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POETRY



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## Editor's Note:

This is new territory for us.

We don't know about you, readers, but we remember a time when we regarded poems with the deep suspicion of a young child encountering a mystifying new vegetable. A run-in with a single over-seasoned, undercooked ballad could turn us away from the whole poetic enterprise for years.

But that's all in the past. The poets featured here have reminded us how spectacular poetry can be, and we're thrilled to unleash them on you. In these lines, you will find beauty and horror, science and magic, laughter and screams, mythic past, intergalactic future, and unsettling present. Prepare to meet an arboreal carnivore, a white-collar witch, an inebriated Dark Knight, and America's most beloved monomaniacal sea captain.

In selecting the poems for this issue, we applied essentially the same test Emily Dickinson describes in a letter to T. W. Higginson in 1870: "If I read a book and it makes my whole body so cold no fire could ever warm me, I know that is poetry. If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know *that* is poetry."

To return to our awkward produce metaphor, this group of poems is a basket of ripe heirloom tomatoes: an explosion of unexpected colors and unique shapes, each with its own bright acidity and lingering finish.

So grab a sweater, strap on a helmet . . . and take a bite.

— Laura Garrison

**Liz Kicak**

## **Girl Eaten by a Tree**

*Mark Ryden: Oil on Canvas, 2006*

So sweet! Like peach nectar. Even her  
bobby socks tasted like candy.

Strolling among whispery pines, larkspur  
and honey-scented clover. A trio of skipping girls never suspected  
that innocuous alcove in the oak, where robins fought  
to lay their eggs, would soon be stuffed with one of them.

He was ravenous—starving, rooted in place.  
He never hesitated to wrap his branches  
around her slight waist and shovel her in  
his open mouth. She flailed and kicked  
but he ate her headfirst so the screaming was brief.

Her golden ringlets tickled the top of his throat.  
He gagged and almost spit her out but then he got a taste  
of the candied flesh. His bark breaking into her body—the joy  
of the feast surpassing his best epicurean dreams.

Her shoulders, still in their blue silk frock,  
slid down with ease. Each pearl button of her dress  
gliding over his tongue. The slight puff of her belly,  
her syrupy hips and thighs—thighs soaked  
in peach nectar, soaked in maple sap!

At last, he is sated,  
drowsy—not the least bit sorry.

Her doe-eyed, porcelain friends stagger away  
with the buckles from her maryjanes.

**LIZ KICAK** lives in Tampa, FL. She received her MFA from the University of South Florida and is now the Assistant Director of the school's Humanities Institute. Her poetry has appeared in *New York Quarterly*, *Barely South Review*, *The Tulane Review*, *Southern Women's Review*, *Palooka Literary Review*, and others.

**Ed Higgins**  
**five scifaiku**

the moon's peak–  
spring's shrill rut  
a braying mist worm

scorching solar winds   all surface mining stopped

clone-soldiers  
stand in straight ranks  
in boring rain

oh, this replacement brain   still empty inside

leftover pin fruit–  
high in the dar-dar tree  
gathering star-wings

**ED HIGGINS's** poems and short fiction have appeared in various print and online journals, including *Scifaikuest* and multiple other haiku/short-form journals. He and his wife live on a small farm South of Portland, OR. He teaches writing and literature at George Fox University.



Jason Braun

## Almost the Last Man on Earth

Magnetized and caught in the push-  
pull commotion, still, we knew making love  
in a lawn mower shack at the edge of town  
wouldn't jump start a new republic.  
Just one short act of consolation, a slow  
reordering of orbits. We held a spark,  
hunted a small thatch of kindling, by the time  
it was over, there was hardly enough  
to warm two pairs of empty hands.  
For once the rustling sounds in the cupboards,  
kicking of leaves, and falling bodies  
were on purpose and the heat we felt, our own.  
We walked separately back to camp,  
where no-one sings in the lantern light,  
where even the snakes are not safe.

**JASON BRAUN** is the Associate Editor of *Sou'wester*. He has published fiction, poetry, reported or been featured in *The Riverfont Times*, *Prime Number*, ESPN.com, *Big Bridge*, *The Evergreen Review*, *SOFTBLOW*, *The Nashville City Paper*, Jane Freidman's blog, *Star\*Line*, and many more. His *Paradise Lost Office App* contextualizes John Milton's epic poem for the cubicle crowd and is available at iTunes. He releases music under the moniker Jason and the Beast.

Skylaar Amann  
**The Day Witch**

is an amateur with an anger problem. She hexes executives and bans bosses from her boundary. She draws symbols in the sand, outlines the office with a ring of ashes, wishes and wishes till exhaustion takes her. She curses the day certain people were born, bears ill-will like a hairstyle. Everything she touches a talisman. Another charm, another day on the calendar. Haggard and wrecked, she wreaks havoc.

The day witch burns bridges. She is sick of the bitches. Hands twitch lines in the air: she casts spells, sends hexes to the next door neighbors, ensorcelles colleagues from cubicles, and harbors general resentments. She conjures trouble for beleaguered fools who fall for it fully.

The day witch stitches voodoo dolls from rags to riches of misery. Minute by minute, she makes minute changes, challenging her own better judgment. Patched heart, torn eye, stuffing on the floor. You're nothing but a burlap bag to her. One pin goes in—then the rest.

The day witch reaches her limit. Wretched and wanted, she's hoping for something that doesn't come. All her magic is tragic, misguided, and sad. She doesn't want to hurt them. She doesn't even hate them. She just wants to work less, turn worthless to purpose. Settle by a sea somewhere where she'll comb sand from her hair, watch the ships sail by, and record harmless incantations in a commonplace book.

**SKYLAAR AMANN** is a poet and artist living in Portland, Oregon. Her poetry has been published in *Cirque*, *Prime Number*, *Belletrist Coterie*, and elsewhere. She is a 2012 Ruth Lilly Poetry Fellowship finalist. She is online at [www.skylaramann.com](http://www.skylaramann.com).

## Mike Cole

### In This Moment . . .

. . . it may be possible  
to devise an aria of  
what would have seemed  
in an earlier context  
only dissimilar mutterings  
of a deranged minstrel  
who had been run down  
by the emperor's chariot  
and was allowed to sing  
only in the most distant  
corners of the royal  
cactus garden where  
the deaf gardener  
resting beside a bucket  
of red prickly pears  
was moved to tears  
by the stories that swirled  
in the singer's black eyes.

**MIKE COLE** was born in Fresno, California (1948), and graduated from Fresno State College (now California State University Fresno) in 1971 when a Fresno Poetry Renaissance led by Philip Levine was underway. Over a very sporadic 45-year publications history (due to a 32-year public teaching career), Cole's poems have appeared in such journals as *Antioch Review*, *Beyond Baroque*, *In the Grove*, *The San Joaquin Review*, *Laurel Review*, *Midland Review*, *Blast Furnace*, and others. One of Cole's poems appeared in the anthology *Highway 99: A Literary Journey through California's Great Central Valley*, published by Heyday Books. Cole's first book manuscript *The Encyclopedia of Naught* is making the rounds of contests and publishers. He currently lives in the Sierra Nevada Foothills near Yosemite National Park.

**Ben Nardolilli**

## **Close-up of Maggie's Merry Old English Farm**

She loves the game because of the optical illusions,  
A chance to show off her love of geometry too,  
We never see that, of course, it escapes us,  
All we can see with our untrained and lazy eyes  
Are crashes of color spread on a screen  
Masquerading as fecund estates bearing much fruit.

Another windmill has gone up, and a waterwheel  
Is quick to follow by a healthy orchard,  
Sheep the size of the trees eat in the nearby grass,  
Their fat coats helping to keep the venture afloat  
For every visitor who comes down to the farm  
To see her wainwright and the pixilated vicar in action.

According to her, there is a fine harvest going on,  
Crops are just going crazy from bumper to bumper,  
The pigs are going to market, somewhere,  
We ask her about the bacon and when we get some,  
She LOLs and tells us about the dollars raised  
By the pork belly futures that have no past or present.

**BEN NARDOLILLI** currently lives in Arlington, Virginia. His work has appeared in *Perigee Magazine*, *Red Fez*, *Danse Macabre*, *The 22 Magazine*, *Quail Bell Magazine*, *Elimae*, *fwriction*, *THEMA*, *Pear Noir*, *The Minetta Review*, and *Yes Poetry*. He has a chapbook, *Common Symptoms of an Enduring Chill Explained*, from Folded Word Press. He blogs at [mirrorsponge.blogspot.com](http://mirrorsponge.blogspot.com) and is looking to publish his first novel.

William Doeski

## Disappearing and Reappearing in New York

Half the city's under construction.  
As we pass a site, a hole crawling  
with hardhats, we disappear.  
Caroline screams and I struggle  
as if drowning. A great silence  
ensues. We reappear somewhere  
half suburban-Jersey, Westchester,  
the Island. A big picture window,  
a view of vinyl and cape and split  
level houses. A roomful of dogs  
and cats. They watch us recover  
our senses. A human couple  
hovers nearby. Grim Fascist smiles.

They inform us we're now keepers  
of animals. We must suffer  
for the sin of domesticating  
creatures that the gods set free  
in the instant of creation.  
Caroline bears her milky fangs  
but the man waves a pistol and points  
to a long row of empty dishes.  
*Feed them, he mutters, this is your life*  
*henceforth.* I hate that heavy word  
but the cats and dogs look hopeful  
so I open can after can  
of smelly glop and fill the dishes.

Caroline can't contain herself  
despite the gun-threat. Exploding  
into her White Goddess costume  
she goes pale as the Angel of Death  
and blood paints her lips. Her hair  
becomes a knot of coral snakes  
and her gaze turns the errant couple  
into Easter Island figures  
of lichen-speckled rock. I applaud,  
although Caroline swore years ago  
she'd never resume this fatal role.

We step outside and discover  
we're still in the city after all,  
a block from where we disappeared,  
so we continue our stroll,  
the skyscrapers lilting like pipes  
of an old brass organ, the dogs  
and cats trailing after us  
with their carnivorous expressions  
cone-shaped, honed and tapered to points.

**WILLIAM DORESKEI** teaches at Keene State College in New Hampshire. His most recent books of poetry are *City of Palms* and *June Snow Dance*, both 2012. He has published three critical studies, including *Robert Lowell's Shifting Colors*. His essays, poetry, fiction, and reviews have appeared in many journals, including *Massachusetts Review*, *Atlanta Review*, *Notre Dame Review*, *The Alembic*, *New England Quarterly*, *Worcester Review*, *Harvard Review*, *Modern Philology*, *Antioch Review*, and *Natural Bridge*.

**M. R. Lang**  
**six poems**

Someone's in the mirror looking back.

Voices through the door. Who's there?

Fat clown shooting balloon marmots, again.

Love is always in another castle.

Good news . . . I found my knife . . .

Her final words: "Make something up."

**M. R. LANG** writes short stories. Sometimes, the stories are very short. So short, that they don't count. A professor once called them poetry.



**Trevor Tingle**

## **Much Later, the Architect Reviews his Masterpiece**

The moon has no eyes.  
Thoth has been waning for days  
and Horus, that shambling mass,  
has stolen the great scales.

He huddles in our alley ways,  
ragged clothes stiff and stale  
from the many deaths of unwashed skin.  
He brandishes his prize at walls  
of mud, brick, and steel,  
welding it now as his weapon,  
his eye piece.

Upon the walls smudges are weighed  
as a thousand hands of emptiness against  
the forever smell: a tumult of offal and gratitude.

From somewhere there is no light.  
Each brick, each stone, each crevice is left  
to its own notion of what its shadow might be.

A creaking can be felt from the umbra.  
Something held so close as to be a touch.  
The axle is rusty and it sways in time.

**TREVOR TINGLE** has tried and failed to sail around the world. He lives with his wife and son in New Orleans.

**Amanda Chiado**

## **The Birth of Houdini**

*For Angelo*

In the beginning our mother  
slept with a silver sword  
in her throat, ate ruby fire,  
danced like a banshee, all charms  
of a stone-face conjurer.

Our father was intent,  
a phantom with slip pockets  
crossing over the fog.  
Music pulsed from his top hat,  
rabbit furs swinging  
from his leather belt.

When the thunderstorm  
brought you, my brother,  
our father levitated until  
a lavender dawn, beside himself,  
his future self. Mother rocked you  
with a mystic's two-step, her skin

gone chameleon peach with you,  
a sweet cantaloupe, in her arms.  
Now, you always ask. Now, they tell you  
that time stood still. Now, you know  
they were always right.

## Floating in Jagermeister

Batman chomps heads off bats  
like Ozzy when he gets blasted.  
Up-heaves a memory-grave, his father  
flung like yesterday's newspaper.

Clumps of muddy-blood stuck  
in the rabbit fur his mother wore  
that night at the Opera. A plane drifts  
feather dust before its smithereens.

Batman's brain whirls like cotton candy.  
How does it feel to be a dead man  
Not just float like one?

When Batman gets smashed  
he puckers up to women  
who are 5's and 3's, spreads  
his buttery eroticism of wings.

He starts to whip with pleasure,  
if one knocks her head back  
rolling her eyes, her legs  
flightless birds, except in bed.

Batman remembers being new,  
a knot of veins, plucked from a cave.  
He wishes he might resurrect time  
but that just makes him drink more.

And the shot glass hollers.  
Let's dive and die again  
cling to ceilings instead of  
grounds stuffed with the dead.

Batman touches his body  
like a blind man, echolocation.  
Booze and a night suit: an embrace  
without a person to complicate it.

**AMANDA CHIADO** is an MFA graduate of California College of the Arts. Her work is forthcoming or appears in *Witness, Sweet, Forklift, Ohio, Best New Poets, Fence, Cranky, Eleven Eleven* and others. She currently works as the Program Coordinator for the San Benito County Arts Council and she is also an active California Poet in the Schools.

## Changming Yuan

### The Programmer

With a single mouse click  
The programmer vanishes  
Into the plasma waves  
Of the screen, with another key-hit  
The computer flies away  
Into the depth of the cyberspace  
Like the legendary yellow crane

I was the one sitting there  
In the coffin-like attic, trying  
To program the destinies of  
Both man and god

**CHANGMING YUAN**, 4-time Pushcart nominee and author of *Allen Qing Yuan*, holds a PhD in English, teaches independently, and edits *Poetry Pacific* in Vancouver. Yuan's poetry appears in 689 literary publications cross 25 countries, including *Asia Literary Review*, *Best Canadian Poetry*, *BestNewPoemsOnline*, *LiNQ*, *London Magazine* and *Threepenny Review*.

**Richard Prins**  
**Kinnings**

We must have skinned our naked minds.  
Our butcher hangs from a sinewy thread  
slobbered on by three leaks overhead.  
Daily we do the moody grind.  
Weekly we tongue a morbid tune  
burped by lugubrious walrus mares  
lately widowed. Their flanks bared  
to those wiggly eyeballs in the moon's  
pate. No telling who's beneath the cleaver  
as daughter and son glaze each other's  
guts. Now the intestine-faced mother  
enters gripping the shank of a beaver.  
Dentures are growing out of her palms  
as if a toothless man asked for alms.

**RICHARD PRINS** is a New Yorker who sometimes lives in Dar es Salaam. He received his MFA degree from New York University. His work appears or is forthcoming in *Los Angeles Review*, *Painted Bride Quarterly*, *Rattle*, *Redivider* and *Strange Horizons*.

**Eric Westerlind**  
**Ahab**

The creak of timber  
Coupled with the lashed  
Slap of splayed wave,  
The men's billowing white cries

Coupled with the lashed,  
Lashing tongue of ivory—the  
Men's billowing white cries and  
Hands, snagging at rigging, the

Lashing tongue of ivory  
Curls within its black cloaked mouth, his  
Hands, snagging at rigging, the  
Sound of his voice is the storm. It

Curls within his black cloaked mouth, his  
Teeth bite through the rain. The  
Sound of his voice is the storm, his  
Hands are lightning across the wheel, and his

Teeth bite through the rain. The  
Men's cries fill the sails and his  
Hands are lightning across the wheel, and his  
Good leg plants like stone.

Men's cries fill the sails and his  
Hands are the gale itself. The  
Good leg plants like stone.  
His fingers are knuckled clouds and his

Hands are the gale itself. The  
Cupped mouth of the sea inhales,  
His fingers are knuckled clouds and his  
Eyes - their strained outlines.

The cupped mouth of the sea inhales,  
The men's cries rise to the topmast, and he  
Eyes their strained outlines,  
Battling the knotted rigging.

The men's cries rise to the topmast, and he,  
Gnashing his teeth,  
Battling the knotted rigging,  
Bays and howls, and they hear the

Gnashing of his teeth, the  
Slap of splayed wave.  
He bays and howls, and they hear  
The creak of timber.

Lafayette, Colorado. **ERIC WESTERLIND** is opening the garage for the year, thank god, too, because sawdust is everywhere and the lawnmower has gone kaputz. Twenty-seven years, one hundred and forty pounds, several thousand dollars, a bike, a new helmet, a dog and a girlfriend. See: *The Bacon Review*.



**Uche Ogbuji**  
**Vulcan's Invisible Ink Trap**

Sky-spanning Venus peacock tail  
Blur of nodes streaked past our eyes  
Goddess sex leaves vapor trail  
Sky-spanning Venus peacock tail  
Lurid colors, black-chain-mail  
Herald copper-plated lies  
Sky-spanning Venus peacock tail  
Blur of nodes streaked past our eyes.

**UCHE OGBUJI** was born in Calabar, Nigeria. He lived, among other places, in Egypt and England before settling near Boulder, Colorado. Uche is a computer engineer and entrepreneur whose abiding passion is poetry. His poems, fusing native Igbo culture, European Classicism, U.S. Mountain West setting, and Hip-Hop influences, have appeared widely, most recently in *IthacaLit*, *Unsplendid*, *String Poet*, *Mountain Gazette*, *The Raintown Review*, *Victorian Violet*, *YB Poetry*, *Shadow Road Quarterly*, *Angle Poetry Journal*, and *Featherlit*. He is editor at *Kin Poetry Journal* and *The Nervous breakdown*.

## Mark Burgh

### Horror Film

the monster needs only  
the touch of a soft hand  
unravels the grizzled mind  
some sad childhood  
bubbles through the green skin  
the bedroom door  
cracks open  
slicing light onto a child's bed  
a shadow falls  
into coverlets  
spills over into a face  
that years later fangs through flesh  
grim budgets & cardboard sets  
can never degrade  
love that endures  
beyond any grave

**MARK BURGH** lives in Fort Smith, AR.

Robert Buswell

## On Discovering Extinct Species

"They were merely barbarians," Kit sighed.

Kit lied, I knew.

If that were true, they'd have slaughtered  
and eaten their daughters and sons.

Their guns would be treasured and leaders  
measured by the size of their warships.

"They did not worship gods!" I cried.

Kit took me aside, away from the others,  
and said, "I know you discovered this planet,  
but damn it, bullet wounds in buried bones  
alone should make you see.

No mystery exists—they were animals,  
mammals in jeweled underclothing,  
going headlong blind toward extinction.

Make no kind distinction between  
these primates and other lower life forms."

Torn between the heft of Kit's truth and my pride,  
I opened my eyes and we left. For all we know  
eternal snows still cover their ruins.

**ROBERT BUSWELL** is native to the forests of northern Colorado and can be seen there in the late summer and early autumn months. He flourishes in direct sunlight and needs very little water. He typically lives 15-20 years in the wild, with a shorter lifespan in captivity.

## JeFF Stumpo

tentacled head  
seaweed like wings  
what odd geometry

**JEFF STUMPO** creates traditional, visual, and performance poetry. He is the author of several chapbooks, the oldest of which, *El Océano y la Serpiente / The Ocean and the Serpent*, is being released in a new edition this year by Seven Kitchens Press. For more of his work, please visit [www.jeffstumpo.com](http://www.jeffstumpo.com).

Sigrun Susan Lane

## White Land (Hvritanannaland)

*"a land promised to the saints, west across the sea which knows neither death nor decay, only simple joys going perpetually on without care."*

*Navigatio Santi Brendani Abatis, Ninth Century*

### 1. The Monks

Beyond Greenland they found a vast listening post  
where prayers passed up to heaven  
through clear air, souls rose like smoke.

Irish monks fled the dragon ships,  
hunkered down in the Faroes. Uprooted,  
chased to the sea, they scaled Iceland's cliffs.

The Norsemen followed, dragging  
their noisy cows, set out farms and fish nets.  
No place for a monk.

The white-robed monks parade for warmth.  
To lift their spirits they shout prayers  
in God's huge ears, raise lurid banners in a freezing wind.

Alone at last, the only sounds their voices,  
they scream at heaven, sing in praise  
and benediction of God's chill wilderness.

Imagine in mid-stride, in a shrieking *ave*,  
a priest turns to see flashing oars,  
striped wool sails, red and blue

against a tossing sea, a curved dragon  
taunting him from the bow,  
like the devil himself.

## 2. The Vikings

It was not for gold they went,  
but for the taste of grapes,  
the smell of fresh cut wood.

In Vinland they found wild wheat,  
grapevines, fields of fine tall grass.  
All left behind.

*By now the skraelings  
have taken the birch palisades  
the settlement stones.*

*So many of them---  
with their catapults,  
thongs of hide and flint.*

*Wave after wave of them.  
They stung like hornets  
and were gone.*

Thorfinn Karlsefni lashes the ship's side-rudder,  
watches the sails fill with an off-shore wind.  
Soon Greenland will loom with its lichen and birds.

The women unroll pallets on the deck,  
murmur as they settle to rest,  
watch the sky for Arctic puffin.

They have heard of land nearby  
where men in white robes carry poles  
with bright cloth, cry out to an empty sky.

But their ship turns homeward in the waves  
leaving the Irish to mutter and sing,  
to their devotions under an alien glacier,  
to their bleak paradise.

**SIGRUN SUSAN LANE** is a Seattle poet of Icelandic descent. Her poems have appeared in national and regional publications, most notably *Albatross*, *Crab Creek Review*, *Malahat Review*, *Mom Egg*, *Rain City Review*, *Seattle Review*, *Sing Heavenly Muse*, *Spindrift*, *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, *Melusene*, *Pontoon*, *Ekphrasis*, *Still Crazy* and others. She received awards for poetry from the Seattle and King County Arts Commissions.







## On the cover:

### "HAMLET, PRINCE OF URANUS"

Laura Garrison

**LAURA GARRISON** is an amateur  
cryptozoologist and reluctant academic  
who dreams of becoming a wrecking-ball  
operator. She lives in Roanoke, Virginia,  
with her husband.

