monthly Press, 1993).

Marco Roth is a founding editor of *n+1*

Raymond Hammond is a poet, critic, and editor of *The New York Quarterly*. His new book of criticism, *Poetic Amusement*, is due to be released this summer by Athanata Arts, Ltd.

Todd Zuniga is the founding editor of *Opium* magazine and a co-founder of the Literary Death Match reading series. A Pushcart Prize nominee, his fiction has appeared most recently in *Canteen*, and online at *Lost Magazine*. He is hard at work on his second novel. During the day he works as a freelance editor for 1up.com and ESPN Video Games.

Eli Horowitz is publisher of *McSweeney's*

Aaron Burch is the editor of *Hobart* and has had recent stories appear in *Quick Fiction*, *Phoebe*, and *Monkeybicycle*.

MR: Literary mags are small magazines that publish less well known writers and serve as stepping stones for writers who eventually go on to become highly regarded, a kind of "Triple A" farm system where younger writers publish their work and learn from that process. Is this any different now than at any time in the past?

Morgan: I think that literary magazines have been important throughout the 20th and the beginning of the new century. They've been important since the teens, really, when *Poetry* magazine kept poetry alive. You know, the newspapers were publishing poetry but it was all pretty bad poetry. [Laughter] There's a long history of literary magazines that are discoverers of new talent and of them taking material that just wasn't readily available in the commercial press. Even during the strength of the magazine—which in America was between the 1880s and the 1950s—there was still need for it.

Roth: Now there is this sense that these small magazines were just an artifact of modernism, and that we moved beyond literary modernism because we've moved beyond ideology, and so what's left is a kind of cultivation of new talent, but talent for what sake? What are the major leagues that literary magazines are serving? Is it publishing, which has become risk adverse? Who is willing to take risks? At this point it is the small magazines who have to take the risks. So, in some ways, it's more like a talent scout. But I think that histories go around. We could live in an age in which a movement magazine is still possible that published literature along with political essays and non-fiction criticism—and that's what we were really trying to do, to kind of break down the necessary "willed minor-ness" that literary magazines have put themselves into.

Hammond: Since the phenomenon of the creative writing program has blossomed since the 60s, I think that one of the functions of the little magazine has become to be a stalwart against homogenization of the work. We are

the magazines that take the risks and put different voices out there as opposed to the larger presses that tend to be more homogenous.

MR: Online literary magazines get much more attention from prospective readers than print magazines. A print magazine might have a press run of 5,000 copies per issue, whereas the online site of the same magazine might get 125,000 visits quarterly. These figures aren't perfectly comparable but they're in the ballpark. Yet, most writers say that they rather publish in print journals. What are your thoughts on this?

Rosser: My students still want print mags. Online publication is great, and, sure, *Poetry Daily* or *Slate* get way more hits than any of us can hope to have. On the other hand, they're hits. I don't mean to denigrate that idea. It's just that when I read online, and I do quite a bit now, it always feels to me like provisional reading. Later, I'll get to the real immediate intimate experience with text. Maybe it's my generation. But I see young people walking around with books, holding them like friends. When I was recently in Paris, they had a vending machine with books in it and I was so moved and gratified by that—because you think of vending machines as providing staples, like food or Snickers bars, or Pepsi and condoms. Immediate, the stores are closed, got-to-have-it stuff. And there were these books. They were novellas mostly, like Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* and Dostoevsky's *Notes from the Underground*, and children's books, poetry books. I was so excited. I kept walking by. It's still needed, the physical object, and I think it lasts longer than any archive. Well, we don't

know yet, but the online archiving systems could all go kablooeey one day, whereas the book is there as long as the library doesn't burn down. [Laughter] I believe online submissions are becoming more important, but I think that the print journal still has a very strong place in 2008 and probably into, oh, 2040.

Horowitz: We try and think about the capabilities and the possibilities for each of the forms. We're not deciding whether or not to put our journal online. We do totally separate things or somewhat separate things that hopefully support each other. When we're making a book and when we're making a print journal, we're making a thing, and so we tend to try and make the thingiest thing possible. [Laughter] The website lends itself much more to shorter pieces and later pieces and so forth, but also presents all these possibilities. You get the instant feedback. You get a community with your readers. It's not a matter of just shifting from one to the other—and so one's inherently the future and one's inherently the past, or one's inherently pure and one's inherently dirty—they just present possibilities.

MR: Is anyone here unhappy with what literary magazines currently are and do?

All: Yes. [Laughter]

Zuniga: At *Opium*, we really try to create a community and to do things that are exciting. Feeding into the last question, I think that one of the impediments of what's happening with literary magazines is that people are busy. There's the Internet. There are video games. There's television. There's so much entertainment. I really feel we're living in this weird space and time where we've

become an entertainment culture. You can get a job making movies and then people watch those movies—it's a cyclical thing, where entertainment is the focus of our society. The one thing that makes me unhappy about literary magazines is that I don't know that they're really trying to find an audience, to really be unique, and to live in a world where things are so brand-oriented and people are so busy. In the modern era I think we really have to sort of compete with [these] other things, and I think literary magazines tend towards just hanging low. I think that's a very high risk position. I still love what's happening in literary magazines, but I also grew up on them, so I'm curious what's going to happen. I want them to change and evolve, and I'm not certain that they are evolving.

MR: How might literary magazines be different in the future?

Burch: *Hobart* started strictly online and then went to print, and for a while I was doing both, primarily myself. Then at some point I handed off the website to other editors. So there's definitely an entirely different editorial selection, but I think overall we're looking for similar stuff with the difference being in brevity. The most exciting thing that I've done personally, that I've gotten most excited about and that I want to do in the future (I have only done it for one issue thus far because it's a time constraint)—but for one issue we did an entire corresponding online issue. It was a little gimmicky. It was kind of like a DVD bonus materials issue and so there were a couple of the people reading their stories, the podcast type thing that we've been talking about. I know

a couple of writers sort of rewrote scenes from a different character's perspective or completely rewrote an ending. A couple of people actually had a photo essay that they put together to correspond with the story that we couldn't print in the issue, so we put that online. It was a bunch of additional materials that sort of fed into the same idea as the print, and so, hopefully, if they were looking at that online, they would be curious about the additional stories in print and vice versa, so there was kind of a back and forth dialogue between the two there.

Zuniga: I'm going to just declare that actually is the future, because that's awesome and I think that gives people what they want. They want to have interactivity. If they buy a magazine, they're going to be online later, so I think just going to a different destination, having a new experience with something, especially when you think of stories in magazines as these unchanging things.

Hammond: I agree wholeheartedly. I think that the dialogue, the possibility of the dialogic, is really going to expand the future for everything.

HERBERT LEIBOWITZ

EDITOR ROUNDTABLE: A RESPONSE

As one of the oldest editorial kids on the block, let me offer some comments from the perspective of longevity. First, the question of money. *Parnassus*, which recently published its 30th Anniversary issue, was going to shut down because it lacked the funds to continue. When Willard Spiegelman, the editor of *The Southwest Review*, heard the news, he decided to publish a eulogy for the magazine before it was lowered into the grave—in *The Wall Street Journal*, of all places. As a result of his eloquence, a benevolent stranger stepped forward and gave us enough money to publish two more issues. Unless one has private wealth or receives an unimaginable legacy from a Ruth Lilly, as *Poetry* did, we all have to struggle to scrounge up the money to pay the printer, the landlord, the post office, the contributors, and ourselves. But money has, ultimately, little to do with literary quality. *Parnassus* can't begin to match the fees of *The New Yorker*, but some distinguished writers have written regularly for us because they've admired our stringency, stylishness, and eclecticism.

All editors like to think that had Walt Whitman sent "Song of Myself" to them, they would have immediately recognized its wild originality and clamored to publish the poem. We all wish to be the impresarios, talent scouts,

clairvoyants, and angel Gabriel who bring the glad tidings to readers that a remarkable experimental novelist or lyrical poet is appearing in our pages. But the truth is, as many of the editors point out, such work is the exception: in our 1976 Bicentennial issue, we had the good fortune to publish Adrienne Rich's essay "Vesuvius at Home," which radically altered the way we viewed Emily Dickinson's poetry. There were other excellent essays in that issue, along with perfectly competent ones. That was a winning percentage. But sometimes the harvest is sparse. We are all familiar with the toxic poems and middling stories that fill our aptly named slush pile. We wade through them in search of a pearl or a diamond in the rough. There's nothing new under the sun about that. *Poetry*, our longest running poetry magazine, published landmark modernist poems by T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Wallace Stevens, William Carlos Williams, and the Objectivists, but Harriet Monroe also chose reams of dull regional verse we no longer remember. Pound had to coax and strong-arm her into printing "Prufrock" and an exasperated Hart Crane had to explain "At Melville's Tomb" before she reluctantly agreed to publish it. Elizabeth Hardwick, a writer of fierce intelligence, once wisely admonished me to avoid the word "risky," because it is so subjective and imprecise—and self-congratulatory. What is caviar for one editor is trash fish for another. Small presses do sometimes put on stage voices of startling freshness and the trade houses sometimes do feature voices that have grown frayed and wobbly. I'm wary, though, of assigning all virtue to the small presses; their taste is not infallible, they can be rather clannish,

enthroning one kind of poem. Perhaps the most brilliant book of poems of 2007, Cathy Park Hong's *Dance Dance Revolution*, was brought out by W. W. Norton.

Who gets to decide what's good literature? Certainly not a cadre of New York intellectuals, San Francisco "Language" poets, academic pontiffs, or the *vox populi* of poetry slams. Deciding what standards are applicable is a thorny issue for American democracy, with its long anti-intellectual tradition and its paranoid suspicion of elitism. Susan Jacoby has tried to rescue the word from its latest narrow definition "snobbism" and to remind us that The Founding Fathers were all elitists, well read in the classics and philosophy, and adept in political disputation. In a culture's non-stop conversation and debate as to whether this novel or book of poems deserves praise or brickbats, all opinions are not created equal. An editor must judge the intellectual force or laziness of an argument, the accuracy or sloppiness of a critic's language: the insularity and factionalism in American poetry often leads to absurd *ex cathedra* pronouncements that poet A is a dreary formalist and poet B is the Second Coming of Yeats or Emily Dickinson. That is mere brand labeling, low-level polemics.

Space is a luxury most literary magazines do not have. But for a review magazine like *Parnassus*, I have long held that an author writing a retrospective of Zbigniew Herbert's or Kenneth Rexroth's *Collected Poems*, tracing the history of the ballad or the epigram, reinterpreting Surrealism or lovingly elaborating the glories of Classical Arab poetry needs ample room to make his or her case and to cast an enchanting spell. The Internet, of course, is

the realm of vast cyberspace and black holes. My crystal ball is in the pawn shop, so I won't resort to prophecy, but this much I'll venture. Like all new technologies, it can be a medium for innovation or mindless grading, like most of the reviews on Amazon.com. In the blogosphere, I have read postings at stimulating sites and at boring ones. But the standards so far seem to me extremely loose and commonplace, too often a sort of infomercial or special pleading for one idea. I miss the pleasures of style and the provocations of making the reader set aside his prejudices and habits.

Nobody has mentioned the marvelous intangible of editing a literary magazine: foremost, the forging of friendships, first through an exchange of letters, then at a coffee shop or wine bar table talking about a Bosnian poet and baseball, the Bayeux tapestry, and a recipe for melon soup: one imagines he's sitting in The Mermaid Tavern with Keats, Hazlitt, Leigh Hunt, and Benjamin Haydon. Equal to that pleasure are the informal colloquies with the young poets who've come to intern at *Parnassus*, where we talk shop, assess reputations, irreverently swap jokes, puns, clerihews, listen to a Schubert song. Such, such are the joys.

William Carlos Williams often said that he would have failed as a poet without the help of the little magazines. He founded *Contact* with Robert McAlmon, served as Consulting Editor to *Others*, submitted poems to the rigorous editorial eye of Marianne Moore, even invested some of his hard-earned cash in journals with tiny circulations whose life span was that of a mayfly. *Kora in Hell*, his Dadaist experiment, ran in *The Little Review*

along with Joyce's *Ulysses*. I don't think literary magazines will disappear unless culture itself is obliterated. So, editors, sharpen those red pencils and make sure the delete button is working on your computers.

Herbert Leibowitz is the editor and publisher of *Parnassus: Poetry in Review*. He has received PEN American Center's Nora Magid Award for distinguished editing (1995), Poets House's Elizabeth Kray Award for "service to poetry"(2002), and The Poetry Foundation's Randall Jarrell Prize for Criticism (2007). He is the author of *Fabricating Lives: Explorations in American Autobiography* and *Hart Carne: An Introduction to the Poetry*. He is completing a critical biography of William Carlos Williams.

PART TWO: EDITORS INTRODUCE

Mississippi Review asked the editors contributing to this issue to introduce a new writer they have published that they found particularly exciting, working in new and interesting ways, or otherwise deserving of more attention. We wanted to obtain a cross-section of the most interesting emerging voices currently being published in literary magazines. The following are the editors' recommendations. Enjoy.

CLAIRE BATEMAN

[Introduced by Jill Allyn Rosser, *New Ohio Review*]

DISPLACED

A relief map of relief is made of water—
channels, tides, & turbulent suspensions
that rise into noctiluminous vapor plumes;
a relief map of relief is made of light
that can't contain its slowness, & so unravels;
a relief map of relief is made of breath,
an endless, tingling stain of exhalation
that navigates the realms of quick & dead
without regard for form or dissolution.
Incalculably heavy in its wholeness,
a relief map of relief is made of melting.

CLAIRE BATEMAN

OCEAN FEVER

A pond, a lake, even a bay
will not do.

You feel irritable all the time.
Nothing smells right.
Nothing tastes clean.
When you lie down,
you long to be vertical again,
and when you rise,
you ache for rest.

Most of the world's population
suffers from this condition
most of the time,
which is why people everywhere
are miserable & crazy
though perhaps slightly less so
in South Dakota,
where the land senses change
at such a leisurely pace
that it believes it's still
covered by waters,
& though you don't feel
the precise mixture

of unease & swelling plenitude
that you crave,
you can still be battered by wind,
& rocked by sky;
you can still watch cloud-shadows
lightly troubling
sinewy ripples of grass.

The people who live by the ocean
have it worst of all.

Even when they are in it,
especially when they are in it,
they are always lamenting & wailing
because they can neither escape their skins
nor swallow the waves,
though the ferocious tears
that spill out of them
make the ocean itself
feel quite at home.

CLAIRE BATEMAN

BE YOND GOOGLE EARTH

To google light is to accelerate
past the wound in the heart of matter
from which light seeps.

To google light is to bypass light's milk, its meltwater,
its fathomless shallows, vessel-wrecking undertow, &
albino reefs,
its glistening gales & freak white-outs,
its glacial alphabets, humming swarms,
more-transcendent-than-thou Mona Lisa glaze,
its leap, its lapse, its labyrinth,
the long odds of its signal-to-noise calibration.

To google light is to steer clear
of the tunnel at the end of the light
that turns over & over,
basking in a joystorm of borrowed radiance,
as if basting its hollow winds with gold
on their way back from transparency.

To google light is to google time is to google mind
is to navigate your own & simple body

fine-tuned to suffer light's turbulence, its tumult,
lather of froth & radioluminescent spume-drift,
sidereal universe dissolving inside your bloodstream,
forever phosphorescing
at the melting point of light.

Claire Bateman's books are *The Bicycle Slow Race* (Wesleyan, 1991); *Friction* (Eighth Mountain, 1998); *At the Funeral of the Ether* (Ninety-Six Press, 1998); *Clumsy* (New Issues Poetry & Prose, 2003); and *Leap* (New Issues, 2005). She has been awarded Individual Artist Fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Tennessee Arts Commission, as well as a Surdna Fellowship. She lives in Greenville, SC.

MAUREEN MCCOY

[Introduced by Robert S. Fogarty, *Antioch Review*]

GIRLS, OR GUNS WERE DRAWN

Careless girls, immortal as girls must be: two girls jig along without plan or purpose, and, as is the privilege of girls at any time, in any way they wish or don't yet imagine, girls carry the circus with them. Look, a flaming cloth bag swings between them, a little hippie purse on a rope, striped—a dropped ash or a live match tunneled its work out to daylight (they smoke, these two girls)—pricks one's thighs and she swats at nothing, again, and on they go, talking and laughing, then finally, suddenly they notice: Fire! And they collapse to the pavement in laughter. Flames! Oh, the beautiful hysterics of girls so rural still as to feel gloriously bad to be walking—in flames—on busy Broadway, Denver's Broadway along the stretch of rental furniture shops choked with timid aspirants, whole families out on Saturdays dreaming up homes; but the girls, jobless girls, have all the days of the week to luxuriate in folly, and a flaming purse ennobles them.

Did such a thing as a chocolate powdered drug ever exist, girls dipping wet fingers into a film canister, then into mouths? Girls! This is no way to begin a trip to Mexico unless you are ready for the consequence of blondes never returning, ever, and this is exactly what will happen, or nearly, or in some way that at least seems

permanent, the way every day of teenage life does, even now, even now, fresh out of the teens, even now, as girls swat and blow and laugh the little purse fire to death. Their tongues taste chocolate and Mexico calls. But this is only one day, one free day on Broadway where the bars open for Sunday breakfast, no charge if you know the ropes, and Larimer Street is still awash in its primitive state of pawn and gritty revel, with lurching men drinking from soup cans. But here is Broadway and on they go, laughing girls sparkly with the dipped powder sucked into questing mouths and oh how the waves part for faces that burn off darkness, shine, little suns, till the cows come home.

Here's to Mexico, to being girls thumbing south now. Nuns and truckers love girls. The microbus loves girls; here, always, comes another. It is that era, that cusp. A man with a walnut-cracking voice driving them south, will point out that Pueblo is, after all, and quite secretly still, sex-change capital, and the way they flutter by, girls dog-faced out the window, the way girls laugh, he wants to tell them anything at all and he will, he will talk non-stop. And who would not scream going by the eerie waste of Pueblo, Colorado, heads out the window, invincibly on the trail away? Oh, how Mexico is calling.

But girls might remember, not immediately but trapped way in the future, they might put memory back on themselves with the notion that isn't all of experience cautionary? Just as they slicked from their mothers' wombs, might not catastrophe birth itself right out of their own quick movements of passionate flinging into both day and night, so that, sure, with foresight, these girls

might have known they would face the gun in Mexico. The gun, like the microbus, loves you and here it comes—again.

Back: Go back to before hitching to Mexico, before the flaming purse. Months before.

One night these two girls streaked like stars down the black chute of land, the foothills tumbling down, down, all the way down to Denver. Land was still allowed to be itself, land untouched. People from all quarters of discontent had not yet swarmed out to claim climate as salvation, which the girls took for granted even as they came west with Midwestern humidity still clinging like dew on their wheatish hair that rode, too, east to west across their heads and fell, identically, across tranced eyes, into golden valleys of shoulders. Those streaks of hair—lucky, lucky girls—caused men to believe, forgive, even as they sometimes hated all the days of their own lives. And this, for girls, is the crossroads to trouble every time. The men: at the crossroads, always.

Before the dip into chocolate powder and the flaming purse, and before the Mexico trip: that one night: smoking a fattish one in the hills while emptying a house of its two dogs: farewell to a cabin shared with a man, briefly—it's over, that recent life of the girl who owns the car. Both girls say, What was that?! Then laugh like horses. And so went the toothy girls wrapped in their capes of stars falling down, down in darkness, to Denver down below: the Mile High City *below* them. Who wouldn't feel like gods? Telling stories, singing to the radio, with dogs packed in back of a blameless yellow Bug and all the swagger and freedom of nighttime's silver platter carrying

them, on they rode. Orion's belt ticked them forward. And here rides the little cloth purse wedged in one girl's lap; the other—the driver, owner of dogs and car and purse; she, the man-leaver—reaching across to fish for a cigarette or a piece of candy kept for emergency *après* pot, and they both laughed when the one whose thighs clenched the purse went woo-woo and shook her hips to say that's deep rummaging! The purse would burn on Broadway, but not yet, not this season in which the girls knew limitless ease. The dogs rode silent, happy. The girls rode singing, happy. Eternity was theirs.

But then—what? Girls' minds staggered to hook onto the eyes' hallucination: dark night burst to day, light slashed across their eyes, a magician's stole unfurled upon a toothy surprise of chain link fence—gated, no less—across the highway that ran from the foothills to Denver as if—surprised you, all right, girls, take that—Denver is *closed*. That cannot be; yet here are men, stick-figure enforcers of the impossible, black figures against the light, pointing rifles in the air. Girls gasped and dogs howled; the car knew to stop itself or be killed dead, a yellow Bug dead. Oh, the lights, girls, the lights in the eyes that forced them first to look down, then to turn the gaze upward in stupefied benediction, hair run wild as horses in the valley of your neck, your shoulders, your thin little poor-boy shirts that only invincible girls would wear against merciless mountain chill, men and their futures. You know this and still: *Girls, girls, girls*, as the old song goes, *oh, girls are made for love!*

Nod the guns: Out of the car. Get out of the car.

And the little purse comes too—now where is her license to drive?! Tossed somewhere in here—there’s no wallet in the little purse that will within the year burst into flame on Broadway. The girl must empty that little purse on the hood now—please, license, stop hiding. In tremendous spotlight drama, more rummaging and the license is found—not drugs, thank your gods and ancestors. This time, girls are legal.

One man in his panting maleness makes motions to the other girl: keep still. Let the dogs howl; and the dogs do howl. The sound beyond: a terrific humming and chuffing in the distance, a slight tinkling, and a smell that the mountain air fights back—this is what the girls will think of later, how air has its dignity and can actually fight back. The fence across the road looks stupid. The fence is flimsy power. Beyond the fence, girls are told, lies their nation’s premiere and utterly off-limits site of plutonium production: Rocky Flats Nuclear Arsenal. Ever heard of it, nitwits?

Someday—and the girls behave as if they know the future—someday this land will turn itself out as a smiling playground, as history welcoming all, begging forgiveness. Signs will urge people to walk trails, *Stay on the trails!* past cheerful (maybe mutant, just maybe poisonous) daisies; and in the distance they will see the unnamed, the unrepentant, wholly incorrigible area, the very, very bad part beyond reclamation, still fenced. Not a prairie dog in sight. And children, while encouraged to frolic, will be advised against eating the dirt or going barefoot in the dirt—look, but don’t touch the dirt,

please—and everyone must gamely decontaminate after trailblazing here. Rinse like mad, my prettys!

But that night, awash in fluorescence, the girls face Rocky Flats and hips swag just a bit, and hair swings, a bit—girls can't help that they are never still, and each shifting of hips or scuffing of shoe in gravel causes men to suck in breath. Men are thrilled; these night-shift men feel so alive. Girls, we have girls standing here, just girls, thank Jesus, not killers shooting toward us full-speed. Well, of course the girls *had* come to them full-speed, of course, thinking this a highway, but damn if they aren't just girls! And adrenaline drains the men dry and their heads are light and the one man blurts out don't the girls get it? Get it? They took a wrong turn! Wrong! Rocky Flats, Rocky Flats! And no one, not a single damn person on the face of, on the butt of, this earth knows where you are. *Your people don't know. We know, get it?* The men shake with buried sobs of relief. We could do anything at all to you! Jammed adrenaline has drugged the men sideways: they are just crazy about the girls and next, they can't stop babbling all the horrible things, a fate of contamination after first doing the *other* to the girls, get it? Right over there, we could *you know*. We could send you out of here crumpled and glowing green. Or: you've seen Vincent Price boiling bones to fizz? The car, the Bug, can be squashed to resemble a lunch bucket, then it too can be sizzled or fried or just heaped in the sun to scald its little way to zero. *No one knows you are here.* These are the things we could do to you! You girls! You fucking, fucking girls who missed the sign, the turn-off, and raced at us, and even pointing guns we didn't know

you were just girls, not at first, and our lives flashed before our eyes, and what were you doing? You'd better be honest here, what? while we were pissing our pants, you godamnners, you! *Singing*? Oh, Jesus, that's just about right, isn't it. *Singing*. Girls playing the radio. You got, what, a station from Oklahoma?! Oh, brother, that makes me just about want to puke my life away. Oklahoma, and here we are, here, at Rocky Flats Nuclear Arsenal. Do you know how much we get *paid* for the night shift? Do you know *why*? Do you have any idea in the most pitiful world of worlds what all we *know*?

And the girls were just girls, waiting for the punishment they knew would not come, and the look on their faces, the look on them, the menace of wide-eyed dazzlement.

Get them out of here. Out!

Girls were ordered into their car, and the dogs howled their reception. Black sedans appeared like moving chunks of night. Escorts. One sedan would lead and one would follow the car of girls and dogs being led away. Girls did not laugh. Girls held their breath so as not to laugh, especially when the car leading them away from standing men and secrecy pointedly stopped at a darkness of intersection out in nowhere and every heart beat to madness in the second before one man got out and shined light on the sign they had missed: Rocky Flats Nuclear Arsenal. Do Not Enter!!! So girls' hair waved just tensily in recognition of girls' folly, and the caravan rolled on.

Now the black cars leave them, turn back toward their lookout post, their night-shifting, and the girls, aimed at wildcat Denver down below, are laughing so hard they

have to pull over, roll out of the car, and laugh into the big jug of a sky pouring out the stars, more and more stars. This is one more very late night in the eternity of girls. Of course Orion's belt picks up duty and again swings them along. Girls will sleep till noon, and Mexico will wait until spring. Girls stick out their tongues and let the starlight, the air, the strength of their incomprehension wet them with courage, and on they go, sparkly as anything you would ever want to touch, down, down to the flat city of Denver, where life as girls, as these girls doing these sudden things, begins and ends.

Maureen McCoy is the author of four novels: *Walking After Midnight*, *Summertime*, *Divining Blood*, and most recently *Junebug*. *The Antioch Review* has recently published two essays from the collection: "1957" and "Vickie's Pour House: A Soldier's Peace." Maureen McCoy teaches in Cornell University's English Department and Program of Creative Writing.

CATHERINE ZEIDLER

[Introduced by Aaron Burch, *Hobart*]

CHRISTINA THE ASTONISHING

Preface

In a rowboat that swung gently from side to side, the friends lay on their backs, fishing poles jutting into a moonless sky. Unanchored, they drifted through the canals, their smoke and laughter lingering in the air behind. It was a warm quiet night, they had stripped down and swam earlier, now they lay naked drying under each others' hands, ridiculing their parents, except for Christina, who had no parents, and so ridiculed her older sisters instead.

“What're we going to do?” asked Augustus.

“Let's orgy,” said Dot, her head in Christina's lap.

“You always want to orgy,” said Christina. “Tonight we're fishing. Everything we catch we eat at sunrise on the glass beach.”

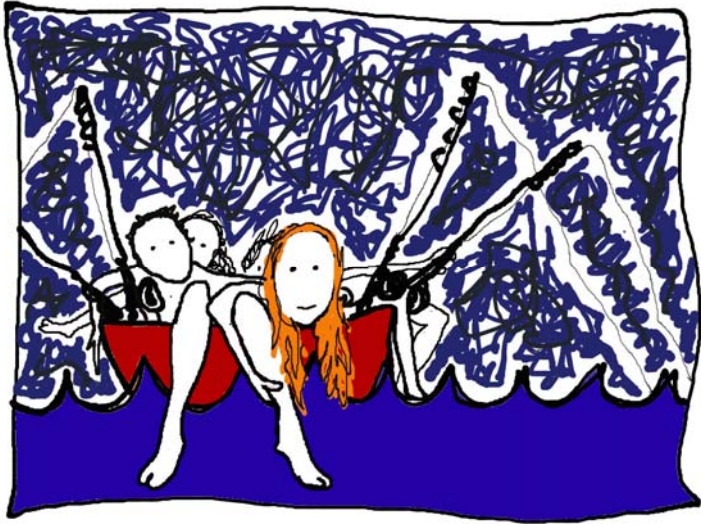
At sunrise the boat turns out a canal into the harbor. Behind it trails a feast of fish on four ropes. Strung through the mouth, the fish are small, scrappy, with vibrant scales; they try to swim along with the boat but instead are jerked about like cans tied to newlyweds' cars.

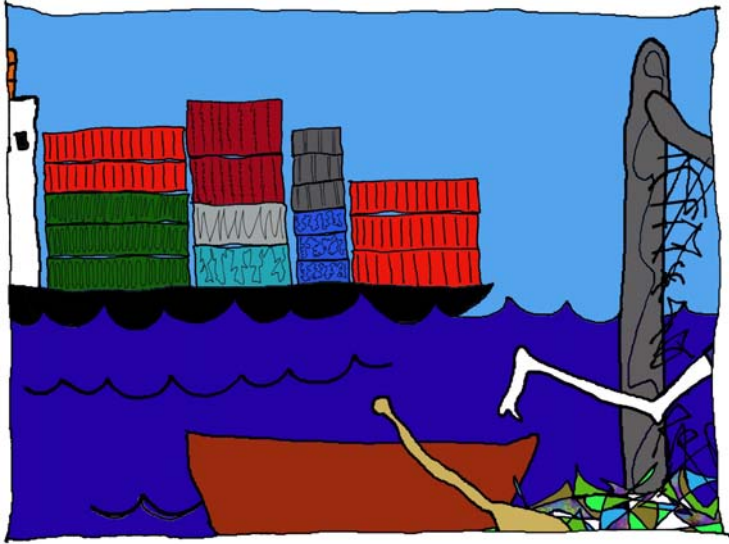
Simon rows, Christina sings drunkenly to herself. As the sea opens out beyond them, she looks up at the

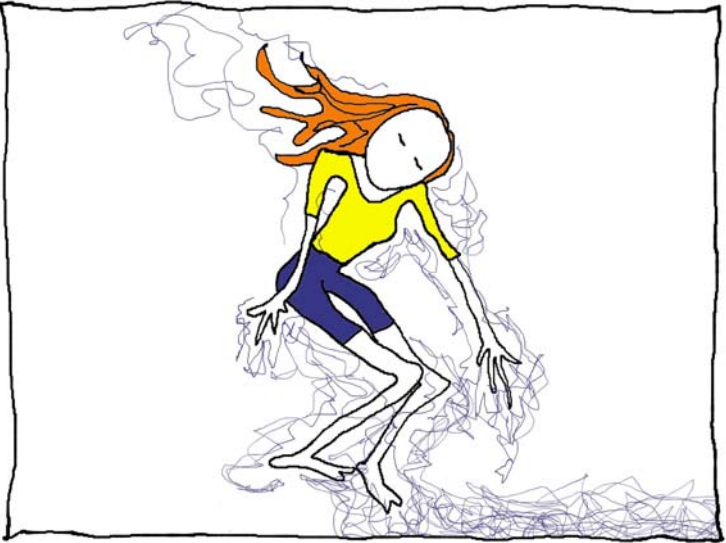
container ships towering above, and their containers—red, blue, brown.

“Land Ho,” calls Simon.

Christina gathers the fish and their ropes into her arms, she stumbles off the boat and leads the group through the hole in the chain link fence and into the empty lot—it is her favorite place. Dawn glistening white, green, brown, across the floor of broken glass, Christina stands in a cluster of weeds, holding her fish like a bouquet, or a baby lamb. Trampled film reels are scattered across the glass, and a stuffed bear with a green bow tie has been skewered on one of the fence posts. Christina's friends will wish later they had film, a camera, an animator to capture her when she starts to shake there in the middle of the glass and the weeds, her knees buckling, the strands of fish flowing from her arms. They will wish they could replay their memory to the point when she falls, looking almost in control, though her fingertips, her shoulders, and the veins in her neck, all of her—if they could just go back and look again, are spasming as if in orgasm—the slowest, most difficult, loneliest orgasm in the world. As Christina's eyes roll into her head her friends come in around her, enclosing her in a circle and bending to try and soothe her, but she flails, pushing them away and awing them until she comes to rest, still and spread before them. Descending into a huddle around her, they check her vitals and agree between them that Christina's death was the most beautiful thing they have ever witnessed.







Christina the Astonishing

24 July

a.k.a. Christina Mirabilis, Saint Christina, Blessed Christina, Christina of Leige

b. 1150 at Brusthem near Liege, Belgium

d. 24 July 1224 at Saint Catherine's convent, Trond, of natural causes

No formal beatification has taken place although popular devotion existed and continues.

Patron Saint of: insanity, lunatics, madness, mental disorders, mental handicaps, mental illness, mentally ill people, mental health caregivers, mental health professionals, psychiatrists, therapists.

She is, of course, redheaded. Her hair is that slightly orange red that looks like it should drip color onto her skin and her clothes when it rains. Long and straggly, her hair frizzes up around her when the air is wet, or jumps with static when the air is dry. They have put it up in a modest French twist to keep her from looking too crazy, and clad her in a red dress, her nicest, though it still shows a touch of the floozy—the thin straps and the lycra in the fabric. Her sisters sigh at their choice, but there is no point in a new dress now. The lining of the cheapest coffin they could buy was red as well, a glistening not-quite-satin red. And so, at her funeral, Christina looks as if she is drowning in blood. Her face is a baby's in a fake flower garden, filled with poinsettias and unconvincing roses, carnations.

While the priest gives Mass, those friends who have shown up mumble uncomfortably in the back pews, some to others and some to themselves. They wish they hadn't come. They wish that they, like so many of her other friends, had already made the journey to death, or that they simply had not heard the news, that they could go back to their myriad activities: tending bar; tilling fields; juggling in the streets; begging in the streets; frantically pacing trying to score in the streets; picking up garbage in movie theaters; playing paintball in concrete playgrounds; picking pockets; sitting in empty rooms staring at locusts.

The priest reads quickly, eager to be finished and away from these people, eager to see this fiery girl covered and returned to the earth.

Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, dona eis requiem

Lamb of God, Who takest away the sins of the world,
grant them rest

Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, dona eis requiem

Lamb of God, Who takest away the sins of the world,
grant them rest

*Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, dona eis requiem
sempiternam.*

Lamb of God, Who takest away the sins of the world,
grant them eternal rest.

Christina is not ready for eternal rest. She is not ready for anything eternal, having been absorbed for many years by all that is fleeting. She wrestles with death; she tries to gag it up. There is much she would wish for—sleep, peace, silence, a blanket to cover her, days of darkness,

but death, at twenty-one, no matter her misery, it is too much. Someone must agree, for suddenly her body lifts from the tacky synthetic coffin. Her red dress and her red hair journey chaotically to the rafters, her body flailing and spasming in a dance of struggle. Her friends, fearing themselves in a dream or a bad trip, run out. At a loss for what to do, the priest goes on with the Mass. Shaking their heads sadly, hardly surprised at Christina's ability to raise questioning eyebrows, even in death, her sisters sit there and watch her ascend.

Hell. Christina is on a moving sidewalk, the kind you find in airports, glass panels on either side topped by a metal rail she rests her hand on. She looks out and sees crimson everywhere. Rivers of blood, landscape of flames, caverns of hot glowing rock. Christina lets her hair down and supposes she was made for this place. The sidewalk moves on, and she begins to see eyes peeking up from the fleshy earth, eyes that stare at her greedily or vacantly or murderously. Some of the eyes begin to rise up with the torn apart flesh of their heads and Christina sees that this earth is not earth at all. Heads begin to call to her from their dark decayed mouths, having pushed their torsos up to separate themselves from the mass of flesh, leaning their sinewy hands on what she can now almost recognize as noses, elbows, toes, even the sexless outlines of rotting genitalia. "Christina," they call, "Remember me?" Their tongues are falling apart, long strands of tissue knot together, dangle down over their chins. Christina might recognize their voices, if there was

anything alive in them. But they are too removed from life. Christina steps away from the rail. They are on both sides of her, these crawling voices that try to reach her, slobbering blood, drooling the past.

“Do you remember when I fed you soup made out of my cat, Elsie?”

“Do you remember the way the air tasted on the tops of mountains?”

“Do you remember when my mother and I sat across the kitchen table from each other for an entire week, her weeping and I laughing?”

“Do you remember the way we danced those times, our digging hands and drunken knees?”

“Do you remember that party when I shit in your closet?”

“Do you remember the smell of rain on wool in the winter?”

“Do you remember when we went fishing; I caught that fish, pretty big, and while it was flopping around, dying, I put my dick in it and fucked it dead?”

“Do you remember how much I used to hate that word, journey?”

“Do you remember my hands, the way I always used to let them do whatever they wanted, and sometimes they wanted to strangle people or grope women in the street, and sometimes they just wanted to feel blood?”

Christina remembers. She stands in the middle of her moving sidewalk, her arms wrapped close around her chest, looking straight ahead, not calling back. How did she end up with so many dead friends? Friends who hastened death with drugs or crime or anger or an

unnatural interest in poisonous animals or a twisted sense of adventure. Friends who invited death by driving drunk or putting guns in their mouths or walking around town blindfolded. So this is where all those friends ended up, all the ones whose deaths, however young, couldn't really be said to be untimely, for their survival would have signaled something profoundly wrong with the world. These were the friends Christina wanted to have: the kind whose recklessness was invigorating. She loved to sit beside them and wonder at how hard they lived; they made life something to be held in awe, the way they disregarded it. Now they struggle for life, remembering and remembering, asking her to remember, too. Christina waits to be dumped into them, to begin the burning, the decomposition, and the onslaught of memories.

Instead she hears an electronic voice:

Please watch your step. The moving platform will ascend shortly.

The escalator flattens again. Purgatory. Here the bodies are recognizable as such. Their lower halves writhe in flames that reach up from hell. Arms stretched above their heads, their wrists shackled, they are all chained to a tangled mass of bars, which filter a blinding light. From beyond the bars Christina can hear a faint choir singing peacefully, *you're not here, we're here and you're down there, not quite here, maybe you'll get here and maybe you won't, who knows, it's not really important, not to us anyway.*

Here she finds friends, too, and relatives, people she knew who try to run toward her and her guarded sidewalk, who cry out to her.

Her parents are there, shackled side by side, the makeup from their funeral six years earlier worn off and the bruises from the car crash showing. “If only I hadn’t gone into the civil service,” her father says. “If only we had waited until we were married,” her mother says.

Her friend Tracy: “If only I had returned that pair of stockings when I realized I stole them.”

Lou: “If only I had ever been able to concentrate on anything.”

George: “If only I hadn’t kicked that squirrel.”

Steve: “If only I never stuck my hands down my pants.”

Rudolph: “If only I didn’t think myself so superior to all those stumbling idiots.”

Jessica: “If only I never heard, said, or thought the word ‘fuck’.”

Christina smiles at them hesitantly, raising her hand in awkward greeting, looking away. She does not want to be among them and their half-flames, their bland agony, their boring confessions. If they are going to deposit her here she almost thinks she would rather run back along the moving sidewalk, run halfway down the upward moving escalator and fling herself headfirst into hell. Yes, she thinks, at least there she could hide.

Please watch your step. The moving platform will ascend shortly.

Heaven is spacious. White and clean. The harps and the choirs and the clouds, as expected. She doesn't recognize anyone and no one calls to her. It is a quiet place. Heaven smells like light lavender. People play tame games with big wooden hoops. They read. They drink herbal tea. They do the foxtrot. They smile and so Christina assumes they are happy, and if they can be happy this way, who is she to criticize? She supposes she could be happy here, too.

The moving platform will end shortly. Prepare to disembark.

Christina steps off, into the soft white clouds and she falls right through them. She plummets, a blur of red.

She opens her eyes to find herself clinging to the rafters of the church. A priest is calling out exorcism chants. Her sisters sit in the first pew with their heads in their hands. The church smells foul to her, as if a huge mound of feces and entrails, carcasses and rotten eggs has just been emptied there. It smells as if the sweat of a thousand football players has been poured over the pews, or rancid soy sauce. She covers her nose with her hand. One of her sisters—Leslie, the elder—looks up and sees that Christina seems to be in control of her body again. “Christina, what in heaven’s name are you doing?” she calls.

“I died. And then I undied, I guess,” Christina answers.

“Well, come down from there,” Leslie says. “We’re taking you home.”

Christina’s sisters hold her hands, one on each side, to walk her back through the streets, as briskly as possible. Christina scrunches up her face and holds her breath. On her right, Leslie smells of perfume oil that has lain around for too long and no longer has anything distinctive to it. On her left, Cheryl smells of milk that has just gone sour.

Compared with the scents that fight their way into Christina’s path, however, her sisters are mild, harmless. The man standing in front of the five-and-dime, turning his head to watch the three women pass, his smell is of spent condoms lying in ashtrays. A group of teenage girls smell like burning hair. A short old man in a vest and coat smells unmistakably of dead skunk. Christina wriggles her hands free and darts away from her sisters, trying to dodge the odors of the town; her progress is haphazard. Leslie and Cheryl reluctantly take up after her and catch her quickly—she is not quite recovered from her death. Leslie grabs her by the waist, and the rest of the way is a struggle and an embarrassment, dragging their lunatic undead sister home.

She does not know why she smells sin so strongly, she can’t even say how she knows its smell or what has taught it to her. She wonders why she didn’t detect the odor in hell, or even purgatory, and considers that only the living are able to change; they are the only ones with real connections to their bodies. The dead must be odorless; they must leave their odor in the ground.

Christina has crawled into the oven again. Mostly, she stays under the bed for its stale smell of book reports. Once, her sisters, in a fit of kindness, or perhaps exasperated by her agonized cries, brought her scented candles and incense, but these items carried with them the smells of drugs and overdoses, domestic misery, sweatshop labor, hypocrisy, passed on from their sellers or owners or manufacturers, or else the smell was just in their essence, and so they had to be taken out to the curb almost as quickly as they came in. Today, some more of her friends came over, to congratulate Christina on her return from death. Leslie called up, told her people were there, at the door to see her. Christina crawled out from under her bed and slid her mask back up over her nose and mouth, hoping this time her friends would somehow not be sinners, or better yet, that these friends would be tricky and have figured out some way to mask the scent.

Christina held the rail and walked slowly down the stairs. She tried not to smell her friends. She held her breath and forced a smile when she entered the sitting room. But their sin hit her like a wave and so she retreated into the kitchen and flung the doors of the oven open.

The oven is green. It is large and metal and has two small doors that open out rather than one big one that opens down. The oven has dials that you tune like radios when you want to adjust the burners. Christina thinks the oven looks very wise, though she can't remember thinking that before her journey she thinks it now, often. If she could live in the oven instead of upstairs, under the

bed, she would. But her sisters don't approve. They need the oven, they say, and besides, living in an oven is awfully morbid. Inside the oven the space is tight, and Christina must hug her knees and burrow her face into her chest, and the walls of the oven leave dents in her skin. Inside the oven there is no smell but the residue of gas and food. Inside the oven she tries to will herself into becoming square. She invents—as she did when she was a child—different worlds, worlds in which everyone lives in tunnels, or in boxes that they never leave, so you never wander, or look at anything from the outside, only from the inside. Inside the oven she sleeps, and does not dream at all. Sometimes there are ants or cockroaches or even mice inside the oven, but none of these things sin and so they do not bother her very much.

Although she has gotten used to the fairly innocuous scent of her sisters, she is tired of living in their house. She is tired of their daily sounds and their leftover macaroni and cheese and their gossip. She is tired of the way they keep opening the door to the people who were once Christina's friends, of their disappointment every time they find her in the oven, and of their urbane curiosities about heaven and their parents. Christina waits for a while for something different to happen and when nothing does, she runs away. She does so in the dead of night, so they will not know and to protect herself as much as possible from odor. She wears her facemask and brings nothing else.

It is a town of many bridges, and though the streets are silent—any after-hours activity well hidden—she is afraid she will find herself stuck in the middle of one sinner coming one way and one coming the other way, with nowhere to go but into the water.

The streets are faintly lined with the sin the town leaves behind, even when it is at home, sleeping, but from behind her mask, Christina hardly notices. She remembers stumbling along these sidewalks alone or in the company of friends. Friends who would stop along the way to vomit or make out, with her, or with each other.

Remembering, she begins to detect scents emanating from her. She thinks, “Well, isn’t this tedious,” and then she tries to think about red balloons, baseball, politics, her parents, they all work for a while, but eventually she starts thinking of other things and she can’t bear the smell that comes off of her then. In the oven or under the bed she never thought like this.

The first instant she steps onto the bridge she finds herself looking into the blue eyes of a husky dog sitting by the rusting poles of a railing. The night is past the halfway point to dawn. A car’s muffler trails along the road behind her, and before her are these wide eyes and broad pupils that seem to fall back into caverns in the dog’s white face. She keeps walking forward, but feels as if she were standing still and the distance between her and those caverns were tightening on its own, through no effort or even willingness on her part. She thinks for a moment that they are her own eyes, and they look either expectant or lost. The dog begins to speak with a muffled

bark, as if it has a hole in its trachea to help it breathe. The voice sounds like the mournings of so many ghosts, and Christina tries to translate it. *Save us*, or maybe *Save yourself*, or maybe just *Where do you think you're going?* She walks by the dog, holding its gaze, but does not turn her head to maintain the gaze as she walks by, nor does she look back after she has passed to see if the dog is still there.

Though there is no rain, it begins to thunder, and Christina walks into a park she thinks is empty to rest her feet and legs. A boy is lying on a bench and leans his neck over the armrest. He smells of rotten fruit and sperm; it overpowers her and she darts up a tree to escape it and to look down on him. He is drunk and doesn't notice her. "Oh won't you," he says stretching his hands to his head and grabbing his scalp. "Oh won't you . . . Oh I want to go home I. Can't God—twelve girls and none of them wants to bone me. It's a motherfucker . . . yes. That's what it is. A motherfucker. A love song to wood glue." Christina climbs out a limb and hovers over him for a minute, holding her breath and looking down at his mouth hanging open, his tongue tracing the bottoms of his teeth. She longs to jump down to him and sit by his side, take his tongue in her fingers and try to feel his taste buds until he notices her. She would follow him and watch him live for as long as he would let her. When she cannot hold her breath any longer she crawls back to the trunk of the tree and then down, out of the park and back to the streets. It is nearing dawn and she walks quickly, fleeing her own scent, trying to put the boy out of her mind.

She crosses many bridges, unsure as to whether they are the right ones, but when she gets to the one that held the dog she knows instantly, and the dog is not there. So she follows the howls of strays out of town and to the railroad tracks, where there is a wild dog party, but the dog with her eyes and the voice of ghosts is not in attendance.

Having found the tracks, Christina walks along them. She figures she is walking away from her sisters' house and away from the town, but she can't quite remember how she has gotten there, all she can remember are the strangled howls in the distance, pushing thorns away from her face, and the eyes of the dog hovering above her in the sky like stars.

She has walked a long way; the howls of the first pack of dogs have faded into the howls of different gangs, gangs which she did not pursue, because she did not think anymore that she would find that dog, even if she lined up all the dogs in the town. She has walked into daylight, and twice she has crouched down to retie her left shoe. She feels a blister forming on her right heel. She stops and sits against a tree whose thick roots are crossed over each other like the lap of a woman. She loosens her shoe, pulls down her sock, and examines the blister at the very back of her heel, red. Fluid is beginning to gather in it. She bends down the heel of her sneaker, and slides her foot back into it. She resumes walking.

She has thrown her shoes into the darkness hours ago when the train approaches with its barreling engine. Christina runs from the track into sparse woods. She is in

a graveyard and she can detect in the distance the smell of a priest and a gravedigger and a grieving family. In front of her rises a stone mausoleum, an angel with broken wings hanging atop the door. She pulls the door of the mausoleum open and walks inside, greeted by dead flowers and candles burnt into pools of wax, an old picture of the virgin behind broken glass. Christina pulls the door shut and watches the light narrow into a sliver across the tomb and then die. She climbs onto the stone coffin and lies across it. The tomb is cold through her clothes, and she does not know how she will live, but she imagines she will now for quite some time.

Catherine Zeidler's fiction has appeared in *Best American Fantasy*, *Hobart*, *Smokelong Quarterly*, and *Art Lies* and has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize. She has an MFA from the University of Michigan and a small website (catpatz.com). She lives in Copenhagen, Denmark.

