

euphony

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# EUPHONY

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*Euphony* is a nonprofit literary journal produced biannually at the University of Chicago. We are dedicated to publishing the finest work by writers and artists both accomplished and aspiring. We publish a variety of works including poetry, fiction, drama, essays, criticism, and translations.

Founded Spring 2000 by  
Stephen Barbara and Matthew Deming

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# WELCOME TO THE SPRING 2019 ISSUE OF EUPHONY

We are proud to present the second issue of the nineteenth volume of *Euphony Journal*. It would not be possible without the tireless work of our wonderful staff, our contributors—who continue to inspire, surprise, and amaze us—the support of the University of Chicago, and our friends at Grace Printing.

On behalf of the entire *Euphony* staff, I also would like to thank two graduating seniors on our editorial board, Mahathi Ayyagari and Miles White. Mahathi and Miles, *Euphony Journal* is forever indebted to your leadership, know-how, and humor. With love and gratitude, we wish you success in whatever your next chapter may hold.

Lastly, thank you, reader. Thank you for picking up our journal, and thank you for sharing in the little bits of euphony inside.

Warm wishes,

Jake Scott  
Managing Editor

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# POEMS

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# POETRY EDITOR'S LETTER

Dear Reader,

Thank you for picking up the Spring 2019 issue of *Euphony*. This cover, a beautiful campus residence hall reflected in a puddle, is one of my favorites from the past few years. It's fitting, not just because we've had such a rainy spring so far, but because it visually captures the theme of reflection. Many of this issue's poems, including "Stretching Back," "Family Recipe," and "Creation of a Language," reflect on how families, stories, and histories are created and transformed, and how that change is perceived in the current moment.

I've also been reflecting myself quite a bit as I prepare to graduate in a few days. And so, in remembering my time in *Euphony*, a thank you to all the talented and dedicated people who made it meaningful—Miles (my fellow graduate, good luck!), Jake, Orli, Annabella, Ben, Maya, and all the rest of the team. Finally, thank you to all our contributors. Though I won't be reading your poems any longer, it was such an honor to have done so. Happy spring and happy reading!

Warmly,  
Mahathi

# Hunger in the Fat of Summer

---

*Robert Rothman*

You can  
be hungry

almost  
ravenous

for the bare

to cut  
teeth on

a bone  
worked clean

a winter  
branch

spare  
of leaves

a line  
unadorned

a love  
so hot

it burns  
away

all the dross

# Roosting Haiku

---

*Lynn Hoggard*

A Mardi Gras guy  
in mask, sleek feathers glowing:  
Ah, cedar waxwing!

Sharp chirps without song—  
the sparrow: Faint from afar,  
up close, a rock star.

With a John Wayne gait  
and Tony Soprano smile,  
the grackle's got style.

Courting in branches,  
mourning doves bow, coo, and mate,  
not letting love wait.

The great blue heron  
unfurls six-foot wings to fly,  
embracing the sky.

# The Other Dorothy

---

*Dana Robbins*

When Elvira Gulch first rode across the screen,  
I felt like she was coming for me. By the time

she wrote *Surrender Dorothy* in the sky, I was  
shaking in terror, sweating in my feetic pajamas.

For years, that witch cycled through my dreams,  
burst in my bedroom window with her hideous

cackle, retribution for my secret sins. Like Dorothy,  
I did not choose this.

Dorothy longed to be a good little girl again,  
redeemed into her own bed. She did not want

the power that was hers to claim all along, never  
meant the fatal watery end. But when the Witch

is melted away, the other Dorothy—in the book,  
not the movie—threw a second bucket just to be sure.

# Stretching Back

---

*Diane Webster*

Tricycle pedals up and down  
red-painted sidewalk  
from steps to gravel driveway  
over and over as red flakes off  
back to natural gray,  
a river bed receding  
in drought leaving mud  
drying, curling fragile  
parchment pulverized  
by shoes stomping  
to and from narrowed water  
leaving silt piled  
as it slithers deeper for cooler  
parts of earth even shade  
from towering banks dusting  
into whirlwinds like currents  
once swirled around boulders  
snagging fish line and gear  
for treasures found in dry years  
like tricycles discovered in weeds  
with handlebars full of dirt  
and long-ago roots stretching  
back generations.

# A Family Recipe

---

*Karnika Pombra*

Strike the sky with a silver fork  
at the crack of dawn like an  
egg breaks open and drips hot yellow  
yolk of the sun oozes into  
the whites of the sky, the whites of their eyes  
pop in anticipation as the wildfire  
spills onto our sidewalks and the world  
burns, fries, turns inside-out.

Smell the stale scent of yesterday's breakfast  
feels fresher than the fumes that asphyxiate  
the outdoors where matchstick sycamores strike  
the sky, charred coal-black by night  
tall cylindrical redwoods blaze like the cigarette  
my neighbor tossed away into the dry underbrush  
air, stained hot yellow with nicotine, addicted to  
igniting this small town of burning houses  
once lined up like eggs in a carton.

Inhale like my neighbor  
chain-smokes his cigarettes.  
breathe in the parchment of her unfinished  
manuscript, the treehouse built for his kids,  
her favorite linen dress, their kitchen table, her half-finished  
coloring book, their lost golden retriever, a fireman's hat  
take one final drag, their white bones, cracked like eggs by the heat  
watch ash rain from the bone-dry sky  
collecting in the urn that rests on our mantelpiece  
whisking with the cremated cinders of my grandfather  
in an urn as ovular as our fragile world  
its contents as lifeless as the unhatched yolk of  
the eggs I had for breakfast this morning.

# The Creation of Man

---

*Lena Breda*

From my dream of cotton and honey,  
I feel your finger along my back,  
Tracing the words of my spine with every knuckle

I feel how sweet it is to emerge from the velvet hood of dreams  
With your warmth against my warmth  
I understand how Adam came to be with a touch  
And why I reach for your hand while I sleep

# the creation of a language

---

*Uma Menon*

a language spreads itself thin  
across the oceans &  
i become its water

my first language was born in a land  
cut from the plentiful sea &  
mid-sentence an axe falls

my tongue becomes its own language  
with teeth to cut grammar &  
lips to spell in silence

my first language became a mother  
before i was born &  
i became a tongue

# Axe-Throwing at Irving & Cicero

---

*Nick Pecucci*

Before me

are two giant woodboards with targets  
like eyes.

Cheers:

someone's hit a small circle.

(In the parking lot my friends  
discussed mutual funds.)

Inside the outside  
world

I find infinite TVs.

On the screen miniature men  
toss axes that spin  
in a series of magnificent Xs  
to the amusement of a crowd  
obscured by a scoreboard.

(I once had a job  
interview down the street.)

The man with the hatchet  
reminds me to follow through.

"I want bullseyes."

(The names on the backs of the workers' shirts  
are the name of the company.)

Three people take videos of my shoulder blades.  
I wind up, imagining  
something on the line.

I picture birthday candles.

(My friend who worked at a library  
laughs at the possibility of a library  
next door.)

When I release my hatchet  
my hatchet barely spins,  
my hatchet does not arc.  
My hatchet hits a pupil  
and waterfalls away

as if the wood was steel.

Afterward

we see our competitors at a bar  
and pretend not to recognize them.

# Odyssey

---

*Nyna Dies*

I used to dream of peonies  
in antebellum

ante  
    (a poverty of you,  
bellum  
    catering to the savagery of the body)

in the gorge where we met &  
laid our worries to sea

garnered affections like  
    shucked shells—  
    pearlescent

where I kissed each  
fingertip on your left hand

& felt my heart  
hardening like the  
stones of Ithaca

# Crater Love

---

*Michael Olenick*

After driving for miles through pure flatness  
we arrived at the crater.  
I had wanted to see it since  
a fourth-grade daydream,  
a spatial infatuation you did not share.

I thought the sight of this ditch-dry  
hole on Earth would astound you  
appearing as it did with no warning  
save the scorched signage pointing the way.

But you could not be convinced:  
the bomb-like violence needed to create it,  
the fact that a plane had once crashed inside,  
that the astronauts had trained there;  
every detail I threw failed to catch your interest.

You told me to take my time  
while you explored the oasis  
of gift shops and displays.

I wandered for an hour to justify  
the long detour but, truth be told,  
after ten minutes I was as bored as  
I had been in that classroom  
and started dreaming about  
your preferred options of  
Hopi Mesa and Navajo tacos,  
which proved to be  
wholly superior.

# PJ's Pancake House after a Swim Meet

---

*Sean Devine*

My daughter's eyes scan the scarred surface of  
our table like the pages of a banned  
book. Her finger traces the initials  
of former Ivy League students pausing  
on some of the deeper cuts as glasses  
of water are set down before us. It  
isn't long until her eyes avoid mine  
while her knife is drawn in repeated strokes  
along the surface of the soft wood. She  
begins to leave her mark just as you once  
did—LC'95—in block letters.  
I watch her cheeks turn pink as our waiter  
arrives and pulls out his pad. We place our  
order—the ink pressed into blank paper.

# Accused

---

Shawna Ervin

Years after she's gone, my body craves my mother's touch.  
*God works all things together for good.*  
Betrayal lingers; she chose to leave me.  
*Everything happens for a reason.*

*God works all things together for good.*  
Hunger burned in my stomach; I forgot how to cry.  
*Everything happens for a reason.*  
His body heavy on mine, pink nightgown peeled back.

Hunger burned in my stomach; I forgot how to cry.  
*God will never give you more than you can handle.*  
His body heavy on mine, pink nightgown peeled back.  
*God wants you to forgive. He must be trying to teach you something.*

*God will never give you more than you can handle.*  
The police report says "aggravated incest."  
*God wants you to forgive. He must be trying to teach you something.*  
My name is in the victim box.

The police report says "aggravated incest."  
Betrayal lingers; she chose to leave me.  
My name is in the victim box.  
Years after she's been gone, my body craves a mother's touch.

# Music

---

*Shawna Ervin*

My voice is raw. I no longer want  
to sing, music a taunt of what  
I could not master, my dad's hands  
heavy on my little girl head  
as I failed to hold  
the tune, find the third  
or fifth. His free hand raised  
to drop into one, draw into two,  
three, up to four, the last  
hope, last chance. I hum  
his death, his hands now dust.

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# PROSE

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# PROSE EDITOR'S LETTER

Dear Reader,

Welcome to the Prose section of *Euphony's* Spring 2019 issue. This year has been a period of transition. For our Winter 2019 issue, there were three prose editors. The collaboration was hectic, but successful, and my two co-editors, Ben Shafer and Miles White, prepared me to take the reins. They have guided me through all the gritty administrative details with unwavering support, and this issue would not exist without them. To Ben, our new Editor-at-Large, thank you for trusting me to carry on your legacy. To Miles, our graduating Reviews Editor, thank you for your patience for my never-ending questions, for responding to my frenzied messages at any and all times of the night, and for giving me the confidence to take on this job. We wish you the best of luck and hope you'll come to visit for *Euphony's* 20th anniversary next spring!

Much like my collaboration with Ben and Miles, this issue's Prose section is eclectic and just a little chaotic. We begin with "Tornado Watch," a story that documents the loss of love and the life we thought we had. We then have the intense satire of "Confessions of a Department Chair."

This spring, we opened up a short story contest for students at universities across the country. We received dozens of submissions and present to you our top four. "After the Drought" is a work of flash fiction that unpacks a single moment in the narrator's life. "Untitled (May 6—Dearborn)" takes the form of a letter ranting about corporate culture. Next is "Airhead Days," another short story told from the perspective of a child, but instead of being a snapshot, this piece examines the relationship formed by an elementary school student and the high schoolers he meets after school.

Finally, we have "Let Them Eat Mooncake," our short story contest winner! An endearing tale of sibling affection, this story won the hearts and whetted the appetites of our staff, and we hope you enjoy it just as much as we did. Thank you for picking up this spring's issue of *Euphony*! See you next winter!

Happy reading,  
Orliana

# Tornado Watch

---

Wendy J. Fox

In our home there were sounds. One of the sounds was like a balloon slowly deflating, a sound of almost nothing, of air being displaced, and I am not sure if we knew it was the canary in the coal mine of our marriage, which we were not paying very much attention to, and so we did not worry about it in particular, we only complained about the unplaceable noise. We checked the fridge and all of the other major appliances, we checked the HVAC system, we poked around outside the house and found nothing, but we kept hearing the slow, gentle whooshing punctuated occasionally by a squeak. Or the call of a suffocating bird.

*We are paying the mortgage, and so I think we have some rights to get whatever this is fixed*, Jimmy, my husband, and I said to one another. We fiddled with the thermostat and took a flashlight to the crawlspace, and we called our insurance company, who kept wanting to know if we were opening a claim and we kept saying that we weren't sure, we weren't sure what was wrong—we were just trying to understand if we were covered.

We were perplexed at why it was so complicated.

We were married to one another, and we were also married to work, and we were married to our ideas, our ridiculous ideas—so caught up in the way laundry was folded or aspirational grocery shopping. Most nights the produce rotted as we hit the booze. If we were drunk enough, we didn't hear anything, until finally that balloon must have released the final wheeze all at once, sputtering around like a firecracker through our house.

*COULD YOU PLEASE*, I'd written with Sharpie on a bright-lime sticky on a Tuesday before I left for work—the last day Jimmy slept in our bed—*CALL A PLUMBER BECAUSE IT MIGHT BE THE PLUMBING?* I didn't know it was the last day then. I didn't know until I came home and his own note was pasted on the countertop.

*went to my moms*

It wasn't like him to leave a note. Usually he texted.

We had met, Jimmy and I, just over a decade ago. We were both working in an office, and he was a contract employee, and when his contract ended, he asked me out. It was surprising. We had barely spoken;

he was on a different team. We went on two dates, and the balloon filled up so quickly I thought it would pop. It was like a sharp intake of helium sucking the oxygen out of our bodies, like we already loved one another so much we couldn't breathe and we were only gasping hearts and guts. We were giddy and high and operating on an upper frequency.

We married on our fifth date—we made an impulsive drive to Blackhawk, Colorado, a casino town in the upper foothills of the Rockies. We both wore jeans, which was what we'd been wearing when we decided to get in Jimmy's car and go. Afterward, we rented a room at a hotel and then lay on the bed naked after consummating our union and wondered just exactly what we'd done.

We decided to sell our respective townhouses and get a place together. We decided we'd really make a go of it. We knew we were being reckless, but we didn't care. The first year of our marriage was in fact highly administrative, working backward through everything we hadn't done, like announcing our nuptials and getting to know one another in the day-to-day.

What we couldn't explain to people was how much grace our hasty commitment had given us. I wondered if this was what it was like in arranged marriages—we were already hitched, so we didn't have the luxury of enumerating deal-breakers because the deal was already done. In our first year, especially, we had to practice acceptance, constant, constant acceptance.

We thought it was a good foundation. Or at least I did.

And really, for how little we knew when we began, we took a long time to let out that last breath, for the balloon to finally deflate.

The night of Jimmy's note, our life had changed enough that I wasn't sure I wanted to fight for him, so I didn't call or text or email. I ordered a pizza and cracked a bottle of wine. I was sure he was not actually at his mom's, and I realized it was certainly not about the plumbing.

On our first date, I'd gone back to his place and we'd had sex on top of his messy bed and he kept saying to me, *Open your eyes*, and I did. He was inside of me and we kept our gazes locked.

When had I closed my eyes again? Year three? Year seven? And when had he closed his?

I'm not sure if it was worse to sign the separation papers, or if it was worse to sign the severance papers at my job. We hide from our marriages inside of work, or we hide from our work inside of our marriages, and then when both are gone, it's like those dreams we had in elementary school, naked on the playground.

Naked on the playground would have been better—at least in those dreams, we aren't thinking about sagging breasts or a failing ass or getting foreclosed on. In those dreams, it's only children, cruel, to be

sure, in their moments, but it's not the same cruelty that comes with the full exposure of adulthood.

The last day at the office, after Dave, our COO, let me go, I went into the supply closet to get a box for my things and he followed me in. I'd been sweating at my desk while I collected my thoughts, but the closet was arctic. Reams of white paper like glaciers, piles of sticky notes like tundra flowers in bloom, a case of AA batteries ready to light up as bright as the aurora borealis, and the foot of an easel sticking out like a narwhal's horn.

"It's not easy for any of us, Kate," Dave said. "I had to fire Michael. Worst day of my career." Michael was his stepson.

"Michael stole our lunches," I said. All of the boxes in the supply closet were either too big or too small. "Yes, I am telling you, your kid was the lunch thief. I caught him once. You probably didn't know."

"He was? That's not why he was let go. It's revenue. It's the markets. We can't control the markets, though I wish I could," said Dave.

I was freezing, and I wondered if I really wanted anything in my desk, and I wondered why Dave thought I cared about the worst day of his career. I had always liked Michael. I had hired him, and I hadn't said anything about the lunches because I figured if that was the worst thing he ever did, he was probably fine. It occurred to me Dave did the firings because Dave was secure.

I abandoned the search for the box. "I think I'm going to just go home," I said. "There's nothing personal in my desk or on my laptop."

"I can be a reference for you," Dave said, noticeably shivering too.

"No, thanks," I said.

My job search was going okay. I wasn't working that hard on it. I had a little money from the severance, and I had a little money from the divorce settlement. The settlement money I didn't really want, and I hadn't asked for it, but I took it anyway. It was a surprise and I wanted to be open to surprises, even though the realization that Jimmy had a large savings account he had hid from me stung. We weren't hurting financially and I wasn't a big spender anyway, so it was hard to believe his secret account had been anything other than a kind of a go-bag.

After we sold the house, I had a new apartment. I liked my place. It was small and compact, and it was mine. I bought bright-fuchsia towels, because I could. I hung up my art prints, and rearranged my furniture, a mix of IKEA and vintage. Jimmy had always said my furniture was like a college kid's—cheap stuff paired with hand-me-downs from Grandma. He liked things to match. He had said we were professionals and we should have a more professional-looking home. I said he was welcome to redecorate any time he felt like it.

After the first rush of nestling into my new space and shopping, I neglected the laundry, and I ate ice cream for dinner.

I know. Ice cream for dinner is a single-lady divorcée cliché. Well, it's a lot better than making something in the microwave.

It was hard to shake the job, and it was hard to shake the divorce. It wasn't that I missed Jimmy or my work so much, it was that I had spent so much time in the swirl of the marriage crumbling and the swirl of the office with the weird wind in it, right in the center, where the hot half and the cold half came together. The physical office was just a suite badly in need of air-balancing, but now that I was at home all the time, I kept thinking about how every day when I'd walk in, I would flash on how tornadoes are made, the convergence of warm and cool air. I knew logically, at least after I looked it up, that a tornado has to be anchored to the ground and tethered to a cloud to really form, to do its damage with wind speed and lightning and hail and gravel flinging everywhere—I knew this was not happening in my office, but still! People get so casual, they get comfortable, and they overlook danger. They think it won't happen to them.

My friends asked me if I knew Jimmy was going to file, and I said, *Oh, yeah. Long time coming. Beat me to it.*

But I had no idea. And actually, he didn't just file, he had me served with papers. After the note on the kitchen counter, it took only another three days for a courier to show. I knew something was up, re: *at my moms*, but I didn't expect to be served. We'd always been nicer than that.

So, just like a tornado. Out of nowhere. I'm the cloud and he's the dirt. I overlooked the danger too. Once it's going, watch out. I think I thought I was on the outside, or that I didn't understand what was forming. I thought we were tracking down a wheezing balloon, a sound in the house, but really I was in the middle of a storm and hadn't noticed getting there. The eye, they call it. It's characterized by light winds and clear skies.

The whooshing sound we had heard, it was those winds. An exhale of atmospheric gas. It seemed like Jimmy must have known all along.

*Open your eyes.*

With ice cream, it's the fancy flavors that get popular, like cookie dough or pints referencing jam bands. I like regular vanilla or chocolate. Strawberry is okay. I can handle a chunk of something mixed in on occasion, if I'm feeling adventurous, but generally I like my ice cream simple. I like my ice cream to reflect my vision for my life.

If there was ever a tornado flavor, I wouldn't even try it.

After I was let go, I didn't see anyone from the office on purpose, not that anyone tried to see me. I had survived the first round of layoffs, the fiscally necessary ones, like when Dave fired his stepson/lunch thief

Michael, and I had thought I was okay after that. Revenues recovered a little, and it seemed pretty smooth. I knew a couple of people from my team were riding out their unemployment and I thought I might be able to hire them back. They felt good, these ideas of rebuilding.

When Dave gave me the notice, it was just like getting served with the divorce papers. Breezy, transparent skies collapsing into gray. Paper seems so harmless. Then you lick an envelope and it cuts your tongue.

I wondered if no one from the office contacted me because I had been on edge for a while. Maybe they had come to dislike me. They all knew my marriage was falling apart, maybe they knew before I did, and also like a lot of people when their marriage is falling apart, I was drinking way too much, way too consistently. There was a feeling I had, and I am sure Jimmy had too, of waking up in the morning, sort of sliding open one eye, and just as the light hit, simultaneously praying there was coffee in the house and also taking a quick mental inventory of the booze for when we got off work.

It's not a feeling we would have wanted other people to understand, but that's how we were then. Planning around cocktails. The same way people plan their living room around their TVs.

At the office, I drank a lot of water. A gallon a day. I measured it in a quart jar, filled and consumed four times. *It'll change your life*, I would say to people in our cubicles. What I really meant was that perpetual hydration was the best bet against a hangover and maybe the only thing that was keeping me even remotely tethered to professional success. It kept the day-old alcohol smell off; it gave me something to reach for through the slog of conference calls and meetings. It was a sense of an accomplishment, when I'd hit that 128th ounce. Like I'd done at least one good thing.

Even though I didn't really want to look for a new job, I was looking for one anyway. The ice cream had mostly replaced the alcohol, though I kept up with the water-drinking.

I took a sip of ice water; I took a spoon of vanilla. I rolled a cube around in my mouth, I took a spoon of pistachio—pistachio is another basic flavor. Overlooked, really, in the ice cream canon.

My teeth were cold, and my insides were cold.

I emailed a recruiter. I updated my profile on LinkedIn. Took a sip of water, took a spoon.

Jimmy and I, we had barely spoken. The early years of our marriage, if nothing else, had taught me that I couldn't change his mind if it was made up, and they had also taught me that I didn't care to try, and not just with my husband. I think if my heart had turned in what seemed such a sudden way, he would have accepted it too.

*went to my moms*

Maybe he had, for a night.

In my old office, with the unpredictable temperatures, it was the cold that seemed to frustrate people the most. When it was hot, we all moaned and fanned ourselves, and the women cracked jokes about being of a certain age to never ask if a room was too hot, but the cold made people angry, bitter even.

Now I felt a kind of attentiveness. I had read online about humans being highly adaptive to chilly temperatures, and I had heard a story on the radio about a man who ran marathon distances in very cold places with not much gear. The story had opened with him crossing a Colorado mountain pass in a car in disrepair, and having to blast cold air to keep the windows from fogging up. How in this moment he changed his mind to believe temperature was yet another construct. How there was no other way to get through it.

When I opened my living room window, the November air came in gently. More cool than cold, but it did refresh.

In the kitchen, I opened another window, put the ice cream back in the freezer, and took a handful of ice for my water.

I wondered what my ex-coworkers would think of me now, or what my ex-husband would think. I wondered what they had thought of me then.

I read somewhere that people who chew ice are sexually frustrated. I tried not to chew the ice, because I had also read that was very bad for your teeth.

I read somewhere about people going on ice cream diets and ice cream cleanses. This seemed ridiculous, but I was neither experiencing the massive stomach pains or weight gain/weight loss that others had reported on the Internet.

I read somewhere that people who have lost a job should keep a daily routine.

I read somewhere that people who get divorced should try new hobbies.

I read somewhere that people who have a high tolerance for cold, like the marathoner, simply perceive temperature differently, resetting their expectations of what comfort is either through training or necessity.

I didn't have a philosophy. I just liked the way the ice cream and the ice water felt going down, how I could feel a cool slide all the way to my stomach. I liked the edge on the late-autumn air.

The trick, I realized, to avoiding disruption, like tornadoes or helium fires, was to keep it consistent and not allow the possibility of convergence.

If only I had known it was so simple.

When Jimmy did finally reach out to me, it was another note. He'd put it in the mail. I was sure I had never seen him post anything, so the short letter felt like it had weight, coming from him. He'd had to write it, fold it, address it, stamp it. I read the single page three times. Mostly what it said was that he was sorry. But he didn't say for what, and he didn't say why.

We had given it quite a go, I thought, as I tacked the letter to my fridge. We had tried. I refused to believe a decade together was a failure. His letter did not offer an opinion, just the *sorry* in his sign-off, inked in his messy hand.

It was December by then, and the winter was bearing down. I opened a window to feel the bite of the cold as I read the letter for the fourth time.

The ink was there, but all I saw was:

*went to my moms*

The room felt out of oxygen.

*Open your eyes.*

I closed the window.

*COULD YOU PLEASE CALL A PLUMBER*

I poured a glass of water and dropped some cubes in.

*Worst day of my career.*

Melissa, Michael, Tabatha, Mariette, Brian, Julie, Christian, Laird, Jorge, Dwayne, D'Shawn, Sabine, Trung, Roger, and Sommer—the group I had worked with from the office. We'd been let go separately, but I felt like I had a memory of riding the elevator down to the ground floor with them, the sixteen of us making the car groan.

My water glass was purple. Not a tornado color at all.

I figured that Dave, the COO, the one who had fired us all, had left too by now, though he probably got a payout, and I understood I could be happy for him. I could be happy for anyone, even Jimmy, even myself, given the right circumstances.

The ice water was condensing against the warmth of my hand, and Jimmy's note fluttered against the refrigerator door.

Maybe the final wisps of the air from the balloon were trapped between a fold of latex, air that had become even smaller as it froze.

Maybe with the right application of pressure or temperature, we could puff it up once more, and do it without having to go on tornado watch. Maybe if we were smart and careful, it could grow again.

# Confessions of a Department Chair

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*Fred McGavran*

As Chair of the Creative Writing Department at City University, I never saw my name in print except in the course catalogue. The reason is obvious: I was so far ahead of the publishing world they never understood me. Proud possessor of 7,479 rejection slips, I have shown my superiority so often that my last 5,829 submissions were returned marked “Opened by Mistake” rather than confirming the editor’s malignity by attaching a preprinted rejection slip.

It was not always so. My first sortie into publication was “MacDougal,” a whimsical piece I sent to *Mad Magazine* in 1964, when my genius was still struggling to emerge. Let me share it with you.

*MacDougal was a mighty man,  
He took his wee wife to bed,  
She slipped ‘neath the covers to give him a thrill,  
And blew up his bagpipe instead.*

This brought me my first rejection slip and near expulsion from the University when someone posted it online in the early 2000s. Nevertheless, it was enough to earn the first Master of Fine Arts (“MFA”) degree City University awarded.

“Drivel!” Professor Giles Scudder exploded at my defense of my one poem chapbook. Scudder was a holdover from the days when English professors and students actually knew the difference between a Shakespearean and Spenserian sonnet, and regarded the canon as something to be read and studied rather than excoriated and dismissed. “There’s only one rhyme and the rhythm gives me vertigo.”

“Haven’t you read Randall Jarrell?” I countered.

“Or Philip Larkin?” snapped Dwight Turgeot, Acting Chair of Creative Writing.

Dwight had a MA in teaching remedial reading, a specialty that disqualified him from teaching creative writing himself because it implied MFA candidates were poor readers. If I didn’t receive my degree, he was out of a department and a job.

Of course we had not read Randall Jarrell or Philip Larkin ourselves, but our sally was enough to send the old man into a paroxysm of “harrumphs” and impress and intimidate the other examiners with our

skill at faculty infighting.

“We have to give him the degree or our department will never get off the ground,” Turgeot argued, adopting a less belligerent tone. “We can’t be spending all our time begging the state legislature for money, can we, Giles?”

In academic matters an appeal to self-interest always prevails.

Not only did I get the degree but a position on the adjunct faculty to teach creative writing. What a change from my life as an academic ski bum, moving from department to department looking for something that would stick after my first failed marriage nearly cost me my draft deferment.

Dwight Turgeot was a companion from my undergraduate days and a fellow searcher for the perfect draft deferment. Remedial reading gave him the respite I lacked. Then he showed me some pornographic pictures he was selling for marijuana money, and I recognized one of the participants engaged in senior faculty’s favorite office hours’ pas-time. It was Henri DuMoins, who had parlayed a French accent and a chance encounter with Jean Paul Sartre in the Café de la Paix into becoming Dean of Arts and Sciences.

“How did you get these?” I asked intrigued.

“I went to his office to ask for more time for my dissertation, and the door was open a crack.”

“Dwight, our success is assured,” I congratulated him.

In exchange for what he thought were all the negatives, Professor DuMoins not only excused Dwight from submitting his dissertation but offered him the position of Acting Chair of the new department, as long as he could find someone to staff it.

So thanks to Dean DuMoins’ open door policy, I nurtured my first generation of students on the intricacies of plotting comic books and reverse engineering their favorite TV shows to create characters like Archie Bunker and Tom Brokaw with names selected at random from the phone book. We gloried in metaphors such as “stepping on eggshells” or similes like “sharp as a pin.” Thanks to me, “like” became the most used word in the English language. When it became too taxing to come up with a comparison, I proposed “like whatever” as a universal expression of angst. Enrollment exploded, and with my duplicate set of the DuMoins negatives, I quickly became the highest paid adjunct on the faculty.

Tests were my favorite times. I never read any of their tormented verse or the Raymond Carver inspired ramblings they called fiction, but I always praised them, urging them to continue in the program for the sake of a meaning-starved world. To my amazement they returned semester after semester, taking the same class again and again until I gave them an MFA to get rid of them. Thus I discovered the secret of teach-

ing creative writing: affirmation trumps content.

Teaching how to write a novel was a challenge. I hadn't read one since I had to do a book report on *Look Homeward, Angel* when I was a junior in high school. So we spent weeks dissecting every sentence or at least those my students could remember, since I'd thrown away my copy at the end of the 1963 school year and couldn't find my book report.

Every successful career has its challenges. Mine came when Melanie Craemer, struggling to finish her chapbook (we now required two poems to graduate) asked me, "Have you ever written a novel?"

The class was silent. If I hadn't been on my third cup of coffee, my heart would have stopped.

"Of course I've written a novel," I replied. "I'm using it as my dissertation for a PhD."

The class emitted a whooshing sound of amazement and relief. I, like them, was still struggling to finish a degree. Only Melanie Craemer frowned, pursing her thin little lips as if she'd bitten into something unpleasant.

"What's it about?" she demanded.

My mind was racing. Had she actually read the catalogue and knew City University did not award a PhD in creative writing?

"It's called *Poor Becky*, and it takes feminism to places it has never been before."

"Like where?"

"Sorry, Melanie. You know I can't discuss my work until after my defense."

The appeal to academic process silenced her, but skepticism flashed from her eyes. So I put her in the advanced class and awarded her a MFA for "The Teardrop," an autobiographical poem about finding happiness writing test questions for undergraduates.

"Dwight, it's time to raise the department to the next level," I remarked to Acting Chair (after five years) Turgeot at our graduation reception of white wine and grass.

Thinking I was angling to replace him, he reached for another glass of graduate student (under \$3 a bottle) chardonnay. Like so many department chairs, he was jealous of his faculty's successes.

"Be cool," I soothed him. "I'm thinking we should add a PhD in Creative Writing to our repertoire."

He had to sit down. Great ideas in art and literature often overwhelm lesser intellects.

"What's the business plan?" he asked knowing there had to be something in it for him.

"We get a larger lecture hall and run them through the same stuff our MFAs are getting for another three or four years. Our only additional expenses are the hall and a few more TAs to deal with the overflow."

He waved down an undergrad serving baked cheese puffs and roaches on a plastic tray.

“Man, this thing will be such a cash cow that the Dean will appoint you permanent chair and make me tenure track.”

“You’d need a PhD for that,” he said, the first intelligent observation he’d made that evening.

“Exactly my point. I get class credit for teaching the courses, and you supervise my dissertation.”

“What dissertation?”

“A novel. I call it *Poor Becky*.”

“We’ll talk about it when you have the novel.”

In a public show of collegiality, we both stuffed our pockets with leftover cheese puffs and roaches to celebrate the start of my work on a PhD.

Teaching to a 60 seat classroom in the mornings, I passed my afternoons in office hours encouraging would-be dropouts to stay with the program and writing recommendations for graduating students. They were all the same: “I am privileged to have read her/his work;” “a voice that must be heard;” “raw talent now honed to a razor’s edge;” “an annihilating vision;” or “at last Chekov’s heir.” With recommendations like these, none of them had any trouble finding positions on the adjunct faculties of the finest colleges and universities in the country. My only problem was my novel.

How would I ever find the time? And then I asked my TAs to see some student writing. And there it was: a sentence from this one, a paragraph from that scrambled so I could never be accused of plagiarism, creating characters and images as intoxicating and meaningless as a stream of consciousness novel.

“Who’s on my committee?” I asked Turgeot at a department party celebrating the enrollment of our largest ever MFA class.

“What committee? Have you been fooling around with the coeds? The Dean handles all the sex cases himself.”

Remember this was early ‘80s. We still called them that then.

“My dissertation committee, Dwight. I’ve finished my novel.”

He looked like he had already received his pink slip.

“I’ll talk to some people,” he muttered.

“Who are you thinking about?”

“Scudder, of course, and some new blood like LaClaire DuMoins and Henekin Sisal.”

Only a stern academic demeanor kept me from wincing. Scudder had slipped from being a reluctant colleague to an outright enemy after the Dean gave me the raise he had been dreaming of for 20 years.

Tenure track instructor LaClaire DuMoins, our Dean’s daughter, taught a course on “Feminism as a Liberal Art” featuring film clips of

Susan Sontag, Gloria Steinem, Jackie Kennedy, and home movies of herself as a child. At last count three students had enrolled in as many years. Due to a serious misinterpretation of “MacDougal” as a parody of the feminist vision, she despised me. Even worse was Henekin Sisal, an avowed communist, who reviled me for finding my students jobs in an exploitative academic environment.

“Just be sure we have someone from Psychology,” I cautioned, almost choking up. “This is deeply personal for me.”

What was deeply personal was my desire to become department chair. Never known for his skill in psychoanalysis, Dwight misread this as a sign of weakness. Perhaps, he thought, having exposed my inner child in *Poor Becky*, I would need psychological support to get through failing my defense. Naturally he chose Lenwick Belaire, PsyD, Chair of the Psychology Department, who had a reputation for so traumatizing his undergraduates that they would sign on for a MS to have any hope of recovery.

Dr. Belaire and I had formed a therapeutic alliance over drinks at the faculty club after I told him how many of my students were breaking down in class. Fortunately for us, they were covered for counseling under the University Health Plan. Belaire, who had been experiencing difficulty placing his students in anything other than fast food, saw an opportunity. We would station a psych graduate student or two outside my classroom and one inside for acute cases. Whenever an MFA student suffered a breakdown, they would enroll them in counseling. Within a semester, his MS students had practices any PsyD would envy.

Ms. DuMoins presented a distinct challenge.

“Let’s have coffee, LaClaire,” I suggested after a particularly difficult faculty meeting in which she had screamed herself hoarse demanding equal pay for male and female faculty, regardless of the number of students in their classes.

She looked as if I had asked her to fornicate in the corridor.

“Feminism is an integral part of creative writing, dear,” I continued.

“I have not gone out for coffee with a man since, since . . .”

“Please, LaClaire, I just want to be friends. Look, I so admire your work I’d like to make your course a prerequisite for our MFA degree, if it’s alright with you.”

Even a feminist can compromise with a male dominated system. By making her course a prerequisite, she was assured of enough students to be appointed assistant professor and acquire tenure.

Henekin Sisal, like so many would-be oppressed colonials born in Santa Monica, was more difficult. I wouldn’t have known him without the Che Guavera T-shirt, so little time did he spend on campus. Rather than pine away in an empty classroom, he concentrated on urging university libraries to buy Xerox copies of his mimeographed doctoral

thesis, *A Marxist Analysis of State University Funding*. When that effort failed, he obtained money from a liberal not-for-profit to send copies to state legislatures. The response from Iowa is worth a separate essay.

Instead of the startle reflex grimace with which LaClaire greeted me, he fixed me with a stare colder than Stalin's. Intrigue was the only way to reach him, so I slipped him a message written in lemon juice on a paper cocktail napkin at a faculty reception. Of course he recoiled at my touch, but when I interjected "The Battle for Algiers" into a lively discussion of "The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly," he sniffed the napkin, realized it contained a secret message, and took out his lighter to read it.

We met as planned at a McDonalds near the campus. Once I got him over speaking Russian, our negotiations proceeded rapidly. I would assign his thesis as a first year MFA requirement if he would approve my dissertation. As soon as he realized this would excuse him from reading it, he agreed.

Academic jealousy is nearly impossible to contain. A week before my defense, Dwight Turgeot announced he had asked Cambridge Doyle, author of 27 wildly successful romance novels under the pseudonym "Karla Sweetheart" and head of the rival creative writing department at State University to be visiting scholar on my committee. As a published author, he would be invulnerable to the argument that I was too far ahead of the literary world to be published.

Lesser men would have concluded they were doomed, but in academia certain death often offers hope for a joyful resurrection. I was copying my standard letter of recommendation for a graduating student when I saw he had spent a year in Doyle's program before transferring to mine.

"How many students in our program started at State?" I asked when he dropped by to pick up his letter.

"Nearly everyone who starts at State transfers here."

"Why?"

"Your program is more fun, has less work, and everyone who graduates gets a job."

"So how many are still with Professor Doyle?"

"Maybe five or six who can't leave without losing their scholarships."

My conversation with Professor Doyle was equally enlightening--for him. We were chatting over the worst scotch I had ever experienced at the reception Acting Chair Turgeot arranged for my committee the evening before my defense. Doyle appeared to be experiencing a gag reflex as I approached.

"Cambridge," I began, "I have some really good stuff in my office, if you'd prefer to talk there."

He looked away with the expression of a drowning sailor hope-

lessly searching an empty sea. Apparently he had read all or part of *Poor Becky*.

"We have quite a lot in common," I continued undeterred.

"Such as?" he grimaced, swallowing the rest of his scotch.

"Such as your students. I don't know how long State University can keep you on at your salary if this exodus continues."

He shook so badly I thought he would collapse. Apparently romance novels were not as lucrative as commonly thought.

"I could stop the bleeding if you'd give me a chance," I offered.

He did not speak, but lowered eyes and trembling hands suggested a desire to negotiate.

"I'll talk with the Dean about not accepting any more transfers from State University, as long as there isn't any unpleasantness tomorrow. *Capiche?*"

I left him fiddling with the peanuts as an antidote to the scotch.

My defense, as they say, was a classic. Instead of the usual display of day-old blueberry bagels, little cans of unsweetened orange juice, and lukewarm coffee, I had arranged for mimosas and sazerac cocktails along with Eggs Benedict, Bananas Foster, and Starbucks coffee. Cambridge Doyle was so impressed he whispered a story about his own defense to LaClaire DuMoins, who responded by sharing her fantasies for his next Karla Sweetheart novel.

After everyone had congratulated each other on surviving last night's reception, they sat down across from me at a long polished table. My 1,321 page manuscript, broken down into six more or less equal stacks was piled before them. Usually doctoral candidates feel they are standing before a firing squad. I felt like one of the fabled deans of long ago who used to tell new students at matriculation to look to their right and to their left: one of them would not be there in four years.

Professor Scudder had the first question or rather expletive.

"Incoherent to the point of imbecility!" he exclaimed, turning an even a deeper red than when sipping raw scotch.

Dwight Turgeot leaned back in his chair, pressing his fingers together over his chest. Victory, he thought, was his.

"Another cup of coffee, Professor?" he asked, smiling in triumph.

"That's what you said about *Ulysses*," LaClaire DuMoins began, "because you never understood Molly Bloom."

"I understand a slut when I see one!" the old man retorted.

"Is that why your review of *Ulysses* in *New Victoriana* was cited by Gladys Keeler in *The 100 Worst Reviews of All Time* as a prime example of ignorance confronting genius?"

"Gladys Keeler is a hack!" raged Scudder. "And James Joyce was a pornographer!"

Once your dissertation committee starts arguing about another

author, you are home free.

“Come now, colleagues,” Cambridge Doyle said soothingly to keep them from leaping over the table top onto each other. “*Ulysses* has produced more PhDs in English literature than Shakespeare and Milton combined. We’re sitting on a gold mine here.”

“I was awed by the parody of the democratic process in Dale’s encounter with Louise,” Henekin Sisal said. “The dictatorship of the proletariat has never had a more powerful advocate.”

“Where’s that?” Dwight asked, reaching for the stack of papers before him.

It was impossible to say, since the pages were not numbered. It took Professor Scudder and Acting Chair Turgeot another cup of coffee to figure that out.

“Becky’s dream of her mother birthing her is the best description of separation anxiety I have ever encountered in fiction,” Dr. Belaire interjected just as it appeared Scudder had found something about Dale and Louise that made his jowls tremble. “Only Freud’s psychoanalysis of Anna B approaches it.”

“Shall we take a break?” Dwight suggested, seeing the day turning against him.

With a rush my committee left the room to scream at each other in the hall and fend off Belaire’s psychology grad students trying to build their practices. I took the Acting Chair aside. A candidate for a new degree needed a unanimous panel.

“Dwight, this thing is big enough for both of us,” I reassured him. “What’s old man Scudder’s problem? Doesn’t he want to retire?”

“He’d be out of here like a shot if the state legislature didn’t cut our budget every year.”

“We’ll make so much on the PhD program we can keep him on at full salary after he retires,” I argued. “And give you a raise, too.” No one on the faculty besides me had had a raise since the Nixon administration. “Talk to him for us.”

Professor Scudder was unmoved.

“Never again!” he screamed.

Then in the most dramatic moment of his career, he raised his arms, gripped his chest, and collapsed. Two of Dr. Belaire’s students were on him before he hit the floor.

“Your insurance card!” one of them yelled, patting the old man down for his wallet.

Professor Scudder groaned.

“We can’t call an ambulance without it,” the other counseled.

Scudder, I fear, was beyond hope or desire of recovery. My committee left him lying there to consider whether they could proceed without him.

“The university only requires five on the committee,” Dwight said acknowledging defeat. “Let’s get on with it.”

So the committee excused me from the room to vote. I spent the time watching Dr. Belaire’s students debate whether they should call an ambulance without Scudder’s insurance card and deciding it was probably unnecessary since he had died.

“University Hospital is a teaching hospital,” the first one said. “They’ll thank us for giving them the body.”

“University Hospital generates enough bodies without our help,” his colleague countered.

They compromised and called the county morgue. It promised a pick up within three hours.

“Should we ice him down?” the first one asked.

“Only if he has another suit for the funeral.”

That settled, it was almost anticlimactic when the conference room door opened and Dwight Turgeot emerged to shake the hand of City University’s first PhD in creative writing, myself. There would be hundreds even thousands more. To celebrate I had my students drag in wash tubs of iced champagne. It was the happiest passing a dissertation party ever held at City University. Even old man Scudder lost his red faced angry look as he lay resting on the floor. One of his former students remarked he was far better as a prop than as a professor.

As a PhD I was awarded a tenured position as assistant professor, allotted a 320 seat lecture hall with 16 TAs, and given the largest raise since the football coach’s contract was renewed. We were flooded with applications for the new PhD program. Anyone could see why. All candidates had to do was register for the same classes they’d already taken for their MFAs so they could cut them all, except for those unlucky 16 TAs. Our success was so great that I was soon promoted to associate and then full professor, generating more free cash flow than the rest of the College of Arts and Sciences combined. No longer did I have to threaten Dean DuMoins with exposure when I wanted the heat turned up or the janitors to make an extra run to carry out pizza boxes after our afternoon snack.

My first PhD lecture assured my success. Before a packed and hushed house I arose, moved unsteadily to the podium (sazerac and marijuana can do that to you in the morning), and delivered my first one word lecture in a trembling nearly inaudible voice: “Foucault.”

I sat down to a silence like that between the heart stopping and death. For a terrible minute I thought I had lost them. Suddenly Henekin Sisal, who had pushed his way into the SRO hall behind a dolly of Xerox copies of his dissertation, cried out: “Foucault! Of course!”

Cries of “Who the hell’s he?” erupted around the room.

“No teacher of any integrity can do more than speak his name,”

Professor Sisal intoned. “To do so would usurp the students’ freedom by exercising a power over them incompatible with knowledge.”

Confused eyes sought mine, much as the confused eyes of his disciples must have sought the Buddha’s the day he received enlightenment. I nodded slowly and then lowered my head onto my outstretched palms. The hall erupted.

“Yes! Of course! Foucault!” they howled, while Sisal passed amongst them collecting \$27.98 plus tax for his tome.

“This is what capitalism has done!” he cried over the din.

After that first lecture, the University posted guards at the door to keep unregistered persons out. Studies have shown the chaotic classroom now the hallmark of American education began with me. Even in an age of podcasts and TED talks, the one word lecture still reigns supreme.

I soon attracted copy cats. Without attribution a well-known TV program copied my format for decades of shouting, shoving, and raving as devoid of intellectual content as any of my classes. Provocation followed by stream of conscious audience participation became the model for talk radio and *Fox News*, where rants are interspersed with uninhibited call-ins. Take an idea, any idea, and run with it. There’s no stopping success.

Not everyone can write like Shakespeare or Karla Sweetheart. Many of my students had low self esteem because they could not write anything. Far better to give them confidence building exercises on cultural theory than assign a literary text that might make their feelings of inadequacy worse.

I was blessed the leading intellectuals of the day all espoused my theory. About the time I was beginning *Poor Becky*, Edward Said published *Orientalism*, which demonstrated to his satisfaction that any person from a dominant culture who said anything about another culture was seeking to expropriate and exploit it. This disarmed one army of privileged observers and empowered another of ravished victims. Mere mention of Said’s name silenced anyone with a cultural perspective wider than their television screens and gave voice to all the ignorant and oppressed living outside the offender’s zip code.

Most helpful of all was Jacques Derrida, who showed any text could be deconstructed (or destroyed) by assumptions and methods unknown to its author. This produced a sense of intellectual superiority to replace that lost sense of cultural superiority Said had so cruelly taken from my students. Thanks to Derrida, children of the white upper class recovered their sense of mission with consequences we are only beginning to appreciate.

Despite frenetic efforts to make *A Marxist Analysis of State University Funding* relevant to a new generation of students, Henekin Si-

sal found himself increasingly isolated. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, he and a few holdovers hanging onto endowed chairs at Harvard Law School were the only communists left in academia. So he changed his name to Harold Johnson, moved to Nevada, and joined the Alt-Right. His timing could not have been better.

Did I tell you how I finally rid myself of poor Dwight Turgeot? With his pitiful degree, he was not qualified to teach anything in the department he oversaw, and we needed more faculty. Two hours a week in the classroom were so tiresome for me.

“What about a sabbatical, Dwight?” I suggested. “You and the wife and kids deserve a break.”

“I don’t have a wife and kids.”

“Then maybe a stay at one of those places where they put hot stones on your back and feed you organic lettuce and lima beans?”

“I don’t like lima beans.”

That’s when I decided to talk to Dean DuMoins. We invited Dwight to a retirement party without telling him whose it was. Although he treated me like a waiter rushing his table, he accepted the inevitable after the Dean showed him a printout of his retirement account with an extra contribution to leave quietly.

As my MFAs and PhDs graduated, they fanned out across the country to set up creative writing departments of their own. Wildly successful, creative writing became the most profitable discipline in all academia, growing exponentially with each new graduate. Like referral sales, success was not measured by selling a product but by enticing others to join the movement. A degree meant a job meant a new program meant new students and on and on into infinity. Not until the launch of the iPhone did American enterprise enjoy such success. With margins higher than football and basketball, creative writing saved higher education in America at a time when declining enrollments and stunted attention spans threatened our knowledge industry.

The Board of Trustees responded by naming me to the Karla Sweetheart Chair of Creative Writing, handsomely endowed with enough cash and perks to keep me out of the classroom most of the year. My position finally secure, I had a negative burning party with Dean DuMoins.

No tree grows up to the sky. I was beginning to think I would ride the bright wave of success forever, until a voice from the past nearly destroyed me. Some disgruntled student posted LaClaire DuMoins’ ancient interpretation of “MacDougal” as a seduction sonnet on line, and it went viral. Though I had not even leered at a female student or colleague in thirty years, the poem was seen as a confession of suppressed desire.

Then something worse happened that forced me to retire. LaClaire,

now Professor DuMoins, inspired by the reconstruction of William Foster Wallace's posthumous novel from fragments, decided to do the same for me. Locating my original manuscript in University Library's dead storage, she spent five years and two major grants preparing it for publication. After all, if *The Pale King* could be a best-seller, so could *Poor Becky*. Her distrust of men made her a powerful advocate: I had to split the royalties 50-50.

Thus, like Dwight Turgeot, I found myself at a surprise retirement party, where the Dean demonstrated convincingly that I would make more money retired than on salary. Even my critics pretended to accept my defense of my poem as an ironic critique of American exceptionalism to see me go. I only wish Harold Johnson had been there, but his *Breitbart* column and appearances on *Fox News* don't leave much time for old friends.

So after 7,479 rejection slips, I not only found a publisher but a place on *The New York Times*' best seller list. Royalties are wonderful, not to mention payments for the film rights LaClaire negotiated. Had I realized this earlier, I might have changed my teaching method. But no regrets; I am successful beyond Harold Johnson né Henekin Sisal's wildest dreams. I have helped bring down a great civilization.

# After the Drought

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*Bina Perino*

*4th Place Contest Runner-Up*

We took buckets to the river every Sunday morning. I dug my small fist into the loose skirt flowing from her hips. Day spilled into a lilac sky as we walked, two by two, down the trampled soil as dark as our skin. Our empty buckets yawned with thirst, clinking like a bell at every step; every reverberation a waking call to the sleeping children and men. When we arrived, the river was a perfect purple and pink mirror of the sky. Both clear and infinite. While the women filled their buckets to the sloshing brim, we sang a song.

Mother's voice was sweetest when she sang, slipping into harmony to join the somber noise. Sometimes I could understand what they were singing, sometimes I hummed along. The words had something to do with rain, mercy, and a Lord who was always listening, but not.

I watched Mother as she unlocked one bucket from the other, materializing two buckets when it appeared there was one. She was like a prophet: she brought eight kids into the world, brought corn and potatoes to our mouths, and brought water from the river back home. I watched her sing through pursed brown lips as we stepped on the edge of the river. She pressed the lips of her buckets to the river, watched them drink, and pulled their weight out from the water.

Stretches of water crawled up to greet my toes. I greeted back, waving with a toe-wiggle. I bent down to the face looking back at me. I smiled and she instantly smiled back. I fell in love with how automatic she was: we smiled at the same time, we turned heads at the same time, we splashed the water at the same time. And, when I splashed the water, she appeared again! In an instant, without demand. She would reappear as if she hadn't gone anywhere, as if she were still crouched into her knees staring back. I wondered if we were the same. We both had dark eyebrows flaring over our eyes as mossy-brown as the riverbed. We both had skinny fingers and narrow wrists, and I wondered if she knew the clutching twist of hunger.

I ran my hands over the surface of the water, watching my reflection imitate. Next to her, I saw Mother. Her reflection reached back to her, dissipated into the ripples around the bucket, and materialized

again in the same form. I smiled at my reflection, knowing she, too, had a mother.

Her soft hand pressed against my back and I looked back at her. She stood over me with her two full buckets. Above her, the sky changed with unspooling threads of gold. To the east, the sun was claiming her day. The other women, with some of their children, paced back along the trail. Two by two, they carried their heavy buckets, careful not to lose a drop. Mother held her buckets in a firm, wide grip. Her arms were thick with the ritual. I stood to walk with her, balling my fist into her skirt again.

I curled my lip and watched my feet march across the dirt path. I recalled every Sunday morning since memory took place. They were always about the same: Mother waking me with a tender nudge, me following her from the house to the trail, me watching the buckets in Mother's hands bounce with each step, and us arriving at the lilac river. Sometimes there were more clouds, sometimes more stars. There was always singing. Singing for rain, forgiveness, or salvation. Everyone with their hands in the water and filling their buckets with promises.

Isn't this worship?

# Untitled

## (May 6—Dearborn)

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Miles White  
3rd Place Contest Runner-Up

David—

You were right. You were right and I didn't even try to understand you and I'm so so sorry.

The job David I don't know how I can stand it. It's not the worst thing in the world but I hate it so much. It's too quiet and too stressful. I feel like I'm not contributing anything but everyone says I'm *really valuable* and I can't tell if they're wrong or if they're lying.

It's always *valuable*. That same word. The corporate culture is oppressive and everyone buys into it. Only a couple people stand out. Only a couple people even try to be anything at all. There's this guy Frank and he tells this joke every morning and he keels over like it's the funniest thing he's ever heard and I don't get it. Sometimes other people laugh but I can't tell if they're being polite or if they think it's funny too. It feels like it goes back and forth.

Naömi in the cubicle across the aisle feeds memos into the shredder without reading them. The building hums. It's only June.

David these are the best years of our lives and I'm tired. I'm so fucking tired. I can't sleep. The days are so quiet that in the night I'm on needles. I'm tense. I'm convinced that everything happens at night and that's why the days are so long and so quiet. I'm afraid that if I go to sleep then everything will finally change when I wake up and I won't be ready. I know better but knowing doesn't help.

I wish you understood. I wish I could talk to you. I go to the office five days and everyone's so busy and everyone has this edge—this edge in their voices all the time and we have these meetings and these team huddles and these brainstorming sessions and everyone talks about how much work there is but nobody actually does anything. Nothing happens. You know I was supposed to be a copywriter or maybe an editor but I haven't written a line. You bought me those pens and they're still in the box.

David I miss you and I tell myself it won't be too long but goddamn it doesn't feel that way.

And the people—I don't understand the people at all and I won-

der if they understand me. My managers are so angry all the time but they tell me not to worry about it. My coworkers are quiet most of the time but sometimes sometimes and you never know when but they just explode they break down at their desks and I can't even look at them because I'm afraid that if I do then I'm next. It's unpredictable. Sometimes in meetings the noise is deafening and sometimes everyone's afraid to speak. At least I think they're afraid. It feels like fear. Everyone hates it but nobody says anything about it but we all know and somehow that makes it worse. Some people try to cope but nothing helps.

I haven't slept like this since the fifth grade. I don't dream. It isn't natural.

Frank oh god Frank tells the same joke every morning at the same time always the same joke at the exact same time in the exact same cadence and nobody laughs not even Frank laughs and it's hard to tell if he does it out of habit or if he does it because he knows everyone expects it. Clair used to laugh when I started here back when they were fucking or maybe they never were fucking and I was looking too much into it. She doesn't laugh anymore. Sometimes I want to beg Frank to let it go. Sometimes I want to smash his teeth in but I know I'll never do anything about it.

I don't think I'm making any sense but David I don't know what to do with myself. I don't know what these people are doing to me. I'm not a violent man. I'm not an unreasonable man. But I get so worked up sometimes that I think they're onto me and then I have to go hide in the meeting room and act like I'm writing copy until I calm down. I don't even know what they're onto me for. I haven't written a word since I got here. We keep having these meetings but the managers never actually talk to us. Maybe they think we already know what to do so they don't tell us anything. I can't understand these people.

Lin in the cubicle across the aisle doesn't move. She's motionless the eight hours. She's the only one that never breaks. I think she knows something I don't. I look at her not moving and I know that she is unbelievably busy and I'm afraid to ask any questions.

I have these recurring nightmares but I can't remember them. I swear to God David I haven't changed.

I remember when I was a boy my father would nurse cheap whiskey and tell me *the only thing a man has in this life is his name and his word* and my mother would tell me when I was older that *all we have is our time on this earth*. She was tired too but I didn't know it then. I keep thinking about it.

One day I'm going to die David and it'll be just NOTHING and I'm scared. I'm so scared because I know that whatever comes after will be colder and quieter than this is. I don't think I'll be ready. I don't think I'll ever be ready.

David I hope you're taking care of yourself. I hope you're sleeping well and I hope that it rains at night like you always liked. I want to think that it's better where you are. I want to think that you were right and I was wrong.

David I love you and I'm afraid to tell you that because I'm afraid that once I say it I won't be able to stop and I'll keep and keep saying it until it doesn't mean anything anymore because nothing here means anything at all but David David I still love you.

It's cold. It's so so cold here. It's only October.

I miss you and I want to be where you are forever.

—Jonathon.

# Airhead Days

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*Sabrina Castillo*  
*2nd Place Contest Runner-Up*

Every day for about two weeks, a group of high schoolers would hang around the elementary school courtyard at dismissal, selling all the naïve kids Airheads. Addicted as we were to the sugar high, we crowded around these cool high schoolers, enamored with their vast quantities of flavors, ranging from green apple to blue raspberry to that mystery flavor that I never quite figured out. The fifth graders would nonchalantly whip out the few dollars of allowance their parents gave them, and everyone else would look on in envy because they didn't need to ask their parents for permission. They just did it. But compared to the fifth graders, the high schoolers were like God. They strolled in with their bubble gum popping, midribs bare, enjoying the pleasant sun that spring gave them, a precursor to the relentless heat of summer.

I wasn't able to taste the Airheads they sold. I had a cavity by then, and my mom was paranoid that I was going to get another one. No matter how much I asked and ate my vegetables and did my chores, she wouldn't buy one for me. I also felt weird about being the only fifth grader without an allowance. Mom always said that I didn't need money yet, and Dad agreed. I think they were nervous that I wouldn't be fiscally responsible, whatever that meant. I mean, I'm twenty-one now and I buy video games with the money I earn from my part-time job. It's not like I was going to buy out the entire stock of Airheads; I just wanted one flavor—watermelon.

So for the first week of selling, I stood at the edge of the crowd, scuffing my gray sneakers into the gravel, while I heard the clamors of, "Three strawberries please!" or, "Daddy, can I have orange?"

But what my classmates said wasn't as interesting as what I heard the high schoolers say. There was a period in my school days where neither Mom or Dad would pick me up on time at dismissal. Mom was doing yoga that sometimes went overtime, and Dad's job let him out thirty minutes after dismissal. The high schoolers were reluctant to leave me moping around by myself when I had to wait outside the secretary's office, so they stuck around until I got picked up. Don't get me wrong, they didn't talk to me directly or anything at first. They were too cool

to actually acknowledge me in a way that made me real. But they'd always linger, just chatting, giving me a glimpse of the glory days I've been dreaming of.

Turns out it's a lot more bullshit than elementary school. It's complaining about the latest boy toy or how that one kid in class is a smart-ass and refuses to do any actual work.

Actually, that sounds pretty much like elementary school 2.0, now that I think about it. Maybe I romanticized being a teen too much. Maybe I hated that I and the kids around me didn't have any autonomy. These high schoolers, these...what were they, fifteen, sixteen? These gods casually just went to the local pizza place, or had girlfriends, or ate whatever and did whatever and no one could stop them.

I loved hearing how they talk to each other. It's so sincere, but not. A girl, Maika, always referred to one of the guys, Ethan, as "my boy," and always aggressively punched his arm. Another boy, Sebastian, annoyed the hell out of Maika, because he was always looking at her phone while she was texting. A girl named Roya was clearly in love with Sebastian, but wouldn't admit it to anyone, even though she threw herself at him at every opportunity. She was the one who only ever wore crop tops when they were selling Airheads.

After a week of selling and waiting around with me until my parents came, Maika asked for my name. Only then did they include me in their conversations, asking me about who my teachers are and my favorite games to play at recess. I felt their genuine interest in me, even if just for a little while, and would tell me about their inside jokes. A lot of it was filtered, of course. I was only ten, and...well, they knew better.

Sebastian became my favorite, mostly because he let me play Bejeweled on his BlackBerry. In exchange, I brought them my Tamagotchi to show. It was nerve-racking at the time—Tamagotchis were banned from school, so my heart was in my throat all day, hiding this secret treasure. Roya, in an effort to impress Sebastian, named my Tamagotchi Chisa, even though I had already named it Leaf.

At some point, I finally asked them, "What are you selling Airheads for?"

Ethan, laid-back on the bright orange seat next to me, light brown hair in his eyes, answered in a slow drawl, "Detention."

I looked at him, mouth agape. Maika, laughing, punched his arm. "Ethan! Don't scare the kid!" She leaned over a little to look at me. "Sorry, it's for our bowling team. We're too small to have significant funding."

That's when my eyes dropped to the bright kaleidoscope of a box they always carried. Just thinking about the sweet taste of artificial watermelon in my mouth drove me crazy. I had to tear my eyes away from the forbidden box.

Of course, Maika already noticed. "Want one?" she inquired.

I shook my head, face aflame. Ethan took the chance to tease me. “Awww, he’s embarrassed!”

Roya, sitting on the other side of me, said without looking up from her phone, “We’ve seen you hanging around the edge of the crowd. Come on, we don’t bite.”

Sebastian quipped, “Bet that you’d like to bite me!” to which Roya slapped his leg. I saw the look she gave him. *Don’t say that in front of the kid.* I liked how they were considerate of me, but I also wished they treated me as an equal.

“So, you want one?” Maika asked again. Her dyed midnight-blue hair swept over her frail shoulders as she leaned over more. Again, I shook my head.

“You know,” Roya started, phone disappeared into her purse that she treated as a proper bookbag, “life’s too short to cut out the things you enjoy. If you’re trying to impress someone...don’t.” Ethan nodded solemnly along as he mussed up my hair. My cheeks continued to burn, as I thought about the fledgling crush I had on Maika. I wanted her to look at me like Roya did towards Sebastian, but I started to notice the way Ethan’s touches lingered on her and the way she tucked her hair behind her ear, dark eyes aglitter. I don’t think they realized themselves what was going on.

“I don’t have any money,” I protested in a whisper, eyes cast down. The too-bright white tiled floor glared at me and my untied sneakers.

“Ah, that’s okay,” Maika replied. “I’ll just put a dollar for you.” She opened the box, showing me the array of options. Blue, green, pink, you name it. They had it all. Hand shaking, I chose the watermelon and gingerly held it in my hands. The four teens all put a dollar in the money envelope and took their favorite flavor to eat with me. They excitedly egged me on to open it, so I did. That first bite was achingly sweet, and in that moment I didn’t want to do anything else but eat this forever, along with my too-cool friends.

Shortly after, when we were halfway done with the taffy sweet, the secretary ducked her head out of the office and announced, “Your mom’s here, hon.” Heart racing, I had to stuff the Airhead into my bag and swallow whatever remnants were in my mouth before I rushed to the front entrance where Mom walked in. I greeted her with a kiss on the cheek and turned around to look at the people who’ve stayed with me. “Bye...!” I called out and waved a hand. Ethan, Maika, Roya, and Sebastian grinned and waved back frantically.

In Mom’s white SUV, she looked back at me and asked, “Who are those youngsters?” I explained the situation to her and she said, “Oh, they’ve been staying with you. That’s kind of them.”

The next day, the teens shared their inventory with me again, putting in a dollar to satisfy my sweet tooth and to eat with me. This time, I

was able to finish the whole taffy before Mom came to pick me up. After I kissed her on the cheek, instead of taking me immediately back to the car, she appraised the high schoolers quietly, then nodded, as if they passed whatever test she had in mind. Without a word, she whipped out two twenties from her green floral wallet and handed them over. Maika, eyebrows furrowed, questioned, "What's this?"

"For being with my son."

Ethan, Roya, Sebastian, and Maika all shared a confused look with each other. "Oh, no, it was really no big deal..." Ethan started to counter. But Mom wouldn't have any of it and insisted. Reluctantly, Sebastian took the money and offered an Airhead in exchange.

After a moment's consideration, Mom agreed. "It's the least I could do." She took out another dollar, to which Roya denied and said that it's on the house. A look of surprise flickered in her eyes as she looked at Sebastian. The high schoolers opened the box to show her their wares. Poring over the options, Mom muttered, "Never had one...wonder what's good..."

Maika suggested the watermelon, which she winked at me for. I blushed and thanked God that Mom wasn't looking at me. "It's one of our most popular!"

Mom nodded, took one, and thanked them profusely. She then looked at me. "Do you want to say bye to your new friends?"

I nodded and ran to Sebastian's legs. "Thank you for letting me play with your phone."

Sebastian laughed. "Anytime."

Then I ran to Maika's legs. "And thank you for sharing your time with me." The other three teens surrounded me in a hug, making heart-felt squealing noises. Too soon, we let go and I let Mom take my hand as we walked out of the school.

The next Monday, the teens didn't come back to sell again, much to everyone's disappointment. It took another two days to realize that their fundraiser was over.

I still think about them sometimes. Do they remember the quiet kid they kept company all those years ago? Did Roya ever confess? Did Maika and Ethan ever see their true feelings? Do they still bowl together? I like to think so, and maybe we'll get to see each other again.

# Let Them Eat Mooncake

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*Anna Lu*  
*1st Place Contest Winner*

*No food allergies*, Lucy's records declared, tucked away somewhere in her kindergarten's front office. Will had watched their mother pen the lie on his little sister's documents in neat, even handwriting.

For the most part, they lived the lie. Will would ladle heaps of fried rice onto a hungry Lucy's plate, ensure he and Lucy always had equal portions of sweet watermelon clutched in their sticky hands, snort along with Lucy's muffled giggles around chipmunk cheeks full of pork bun. She swallowed the truth down with weighty gulps of their shared Beijing yogurt.

But tonight, the full September moon climbed high in the wispy sky and perched itself above their home, seemingly oblivious to its effects on humanity below. It glowed, undisturbed, as raucous relatives streamed into Will and Lucy's home, as the truth stirred and yawned bitterly in Lucy's stomach. Sneakers and flats and boots congested the entrance. Raving chatter and gushing from the living room flooded the late hours with salvos of Mandarin, Cantonese, and punctuated English. Mooncakes of all kinds flooded the kitchen counter, threatening to spill their colorful, embellished packaging onto the tiled floor.

The piles stubbornly refused to shrink in size, even as the adults sliced mooncake after mooncake into small, satisfying slabs. The portioned pastries were presented on cute wooden discs, but never lingered there long before greedy fingers snatched them up to be munched over tea. Will himself took advantage of his short stature—a source of disgruntlement every other day of the year—to dart under the throng of outstretched arms and snag his own share of slices.

Lucy stayed back on the couch and kept her fingers wrapped around her hot, brimming mug.

Pleased with his winnings, Will dashed over and plopped down beside her. He popped a fruity one into his mouth and hummed in delight. "Here," he said without thinking, and held out his handful of soft slices to Lucy so that she could partake of the sweet as well, as per their personal tradition. But Lucy merely bit her lip where she normally would have seized and devoured the offerings with relish.

Mortified, Will hastily retracted his hand. “Oh, I—sorry.”

“It’s okay. I would forget, too, if I were you.” Lucy smiled, her cheeks dimpled. Her legs, too short to reach the ground, swung over the edge of the couch in a carefree facade. She poked him in the side. “So tonight you gotta eat for me! I mean, if you think you can handle it.”

Will forced a smile in return, but the miniature heap of mooncake wedges cupped in his hand had lost their appetizing glamor. They seemed to taunt him, now, their exposed fruity and savory cores jeering, *eat us, eat us, at least you can*. He stuck a taro mooncake slice in his mouth and half-heartedly chewed. A sensation of sickening wrongness planted itself in his stomach. It panged like hunger.

*If I were you*, she’d said. Will wished it was true.

A familiar aunt untangled herself from the crowd, skittered over to their side, and pulled them into a quick hug. “Look at you two; so skinny!” she tutted in stilted syllables. “Has your mother not been feeding you properly?”

Will hoped his scowl was distinguishable around his mouthful.

“Hi, Linda-*ayi*,” Lucy said demurely. “How are you?”

“I’m fine, just fine,” Aunt Linda enthused. “But you! Is everything okay? Usually you’re such a good eater.” She gently pried Lucy’s rigid fingers apart to take her tea away, ignoring the sound Will made from the back of his throat. A wedge of flaky egg mooncake was pushed into Lucy’s empty hands. “Eat, eat! Today is a special day.”

Will snatched it from Lucy. “She can’t,” he said tersely. “Mom’s told you before—”

“*Aiya*, Will, I know what your mother says, but she is being silly,” Aunt Linda scoffed. “You cannot have allergy to mooncakes. Something *in* them, maybe. In fact—” She plucked the mooncake slice from his hands and delicately broke it apart. “This Linda-*ayi* can prove it.”

Lucy fidgeted and glanced at her mug, which Aunt Linda had set on the coffee table. “I don’t think—”

Aunt Linda hushed her as she carefully separated the flaky crust from the mooncake’s hard yolky core. “Almost done.”

Will bristled. He was only ten, yet it seemed he knew the meaning of *allergy* better than this probably hundred-year-old aunt. Also, he and Lucy and food were *exclusive*! And if Aunt Linda wouldn’t listen to him, then there was only one course of action. He dashed off to the kitchen.

“Again? Every year, I swear; why do I even invite her,” his mother said angrily, once Will had rapidly relayed the situation. She took a moment to brush crumbs from Will’s cheek, then rolled up her sleeves and rushed off, armed for confrontation. “Thinking she’s ‘calling my bluff’ *Honestly*,” she muttered.

His father briefly glanced at her as she strode past him, then broke from the gaggle of relatives gathered by the mooncake-laden kitch-

en counter to look down at his sulking son. “So grouchy,” he chided. “What’s wrong?”

“Linda-*ayi*’s feeding Lucy,” Will said miserably. “Mooncakes, I mean.”

His father craned his neck around the corner to peer into the living room. Will mimicked him, though his view was partially obscured by an uncle, who was currently engaged in some particularly animated conversation. As they watched, Will’s mother nonchalantly wrestled the deconstructed mooncake from Aunt Linda’s bony fingers, despite Aunt Linda’s snappish complaints. A smile was plastered across Will’s mother’s face. Lucy scurried between them to gingerly retrieve her tea from the coffee table.

“Your mother’s got it handled,” his father said. “But you’re not really angry at Linda, are you?”

Will averted his eyes and glowered at a nearby cabinet.

“Well, we know how you are with Lucy and food. You know, this boy—” His father raised his voice, turning back to his guests.

“Dad, no—”

His father ignored him. “—he took to Lucy the moment he saw her!” Wide grins and amused looks were shot at Will from his father’s audience, most of them having heard this all too many times over dinners. “Four years old and whining that he wanted to bottle feed her—but he would spill the bottle and make such a mess. The number of times I had to wring milk from their clothes...”

“Dad!” Will sputtered, even though every word was true. He loved the way that little Lucy loved salted duck egg with her porridge, snapped up lotus seed and taro and red bean paste, munched happily on assorted nuts and fruits, gobbled up roast pork and seafood like no one’s business. He loved food, she loved food, and everything was right in the world.

But somehow, as soon as those ingredients became mooncakes—sweet mooncakes and savory mooncakes, flaky crust mooncakes and snow skin mooncakes—Lucy’s oversensitive, delicate throat would clam up in the ultimate betrayal, strangling her from the inside out.

Will swallowed and tuned out his father’s voice. He watched Lucy as she nonchalantly sipped her tea and nodded along to the adult conversation. Her short bobbed haircut bounced at the height of their elbows. She pulled faces at the tea’s bitter taste, but—as she’d confessed to Will she likely would, the night before—she forced herself to finish every last drop, lest she feel left out of the autumn night festivities entirely.

Will loved mooncakes. Lucy, he thought, ought to be able to love them too, so they could love them together.

The sound of his name being called jostled him out of his brood-

ing. His mother had returned. “All taken care of,” she said. She ruffled his hair fondly. “Also, I ran into your cousin—she brought these delicious peach-filled ones from work. Give it a try.” She pressed a sliced mooncake wedge in his palm before trotting back to join the throng of adults and a quiet, tea-sipping Lucy in the living room.

Frowning, Will considered the mooncake. The fruity aroma from its pale pink center was faint and enticing. Slowly, he raised it to his lips. His teeth easily sliced through the snow skin and reached the center with little resistance, the peach perfusing his mouth with tangy comfort, but—and this struck him as odd—a hint of bittersweetness as well.

Will staggered. Packaged mooncakes teetered in their precarious piles before cascading down and spilling over Will’s shoulders. He scrabbled at his neck, throat swelling even as his tongue sang.

# CONTRIBUTORS

**Lena Breda** is a fourth year history major, Italian minor at the University of Chicago. As a student, she studies food history and struggles with her ever-increasing coffee addiction. Her work is most inspired by Mary Oliver, Li Young Lee, and Billy Collins. She is thrilled to have been published again in *Euphony Journal*.

**Sabrina Castillo** is a current Creative Writing MAPH graduate student at the University of Chicago. She loves writing about love and the small ways it manifests. She usually spends her time drinking rose-flavored bubble tea and playing video games when not drowning in work.

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**Nyna Dies** is wonderfully fond of the profound and the profane. Originally from Iowa, she currently resides in Hawai'i where she has recently received an undergraduate degree in English from Hawai'i Pacific University. The poem "Odyssey" won the university's James A. Vaughan's poetry competition in 2018. She has plans to pursue graduate studies in English and Writing.

**Shawna Ervin** is an MFA candidate at Rainier Writers Workshop, Pacific Lutheran University's low-residency program. Her poetry has appeared in Tampa Review, Steam Ticket, Crack the Spine, After the Pause, and Hiram Poetry Review. She lives in Denver with her family.

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**Anna Lu** is a second-year Creative Writing and Psychology double major at the University of Chicago. She adores magic realism and has recently been made uncomfortably aware of her tendency to write sad short stories about friendly ghosts. She enjoys music, dance, and the occasional head pat.

**Fred McGavran** is a graduate of Kenyon College and Harvard Law School. He served as an officer in the US Navy in Vietnam. After retiring from law, he was ordained a deacon in the Diocese of Southern Ohio, where he serves as Assistant Chaplain with Episcopal Retirement Services. The Ohio Arts Council awarded him an Individual Achievement Award for “The Reincarnation of Horlach Spenser,” a story that appeared in *Harvard Review*. Black Lawrence Press published *The Butterfly Collector*, his award-winning collection of short stories, and Glass Lyre Press published *Recycled Glass and Other Stories*, his second collection, in April 2017. For more information, please go to [www.fredmcgavran.com](http://www.fredmcgavran.com).

**Uma Menon** is a fifteen-year-old student and writer from Winter Park, Florida. Her work has been featured or is forthcoming in the *Huffington Post*, *The Cincinnati Review*, and *The Rumpus*. Her first full-length collection was shortlisted by the 2019 erbacce-prize, and her first chapbook is available from Zoetic Press.

**Michael Olenick** lives in Brooklyn with his daughter, son, and wife’s ashes. He had a promising start with a story appearing in *Journeys: Prose by Children of the English-Speaking World* when he was ten. He then put writing aside to focus on the usual sensible adult things people focus on when they are sensible adults. Since his wife’s death, his inner English major has awakened, and he has started writing again as a way to forget and not to forget. Besides *Euphony*, his poems have recently appeared in *Offcourse Literary Journal* and *These Fragile Lilacs*.

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**Dana Robbins** obtained an MFA from the Stonecoast Writers program following a long career as a lawyer. Her first book, *The Left Side of My Life*, was published by Moon Pie Press in 2015. Her poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in numerous journals and anthologies including *Muddy River Poetry Review*, *The Paterson Literary Review*, *Calyx*, and *The Fish Anthology*. Her poem, “To My Daughter Teaching Science,” was featured by Garrison Keillor on *The Writer’s Almanac*. Dana lives in Bronx, NY and Palo Alto, California.

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**Diane Webster** grew up in Eastern Oregon before she moved to Colorado. She enjoys drives in the mountains to view all the wildlife and scenery and takes amateur photographs. Her work has appeared in “Better Than Starbucks,” “Eunoia Review,” “Home Planet News Online,” and other literary magazines.

**Miles White** is a poet, songwriter, and Byzantinist with a degree in History from the University of Chicago. Between 2015 and 2019, White served in multiple positions on the staff of *Euphony Journal*; he founded its Reviews Department in 2018. “Untitled (May 6—Dearborn)” is his first published story.

# SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

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