



Donald Zirilli

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Nigel Holt — Poetry Editor, *TSCR*

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This Letter-size publication will also fit for printing on A4 paper.

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**II: a themed
sub-zine of
The Shit Creek
Review**



Editorial

The Plywood Canoe

Welcome to the Plywood Canoe! This is the first-ever poetry ezine branded onto plywood with a woodburner. And here we are, heading up Shit Creek again, boldly seeking more quagmires to flounder about in. Never satisfied with more than enough trouble, we have added to our woes by initiating a zine-within-a-zine, a subzine, a parasitic growth upon the body poetic of *SCR*, an entity labelled “II”. Yes, *The Shit Creek Review* has laboured and strained, and out has popped II — pronounced “Two” or “Too” or “To” or “Number Two” or “Eye-Eye” or “Aye-Aye”, or “I and I”, or what you will. But probably “Two”.

II’s function is to provide an area of focus within the vaster free-range swamp of *The Shit Creek Review*; and so for example our inaugural II features the American poet Timothy Murphy, with a miniature treasure-trove of new poems by Tim, essays on him, and selections from his unpublished prosimetrum memoirs, *Requited*. We’ve even talked a few of his friends into sharing with us what Tim is *really* like up close and personal. Hair-raising stuff. You’d better get over to II and check it out — after you finish reading this editorial, of course. Click on the big II on the front cover of this issue.

In future issues of II we hope to feature other poets, Australian and British, as well as American, or any others that write in English. Today, Fargo, tomorrow, the World! But we also intend to focus on other areas as well, such as on themes for poets to write to. Our next issue of II, bundled into *The Shit Creek Review*, will be devoted to poems with a biographical bent, loosely interpreted; poems about Lives. See our Submissions page for more details.

Innovations keep surging into the Canoe of Poesy. Here’s another one: *SCR* is switching from Bi-monthly to Quarterly publication. This issue was held back to help synchronise that switch: we’ll publish in July, October, January and April. We won’t call them Summer, Autumn, Winter and Spring editions though, because many of us are Southern Hemisphereans of the Antipodean persuasion, and we would become very disoriented under such a reversed seasonal nomenclature. *SCR* is making this switch because the work involved in getting *SCR* (now+II) out every two months was leading to marriage breakdowns, fugue-states, delirium, loss of sanity and motor-function, and so forth. Think of us as basically lazy workaholics.

More innovation: we’re experimenting with editorial procedure, and beginning with this issue, the elite Poetry Editors (Nigel and myself) are generously allowing the Art Editor (Don) and Artist-in-Residence (Pat) to make the Artist’s Choice: they get to choose one poem a piece to go into *SCR*, and to tell us all why they chose it. As compensation for this noble surrender of power, Nigel and I will also pick a stand-out poem each from the current crop: so four poems each issue will receive special recognition – not for being superior to the others, but for particularly appealing to one or other of the editors in various ways. All bribes to the Shit Creek

Anti-Corruption Committee please.

There you have it, then. Awash with innovations! A parasitic subzine, a devious avoidance of extra work, a switch to Quarterly, and new avenues for bribery for Editor's Special Picks. Where the bloody hell can the canoe go from here?

Editors' Picks

Pat: I'm picking Angela's "Wayland Smith". I remember fondly the first time I saw the chalk horse. This poem takes me back to that memory, back home to a country that I am certain I was born in, if not in this life, in a life before. I respond to many of Angela's poems in this way. Her words and imagery always touch and inspire me... to make art, book a ticket to England or both... always hoping for the call of a horn, or the demand of a hoofbeat to lead me.

Don: Dave McClure's "The Pessimistic Ballade of Arbitrary Behaviour" has a timeless, authorless quality. In other words, it strikes me as a traditional or "folk" poem. The seriousness, wisdom and tautology of the repeating line "for people do as people will" balances the levity in the rest. I am sent vibrating between two extremes as I read: doggerel on one side and profundity on the other. I am won over by the poem because it never decides between the two.

Nigel: Brian Dion's "A Smuggler in the Chancery" is my pick. A great sonnet that in its sad defiance and pride in an already lost language is a melancholy Canute which sits within the waves that have already consumed it.

Paul: Danielle Lapidoth's "The Fight" does it for me. So many aspects of this poem get it just right. It deals with a volatile, dangerous topic, yet keeps the subject under tight control through superb manipulation of form. The sounds in this are so taut and closely-bound, so precise: form and sound enact the barely-controlled intoxication of rage. The tension between subject and form is palpable.

Editors

Paul Stevens — General Editor

Nigel Holt — Poetry Editor

Don Zirilli — Art Editor

Patricia Wallace Jones — Artist-In-Residence

Peter Bloxsom – Technical Consultant for designing and coding of **II**. Peter (who also helps out with Umbrella Journal) is a writer himself as well as a web developer. At his netpublish site he offers an inexpensive service to make sites for writers, among others, and may soon be branching out into e-books.

Best Ladies' Room on U. S. 50

by *Lee Harlin Bahan*

Versailles (verSAYLZ), town, SE IN, W of Cincinnati, OH

Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose

I'm sitting on a toilet in Versailles,
amazed a public restroom can be clean.
Most service station johns aren't mopped and leak
so dirty water soaks your tennis shoes
but keep—with blow-by-blow accounts of who-
does-what-how-often scribbled on the walls—

your mind off wet feet. These could be the walls
a nun lives in. Suppose the name *Versailles*
were said correctly—not by locals who
insist the other word that means “to clean”
is *warsh*—I'd be in France when wooden shoes
chafed novices toward sainthood, pouring leek

soup in an earthen bowl, checking for leaks
that might stain Reverend Mother's habit. Walls
marbleized with gilt recede as I shoo
flies—aswarm in summer at Versailles —
off simple food I carry, must keep clean
until it reaches Reverend Mother who

is here by God's command to save the Queen who
otherwise will land in Hell. Rose-smell leaks
from the royal chamber where, unclean
beneath the silk she's sewed in, mirrored walls
repeating her, the mistress of Versailles
sits eating chocolates and cashews.

Cont'd/...



Patricia Wallace Jones

I blush, embarrassed by my clunking shoes
and try to be like Reverend Mother who
sips soup, untempted to try on for size
those jeweled slippers that *pieds angéliques*
would fear to tread in. “Jericho’s proud walls
collapsed,” the R. M. warns while wiping clean

her lips, “as these will if you do not cleanse
this palace of its decadence. Eschew,
my daughter, worldly goods lest Mammon wall
you off from Heaven.” In reply, the Queen, whose
skin is milk, chokes back a chuckle leaking
from her throat. “Our soul is not for sale,

our conscience, clean. The King hates golden shoes.
He leaked on his once, charmed by *La Joconde* who
watched, smiling from the wall here at Versailles.”

(First appeared in the Spring 1990 issue of *Cincinnati
Poetry Review*)

Rime of a Modern Mariner

by *Lee Harlin Bahan*

*inspired by 118 of Petrarch's Rerum
vulgarium fragmenta*

I've been plugging along like this for years,
sighs in my wake, mateless on a toy tug
leaking fast as I bail, circling a moat I dug,
afraid of drowning on shores I gasp for.

So to hell with drying out. Pints of bitters
sweeten my disposition, cut the legs
out from under this devil, the one bugging
me to phone. What if a truck hits her?

Smoke fogs the bar until she's whores
the bathroom wall advertises. A bought fuck
would cost less than calling her. Drifting home

I salute whining German shepherds moored
to warehouse light poles near the dock,
marking fence, pissing on what they can't own.

(first appeared in Volume XII, Number 2 of
Blue Unicorn)



Patricia Wallace Jones

Arriving in a New Country Town

by Sam Byfield

On the way in kangaroos filled roadsides,
spurred on by headlights and food scraps
at truck stops. Late sun caught
the red buds of eucalypts, the white

of bald-head boulders. Now, dark comes
on fast in the chimney-smoke town.
It's a different cold here, after winter
in China, where wind cut through

whatever you wore, and moisture clung
to you like a relative at a funeral.
Here the cold slides over you
like a sexy massage girl. The skyline

is a gold rush, clouds flick like stockyard whips,
while on the ground the only sound
is a dog's half-hearted bark,
the chatter of parrots, shifting leaves

in patterns people can't make.

Previously published in *The Adroitly Placed Word*.

God Is Great

by Michael Cantor

The Lord our God, the Lord is wise, our God is great;
our only God, attend our cries that God is great!

We honor and submit to thee, with heads bowed low;
on hands and knees, we recognize that God is great!

The meadows bloom, the rivers flood and oceans flow;
the sun and moon forever rise, for God is great!

Pay homage to His might; be certain that you go
before him in a humble guise, for God is great!

Obey the Lord, defend the Lord, observe His word;
resist the sinner who denies that God is great!

Be most severe when heresy is overheard
until the disbeliever sighs that God is great!

Enforce the Laws of God as strictly as you can;
and scourge and burn the one who lies, for God is great!

When God is mocked or disobeyed, a righteous man
tears out offending tongues and eyes, for God is great!

The armies of the Lord are vast; our hosts increase;
our voices rise up to the skies: our God is great!

Know ye, our enemies, that God is Lord of peace;
but He shall never compromise, for God is great!

Whatever happens, let it be, it is God's plan;
and he who acts against Him dies, for God is great!

To die for God is not to die, but to ascend;
if all men die it testifies that God is great!

The Lord our God, our God is wise, God is the end;
and now a final cantor cries that God is great!

The Performer

by Michael Cantor

She met a man of strange, but charming skills,
who entertained by juggling champagne corks
as he squared three-digit numbers in his head;
who opened breakfast eggs one-handed, never
smashed a yolk – *I don't like pigeonholes*

he said, and practiced Yoga, quoted Marx,
did crosswords with a *Mont Blanc* fountain pen –
her friends all said he was extremely clever.

But he had a problem recognizing
patterns – or a woman's waiting face –
or recalling what he'd said some other time.

He savagely cracked eggs in shallow plates
the day she left; distressed she would not see
their perfect and unbroken symmetry.



Valori Herzlich

Trust is a Rusty Bucket

by *K.R. Copeland*

But then, I don't know jack
or Jill for that matter. Matter of fact,
I don't know diddly. Simply put
the years of rain have eroded the hand-
held water holder I used to tote.

Up and down the hill I'd fill and refill,
empty and empty again. That was then,

before I fell. Now, I settle
for a sip at a time, which is fine,
I guess. It helps the hours pass.
Alas, dear Liza, I knew her well.

Previously published, *The American Drivel
Review*, Summer 2005.



Patricia Wallace Jones

A Smuggler in the Chancery

by *Brian Dion*

Westminster, 14th century

Northumberland, still claggy on my tongue,
 can nae muck up my quill. The Master rails
 "Affairs of state must have the speech of Kings!
 The noble words that came by Norman sails
 across the channel, that's what we use here."
 I heed his call and pen each day's events:
deliveries of venison, the hour
a fine is paid, petitioners' laments.

But when I can, I grant the common man
 his native *deer*, his *calf* and nae their *veal*.
 I pen the *shepherd hounds* to watch his *sheep*;
 and in my house I'll teach my growing son
 our English speech and of its stony will,
 then dream of Wigton wan I've gaan t'sleep.



Patricia Wallace Jones

Benvolio's Aside

by Brian Dion

Time consumed my pity long ago
and blame's a knife that pierces all the players.
So when the curtain comes down on the show
the guilty stack in layers upon layers.
The meddling friar, Tybalt to be sure;
for R. & J. all I will say is this:
When love casts out its charming, perfumed lure,
the fish it hooks deserves its prickly kiss.

There's only one I mourn. Mercutio,
who spreads his wit and blood across our stage.
I swoon to his sad oratorio
when the sword invades his bony cage;
and then he dies. I find myself struck dumb.
To all the rest I curse and bite my thumb.

The Poesy Palace

by Richard Epstein

for Harold

A spangled palace, Byzantine and bronze,
Nevada, maybe, home but out of place,
And filled with texts, as regular as clocks
Or extra fiber, many wooden shelves,
And tape recordings of a scornful voice,
Too sotto to salute, too haut en bas
To be ignored: a county in a land
Which thinks it is exotic to be real.

The blue-tiled roof is meant to funnel rain,
But none has fallen this year. None fell last.
The forecast augurs unrelenting light.
The fruit trees all are starving, dried to sticks;
And water for the fountains must be trucked
From undisclosed locations. Still the fish,
Copper and stone, spit featly, each to each.
Their indicated fins have never moved.

The house will soon be up for sale. At least
Those vans outside imply that, and the lights
Retract inside from room to room, until,
There upstairs, to the north, there is one lamp,
And it has flickered more than once tonight.

Tower Town

by Richard Epstein

Towers topple. That's what a tower does,
 After a time. The time is flexible,
 The towers mostly not. Abandoned towns
 With dirt on top, the barns and beds filled up,
 Soiled from the git-go, built and buffed and gone,
 Never unearthed, though excavated here
 For rubes to gawk at in their cargo shorts,
 Display their trinkets, wedding rings, and soup
 Tureens of matchless patterning. The book
 In which the set was registered is here;
 The epic poems of Hectorus Vir,
 Described by steles, columnar petroglyphs,
 And monkish annals, haven't turned up yet.
 It's said he wrote a dozen by the first
 Fire and sack, and then the towers fell.



Patricia Wallace Jones

Dust Radio Keeps Calling Me

by Larry Fontenot

Out the window night is black
as dirt dug from the bottom
of a Louisiana gumbo hole.
Stars dust the sky, shun
houses lit by electric bulbs.
I'm belly down on the bed, listening
to the Mighty Clouds of Joy singing "Steal Away to Jesus."
Momma says, "God won't move your tricycle."
I trudge out to the driveway, park my bike out of the way.

Momma knows the boundaries of sin
having crossed over and back several times
and willing to preach on it.
But dust radio calls my name,
and I am not earth bound
to any voice tonight. I'm gone,
and will not come back to Jesus.

Once deep in dust, the old road sleeps
under the hiss of concrete.
the road we followed into the darkness,
the path of misbegotten youth.

Now I wait for the sunrise, convinced
no light shines on answers.

And when the rooster sings hallelujah,
I'll be far away, clouds of joy
covering my back, hiding my escape.
I will meet you at the turn of the river.
We'll race along the road ridden hard by crushed stones.
And the command to turn around
and go back will be lost
among the hum of spinning wheels.

Wayland Smith

by Angela France

Artistry and craft glow from every piece that nestles
inside the chests in the cottage under the White Horse;
celestial against midnight blue, dazzle against dark.
They come for miles, the well heeled and the well off,
nouveau or old money, the dot-coms and the county
to try their influence at his studded door.

The door opens for every supplicant and he looks.
Some gush and fawn, some demand, some plead
but all fall into silence under his metalled gaze
and only get a glimpse of the dark room behind him;
the tumbled cot and the willow twigs ribbed with rings,
before he sighs and closes the door against them.

Rarely does his assaying stare meet an alloy he approves,
rarely does he give a sharp nod and turn to limp to his bench
leaving them to follow. The few who win his nod never speak
of what they see; never tell of choices made, whether for them
or by them. They never comment when others exclaim
'Oh! You have a Wayland Smith!' but only dip their heads
as though they wear a scar, not a jewel.

Dusk falls under the White Horse and the old man stands
to watch the sky, the work on his bench forgotten. He sees
nothing but the hope of a silhouette against the sunset,
hears nothing but the anticipation of a wing's whisper.
Only when the night has fully settled on the hills
does his head drop and he turns to the cottage,
there to lie down in his leather apron; always waiting
for the call of a horn, or the demand of a hoofbeat.

The Flat Hand of Winter

by Jude Goodwin

A passing neighbour waves his white hand
as if lifting a fish. The roadways are thick
with its scales and shine
beneath a gutterless moon. The windows
weep and freeze, weep and freeze.
Even the cottonwoods
hiss as they rise from the river ice,
scrape the ceiling of night
with their brittle combs. November sulks
in a dark room with the TV flickering.
December is drinking scotch
and rubs his lips with rough fingers.



Patricia Wallace Jones

Apostasy

by Juleigh Howard-Hobson

A gated street, with lawns and yards and trees.
 Dual pane glass windows (facing north). A place
 So exactly what I never dreamt to own
 Once. But now is mine. Oh yes, mine. My home
 With my leased Rovers in the drive. My space;
 My American Dream Come True. Is it me,
 Or do these dreams we all have seem to pale
 Against the deeper, truer, dreams we've sold
 Away with our free will and our free time?
 Settling here. Accepting that. "*At least it's mine*":
 This plastic thing, this ersatz choice. I'm told
 Some people still don't buy the fairy tales.
 They live in older homes in depressed spots
 And laugh at all our haves while they have not.

(first appeared in *ShatterColors Literary Review*)



C.D. Russell

At St. Albans Churchyard

by *Juleigh Howard-Hobson*

Old headstones—namelessly eroded—green
and grey with speckled moss in the sudden light
that fell after this morning's rain. The bright
sparkle of the sun reflected in between
these markers, where crevassed droplets fell
on webs, wet-laden now and spider-less.

So do our lives always come down to this:
damp stones in sunny boneyards. Nothing else.

(first appeared in *The Hyper Texts*)



C.D. Russell

The Fight

by Danielle Lapidoth

“Don’t give me that shit!” you yell—
I hide my smile in the sink. I hate
this you but even so I have a smile
to hide. I carry the freight

of this fight lightly; you huff
beneath its weight.
When in this mood, my mettle
steeled, I dare anything. I can’t wait

to test my lines. I cast them
and watch you reel, anticipate
the flash of fury in your turn,
your mental thrash: the bait

tastes bad but you’re in thrall.
We share this trait:
the fight’s worth having once
begun. Regret comes late, if at all.

Sundays

by Amanda Laughtland

Jack-in-the-pulpit always selects
the same text, evidence

of life after death: homes
for families of owls in the holes

of dead trees. Jack sets his watch
by the lilies of the valley

on Mother's Day. He never runs late.



Patricia Wallace Jones

The Pessimistic Ballade of Arbitrary Behaviour

by *David McClure*

Nathaniel thought the way ahead
was clear. He looked at Clementine
(a silly name) and softly said
“My only love, will you be mine?
A word, a nod, a glance, a sign
that I’m your Jack and you’re my Jill?”
But then he swallowed turpentine
for people do as people will.

She laid him on her mother’s bed.
(Her dad had gone to Lichtenstein
in search of mirth and maidenhead,
which some considered out of line.)
She called the priest at ten to nine.
He leaned across the window-sill
and purred, “Your arse is very fine!”
for people do as people will.

He died (Nathaniel) but, instead
of grieving, she went out to dine
(that’s Clementine) on garlic bread
and marinated porcupine.
She choked (of course) upon a spine
that lay concealed in fronds of dill.
The waiter gave her shoes a shine
for people do as people will.

Rational souls, though you decline
to heed my dismal codicil,
pull up a chair, uncork the wine
for people do as people will.



Donald Zirilli

Handheld Objects

by Mary Meriam

Knife

My sister slipped and fell
Into a pit of hell
And so a sharp knife
Of pain became my life

Pen

I hold my pen and write
Words to stop the night
From drowning me in black
I want my sister back

Penny

Sally worshipped Denny
One day he dropped a penny
She picked it up to hold
But Denny dropped her cold

Wand

My sister told me fronds
Of grass are fairy wands
Her dresser drawer had things
Like folded angel wings

Lock

My name is Sally Jane
They say that I'm insane
But mommy stole my mind
And locked me up inside

Needle

The doctors all agreed
That Sally's constant need
Was pharmaceutical
By syrup, pill, and needle



Patricia Wallace Jones

Bottle

I'm ten years old, and she's
Sixteen—no, Sally, please—
She swallows Bayer one
By one—the bottle's done

Candy

A wicked witch will trick
Her kids and make them sick
Until they'd rather die
Than eat another lie

Flower

I walk the lonely valley
Of longing for my Sally
Imprisoned for no reason
Season after season

Key

She loves the holidays
From institution daze
Eternity TV
The gatekeeper's key

Dedicated to Sally Jane Meriam.
(Previously published in *Street Spirit* and *Sinister Wisdom*.)

Being Lazarus' Wife

by Bee Smith

So how did Lazarus' wife feel
When her husband came back
From his very dramatic second act?

Would he seamlessly pick up the old reflexes
The same routine – dinner with his mother
Every Friday night, Saturday night sex,
Or would he have visions of something other?

Would he just drop his winding sheet
And suddenly want to buy a Porsche?
Would he demand divorce? Become a
Hippy, a zealot? Or do nothing at all – a life replete

Not needing a different wife or
A different life.

But still,
When you have been resurrected,
Either to amuse Jesus or serve some
Opaque higher purpose,
When your life has been turned into parable,

People will scream and stare. They faint.
Your debtors despair and your creditors stop
Gnashing their teeth. But mostly they want
You to tell them what it's like to die.

But Lazarus, all he wants to talk about is
Being alive. He grows vague about the dying.
He disappoints with no tale of angels or
Gorgons although sometimes into her pillow

Cont'd/...

Being Lazarus' Wife...

He will mention the night train to Edinburgh,
All darkness and motion with a sudden flash
When you pause at a level crossing. There was
A clang and a lurch forward and he looked out

Through a rain splashed window.
It was that mundane. It was that sublime.
Although for him, this time
They managed to clear the leaves off the line.

He reached the station but
It was not a terminus. All change.



Patricia Wallace Jones

Molokai Budget Vacation

by Kirby Wright

The lawn is full
Of weeds and stumps.

Trees have been
Beheaded here.

Two dogs sniff
An eel carcass?

They choose sides,
Stretch it like rubber.

The smell of death
Defeats the gardenias.

My plywood shack
Overlooks a harbor

Stuffed with lobster shells
And liquor bottles.

The beach east
Is thin and beige.

The shallows to the west?
A minefield of sting rays.



Patricia Wallace Jones

The Poem That Wasn't There

by Norman Ball

*Things are there for those who really want 'em.
Or not, it seems, for those wed more to quantum.*

Many years ago, my eyes were opened to Plato's Realm of Ideas through a remarkable sleight-of-hand. A Political Theory professor asked us one day in class to name a physical characteristic common to all chairs. You could feel the class suddenly slackening — finally, an easy question! A chair has four legs, someone offered. There are three-legged chairs, the professor replied. A chair has a backrest, said someone else. On the contrary, some chairs are backless, he responded. After a series of examples, it became clear there was no physical characteristic common to all chairs. The conclusion was inescapable. Chairs did not exist. After this a cave allegory seemed like so much piling on.

For those, like me, who departed imaginary numbers long ago, we are blessed indeed to have in our space-time corridor a wonderful explicator-to-the-masses, physicist Fred Alan Wolf. His various books, a sort of journeyman's guide to quantum mechanics, should have the science fiction genre blushing in embarrassment over the latter's staid unimaginativeness. Indeed for sheer speculative fervor, today's quantum cosmology would give the late P. K. Dick a real (blade-)run for his money. Sorry.

In one of many fascinating passages in *Parallel Universes*, Wolf points out that the human mind, with its capacity to traverse past (via recollection) present (via the moment) and future (via speculation) is by itself a sort of time machine, an interpreter of 'possibility waves'. If the quantum potential of human consciousness can be fully exploited, time, long regarded a barrier, may be fully overcome — in time. Or, as the mystics have insisted for centuries, all will be revealed in the fullness of time. Wolf himself concedes the poets were there first. Eliot in his *Four Quartets* asserted that 'all time is eternally present'. Emerson in *The Poet* suggested that poetry 'existed before all time was.' Indeed there is an out-of-time quality that clings to the best poetry. Time seems to slide off the back of excellent poetry because, yes that's right, the ravages of linear time are in great measure mitigated for the purest projections of consciousness; though never repealed.

Three cheers for the old guys. It seems Plato had anticipated quantum mechanics by over three millennia. Not bad for a guy without tape-reinforced glasses. For as we now 'know' (from this epoch forward, all intimations of knowledge must be bound in ironic quotations), matter at the subatomic level is nothing but a series of probabilities, that is to say, it isn't really there in a particle sense until we offer a

The Poem That Wasn't There

particular rendition of it. In effect, we pluck a universe from an infinity of parallel universes traversing a wave. The physicists call this human intervention *wave collapse*.

Funny how, in a sort of retro-Copernican twist, quantum mechanics restores man to the center of his universe albeit as horribly reductive author. Jung maintained we were God's eye without which He could not see. He has Job gently guiding God through the Universe instructing Him in the ways of human morality. Traditionalists may bristle at the implied sacrilege. But who other than Job is the moral instructor in this most sublime of Old Testament books, gently chastising God in the responsibilities, perhaps unwitting excesses, of infinitude? And how different is his role really from that of the observer so essential to Neil Bohr's quantum world? Let the small minds quarrel over lexicons, syllabi and which professorial class fell upon what truth first. Un beholden to tenure and its manifold evils, I simply say — speaking as a singularly unaffiliated man—it's great to be king again!

In the same way, extant poetry is but a particle rescued from a void, an ember of stolen fire. To be sure books fill up with these shadow-forms, droplets tasked with evoking seas. But all that straddles the page is not poetry at all. To conceive a poem in its Platonic/ quantum sense, you'd have to wrestle a wave to the page. So we settle instead, and in the process of settling, a universe happens.

*Wave to that nice particle.
It's standing still for you.
If you won't see it coming,
it won't come into view.*

In *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* (1927), Laura Jackson Riding beats me to the punch by eighty years:

“... Method in poetry is therefore not anything that can be talked about in terms of physical form. The poem is not the paper, not the type, not the spoken syllables. It is as invisible and as inaudible as thought; and the only method that the real poet is interested in using is one that will present the poem without making it either visible or audible, without turning it into a substitute for a picture or for music. But when conservatism of method, through its abuse of slack-minded poets, has come to mean the supplanting of the poem by an exercise in poet-craft, then there is reasonable place for innovation, if the new method defeats the old method and brings up the important question: how should poetry be written? Once this question is asked, the new method

has accomplished its end. Further than this it should not be allowed to go, for poems cannot be written from a formula. The principle value of a new method is that it can act as a strong deterrent against writing in a worn-out style.” (p. 21)

As Riding points out in her characteristic scolding tone (you can't convince me she didn't fulfill a dominatrix role in Graves' life), poetry is often misconstrued — particularly among 'slack-minded poets' — for poet-craft, that is, a thicket of words, syllables, sounds and techniques applied to typeset, applied to paper. From this, the urge towards the formulaic and its poor relations, convention and cliché, is a not-so-quantum leap into the seedy back-roads of stagnant verse. Earnest attempts at excellent poetry can founder on the artisan's too-diligent workbench.

This is why defenders of the art often attack rote efforts with shocking ferocity. The bureaucratic spirit wants to be shown some rules before drawing a bath and taking a nap. Sleepwalkers pervade. However a poet must inhabit a Maoist-state of permanent revolution. Life for the poet is one big roiling question: how best to approach poetry *at this precise hour*? The quantum observer has the daunting task of expressing perpetual awe and perennial surprise. After all he is authoring a universe. The classical world of Newtonian pulleys and levers with their familiar squeaks and hums has receded forever. This recognition of a recently-eclipsed world helps fuel the post-Modernist ire towards formalist poetry which, at its worst, coddles a rule-based, diffident artist. Heisenberg is the father of the new aesthetic. That aesthetic is *uncertainty*.

*The building blocks of paradox
consist of dodgy charged-up quarks
—or maybe not.*

At the sub-atomic level, nothing makes sense. This leaves us with paradox, the last sure place to rest our weary heads. Formalist poetry, paradoxically of course, provides a helpful and strangely liberating frame against which failure can be calibrated. Absent Kafka's bird-cage, all formulations of freedom are impossible to render. The archetype of *reaching and falling* litters the mythic record: Prometheus, Sisyphus, Orpheus. All were epic strivers who fell short, often with dire consequence: eternal torment, weighted chains, the stultifying curse of repetitive meaningless tasks. Nothing worth attaining is easy —even as failure is worse.

The best poems are spectacular failures, crash-and-burners in the highest aesthetic sense. The work of a poet, properly undertaken, is difficult and perilous. I'm

reminded of a maxim that arose in the aftermath of the American Savings and Loan crisis: as soon as you find yourself having fun as a banker, you have departed the gray realm of banking. You are a 'not-banker' who nonetheless continues to show up for work. Richard Feynmann echoed this general sentiment in his description of quantum physics (and I'm paraphrasing): if you think you understand it, then you don't understand it. Poetry's no different. That which spills effortless from ones pen like manna from a loquacious god cannot possibly be the real thing. By 'real', I mean of course in a Platonic sense —whatever that means.

In his series of on-line essay called *Logopoetry*, C.E. Chaffin defines the Gospel of John's conception of the Logos in *Logopoetry III* as:

"...the perfect expression of the inexpressible, the perfect form of the formless...an assumption all artists make each time they revise a poem or edit a score. Whatever urges them toward an ideal, toward their best— whether the image of God within them or an evolutionary striving—bears testimony to the existence of the Logos. With each chip of the chisel, each stroke of the brush, artists acknowledge faith in an ideal never quite attained. This unrealized ideal is the inspiration behind their best efforts."

Poetry is a convergence upon something 'never quite attained'. In this sense, it is process only, though oft-confused with final product. John's *logos* is nothing more really than a Christianized Platonism.

I do not wish to gloss the aesthetic appeal of one poet over another. By all means, let's derive some enjoyment from a universe of failed attempts. Clearly some poets manage a greater fealty to the poetic ideal. Individual technique, skill, talent, stamina—all those aspects meted out to poets in unequal measure— serve to render some poems 'more-perfect' than others; thus the enduring appeal of Yeats over, say, McGonagall. In short, there will always be good poets and bad poets. It's just that poetry, practiced even at its best, conforms to an asymptotic function; it seeks tirelessly to split the difference, converging on the X-axis infinitely. Consummate arrival is a myth, or in Chaffin's words, a perpetually 'unrealized ideal.'

But I've banged the table long enough. And as any quantum guy will tell you, bang a table long enough (like an eternity or so), and your fist is bound to come

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clean through one time and slam you square in the solar plexus. Certitude is dead. Potentialities pose the only certainties. Nihilism must be resisted. That said, when consciousness is wed to imagination, the old cliché rings true: anything is possible. We must thank the scientists for delivering us finally to a place where the metaphysicians have been waiting all along. The ensuing convergence offers us, quite literally, a breathless infinity of possibilities.

*I dreamt a place in space and time
where lambs lie down with lions.
Nice thought to think a thinking mind
might birth an alter-Zion.*

“Why I Am Not a Painter” by Frank O’Hara *a Close Reading by Anna Evans*

Text of “Why I Am Not a Painter”

In this New York School classic the poet narrator visits his painter friend over a number of days during which the artist is at work on a painting. The painting originally contains the word “sardines” but this is ultimately only retained in the painting’s title and as the presence of some letters. To illustrate the difference between painting and poetry, the narrator goes on to describe how, in a neat reverse effect, he writes a poem inspired by the color orange, yet the resulting poem(s) never mentions the color.

The provocation for the poem is the admitted envy that the poets of the New York School held for the Abstract Expressionist painters who pre-dated them and could be said to have inspired them. This is alluded to in the first and shortest stanza of the poem, while the second and third stanzas, of equal length, describe the creative acts of painting and poetry respectively.

The climactic sentence in the poem is “There should be/ so much more, not of orange, of/ words, of how terrible orange is/ and life.” This states a fundamental difference between poetry, which is made of words and can thus directly stimulate philosophical trains of thought, and painting, which is constructed from visual stimuli and can only do so obliquely. One reason this line stands out is that in a poem written colloquially in the first person present tense, it is one of only two lines in the subjunctive. It is also in the third person, a much more didactic statement than the other subjunctive line which occurs earlier: “I think I would rather be/ a painter...”

The colloquial nature of the poem gives it a skeletal structure similar to a sine curve with all the gentle repetition that implies: “I go and the days go by/ and I drop in again. The painting/ is going on, and I go, and the days/ go by. I drop in.” On entering the final stanza about the creative act of poetry, however, the amplitude of the sine curve begins to increase as the reader feels the narrator’s own sense of excitement building. O’Hara uses tone to great effect here as the narrator crows “It is even in prose. I am a real poet.” This reaches its highest positive point at the climactic sentence, dips sharply downward in the line “The poem is finished” and returns to the gentle, almost anti-climactic amplitude in the final sentence: “and one day in a gallery/ I see Mike’s poem, called SARDINES.”

An effect worth noting is how O’Hara subtly gives the works of art (both painting and poetry) agency in their own creation rather than talking always about his friend painting or himself writing. In stanza two we have “The painting is going on”

"Why I am not a Painter"

and in stanza two "Pretty soon it is a/ whole page of words" as though the artworks are independently coming into being.

The poem is so typical of O'Hara's jaunty, apparently artless style that it is difficult to imagine it written otherwise. It would be interesting to envisage it written from the painter's viewpoint instead. ("I am not a poet, I am a painter...") but that would imply a different cultural dynamic.

The poem is a triumphant celebration of the two different arts and the relative importance they place on words as opposed to visual cues. The reader does not believe the narrator would actually rather be a painter—he is too delighted in his poetry—however it is O'Hara's respect for that medium which enabled him, and the other poets of the New York School, to carry out the groundbreaking experiments with language which still fascinate readers today.

Edgy vs. Nice

by Rose Kelleher

There's nothing poets love better than sneering at other poets. Those whose taste is markedly different from ours aren't just bad poets; they're not poets at all. Not *true* poets, anyway. They have no integrity, no real love of words. Every choice they make is driven by ego and ambition.

Ask any poet what the biggest problem is with contemporary poetry, and the answer is always the same: Other Poets. If only those formalists would stop being so stuffy and hidebound; if those verse librists weren't so undisciplined and self-indulgent; if those academic careerists weren't so cryptic; if those Sunday poetasters weren't so literal-minded; then maybe poetry wouldn't be going to Hell in a handbasket.

Of all the ongoing poetry wars, the one that most interests me these days is Edgy vs. Nice. I guess it's because the arguments are all *ad hominem*, and that's more fun than the intellectual stuff. The American Heritage Dictionary defines "edgy" as "daring, provocative, or trend-setting." What's daring and what's trend-setting, however, are often very different things. I'm using "edgy" here in the "daring, provocative" sense because that's how I've heard it bandied about lately. In that sense, poets who write on edgy themes are considered edgy even if their writing style isn't.

(Three paragraphs in, and already someone, somewhere, is cursing me under his breath. Yes, I'm talking about poems that are *about* things. By some people's definition, such poems cannot be edgy. Well, I happen to feel like talking about subject matter. One war at a time, please.)

Here's how poets see each other across the Edgy/Nice divide:

Edgy poets care about nothing but shock value. They don't write about edgy things because they feel moved to write about those particular things, but because being edgy gives them a certain cachet. Terrified of being accused of triteness, they rummage around in garbage cans for poem ideas, hoping to find something suitably dark and gritty. Edgy poets have no appreciation for the insights to be found in moments of quiet contemplation; they're all about blood and gore, dead prostitutes, crucifixes immersed in urine, and orgies. Though they appear daring, they're really playing it safe, hiding behind their fashionable edginess. At heart, they're cowardly conformists.

Nice poets are old ladies (who may or may not live in Cambridge) or emasculated men who value inoffensiveness above all else. They write about nice things because they're afraid to write about real life. Prudish and conventional, they cluck like hens whenever anyone shocks their delicate sensibilities by writing about anything other than life in

suburbia, parenthood, love, or the beauty of nature. In their poetic vision, there's no sex, only G-rated love between spouses, and no controversy. Nice poets are so afraid of offending anyone that they end up delighting no one. At heart, they're cowardly conformists.

So who really are the cowardly conformists? That's easy: Other Poets.

Who's really edgy? The definition suggests edgy poets are a distinct minority, but it's a verifiable fact that every male poet *thinks* he's edgy. It matters not a whit what kind of poetry he writes. Search the world over for the stodgiest of stodgy male writers, and I guarantee he fancies himself a rebel, even if his rebellion consists in using archaic diction to pontificate on the virtues of temperance.

I've heard *The Shit Creek Review* described as edgy. At the time, I objected. There was something pretentious and dorky-sounding about it: I kept imagining Conan O'Brien doing one of his ironical cool-cat moves and saying, "Watch out, baby. I'm *edgy!* Rowr!" But TSCR's submission guidelines mention the use of form as potentially edgy. Formalists, edgy? I thought we were all a bunch of prudish, whalebone-corset-wearing anal retentives. That's what they tell me, anyway. But free verse is still predominant, and bucking trends, arguably, is edgy. By that logic, *Candelabrum*, with its formal poems about flowers and sunsets, is twice as edgy as *TSCR*. After all, poems about flowers and sunsets have been out of favor for ages. They're not edgy; therefore they're edgy.

If "formal therefore edgy" doesn't hold water, neither does "formal therefore not edgy." Mike Alexander, one of the administrators at Sonnet Central, once went to a poetry reading by Sapphire, and was listening appreciatively until the end, when she sneered, "Can you believe some people are still sitting in the closet writing *sonnets*?" The audience laughed, which is not surprising, since most people think of sonnets as flowery, archaic love poems. But Sapphire is a well-known poet with an MFA degree; she's speaking from a position of authority when she tells people sonnets are for wimps. I'd fight her on this, but I'm too wimpy. Instead, I'll just say that in my opinion, a sonnet is as good or bad, as tame or shocking, as shallow or insightful, as what you put into it. Consider Tony Barnstone's "White Pig, Dark Pig," a sonnet about Japanese cannibalism during WWII which appears in the December 2006 issue of *The Cortland Review*:

I didn't rape the women, didn't lust
for their dark flesh, not like you think. I dreamed
of food, not sex. A man does what he must
to live. I ate dark breasts and brains...

Is this what people write when they're sitting in closets hiding from reality? Would sitting somewhere else have made the poem come out with different line breaks?

Something bothers me about this defense, though: it implies that Barnstone's sonnet is exempt from the charge of hiding from reality only because it's about something ugly. In the same issue, Myrna Goodman's "November Morning, 1972" is a softer poem, a poem no one would consider edgy. It's about a suburban woman giving a neighbor boy a ride to school. I'm sure some critics would consider it worthless pap. There's no sex, no urban grit, no gobbets of gore; therefore it's not rooted in the real world. It doesn't matter if, as I suspect, Goodman's poem describes something she actually experienced and Barnstone's was concocted from third-hand accounts while he sat at his desk; his poem will be seen as more realistic.

Edgy poetry isn't necessarily more realistic than other poetry, but poetry as a whole would be unrealistic without it. Obviously you wouldn't want poetry to be all edgy, or all nice; the difference is that there's more danger of the latter actually happening. Given that most readers don't like to be made uncomfortable; given that the poetry scene, in print at least, is dominated by book-loving college graduates who have never, say, been homeless, or killed a man; given that our writing always reflects our experience, directly or indirectly; the Edgy:Nice ratio is always low.

In "The Poetry of Nicey-Nice," Joseph Salemi criticized Rhina Espaillat's poetry for being too nice. Well, I like it, but it certainly isn't edgy. One part of his review that bugged me, though, was his suggestion that she'd purposely adopted a fashionably doubtful stance toward religion. It's true that devotional poems are not fashionable. How often do you come across an unabashed expression of religious faith—a specific faith, mind you, not the nebulous, universal kind—in a poetry magazine? But it doesn't follow that Espaillat was only pretending to be doubtful in a cynical attempt to curry favor.

I've written a few poems about religious doubt. I didn't do it to score points with some editor, but because I doubt. Nor did I decide to doubt after consulting a focus group; I've never had any choice in the matter. Are poems about doubt "nicer" than poems about faith? It depends on the venue, and the kind of faith. Are we talking about *Poetry* or *First Things*? And what's the message: that the beauty of spring should remind us of Christ's resurrection, or that fornicators roast in Hell forever?

Whether your poetry is nice or edgy, someone's going to question your motives. I learned this when a poem of mine was called edgy in an online workshop. (Yeah,

that's right. I'm *edgy*, baby. *Rowr!*) Soon afterwards, another reader mentioned my poem as one of several that had gotten her thinking about the nature of pandering. The implication was that we'd consciously tried, like ad execs, to come up with topics that were sexy and attention-grabbing. In truth, my poem described a scene (involving a man, marijuana, and an eleven-year-old girl) I'd felt moved to write about because it was thought-provoking. I had hoped the poem would get readers thinking about things like complicity and responsibility. Which brings me to my next two points: (1) edginess is relative, and (2) it can be distracting. Where the poet may have intended to explore some idea, readers may see only selfconscious, gratuitous edginess.

Good edginess is never gratuitous. Take "After Experience Taught Me..." by W. D. Snodgrass². Talk about edgy: a poem that tells you how to rip a man's face off. The first time I read it my reaction was "Wahhh! I didn't want to know how to do that!" It's a horrifying image, but it has to be horrifying. The poem ends with this question:

What evil, what unspeakable crime
Have you made your life worth?

If you weren't shuddering at the thought of ripping someone's face off, the question wouldn't have so much weight. In asking yourself, "Would I do that to save my own life?" you end up taking stock of your life, your character, your most basic values. How many nice poems make you do that?

James Kirkup's "The Love that Dares to Speak its Name"³ was so edgy in 1976 that its publisher, Denis Lemon, was convicted of "blasphemous libel." The poem describes homosexual acts committed with Christ's dead body. To some that may sound like an attack on Christianity, but the poem is anything but. How to explain this to a Christian who finds it offensive? Well, first you have to know that the title is a play on "the love that dare not speak its name," a phrase from a poem quoted by Oscar Wilde during his trial for "gross indecency," i.e. being gay.

Next you have to imagine what it's like to be treated by Christians as if Christ had died on the cross for everyone but you. And finally, you have to read the poem and see for yourself how much the narrator loves Christ. He expresses his love symbolically through sex:

It was the only way I knew to speak our love's proud name,
to tell him of my long devotion...

Kirkup is saying that he's human too, and as such, worthy of Christ's love: "He loved all men, body, soul and spirit - even me." He's saying it in an in-your-face way because others have been aggressive about excluding him, and he's got to barge his way through to Christ's table. For an edgy poem, it's really quite sentimental and life-affirming.

Edgy poetry is often nice under the surface. Few would deny that Nigel Holt's "Perversion Sonnets"—a series of love poems written in the voices of coprophiliacs, urolagnists and other fetishists—are edgy. Much of the imagery is gory or scatological. Whatever your initial reaction, odds are you're not going to say, "Aw, isn't that *nice*." But the series is about love, something that takes many shapes and can be found in surprising places. Specifics aside, that's nice.

Still, Holt's sonnets probably won't be read on the air by Garrison Keillor. In his review of *Good Poems*, August Kleinzahler famously attacked Keillor for (you could say) not being edgy⁴. Really, I think his problem with Keillor was that he felt Keillor was trying to impose some kind of edgy-free vision on the poetry world, as opposed to just publishing one nice book. Poetry wars are like that. Any sensible person knows that good poems can be edgy or not, formal or not, etc., but every poet is convinced the Other Poets are bent on wiping out his tribe. Traditionally, Edgy poets have been more justified in this belief than Nice poets; after all, when was a poet ever censored or jailed for niceness?

On the other hand, nowadays, what is there to be afraid of? Daring implies risk. Baudelaire took risks, but in the United States, in 2007, nobody's going to clap you in irons or even ban your poems for obscenity. The worst that can happen is your officemate Googles you and decides you're a weirdo; and let's face it, you were never going to be friends with her anyway.

Same with political poems. We speak of poets "courageously taking a stand," and that's certainly true in some countries, such as China⁵ and Morocco⁶, but American poets have little to fear. I suppose it would be risky to write a perfectly unambiguous poem urging readers to blow up the White House, but even then I doubt you'd be in real trouble unless you actually included bomb-making instructions in the poem. Let's test that theory:

Edgy Haiku

Blow up the White House.
Blow up the White House right now.
Go on, I dare ya.

I'll let you know what happens (assuming they give me Internet access from Guantanamo).

For most English-language poets, "risk" means the risk of not being published, which means the risk of not getting a nice ego stroke and a complimentary copy of some magazine that will be read by the other poets published in that issue. I suppose if you're on a publish-or-perish career track, that's a real risk. But the Snodgrass poem was published. Sapphire's poems on child sexual abuse and other edgy themes have been widely published. Bukowski was wildly successful in his day and is still popular now. Profanity is no longer taboo; everybody and his brother knows Larkin's "This Be The Verse" by heart. I hate to say it, but the only thing that's still edgy, really, is racism. It's the only thing people will admit to being shocked and offended by, the only thing that still gets censored. Thankfully it's also old-fashioned, otherwise we'd be drowning in Neo-Nazi verse by poets anxious to appear daring.

So what am I saying? I suppose I should try to wrap all this up with some kind of point. Okay, here goes:

Don't try to be edgy.
 Don't try to be nice.
 Try to write good poems.
 Ignore critics.

Notes

1 The issue is online here:

<http://www.cortlandreview.com/features/06/december/index.html?ref=home>

2 For the full text, see: <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/archive/poem.html?id=171513>

3 For the full text, see: <http://torturebyroses.gydja.com/tbrkirkup.html>

4 All three of our names begin with K, end with R, and have two L's. Isn't that, like, really weird?

5 A Chinese poet named Qin Zhongfei went to jail last year for writing a satirical poem.

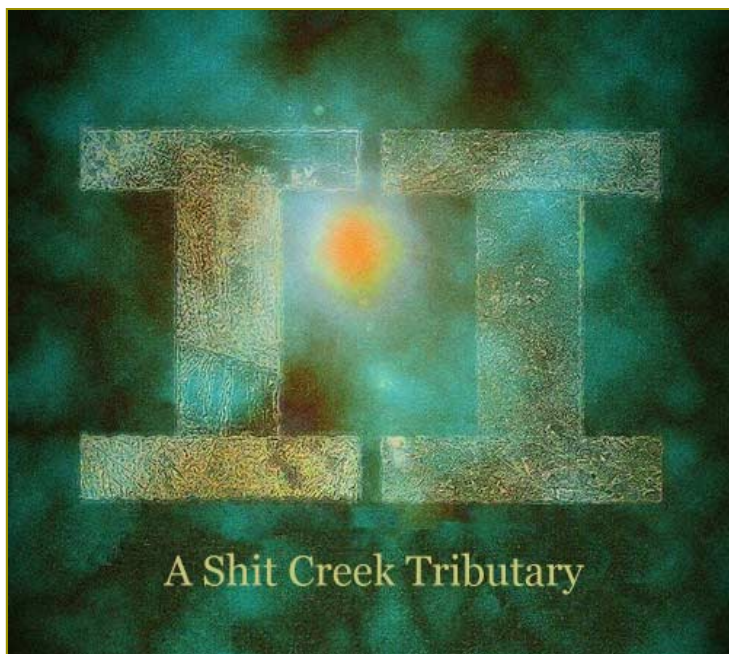
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/01/07/AR2007010701120.html>

6 Moroccan poet Ali Lmrabet was imprisoned in 2003 for writing satire.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/04/25/AR2005042501591.html>



Patricia Wallace Jones



Patricia Wallace Jones

This is the first **II**, instituted as a subzine of *The Shit Creek Review* at Issue 3. We expect the subzine, whether under this or a different name, to be a regular feature.

The Shit Creek Review (TSCR) is a Web-based, form-friendly literary zine with art — and with more serious standards than might be inferred from the name, which we think inspires us to keep trying to be stronger and meaner. TSCR is online [here](#).

While TSCR generally has no special theme per issue, each **II** is likely to be slanted in a specific direction or to have content relating to a single common theme. This inaugural issue looks at the work of **Timothy Murphy**, poet-farmer of the American Upper Midwest.

Paul Stevens — General Editor, TSCR+II

Patricia Wallace Jones — Artist-In-Residence

Peter Bloxsom — Coding and page design for II; desktop publishing and PDF conversion

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More impressions and appreciations

*We'll be pleased to hear from poets, prose writers and
artists who would like to contribute to TSCR or II. Please
see our submission guidelines in TSCR.*



Beaver Creek, North Dakota

Editorial

Beyond Shit Creek by Paul Stevens

“What lies beyond Shit Creek?” you ask.

Well, lots of things; but beyond Shit Creek, the stream leads to **Two**, too.

Two, or more classically **II**, is the parasitic subzine which has attached itself to *The Shit Creek Review*. **II**’s function is focus. While *The Shit Creek Review* will be a generally open-slather kind of venue, publishing free-range poems, art and criticism, **II** will be devoted to particular themes and features. For example, in the next **II**, we will have the theme of “Lives”, asking you to submit poems relating to a biographical theme: poems about the life of. You can interpret that theme as loosely as you like, and of course you can still submit poems on all sorts of other themes to the host zine, *The Shit Creek Review*. Look for more details on our Submissions page.

As well as devoting individual issues of **II** to themes for poets, we will also use them occasionally to focus on the work of one particular poet. For our inaugural edition of **II** the feature poet is Tim Murphy.

I first came across Tim Murphy’s poetry on the internet poetry forum [Eratosphere](#), and I’ll be honest with you: I found it a bit challenging. I could tell that this poetry was very well written, but it seemed to be concerned with themes that I found rather problematic: guns, weapons, hunting and slaying, and general red-neckery. Not my usual cup of tea at all; and we don’t like our prejudices challenged, do we?

Well, of course, challenging our prejudices (in the widest sense) is exactly what poetry should do, and I found that increasing familiarity with Tim’s work made me increasingly empathetic with the reality of North American Midwestern farmers and their world. People who know me will realise that is a very large leap indeed; yet that’s what happened. And isn’t that among the things poetry should do: open up new worlds for us? Show us fresh ways of looking at things? Widen our imaginations? Provoke our identification with that which is opposite?

What helped me immensely in this process was that technically the verse written by Tim Murphy is very much in the tradition and style that I already loved. My university degree is in Early English Literature and Language: I studied *Beowulf*, *The Battle of Maldon*, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *Piers Ploughman*, and other texts in the accentual-alliterative tradition and beyond through to the late Middle Ages. Among my half-dozen favourite poets is John Skelton. And this is the very tradition that Tim consciously and squarely placed himself firmly in, and that

shapes the music and the vision of his verse.

So that resonance made my leap of appreciation easier; as did my personal dealings with Tim. In selecting and preparing poems of his for *The Shit Creek Review* #2, and then later preparing this first issue of **II**, Tim and I developed quite an extensive correspondence by email. Through that correspondence I came increasingly to appreciate and value Tim as a person, for his qualities of kindness, patience, resourcefulness and sincerity with which he unfailingly treated me and my work. You can tell a lot about a person by the way they handle problems. Tim came through shining.

I intuit the same attitude to Tim among the people I asked to contribute to this Tim Murphy edition of **II**. They love him. That alone tells us the most important thing about Tim Murphy. In plain Australian: He's a bloody good bloke.



Tim Murphy and hunting companion

Thanks to the many people who have helped me put **II** together, especially [Peter Bloxsom](#) (who did the **II** page design and coding) and [Janet Kenny](#) (who provided support, advice and kindnesses too numerous to list).

Interview with Tim Murphy

Paul Stevens puts the questions

Paul Stevens: In his essay, [A Fine Line](#), Alan Sullivan writes of you that as a young writer you were “unaware that anyone else wanted to challenge the hegemony of free verse.” How far do you see that as true now? Is there still such a hegemony, and how far is it being challenged?

Tim Murphy: I was ignorant. I was 44 when I met Richard Wilbur, who introduced me to Tim Steele, who introduced me to The New Formalists. Many of my near contemporaries whom I consider to be excellent poets were turning to form at the same time as I. Steele, Gioia, Gwynn, Hadas, Doyle, etc. They published and so learned of one another two decades before I learned of them.

PS: Isn't Formalist poetry old-fashioned, out of date, unsuitable as a vehicle for contemporary subject-matter?

TM: Certainly not. The great themes, love, death and faith, are unchanged since King David. To my mind the major poets of the last century were masters of form: Hardy, Yeats, Housman, Robinson, Auden, Stevens, Hope, Wilbur, Hecht. That is true of the thirty-one preceding centuries as well.

PS: You mention the Australian A.D. Hope in this list of major poets. Bearing in mind that many of the readers of *The Shit Creek Review* will be Australians, I want to ask you if you're interested in the work of other Australian poets, such as Gwen Harwood. Who else do you find significant?

TM: I think Hope is a very major figure, and I'd never heard of him until Dave Mason and Dana Gioia set me to reading him. I have enjoyed Gwen Harwood, especially the trimeter poem for her father in which she wantonly slaughters an owl (“Father and Child: Barn Owl”). I have enjoyed individual poems by Murray and Wright. And I pay very close attention to the many talented Australians who frequent the Eratosphere workshop. As a Plainsman I feel a close kinship with your outsized, under-populated country that has stood shoulder to shoulder with my own for so long.

Western Oz, A State Of Mind

A drover in Mundiwindi
grins from his dusty rig:
“Mate, ’ere’s fantastic country,
loik Texas, except it’s big.”

PS: Writing of your development in the 1970s and 80s, Alan Sullivan says, “Murphy decided he had a lot more work to do before he could measure up to [Richard Wilbur’s] exacting standards. He did not seek publication again for many years.” During this period, how did you improve your poetry?

TM: I developed a life outside of literature. I had embarked on a lifelong gay relationship, become a farmer and hunter of the High Plains, a sailor and trekker, and I began writing of these things rather than about worlds of which I had only read. We’ll address the formal choices later.

PS: How conscious or deliberate was this movement towards a life outside of literature? If it was to some extent a strategic move, was it (ironically) to achieve material for literary purposes? Tim, I ask this because I did a similar thing when I left university for several years and worked as a ditch-digger, brickies’ labourer, factory worker, fettler, and sandal maker – partly it was a reaction against the massive overdose of academia that had rendered me intellectually comatose, partly I thought it would give me some “real life” to write about. Unfortunately in my case it couldn’t remedy the fact that I had no talent to start with!

TM: Oh it was just to make some money! Alan and I were eating pork and beans, and on a good night we’d melt some cheddar over our fare. But I was drawn to the people of the High Plains. My ear delighted in their colorful speech. Alfred Nicol memorably described *Very Far North* as “Open mic time for North Dakota.” I also had a primitive, romantic notion: that the true wealth of the earth came from the mines, the forests, the farms, and the sea. I wanted to be part of that. The irony is that I have lost my ass farming and made a small fortune in computers.

PS: You’ve remarked that you agree with Robert Penn Warren’s advice to you never to waste time reading critical theory. Do you see any use for criticism at all both in general, and specifically to poets?

TM: I recant. I've no use for critical theory, but I now enjoy reading the criticism of many authors, all of whom are good or better poets. But Warren wanted me to immerse myself in verse, not prose about verse. I still think that's good advice to a youngster. Now I not only read criticism, I write it. Although the profiles of my friends in *Requited* might better be called "appreciations."

PS: Your working life has been associated for many years with farming. What effect has that had on your poetry?

TM: I last drove the tractor when I was seventeen. But I have blown three modest fortunes farming, and I have become intimately acquainted with flood, hail, drought, disease. My losing battles with nature animate much of my best work.

PS: Do you envisage a perfect reader of your poetry? What qualities would that perfect reader have?

TM: Wilbur, Hecht, Gwynn, Espailat, Sullivan, all are perfect readers for my poetry. All are superb poets. That said, I value the farmers who read my farm poems, the hunters who read my hunting poems. They can't read as poets would, but they have a depth of shared experience the poets lack.

PS: In *Requited* you wrote, "So began my passionate admiration for the great birds of prey, peerless hunters, fishermen and sailors of the three earthly dimensions." How do you respond to the suggestion that your poetic perspective is somewhat modeled on birds of prey?

TM: I'm ungainly and blind as a bat, so any comparison to the birds of prey is unfair to them. I look up at the sky and they, down at the earth. Nonetheless I hunt, fish and sail, and the osprey cannot rhyme.

PS: How important is a sense of place, of *terroir*, to you as a poet?

TM: No more important than Ireland to Yeats, Wessex to Hardy, or New England to Frost. (This is the best answer I ever gave an interviewer.)

PS: Alan Sullivan calls you an "intensely private man" ([A Fine Line](#)). You said of yourself, "I believe that the poet speaks for his tribe" (in the *Cortland Review* interview with Cynthia Haven). Is there a conflict between the roles of private man and speaker for the tribe? Do poets have a public role? Do you, as a poet, see yourself as having a public role?

TM: I become a less private man with each confessional poem I publish. I don't think any contemporary poet speaks for the tribe as Homer did. I address each audience to which I belong, hunters, farmers, poets, Christians, gays, audiences which are sometimes inimical to one another. Whether I read for the Library of Congress or Oxford, I have no public role. Wilbur's readership is miniscule, and mine, infinitesimal.

PS: You've said, "I am a self-destructive poet -- but I dust myself off and carry on." (*Cortland Review*). In what ways are you self-destructive as a poet? How does this affect your poetry?

TM: It is my alcoholism, my dysthymic depression, which is self-destructive. My focused poetic ambition has centered and sustained me. Like the farmer's adversity, my self-destructive bent lends tension to my work.

PS: Referring to your desire to write a poem "as cold and passionate as the dawn," you've said that you haven't achieved that yet (*Cortland Review*). Is that still the case? Has any poem of yours come close?

TM: The quote is Yeats, and it is romantic posturing, a vice to which I still sometimes sink. When Cynthia Havens interviewed me, I was about to organize *Very Far North*, and I had written a handful of poems as perfect as any I am likely to write. I had so little facility as a youth, and it took years even to manage pentameter. But I couldn't get away from it, I stuck with it for decades, and my improbable ambition has been sometimes satisfied. Here is the first poem in *Very Far North*.

The Last Sodbusters

Wibaux, Montana, 1907

"Rain follows the plough!"
the pamphleteers proclaim.

Does grass follow the cow
or wind, the weathervane?

Care furrows the brow
and bows the straightest frame.

Thistles follow the plough,
and hail threshes the grain.

PS: You often write of hunting, of shooting animals. Many readers might feel uncomfortable with that theme. What would you say to that?

TM: Sam Gwynn is the only one of the aforementioned perfect readers who hunts. The others find it baffling or even offensive, though they eat the birds with relish! But they all love my hunting poems. Just as I love Catherine Tufariello's poems about her infertility and her difficult quest to become a mother. Or Wilbur's and Espallat's poems for their grandchildren. You can't imagine how desolate those loving poems can make an aging gay man feel. But for heaven's sake, it is poetry's task to take us outside our narrow fields of reference.

PS: What effect have your linguistic studies in Old English, Ancient Greek had on your poetry?

TM: Homer taught me to hear a magnificent music I could never compose, as did Baudelaire. You don't need to know a language well to memorize its verse and understand its music. Anglo Saxon is another matter. I employ the forty percent Anglo-Saxon minority of our vocabulary more than any modern poet I know, including the young Auden. In the above poem only "pamphleteers proclaim" are words from the Romance side. Every other word is Anglo-Saxon. I once examined a significant chunk of the *Beowulf* Alan and I did for the Longman Anthologies of English and World literature, and over ninety percent of our vocabulary is Anglo-Saxon. Of course, that was a consciously chosen principle of translation, a ground rule we set at the inception of that project. The High Plains is populated by heirs of the Germanic family: English, German, and the Scandinavian tongues. So it is the speech to which my heart beats. Knowing this of his eighteen-year old pupil, Mr. Warren had me learn Old English. As a counterweight he had me learn Homeric Greek. I never learned the grammar, but I can still bellow out the *Iliad*. And that music rings in my ears when I read A.D. Hope's magnificent Western Elegies. Had he given us an *Iliad*, *Odyssey*, or *Aeneid*, THAT would be something to have! Mark Allinson understands the dactylic hexameter as Hope did. He has started the *Odyssey*, and I say to him what Dick Davis said to me when I was 100 lines into the *Beowulf*: "But you must finish the job."

PS: Why do you use short lines so frequently? What particular challenges and advantages do they present?

TM: One of the first poets Warren had me study was Skelton. I love short poems in short lines. I liked "West Running Brook", but I adore "Neither Out Far Nor In Deep" and "A Dust Of Snow". Turning to short line gave me my voice, of which X.J.

Kennedy wrote “He is one of the few contemporaries whose work I don’t want to run through a trash compacter.” It is harder to rhyme on each fourth or sixth syllable, than on every tenth. It is harder to substitute metrically, to enjamb, to lay the sentence across the lines and within the stanza. That said, I confined myself to pentameter for the years 1976 to 1980, just to learn how to lay the sentence across those capacious lines and stanzas.

PS: Which other poets have you particularly admired?

TM: This is entirely too large a question. In recent years though, I have been amazed to read Borges in the samizdat Mezey Barnes metrical translation and St. John of the Cross in Espailat’s miraculous translation. I have delighted in reading Greg Williamson and Alicia Stallings and Mike Stocks and many other poets who are much younger than I. In reading my contemporaries, some of whom I listed above. In studying for the first time King David.

PS: What advice would you give a novice poet?

TM: A novice poet asked that question of Anthony Hecht when he was my guest at the Eratosphere, an internet workshop to which many of *Shit Creek Review*’s readers belong. Here is Tony’s advice. “Memorize. There is no contemporary poet I admire who has not a great deal, and I mean a VERY great deal, of verse by heart.” Same advice Warren gave me. I carried it to excess, committing so much Yeats alone, that his influence overwhelmed me and much delayed my coming into my own. But with those tens of thousands of lines ringing in my head, I am highly unlikely to make mistakes.

PS: Do you see the internet as an important influence on poetry in general, and on the way you write poetry in particular?

TM: Sitting on a panel at an early West Chester Conference on Form, I was asked about the net and the web. Didn’t know anything to say, except quote Wyatt’s “Sins in a net I seek to catch the winde.” And Sir Walter Scott’s “Oh what a tangled web we weave.” That was a decade ago. I shall always compose in my head. My memory is sufficiently trained for me to write a first and even a third draft of a sonnet before typing it. But the net is a fantastic boon for poets. Had I had the Eratosphere workshops available to me in my twenties, it would have propelled my development by many years. I think the internet will also supplant print periodicals as the main venue for disseminating our art, and I have only come to that view and started sending my work to “zines” very recently.

PS: Tell us more about the process of composition for you. How do ideas come? Do you think, “I’ll write a sonnet” or does the idea suggest the form? Do you write with pen on paper or straight onto computer? Do you find yourself tending to favour a particular form? How many drafts do you take a poem through? What sort of a discard rate do you have?

TM: No, I have never set out to write a sonnet. However, twenty-five of my poems decided to be sonnets. I begin with an image, or more likely the fragment of a tune. Then the developing argument finds its form. I heard “you can’t fertilize a field/ by farting through the fence” in a bar in rural North Dakota twenty years before I succeeded in ending a poem with that couplet. Some poems come gratifyingly swiftly and a few can take a decade. Most poems involve many drafts, and there is always hell to pay when Alan does the final editing on a book. We call it “dictionary throwing.”

PS: How has your return to Christianity affected you, and what direction do you envisage your poetry taking next?

TM: My return to the Church prevented me from the sin of self murder. It has had a profound effect on my dark art. In twice daily prayer I ask, “Lord, make me more like Richard Wilbur, able to celebrate not just the beauty of creation but the majesty of its Creator.” You have published “To the Dean”, in which I say “You make it look so easy, Dr. Donne.” For me it has not been easy, and I daresay it was not easy, even for so incandescent a genius as Donne, who wrote love poems that employed spiritual language and godly poems like “Batter my Heart” that used carnal language. In all three poems that you have published here, Paul, I am consecrating my modest gifts to the service of God. Like the historian, John Boswell, I am too gay for the Catholics, too Catholic for the gays. Thy will be done.

PS: Thank you, Tim Murphy.

Three New Murphy Poems

Cross and Veil; To the Dean; Historian;

Cross and Veil

I grew up with *Aurora Borealis*,
 though in Walhalla they were “Northern Lights”
 that flickered through the brief summer nights.
 One year, much further north, I hiked the talus
 that spalled with icefalls from Mount Odin’s peak
 and reached a plaque that read *Le Cercle Arctique*,
 a place so near the North Magnetic Pole
 that northern lights are southern where they fall.
 Some sights my love and I have never seen —
 the Southern Cross beyond the shimmer-screen
 mariners named *Aurora Australis*.
 I doubt *Le Dieu Soleil* will ever fail us
 but dread the day the Son of God shall call us.



To the Dean

I was amazed to see *Batter my heart*
 in the breviary of a Catholic priest
 who wages battle with The Beast
 and longs to divine your art.

You make it look so easy, Dr. Donne:
 from courtier to prelate in a minute
 timed by the human heartbeats in it,
 a sprint to heaven won.

I am the much indebted legatee
 of words four hundred years have not erased,
 your ardent lover, never chaste
 except you ravish me.

God was the sitting judge for your complaint.
Amicus curiae, win for me relief
 from mortal sin as though my brief
 were argued by a saint.

Historian

Leviticus was parroted by Paul,
and the gays lay with Jews in Nazi graves.

Men would be whipping slaves
if we were wholly in the Bible's thrall.

Catholic and queer by grace of God's design,
carrier of the cross so many shared
and every straight is spared,
you mastered many tongues I wish were mine.



Your photo on an old dust jacket fades.
Strangers who envied you your boyish looks
took comfort from your books;
your students grieved when you were felled by AIDS.

John Boswell, you have gone to your long home
where the streets are paved not with gold but dirt
and the Lord's loins are girt
not with the purple of imperious Rome.

Prosimetrum Excerpt

*Prose on Poetry, from Tim's Prosimetrum in Progress, **Required***

From XIV: The Powow Poets)

Rhina Espaillat was seven when her parents moved from the Dominican Republic to New York City. Raised bilingually, she learned to write with equal fluency in Spanish and English. As a New York schoolteacher, Rhina was never seduced by the sirens of linguistic separatism. She always asserted the necessity of English for children growing up in the United States. Marrying another schoolteacher, she also balanced career and family with a rare ease. After retirement, Rhina and her husband relocated to Newburyport Massachusetts. There a small stream fortuitously called the Powow joins the Merrimac near its estuary, and there Rhina has gathered round her the Powow River Poets — a most remarkable group of people. Among its best poets are David Berman, Alfred Nicol, Len Krisak, Bob Crawford, Michael Cantor, Bill Coyle, and Mike Juster.

I can't remember who said "Ireland maintains a standing army of 3000 poets," but I can attest that the small town of Newburyport boasts no less than 60, many of whom are publishing first or second collections. "We all dance round in a ring and suppose,/But the secret sits in the center and knows." So Frost told us long ago. In Newburyport the secret is Rhina. She has mastered (mistressed?) every form known to English: heroic couplet, heroic quatrain, free verse, rondeau, ovillejo, sestina, villanelle, and above all the sonnet. She uses those forms so effortlessly that unless you're an obsessive like me, you don't even notice how intricate a set of rules she fulfills in each of them. Instead you are smitten by the sensibility.

Well, not everyone is smitten. Joseph Salemi wrote a hostile review of one of Rhina's books, calling it "The Poetry of Nicey-Nice." Perhaps he took his inspiration from critics who have dismissed Dick Wilbur for his civility — for his not being a brooding, suicidal maniac like Lowell, Berryman, or Schwartz. Unlike her own famously self-destructive contemporaries, Plath and Sexton, Rhina is quiet and affirmative. She writes about squirrels, dogs, songbirds and family because these are objects of her daily attention, but loss is a recurring topic in her poetry. Even a marriage can occasion sad reflections which require conscious transmutation into joy.

For My Son on His Wedding Day

In your fisherman's room, becalmed by loss,
 I sit, thinking *Yes* hard while the heart cries *No*
 whose love you landed, unfished-for, long ago.
 Mother, pet nag, Blue Fairy, and albatross,
 truer than any compass, stubborn as whale,
 I cursed you with gloves and lunches and beliefs,
 harpooned you with Don'ts, dragged anchor to your sail,
 and, whether wrong or unforgivably right,
 sighted everywhere storms and secret reefs.
 Now, beached as the tide goes out that bears away
 both the man and the boy you were, what can I say?
 That fear is the fare we pay to all delight;
 that none steer blithely with so much to lose;
 that if I doled out like rations your right to choose,
 I flung out by prodigal handfuls joy to your joy,
 balm to your grief; that, proud of my tall, fair boy,
 I wish you, too, beautiful sons and daughters,
 and long miraculous fishing in quiet waters.

One of my favorite wedding poems is Wilbur's "A Wedding Toast," which reflects on the turning of water to wine at Cana and expresses forthright best wishes to his son and the bride in perfectly straightforward accentual syllabic stanzas. Rhina's poem by contrast is haunted by parental concern over rearing her boy, regret for the discipline she had to dish out, foreboding of loss. She employs what Frost called "loose iambics" to express her unease over the celebratory occasion, giving us lines with varying numbers of accents and syllables. There is a nervousness, a hesitancy to this pentameter that mirrors the mixed feelings of the mother. It can be usefully compared with the stricter meter of "Here, Here!" from her last collection, *Rehearsing Absence* (University of Evansville Press.)

"Here! Here!"

What bird are you, repeating "Here! Here! Here!"
 and later, "What to do!" as if distraught,
 and "What to do!" again? And yet it's clear
 you're neither calling me nor overwrought,
 but occupied, and singing quite by chance.
 Almost unseen, your feathered self, aware
 of nothing but each pressing circumstance —
 each straw for your light carpentry midair —
 tosses out songs in passing, line by line

not consciously, but idly thrown away
 on strangers' ears as ignorant as mine.
 And still I hear you say the things you say,
 swear I could almost knock on your green door,
 as if you meant it and I knew what for.

Although she is perfectly capable of bloodying the nose of the God in whom she does not quite believe, Rhina's program is minute and accurate observation of her surroundings, both outward and inward. There are more birds in Espailat than in any poet I know except Murphy (although most of my birds get massacred by the final line.) Despite her domesticity, she is, like her beloved Robert Frost, "one who has been acquainted with the night" — uprooted from homeland and extended family, bereaved of her father as a young woman, employed for many years in difficult urban schools. From all this she makes her "light carpentry midair." Miraculously, she has achieved this state of grace without the aid of religion.

Last year Joseph Bottum commissioned her to translate three of the great poems of San Juan de la Cruz for *First Things*. Let me quote my favorite of these. It has been what the Anglicans call "a very near and present comfort" to me. For years I have adored the John Frederick Nims translation, which he revised for three decades. Immersed from childhood on in St. John (her late father's favorite poet), at ease with his archaic Spanish, Rhina offers us an English poem so true to its great original, so graceful in its stanzaic execution, the performance appears to be effortless.

The Dark Night of the Soul

*(Cancion de la subida del Monte Carmel, de San Juan de la Cruz,
 1542–1591)*

One darkest night I went,
 aflame with love's devouring eager burning —
 O delirious event! —
 no witnesses discerning,
 the house now still from which my steps were turning.
 Hidden by darkness, bent
 on flight, disguised, down secret steps sojourning —
 O delirious event! —
 Hidden by dark, and yearning,
 the house now still from which my steps were turning;

In that most blissful night,
 in secrecy, since none had seen my going,
 nor did I pause for sight,
 nor had I light, for showing
 the route, but that which in my heart was glowing.

This only did the guiding,
 surer than the blaze when noonday shone,
 to where he was abiding —
 who was to me well known —
 where we would be together and alone.

O night that led me true,
 O night more fair than morning's earliest shining,
 O night that wrought from two —
 lover, beloved entwining —
 beloved and lover one in their combining!

On my new-flowered breast,
 to him alone and wholly sanctified,
 he leaned and lay at rest;
 his pleasure was my guide,
 and cedars to the wind their scent supplied.

Down from the tower, breezes
 came, while soft fingers winnowed through his hair;
 a touch that wounds and pleases
 caressed my throat with air, leaving every sense suspended there. I
 stayed, all else forgetting,
 inclined toward the beloved, face to face;
 all motion halted, letting
 care vanish with no trace,
 forgotten in the lilies of that place.

Twice in my peregrinations as performing poet, I have driven from Amherst to Newburyport. I began those journeys a stone's throw from Emily Dickinson's house and ended two miles from the Atlantic, dining on lamb shanks with Rhina, whose hospitality surpasses Ms. D's reclusiveness. If you should pass that way, don't make for the turnpike. Take US 202. Northeast of Amherst, this shoulderless two-lane road meanders amid forested hills and rounds reservoirs. Mind the "Moose Crossings." On the other side of the continent, my friends the Millers once had a 54 car unitrain derailed near the continental divide. A bull moose charged a locomotive and spilled 10 million pounds of number 2 yellow corn some 17000 miles short of the intended destination in China. Cleanup was complicated when a grizzly took possession of what was left of the moose.

American poetry is largely the possession of New Englanders. We have Dickinson, Robinson, Frost, Stevens, Francis and Wilbur, just to name my six favorite American poets in the order of their births. To this day, it seems that half of the

country's emerging poetic talent is locatable in a sixty mile radius of Newburyport, Massachusetts. One of the most accomplished Powows is Deborah Warren. To place her in context, consider E.A. Robinson.

New England

Here where the wind is always north-north-east
 And children learn to walk on frozen toes,
 Wonder begets an envy of all those
 Who boil elsewhere with such a lyric yeast
 Of love that you will hear them at a feast
 Where demons would appeal for some repose,
 Still clamoring where the chalice overflows
 And crying wildest who have drunk the least.
 Passion is here a soilure of the wits,
 We're told, and Love a cross for them to bear;
 Joy shivers in the corner where she knits
 And Conscience always has the rocking-chair,
 Cheerful as when she tortured into fits
 The first cat that was ever killed by Care.

Robinson is toying with us all the way through this poem, beginning with a weather quip — though he never felt the nip of North Dakota's north-northwest — and concluding with a killer sestet that slinks sinuously toward its close, then pounces. He chooses a form notorious for its constriction, the Italian sonnet, but we laugh with him as those limitations liberate his imagination.

Limitation comes very naturally to the New England mind. Hoping to farm, the settlers of New England cleared forests only to find soil so stony that they had no choice but to build (and mend) walls. They also found growing seasons so short that only the most vigilant and vigorous sower could hope for a crop. Harsh life and harsh religion marked the people who lived there. They made virtue of their necessities — a virtue Warren celebrates in “Thrift Shop,” where she delightfully discovers “seven nightgowns with their nap/ still blooming on the flannel.”

“Thrift Shop” makes me think of Thoreau, and of the poet Robert Francis, who incorporated account books in his memoir, to celebrate his poverty precisely. Even when New Englanders escaped the exigencies of life on land or at sea, poverty's mark remained for generations — narrowing the lives and minds of those Beacon Hill ladies in the Robinson poem. But life is less harsh in Howard Dean's New England. Deborah Warren's dairy operation is a labor of love, not the sole source of sustenance for her large family. In the title poem of her first book, *The Size of Happiness*, she dreams of running a 150 cow dairy, of buying up and plowing the surrounding mountains, but as a farmer she has the wisdom to concentrate on what is rewarding — and profitable — breeding stock.

The Heifers

The three-week heifers straggle down
 the ramp this April Saturday,
 out to a small enclosure where
 they won't get very far away.

On Thursday — even Wednesday — though,
 we'll wander over here again;
 their bellies will be deeper,
 and their faces will be longer then.
 A different slant of haunch or brow:
 They won't still be these heifers, who
 will get away from us inside
 the small space of a day or two.

Eastern North Dakota is cropland too fine for pasture. I have only one friend in the dairy business, only a few in cattle-rearing. However I have been privileged to watch new-born calves, and I envy the precision of observation Deborah brings to this poem. "A different slant" tips her invisible hat to Ms. D. But bellies deeper, faces longer? Dickinson couldn't have conjured those images. It is the work of a woman who has mastered mothering, and who knows the changes that come over calves and children. She also knows that plowing a mountain slope is masculine folly, and she tells us so in one of my favorite poems from her second book, *Zero Meridian*.

Hay Field on Methodist Hill

From the time we cleared it, all it's been is trouble,
 stubborn and recalcitrant and proud;
 every winter, fractious and uncowed,
 throwing up new rocks and glacier-rubble:
 It's clear it never wanted to be plowed.

And once we got the stones out, it was trees
 behaving as if they had the right of way:
 Every March the maples have a field day —
 don't expect them to give you a year of peace —
 shoving, off-side, elbowing out the hay.
 When the saplings get above themselves, it's over.
 Let them grow a foot or so too high
 and-teen-age trees? You might as well go try
 and sow the sea with rocks and hope for clover,
 or, if you want less trouble, plow the sky.

There is much to be admired in these pentameter cinquains which borrow the rhyme scheme of “The Road Not Taken.” Though the colloquiality of the speech is one hundred years more current, the poem has much the same wry, edgy spirit as the Robinson I quoted above. I’ve cleared slopes of scrub aspen to plant red and white pine, and I’ve wielded the brush cutter to keep weed trees down — a far easier task than keeping newly-planted clover fit for mowing and baling. I could imagine writing a poem something like this, but I’m not a family man, and I could not have come up with “teen-age trees.” Deborah is both mother and teacher. Her experience with young people has instilled an instinct for setting serious thoughts in colloquial, playful language.

In August 2005 Alan and I visited that picture postcard of a farm. Deborah’s husband George had sold the heifers and leased out the land, but at least those transactions cash flowed the farm. George and I discussed the vicissitudes of agriculture. He was an admirer of *Set the Ploughshare Deep*, my prior prosimetrum in which I chronicled the building and collapse of my first farming venture. Deborah and George had suffered a tragedy last year when their son Nicholas fell from a tree in New Zealand. He suffered a serious head injury and was in a coma for six months. That he is now in rehab back in Boston is something of a miracle. I wrote him this poem:

The Bowline

For Nicholas

A young sailor plummeted from a tree.
 Stunned as though a spreader had cracked his head,
 he lay six months unmoving, nearly dead.
 To rouse him from insensibility
 a wise doctor gave him a length of rope,
 said “Bowline.” The rabbit popped up the hole,
 and hopped counter-clockwise around the bole.
 Prayers had been heard, a mooring made for hope.

Rhina P. Espaillat’s “For My Son on His Wedding Day” appeared in *Playing at Stillness* (Truman state University Press, 2005); “Here! Here!” appeared in *Rehearsing Absence* (University of Evansville Press, 2001); and “One Darkest Night,” her translation of *The Dark Night of the Soul*,

by St. John of the Cross, appeared in *First Things* #134, June/July 2003.

Deborah Warren's "Heifers" appeared in *The Size of Happiness*, [Waywiser Press](#), 2003. Her "Hayfield on Methodist Hill" appeared in *Zero Meridian*, Ivan R. Dee, 2004.

As yet, Tim Murphy's *Requited* is unpublished in book form. Other excerpts have appeared in *Texas Poetry Journal* and *Umbrella Journal*.

A Fine Line

An essay on Tim Murphy and his work, by Alan Sullivan

The vitality of a literary movement depends on the emergence of distinctive voices. Formalist poets should welcome the deep-chested Midwestern speech of Timothy Murphy. His poetry reflects an unusual life and eclectic, even eccentric interests. As a farmer and businessman, he has a firm grip on the practical and particular. As an avid, if erratic reader, he has some acquaintance with other times and cultures. As a gay man living in a small town, he has contended with isolation and prejudice. In the course of this essay I hope to illuminate his work from my vantage as an editor and occasional collaborator.

Timothy Murphy's first book, *The Deed Of Gift* (Story Line Press, 1998) appears in his forty-seventh year. Thematically organized, it represents a selection from the work of more than two decades. Inevitably such a structure obscures the provenance of individual poems. The careers of many poets divide into distinct phases as new interests and influences come to bear on their work. The Yeats of "Brown Penny" seems a very different man from the Yeats of "Crazy Jane Talks With The Bishop." When a poet publishes frequently, his work arranges itself chronologically, and transitions are clear. In Murphy's case, they are more obscure.

Why has this estimable poet waited so long to publish? Chiefly because he despaired of finding an audience. He began writing verse at the same time as other young formalists, but he was unaware that anyone else wanted to challenge the hegemony of free verse, which looked so unshakeable from the remote vantage of the Midwest. Physically and artistically isolated, he found his unique voice in the silence of his native prairie. Yet the young Suzanne Noguere felt no less isolated in New York City, while Dana Gioia, working in Minneapolis, never crossed paths with Murphy, who was also employed there for a time. In the 1970's it was reasonable for a would-be formalist to believe no one could revive the fading tradition of Auden and Frost.

Of course Murphy could have adapted to the fashion of the day. Several of his student exercises in free verse were actually published by *The Yale Review* in 1971, but he loved the sounds of meter and rhyme too much to abandon them. His tutor at Yale, Robert Penn Warren, had required him to memorize and recite thousands of lines. A fine reader with a powerful speaking-voice, Murphy mesmerized otherwise unpoetic peers with Shakespeare, Keats, and Yeats. Such exercises are invaluable for tuning the ear to metrical speech. Without them, it is exceedingly difficult to attain any facility with meter.

Warren also urged his pupil to undertake a business career rather than pursue graduate studies. No enthusiast of academic life, the old laureate thought young



Robert Penn Warren

writers needed experience of the world to inspire them. In the early 1970s Minneapolis was changing from an overgrown farm-town to a genuine city. There Murphy worked at an insurance agency by day, while hobnobbing with musicians and artists by night. His chief poetic models during this period were Yeats and Kavafy. He wrote mostly in pentameter. His lines were often metrically and grammatically awkward. Naturally he was pleased when some of his verse appeared in a New York magazine called *Christopher Street*.

Before Murphy left Connecticut, his mentor had offered one additional piece of advice. If he intended to pursue “this madness” of meter and rhyme, suggested Warren, he should contact Richard Wilbur for further tutelage. By 1978 publication and admiring friends had enhanced Murphy’s confidence enough for him to send Wilbur a packet of poems. The reply, though prompt and courteous, was also strict and daunting. Wilbur told the novice not to imagine sensational subjects could substitute for charged language, lively rhythms, or vivid rhymes. In subsequent letters he offered invaluable examples of editorial rigor as he dissected the flaws of individual lines. He also proffered some sparse but cherished words of praise.

Murphy decided he had a lot more work to do before he could measure up to such exacting standards. He did not seek publication again for many years, and he let the correspondence with Wilbur lapse. A major shift in his life and career were at hand. In 1980 he moved from Minneapolis to Fargo, North Dakota. Murphy had grown up in the small town of Moorhead, Minnesota, just across the Red River from Fargo. Now his father was ready to reconcile with an errant first-born son and accept him as successor in the family business.

Work as an estate planner brought Murphy into contact with the farmers of the Red River Valley, who cultivate some of the most fertile land on earth. Soon the businessman acquired a farm of his own, tilled in partnership with the son of a dead client, whose family would have lost their land to taxes without the assistance of Murphy’s firm. Over the next fifteen years Murphy experienced first-hand the tribulations of agriculture: drought and flood, hailstorms and blizzards, locusts and bankers. Here were the grit and the grist that Robert Penn Warren had sent his student to find.

The Deed Of Gift begins with poems of the prairie. In this new setting Murphy’s poetry turned stark and spare. The pentameter of “The Failure” and “Razing The Woodlot,” both written in the early 1980’s, tightened into the bleak trimeter and dimeter of “Kelly’s Lament” and “Buffalo Commons.” Later the poet initiated his experiments with extremes of musicality in “Harvest Of Sorrows,” which I quote here in full:

Harvest Of Sorrows

When swift brown swallows
 return to their burrows
 and diamond willows
 leaf in the hollows,
 when barrows wallow
 and brood sows farrow,
 we sow the black furrows
 behind our green harrows.

When willows yellow
 in the windy hollows,
 we butcher the barrows
 and fallow the prairies.
 The silo swallows
 a harvest of sorrows;
 the plowshare buries
 a farmer's worries.

Now harried sparrows
 forage in furrows.
 Lashing the willows,
 the north wind bellows
 while farmers borrow
 on unborn barrows.
 Tomorrow, tomorrow
 the sows will farrow.

I shall refrain from any detailed discussion of this unusual work, except to remark that its feminine rhymes make it difficult to categorize metrically. Tim scans its dominant foot as the amphibrach. R. S. Gwynn hears in such lines as “we butcher the barrows” or “tomorrow, tomorrow” the conventional iamb followed by a fantastical, hypermetrical anapest. Scansion is not a science but an art, and such differences of opinion can never be definitively resolved.

It is no accident that Murphy uses an almost exclusively Anglo-Saxon language in his dark hymns to the land. Words of Latin derivation are scarce, Greek entirely absent. In this regard his usage favors the harshness of early Auden over the fluidity of Yeats. Working at the northern limits of English, the Irish-American has even tried writing in Lalland Scots. One Scots poem, “Passel o’ Pups,” survived culling and appears in the fourth section of *The Deed of Gift*. Several others exist in manu-

script. Since his teenage years Tim has shared Auden's youthful fascination with Old English and its Norse relatives. On the prairie he found themes well-suited to the starkness of these tongues.



W. H. Auden

As Richard Wilbur suggests in his preface to *The Deed Of Gift*, these “songlike” poems reflect “the high morale of a man who has a purchase on reality, however bleak.” If poetry is ever to regain the broad audience it has lost through the self-indulgence of aesthetes, it must learn how to sing again; and it must sing of places and experiences familiar to a wider public. I do not mean to suggest that poets need lessons from Nashville or Broadway. But I should like to hear more of them recovering the self-confidence to deploy the full music of our language, whether they prefer its Latin-Norman vocabulary or the Anglo-Saxon.

Although Murphy outgrew the lilt of Yeats, in other respects the dead master remained an important influence on him. Murphy always admired the large lines and large visions of Yeats' bravura works; but he was more drawn as a poet to the mysterious songs, especially “Words For Music Perhaps.” So in a poem like “Eighty-Eight At Midnight,” Murphy shifted and blurred his rhymes unpredictably, starting with couplets, then lapsing into irregular off-rhyme, as a dreamer might drift into nightmare. Lines ranged from four to seven syllables, wavering between dimeter and trimeter. Murphy had not yet encountered the stricter formalism of Timothy Steele or R.S. Gwynn.



W. B. Yeats

Eighty-Eight At Midnight

A black calf bleats
at shrivelled teats.
Incessant heat
withers the wheat
and wilts the silking corn.
Too few, too late
the spotty showers
mock my stunted flowers.
Too late I shrink from debt.
Like a spitted calf I turn
over a bed of coals
while the pastures burn.

Like his father in 1936, Murphy watched drought sear the plains in 1988. Crop failure on his indebted farms nearly forced him into bankruptcy. He also experienced a poetic drought that persisted long after the rains returned. “Eighty-Eight At Midnight” was not written until 1992. By then businessman/farmer was solvent again, with time and energy to spare for poetry. A year later it rained all summer, the wheat rotted in the fields, and the farmer found himself “Twice Cursed” under “The Godless Sky.” Reliving family history, Tim was obliged to sell off most of his acreage.

Although he lived on and by the land, recording such rural curiosities as “The Peg-Leg Pig,” Murphy retained some of the urbane tastes acquired in youth. A fondness for travel gave rise to the poems in “Je Me Souviens,” the second section of his book. But the travels tended to peculiar locales like Baffin Island and Belize. Several of the poems in part two also explore, in a very understated, almost covert manner, the ramifications of love between men, setting the lovers in wilderness, rather than farm or city.

The poems of part two also date from different periods, each distinguished by a shift in the predominant form of new work. Thus a later piece like “Bedrock,” which is strictly rhymed and metrically rigorous, is closely juxtaposed with the older “Lonesome Peak,” which is odder and more irregular, like many of the poems written around 1990, when the author was most attuned to the muse of “Words For Music Perhaps.” The pentameter of “The Quarrel” places it earlier still, and links it to the *Christopher Street* poems.

The Quarrel

Climbing in sullen silence past treeline
 where blasted spruces drunkenly incline,
 we stumble on two racks of caribou.
 Clapsed in a deadlock neither bull could break
 they bleach beside a frigid Yukon lake —
 amateurs who never locked horns with you.

In this poem the lurching trochees of the first and last lines neatly echo the theme. The reader can almost hear antlers clash, an effect reinforced by numerous plosives. Yet the angry mood is also undercut by the implicit puns of “blasted” and “drunkenly,” then definitively dispelled by the humor of the final line. The result, paradoxically, is a poem of affirmation composed entirely from the blackest and bleakest material. This sense of permanence was confirmed twelve years later by the incredibly terse “Bedrock,” which concludes the section:

Bedrock

Though I endure the shore
 Moorish villas
 bougainvilleas
 surely I love you more

by waterfalls than fountains
 for our friendship
 came of hardship
 wandering the mountains.

How far removed this is, in every sense, from the strident expressions of sexual liberation prevalent at the time. Nor has it anything in common with the mythopoetical imposture of Robert Bly. It is more akin to the sensibility of the Irish poet Patrick Kavanagh, who once wrote, “I know nothing of women, nothing of cities.” The artifacts mentioned — villas, flowers, and fountains — are unmistakably feminine, the waterfalls and mountains unabashedly masculine. This is the declaration of a plain-speaking plainsman who never lost that boyhood sense of communion with nature, which Wordsworth sentimentalized so long-windedly.

In late 1993 Murphy resumed contact with Richard Wilbur after a lapse of fourteen years. The two arranged to meet in Florida that winter. Since leaving Minneapolis, the prairie poet had worked in complete isolation. Now through Wilbur he learned of Timothy Steele and Dana Gioia. Soon he was reading their work for the first time. Within a year both of these younger men had visited Fargo, followed later by R. S. Gwynn and Dick Davis, all of whom read at a local college, Moorhead State. Murphy also met the professor and poet who hosted these readings, David Mason, co-editor of the formalist anthology, *Rebel Angels* (Story Line Press, 1996).

Though now affiliated with these exemplars of New Formalism, Murphy remains distinct among them, marked by his peculiar history and affinities. So far as I have seen, no other contemporary poet writes of the land with such authority. Nor does anyone else compose rhymed trimeter in such abundance, though others have used the form equally well. Dick Davis has produced outstanding poems in trimeter quatrains, for example, “A Recording Of Guiseppe di Luca” and “Zuleikha Speaks,” both in his collection, *A Kind Of Love* (University Of Arkansas Press, 1991).

In short line poetry, the quality of enjambment becomes a paramount consideration. It is relatively easy to write distinct lines in pentameter, though many formalists are quite lax about lineation. Five feet allow plenty of scope for subjects and predicates, phrases and clauses. But three feet, or two? Consider again the poem

“Bedrock,” quoted above. Each line has a definite identity and constitutes a thematic whole, even the line which consists of a single word. Yet there are no weak endings — no prepositions, articles or conjunctions. Of course Murphy has indulged himself a bit by omitting commas in lines one, two and three. These are not true enjambments. But the succeeding lines achieve the near-impossible with a seeming ease that redeems the pat rhyme of “fountains” and “mountains.” Formalists need many such redemptive moments if they expect to derive contemporary work from the tradition they inherit.



Richard Wilbur

Spurred by new friends and new reading, Murphy has written more consistently in recent years. Enthusiasm is hard to sustain in isolation, but it thrives on the correspondences, critiques and competition of a literary movement. Inevitably, the poet’s contact with New Formalism has changed his work. Section three of his collection opens with “Two Songs For Richard Wilbur.” Now the literary and historical interests of youth revive, but they find expression in forms Murphy forged for recounting the travails of North Dakota farming. Here also this intensely private man begins to search out a public voice in his title poem, “The Deed Of Gift,” though he fails to reflect — if I understand this murky work rightly — how little JFK’s “literary taste” really meant in the conduct of private or public life.

Some readers may weary of the short poems and epigrams in this part of the book. Murphy’s concision sometimes becomes a weakness, undercutting his ability to sustain or develop a thought. Still, it is hard to quarrel with the painful humility of “Yggdrasil:” “I am the least leaf / on the tiniest twig / of an unseen tree / inconceivably / bigger than me.” Or to gainsay the frightening “Ant Lion,” which yearns to “...fly, / copulate, and die.” Here the brief lines with their feminine rhymes teeter at the brink of disintegration before they resolve in the final couplet. Robert Lowell might have taken several turgid pages to say as much about addiction and despair.

After Emily Dickinson, the most adept American practitioner of short line was probably Robert Frost. Though many New Formalists revere the narrative Frost of “Home Burial” or “The Death Of The Hired Man,” Murphy finds more inspiration in Frost’s lyrics. In his preface to *The Deed Of Gift*, Richard Wilbur observes that Murphy’s work, at its best, is “worthy of Frost.” Putting that observation to the test, I shall print “Dust Of Snow” alongside “The Expulsion.”

Dust Of Snow

The way a crow
Shook down on me
The dust of snow
From a hemlock tree

Has given my heart
A change of mood
And saved some part
Of a day I had rued.

— Robert Frost

The Expulsion

Six weeks of drought,
the corn undone
and wheat burned out
by the brazen sun:

over that land
an angel stands
with an iron brand
singeing his hands.

— Timothy Murphy

The formal parallels are striking, despite the difference in subject matter, which is understated in one poem, dramatized in the other. Both poems are comprised of a single sentence, though Murphy's stanza break is sharper than Frost's. Both poems feature masterful enjambments. Both use plain rhymes and plain language. Both employ one initial spondee and several anapests, though only Frost extends a line to six syllables, a virtuoso flourish at the close. But "Dust Of Snow" has eighteen stresses in a poem of thirty-six syllables, while "The Expulsion" has twenty in thirty-four. Murphy's speech is more charged, which befits a poem bound straight for hell, while Frost, for once, hints at redemption.

The fourth part of Murphy's collection contains the poems I regard as his best. Here his statements are more expansive and less abstract as he writes of his family and home terrain. These are not the affectations of a suburban pastoralist, evading urban realities with leafy meter and rhyme. This work is rural to the core. Tending his orchard beside the Red River, the poet affirms the pagan creed of "the vernal believer." His tones and forms vary widely: sometimes playful, as in "Feathers," sometimes restrained and elegiac, as in the lovely tercets of "Air," threaded with a single off-rhyme that recurs six times.

Air

Come Diktyнна come —
 once more the mourning dove
 coos in the blooming plum.

Mark the wood duck drake
 plummeting through a grove,
 and greenheads in the brake.

When fledglings try their wings
 and waves of migrants heave
 skyward in widening rings,

you will not heed my gun
 nor leave this grassy grave —
 your hunting days are done.

Drowse, Diktyнна, drowse
 lulled by a humming hive
 under the apple boughs.

So stealthily stole death
 my love could not retrieve
 your evanescent breath.

At last the disparate elements of the poet's life and personality merge harmoniously. The hunter names his retriever Diktyнна Thea, goddess of the hunt; the poet weds the word "evanescent" with his Anglo-Saxon monosyllables. Yeatsean echoes are now deliberate and controlled rather than compulsive. So the "widening rings" are merely a tip of the hunter's cap, and this poem owes as much to favorite haiku themes as it does to Yeats or the anonymous Scots poet who wrote "yer hountin days are dane."

The Deed Of Gift includes several other poems about bird-hunting. This fall ritual links contemporary plains dwellers to the tribesmen their forebears dispossessed. Poems of the hunt are authentic tributes to the earth. They tell us that the land shapes people as much as people shape the land. Is it any surprise that some descendants of the sodbusters have gone native? Or that an heir of Yeats, born on the plains, would write "A Dog Young And Old" for his retriever? As Timothy Steele quipped to the author: "You have the advantage of knowing your material better than Yeats knew women."

The most moving poems in section four are addressed to the poet's father. These are "Razing The Woodlot" and "The Blind." Among younger formalists, perhaps only Suzanne Doyle has written so memorably for a parent. How does Murphy avoid the pitfalls of confessional verse? Partly by confessing very little. These poems are grounded in the outer world, not the inner, yet they connect rather than alienate the objective and subjective poles of experience. They are unsparingly unsentimental, as in this evocation of a duck blind: "Father, the dog and I / are learning how to die / with our feet stuck in the muck / and our eyes trained on the sky." Yet they are also full of feeling for the prairie and its inhabitants, human and animal, even the beleaguered trees.

If the fourth part of Murphy's book is strongest, the fifth, "Early Poems," is most problematic. These works are predominantly narrative and historical rather than personal or lyrical. They were the products of a mind still giddy with books and short on lived experience. Had Murphy not taken his mentor's advice, he might never have transcended this phase, though some readers might actually prefer the explicit eroticism and exotic settings of "Early Poems." An alert eye will notice they are arranged chronologically by historical period. Oddly enough, this scheme roughly parallels the sequence of composition, as though the poet were groping his way toward the present.

Though reluctant to abandon his early works, Murphy no longer felt their inspiration keenly enough to recast them in accordance with the higher standard of craft he had developed over the years. Instead he loosed me to edit at my own discretion. Some poems survived with virtually no alteration; some were tightened; still others wholly remade; but most remained in the reject stack. Here is one of the earliest, a martial epigram "For The Theban Dead," in its heterometric original, then a tighter tetrameter.

The Sacred Band of Thebes is overthrown.
On the field of slaughter lover by lover sleeps
and iron-hearted Phillip of Macedon
sags on his bloody horse and weeps.

The Sacred Band is overthrown.
Lover by slaughtered lover sleeps
while iron-hearted Macedon
sags on his bloody horse and weeps.

The changes do not materially alter the poem; they simply enhance its focus and force. Few authors would trust an editor to participate so directly in the creative

process, but long before we compiled *The Deed Of Gift*, I had taken a collaborative role in some of Murphy's poems. After we decided to include early works in the collection, I spent months poring over them. This project of retrieval and rewriting under the author's guidance initiated my own switch from prose to poetry. But that's another story. Perhaps Tim will tell it for me sometime.

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N. Dakota country



Tim Murphy — a Catholic Sufi

Daniel Haar looks at Tim's religious verse through a Muslim lens

*Profession, profit, trade are what we've burned;
Song, poetry, and verse are what we've learned;
We've given heart and soul and sight to love
And heart and soul and sight are what we've earned.*

— Jalal al-Din Rumi (trans. Dick Davis)

I first met Tim Murphy on an online poetry community, *Eratosphere*. Tim told me flat out that my verse needed much work. But he was happy to correspond with me over email in an effort to lift my verse out of the 19th century. Around the same time, Tim experienced a spiritual crisis, and I began to explore the Muslim faith of my girlfriend and future wife. Thus, the subject of our notes moved from Yeats and Frost to St. John of the Cross and Rumi. Tim introduced me to the theology of von Balthasar, and I showed him the writings of al-Ghazali. We both began experimenting with devotional (and even spiritual) verse, though Tim had the advantage of having already mastered the lyric – Tim's ear was attuned to the divine rhythms even when he knew it not.

Since our virtual meeting, I have met Tim in person. Two years ago Tim came to the National Book Festival on the Mall in Washington, DC to recite several of his poems and a section of the *Beowulf*, which he had co-translated with Alan Sullivan. With his rich, sonorous voice, he sounded just like a bard of old, or at least how I imagine one. Whether these experiences give me a unique perspective on Tim's recent journeys or not, I will try to understand them in light of my own spiritual understanding, which I have learned through books of the Sufis, the mystics of Islam. A Sufi (which I cannot claim to be, though I am a Muslim) would be the first to say that spiritual enlightenment cannot be reached through book learning. A book is at most a map; it is the destination which matters. I live in Washington, and I hold maps of Jerusalem. Nevertheless, let's speak of Jerusalem!

From God we come, and to Him do we return. This phrase is often on the lips of the Sufis. Sufis are those who have become aware of the vast distance separating themselves and God but strive to bridge that gap. They believe that life's journey is circular. We are born in perfect submission to God, but drift away as we become caught up in affairs of the world. A Sufi is one who has rounded the opposite side of the circle, and has turned back toward his true home with God, which may be far

off yet. Tim Murphy is akin to the Sufis. He has been, and still is, somewhat of a wanderer, physically and spiritually. In one of his most memorable verses he speaks of a life (and heart) split between farm and sea:

Elsewhere... what is its lasting charm
for a creature in misery?
A fisherman longs for the landlocked farm
its tenant would trade for the sea.

Elsewhere... perhaps neither “where” completely satisfies because the true longed-for place is more heavenly than those contemplated in the poem. But this realization has not come quickly for Tim.

Tim, not satisfied with blind belief, began his spiritual wanderings early in life, as he wrote in “The Reversion”, the third part of his poetic series “Antiphonal Responses”:

Born to go astray,
I fled the Catholic fold
when I was twelve years old,
a lamb who ran away,
prey to the wolves, the cold.

In the meantime, this “stray lamb” has been a sometimes poet, farmer, lover, businessman, drinker, and sailor. But, like the waves of the sea, his fortunes in each of these endeavors have been up and down, as many of his poems have attested to. And yet, some forty years later, he is finding his way back to the Church of his Irish forbears, and the poem finishes on an auspicious note:

My shepherd piped me home
Filing into a pew,
I learned what Caesar knew:
all roads lead to Rome
where wolves are mothers too.

Though such a religious turn requires the guidance of the shepherd’s song, it could not happen without enough awareness to differentiate that pure music from the world’s din. Essentially, this turn requires self-knowledge, knowledge of one’s heart. As al-Ghazali wrote:

Knowledge of self is the key to the knowledge of God, according to the saying: “He who knows himself knows God” ...[R]eal self-knowledge consists in the following things: What are thou in thyself, and from

whence hast thou come? Whither art thou going, and for what purpose hast thou come to tarry here awhile, and in what does thy real happiness and misery consist? Some of thy attributes are those of animals, some of devils, and some of angels, and thou hast to find out which of these attributes are accidental and which essential. Till thou knowest this, thou canst not find out where thy real happiness lies.

— from *The Alchemy of Happiness*, (trans. Claud Field)

Timothy Murphy has begun this difficult, and truly heart-wrenching, struggle of discerning what is essential within him, and what must finally be cast off. To this end, he has become a confessional poet. In his terse and pointed poem “Case Notes” a psychiatrist observes of his patient (presumably the author):

Allured by verse and drink
when he was just sixteen,
turned to drugs at Yale,
patient began to think
people would see a ‘queen’—
scrawny, friendless, frail—
a “queer” condemned to fail.

The doctor here has singled out verse, drugs, and sexuality as possible sources of the patient’s woe. So which, if any, of these are essential to Tim? Poetry, especially in the hands of a confessional poet, can be used a vehicle for despair. But Tim does not display his sins to no end. In “How Shall I Drink” Tim writes:

When you are sick and drunk,
the ones to whom you lie
are those who love you most

By acknowledging his sins, he can move past them. The craft of poetry, properly pursued, is thus no sin at all, but rather part of the cure. Intoxicants, on the other hand, such as alcohol are considered sinful by Muslims, because they destroy the mind, which is humanity’s essential attribute. An alcoholic, Tim is now courageously battling the demon of addiction. In keeping with this sober purpose of these verses, Tim often employs a lean trimeter, almost completely bare of rhythmic and linguistic ornament, much less playful than the characteristic Murphy style of his previous books. There is hardly a metaphor in sight in these lines, and the only metric variations are the occasional initial headless iambs or trochee substitution. This leaves sexuality; but whatever traditional religious teachings might say, I cannot condemn Tim’s profound and committed love for another man, fellow poet and seafarer Alan Sullivan.

God sends human love into the world as a sign of His all-encompassing love, as Tim has come to realize, having written of himself as an adolescent in scout camp in “Cross-lashed”:

Summits would loom above
the stony trails I trod.
Sex led me to love;
love bound me to God.

Tim Murphy’s religious poetry is by no means limited to the confessional mode. It is commonly said that the heart is the spiritual eye, the locus of one’s sixth sense. But truly the heart contains the sixth through tenth senses, as each sense has an outward and inward dimension. The journey back to God requires the occasional “shutting off” of the five outward senses, to allow cultivation of the next five, especially the “inner” ear in the case of a mystic poet. God is thought to have created the world through his Word, *Be!* This pure, creative music of God’s Word is that shepherd’s song we all seek. In “Prayer for Sobriety,” part II of “Antiphonal Responses,” I detect echoes of this beautiful music that Tim is starting to hear himself:

Here is the sacramental cup we drink,
here the unleavened loaf on which we dine,
deliverance from the sins to which I sink.
Here is the book, the work of my Divine
Redeemer at whose Word the worlds revolve.
Let me return His passion with resolve.

And Tim is perfecting his inner vision too. Sufis differentiate between spiritual states and stations. The former are brief bursts of clarity freely given by God, while the latter are permanent advancements of the soul, achieved after devoted effort on the part of the spiritual aspirant. Toward the beginning of spiritual quests, mystics will often experience the former, as God wishes to foreshadow the beauty to come. In “Cross and Veil,” Tim describes a childhood experience he now recognizes to be a vision of the divine:

I grew up with *Aurora Borealis*,
though in Walhalla they were “Northern Lights”
that flickered through the brief summer nights.

Here Tim has returned to the light-footed, dancing mode of many of his lyric gems, yet with a spiritual gravity lately learned. But whatever he has seen, he recognizes there is much experience left to be gained:

Some sights my love and I have never seen—
 the Southern Cross beyond the shimmer-screen
 mariners named *Aurora Australis*.
 I doubt *Le Dieu Soleil* will ever fail us
 but dread the day the Son of God shall call us.

Perhaps you realize I have skirted a pretty large issue. How can a Muslim praise one returning to the Catholic faith? In the Qur'an, the holy book of the Muslims, it is written:

And We sent, following in their footsteps, Jesus the son of Mary,
 confirming the Torah before him; and We gave to him the Gospel,
 wherein is guidance and light, and confirming the Torah before it, as a
 guidance and an admonition unto the godfearing. So let the People of
 the Gospel judge according to what God has sent down therein.

— *Qur'an* 5:46 (trans. A.J. Arberry)

So to me, Muslims and Christians and Jews are truly brothers before God. Though separated by some doctrinal disputes, we all follow books graven with the pen of prophesy. The paths to God are many: *To you be your way, and to me mine*, as it is also written in the Qur'an, (109:6, trans. Yusuf Ali). Keep to your path, Tim. *Insha'allah*, you will reach your journey's end.

Tim's recent poem "Cross and Veil," quoted in this essay, is one of the [Three New Murphy Poems](#) in this issue.

Review of *Very Far North*

Richard Wakefield on *Tim's second collection*

The first fifth of Timothy Murphy's *Very Far North*, subtitled "No Place for Trees," surveys rural North Dakota, a land that has been losing population for a century. The people who hang on are like the trees in the poem from which the section takes its title: "A few scrub oaks survive / droughts, blizzards, and disease." Later, in "The Last Sodbusters," they are described directly, etched and scored by the land that they in turn have ploughed: "Care furrows the brow / and bows the straightest frame."

Unlike Murphy's previous collection *Set the Ploughshare Deep*, this book has no illustrations or prose passages to contextualize the poems, nor does it need any. For all their meticulous craft, the poems here evoke the senses, the sights and sounds, smells and textures of a place that grudgingly, sporadically repays all that human ingenuity and perseverance can do and that just as often frustrates it. Here, for example, from "Unposted," we see a life's work dwarfed by the sweep of time and geography:

Abandoned where the grass grew lank and damp,
the antiquated grain drill seemed a toy
some Lilliputian farmer might employ
to plant a field small as a postage stamp.

Elsewhere we hear the voices of people accustomed to expressing themselves succinctly, perhaps to save breath against the incessant wind. A "Master Farmer," maimed by his machinery, says, "The picker took my fingers / to fertilize this land." On a Sunday morning "while country wives are praying," a "Godfearer" runs his plow across "the powdery plain" and offers his own supplication to heaven: "Now where's the goddamn rain?" Not content with sweat, the land demands the farmer's very flesh. No amount of effort can make up for the rain that doesn't come on time and the wind that does, making the biblical "dust to dust" quite literal.

Very Far North takes its title from a line in Frost's "There Are Roughly Zones," in which an orchard keeper acknowledges the folly of planting fruit trees at a high latitude but also admires, it seems, the very human refusal to let nature have its way unchallenged. Farming is both the most natural and the most artificial of our occupations: even as we depend upon the forces of nature we try to channel them into unnatural forms. In a harsh land like North Dakota, the effort fails as often as it succeeds.

In a sense that doesn't involve nearly as much dirt and sweat, a formal poet does the same thing. Murphy shapes the natural cadences of speech into tight, formal

Review of Very Far North

verse, often trimeter lines with (usually) perfect rhymes that in the hands of a lesser poet would sound stilted. But like the successful farmer who makes the land yield far more than it would untended, Murphy turns colloquial talk into music. These are poems not only meant to be sung but almost impossible not to sing. Their music is as engrained as the lines in that sodbuster's face.

The third part, "Elsewhere," broadens the scope. It portrays not merely a change in venue but a change of heart — or perhaps something unchanging in our deepest nature: the need always to be pressing onward, outward. "A fisherman longs for the land-locked farm / its tenant would trade for the sea," Murphy sings in the second of the two ballad stanzas of the title poem.



N. Dakota farm country

This upland bird hunter and abandoned farm stalker turns out to be an avid sailor. In many poems he trades the horizon-wide plains for an even wider sea where he is no less at the mercy of wind. Like farming, hunting, and hiking, though, sailing is another discipline that involves finding the art in nature and the nature in art — and not unlike poetry. Murphy's verse can be the boustrophedon of a plowed field, and it can, equally, be the zigzag tack of a sailboat. Here, in its entirety, is "The Watch," a poem about sailing, love, and poetry:

When I leave this little ship
(which I can ill-afford)
springlined in a slip
I leave my love aboard.

If the weather is in doubt
he scans the sky for signs.
When the spring tide runs out
love will adjust my lines.

Those concluding lines, in particular, work in various distinct but complementary ways. The "spring tide" that "runs out" is quite literal but also suggests the onset of age that we all hope our love will outlast; the "lines," of course, are real ropes holding a real boat, but they are also lines of poetry and, perhaps, the bonds of affection, lines that contract and attenuate but, with luck, always hold.

Review of Very Far North

Finally, in “Timing” Murphy writes about the aspiration that motivates a life well lived and a poem well written:

Walking a narrow path
where pilgrims go astray,
I regulate my breath
because I cannot pray.

By “pray” he must mean the rote, conventional prayers of his boyhood. These poems are all prayers, each original and each vital, sung in the regulated breath of a voice both disciplined and wayward.

This review was originally published in *Iambs & Trochees*.

Takes on Tim

Impressions and appreciations, by various authors

Rhina Espaillet: Celebrating Tim Murphy

I met Tim Murphy in the pages of *The Formalist*, where I suspect many enduring friendships had their beginnings. Volume 7, Issue 2, 1996, was a lucky issue for me, because it marked my first appearance in that stellar publication. So when it finally dropped through the mailslot I didn't so much read it as inhale it in a rush of curiosity and excitement. And there it was, on page 42, what I was most curious about: a sonnet titled "The Track of the Storm."

The poem moved easily, with perfect grace, from contemplation of a stormy night's damaged trees to images invoking the decapitations of the French Revolution, then to the resentful confusion of a bird, bereaved and dispossessed, watching the poet chainsaw the tree that had supported her nest, and finally — by a stunning sleight more of eye than of tongue — to the liberation of "supple saplings" now claiming their share of the sun for the first time. The poem was such a delightful series of surprises that I forgot to envy the author his Nemerov Award, and instead patted myself on the back for having made it as a finalist in such a field. The list of "Contributors" identified the author, Tim Murphy, as "a farmer in North Dakota."

The following spring I attended the West Chester Poetry Contest for the first time, and was introduced to the farmer: a tall, stringy, red-headed chain-smoker whom I subsequently learned was also gay, an avid hunter, and hopelessly right-wing. Despite differences too glaring to require comment, we became friends — from the first day, I believe — and have been friends ever since.

These ten years of profound affection across deep political, religious, generational and temperamental divides have made me feel lucky. We exchange poems, views and confidences that have given me insight into a remarkable mind not always at peace with itself, but invariably generous and loving, and blessed with a degree of talent that is almost scary. Tim's original poems, like the headlong, brilliant translation of *Beowulf* he produced with Alan Sullivan and the biographical and critical prose of his prosimetrum, are extraordinary, as is his ability to mesmerize an audience with the spoken word.

Among the joys of these ten years of friendship are the visits that Tim and Alan have made to Newburyport, which have earned both poets loyal audiences and readers in New England. I cherish memories of Tim on the sands of Plum Island, regaling the waves of the Atlantic with the glorious verbal thunder of Anglo Saxon poetry; of both poets sharing their work with the gathered Powow River Poets in our

garden; of Tim reciting, arguing, joking and singing at our fortunate dining room table; of Tim exhaling clouds of sacrificial smoke in our screened porch, like a living oblation to the ancient gods, while I pile up before him the work of Alicia Stallings, Yehuda Amichai, Stanley Kunitz, Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz and other literary loves of mine. Tim has taught and encouraged me, as he's done for countless others — both in person and online at *Eratosphere*, and through the literary ventures he helps to sponsor. He honors me by believing that I may have something to teach him about poetry, but I doubt it.

May there be many, many more such exchanges in our future, many more visits, many happy, healthy, productive years ahead for a friend dear both to Alfred and to me, whose mind I admire, and — better still — whose heart I trust.

R.S. Gwynn

Tim and I have hunted together on several occasions, and I can verify that the tales he tells in his poems aren't tall ones. He knows where the birds are and, despite not being able to tell purple from orange (he's color blind), is one hell of a wing shot. He can do more damage with a double-barrel twenty-gauge than I can with an automatic twelve. Once he came down to Texas, and we went out to my dove lease. Birds were few and far between that afternoon, but we managed to hit a few, one of which landed in the middle of a wide and fairly deep-looking drainage ditch. Since my two "company dog" Labs wouldn't retrieve, Tim was crestfallen that we'd have to leave a bird behind. "Wait a minute," I said. I got my golf umbrella out of the back of the truck, tied a piece of cord to its handle, and tossed it, open, past the bird and pulled it back close to the bank where Tim could scoop it up. He rightly can make fun of my deficient shooting skills, but he generously allowed that I could retrieve for him anytime! We had dove and deer sausage gumbo for supper that night, but I'm sure he'll agree with me that the dish that hunters most enjoy is the feast that memory spreads.

A.E. Stallings

I met Timothy Murphy on-line at *Eratosphere* long before I met him in person. I had read and admired many of his poems in journals, but on our striking up a correspondence, he sent me a few of his books, even though at the time I had no book of my own to trade. Although chary with syllables in his verse, Tim is generous in his enthusiasms and friendships, and this generosity is evident in how he weaves other people into the texture of his writing — affectionately as characters, dedications and anecdotes in his poems and prose. He wrote a charming poem for

my father (published here), whom he never met, but with whom he shares a passion for dove hunting. (I am sorry my father did not get to know his hunting poems, for he was an outdoorsman with a taste for literature.)

Several years ago there was a little challenge on Eratosphere to write a haiku in the voice of another writer. Somehow, with its tight syllable count, this seemed a way to channel Tim's distinctive voice and themes. Haiku is not a form I think Tim himself is much drawn to, but perhaps it is also a nod that I use rhyme in it (though three modulated slant Murphy-ish rhymes), à la Richard Wilbur, one of his (and my) favorite poets. So, here goes:

Haiku in the Voice of Timothy Murphy

Like debts, locusts swarm.
The farmer watches the storm
Foreclose on the farm.

Rose Kelleher

I'm in touch with my inner warrior now, and it's Tim's fault. It all started when I listened to a recording of him reciting a passage from Beowulf in Anglo Saxon. I loved the way it sounded. Soon afterwards I bought a copy of the Murphy/Sullivan Beowulf. I had perused Beowulf in high school (I was a skilled peruser in those days) and hated it, but now, in my forties, I was suddenly intrigued. I ended up reading the whole thing aloud in one sitting. By the time I was finished I was hoarse, my husband thought I was crazy, and there was hair all over my chest. I had to read three Jane Austen novels just to get rid of it. I'm still not completely cured, though; I keep throwing poetry magazines across the room and snarling, "You can't bang a drum to this!"

Henry Quince: Salute to Tim Murphy

I've been reading and posting at the Eratosphere poetry workshops and forums, with varying frequency, for nearly five years, and if anyone has been my cheerleader there, it's been Tim Murphy. Of course, he shows the same generosity to others, too, but speaking for myself — his support has meant more to me than he may know.

I think of myself as more versifier than poet — in fact, I cringe at applying the latter term to myself — and of course Tim has been way too generous in praising my sometimes unsubtle or scattershot efforts. My excuse for a lack of any disciplined

development or thematic coherence is that I've changed interests and countries numerous times in my life. Unlike Tim, I have no strong sense of rootedness in one geographical or cultural milieu. I envy him that identification with place and local life which pervades much of his poetry.

Prior to Tim's example and Tim's motivating comments, I was a much lazier writer than I now am. And I was more indolent still when it came to showing work to anyone or submitting for publication. (If only it wasn't called "submitting" — like rolling over and exposing the soft underbelly to the predator's fangs!) I was simply unmotivated. Maybe I thought I wasn't good enough or that my work was too out of keeping with the modern majority. Whatever, if I'm trying harder these days — writing more, holding back from my website what I consider "better" work with potential for publication elsewhere, steeling myself to "submit" at least now and again — if all that is happening, credit must mostly go to the friendly and collegial encouragement I have received from Tim Murphy. We're poles apart in lifestyle and political stance, but where we disagree we do so civilly. And when it comes to poems, his is the feedback (and of course the imprimatur if possible) that I most covet and value. Like many others no doubt, I'm greatly in his debt.

Some months ago on a thread at Eratosphere where Tim was "The Distinguished Guest" he made a comment: "I don't know how to pick out the poem of mine that best resonates with me." Being plagued myself with a poor or erratic ability to assess my own work, I posted in response eight lines of trimeter to the poet-farmer, which I hoped were apropos and maybe a little Murphysque as well. Since they seemed to please Tim there, it pleases me to include them here.

Horizon

(For Tim Murphy)

It's a hard life for the farmer
ploughing the land in spring,
and a hard life for the poet
trying and trying to sing.

Who can judge if his finest
was wrought on this or that day?
All the heart's in the new thing,
and the old is last year's hay.

More Takes on Tim

More impressions and appreciations

Janet Kenny: My Tribute to Tim Murphy

New Zealand, the land of my birth, bred tough people who lived off the land and didn't complain. A masculine culture where, despite their early access to the vote, women had to fight to be heard.

Tim Murphy is the child and poet of an equally unforgiving country, North Dakota. He wrote in *Set the Drawbar Deep*:

It's hard to imagine a horizon as flat as a ruled line unless you've sailed far out to sea or driven Interstate 29 along the Red River of the North. Planed by an Ice Age lake, our Valley extends hundreds of miles along the border of Minnesota and the Dakotas, widening from thirty to ninety miles as it drops imperceptibly northward toward Winnipeg.



Tim steeped himself in the classics and Anglo-Saxon poetry but knew that the real link with the past is a living response to the earth.

He returned to his roots to deal, painfully and bravely with a loved but restricting environment.

To be honestly gay in a world made up of family relationships must have taken courage of heroic proportions. I would honour Tim for that alone but it is his uncompromising attitude to poetry that really seals my undying respect.

His small poems are like weathered stones. The words are spare and perfect and leave huge images in the mind of the reader.

A Farmer's Prayer

Spirit of the wheat
brush every beard
turning green flaxen
with a wave of your wand.
The wind is your oven,

the hills your loaves.
 Dry husks rustle,
 flag leaves furl,
 heads curl earthward
 as kernels harden.
 Your garden is golden,
 your larder laden.
 Feed a hungry world.

(Set the Drawbar Deep)

This poem is at once strong and limpid. A lesser poet would have placed “garden” at the end of a line but Tim knew to leave a subtler echo.

Tim is basically a lover. A lover of the world. He is thin-skinned and only too easily hurt. The positive side of this is that he is open to beauty and humour and large feelings. His generosity towards others illuminates his work.

He has suffered many financial and emotional disasters any one of which would have destroyed a lesser poet.

He dedicated this poem to Charlee Wilbur.

Eidyllion

I am selling my farms
 to build a butterfly barn
 where multicolored swarms
 will storm the glassy dome
 to greet the midnight sun,
 and that will be my home.

(Set the Drawbar Deep)

Tim is struggling to make peace with the Catholic Church. For a gay man this means constant agony and frustration. I wish him success. The church has need of honest and sensitive men who need spiritual acceptance.

I found these two poems in *Very Far North*:

Il Poverello

Leaving Giotto's frescoed nave,
I climbed from the foothill town
to see the saint's unpainted cave
where Satan was cast down.

The cleft on Mount Subasio
was perilous and wooded,
and the young monk from Gubbio
beautiful but hooded.

He smiled like an angel kissed,
kissed by Giotto's tincture.
Beads were twisted round his wrist;
his waist bound in a cincture.

He whispered "*Vade retro*"
when the Devil came to parley
and prayed, prayed from *l'Eremo*
for the songbirds and the barley.

Apologia Pro Eccelsia Sua

Holy Father, you slip a folded prayer
between two stone blocks at the Wailing Wall.
What do you pray for? An end to the despair
that holds the land of Palestine in thrall?

Your sermon is an overdue endeavor
to make your peace with women, Muslims, Jews.
But not with homosexuals. No, never.
Ours is the priestly sin you won't excuse.

Crippled by your incurable disease,
you shuffle slowly through the Holy Land
as throngs of sinners praying on their knees
bow to the scepter in your palsied hand.

You preach that God is three and God is one?
If He exists, you are his dying son.

More Takes on Tim

And this witty cinquain:

Post Mortem

A certain erratic
erotic erratum
was found at the bottom
of Timothy's attic,
or was it his closet?

(Very Far North)

And lastly, I wish to thank Tim for his patience and openness when communicating with lesser poets.

Tim and I will never agree about politics but we will always agree about the importance of poetry and truth to materials which is the fundamental virtue of all serious art.

Alan Sullivan

I once knew a farmer named Murphy
His acres were birdy and turfy.
The hair on his head
was shockingly red,
and his clothing poetically scurfy.



The Skipper

Wendy Videlock

I've learned a good deal from Timothy Tim, but primarily he's been meaningful to my understanding of instinctual music. I lifted the following quote from an older poem of his called *The Wanderer*, a poem which appeals to me for a number of reasons, including the obvious: my own name, of course, means "wanderer".

Of Promiscuity

*There is no end
to the wanderer's sorrow.
— Tim Murphy*

I have lain with Jesus.
I have touched the Buddha.
I have bathed with Isis
in the great river.

I have slept with the gods.
With the goddess.
With men.
Alas.

I have never belonged
to any of them.



Contributors to *The Shit Creek Review* and II

Authors

Lee Harlin Bahan earned from Indiana University of Bloomington a Master of Fine Arts in creative writing and authored the chapbook *Migration Solo*. Her work most recently appeared in *North American Review*. An avid canoeist—really!—she hopes this journal someday has t-shirts printed and puts them up for sale.

Returning, inexplicably, to *The Shit Creek Review* for what is often delicately referred to as number two, **Norman Ball** has had nearly a hundred poems, articles and essays published over the last few years in venues bound by a singularly overriding vision: lax quality control. As further evidence that the apparent nadir in a writer's life is often but a low-lying plateau from which new depths are soon plunged, Norm has a number of poems coming out shortly in the *American Drivel Review*. How's that for some shit?

Australian **Sam Byfield** is addicted to China, where he teaches English in a university, travels, studies Mandarin and writes. He has been published or has work forthcoming in print and online magazines *Meridian*, *Diner*, *The Pedestal Magazine*, *Stirring*, *Eclectica*, *The Avatar Review*, *foam-e* and others. He is an editorial assistant for *Lily Lit Review* and a 2006 Sundress Best of the Net finalist.

Michael Cantor, New York-born, and a former business executive, has lived and worked in Japan, Europe and Latin America; and now resides on Plum Island, north of Boston on the Massachusetts coast. His poetry has appeared in *Measure*, *The Formalist*, *Dark Horse*, *Iambs & Trochees*, *Texas Poetry Journal*, *The Atlanta Review*, and many other journals and anthologies.

K.R. Copeland is a hopelessly romantic sociopath who openly admits to being a poet, but only in the privacy of her fully-padded living quarters. She's been published a bunch, has a chapbook available through Dancing Girl Press, and acts as the Art Director at *Unlikely 2.0*.

Brian Dion's work has appeared in *Candelabrum* and the *Raintown Review* and he was a runner-up for the 2005 Grolier Poetry prize. He is active in his local Community Theatre and resides in Massachusetts with his wife and daughter.

Richard Epstein's poems have been published in obscure literary journals, little magazines, and academic quarterlies and have been doing so for a long time now. If you haven't noticed, that's your fault, not his. Now, it seems, they'll appear in excremental zines, too, which, considering his academic background in 18th-

century British literature, seems entirely appropriate. He lives in Denver. His own, somewhat more sanitized blog, can be read at RHEpoems@blogspot.com.

Rhina P. Espaillet has published three chapbooks and six full-length books, most recently *Agua de dos rios* (“*Water from Two Rivers*”), a bilingual collection of poems and essays. Her next, due out in April, is a collection of her short stories, also bilingual, titled *El olor de la memoria* (“*The Scent of Memory*”).

Anna Evans is a British citizen but permanent resident of NJ, where she is raising two daughters. She has had over 100 poems published in journals including *The Formalist*, *The Evansville Review*, *Measure* and e-zines such as *Verse Libre Quarterly*. She has been nominated three times for a Pushcart Prize and was a finalist in the 2005 Howard Nemerov sonnet award. She is editor of the formal poetry e-zine *The Barefoot Muse* and is currently enrolled in the Bennington College MFA Program. Her first chapbook *Swimming* was published in March 2006 by Maverick Duck Press.

Larry Fontenot was a Featured Poet at the 1996 and the 2000 Houston Poetry Fests. A chapbook, *Choices & Consequences*, was the winner of the Maverick Press 1996 *Southwest Poets' Series Chapbook* competition. Larry also won the 2000 Alsop Review Poetry Competition for his poem “Mowing Deconstructed”. His poem “Wile E. Coyote’s Lament” was published in *The Year’s Best Fantasy and Horror*, 12th Annual Collection in 1999.

Angela France lives in Gloucestershire and is enjoying middle age. She runs a local live poetry event - ‘Buzzwords’ - and writes for self-indulgence, as an antidote to demanding work with challenging young people. She has had poems published in, or forthcoming in: *Acumen*, *Iota*, *The Frogmore Papers*, *Rain Dog*, *The Panhandler*, *The Shit Creek Review*, *Voice and Verse*, and in anthologies *The White Car* and *Mind Mutations*.

Jude Goodwin’s poems can be read in print journals including *Cider Press Review*, *Burnside Review*, and *Comstock Review*, as well as various online journals. They have won and placed well in the IBPC: New Poetry Voices competition, were short-listed in the CBC Radio Literary Awards, and recently received Honorable Mention in the Jessie Bryce Niles Chapbook Competition. Jude is currently considering publishers for her first book of poetry. She lives in BC, Canada where she freelances as publisher/editor/author and illustrator for various small journals and papers.

Contributors

R.S. Gwynn is University Professor of English and Poet-in-Residence at Lamar University. *No Word of Farewell*, his selected poems, came out from Story Line in 2001.

Daniel Haar works as an economist in Washington, DC, but in his little free time he would rather read works of medieval theology than modern economics. This leaves even less time for poetry, but he enjoys its pleasures too.

Juleigh Howard-Hobson: Besides winning the Australian RSL ANZAC Day Award for her poetry, Juleigh Howard-Hobson's poetry has most recently been, or will be, included in *The Barefoot Muse*, *The Raintown Review*, *Contemporary Rhyme*, *Strong Verse*, *Workers Write!*, *The Quarterly Journal of Food and Car Poetry*, *The Arabesques Print Review*, *Mezzo Cammin*, *Shatter Colors Literary Review*, *Poem, Revised* (Robert Fiske, ed) and *The Hypertexts*. She was a finalist for the 2006 Morton Marr Poetry Award. English-born, she has lived in the UK, Australia and both sides of the US. She now resides in the Pacific Northwest with her artist-blacksmith husband, their three home-schooled children and a library of classically wrought literature... too many volumes of which are sadly out of print.

Rose Kelleher sometimes writes.

Janet Kenny has metamorphosed from painter to classical singer to anti-nuclear activist, researcher, writer, illustrator and poet. Started in New Zealand and zigzagged across the globe to finally settle in Australia. She has published fairly widely as a poet. Some of her poetry can be found at her [website](#).

Danielle Lapidoth lives with her husband and children in Zurich, Switzerland, where she runs an editing business, teaches English and writes poetry, flash fiction and essays while her family sleeps. She has work published or forthcoming in *Lily: A Monthly Literary Review*, *Barnwood*, *Midstream*, *Lightning Bell*, [Literary Mama](#) and [Mamaphonic](#).

Amanda Laughtland writes poems, works in a public library, teaches at a community college, and publishes a very small zine called *Teeny Tiny*. Amanda's zine and other endeavors are described at <http://www.teenytiny.org>. Her chapbook, *I Meant to Say*, is available from [overhere Press](#).

Dave McClure had written sporadically all his life, but became hooked about ten years ago when he started contributing to a number of on-line forums and workshops. He writes in English and modern Scots, mostly in form, and with no

particular life theme, preferring to ring the changes in subject matter and style. If he ever ‘finds his voice’ it’ll be time to stop. He has heard it said that in order to publish, one must submit for publication. This sounds too much like hard work.

Mary Meriam’s first book of poems, *The Countess of Flatbroke* ([Modern Metrics](#), 2006), features an afterword by Lillian Faderman and a cover design by R. Nemo Hill.

Tim Murphy’s latest books are *Beowulf*, A Longman Cultural Edition, co-translated with Alan Sullivan, 2004, and *Very Far North*, [Waywiser Press](#) (London), 2002.

Henry Quince has been an academic, jazz pianist, editor, copywriter, and voiceover man. A recidivist wanderer, he lives in Australia. He’s had the odd poem or two published here and there. Others have been widely refused. (Since the poems are all top-notch, he says, it must be the red wine splashes on the paper.) Read some of Henry’s work at his [website](#).

Bee Smith lives and gardens on an acre of West Cavan in the Irish Republic. Born in Queens, NY she lived in England for 20 years before moving country a second time. She is the co-author with Helen Shay of a poetry collection, *Binary Star*. Poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Magma*, *The sHOP*, *Writing Women*, and many small press publications. She writes a regular astrology column for [Sagewoman](#) and has a website ???www.beesmith.com.

A. E. Stallings was born in 1968 and grew up in Decatur, Georgia. She has received numerous awards for her poetry, including the Richard Wilbur Award, the 2004 Frederick Bock Prize, a Pushcart Prize, and the Howard Nemerov Sonnet Award. Stallings studied classics in Athens, Georgia, and now lives in Athens, Greece. She is married to the journalist John Psaropoulos, and they have a son, Jason.

Alan Sullivan translated the with Timothy Murphy for A.B. Longman. His poems have appeared in many venues, including *The Hudson Review*, *Poetry*, *The Formalist*, and *Chronicles*. He blogs at [seablogger.com](#).

Wendy Videlock sometimes writes poems.

Richard Wakefield lives near Seattle, Washington, with his wife and their two daughters. He teaches American literature at Tacoma Community College and the University of Washington Tacoma, and is the poetry critic for the *Seattle Times*.

Contributors

His poetry has appeared in *Seattle Review*, *Atlanta Review*, *Light*, *Hellas*, *The Formalist*, *Tampa Review*, and others. His articles, essays, and reviews have appeared in *American Literature*, *Sewanee Review*, *Light*, *Midwest Quarterly*, and others. His collection of poetry, *East of Early Winters*, received the 2006 Richard Wilbur Award and is available from the [University of Evansville Press](#)

Kirby Wright was born and raised in Honolulu, Hawaii. He is a graduate of Punahou School in Honolulu and the University of California at San Diego. He received his MFA in Creative Writing from San Francisco State University. Kirby has been nominated for two Pushcart Prizes and is a past recipient of the Ann Fields Poetry Prize, the Academy of American Poets Award, the Browning Society Award for Dramatic Monologue, the San Diego Book Award, and Arts Council Silicon Valley Fellowships in Poetry and The Novel. His forthcoming novel is set on east end Molokai, a stone's throw from a minefield of sting rays.

Artists

Valori Herzlich was born in Latvia, and educated in New York City. She has worked as an art director, designer and illustrator; and now spends her time quilting, drawing, practicing Yoga, and dealing with massive quantities of champagne corks and freshly opened eggs.

Hanka Jaskowska is a 21 year old living in Cheltenham, Gloucestershire. She is currently studying Art and Design, taking the first steps in fulfilling an ambition of a career in prop-making and sculptural costume for theatre/screen. One of her primary hobbies is photography, within which she can be often be found being looked at strangely for finding interest in the less interesting things.

C. D. Russell has an itchy shutter finger and is patiently persuading her camera to lie. She prefers to photograph cows.

Submissions

for the July, 2007 issue of The Shit Creek Review+II

The Shit Creek Review

Submissions for the July Issue of *The Shit Creek Review+II* may be sent now.

There is no set theme for poems submitted to the July issue of *The Shit Creek Review* – send in your best 1–5 poems on whatever you like. But read the **General Submission Guidelines** first (below).

Poetry- or Art-related prose is also welcome: reviews, close reads, essays, musings, reminiscences or hot gossip. If you're not sure about whether it will fit, send it in anyway and we'll let you know.

Artists can send image submissions to the Art Editor Don Zirilli (details below).

II

The theme for poems for the July issue of **II** is “Lives”.

What the blue blazes does that mean? You tell us. Send us poems that can somehow relate to the notion of **biography**: lives of people or other entities, life-cycles, secret histories, notes from under the floorboards, case notes, memoirs, what have you – seen from any normal or altered state of consciousness you can devise.

Submissions for *The Shit Creek Review+II* July Edition must be received by Monday, May 21st, 2007.

Text Submissions:

Nigel Holt
Paul Stevens
shitcreekreview@yahoo.com

Visual Arts Submissions:

Don Zirilli
shitcreekart@blackyak.com

General Submission Guidelines

1. *The Shit Creek Review+II* will publish quarterly in January, April, July, and October, and seeks to present high-quality original work in the fields of poetry, art, and prose criticism, as well as in other creative or analytic areas.
2. Submission deadline dates and themes (if any) for the next issue will be specified in each current issue, but you may submit work at any time. If your submission is too late for the deadline date for one issue it will be placed in the batch for the next.

Submissions

3. In poetry, we are biased towards formalism, but by no means dismissive of vers libre. We are looking for original work which deals with a wide variety of issues and imagery, including that which might test or challenge boundaries, or disturb sensibilities. But it must be well executed. Please do not send us work which has not been extensively drafted and polished. We definitely do not seek poems about toilet issues. People who submit such poems have misunderstood the overarching ethos of Shit Creek.
4. Previous publication is not a problem as long as the previous publisher does not hold copyright. You must inform us of any previous publication when you submit. Posting to blogs or online workshops is not in our opinion publishing, so any such poems or other pieces are clearly eligible. But the person who submits work must be the original author. We reserve the right to archive your work as part of this site, and with your specific consent to publish it in a print anthology later; but all other rights remain with the author.
5. We accept simultaneous submissions, but please inform us immediately if the submission is accepted elsewhere.
6. Poets should submit 1 - 5 poems. Contributions should be sent in the body of an email, or as .doc file attachments if necessary to preserve formatting: text contributions, whether poetry or prose, should be single-spaced. Please include the word "Submission" in the subject line of your email.
7. Visual arts contributions should be as .jpeg files and may be sent as attachments. Image submissions should be original work or cite relevant permissions from copyright owners.
8. All contributors should include brief third person biographical details of up to five lines.
9. We will attempt to acknowledge receipt of all submissions within two weeks of arrival.
10. Payment for publication in *The Shit Creek Review* is not possible in this life, but contributors will be rewarded in the next. On the other hand the editors are very receptive to offers (redeemable in this life) of cash bribes, vouchers, favours, and so forth.



Patricia Wallace Jones

The steps to Shit Creek