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DEAD FLOWERS

A Poetry Rag

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GUEST EDITOR

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David E. Malehorn Ph.D. is navigating an unplanned detour from his career path as a molecular biologist. His creative nonfiction appears in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*.

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Indifference to Poetry Statement

I have a knack for simile, but not a gift for metaphor. [Simile is like metaphor on its day off.] My hat is off to those who slave like Bavarian clockmakers over their intricate metaphors, even while knowing that blockheads like me will probably just stand there, frowning, like a blue-collar museumgoer in front of a Mark Rothko painting, wondering, "What the hell is this?" I look forward to expressing my genuine bafflement at poetry.

~David Malehorn

[lame... she said: and changed the channel. blackness cuts the color]

lame... she said: and changed the channel. blackness cuts the color
like an animal running through the trees

I try and watch and see fragments: of images. all over the screen they spin never end
-ing and rigidly timed

shaven white legs: the smooth surface
of the new Ford truck. come buy some fancy accessories for your home. lights and chairs and tables
and the new vacuum

that your wife can use just like the lady in the commercial. made up
with cosmetics and paint and plastic: they hire the artist to paint the mask
on her face. make her immortal.

they yell at me furiously. you need this pen for it will change
into seven different pens and change your life. my eyes are bleeding

the red ink with which he grades the tests: it's an ad for a dating service –
you can grade the anonymous voices over the phone. on sale

now for only a limited amount of money back guaranteed don't wait
buy now and receive this free carburetor repair service: the best in town one time
only special delivery free rubber handling gloves

~Miles Stearns

Miles Stearns is a twenty-something writer currently living out of a Honda Accord traveling across the United States to figure out everything between his home of San Francisco and that place people say he should go called New York. He combs his hair with a plastic comb daily.

THE TABLE OF MY HISTORY

It belonged to Grandma Phyllis
Or maybe Great Aunt Gertrude
Anyway it had lived
In the family dining room
For as long as I can remember
Well polished in myth—
It crossed the prairie in covered wagon
Came from Texas on the back of a mule
Sailed the Mayflower
Or maybe it survived dust storms
Wild animal attacks
Outlived famine and plague—
The Paul Bunyan of tables
Thick round mahogany top
Sturdy pillared base
Bulky struts with outturned ends
Leaves enough to extend the surface
For any birthday or reunion

My father hated it
Tried to stain it with coffee mugs
And cigarettes too long in the ash
The solid pedestal thumped his knees
Curved braces barked his shins
Upturned feet nipping his ankles
Left little room to tuck his long legs

After work and too many beers
Or maybe shots
Or laughs with familiar strangers
He would bring that fun home
Hurl it through the doorway
Stinking and swaying his merriment
Bounce it off the hall pictures
And around the living room walls
Then slam his fists into the table
We all hid behind closed doors
Terrified of too much joy

~

Mother would usually sneak out
To window shop
Possibly seeing a happy woman
In the reflection
We left by the back door
To blast music on stoops
Or maybe play kick the can
In the twilight of forgetting

One Saturday he over-spiced his coffee
And took a saw to the table
Carried the top down to his basement workshop
Or maybe he rolled it down the stairs
Covered it with tools
And clamped a vice to the edge
We never found the bottom
When we came home
A folding card table stood in its place
Mother sitting stunned
She slowly walked into the guest bedroom
And closed the door
We didn't see her for years
Clothes were cleaned and piled on our beds
School lunches, dinners appeared
As if some magical genie had landed

Sometimes we would creep down the silence
And find father in his workshop
Staring at the table top
As if unsure how it had gotten there
Or maybe as if it held the heart of the world

~ Allison Thorpe

Allison Thorpe's work has appeared in a variety of journals, magazines, and anthologies, some of which include *Appalachian Heritage*, *Poem*, *Parnasus*, *Still: The Journal*, *Pikeville Review*, *Women's Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, *Red Mountain Rendezvous*, *Juggler's World*, *Writing Who We Are: Poems by Kentucky Feminists*, and many others.

projections

how dare i be a real person
and have flaws and failures?
yeah, i know you never make
mistakes; never eroded anyone else
into tears because i'm just the same
monster that my daddy was —
navigating my life through the concessions
of other's sorrows, i'm just a vicious
biting creature deserving nothing more than
every bitterness you've bestowed me;
yes, i know i'm a terrible thing
i should have never been conceived
because all i've ever brought you is more
complication than you could swallow
i know i am not my sister,
the perfect and beautiful blonde with her
eyes of azure skies; i'm the red headed brown eyed
stepdaughter whose roots are further in failure
than the trees in the ground —
i can't get anything right because i'm just a monster
you got with the package when you married mother dearest
let me take my broken wings and fly away
for you are the beast you've always projected on me
tearing every dream from the stars in my eyes —
i've hated you, oh how i've hated you, for so long you forsook
me to the cold of loneliness of friendlessness with your
restless list of chores and demands
you never gave me a chance to be a child as you've
given your own child, so let my weary heart
beat out a melody of happiness at least once before i die
just let me go because i don't like you and i never will.

~ *Linda Crate*

Linda Crate is a Pennsylvanian native and graduate of Edinboro University of Pennsylvania. She has a Bachelor's in English-Literature. Her poetry and short stories have been published in several journals.

APRIL AFTERNOON II

It was April afternoon

With the sky tearing itself apart

Blue- white- gray- and the violent shades between

It was April afternoon

When you looked at me and I knew

Under the sky that was tearing itself apart.

The cars sped up Capitol Street, and came down Summer Street in absolute perfection. They ticked like a metronome between lights. Inside, drivers' thoughts were a chaos of school and kids and work and bosses and lovers and bills and coworkers and pain and kids and bosses and joy and school and kids and flossing teeth under a sky tearing itself apart.

A stooped back man with a bald patch and earth tone shirt paused by Mill Creek and checked his phone for the latest in mediocrity. Hoping to escape the situation with his wife and oldest son, the supervisor that doesn't value him, with trivia. It works for a few seconds but then they are back with him under a sky tearing itself apart.

Maybe it's the distracting noise

The vague disgust for dirt

The fascination with technology

That causes the divorce with the front door.

Maybe it's the internal external voice

The psychological need for relevance

The dwindling social aspect

That drowns all color into the shades of hamburgers.

Maybe it's the boobs on computer screens

Feelings of inadequacy

Or the Venetian blinds

That blinds us when the sky tears itself apart.

Now a man in shabby clothes sits chin to chest on a bench near the World War One memorial, the Flanders poppies are not blooming yet. A haze, an afterthought of rain sweeps by like a broom across the Veterans Building and on toward the high school. Once it passes he slips his hood off and slowly lies down on the wet of the bench looking up, the sun brilliant between clouds and the wind tears the sky apart. He lets it explode into castles, islands, boats and maybe hope.

~ *Marc Janssen*

"I have had poems appear in a few other places, most recently *The Gold Man Review*, *Bellowing Ark*, *Four Ties Lit Review*, *Dead Flowers: A Poetry Rag* and the anthology *Green is the Color of Winter*. I write when I can." ~Marc Janssen

The Hothouse Remains

1.

The heat in here stays constant, netted
kept unmoving, billowed down.

Down all, all the leaves to
lethargic rubbered limbs – I can only
ascertain who comes or goes by read-
-ing the peaks in this dim but varied
show of slanting white-wet lights

2.

wrought iron corridors
this swelling, lead crystal-
-ised sweat rises and
congregates in old fields
obese lungs, panting.
A stamen paralyzes the
hacking of mists. Some-
where, damp leaves
a shattering.

3.

We grow inside houses.
It may be easier
to find us – look inside
there's a space where you can see
a battle with the urge
to simply orbit one another
swinging around a larger mass
we haven't found a word for
yet. The days drop off,
we spend one moment
seeking ways to wound,
the next lost in grasses with
blades splitting skies, and these
useless links are what birth us
to ensure we never really move.

4.

You spoke of long-gloved hands: you claim to not
see where the climbers stretch to, only spaces:
the leaves are powder. Distance swells, unorganic
a beating through the lead-lined frames: afterthoughts
assume your shape: you remember that before we burst
husks, there was a minute when we were not

5.

What happened here?
the window lining pulled away – just
an inch, a curve allowing
different airs
to penetrate
the sticky mass, the bulb
heaving with humidity
so all clamour to the splitting
shock grows out from the glass -
the vapour's fit for breathing
the vapour's fit for breathing
though fast closed up again:
enthusiasm soon resembles
panic: grassy hysteria gums
and tramples underfoot while
spring passes by outside
as we knew it would.

~ *Benjamin Norris*

Benjamin Norris is a poet and lecturer from Wales who currently resides in Budapest, where he lectures Indian Cultural Studies and Art History at a leading university. His poetry is mainly preoccupied with a sense of longing for distance from familiarity, whilst being unable to escape one's roots and the trappings which come with culture.

3 Kiss me like...

kiss me forbidden impossible to prevent streetlights overhead
where are we kiss me like clouds electric wet brand new yet
ancient as the world inhaling kiss me slow soft intense with
hands moving unsurely sure as a pulsating pause kiss me
passionate hold eyes closed then peaking shiver in the universe
kiss me close and harder still tender little trailings along the
skin embrace kiss me of in out breathing intimate mouth dance
playing but serious is this play kiss me lingering lock and ripe
release push me pulling me in lip hunger kiss me starry over
shining sea see it surround us sky above ocean below kiss me
caressing with sucking and wanting there is only the now here
now yes kiss me around in question and in answer consuming
each other and whatever else is

~ *Amber Hollinger*

"I hope to contribute something good to the world by sharing my work, which has appeared at *PoetrySuperHighway.com*, in *S/tick*, and in the *Rose Red Review*. I hold an MA in International Relations - not writing. I recently completed my first poetry collection (*S*)urge and am working on new short stories and non-fiction pieces." ~Amber Hollinger

Sugaring Season

You will leave me one day,
when I have expected you home with groceries in hand, 15
minutes past, and the dogs will rest at the door,
furry chins on furry paws, and I will not notice the
time has gone until the dark has set itself on my windowsill —

The stove will go dry and sigh
to sleep as my chest picks up the crackle of radio static,
worrying somewhere your tires spin air and not dirt —
that your lungs fail quietly in the night
and only the snow listens.

~ *Meriah Nunn*

"I'm interested in those moments that are unique to each, and yet a shared connection of the human condition. I hope to capture that in a way that anyone could grasp a small piece of my poetry as his or her own." ~Meriah Nunn

Winning the Invitational

We ran through crackling corn rows
muddy legs, burning lungs, snow
 thin ice on mud
exhalations like explosions of factory steam
skinny arms whipped by icy leaves
solitary endeavors for a team
picking off the man in front
 for personal joy
we ran for school
 community
 identity
finding ourselves in the function of our legs

On the way home, the coach
 a one-legged man drove
as if drunk
 still trying to find himself
his dreams of running through icy fields

gathered around him

~ *Brad Garber*

Brad has published poetry in *Cream City Review*, *Alchemy*, *Fireweed*, "gape seed" (an anthology published by Uphook Press), *Front Range Review*, *theNewerYork Press*, *Taekwondo Times*, *Ray's Road Review*, *Flowers & Vortexes (Promise of Light)*, *Emerge Literary Journal*, *Generation Press*, *Penduline Press*, among many others.

the larger streets were astronomical

jupiter, mars, milky way
the lifeless blank of space movies
the smaller ones Canadian provinces
Ontario, Quebec, Alberta
a civilization we Americans doubted

suburban life was purgatory
trapped between extreme neighbors
the zirconian hell of city
the pastoral heaven of farmland

Dallas a hub of shadows
loomed unreal
projected stories from newscasts
Sodom anecdotes
downtown business towers shot upward
pagan temples to worldly gods
skirted by hordes of sin
Harry Hines professionals
nocturnal junkies
waking like starlight downtown evenings

on the outside Terrell
Rockwall, Wylie
ruralities stretched unmarked aside farm roads
Mark Twain escapes
into Canaan entitlements
on weekend vacations
picking blackberries
and watching wild rabbits
the brown of summer grass

while half dead in homestead squares
heirs to limbo
we played a grey hopscotch
on Garland pavements
ate goulash and government cheese
tried on second hand clothes

from the deacon's kids
and distant cousins
pale indentures to silk-suited Baptist Brothers

~ *Donny Wankan*

On Becoming a Writer

I no longer dream
of staged streets frayed with crowds and
stilt buildings winking with glitter – concealing
the fashion I once craved. The plastic
skin never grew out of me. The marked models
and I got along but they belonged to the city – meant to balloon
into prisoned window displays. I took
their stiletto lines swathed in folded reds and violets,
cut them into pieces – balancing black lines
against each other, flexing them into arches –
and ironed white in between until they spoke letters
then words. No longer needing
color, I recycled it to the art students.
For years
I thought about sticking the models
back together, realigning the silver-dot zippers,
their pleat-drawn gowns hemmed
with a single stroke, but the unmapped
city noise settled in the background:
the hiss of cheap paint smeared across walls, dumped
glass against asphalt, the slow-burning sirens –
a blinking reminder the words and I are louder.

~ *Alexandra Daley*

Alexandra Daley is a poet and creative nonfiction writer living in the Charleston, South Carolina area who has been published by *Emerge Literary Journal*. She is currently composing a collection of poetry and is working on her first novel.

grandfather

when no one and nothing paid attention to me
when I was a little girl drawing in a corner alone
watching adults do important things
live the life they really wanted
and forget for awhile what I took from them,
the right to be careless, the right to be young

you crossed your legs beside me
drew dragons and butterflies
taught me how to write my name
spoke to me and looked in my eyes
and that was enough for me to love you forever
and even though you're gone
and my father keeps your photographs in boxes

forgets for awhile you were there
when he was little too
I remember you happened
I remember

I still write my name in your handwriting

~ *Kate LaDew*

Tangled

I guess you can find me
on my broken ass bike.
Wobbling somewhere not quite between

Rocky edges/
Pavement

I shift these rusted, clunky
gears forcing the greased chain wider.

I wanna ache and struggle.
Let my quads explode
and spew out red, slimy meat
as I catapult down hills
sputtering gravel and stagnant mud.

Someone fucking hit me.
I wanna slam into that mucky
brush guard, screeching to a halt.
Slay us,
- my broken ass bike and I.

Merge us,
With this reinforced steel shaft thrust
through my displaced sternum.

~ *David Neal*

"I am unpublished, mainly because I am just now starting to submit. Interestingly enough, I ended up being one of those kids in workshop that claimed poetry to be rather lame, and then switched focus to it one semester before graduation. Fun!" ~David Neal

Behind the Choices

ENOUGH ABOUT ME

Why are you here? Do you care at all about the literary judgment of a laboratory scientist? How would your reaction to my selected poems be different, were I an expert in Poetry? What does that say about you?

What criteria do you apply in evaluating poems? What is the ideal poem, in terms of its construction and effect? What are your preferred conditions for receiving poetry, e.g. reading them, hearing them, seeing them performed at “slams,” etc? How would/did your preferences change if/when you studied poetry? What does that say about you?

Why do very few current poetry submissions have any perceptible meter or rhyme scheme? How does this correlate to other generational changes in popular culture and fine arts? Should iconoclasts first master an artistic convention before flouting it in their own work? When and how have you rebelled against dogma? What does that say about you?

How have the motivations for writing poetry changed? Should published poems be accompanied by “artist statements”? How are your impressions of poems affected by learning more about the poets themselves, and their intentions? What does that say about you?

What is the artistic merit of random word association? Could a computer generate good poetry? How does your response relate to your opinion of abstract art? Do you perceive and value “negative space” in poems? What do you find between the lines of this essay? What does that say about you?

Would Emily Dickinson still be a Great Poet if she had published all her work to popular acclaim during her lifetime? If you are a poet, do you care what anyone else thinks about your work? How does your opinion of your own work change over time? What does that say about you?

How would/did hiding your own prized poem in a shoebox for decades affect its value? Why did you get it out now to reread it, and to send photocopies to your children, instead of just tucking it into your burial suit? What does that say about you?

Will poetry in its current “form” [sic] survive? Why or why not? At what point in its evolution would you no longer consider it poetry? can u b moved by a tweet? can u c eternal truth in < 140 chars? whats that say re: u?

Selah.

Respond to either of the following poems.
Take all the time you need.

Fuck poetry
Fuck poetry
real life doesn't
happen in words

--James Moran

-the fuck? Poetry
-the fuck? Poetry
happens in
real lives. *Word.*

--D. M.

~*David Malehorn*

James Moran was born in Washington, D.C. in 1976 and was raised in the area. He has been writing since a young age. His recent projects include poetry, a play, flash fiction, and articles on astrology. His work has been published in numerous journals. At the time of this publication he lives in the San Francisco Bay Area.