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Literature of an Invasive Species.

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Editor’s Note:

What a thrilling experience this issue has been: going through our reading period, attending conferences and literary festivals to promote KR across the country, and learning the ropes of going into print! The staff and I have grown so much just watching this magazine spread branches all over the midwest, deepen roots in the south, and have so many quality pieces to show for all of our hard work.

I would like to point to Jonathan Highfield’s poem “Hippobear,” a shining example of a post-natural or “new nature” poem, which is also a hilarious look at genetic modification that simultaneously embraces a poetics of local narrative reminiscent of late Wordsworth, and also to R.W. Haynes, who proves that sonnets still can hold their own, nay, belong in modern collections. We have place-protest fiction by Andy Myers, and poems by Salma Ruth Bratt & award-winning author Karla Lynn Merrifield. Also re-joining us is Sue Blaustein, with her electric-amp’d poems, and many other talented voices, emerging and well-known.

But this isn’t just a creative writing publication, no, Kudzu Review defines itself with every issue into a hybrid journal of environmental thought. We have creative-nonfiction and post-natural fiction by W.C. Bamberger, and our very first Nonfiction article, on Masuji Ibuse’s Black Rain, is by University of Montevallo’s own graduate student Jamie King, which reveals the startling (yet disturbingly comforting) possibility that humans, invasive as they may be, may be only able to destroy human life.

Endless thanks, as always, for the KR team’s tireless efforts. Our gratitude goes out to Iris Kish of Montevallo’s local print shop, The Type Shop, for your knowledge and patience with us as we made the transition into print. Thanks to Duotrope, Upenn CFP, and all the other independent places where writers gather. Special thanks to everyone who donated to Kudzu Review by means of t-shirt, paperback purchase, Kindle Edition, or plain generosity—you’re patronage is so important. Most of all thank YOU the reader and every single submitter, selected or not, for making this journal greater than the sum of its parts.

As always:
may the Kudzu grow!

Cheers,

M.P. Jones
Editor-in-Chief
Joe Mills

WHAT THEY SAY

She says the dead must be cut away
if anything is to bloom
in the coming spring.
It’s something doctors know
as well. The dead skin.
The crushed limb.
The still fetus.
These must go.

It’s straight-forward.
The living must
cut away the dead
if they are to go on
living. It’s easy
for gardeners
and doctors
and neighbors
and even friends,
even old friends,
to say.
She grows poems in her backyard. Some she tends, pruning dead phrases, trellising lines, dividing and moving stanzas, and some she lets grow wild, simply scattering images and words on the ground and letting what happens happen. Some seasons the blooms and colors attract the admiration of everyone in the neighborhood, and they say she should sell some at the farmer’s market or consider going into business. Some seasons the yard lies dormant, seemingly not a garden at all, but a vacant lot, a blank page, and yet, underneath the surface, word attaches to word, phrase finds phrase, and eventually something pushes into sight to change her small square of the world.
Karla Linn Merrifield

EVERGLADES BAPTISM

In one version, the clear woman falls into the wellspring that is the Florida aquifer. The cold, the dark do comfort her. She swims in the safety of sweet water in limestone vaults beneath the skin of the Everglades. She bubbles up where the palm warblers buzz applause.

In another iteration it is the clear poet who is also a woman who falls into a sinkhole on the sawgrass prairie – such cool salvific water of water moccasins in the driest of dry winter seasons. Black vultures swoop their approval as she emerges from the pool gasping for awe, and her dream goes on.

In yet a third variation, the poet who is clear like the barred owl who laughs, falls into a borrow pit where enough bedrock was excavated for road fill to engineer a lake. Though alligators be present, three crows, one by one, bathe in the shallows. Warm water at water’s edge. They caw raucously, and she rises, heads toward them for shore.

No one, nothing drowns in this river of grass story, no matter how you tell it: The water is always holy.

for Chris Crittenden
Patty Somlo

IMAGINE THAT

Every morning they came to the beach and waited. Some sat in small short-legged chairs, whose plastic stripes left lines on their legs. Others stepped into the water and waded, until the waves splashed up against their calves. They clutched fishing poles and even daydreamed, as they used to when everything was fine.

Boats motored out from the marina. Men looked past one another, standing and smoking on the bleached dock. Some shook their heads, while others frowned.

That’s how it was in the early part of the day.

By afternoon, the boats were back. Chairs had been folded on the beach and carried to waiting cars and some to cottages. The suits of those who’d carried their poles into the water and pretended that nothing had changed were no longer damp.

As the men returned to the dock, they looked past one another and scowled. This can’t be, they muttered. It’s impossible, another said, and the next man offered a hopeful response. Maybe better tomorrow. Manny, who’d always had a tendency to exaggerate, said, “Yeah, but what if they don’t come back?”

You see, something unimaginable had occurred, in the lukewarm water that softened the shoreline alongside this sleepy place. The fish had all gone away.

A way of life, Andy Coughlin said and spat.

Two months had passed, and Andy who’d been fat since childhood was getting thin. He had enough money to buy groceries, but his appetite, like the fish, had vanished. Here was a man who could put away an entire bucket of boiled shrimp, with a cold pitcher of beer and a loaf of just-baked white bread slathered with melted butter, and then scarf down dessert, and he didn’t have the least craving for food.

“It’s like our whole life has vanished,” Andy said. “Right before our eyes.”

Andy was the first to leave the dock that morning. He set his fishing pole on the back porch. Andy didn’t know what else to do, so he sat down.

His ex-wife Laurie was living in Houston with her husband Sam and Andy and Laurie’s son, Adam. Andy had done this same thing the day Laurie moved out. He’d plopped down onto the top step and sat for a good couple of hours. Then, as now, Andy didn’t know what to do with himself and he figured he’d sit and wait it out. At some point, a new life was sure to come around.

All around town, men and women sat, as if staying in one place might bring the fish back. The anger that first surfaced had been replaced by a silence that weighed down the wind.

Vera Wilton had never run out of something to say. That’s what she thought, sitting across the breakfast table from her husband Bud, the morning of the fourth month the fish had been gone. Vera and Bud had been married for thirty-seven years. When Bud had thrown back one too many shots of Jack Daniels, he railed at Vera, “Can’t you shut up? Give a man some peace.”

Bud would have loved to hear Vera’s voice now. He hadn’t understood that Vera’s words often soothed him. The silence left him fighting against his own desperate thoughts.
Bud started to wonder: *Do I really want to go on?* In the past, when there’d been trouble – hurricanes that pried the roof off or the kids getting into trouble – Vera had assured him that they would find a way out.

Even without the silence, Bud knew this latest disaster was different. Something had occurred in the ocean, and nothing Vera said would make life return to normal. Bud had to admit that Vera knew this. That’s why she’d finally shut up.

Slowly, the scientists trickled in. The first came from the state university. Fishermen stood on the dock and watched Dr. Howard Fisher and his graduate students. The air felt humid enough to start shedding itself in drops. The students had wisely worn shorts.

No one – including Dr. Fisher – bothered to talk to the fishermen. Instead, the professor rolled one cotton khaki pant leg up and then the other and proceeded to wade into the water with the graduate students following. It was hard to see from the dock but Manny, standing there, reported, “Looks like they’re collecting water in little glass bottles.”

The following day, a team arrived from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

“No, that there’s a boat,” Manny said, when he spotted the sleek white yacht in the water, with NOAA painted in large blue letters across the side.

A rumor started – it may have been on the dock – and traveled to the Sands Diner where Mary Carlson was serving the counter and passing on the rumor to men filling the stools and sipping coffee and free refills.

“I hear the president’s coming down to take a look for himself.”

The rumor flew from the diner into the quiet little bungalows and board and batten-sided cottages. Before long, the rumor ended up on T.V. Vera was watching when a picture of the beach and the NOAA boat came up and she heard, “The president will travel to the coast tomorrow to assess the situation on the ground for himself.”

Even Vera went down to the beach that next morning, though the area had been roped off. There were so many police and guys in gray suits, white shirts and ties – and in that terrible heat and humidity – Vera wondered if they’d even see the president. Vera was secretly happy about the president’s visit, though she hadn’t voted for him. Vera didn’t say more than a couple of words to Bud.

“I sure hope he helps us,” she whispered as they left the house, though she couldn’t figure out how anyone other than God might be able to bring the fish back to that water.

Regardless, Bud was relieved that Vera had spoken.

The fishermen, Vera and Bud, and even Mary from the diner -- they’d closed until one o’clock so everyone could get a chance to see the president -- stood arms pressed to other sticky arms in the small roped-off area allotted to the locals. Not a single one of them had thought to bring binoculars. Instead, they squinted in the overly bright sunlight reflected off the water. And they sweat. Perspiration slid down their arms and mingled with that pooling on the skin of their neighbors.

The only way they knew where the president had gone was by looking out to where the mob of gray-suited men and cameras and reporters had headed. Manny took on the job of giving the play-by-play, even though his eyesight wasn’t the best, and he refused to wear glasses.

“The president is heading north along the shore,” Manny announced and all heads swiveled to the left. “He’s got a white shirt on and the sleeves are rolled up.”
People on the dock pictured the tall slender man they’d seen on television and the shirt sleeves folded over, a few inches below the elbow. They felt reassured by that casualness, with the sleeves suggesting to them that the president was not only here but clearly on their side.

“Oh my God,” Manny exhaled.
The crowd inhaled loudly in response.
“He’s goin’ in,” Manny shouted. “The president’s goin’ in the water.”
And sure enough, the crowd, on seeing the gray-haired mob move east, pictured the President of the United States in a pair of pressed, tailored, charcoal-gray pants stepping into the lukewarm water they’d spent their lives standing, swimming and fishing in, as if – and dared they even imagine it? – he was one of them.

Now there followed a rousing round of applause.
Manny couldn’t see a darned thing, because the president had been swallowed up by the gray throng. He knew, though, that his friends and neighbors were counting on him.
That’s when Manny began to make things up.
“The president has him some glass jars,” Manny began.
Vera couldn’t help but speak up.
“Just imagine that,” she said.
A contented murmur circulated among the women out there on the dock and several recalled how they’d once thought the president would make a fine husband and father.
“He’s got hisself some water in them jars and lifted ‘em up,” Manny said, and the women hummed.
“The president’s gonna take that there water – our water – back to Washington,” Manny announced, his voice raised a few decibels too high.
“Back to the White House,” he added, as if everyone didn’t already know how carefully the president was going to take care of their water.
The gray mob moved toward shore, and Manny gave the crowd a last bit of news.
“The president is goin’ back to the White House now,” he said, a little sad about giving up his new role. “He’s goin’ back on Air Force One.”

The following night, husbands and wives, kids, grandparents and widows watched the president as he stood on their beach telling the whole world he wouldn’t forget them. A few of the women, including Vera and Mary Carlson, cried. They’d seen this kind of thing a million times on T.V., but the victims were always strangers. Now, they were the poor people a president was promising to remember.

The next day, everyone was back in their usual spots. The more hopeful waded into the water with their poles, while the cautious lingered on the dock. The president had taken a sample of their lives with him to Washington. Now, even the doubters expected something back.

Three camera crews arrived. One cute, sweet anchor – the blond – showed up. Vera had to admit – and she said it out loud – that the anchor looked prettier on T.V. than in person. Newspaper reporters asked questions. But as Manny would relate later in his play-by-play, that was all.

Two weeks went by. Effortlessly, the weeks rolled like a series of long, slow waves into a month. The group in the water dwindled. So did the numbers on the dock. One by one, people packed up and moved away from the coast.
By the end of that year, Manny and a small group of retired folks were the only ones left. Neither the residents nor the fish ever returned. If you walk over to the dock early in the morning, you will see a man standing there, talking to the wind. He’s telling the invisible crowd that he just saw Air Force One land, on a wide runway cleared of other planes, and that the President of the United States will arrive on the beach at any moment.

The man turns his back on the water, emptied of fish, boats, fishermen, scientists and reporters. He wipes the sweat off his forehead, smooths down his hair and gets himself ready to face another long and exhaustingly hot and humid, lonely day.
Salma Ruth Bratt

LARACHE AND LEXIS

In Northern Morocco, two cities face one another, each nesting high above the valley that separates them. One city, Larache, is a vibrant busy city of Spanish architecture, hexagonal plazas. It has a bookstore of Arabic, English, and French treasures, the grave of Jean Genet, and old fortresses that crumble eternally toward the sea. If you stand on one of Larache’s highest points, at the end of one of those mazes of sidewalks and walls that enclose hundreds of hidden homes, you will look toward Lexis, and you will see the home of Romans, Carthaginians, and Phoenicians, all who added to the scene at Lexis, who built monuments, plazas, and homes there, many centuries ago. If you go to Lexis, you will see how these ancient people developed the land and harnessed the sea. They built stadiums and stages, multi-layered homes of many rooms. Stand on these cliffs, and you can feel the same breeze they felt. Look: the trees here descend from the same trees they knew. Lexis is designed for prayer, performance, and protection. From a high flat plain of green rises a monument – an altar. An amphitheater rises from a natural grove. Military quarters sit high on the mountain and close to the wealthy estates. Look down from its heights, and see a wonder of hydraulic engineering from the Roman days: a river has been created in a path of semi-circles and figure eights. Water flows in open tight curves across the land. From our vantage point it is easy to see how the river was diverted into perfectly even, precise, round shapes. The rivers enclose circular plots of land so that the distance between the water and the crops is always close. Arched bridges keep the farms separate but connected. When we ask our guide, he looks puzzled. He insists this river is simply following its natural path. We don’t argue, though we know he is wrong. Impossible, we know, that the curves would form naturally into regular curves, forming perfectly equitable plots of land. Do you see? The most amazing human wonders are not easily recognized – like the forgiveness of one beloved to another, or the sudden offering of friendship.

Larache and Lexis, 2011
FIRST IMPRESSIONS

One February in Morocco, it rained for many days: a steady, unrelenting downpour. In the history of keeping track, such rain had never been recorded in Morocco. We canceled our appointments from Tangier to Taroudant, as the roads became feral rivers, rushing to sea, carrying all they could tear away and all they could hold. Bridges went to sea, and walls and windows, tables, cushions, even refrigerators and cars. The Atlantic Ocean grew to a tall, muddy, churning mountain. We watched it, worried it might rush back toward us or assail us with its wreckage, but it never did, choosing instead to settle within itself. When the rains stopped, there were roads to repair and homes to rebuild. Within months, seeds that had lain dormant under desert sands for decades had sprouted, and the deserts bloomed in green, purple, yellow, and white. The parks became so lush and thick with vegetation that it became impossible to find the pathways.

Agadir, Morocco, 2010
Mark Jackley

GATHERING MYSELF

I am trying to gather myself.  
My self has other ideas.  
I track it down in a diner  
somewhere in Nebraska,  
sipping trucker coffee,  
unmarried and unemployed,  
blissfully watching strangers  
gathering themselves,  
whether they know it or not.  
Moments before, I found  
my self on a bench outside  
the Safeway in Seward, Alaska,  
where with welfare mothers  
and fishermen I smoked,  
clipped my words and gazed  
like a panting salmon  
on the steaming shore.  
Before, my self was watching,  
from a respectful distance,  
my daughter eulogize  
at her father's funeral.  
I dragged my self away  
to ponder how the Buddha  
gathered himself. I know:  
he sat until he melted  
into the Indian jungles.  
Speaking of jungles, my self  
is now in my ex's kitchen,  
where after grilling me  
in her Puerto Ricanese  
for being an hour late,  
she grills a steak and serves it  
with the knife plunged in  
upright. This gathering  
is not like herding cats  
but wrestling giant squids.  
Some creatures are at ease  
with multiplicity.  
Ask Cousteau, they never  
go down without a fight.
HIPPOBEAR: a dream poem
for Dan

Born in a genetics lab
at the University of Minnesota
the hippobear glides through Minnehaha creek
between the lakes Nokomis and Minnetonka.
Lonely, pearly gray and always hungry
it stalks a woman feeding ducks at the creek’s edge.
One moment a piece of bread drifts
through the air toward squabbling mallards, then
a frenzy of feathers, deep gurgling
and the bank is empty,
as if the woman never existed, as if she
were dreamed by the passersby
who hurry home, shut their doors to keep
the autumn wind and musky odor out.
Nocturnal, it pads through prairie-style neighborhoods
watching for any opportunity to feed.
A man wakes to a sound
as a rooster crows to the near-dawn.
Was it the hippobear
munching on crawfish shells
put out on the porch
because their smell, his daughter said,
was keeping her awake? Or was it
the snore of his wife, wrestling with
a horror as big as any hippobear
in her unquiet sleep?
He pulls the wool blanket up higher,
cowers in his own bed as the hippobear flits up streams
seemingly too small for its bulk
drifts through dreams
and waters fouled by fallen leaves.
Winter approaches,
soon ice will cover the lakes
snow blanket the woods where the hippobear lurks
and alone in his lab a sleepless scientist shivers, for he knows
that being part Ursus maritimus
the great beast will not mind the cold
will break the ice with its ivory tusks
lie in wait for unwary ice fishermen,
desolate dreamers at the water’s edge of sleep,
to come within reach of its terrible claws.
Aaron Poller

PUERARIA LOBATA

Known as Kudzu, how could you, tiny vine, devour half of Georgia,
a large part of the Carolinas, and a substantial portion of Virginia
to boot. Some Buddhists brought this stuff to Philly in 1876.
It's been unstoppable ever since. The Japanese may have tanked the war,
but this shade of global revenge recovers ground lost. In April
the leaf fragrant, in winter it dies back. In summer vines attack a small yard,
a shopping mall, abandoned cars, highway shoulders, phone poles, stars.
Can you believe this jive? The heartbreak of Kudzu, invasive plant from far off Asia.
Cultivate some, you who are without fear. Ah, the sound of one leaf clapping everywhere.
Sue Blaustein

“AT THE SPEED OF A REBORN MAN”

“A musician, if he’s a messenger, is like a child who hasn’t been handled too many times by man, hasn’t had too many fingerprints across his brain.” Jimi Hendrix

I love Wisconsin Paperboard for the way it thrums with shreds, set beside a slow stretch of river. When empty trailers unhook, I hear the rhythmic beep from their cabs – released and backing up across the yard.

Geese mutter and dip below the concrete outfall, sheltered from the malevolent public eye. They recapture their selves here – they’re un-comical

and calmly attuned – like an imaginative child with a school hall pass, pausing alone in a stairwell.

******

Mallards paddle in constant strokes, grunting with orange beaks. Their vivid purplish heads go streaming by,

while motorcycles green as aphid’s wings roar the North Avenue bridge, to squad cars idling in front of Open Pantry.

There the countertops blare cartoon red, as mutable retail waters
cycle through condensers
and metal fins.

There are gurgles
and drips – sounds of creation –
(Jimi Hendrix first hearing
Little Wing)
then infant ice cubes thunder
into the bin.

Title from “Message of Love”, by Jimi Hendrix
WHEN

I met you on the day
of a mid-April storm, when wet
wretched flakes pelted
everything. Rivers of slush
rose to meet the curb
outside the dojo.
Inside, I saw you
for the first time –

your name
in black letters,
across the back of your white gi top.

That was a chance Saturday,
and there were one or two others.
Since I worked nights
I rarely crossed your path.
You came to teach
the morning class
when your local was on strike.
More than once
you looked directly at me.

I memorized
your worn quilted jacket,
learned to recognize
your swamp green car.

The following year
I transferred to the day shift
in February.
We were lovers before
it warmed to even fifty.
In early March on our first
weekend away,
Rock River Leisure Estates
was deserted.

We slid deep orange yams
from a can
of heavy syrup
to simmer into the first of
years of meals.
The grass was emerald from thaws,
   wet under a steady,
   clicking sleet
that beaded white propane
   tanks squatted at the ends
   of empty trailers.

I heard
a chorus of spray from cars
   crossing
the I-90 bridge
as huge carp nosed silently
   through Lake Koshkonong.

Since then
when boats
are pulled from the water,
   when snow dampens
redwood campground signs;
   when ornaments
are marked down, or
cottage pumps are drained,
   my heart
catches
that off-season hum.
R. W. Haynes

TO CASSANDRA

The sound of one’s own voice in prophecy
Of deeds that come to shake the very earth
 Strikes through the chronologic tyranny
One inherits helplessly at birth,
And, in giving power, takes all the power
From the action of deliberate choice,
Although as actors we face the final hour,
Both doomed and satisfied by that voice.
Why should we then repeat or overstate
The implications of this situation,
And let its empty loudness intimidate
Our abstract thought with dissonant negation?
In your sane madness you cry what’s true
But no one hears your desperate voice but you.
EAST OF EL PASO

Last night I met a perished knight at arms
Wandering feebly down the murmuring stream,
And we spoke awhile of debilitating charms
That lurk malignantly in hope and dream.
Death had relieved him of all but regret,
He smiled, his eyes unseen in the ghostly shade,
But hoarsely whispered then that to forget
He’d instantly take agony in trade,
And he reached forth to me his bony hand,
And I pronounced forthwith the living curse,
And he was gone with that crushing command
That the dead must obey and none can reverse.
And the waterfall echoes its perpetual sighs
And I stand watch here silent at moon-rise.
Peter Branson

THE WILDERNESS

Pass apple trees in fallen state. Where Jack kept guard, find pollard scars; exotica transported, nursed, improved, now specimen, top heavy, overblown; script run amok, ink-blots of punctuation marks beyond head height, gargoyle-tormented bark. Trace steps by tumbled barrow, bleach-dry bones of mill, neglected coppice, feral, overwhelmed.

Coupes bolted, underwood for charcoal, fence parts, furniture, Necessity hand-jived via foot and dancing pole, decays at stool. We'll rouse Jack Green to rhyme, re-jig, reform, rejuvenate for nightingale, dormouse and butterfly, sustain with grace and time.
Seth Trent

NEW TREES

Driving home at night
a little blitz
I see new trees planted next
to old ones and think;
They'll never make it.
Who am I to think that?

I have no right.

I like being a little blitz
I say what I'm feeling.
But feel every word I say is stupid.
I want to stop talking
to have a deeper quieter
voice.
The world won't let me and
I am too much of a coward to ask for
more.

I am like these new trees
planted next to old ones.
THE CHAMPION MAPLE OF WELLS AVENUE

The distant thundering had shook the loose panes of glass through the night and the lavender skies mingled with dark clouds anxious with precipitation. There was no sunrise, merely a shift of hues in the sky, from night into a white skied morning with rolling pockets of rain clouds arriving from the west. In the dusty attic shrieks of wind streamed through the drafty windows. The old frame clapboard house felt the fear in its piney bones. Around noon the sky fell through forming rivers of runoff to roll down the sloping streets and the wheelbarrows in the gardens overflowing with the bubbling nectar of life. It was a nearly useless day, a day of waiting and listening as the thudding hum of rain drops fell onto the tin roof like dried peas. The rain barrel filled up with ease and was soon overflowing from the top; my toes sunk deep into the silty mud as I walked into the downpour to open the spigot and unleash the water to ease its condition. As the day rolled on into afternoon, the rotating howl of tornado sirens began blasting from the cemetery, their harsh pitch belting down the alleyways and through opened screen doors. Soon the televisions would be on, their screens glowing and casting an eerie blue light amid the early darkness. Manic bursts of wind bolt down the empty streets and the tops of trees bend. The old trees stand in bold defiance to these forces, their roots anchoring them as deep as they grow tall, reaching down to latch onto the marrow of earth.

The day was nearly a greying preamble to the blanketing darkness of night. The rain continued on, washing layers of silt and hummusy earth from the fresh spring soils, stripping young green shoots of their leaves. An old maple, its arms stretch heavenward, forms a faint silhouette against the blasting of wind and rain. Sometime before midnight the street is awoken by a tumultuous pop and a bluish flash of electric light. The kinetic energy of a century of thunderstorms is suddenly released onto the cooled saturated pavement. All eyes rush to the front windows of their prospective houses, their heads swimming with images of panic. There in a neighbor's driveway lies the bulking arm of the ancient maple, having drug a tangle of power lines with it to lie on the limestone gravel in the rain. Several people emerge to watch and ponder, and soon emergency vehicles and some city workers have arrived to do their work. They work into the night, clearing the mangled wires and hauling debris away; the repetitive dull yellowing flash of their trucks casting a stark image in darkened living rooms. Morning comes, with the coppering sun washing out the grey skies into deep shades of blue that grow richer as they crown the horizon. Miniature ravines have formed along the driveways, dry now and clotted with leaves and twigs from last night’s downpour. The week-day begins, and cars begin to jet down Wells Avenue like any other working day, some slowing to survey the damaged Maple. In the yard next door, the massive limb boldly lies among the grass. New shoots of vibrant green leaves bud out from the twigs, the grounds nutrients still rushing through its woody veins. As the day shoves on, city workers return to shred the mighty arm into thousands of pulpy shards, and the buzz of the machines shrieks as it is fed. I see several neighbors standing in front of my house, and so I venture out the front door, hoping to learn of the tree's fate.
"Well the tree's gonna have to come down," She explains, holding a photocopy of an older image and motioning with her hand, "It's completely rotten on the inside. I tried for years to repair it, but these things happen." A man is standing next to her; he adjusts his glasses and wipes his brow. He explains that he grew up on the street and had supplied the old picture. The image is black and white, around the time of World War Two or before, and for a second the whine of the buzzsaw is drowned out, and my mind shifts back seventy years. Two young girls, dressed in Sunday clothes stand on the very sidewalk of which we reside. The picture is taken from my front porch and in the corner is the tree, younger perhaps but still as mighty as today. On the other side of the photograph is a wooded area where the cemetery has now spread, a thick tangle of brush. Further back, a now abandoned farmhouse looks vibrant, and people can be seen on the front porch. The neighborhood of Five Points is new and still full of empty lots, the edge of town. At one time, Wells Avenue was the main road up to Monte Sano mountain, the numerous grocery stores selling provisions for the visitors on weekend getaways to the mountain of health. All the while, the champion Maple stood watch, observing the world from its majestic vantage point.

A week passes, and thunderstorms are again predicted for the weekend, and I wonder how long the tree has. From my living room couch the tree puts on a daily show as it gestures with the breeze and the leaves flitter and curl. In the fall, it's hand shaped leaves are dyed rich hues of red and yellow like some alchemical process. It's a sense of beauty the human race has yet to decipher. On Friday night another storm passes through, and the tree creaks and moans and sheds more twigs and leaves. And again Saturday arrives with a fresh wash of blue skies. Around ten o'clock the familiar droning note of a city truck in reverse is heard, and soon the street is filled with cherry pickers and helmeted employees armed with oversized chainsaws. They ascend high into the tree traversing its limbs and gauging their work. Sections of the tree begin to come down, crashing onto the pavement in dead weight. The dismantling takes all day, and as night falls I think of the vision trees have and of the human frivolity they are silent witness to. In the morning, the tree is gone; the massive trunk is sectioned off and trucked out. All that remains is an empty sky and a lonely breeze searching for another heaven-reaching treetop to caress for eternity.
Chris Jackson

JANUARY CROCUSES

Love, we inhabit strange weather. These lacked a normal season to coax them towards spring, and sent their shoots into the coal-tweaked temperature, excused themselves too soon from their wintering.

Their heads go into unpredictability, peeping at the air, like conspicuous spies. They were duped by what we have done to indemnify ourselves against the dark, our costly strategies.

I hate to see them fooled in their confessed desire, this crocus-y need to be and grow, and thrive. Each deserves better, but the frost will meet them here. Like us, love, they know not how to live, but how to strive.
CIRCLE AROUND THE MOON

It was undeniable; the frost in the air was beautiful. It hung in tufts like silver pollen above the deep black of the bay. It gathered into a halo around the hazed moon, glowed, a pocket borealis in the snug long channel between the dark pickets of the evergreens. Lincoln knew something about the numbers of heat, its sluggish gain and its terrible quick loss, knew why frost was so rare this time of year even in the chill northern air of Michigan, knew it took more shed BTUs, more heat lifted off into clear space or lost on a quick, lickerish wind to change 32 degree water into 32 degree ice than it did to drop the vapor in the air from a comfortable temperature to that dangerous 32 ledge. The same was true for passage the other way. Science and the finger poking into the top of the water barrel both proved just how thick was the wall of resistance at the change-of-state line, how stubbornly nature herself resisted any drastic change of affairs, how violently heat had to pound against that wall to move one way or the other.

The peninsula’s cherry growers, the few who would listen to him at all, had impatiently humored him as he tried to explain it, his hands shaking to suggest water molecules shivering on the threshold of change. They hadn’t believe him, not really; not even when Lincoln had gone to his truck, opened his glove box, and showed them the table in his refrigeration manual—a relic from the days when he had hoped to find regular work on the peninsula. But he knew these same growers had decided to take some abstract comfort from the idea, anyway. What interested them most was the fact that ice forms in blades and needles, gradually accumulating to a mesh of cold coating on the blossoms. It’s good to know your enemy, one of them had told him.

Now here it was, breaching that wall of resistance—frost, twisting in the moonlight like cotton candy crackling around a spindle, settling on the beaches for the third time this season since the trees had begun to stir and swell. High in the air it was a faint tiara, and on the ground it was like the grit beneath a diamond cutter’s stool. A change-of-state was intent on coming in, damn the difficulty.

“Frosting pisser,” Lincoln said, and he went to the saw shed to get the Drunken Dutch Maid.

Lincoln took down a witch-black kettle and set it on the dirt floor next to the Maid and the pots. From out of the wood box he lifted crumbly slabs of pitch pine stump and dropped them into the pot. The punky wood was as red as cinnamon from the sap that had settled down into the stump after a fire had stripped the pine’s needles. When the pot was half full, Lincoln took the yellow vinyl-coated anchor from his workbench and began to pound. When he stopped the pot was packed with splinters and a salmony paste midway between wood and a primeval oil. It would burn with a hunkered-down, earth’s core heat. He scooped handfuls of the sinus-burning pulp into the ancient smudge pots, lit them, and snapped their lids shut. He kicked up the kickstand and rolled the Maid out the open door. Jumping on, he began to pump, hard.
His Uncle Earl’s crony Otis Asio had created the Maid from a salvaged German bicycle-built-for-two (Indian on the faux tank, horn button in his war bonnet), a pair of Army surplus Lyster bags, four brass sprinkler heads from the back nine of a once-and-never-again golf course that was now a vineyard, and what Otis had called “old Volkswagen radiator hose.” Old Volkswagens had never had radiators, but it was never a good idea to question Otis. The problem was that he was honest: if Lincoln asked, he’d answer, and the phrase “accessory after the fact” would haunt Lincoln’s conscience for weeks. Otis had named his smudging machine the Drunken Dutch Maid because its silhouette was nearly identical to that of the figure on the old cleanser cans—“Only yours has its skirt ripped off,” Otis explained, “so you can see how skinny Michigan farm girls really are”—and because it would list wildly side to side as the rider pedaled.

Above the creak of the swaying pots Lincoln heard a small plane, a nasal song in the key of futility, and knew the dairy queens were flying tonight, looking to catch refrigerant and bottle smugglers on the bay running with lights to cut the cold haze. The Department of Environmental Quality pilots never succeeded in arresting anyone, their instruments unable to read the peninsula’s whispery energy register. It had occurred to Lincoln and everyone else north of Lansing that their snarly ancient Beechcraft Bonanza—split-tail fiberglass peace sign in the sky—was doing more to dilate the ozone cervix than all the smugglers’ boats chuffing along the shorelines, and all the free-range oxides—\textit{mon; di;}—and carbons—\textit{chlorofluoro}—snaking up from the old beaters running its washboard veins combined. A cadre of refugee Cuban mechanics had come north in the late 1970s and the life expectancy of any old Detroit iron had expanded exponentially.

Lincoln reached the end of one of the long orchard lines, and doubled back between the next two rows of trees. The plane buzzed louder, now almost overhead. In Naval Tactical School, back in the Texas desert, Lincoln had learned that in their day the Viet Cong had lit hundreds of smudge pots in ragged circles around their sites. It turned out that the little spittoon-shaped oil burners baffled laser-guided ordnance. Lincoln smiled at the thought of frost and lasers having a common natural enemy. The Beechcraft’s noise soon faded away.

The moonlight, the frost and the smoke reduced the landscape to deep black pockets and shimmering white buds, scenery out of an old \textit{film noir}, over the hours that Lincoln pedaled, relit the pots, and pedaled again. The black smoke from the three-hole flues of the swinging smudge pots, Model A’s of the censer lineage, rose up thick through the trees and slipped over the young cherry blossoms—delicate and tight as artichoke buttons—and threaded its way up through the circles of condensation and moonlight over the black mirror of the long bay.

The work was repetitive, the orchard course a closed circuit, and Lincoln’s mind wandered. The passing plane made him think of his days in the landlocked Navy. Along with changes of state, the refrigeration school had taught its students the dangers of freezing off a finger during a refrigerant leak, and of grabbing a 220 hot-wire. The newly ecologically aware Navy had also offered handouts about carcinogens in the CFC that made up the refrigerants; footnotes to these articles had discussed the byproducts of the opposite element—fire. Most of his classmates had exhibited a sudden affection for airplane construction, but Lincoln had actually read those handouts. There he had learned that smoke from burning pine contains previously undiscovered alkaloids, powerful mutagens that can affect human health and aquatic and forest ecosystems.
Plants often use alkaloids for protection, the footnotes droned on, because they can poison other plants and animals, including humans.

What came back to Lincoln now, pedaling in the frost-banged dark, was the odd fact that fierce, blazing fires produce fewer of these poisonous alkaloids than do smoldering, controlled burns. So, if one of his pots spilled and the whole damn orchard burned to ash it would in the end be healthier for Lincoln and his grandmother than was his straining attempt to save it. There’s probably a lesson in that, Lincoln thought, but, with the muscles in his thighs beginning to tremble with exhaustion, he kept pedaling. This was not the time for any sudden change of state.

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By the time Lincoln ran out of fuel—after the pitch pine had run out he had switched to used sump oil from the recycling tank at the BP; outlay bupkiss—the backs of Lincoln’s thighs were cramped and cold. After he stowed the Maid, Lincoln stood among the trees just uphill from his saw shed, drinking cold coffee and watching the last of the thick smudge coiling toward the circle around the moon. He wondered if he were watching his grandmother’s life float away as well. He was near the crest of the long slope that overlooked the orchard groves. Straddling the hump where the ridge broke before sloping down to the bay shore, stood his grandmother’s tall wood-sided house. Lincoln know she and Robertson, her husband, almost certainly had been standing in the door to the second-story deck, watching him ride up and down the rows like a clumsy needle trying to sew a soot cover over the trees. Grandmother Lacies was probably still standing there, one hand gripping the fore- and middle fingers of the other, the way Lincoln had seen her do so many times. Often enough he had prompted that twisting grip. On nights like this she didn’t sleep, and more than once he had seen her leaning into some window, squeezing with all her might to keep her hands still, cursing a frost in an even, dark mumble. Robertson always stood next to her, near-silent, one hand touching her, watching what she watched.

Lincoln skirted the scraggly windbreak pines and yews, moved through the moonlight past his cabin, and down toward the rubble of the breakwater where he could listen for CFC smugglers and avoid looking toward the orchard. If the small soot excitation hadn’t warmed the filament thin channels inside, the petals would begin to droop, curl and brown when the temperature rose in an hour or two.

At the breakwater, Lincoln tucked his hands into his coat pockets, shrugged to adjust the scrape of Velcro against his wrists. Out across the bay the light from the setting moon blurred and flattened the scallops of the waves. The running lights of the few fishermen’s boats coming in or just setting out were smeared in reflection, the reds shifted to an unappealing lipstick shade, the whites twisted, negatives of spilled ink. The green seemed to sink without a trace. March had come and gone like the creatures the proverb assigned to its head and tail, but the lamb had been too comforting, and the orchard people had grown a little drowsy. Then, in compensation of some punishing kind, the trees had turned hyperactive—much too early; and now the frost had come again. As Lincoln stood watching the belt of the Milky Way, the frost was dropping onto the blossoms all up and down the peninsula like salt on a hundred thousand sparrow’s tails. And Grandmother Lacies had said this might be their last year if the crop got stripped off.
North of where Lincoln stood, fifteen more miles of the peninsula stretched into Grand Traverse Bay. On the map, it was a few unraveled threads of rich farmland and beautiful sand caught between the little finger and the rest of the left-hand mitten of Michigan. The winds that surrounded and soothed it from early spring through late fall made for a steady growing season, and rich ripeness in anything that was grown there. Except for the farmers themselves, of course. The old farmers and orchard people were dropping one by one, not dying but selling out and dropping down state.

Some of them flew directly against the usual current of migration, moving below the Dow Chemical line at Midland and recolonizing the crumbling factory towns. But most moved only a few dozen miles southeast and bought cabins in the monotonous jack pine flats near Grayling, bought bird-nest sized cabins within the sound of ordnance on the National Guard firing range. They would lie back in their nylon web chairs, tear up at the smells of propane and bratwurst, and imagine cherry blossoms bobbing in sunlight as stray shells landed on selected roofs in Traverse City. Lincoln tried to imagine his grandmother down there, watching fox squirrels through the window because the TV reception was so bad, with arthritis, invisible as Radon, seeming to rise into her from the ground itself, one hand gripping the fore- and middle fingers of the other. It was easy to imagine. Easy as hell.

“What do you think?” It was Robertson. The smell of cherry-cured tobacco came off his coat. He walked up and stood next to Lincoln.

“I think that being outside in weather like this is very educational. Lets a man discover the shape and full extent of every opening in his head.”

“Every other opening, too.” Robertson was Grandmother Lakies’ second husband. He was only eighteen years older than Lincoln, where his grandmother was nearly forty years older. Lincoln’s grandfather had died, in the good company of his dog, when a power line had snapped in an early March wind and fallen into an old hay wagon, killing man, dog and a Massasauga curled in a number 3 galvanized zinc washtub. A friend of his grandfather, asked to give a eulogy, stepped to the graveside and declared, “Weather up here is so mean it even kills snakes.” Only the seedlings in the wagon bed had survived. Lincoln had never known Grandfather Heath, but Grandmother Lakies had told stories about him. Lincoln had also recently inherited his grandfather’s considerable stack of worn 78s by black blues singers (Charlie Patton out of Mississippi was a favorite: “Come on, Mama, out to the edge of town / I know where there’s a bird’s nest built down on the ground”), because no one else in the family had the patience to change records every three minutes. Or maybe because Grandmother Lakies thought he had the most affinity for the music; he had just said “Thank you,” and asked no questions.

The seedlings that had survived the electrocution now grew all around where he and Robertson stood. Grandmother Lakies had run the orchard alone for a number of years, hiring migrant workers out of Saginaw—she liked the way they sang Question Mark and the Mysterians oldies in Tejano Spanish—and occasionally taking on her delinquent son’s delinquent son Lincoln as a glorified water boy.
Then she had married Robertson. He had had a school-year half-time job repairing the computers and electronic geegaws that flatlanders were always donating to schools for the write-offs, so he suffered more than most when the peninsula cut itself loose from the digital grid a couple years back. But he had once worked at the Newberry Psychiatric Institution, up across the Straits of Mackinaw. He used to escort the patients on buses and helped dunk them in the steady 38-degree water of Lake Superior. Having been a male nurse, Robertson “knew things,” Lincoln’s grandmother had confided to Lincoln. “And I don’t mean about cherries.” She had a firm grip on the necessities of life where winters are long and dark.

“Any smugglers on the water tonight, you think?” Robertson asked.

“There’s a black bar right there,” Lincoln said, and he pointed across the water where the fleecy reflected moonlight had an odd empty fold in it. “Somebody running without lights.”

Robertson nodded. They stood watching the black fold slide along the water, the sound of its engine covered by the thin rustle in the pine cover and the whisk of the ferns that floated like a staked magic carpet some 18 inches above the ground. The high environmental tax on certain classic blends of refrigerant used in air conditioners and chillers had driven the price so high that smugglers were bringing it down out of Canada to sell to people too stubborn to convert to the newer, greener, less efficient gases. Double-inboard cruisers brought in tons of the stuff in fat green DOT 39 cylinders stacked up like watermelons in their holds. Resort areas, where penny-pinchers and luxury lifestyles came together, were said to be favored destinations. So there were often boats without running lights moving through the bay. The rewards for catching these smugglers were exorbitant—in the thousands of dollars. But no matter how difficult things got, even if it meant Grandmother Lakies losing her land, no one among them would try to claim such money. They all had their own reasons: for Lincoln, it would have been an endorsement of the idea that there was a hard line that cleanly separated “the good guys” and “the bad guys.” For others it was the simple biting of the thumb at the government; while others romanticized the smugglers in their invisible black craft as kin to pirates. Still, the innocent game of spotting dark boats on the dark water, intended only to provide Lincoln and Robertson a refuge subject—one having nothing to do with cherries or land—served to remind them of the third element they tried not to think about: money.

They stood a long time without talking, and Lincoln felt himself beginning to twitch. He always had difficulty with silent types like Robertson. Lines of connection between him and anyone else always seemed to go opaque without words. Lincoln had never been any good at reading expressions or body language. A silent companion made Lincoln feel clumsy.

“You’re taking this frost pretty calm,” Lincoln finally said.

“Oh, outside I am. Outside I’m as silent as a printed circuit. Inside. . . .” Robertson searched the cold halo above them as if it had words or numbers written on it. “You remember punch cards, Lincoln? You don’t see them anymore, but they used to be how everything was figured, and they clacked and slapped when they went through the computers. Inside I’m all punch cards, whole boxfuls riffling and sorting, just clacking away.”

“Oh.” This exchange had not been helpful.

“But the halo around the moon is lovely, isn’t it?” Robertson nodded at his own words.
Lincoln felt the crystal damp slipping in between his buttons. The circle around the moon wasn’t a halo, he decided, and then he thought he saw what it was. He turned to tell Robertson, but he was already walking back upslope to the dark house, taking his cold May into her warm December.

“It’s not a halo,” Lincoln said, softly to himself. That tight circle around the moon was more like the barrel of a muzzleloader, and the big moon like a musket ball aimed their way. The sad thing was that, yes, the barrel he was staring up into was, undeniably, beautiful. He felt himself beginning to shiver.
In the last week of July, 1994 I flew to Arizona to visit novelist William Eastlake. A decade earlier I had written a book about Eastlake’s work, highlighting what I saw as his growing dismay at the failure of man to engage in moral evolution. Bill hadn’t published a novel since 1977, and I wondered whether this was a sign that his disillusionment had driven him into silence.

I flew into Sky Harbor International airport in Phoenix very late in the afternoon. The sky was going dark as I drove toward my motel in Casa Grande, a city I had picked from a map because I wanted to spend the night outside the maze of the greater Phoenix area. A miles-long stretch of the south-bound expressway was under construction so I drove through the desert night with a double yellow line on one side and blinking caution lights on the other. Staring at miles of these winding strings of blinking amber lights I began to imagine they were the eyes of large electric insects.

I was exhausted by the time I got to my motel room. I turned on the television for distraction. William Burroughs suddenly popped up on the screen, hawking Nike shoes, a commercial I hadn’t known existed. “The purpose of technology is not to confuse the brain, but to serve the body,” he intoned, from a laptop screen set down on an athletic field. “Oh,” I thought, “this commercial is what made me think of giant electric insects; a very Burroughs image.” This unscientific thought was one of my last before I dropped off to sleep.

In the lobby the next morning I saw pamphlets for Casa Grande itself, built by the Hohokam Indians, circa the early 13th century. I backtracked slightly and went to see these ruins. “Casa Grande” is of course Spanish for “big house.” This refers to the remains of the four story structure which has managed to survive here for some seven hundred years. I walked the tourist paths, took pictures, and was careful not to touch the fragile surface of the honey-gold adobe walls. Casa Grande has a kind of nested architecture, with several three-story outer rooms that surround an inner structure a story higher. The walls are eroded, broken, irregular, but the damaged structure has a strong presence under its soaring roof. Casa Grande is covered by an immense free-standing roof to protect it—its building materials processed from the ground itself—from the environment. The on-site guards—the term “park rangers” didn’t seem to fit—told me the roof had been constructed to protect the walls from acid rain. I later found out the first roof had been built in 1932. The guards, with their chest-out attitudes, clearly had a protective interest in this battered survivor.
I began to wander south again toward Bisbee, where Eastlake lived. Near Oracle, I saw a sign giving directions to “Biosphere 2.” I couldn’t remember what this was but, even while I knew I should keep moving south to get to Bisbee by our agreed-upon time, I turned to follow the signs.

By the time I pulled into the parking lot I had recalled Biosphere 2. This was a huge domed environment inside of which teams of volunteers were sealed, spending a year or more studying the effects of human biology and activities (farming, producing carbon dioxide, et al), on this enclosed miniature model of earth’s environment. From the beginning then, the explicit premise of Biosphere 2 was that earth’s environment was a separate entity from us, and needed to be protected from us.

Posted along the gently rising walkway from the parking lot to the information center were short metal figures, their height and spacing almost identical to that of the amber electric insects of my previous night’s imagining. An information plaque informed me that these figures were updated versions of kachinas. Kachinas are spirits important to southwest Pueblo peoples. Many people think kachinas are the dolls that are often made, either as toys or as spiritual objects, but these are only images of the spirits. A kachina can be the spirit of land, of wind, of rain, of hundreds of things important to the people who honor them and ask for their aid. These particular kachinas, the Biosphere 2 plaque proudly declared, had been designed and built specifically for the site, created from “obsolete atomic hardware.”

Biosphere 2 itself was just beyond the barrier of the information center—accessible for $12.95. The receipts tucked into my Biosphere 2 Visitor Map & Directory tell me that I bought a disposable camera and a Biosphere 2 pencil. Pictures and pencil have all fallen away; only the financial particulars linger on.

Our tour guide was the opposite of the taciturn, bristling men at Casa Grande. He was a jovial chatterbox who, after he saw me scribbling away in my notebook, often spoke directly to me. His enthusiasm was a little off-putting from the beginning: as we began our tour he said, “Welcome to Biosphere 2. Who can tell me where Biosphere 1 is?” After a long awkward silence, a man said, “I think it’s near Chicago.” “You’re right,” the guide said. “But it’s also near Los Angeles, and it’s right here, too. Because Biosphere 1 is the earth itself!” The embarrassed man was not pleased.

For the first part of our tour we were taken through a series of greenhouses and habitats uphill from the main structure. We trooped from room to room, from one tiny sliver of an environment to another. (It came to me that this array, the egg-carton compactness of these experimental plantings,
was almost identical to that in Andre Norton’s science fiction novel Beast Master, where an alien civilization had gathered together bits of dozens of worlds—including the dead earth—and put them inside a mountain on Arzor, a planet clearly modeled on Arizona, as a kind of galactic sample case.) Our guide stressed that these plants, while on a kind of life support in these small rooms, would become parts of a total self-sustaining, earth-duplicate environment in future experiments within the sealed structure. This led to his most telling line of the morning. “Here,” he told us with an earnest smile, “we replicate the outside world in miniature.”

Out of the jungle rooms and into the light—and our first unobstructed view of the Biosphere 2 enclosure. From a distance it made me think of a glass shopping mall with a giant light bulb, less rounded than beveled with Bizarro-World anglings, protruding from its peak. We were told that this was in fact the environment’s library, positioned high above the humid welter of the biological processes. (The facility had been designed by John Polk Allen, who had just a few years earlier designed a performing arts center in Houston called Caravan of Dreams. Attendants at the opening night festivities in Houston in 1983 had included William Burroughs.) I wondered what books were in that library.

As we walked down toward the main facility, the guide detailed the size, make-up and processes of the elements inside. There were trees and birds and underwater life, and a crew of seven, all of which were visible through the glass walls. Theoretically, at least: the observation walkway was far enough away that it gave the crew some sense of privacy.

As we viewed the thriving rain forest area, the guide told us how the two-year-long first experiment had attempted to replicate a complete rain forest environment. The most exotic denizens of this forest had been two pairs of small rain forest animals. In the official Biosphere 2 literature these kitten-sized primates are referred to as “galagos” rather than by their vernacular name, “African bush babies.” It was thought that these cute African creatures would provide the closed-in group with a kind of delightful animal companionship that goats and pigs couldn’t. (The pigs were, in fact, there to be eaten.) But, like the humans, the nimble, territorial galagos were true to their basic characters even in the controlled environment: they took most of the best fruit for themselves, and chased humans away from the trees by bombarding them. I wrote again, “We replicate the outside world in miniature.”

We walked past the long wall of the vast glittering greenhouse shape, peering in as best we could at the tiny figures, with no sense of what work they might be doing, if any. As we came around the back side of the environment we could see the piping, the ducts, and the huge expansion chambers called
“lungs” that regulated pressure inside. We also saw, though we didn’t speak to, a scattering of men in overalls, driving a small truck, walking in and out of a shed, walking under Biosphere 2 itself, into the more than three acres of propane-powered support machinery humming there. To be self-sustaining the environment had to be positioned in and on a fairly steady “earth” and million-gallon sea, something these technicians helped to maintain. (At one point a large helping of oxygen had to be pumped in, for example.) Even achieved, the ideal equilibrium sought inside Biosphere 2 had shortcomings of its own. They had trouble with collapsing trees, for example—in the sealed atmosphere of Biosphere 2 there were no windstorms to put stress on their trunks, a process that lets trees develop the strength they need to remain upright. Also, because the miniature earth wasn’t connected to the earth’s atmosphere, it didn’t have unlimited space above to dissipate heat, and so the internal pressure also had to be dealt with by technical means—those big mechanical lungs. Repairmen were always on-site. Still, the Morlocks working below us and to our right were barely acknowledged. “We replicate the outside world in miniature.”

On we went, until we had completed a full circle, and our guide thanked us for coming. Among the facts the ebullient tour guide didn’t share was that the experiment currently underway, a severely down-sized version of the first (the African bush babies weren’t invited back), had been marred by infighting among the partners—on April Fool’s Day federal marshals had escorted the serving management team off-site so a Beverly Hills based financial group could take over. Idealism and even separation of the spheres all fell away (at one point, clandestinely, a door had been opened from the outside). These problems were rooted, not surprisingly, in financial particulars.

On September 6th, exactly 40 days after my visit, the experiment was abruptly terminated and the site sold, then sold again, then sold again. “We replicate the outside world. . . .”

II: January, 2012

For years I was almost entirely satisfied with this story of my visit to Biosphere 2. It has a nice sense of closure to it; a few amusing coincidences; subtle lessons in class and intellectual division; a “plague on both your houses” aspect meant to prompt readers to compare the fates of Casa Grande and Biosphere 2; it allows me to name drop several of my favorite authors; and has a kind of poetic algebra that demonstrates, in a pleasingly indirect way, the absurdity of overactive, tunnel-vision science, and of the helplessness of those looking into nature before the tooth-and-claw of the monied.
I had been almost entirely satisfied. . . . What came back to me again and again are those post-Hiroshima garden gnomes, the nuclear hardware kachinas. They were of course tangential to the Biosphere 2 experiments, amusing tchotchkes and nothing more. But someone had to think of the idea, had to have had some reason for choosing to bind these forms with these materials, and everyone who participated in the experiments, every scientist and administrator, every technician, at some point had to have passed them—but did they understand what they were seeing? Understood, that is, how the spirits of everything that made up the lives of the Pueblo people in the area, every emotion, every element in their environment, were here reincarnated as pieces of discarded nuclear hardware. Aside from the directly spiritual dimension, there is the fact that uranium mines in the Southwest, primarily in Colorado, New Mexico and on Navajo lands in northern Arizona, have dumped hundreds of tons of radioactive tailings on the land; there have been accidents and surface water contaminations; it remains a sensitive environmental subject to this day. From the moment I first saw them these kachinas have seemed to me to be startlingly wrong-headed on several levels.

Being located in central Arizona, Biosphere 2 certainly had visitors from the Pueblo peoples. Perhaps those who have a spiritual relationship with traditional kachinas saw these tiny metal men and shrugged them off; even found them amusing. I am not making any paternalist claim to the right to be outraged at some desecration on their behalf. But every time I have thought about the kachinas over the past 18 years, I have felt that they, more clearly than anything else I’d seen at Biosphere 2, were trying to tell me something. It wasn’t until a recent rereading of Belgian philosopher Isabelle Stengers’ “Beyond Conversation: The Risks of Peace” that I was finally able to hear what the kachinas had been trying to tell me.

Stengers points out that since Galileo, the “dark greatness” of science has come from its refusal to accept any peaceful, negotiated coexistence with anything it feels it has supplanted. Those whose lives are intertwined with the scientific method are subject to, “The seduction of the idea of a truth that should hurt and disenchant, which should go beyond illusions and destroy them. . . .”[i] For science this is what “truth” does: a scientific truth is by its nature meant to expel—expel philosophy, opinion, superstition, magic and myth, anything “other”—that might be holding a place where a scientific truth should go. It is through this belief that first someone, then everyone, could accept the nuclear spirit figures. This is what the kachinas were trying to tell me: the creators and crew of Biosphere 2 would have been betraying their scientific mission had they taken into account the “myths” that (formerly) resided in the kachinas form.
One of this belief system’s corollaries—that the only admissible role for the non-human is to serve the human-directed role of being reliable witnesses to “objective” interpretations—explains why the bush babies weren’t invited back.

Stengers suggests that this scientific model be replaced by one she has named “cosmopolitics.” The first two syllables reflect her answer to one of science’s haughtiest questions: “Who is entitled to speak and on what grounds when the question of our common destiny is at stake?” Stengers believes “the word common should not be restricted to our fellow humans . . . but should entertain the problematic togetherness” of all “shapes of value” that comprise our realities, “including beings as disparate as ‘neutrinos’ (a part of the physicist’s reality) and ancestors (a part of reality for those whose traditions have taught them to communicate with the dead).” [ii] For Stengers, entitling all these voices—those of the subatomic, of the dead, of bush babies and more—would create an ecological production of actual togetherness, where “ecological” means that the aim is not toward a unity beyond differences . . . but toward a creation of concrete, interlocked, asymmetrical, and always partial graspings.[iii]

As an exercise in the scientific method, an ideal of either/or, Biosphere could not accept a unity beyond differences. Its belief in the idea that “scientific success” means “to stop interpretation, to have ambitions bowing in front of an objective verdict, to promote reality against intentions, and to enforce the closure of until then free human controversies”[iv] doomed it. Because science’s own “dark greatness” explains how the Beverly Hills financiers, who could have benefited from cooperation with the original staff, came to destroy the project. Economics is, after all, a science, and as such could not be expected to allow the myth of “pure research” to remain, to take up the belief space where economic facts should rightly be.

III: May, 1943

For a full day, I was almost entirely satisfied with the partial graspings of this explanation, in large part because some of the ideas Stengers develops in her essay originate in the work of A. N. Whitehead’s “process philosophy,” a theory with which I agree. This underappreciated philosophy holds that “being” or “existence” is always a matter of the processes at work. The processes that go to make up something are what create its reality; what a thing is is what it does. These processes can be very abstract, or as physical as atoms in open air creating the process of a windstorm. If the relevant processes aren’t present, nothing can exist. With this freshly in mind, one day after I wrote the second note above, I turned to another thinker in the process philosophy line, Adelbert Ames, Jr.[v]
While Ames died more than 35 years before Biosphere 2 (allegedly) opened, his work offers me an important perspective, one that shapes this final note—on the very existence of the facility.

From 1941 through his death in 1955 Ames wrote “Morning Notes” to himself. Here is a note from May of 1943:

It is only through relative motion between the organism and the other events that their spatial relationship to the organism could be disclosed. Movement, relative change, and therefore time necessary for it are conditions for the disclosure of relative spatial relationships . . . and the action must be purposeful to provide a basis for meaning and significance.

That purposeful change, action, is a condition for the existence of space is very interesting.[vi]

The implications of Ames’ note seem to me to be as follows: Because the scientists’ at Biosphere 2 only concerned themselves with the maintenance of a sealed-off physical stasis, rather than with what we (meaning those of us who find ourselves in sympathy with Stegners’ “cosmopolitics,” those of us who try to be “ecological” beings, and care about the voices of, for example, African bush babies, or subatomic particles—some of which wink in and out of existence as we observe them, something which also be said of our dead ancestors) might view as the complex of processes that constitute and carry true truths and values, then there was no purposeful change at Biosphere 2. This is true even by way of simple definition: stasis = no change. Per Ames, without purposeful change there is no “relative spatial relationship” between our environment and us. So the unavoidable conclusion, the only true—which is to say value-containing—conclusion I can come to is, as there was no spatial relationship created, nor any space of “meaning and significance” at the site, Biosphere 2 never truly existed. My Arizona trip took place in a more ecologically valuable landscape than I had (briefly, erroneously) believed.

This, finally, is the version of the story of my visit which I find entirely satisfactory.

[ii] Stengers, 248.
[iii] Stengers, 248-249.
[iv] Stengers, 251.
[v] Ames’ primary field was the psychology of visual perception, by way of which he made significant contributions to the physical demonstration of process philosophy. Whitehead called him “a genius.” See my biography, Adelbert Ames, Jr.: A Life of Vision and Becomingness (Bamberger Books, 2006).
Rob K. Baum

FACE OF THE HILLS

In the hum
before everything changed

fern drenched the sky
sunlight spidered rock
  on lazy afternoons
as tuatara left their ancient skins
  beneath the eyes of the forest

When did the green begin to choke
the old growth pine entangle
and broken birds unwhistle the air

Now rain drums the wood red
and the carved face of the hills
  spits borrowed bones

Kia **ora**.
Memory persists
  to endanger the past
Simon Jackson

SYMBOLOGY

That the place for human effluent to be jettisoned into porcelain chutes should be signified by the emblem of a standing human seems odd.

This stance with arms stretched out away from the action, is not the posture most men adopt to urinate, hands gun-slinger wide.

And unlike these signs, ladies, I’m told, prefer not to stand at all, at least not with legs pressed together so tight.

Out of context the logo could well confuse, yet as a symbol for our disposable age, that the sign of a standing man and woman should signify the detritus left behind is fitting, as future races try to make sense of our sullied earth picking through the toxic waste for a single remnant of worth.
Uncanny Plant Growth: The Effect of the Atomic Bomb on Plant Life in Masuji Ibuse’s *Black Rain*

On August 6, 1945, the ecological space of Hiroshima changed drastically. No longer was the space defined by the urban environment of the city, but rather the atomic bomb opened up a new, vast space for plant life to thrive. One would think that the radiation would destroy the plant life around the port city of Hiroshima, yet there are still trees that produce new buds even though they were affected by the bomb. Located 1.3 kilometers from the hypocenter, the now dubbed “phoenix trees,” also known as Chinese Parasol Trees, stand as testament that plant life could adapt to the harsh conditions the bomb created (“24 Phoenix Trees”). Other trees, too, survived the atomic bomb and flourished. In “Hibaku Trees of Hiroshima,” Peter Del Tredici speaks of photographs of bomb-stricken trees taken by photographer Hiromi Tsuchida, whose work between 1976 and 1983 served as a “systematic and measured chronicle of the aftermath of the atomic apocalypse” (25). Tredici states, “Looking at Tsuchida’s photographs of trees, the sense of tragedy gives way to a sense of wonder at the indomitable vitality of life. These are the true survivors, plants that can withstand the worst humanity has to offer” (Tredici 25-26). However, Tredici and the visitors to the Hiroshima Peace Memorial are not the only ones to speculate over the phenomenon of atomic plant life.

In Masuji Ibuse’s *Black Rain*, Shigematsu, too, experiences an uncanny moment in light of seeing plant life thriving under the bleak conditions of post-bomb Hiroshima. Shigematsu must read the land in order to figure out what is happening to the world around him. The newly grown shoots, rather than the people, provide the clues that this bomb is not the regular conventional weapon, as the atomic bomb not only killed thousands of people but also affected the ecosystem. Shigematsu’s encounter with the shoots is one that can easily be explained by science, but with his convergence, Shigematsu does not even know what to call the experience attached to the signified new land. The uncanny shoots show the endurance of the natural world over the man-made and inform that even in this apocalyptic environment looking to the land promises an answer.

Shigematsu records in his journal:

> Along this road, too, I could see, between the broken stone walls and the ornamental rocks where people’s house had been, wood sorrel and vetch drooping under the weight of new shoots that had sprouted too quickly for them to support. I wondered whether the shock of the raid could have affected the cell structure of plants in the same way as with human beings (Ibuse 190).
This encounter is the first instance where Shigematsu looks at the plant life itself rather than the rubble around it. He approaches this experience in a scientific manner, wondering if the bomb affects the plants’ cell structure; however, the use of the adverbs “too quickly” and “unusually” lend the uncanny feeling that Shigematsu suffers because he cannot name the spectacle that is occurring. All of his musings over the situation fall short of satisfying his curiosity: “But I had never heard anyone say that a sudden shock from light or sound or heat could set plants growing unusually fast” (Ibuse 190).

Research from the Chernobyl incident helps shed light on how plant life grows when exposed to high dosages of radiation—a helpful tool in assessing the ecology of Hiroshima. In *The Legacy of Chernobyl*, Zhores A. Medvedev states, “The Soviet press reported rather casually that the pine trees around the Chernobyl plant died within a few days after the accident. Later it was acknowledged that 400 hectares of pine forest had died. Birch, oak and other leafy species survived the first year” (89). Medvedev’s work does not delve into the reasons why the deciduous trees survived longer than the pine trees, but it might be due to weather conditions and the surface area of the leaves. Shigematsu notices that the shoots that do persist are deciduous. He does not comment on whether or not there are pine varieties of trees still existing during his roaming of Hiroshima, but the types of plants he does encounter like the sorrel, vetch, and plantain have leaves instead of needles. H. Nishita, E.M. Romney, and K.H. Larson state, “Aside from the effects of plant surface characteristics and fallout particle size, the extent of fallout retention on the plant surfaces relative to that on the soil surface is influenced largely by weather conditions. Particles may be dislodged by wind or rain” (61). The surface area of the plant might explain why the deciduous variety tended to survive in both Chernobyl and Hiroshima. It is through this affected flora that Shigematsu has to read that the bomb is not an ordinary one; rather, it is one that can give life while selectively taking others.

Shigematsu constantly sees the masses of corpses lining the streets of Hiroshima, but these bodies have merely taken on an inanimate status to him due to the bomb’s unselective process concerning human life. The shoots, however, arrest his gaze because in the midst of all the death there is life. He states, “The bomb seemed to have encouraged the growth of plants and flies at the same time that it put a stop to human life” (Ibuse 190-191). Shigematsu is not privileging one or the other here; he is just expressing his confusion. Why should the bomb take one life and not the other? Why should it “encourage the growth” of plants (Ibuse 191)? The bomb has a dualized nature in that not only does it create “natural” phenomenon like rain and plant growth, but also it makes these processes perverse. It is this very perverseness that makes
Shigematsu question the nature of the bomb, but it is the plant life that gives an answer—albeit a vague one. The bomb can ravage, maim, and kill, but it can also produce life at an abrupt pace.

The plantain tree that Shigematsu notices rapidly reproduces a new bud even though the bomb tore its branches asunder: “Yesterday, I had seen a new shoot a foot and a half long on a plantain tree in what had been the back garden of a noodle shop. The original stem had been snapped off by the blast and had disappeared without a trace, but a new shoot, encased in a sheath like bamboo, was already growing in its place” (Ibuse 191). Just as with the sorrel and vetch, the plantain is a deciduous with huge leaves, but the growth of the shoot also has to do with what was damaged on the tree—research on nuclear fallout points that aboveground plant parts receive more damage than the underground portions. M.J. Buckovac, S.H. Wittwer, and H.B. Tukey assert, “Aboveground plant parts function not only as organs for the exchange of gases and synthesis and storage of metabolites, but also in the absorption and secretion of substances from and to the ambient environment” (82). In the 1981 publication Hiroshima and Nagasaki: The Physical, Medical, and Social Effects of the Atomic Bombings the research shows:

Damage to plants was found only in the portions exposed aboveground, and portions underground were not directly damaged. Consequently, the root and the underground stalk put forth new buds even those whose aboveground portion was completely burned [...] Broad-leaved trees in general regenerated actively [...] The poorly resistant herbs were needle-leafed trees such as Japanese cedar [Cryptomeria japonica] and pine” (Qtd in Tredici 26-27).

This information is reminiscent of the Chinese Parasol Trees, which produce large foliage “giving the tree a tropical appearance” and are “able to naturalize [themselves] fairly easily if given the chance” (“Firmiana simplex-Chinese Parasol Tree”). The Hiroshima Peace Memorial writes, “Because no intervening object stood in the direction of the hypocenter, they took the full force of the heat ray and blast, losing all of their branches and leaves. The sides of the trunks toward the hypocenter was [sic] burned and hollowed out. Although the trees appeared to be dead, their branches put out buds the following spring” (“24 Phoenix Trees”). And like the Chinese Parasol trees, the plantain tree also exhibits the signs that though its leaves and branches were destroyed in the blast, the radiation did not wholly damage the root system.

Shigematsu’s uncanny moment becomes one filled with questions and amazement because there is not a name for the phenomenon of the atomic bomb. There is no signifier for the signified. Only towards the end of the novel are we presented with the name of the bomb: “An “atomic bomb” [...] ‘It gives off a terrific radiation [...] They say nothing’ll grow in Hiroshima or Nagasaki for another seventy-five years’” (Ibuse 282). The plants defy the very
notion of ecological death caused by the bomb, even though the anxiety around this notion is great once the people of Hiroshima learn the name of it. Shigematsu reminisces and thinks, “Hadn’t I seen weeds running riot all over the ruins?” (Ibuse 282). The weeds do run riot; they overtake the newly formed open space around them.

Even though Shigematsu cannot explain the phenomenon happening around him, he reads the landscape for answers. In this moment, Shigematsu is entering upon an interrelated conversation with the flourishing blooms of the sorrel, the vetch, and the plantain. They might not be able to tell him the whole answer, but they can tell him that this bomb goes beyond what man should. The bomb touches everything, and it also genetically alters. The radiation from the atomic bomb distorted the landscape that it touched, and it affected the plant and human life that it fell upon permanently. But even in the bad, something good will come. The plant life that Shigematsu encounters might be uncanny and why they are growing might not be explained, but it thrives nonetheless providing hope for future ecological life.
Works Cited:


André Babyn
GYGES

The old fortune teller had died. We watched as they took her body out of the room across the hall. One night sometime afterwards, she visited us.

We had heard irregular noises coming from her room. Crime was on the rise in New Babylon, and we thought it might have been some hoodlums who had heard she had died and thought to rob her of her valuables before they could be re-distributed. In fact, the committee was to meet the next morning. In the meantime they’d left us with the key. But when we opened the door to her quarters the noise ceased and there was nothing there. Only her dusty furniture looming in the darkness. A teapot that had been turned over. We were frightened, of course, but the empty certainty of her apartment that night allowed us to believe we had imagined the noises we’d heard.

When we returned to my apartment we found the dead woman sitting on my couch. The fortune teller gestured at her palm, and then at the leather chair at her side. A reading. I’ve heard it is bad luck to deny the requests of ghosts. Her fingers were unbearably cold. When she spoke, her consonants were glottal and she spat like she was enunciating mud. I understood nothing. But I acted as if I had, nodding. I hoped she wouldn’t make me repeat her in the language of the dead.

She turned her attention to my companion, Sam. Sam avoided her gaze and shrunk against the wall.

The dead woman’s limbs moved with the hesitating measure of a skeleton. Standing up, she left us.

That night I saw the old woman in my dream. She was holding my palm, and this is what she told me:

"A wardrobe stands in my room. Open it. In it you will find a wooden box. Take what you find inside. They are yours."

I went, hoping to find treasure. Instead, wrapped in paper towels, I found several hard, oblong seeds.

I don’t know why New Babylon was spared the destruction that ravaged the rest of the city and the surrounding countryside. Perhaps, by chance, a vehicle of war drifted too far from its intended target. We’ve found their pieces—or what we assume are their pieces—all over the city. There is one, a complete one, not far away from New Babylon. If you put your head to its smooth walls you can hear its drone heart ticking. It is the most alive thing we have ever found in the ruins.

We are visited often by representatives of other survivors. For some we serve a function in their dim religion. Others, we trade with. Still others have made us their enemies. But our antiquated weapons, mined out of the ruins, are without equal.

It has been generations since the first survivors climbed out of New Babylon and greeted the new world. Maybe too long. The complex is beginning to crumble. A madness is spreading. Sam is one of the worst affected. He doesn’t attend the meetings I’ve organized, and when I see him he snarls at me, as if I have unravelled everything. The old woman was a wound between us.

"You might think that’s what you saw, but that isn’t what you saw."
"What I saw?"
"Yes. What you saw."
"Then what did I see?"
"I don’t know. An ape. A flock of pigeons. Dust."
"And what did you see?"
"Nothing."
"Nothing made your skin tighten? Nothing made you push up against the wall?"
"Yes. That was an involuntary response. I have a condition. It's insensitive of you to bring it up."

The only solution is to leave him behind, with all of the others.

The road to the south was not as long and arduous as we expected. I have heard it said that beyond the crumbling rock that defines New Babylon's sphere of influence the land is harsh and barren. This is not so. It is hardly paradise. But scrub grows here and there. Sometimes we find ourselves in the midst of tall fields of wild grasses, and the sound from the insects is so loud it's almost deafening. We have seen a few trees—the quick-growing sumac—large enough to provide us with shade. There is no equal to the lightness of being felt when, in repose, we are caressed by a soft, moist breeze.

The merchants had told us the people of the plains were cannibals. We've had our troubles.

On the second night out of the city we lost one of our number—Lucinda—to a spear thrust through the heart. And Emile's left shoulder, as he was reloading his weapon, was mashed to paste with a club. On that night we were lucky to have the good weapons we smuggled out of New Babylon. Since that time we have added vigilance to our armoury.

Only the wild men are dangerous. The nomads with their semi-permanent dwellings and large herds of sheep and goats bring us no trouble. Their hospitality is unparalleled. There is a root that grows principally around their settlements—the natives call it "chikrot"—that, when dried, is a humble and nourishing substitute for our tea. We have taken to smoking it with them. At night, with their cattle milling about.

There is a city in the south. Its name is Gyges. We have established a school there, teaching what we've brought with us from New Babylon. In the courtyard I planted the seeds that I found.

The seeds sprouted. The tree that grew up from them provides fruit, red and firm, which we eat in the shade on hot afternoons.
Kudzu Biographies:

Aaron Poller currently works as an advanced practice nurse-psychotherapist in Winston-Salem and teaches Mental Health Nursing at Winston-Salem State University. He has been writing since the 1960’s when he studied poetry with Jean Garrigue and Daniel Hoffman while a student at the University of Pennsylvania. His poems have appeared recently in Barnwood Poetry Magazine, Eunoia Review, Muddy River Poetry Review, The Writing Disorder, Cherry Blossom Review, Wild Goose Poetry Review, Poetry Quarterly, Poetic Medicine, The Yale Journal of Humanities in Medicine and Palimpsest. He lives in a small house with his wife, four rescued dogs and three rescued cats.

W. C. Bamberger’s recent books include the novel On the Backstretch, and two translations: Louis Levy’s early twentieth-century Expressionist novel, Kradock the Onion Man, and the Spring-Fresh Methuselah, and the chapbook Two Draft Essays from 1918, by Gershom Scholem.

Much of Rob Baum’s poetry is written for performance but has appeared in Alaskan and Australian anthologies, and journals such as The Journal of Peace and Conflict, Nashim, New Contrast, Making Connections, and Boxcar Poetry Review. Rob performs in improvisational movement, circus and theatre, and directs disabled practitioners. Her feminist plays feature strong, desirable roles for women: Every Woman’s War premiered in Singapore, 2006. Rob’s research publications include Female Absence: Women, Theatre and Other Metaphors (Peter Lang, 2003) and journal articles on African ritual, dance, race/gender issues and identity politics; a book-in-progress concerns trauma and memory.

Eleanor Leonne Bennett is a 15 year old photographer and artist who has won contests with National Geographic, The Woodland Trust, The World Photography Organisation, Winstons Wish, Papworth Trust, Mencap, Big Issue, Wrexham science, Fennel and Fern and Nature’s Best Photography. She has had her photographs published in exhibitions and magazines across the world including the Guardian, RSPB Birds, RSPB Bird Life, Dot Dot Dash, Alabama Coast, Alabama Seaport and NG Kids Magazine (the most popular kids magazine in the world). She was also the only person from the UK to have her work displayed in the National Geographic and Airbus run See The Bigger Picture global exhibition tour with the United Nations International Year Of Biodiversity 2010. Only visual artist published in the Taj Mahal Review June 2011. Youngest artist to be displayed in Charnwood Art’s Vision 09 Exhibition and New Mill’s Artlounge Dark Colours Exhibition. www.eleanorleonnebennett.zenfolio.com


Peter Branson’s poetry has been published or accepted for publication by journals in Britain, USA, Canada, EIRE, Australia and New Zealand, including Acumen, Ambit, Envoi, Magma, The London Magazine, Iota, Frognmore Papers, The Interpreter’s House, Poetry Nottingham, Pulsar, Red Ink, The Recusant, South, The New Writer, Crannog, Raintown Review, The Huston Poetry Review, Barnwood, The Able Muse and Other Poetry. His first collection, The Accidental Tourist, was published in May 2008. A second collection was published at the beginning of last year by Caparison Press for The Recusant. More recently a pamphlet has been issued by Silkworms Ink. A third collection has been accepted for publication by Salmon Press, EIRE. He has won prizes and been placed in a number of poetry competitions over recent years, including firsts in the Grace Dieux and the Envoi International.

A professor of English and pedagogy, Salma Ruth Bratt is a second generation American with an interest in the literature and linguistics of immigrants. She loves her sweet and thoughtful family, traveling abroad, passionate readers and writers, the theater of complex and interesting playwrights, the music of good listeners. Her work is often completed in collaboration with Moulay Youness Elbousy, for whom she is exceedingly grateful.

R. W. Haynes, Professor of English at Texas A&M International University, Laredo, Texas, writes often of border issues of the body and spirit. Those interested in his verse can google it. Haynes is also a literary critic whose 2010 book The Major Plays of Horton Foote is one of the few detailed studies of this remarkable playwright’s best-known dramas.


Mark Jackley Mark Jackley is the author of several chapbooks, most recently Every Green Word (Finishing Line Press), and a full-length collection, (Plain View Press). He lives in Sterling, VA.

Chris Jackson, a resident of Surrey, has had poetry and translations appear in, amongst other places, Ambit, Equinox, Poetry Salzburg Review, Assent, Fuselit, and Ink, Sweat & Tears.

Simon Jackson lives in Edinburgh. He has been a journalist, teacher, musician and director of Living Arts Space Theatre Company. He has had more than twenty plays performed and was British Gas Young Playwright of the Year (when he was still a young playwright) and his last play, Turning to the Camera was The Guardian’s Pick of the Week for Scottish theatre. His poetry has won several awards including The Grace Dieux Writers’ Prize 2009, The Writers Bureau Poetry Award 2010 and The Segora Poetry Prize 2011. A collection, Fragile Cargo will be published by BeWrite Books in 2012. His short films have been used by the BBC and shown international Film Festivals. He is currently filming music videos for Billy Bragg’s Jail Guitar Doors charity. He has composed
soundtracks for a few films, plays and radio plays and an album of his music (with words) is available from http://torpedobuoy.weebly.com/ All profits go to support education in Kenya. You may purchase it, if you like that sort of thing.

Award-winning poet with seven Pushcart Prize nominations, National Park Artist-in-Residence, and assistant editor and book reviewer of The Centrifugal Eye, Karla Linn Merrifield has had work published in dozens of journals and anthologies. She has six books to her credit, including Godwit: Poems of Canada, which received the 2009 Andrew Eiseman Writers Award for Poetry, and her new chapbook, The Urn, from Finishing Line Press. Forthcoming from Salmon Press is her full-length collection Athabaskan Fractal and Other Poems of the Far North. And from Finishing Line Press Merrifield’s The Ice Decides: Poems of Antarctica. She is currently co-editing the forthcoming Liberty’s Vigil, The Occupy Anthology: 99 Poets among the 99%. You can read more about her and sample her poems and photographs at http://karlalinn.blogspot.com.

Joe Mills teaches at the University of North Carolina School of the Arts where he holds the Susan Burress Wall Distinguished Professorship in the Humanities. He has published four collections of poetry with Press 53, most recently, Sending Christmas Cards to Huck and Hamlet. He also has co-written two editions of A Guide to North Carolina’s Wineries with his wife, Danielle Tarmey and edited a collection of film criticism entitled A Century of the Marx Brothers.

Andy Myers is a seventh generation Alabamian with a pursuing interest in cedar trees, skinks, banjos, and the lunar cycle.

Patty Somlo has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize three times and was a finalist in the Tom Howard Short Story Contest. She is the author of From Here to There and Other Stories, published by Paraguas Books. Her work has appeared in the Los Angeles Review, the Santa Clara Review, the Jackson Hole Review, WomenArts Quarterly, Guernica, Slow Trains and Fringe Magazine, among others, and in several anthologies.

Seth Trent currently lives in Dallas Texas as a first level graduate student in sculpture the University of Dallas. His style is minimal, surreal, and is structured as a constant flow of subconscious thought.

Jamie King is a graduate student at the University of Montevallo where she is pursuing a Masters degree in English. “Uncanny Plant Growth: The Effect of the Atomic Bomb on Plant Life in Masuji Ibuse’s Black Rain,” was her first endeavor into the world of Ecocriticism; however, it shall not be her last.

André Babyn lives in Canada. His work has appeared in Punk, Misunderstandings Magazine, HHR Online, and elsewhere.
Kudzu Staff:

M. P. Jones IV: Editor-in-Chief

M.P., a working writer living in Alabama, begins a Graduate Teaching Assistantship in Literature at Auburn University this Fall. He edits, Kudzu Review, an online, southern literary-eco journal in his little spare time. Recently, he received a B.A. in English from the University of Montevallo. He has poems forthcoming and appearing in Bolts of Silk, Avocet, Wilderness House Literary Review, InkTank, Centrifugal Eye, A Few Lines Magazine & elsewhere, and has a cycling memoir in the current issue of Sleet Magazine, fast-food fiction in decomP magazine, and a book review forthcoming in the next issue of I.S.L.E. He lives in a cedar shack on the Cahaba River, spending days playing banjo in the pecans. -editor@kudzureview.com

Robin Conn Ward: Executive Design Editor

Robin is the mastermind of our website design, having achieved a degree in computer networking from Cochise College. He is currently pursuing a degree in web development from ASU. Robin’s interests lie in the hyper-real, the increasing development of an artificial world in the face of an eroding biosphere. That is to say, he’s beaten Mario over a thousand times. -robin@kudzureview.com

Arthur Wilke: Editor-in-a-Field

Arthur Wilke is a provocateur of environmental studies of the literary and socio-political realms. Known for undertaking such extended expeditions as the Appalachian Trail, the Northern Forest Canoe Trail, as well as many others without the privilege of a name, Arthur studies the real world relationships of humanity, wilderness, and the environment. When he can be torn away from the woods, he is most often found tinkering with old cameras in search of the big Other, reading the latest Žižek, and agreeing way too much with Gore Vidal and Edward Abbey. -artwilke@kudzureview.com

Jane Alford: Nonfiction, Assistant Editor

Jane is our resident ecofeminist and strict grammatician (someone around here has to be). She’s always on call, reminding us of the right place for a direct object and when we’re describing women as such. Her main interest is high modernism, and she spends many sleepless nights pondering the “whatness of a thing.” On sunny days she can be found reading Bowen on Montevallo’s grassy quad. When not studying dusty authors, she works at a consignment boutique, a sustainable method of fashioning. She enjoys jewelry making, fat cats, and red wine. -jane@kudzureview.com

Ashley Sams: Visual Art, Assistant Editor

Ashley Sams is our Visual Art specialist, currently pursuing a degree in Art from Auburn University. She is a member of the Association of Visual Artists at AU and has participated in the community restoration project at Hickory Dickory Park. Her work appears in the office of the dean of the liberal arts college. She has worked with Drive by Press, and the first annual Jule Collins Smith Museum’s Art in the Garden. She loves collecting vintage things, repurposing old junk, because of the mystery an object acquires when it no longer reflects the maker or owner. -ashley@kudzureview.com

Powell Burke: Fiction, Assistant Editor

Powell is a graduate of Bennington College’s MFA fiction program. When he’s not noveling, he enjoys reading literature both serious and light, seeing films, wandering museums, and traveling. His secret shame is devouring pop culture minutiae and regurgitating it in trivia form. He’s lived for varying amounts of time in New York, Austin, and Italy, but currently calls the Southeast home. Short fiction has appeared in Cricket Online Review and Eclectica. -powell@kudzureview.com