

Aquila Review

**Volume 3
Fall 2009**

Texas A&M University-Texarkana

2009 Aquila Review

Editors

Brian C. Billings (Editor)
Gretchen Cobb (Student Editor)

Front Cover Art

Patricia Moore (*Country Road*)

Back Cover Art

Agnes Tirrito (*Sunday Evening*)

Aquila Review is a nonprofit arts journal published twice each year by Texas A&M University-Texarkana. Funding for this publication is provided by Texas A&M University-Texarkana's English Club and subscriptions to the journal.

Communicate with the staff of *Aquila Review* using the following contact information:

Aquila Review
Texas A&M University-Texarkana
Department of English
P. O. Box 5518
2600 N. Robison Rd.
Texarkana, TX 75505-5518
(903) 223-3022
www.tamut.edu/aquila

© 2009

Submissions

Aquila Review publishes original art, creative nonfiction, drama, fiction, nonfiction, and poetry. Unsolicited interviews and reviews will not be considered. Manuscripts are not read during the summer months.

Submissions may be sent as hard copies, or submissions may be sent in the body of an e-mail to brian.billings@tamut.edu. Simultaneous submissions are encouraged. When mailing hard copies, please include a self-addressed stamped envelope. Submissions without a self-addressed stamped envelope will not be returned. *Aquila Review* cannot accept responsibility for the loss or damage of any materials sent by mail. Sample copies of *Aquila Review* are available upon request for \$8.00 apiece.

Contents

Art

<i>In the Meadow</i>	MELANIE GLOSTER	77
<i>Links</i>	MELANIE GLOSTER	14
<i>Rose's Secrets</i>	MELANIE GLOSTER	22
<i>Setting Boundaries</i>	MELANIE GLOSTER	41
<i>The Club House</i>	RICHARD KARNATZ	07
<i>Morning Light</i>	RICHARD KARNATZ	105
<i>The Beautiful Señorita</i>	MELBA PEÑA	18
<i>Daffodils</i>	KAYTLON SMITH	73

Children's Poetry

Matt	BRITTANY GILLESPIE	75
Sassy	BRITTANY GILLESPIE	75
The Ice-Cream Man	KOURTNEY MAYNARD	53
Rainbow Fish	KOURTNEY MAYNARD	74
Exploration	KAYTLON SMITH	68
Joe	KAYTLON SMITH	75
Sam	KAYTLON SMITH	75
Streetlight	KAYTLON SMITH	45
A Boy and His Dog	CHRISTY TURNER	69

Drama

<i>Creatures That Move</i>	DAVID STARKEY	55
<i>along the Ground</i>	MICHAEL HARDY	
<i>Darfur Calls</i>	KATHLEEN KARDON	
	RACHELLE NEUMAN	78

Fiction

A Quantum Event	TIM COTTEN	28
Mr. Farley	DAN TIMOSKEVICH	42
The Final Out	DAN TIMOSKEVICH	20

Nonfiction

The Importance of Writing Great Characters	GARY W. LAVIGNE	23
Children of the Enemy: Norway's <i>Lebensborn</i> Survivors	TERESA WILDER	32

Poetry

Stir-Fried Past	TRICIA BAKER	46
Epithalamion	WENDY TAYLOR CARLISLE	13
Sunset: <i>Pont Neuf</i>	WENDY TAYLOR CARLISLE	65
Another Dance	GRETCHEN COBB	15
The <i>Dybbuk</i> and the Burrito	GRETCHEN COBB	30
Anxiety Chick	RANDALL COBB	10
Changing Addresses	TIM COTTEN	06
My Poetic Friend	TIM COTTEN	12
In the Afterlife	DORIS DAVIS	76
Psyche in Texas	DORIS DAVIS	48
Bristle	SUSAN H. MAURER	08
Seabright Seabridge	SUSAN H. MAURER	51
Star	SUSAN H. MAURER	50
New Life in Old Skin	LISA MYERS	47
Grand Mal	ANN ATCHISON NICHOLAS	54
<i>Ars Poetica</i> , 1970	ANNE BRITTING OLESON	67
Beautiful <i>Señorita</i> with Beguiling Hands	MELBA PEÑA	17
Pardon Me	CHRISTINA M. RAU	26

Mornings	AMBER SMITH	49
Daffodils	KAYTLON SMITH	70
Floating Crayons	KAYTLON SMITH	52
Hope	AGNES TIRRITO	66
Surprise Snow	AGNES TIRRITO	64
Hunters' Season	GLENN L. WILEY	19
Strangers	GLENN L. WILEY	09
 <u>About the Contributors</u>		 106

Changing Addresses

Tim Cotten

I moved today, almost,
 From sixty to sixty-one
And again, some years before,
 A precocious child into a teen.

I moved in my mother's kitchen
 Once, stealing her fresh-baked cherry pie
At three and eating it all alone
 Under the table without a spoon.

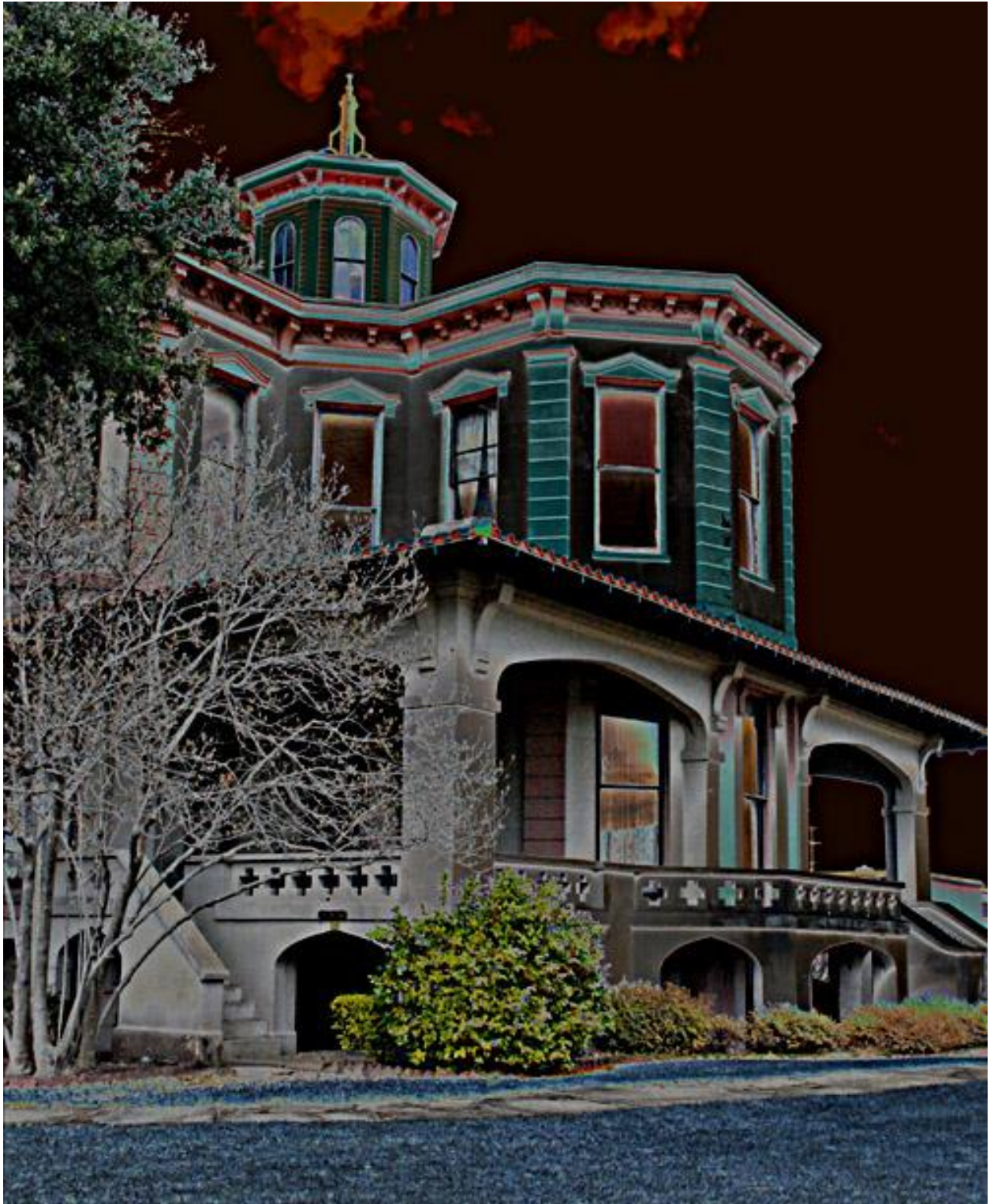
Wild and reckless long ago,
 I wore long hair and ideas
Streaming in protest, unique
 (Just like my peers) and moving, moving on.

Then marriage moved me, and love . . . more than
 Once. The children were gifts
Replete with bills and tantrums, but
 They've lives of their own now, moving on.

More often now I wonder,
 Concerning death and cherry pies and
Moving on once more, where
 Changing address one more time

Somehow feels like going home
 To a grateful welcome by some ageless soul,
My partner who was always there, within the moves
 To someplace new, where once I've always been.

The Club House
Richard Karnatz



Bristle

Susan H. Maurer

Her eyes had taken on a new look.
She fixed a brief look at my jumper,
said, “You’ve changed your hair. It used to be long.”
No doubt was left that it wasn’t improved.
The man missed this and laughed at her story of how
she—in her youth—had a *sheikh* inquire,
“How many goats for her hand?”
She stroked her platinum hair, not quite the right hue
for our age, but thick. I wished her her own man.
I’d never seen this side before,
this “What is he doing with *you*?”

Strangers

Glenn L. Wiley

We meet, eyes looking across
the bar and crowded floor—
radiantly sensual, healthy
primal beings.

Our dance is a primitive
communication, and poetry is in
the motion of every shimmy,
shake, or grind.

Eruptions of lust precede emotion
due to harmonic melodies
reverberating . . .
in our bodies.

As the result of mutual
attraction, we smile,
inviting danger, surprise,
and sometimes . . . the stranger
of fantasy in our lives.

Anxiety Chick
Randall Cobb

I know a woman, and she never slow down.
Patience is not her virtue.
Don't get in her way; she get that look on her face,
she ready to hurt you—
Anxiety Chick.

She chew her fashion nails down to the quick.
You worry she gonna make herself sick.
She on the prowl for love—
Anxiety Chick.

She cross her fingers, and she makin' a wish.
She on the Internet on *Plenty of Fish*.
She hope to find the man of her dreams.
They all misrepresent; they not what they seem,
Anxiety Chick.

She got a date with the long-haired guy.
She like the rougher look and can't say why.
Like everyone she want a happy life—
Anxiety Chick.

She say she really only need a good man.
She can give him love if anyone can.
Oh, yes, someday she want another ring on her hand—
Anxiety Chick.

Being an only child, she say, left its scar.
She don't say what the complications are.
She slam the door—speeds off in the car—
Anxiety Chick.

She take a pill or two to slow down the pace,
tosses her hair away from her face.
She likes it mellow while she running in place—
Anxiety Chick.

Don't want no man under five foot nine . . .
makes an exception if he Johnny-Depp fine.
She'd love that man so hard that he would go blind—
Anxiety Chick.

She like the metal music cranked up high.
She say it calm her down—it soothes the beast
of all the anger lying underneath—
Anxiety Chick.

She got a heart so warm—a smile so sweet.
Being her friend is always a treat.
She lives alone on a dead-end street—
Anxiety Chick, Anxiety Chick, Anxiety Chick.

My Poetic Friend

Tim Cotten

A high mind entangled in
Words. Meaning is an afterthought,
Purpose lost in sensory exploration.

A gentle soul. Character rolls
Onto arms and shoulders, trips
Off the tongue. Honeydew and

Exotic wine stream like rivers;
The mouth is lithe,
An orchard in the breath.

Deep soul, close to the surface,
Sends tremors of delights dreamed.
Welcome is primitive, provocative,

An ancient voice pounding casual beats
Into the mind. The body shrinks
Around taboos. Its wants and needs

Become the license of the day
Or night in burning candy
Beds. The spirit flames.

Music enchants the room.
Hidden desires thought lost awaken
Into basic drives and common themes

Of love given freely
In sensation's fleeting moment
By eye and tongue and ear and mouth.

Epithalamion

Wendy Taylor Carlisle

for Kase and Dennis

In the movie about the middle-aged man who takes up ballroom dancing,
the lead is played by a famous movie star and both of them—
the luminary and the would-be dancer—
exist side by side in a body which is thicker these days
than it was when the star played a gigolo on Hollywood Boulevard
and in real life was a struggling actor but who now is
a married Buddhist celebrity and therefore has less need to struggle,
sex, dancing, acting, aging all being one to him and never ending
but circling eternally on a dance floor like the one in this movie

with the fiftyish matinee idol who has the dancer as well as
a young rent-boy inside and also has a smart movie wife who tells him,
“When we marry, we sign on to be each other’s witnesses,”
a statement that’s right in line with a sociological study showing
partners who don’t look directly at each other are on their way
to splitsville, which sounds right, and the dancing star’s wife
looks straight at him and sees him and also learns to dance,
and he in turn looks back at her from where he’s been waltzing
at the edge of the dance floor and waiting for the music to change,

and the music changes as it has always changed, is changing
even now, our distant sadnesses replaced by glee or anger,
ecstasy or meanness, patient smiling or forbearance,
which goes a long way in this scene, as does
remembering that love is what you do, not what you feel—
to make love, act, write, dance, fight, work,
play, pray, as the Buddha pointed out, it is all one,
and so, my dears, from this day on,
existing side by side, are you.

Links
Melanie Gloster



Another Dance

Gretchen Cobb

Excitement mounts as we prepare for the dance.
Grandmother polishes me with soap and water.
Mother turns me around, examining me in the light.
My handmade dress is smocked with lace and ribbons.
Only my stocking feet remain. “No, Mother, I hate those shoes!”
Finally, we all settle in the little red car and pull away.

The audience assembles, voices hush, and lights fade away.
Colors, costumes, arms, legs—the graceful souls create the dance.
Enter the corps. In the darkness, we hear softly thudding shoes.
Swans on a lake, ballerinas glide on a mystical stage of water.
Beautiful women create a patchwork of shiny, sinuous ribbons.
“The men,” Mother exclaims, “when they leap, they look so light.”

Outside, the sun drips on our melting bodies; he appears in the hazy light.
At first, he’s only a figure in the dark corridor—far away.
From the lobby, framed in fluttering flags and fancy ribbons,
He emerges. We all gasp, “It’s Nureyev, the star of the dance.”
He passes close beside me, and I can see the sweat—droplets of water.
“He’s barefoot,” says Grandmother. “Where are his shoes?”

Wishing I could be barefoot, I squirm in my painful shoes.
Graceful, proud, and barefoot, he flows along with a gait so light.
Advancing towards the circular building, he heads for the fountain.
Everyone, awed, silently prays nothing will drive him away.
Oblivious, he continues to choreograph his own little dance
Under the blue sky with clouds streaked in ribbons.

Thick crystalline streams run over his body in ribbons.
Gliding over the wall, he slips in like he’s sliding on his shoes.
Swirling in the man-made rain, he performs a fluid dance.
His glistening skin sparkles in the sun’s light.
Renewed for the stage, cool and godlike, he strolls away,
Never sparing a look back at the lonely water.

Overheated strangers on the street stare when he departs the water.
Taxis honk, babies babble, people clamor, and birds fly in seamless ribbons.
“It’s over,” chirps Grandmother, breaking the spell as we move away.
Still mesmerized, I wonder if I can walk to the car in these shoes.
I know I can; after seeing a world-famous dancer, my heart is light.
On our journey home, we plan our next trip to the wonderful dance.

Asleep, I dream of silver ribbons and see myself in the starlight.
Carried away by slumbering visions to another dance,
I know I will walk in his shoes and leap in the water.

Beautiful *Señorita* with Beguiling Hands

Melba Peña

Tapping shoes accompanying “*El Tilingo Lingo*,”
The beautiful *señorita* pirouettes.
Her wrists gracefully twist with fluency;
she is caught in the sound’s depth.
Her brown skin embellishes her lacey white gown.
She moves, and she sways. No worries today.
The guitars with strong momentum play.
The trumpets challenge the day.

With the music taking control, she smiles,
and her arms beguile with every twist
while her hands snap, encouraging her dress
to fly and float and curl.
Her moves control the audience.
Captured by her beauty and her flow
and the hypnotic movement of her arms,
she escapes to the music and the dance.

The Beautiful Señorita
Melba Peña



Hunters' Season

Glenn L. Wiley

I called my woman. No one answered the phone . . .
It is hunters' season. In the heat of excitement,
even men change, transforming
into four-legged, predatory beasts.

As if they know me or scent my fear,
the beasts are out to prey . . .

The wolf assumes the guise of the lamb.
The scavenger becomes a hunter.
The cat in his joy flies on the wings of an eagle,
and the young pup grows fangs.

My woman is out there somewhere . . . alone?

The Final Out

Dan Timoskevich

The crowd has disappeared. My teammates—friends for ages—have cleared out and left me alone sitting on the pine in this half-buried hole in the ground. *What a career.* Who'd have thought I'd last this long, but the crowd's not coming to beg me for one more year. I'm no Mantle or Dimaggio, but I did all right. No one's coming to tell me how much he's gonna miss me or give me farewell gifts. Though our final game was a win—a decisive one at that—there will be no October this year.

I must have pulled the dugout's phone off the hook because that incessant beeping won't stop. I don't want to talk to anyone right now. The muffled voice of the PA announcer crackles over the speakers, but I don't want to hear it. All I know is he's not calling my name. I'm sure he's clearing people out, leaving me alone in my final moment in this giant stadium.

My wife. Where is she? Of course. She told me she'd be waiting—waiting for me to come to her, but I'm not ready to leave just yet because this is *my* night under the lights. I want to soak in the air of this life and inhale the clumsy aroma of alcohol and Cracker Jack.

Every seat in the stadium holds a memory, and tonight the house is full. Over there, just beyond the center field wall, right below the scoreboard, is where I hit my first homer. I didn't hit many over that wall in my career. I never performed well at home. What a feeling, though, when the ball clears the fence. No more pressure. No one to stop you. All the other team can do is watch with bowed heads as you pass by in that victory trot. Your friends are waiting to greet you when you finish. Doesn't get any better than that.

Oh, God, what am I gonna do? What's next for me? Nothing I did on the field is gonna matter anymore. Hits, steals, walks, errors—those are just stats jotted down and eventually lost in the ledger of time. Those stats can't define me.

Nothing's gonna record all those Thanksgivings when I bought and served dinners for all those poor folks; or cleaning my son's scrapes; or fixing my daughter's bike. Those moments won't be in next year's program. No official scorecard tracks those stats.

But to be fair, there was also the prostitute in Brooklyn. Nights I didn't come home. Nights I was so piss drunk I couldn't even find my bed. My poor wife. My darling wife. I'm so glad she was there to coach me straight.

I met her here, right up there in those front-row seats. I climbed to the top of the dugout during warm-ups to see who was calling my name. She said she liked my smile, but could it have been that simple? She followed me everywhere. One night, I blindfolded her and brought her here. Under the moonlight, I carried her in my arms through the walkway and set her down over by second base. I removed the

handkerchief tied around her eyes, but she had no clue where she was. Then Rod—what a loyal friend—flipped on the lights in the stadium.

“What are we doing *here*?” she asked. She didn’t get it.

“You said someday you wanted a diamond from me. Well, tonight this whole baseball diamond is yours. *All of it*. It’s a big one.”

Man, I couldn’t contain my smile, but she wouldn’t have any of that.

“I come and watch you every night,” she said with her chin angling off to the side like it always did when she was mad. “This is supposed to be some kind of surprise?”

“It’s just you and me.” I wrapped my arm around her waist. “This diamond is ours. It’s our future.”

I’ve gotta say, she did give me a polite five minutes to share this moment with her before she asked to go home.

“Home? Yeah, let’s walk home.”

I took her slender hand. She tried to pull away and said, “Not home plate, you fool.”

I held her tighter and wouldn’t let go. Not then. Not *then*.

“Nope,” I told her. “You already said home.”

We had rounded third and were within a few steps of home plate when I released her hand. The rest was up to her. She folded her arms and started to turn away when she saw that glitter of light sparkle from the center of the plate. We knelt together to have a closer look, and when she saw the diamond ring in the center, every good emotion spilled like champagne from that angelic face. Right there, kneeling on home plate, I asked her to marry me. She said, “*Yes!*”

And over there, in those seats behind home plate . . . Over there . . . is where we sat when we came to watch that game a year ago, just a month before she . . .

Pneumonia.

She deserved to win. We left her among the flowers and walked away from the mound, my children holding my hands. My son. He never liked to play ball, but he’s a fine boy. And my daughter’s just as caring as her mother. They’re here somewhere on this, my final night. I should go. I can’t move, though. I’m trembling. This game is hard to leave. My eyes. They’re closed. When did that happen? I open them wide. The bright lights blind me for a moment, and then I see a pair of faces nearly bleached into whiteness. It’s my kids. My they’re big, but their voices are sweet.

Sweet voices.

“Dad? Dad? Nurse!”

Rose's Secrets
Melanie Gloster



The Importance of Writing Great Characters

Gary W. LaVigne

As a writer and director of children's plays and musicals, my main objective is to create a fun experience for the audience and the actors. If asked to name one factor above all others that will make this experience happen during a play, I would put *character* first. The playwright Neil Simon once said something like, "Write strong and well-developed characters, place them in interesting situations, and they'll write your play for you." In other words, when one character displays an attitude or utters words, another character will chime in with a response or a new insight of a particular sort that will trigger more responses . . . and so goes the scene. This process may sound quite elemental, but weak dialogue and mediocre plays have evolved from vaguely drawn characters.

Character creation begins with the writer. If he sees and hears his characters in his head and keeps them, with all their idiosyncrasies, wants, and needs, clearly in mind as the script progresses, he has a good chance of seeing them spring to life on paper. The job is challenging. The writer must constantly change hats as he brings on each new and fully conceived character to interact with established characters.

Being a writer, a director, and an actor, I have witnessed firsthand my full array of successes and failures on the stage. As a saving grace, one cannot really label a children's play a failure when parents and audience members smile and say things like "Adorable!" and "They're so cute!" However, praise is not a goal for me. I always hope to find children who become amazed that they can step into other people's shoes so effectively that audiences can see newly created beings before them. Hand a child actor a strong and clearly defined role and, with good direction, he stands a good chance of losing himself in his part. One needs courage to jump out of one's skin and into someone else's body, but if the destination is clear and the desire is present, a child will discover that courage. To witness this transformation from timid actor to bold thespian has always been one of the greatest delights of my life in the theatre.

What happens when a child actor arrives on the stage cloaked in a new persona? Many little technical problems miraculously dissolve. The actor's self-consciousness or embarrassment vanishes because he's cloaked in the guise of another person. The actor has become an individual whom he has come to know well during rehearsals, and this character has specific words to say and actions to perform. The performer speaks more clearly and with greater energy (even when whispering) because the character he portrays wants to be heard. He listens and

reacts to others in ways fitting to the role because he has a stake in what is said and done. The actor has found his character.

So where on earth do these characters come from who are interesting, unique, and fun to portray? They come from inspired playwrights. Sometimes, playwrights can follow an idea into wholly unexplored territory. After seeing one of my musicals, someone suggested that the show would make a fun children's book. "Hm," I said. "I never thought of that." I began the attempt. I soon discovered that everything had to be described: the scene, the atmosphere, and each character's thoughts, emotions, and facial expressions. In the script, I could write "Young Jack enters stage left" and let Jack do the rest, but for the book I had to explain everything except what Jack said. I had to elaborate upon what my well-realized character could show quickly on the stage.

Roles must be clearly drawn for them to work in a script. The writer tells a story, and who better to make that story live for both actors and audiences than a cast of interesting folks? In daily life, one may spot a person who stands out somehow, prompting bystanders to remark, "What a character!" People like that are the ones who can spice up a story.

One factor to keep in mind when crafting characters is variety . . . not only physical and vocal variety but also emotional variety. Of course, viewers immediately recognize physical variety. Audiences prefer looking at a stage picture peopled with many types: short, tall, skinny, plump, young, and old. Variety adds interest. To build suspense, one can include animals or imaginary creatures. A broad array of roles brings on a whole range of voices that children can enjoy creating. Vocal variety helps distinguish the various characters. When characters are vague or uniform, children will use similar voices (most commonly their own) for their roles, causing audience members to have difficulty identifying who is speaking.

Watching characters transform during the course of a play is fascinating. A shy and timid character can become courageous when confronted with certain conditions, or a roaring-lion figure may become mouse-like. These are broad extremes, but this unfolding of characters (revealing hidden strengths and weaknesses) heightens a story's suspense. One rarely witnesses such personal changes so clearly in real life, but stage license allows these transformations to take place easily.

Good writers should have a plan for how they intend their audiences to be emotionally affected. Consider the following example: a playwright brings on a person who appears brash, hard-nosed, and aggressive; in short, he displays negative traits. The audience members soon regard this character disapprovingly. Later in the play, the playwright reveals the underlying motivations for that

character's behavior. The audience is then persuaded that the character's earlier words and actions were unselfish, understandable, and even . . . noble. This revelation should make audience members feel a little guilty about judging the character too quickly. The playwright has created a memorable experience.

As an actor, when I first read a script for a play in which I may be cast, I hope that one or two characters will captivate me enough to make the long process of rehearsals and performances worth my time and effort. When I read a script as a director, I drink in the full array of characters and their circumstances while hoping they will be true to life and fascinating. In both cases, I look for characters who are true to their natures. The playwright's goal must be to create engaging characters who are intertwined in engrossing situations that will captivate actors, directors, and audiences alike, thereby promising delightful evenings of theatre.

Pardon Me

Christina M. Rau

Who slept here before
on this shaking, vibrating
journey from A to B:
New York to Chattanooga,
 ready for the downtown delight
 of Dixie?

Chicago to Miami,
 just passing through
 the Southern depot?

Who riveted these steel walls,
installed each individual light switch,
filled the thirty-gallon tank with hot water,
set each car down on the tracks that stretched
 for miles
 and miles
 and miles North and South?

Who traded Cincinnati's steam
 for Smoky-Mountain wood?

When Hayes stopped in
during the Reconstruction,
did he disembark in Chattanooga?
Did he nibble on a Moonpie?
Did he sip an RC Cola from the can?

From 1870 to 1940,
from John Stanton's house
 to the students of Beaux Arts
 to NYC's own Don Barber,
who in the bustling terminal greeted
Wilson and the Roosevelts
when they, too, passed through?

Did Glenn Miller ever climb up
the stairs when the conductor
called the last “All aboard!”?
Did he rush, bag in hand,
waistcoat tails flowing behind,
to Track 29?
Did Dorothy Dandridge
dance between the cars?
Did the train ever make it
to Sun Valley, Idaho,
where the foreign refugees
don’t go?

A Quantum Event

Tim Cotten

Hi! Phil Photon here. I don't have long to talk. I'm headed for the crystal splitter; full speed ahead and it's going to split me in half. Ouch!

I come from a long-lived family. Part of me (I say part because I've changed directions many times) was born about when Grandpa Time was, and that was a very long time ago. Let me tell you, I remember the Big Bang as if it were yesterday, and it was a walloping big one. Everything started happening then, and I mean everything. I remember, too, vaguely, what Light Dad, my father, told me then about our mother, She of Many Names, nicknamed Void by most of us kids. I imagine her best as a huge cavernous womb with all of everything crunched down to less than nothing inside her.

She was, in fact, the void (still is, actually), and at that time (although it's hard to put a singular point on it because time was only beginning then) she was it; there wasn't anything else: no photons, no electrons going around atoms in electromagnetic tug-of-wars, no suns or planets or physical laws to keep things going, no Phil's Diner with flashing neon banners catering to truckers and bikers twenty-four hours daily (because there was no Earth to put it on). She was a singularity pregnant with space and time (don't ask me how because I wasn't brave enough to ask Light Dad).

Then she exploded. Boy, when she delivers, she delivers. Pop Photon popped out in frequencies beyond description, beaming and sparking out us kids in every direction. Time? About ten to the negative forty-third seconds, give or take a trillion trillion trillionth or so. (Whew! Even now, it's hard to realize how old Grandpa really is.)

Now don't forget that Light Dad and Grandpa Time started this all out together, and their sons and daughters (including me) still buzz along about the same speed in what they call a continuum today. Mom's there, too, just not so obvious, and she's providing us with space, time, and direction (just like a mom, huh?).

Lots of things have happened since then, and, in some way or another, I've been involved in all of them. It's all been relative (although some of the relatives get really weird). Now like I started to tell you, I'm headed for the crystal splitter. It's going to slice me neatly in two when I ram into its crystal lattice, and we'll see what happens next.

Here it comes!

"Sis! Sis, which way are you going?"

Me? Sis?

A ghostly apparition whispers the unanswerable question through space and time which isn't really there. I'm doubled, and I travel alternate paths. I know where I am without reference frames. I know/have known how/where I'll be after the decision is already made, but not before. Grandpa's here, too. He knows. Sis knows, too, just like me. We'll be real then, together like we'd never been split, whole and measurable in space/time.

(This is so strange, as if I'd been a phantom, unreal and waiting for you to decide who I am, but if you interfere with me or Sis now while we're split—or even think about us or ask questions—my decision will already have been made with Grandpa Time's complete permission. Time, you see, doesn't seem to follow the correct order. It's like you have to decide how to look at me before I can be that way, but I'll know what you were going to decide before you make the decision. Do you get it?)

It's over. Oh, God, it's over! We're through, and I'm everywhere. We're everywhere—me, Sis, and Grandpa, too. Waves are forever!

Ah, freedom from that fateful decision. I wave my sparkling tail in tune with all of Light Dad's waves.

What was missed, I wonder? What or where could I have been, particularized and pinpointed in real space/time? Would Sis have been as really real or still just the ghost-whisper I heard outside? Would we have made a difference?

Maybe Light Dad knows.

The *Dybbuk* and the Burrito *Gretchen Cobb*

The boy stood, lonely and alone,
Staring and glaring while the dark abyss
Awaited his arrival; its chaotic world,
Lacking serenity, was not one of bliss.

The *dybbuk* seeped in and slipped over
The edge of his mind; spirit was splitting.
His descent was a winding, blinding blur—
Arms flailing, fists clenching, jaws gritting.

The *dybbuk* adhered to the human body,
Soaking up its sins and melting the soul;
The stranded boy could not break free,
Slowly spiraling to the depths of Sheol.

They velcroed him together, all the pieces.
They dragged him away in a canvas burrito.
They misplaced parts and left them behind,
Abandoning him, this ravaged son of Leto.

Inside the womb of his custodial cocoon,
His head pounded while his toes jammed.
Wrapped tightly with no room to breathe,
His body felt dense—pressed, crammed.

His thrashing head was a vacuum, void
Of sensibility, leaving him to drift.
Fire burned and billowed beneath him.
Water washed and wafted—too swift.

Body versus Spirit. A struggle ensued—
Each trying to win the battle of life.
While Body grappled for freedom,
Spirit clung and continued the strife.

The boy in the swaddling blanket babbled
In alien tongues, but Body had won;
The *dybbuk*, lonely and alone, determined
He would share another soul with someone.

Children of the Enemy: Norway's *Lebensborn* Survivors

Teresa Wilder

The story of Nazi Germany's negative population policy—with its stated goals of exterminating eleven million Jews, thirty million Slavs, and several million other assorted undesirables (plus deporting an estimated seventy million subhumans to Siberia, Africa, and Latin America by 1980)—is well documented and well known (Hillel and Henry 116-26). However, this policy was only one half of a two-pronged attack on the populations of Europe, for it was balanced by the Third Reich's equally well documented (but much less widely known) positive population policy—a policy intended to repopulate an expanded Germany with pure Aryan bloodlines.

Heinrich Himmler, architect of much of the Nazi genetic engineering program, had set a goal of filling Germany and its expanded lands (the *Lebensraum*) with two hundred million Aryan Germans to replace those people deemed “unworthy of life” (Hillel and Henry 116-26). His plans included kidnapping children of Aryan appearance from conquered areas, particularly Poland. Those people who passed racial inspection would be offered for adoption by genetically approved German couples. Himmler also wanted to increase the birth rate of Aryan children within Germany, which had seen birth rates drop during the twentieth century. To this end, abortion (common during and following the Great Depression) was strictly forbidden, monetary and honorary rewards for large families were written into law, and vigorous propaganda campaigns aimed at removing the social and religious stigma of illegitimate birth were instituted. *Schutzstaffel* (SS) men, as prime genetic stock, were ordered to father a minimum of four children each with suitably Aryan women.

Germany's system of maternity homes was expanded, and it became part of the new *Lebensborn* (“fountain or wellspring of life”) Society. Young women could give birth secretly and without censure in these homes. While there, the mothers received ample and nutritious foods (even when the rest of Germany was suffering rationing and privation). The women were promised that the German government would provide them with job opportunities and other benefits upon leaving the homes. The women were also told that the children they produced would be provided for and educated by the state.

Looking beyond Germany's borders, Himmler saw the Scandinavian countries as a great reservoir of Nordic blood available for transfusion into the new German population. The pseudo-Nordic mythology of Nazism made the populations of Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Belgium, and Holland—believed to be

descendents of the Vikings—particularly desirable for building up Germanic warrior stock.

Lebensborn homes were planned for these countries in order to take advantage of this source of suitable genetic material. Success varied. These homes were never established in Denmark, and Sweden experienced only limited success with them. In Norway, however, these homes flourished, and in the five years preceding Germany's defeat by the Allies, an estimated ten to twelve thousand children were fathered by German men and born to Norwegian mothers.

The first Norwegian home opened in April of 1942, and soon nine others were operating in villas and hotels which had been commandeered from private ownership (Nicholas 274-76). The homes were soon filled to capacity with babies and young mothers—a marked contrast to those homes in other Scandinavian countries. In part, this difference arose because Quisling's¹ collaborationist government signed agreements with Nazi Germany and passed laws making parents unable to forbid their underage daughters to marry or leave home without parental permission. Children born to Norwegian women and German fathers could receive German—instead of Norwegian—citizenship under the new laws. This difference in citizenship ensured that the infants could be removed easily to Germany for adoption with or without their mothers' consent. In addition, women of Aryan appearance were encouraged to relocate to Germany and bear more children. In some cases, German women traveled to Norway to give birth in homes there, far from the dangers of Allied bombing (Hillel and Henry 120-23).

Although the plan was for Norwegian-born babies to be adopted by suitable families inside Germany, documents show that only about 250 of the Norwegian-born babies were actually sent there. Of those children, some died in transit. The vast majority of them remained in Norway, and some of the children sent to Germany were located by Allied relief agencies after the war's end and returned to Norway. Thus, thousands of *krigsbarn* or “war children” (most of them under the age of five) were living in Norway when the collapse of Nazi Germany ended its control of their native country and negated the safety and support which had been promised to the *Lebensborn* mothers and babies by Himmler, the SS, and Hitler's government (“Norway's ‘*Lebensborn*’”).

One might assume that innocent children would have no need to fear retribution and cruelty in a newly liberated Allied country. Unfortunately, this safe environment was not realized. Thousands of children abandoned by the Nazis

¹ Vidkun Quisling claimed the office of Minister President of German-occupied Norway from 1942 to 1945 while Norway's legitimate constitutional government was in exile in London. He was convicted of treason and executed after the war.

were not rescued and nurtured by their own countrymen. Ironically, many of the children were abused by schoolmates, government representatives, and even family members—all of whom saw them as shameful proof of Norway's cooperation with Nazi Germany. As they grew up in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, most of these boys and girls suffered pitiless discrimination as "children of the enemy" (Landler). Their brutal treatment was sometimes not much different from that suffered by children in the Eastern countries overrun by Nazi Germany.

Violette Wallenborn, the child of a Norwegian singer and a Nazi choir director, articulates the feeling of urgency growing among the remaining *krigsbarn*: "We need to find the courage to publicly tell our stories as long as we are still alive" (qtd. in Brackman). The consequences of Norway's participation in the *Lebensborn* project and the prejudice and intolerance which followed are best described in the words and memories of its innocent victims.

Gerd Fleischer's mother had a love affair with a young German officer who wanted to marry her when she became pregnant. When Gerd entered elementary school at age seven, other children called her *tyskerhore* ("German whore"). She remembers going home and asking her mother what the word meant: "It was the first bad word I learned in Norwegian" (qtd. in Crouch). She was frequently a victim of beatings and bullying at school: "I learned very soon that there was something very wrong with me, basically wrong with my blood. I was the child of the hated" (qtd. in Crouch). Home, however, remained a refuge from the enmity she encountered at school only until her mother married. Her stepfather had been a resistance fighter; he was a bitter, angry man who despised all that his half-German stepdaughter symbolized. "A Norwegian patriot who hated me" is Gerd's description of him (qtd. in Crouch).

Gerd withstood the rejection and beatings at home until age thirteen, when she ran away. She never returned home. She frequently lived on the streets, but she somehow managed to make a scanty living and put herself through school. She says that Norway's social welfare organizations were aware of her situation but did not help. She finished school at seventeen, left Norway, and did not return until she was thirty-five years old: "I knew that if I was to become a whole person, I had to leave the country" (qtd. in Crouch).

While living in Mexico, Gerd rescued two young street children; and when she finally returned to Norway, she took her two foster sons with her. Perhaps she had seen the suffering of her own childhood in them; she was determined to give them a chance at a decent life. In any case, her desire to help others who had suffered like herself had crystallized; by the time she moved back to Norway, Gerd Fleischer was determined to seek justice for all of Norway's ill-treated war

children. She began reaching out to other *krigsbarn* and encouraging them to give up the secrecy which had been forced upon them.

Gerd Fleischer was—and remains—active in the organizations formed to accuse the Norwegian government of neglect, lack of protection from abuse, and active attempts to conceal the existence of the war children. In the past decades, Fleischer has offered support to many other war children eager to trace their family roots and seek legal redress.

One of those adult war children is Paul Hansen. He was profoundly harmed by the government's attempts at concealment and denial, for he was one of the hundreds of children hidden away in institutions. Most children were placed in orphanages or foster homes, but Hansen was among those children committed to mental hospitals. Hansen's mother had engaged in a brief affair with a *Luftwaffe* pilot and had given her baby up at birth. When the war ended, he was three and still living in the same *Lebensborn* home where he had been born, awaiting an adoption that never materialized.

Paul was four years old when he was placed in the locked ward of a mental institution. He was surrounded by profoundly disturbed adults and incontinent children who were unable to feed themselves or speak. He was insulted and beaten by guards, and he slept in feces-spattered dormitories where he was often awakened at night by the screams of psychotic patients. He received no affection and no opportunities for normal childhood play. He would tell the employees, "I'm not insane. Let me out" (qtd. in Hammer). No one listened. He remained there until he was twenty-two years old. During those years, he was never tested for or diagnosed with any disability. He received no education, so, upon his eventual release in 1965, the only work for which he was qualified was unskilled menial labor such as cleaning and janitorial services (Landler).

Today, Paul Hansen is nearing retirement age, and he still works as a janitor at a university. He has become outspoken about Norway's treatment of its war children, and he becomes emotional when retelling the story of his childhood: "Why the hell did they send us there? What did we do wrong?" (qtd. in Mellgren). Hansen was part of the first group of war children to file suit against Norway in 2001.

One of the best-known of the war children is Anni-Frid Synni "Frida" Lyngstad, a member of the 1970s Swedish rock band ABBA. She is the product of a liaison between her teenage mother, Synni, and a young German sergeant. The soldier was transferred from the small northern town before learning of the pregnancy, and Frida's mother and grandmother were so badly treated by their acquaintances that they chose to immigrate to Sweden when the child was eighteen months old. Being raised outside of Norway did not completely insulate Lyngstad

from stigma, but it spared her the worst of the abuses suffered by those who remained (“Anni-Frid Lynstad’s Biography”).

Even children who remained in the general population and were raised by loving mothers and maternal families were seen as tainted. Not only were these children offspring of the hated Germans, they were illegitimate. Bjoern Drivdal, currently secretary of the League *Lebensborn*, explains, “For half the population we were the German bastards. For the other half, the religious half, we were the immoral love children” (qtd. in Mellgren).

The Norwegian government discussed deporting the thousands of half-German children as a solution to the dilemma. The government first tried to send the war children to Germany but was unable to do so due to the miserable conditions in Germany following the collapse of the Third Reich. Authorities considered transporting the children to Australia, but when this idea proved unfeasible, the children were moved to various Norwegian institutions where they became virtually invisible—unacknowledged and hidden.

Why were some of the war children placed in mental hospitals and psychiatric wards instead of orphanages and foster homes? The rationale for this placement is chillingly direct: a Norwegian woman would have had to be mentally defective to have relations with a German voluntarily. Mainstream science of the time held that mental incompetence was inherited. Therefore, these children—assumed to be mentally incompetent like their mothers—belonged in mental institutions. The Ministry of Social Affairs classified hundreds of half-German children as retarded solely because of their parentage, and the head of Norway’s largest mental hospital stated that approximately eighty percent of these offspring of mixed parentage should be considered mentally retarded (Hammer). Another well-known doctor stated that a half-German child had as much chance of growing into a normal citizen as cellar rats had of becoming house pets (Crouch).

Another factor contributing to the war children’s treatment, quite different from concerns of eugenics and heredity, was national image. Norway was rebuilding itself and working hard to present itself to the world as a clean and progressive modern constitutional monarchy untainted by Nazi ideology—an ideal trading partner for other industrial nations. To this end, the governments of post-war Norway wished to distance their country from certain embarrassments of the war years—such as the fact that not all Norwegians had been members of the resistance (“Norway’s Nazi Legacy”). Nor had all Norwegians been anti-German; some of them had actively supported Germany’s cause and volunteered for German military service. Many Norwegians had been extremely friendly toward the occupying Germans, as evidenced by thousands of half-German children whose existence was ignored as much as possible. This intense national desire to forget,

unify, and move forward led to brutal attempts to keep the inconvenient war children out of sight.

Vengeance also played its part in the rejection and abuse of the war children, especially in the years immediately following 1945. An estimated fifty thousand Norwegian women and girls (about ten percent of females between ages fifteen and thirty) had socialized with German soldiers during the occupation (Sujan). At the war's end, Norway sent fourteen thousand of these women to internment camps (including an island in Oslo harbor) even though they had broken no laws. Unknown numbers of these women were deported, and some of them—their heads shaved by their neighbors—were paraded through the streets of their hometowns followed by angry, jeering crowds (Hammer).

The survivors quoted in this paper are a distinct minority of the whole; the majority of Norway's war children remain silent—unable to talk about their traumatic childhood experiences . . . or perhaps unwilling to disturb such peace as they have been able to find. Some war children who have appeared in television interviews have been recognized and spat upon in public. One woman who had finally admitted that she was a war child and entered the class action suit against Norway lost the friendship of a long-time neighbor whom she had considered a close friend. The friend told her that she did not wish to associate with whore-children nor give her taxes to pay restitution to one (Stuart).

Many of the adult war children suffer from stress-related illnesses and mental disorders; they have had problems with drug or alcohol addiction, and few of them have been able to maintain successful relationships. There has been a high incidence of suicide among them. Some of those war children who were kept in institutions believe they were used by the government for experiments with LSD and other substances. (The records to prove or disprove this belief are not yet available.) Lobotomies, sterilization, or shock treatments left other war children permanently physically impaired. Only now, as the twenty-first century begins, have the most recent generations of Norwegians become aware of this dark portion of their national history.

How could so many people, including many of the war children themselves, not know what had happened? Many records were destroyed by SS troops in the last days of World War II, and the records which remained were not available to the public. Himmler, along with others who had personal knowledge of the program, had been executed. Birth and foster parents simply did not talk about the *Lebensborn*—it was a forbidden subject. Germany, in a national state of denial, did not want the subject investigated any more than did Norway.

For decades, the media did not report on the extent of Himmler's genetic experiments. Rumors circulated that the maternity homes had actually been

bordellos, baby factories, or some sort of stud farm for Nazi officers. A titillating (but inaccurate) movie was actually filmed in the 1960s and titled *Lebensborn*. The movie's posters featured athletically blonde young women in short-shorts posed around actors in Nazi uniforms.

War children who tried to uncover the facts of their personal past were stymied, but a breakthrough of sorts came in December of 1999 when German television reporters discovered one thousand files still stored at the German government's archives in Berlin. The information contained in the files allowed a number of survivors to trace their genealogies. Two Norwegian organizations were formed to help those people who wished to discover their parentage and lend support to people who were willing to talk about their experiences. By the early 2000s, many of the war children were finally becoming aware of their parentage and beginning to understand the events of their own lives.

In 2002, the Norwegian parliament finally authorized compensation for the now-grown children—if, that is, they could prove they had suffered sufficient discrimination. The offer was for 200,000 kroner (about 16,700 pounds or 8,000 United-States dollars) (Crouch). The war children refused the offer; they are currently asking for 34,000 pounds per person with up to four times that amount for those people who suffered the most (Crouch).

Norway's official Web site now offers information on applying for ex gratia compensation. Acceptable factors include "being sent back and forth between Norway and Germany, wrongful adoption, and bullying . . . [and] the application must include a description of what the applicant has suffered and what consequences this had for him or her subsequently" ("War Children' Can Apply for Compensation").

One group of 154 people has hired attorney Randi Hagen Spydevold to file a class-action suit against the Norwegian government requesting financial compensation for the years of abuse and neglect they suffered due to their status as *Tyskerbarna* ("German bastards"); these people demand that Norway admit its culpability. They accuse the Norwegian government of denying them basic human rights and failing to protect them. Their memories of physical and mental abuse suffered in public schools, humiliation by teachers, molestation in orphanages, and mistreatment by public health personnel are consistent and horrifying; yet, to date, they have lost all cases filed in Oslo City Court, the state Appeals Court, and Norway's highest court. The case has recently been rejected by the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, but an appeal is in process ("Chamber Hearing: Thiermann and Others v. Norway").

The government defense attorneys continue to maintain that Norwegian authorities were never aware of the abuse of the children after the war; therefore,

there is no basis for claims of entitlement to punitive damages. In an argument which negates this claim of ignorance, the government also says that the case is now too old and the plaintiffs have waited too long to file their claims. A third rationale given by government attorneys is that Norway cannot be held responsible for failing to protect the *krigsbarn* prior to 1953, which is the year it signed the European Convention on Human Rights. In reply, the war children point out that they did not suffer only prior to 1953. Their suffering continued long after that date. It continues today.

Works Cited

“Anni-Frid Lyngstad’s Biography.” *ABBA-The Site*. 1 Sept. 2008. Web. 1 Sept. 2008. <<http://www.abbasite.com/start/index.php?ret=/start/index.php&flash=yes>>.

Brackman, Levi. “Tracing Life: Children from Secretive Nazi Program Meet Publicly.” *Ynetnews.com: Jewish World*. 6 Nov. 2006. Web. 25 Feb. 2008. <<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L 3323958,00.html>>.

“Chamber Hearing: Thiermann and Others v. Norway.” *Europarat*. 3 Aug. 2007. Web. 1 Apr. 2008. <http://www.coe.int/T/D/Kommunikation_und_politische_Forschung/Presse_und_Online_Info/Presseinfos/2007/20070308-153-GH-Norwegen.asp>.

Crouch, Gregory. “Norway Tries to Resolve a Lasting Nazi Legacy.” *The New York Times*. 16 Dec. 2002. Web. 1 Apr. 2008. <<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9F02E4D>>.

Hammer, Joshua. “Hitler’s Children.” *The Ross Institute Internet Archives for the Study of Destructive Cults, Controversial Cults, and Movements*. 20 Mar. 2000. Web. 25 Feb. 2008. <http://www.rickross.com/reference/hate_groups/hategroups164.html>.

Hillel, Marc, and Clarissa Henry. *Of Pure Blood*. Trans. Eric Mossbacher. New York: McGraw, 1976.

Landler, Mark. “Eight People, Products of the Program to Propagate Aryan Traits, Met to Exchange Their Stories.” *The New York Times*. 7 Nov. 2006. Web. 10 Feb. 2008. <http://isurvived.org/InTheNews/Children_of_.html>.

- Mellgren, Doug. "Children Born of Hitler's Plan for Master Race Still Suffering." *The Seattle Times*. 13 Mar. 2005. Web. 25 Feb. 2008. <<http://seattletimes.nwsources.com/cgi-bin/PrintStory.pl?document>>.
- "Norway's 'Lebensborn.'" *BBC News*. 5 Dec. 2001. Web. 7 Feb. 2008. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/crossing_continents>.
- "Norway's Nazi Legacy." *BBC News*. 4 Feb. 2003. Web. 25 Feb. 2008. <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/correspondent/729902.stm>>.
- Nicholas, Lynn H. *Cruel World: The Children of Europe in the Nazi Web*. New York: Knopf, 2005.
- Stuart, Julia. "Sleeping With the Enemy: Spat At, Abused, Shunned by Neighbors. Their Crime?" *London Independent*. 2 Feb. 2003. Web. 25 Feb. 2008. <<http://hnn.us/comments/7983.html>>.
- Sujan, Dheers. "Children of the Hated: Norway's Children." *Radio Netherlands Worldwide—English*. 18 June 2003. Web. 23 Apr. 2008. <<http://radionetherlands.nl/features/cultureandhistory/030618children.html>>.
- "'War Children' Can Apply for Compensation." *Norwegian Embassy in London*. 12 Apr. 2008. Web. 12 Apr. 2008. <<http://www.norway.org.uk/misc/print.aspx?article={188431e1}>>.

Setting Boundaries
Melanie Gloster



Mr. Farley

Dan Timoskevich

Traffic was unusually light for an early Thursday evening, but like every weekday, Crazy Ron was out on the street corner saluting the traffic. He saluted the lone pedestrian who passed by on that cold November day. Jack Farley hardly lifted his eyes as he shuffled by toward North Main Street. At least *he* didn't have a metal plate in his head like Crazy Ron, and at least *he* wasn't crazy (although others may have thought so). Jack huddled inside his mustard-colored canvas overcoat as blistery northern winds whistled across the barren plains of Kansas. He staggered by passing cars containing familiar eyes that followed him until he disappeared in their rear-view mirrors. Despite stringy brown hair that had grown longer over the years, Jack's tan face was as distinct as it had always been.

Unlike the urban homeless, Jack was not suspended by the golden thread of anonymity. Instead, he roamed the small town, always encountering the pity-filled eyes of his childhood friends. His cup would eventually fill with change, but by morning it would be empty, and he would be the same.

His plastic cup was from Luigi's Italian Restaurant (owned by his former teammate Von Kenny). Jack didn't notice the absence of Von's car from the parking lot. He pulled the door to the restaurant, but it didn't budge. He peered through the windows into the dark interior and then rattled the door a few more times. He was *sure* it was Thursday. Every Thursday, Von would give him a pizza and take him to his house, where he'd let him shower and spend the night.

When Jack was his high school's star quarterback, he used to hand the ball off to Von, who would grab it and charge fearlessly into the teeth of the defense . . . but it was Jack's repeated success at connecting with his receivers that had made him the icon of his day. Despite his reluctance to give the ball to Von, it *was* Von's parents who had taken him into their home his junior year . . . the year his mom had died of cancer and his dad had been murdered inside the family pawnshop. Jack moved out on his own the next year, and though he graduated from school, he did so only by the good graces of his teachers, who refused to fail a former honor-roll student and football hero. Since those final high-school days when he'd injected a cloud of confusion into his body, his mind had wandered somewhere from which it refused to return.

Outside the restaurant, torrential rains began to fall, and Jack pressed his hands against the window. His eyes followed the streams of water that traced the outline of his fingers until their confluence just above a pair of signs. Underneath

the “Dishwasher Wanted” sign was another sign that read “Closed for Thanksgiving.”

Jack spun around and scanned the empty parking lots on Main Street. He wasn’t looking forward to trudging against the wind and icy bullets back to the city park where he’d sleep another night. Jack slumped down to the ground and shut his eyes. Through a tremolo of thunder, he heard a man’s voice accompanying the strumming of a guitar:

*It’s a battle of the bottle.
The genie drowns inside your beer.
It’s a bitter taste to swallow
When all around’s the smell of fear.*

Across the street, standing beneath the covered patio of a coffee shop, was a young musician. He performed without an audience as the last customers fled from the rain to their cars.

*You don’t know where you’re going.
You don’t know who you are
Anymore.
So they say.*

Oblivious to the surrounding traffic, Jack walked through the slicing rain toward the music. Cautious drivers slowed, allowing him to cross the street.

*Your friends have not departed.
It’s you who hides away
In your shame.
So they say.*

He approached the singer, cleared his throat, and mumbled, “What’s this about?”

The music stopped. “Hi, Mr. Farley. The song? It’s about moving on.”

“No. *Who* is it about?”

“I don’t know, Mr. Farley. Maybe myself.”

Jack nodded. He didn’t recognize the boy, but perhaps he had known his father.

“Go on,” he said.

The young man continued his song. Jack slowly stooped over and poured the coins from his plastic cup onto the red felt of the empty guitar case. The man stopped his playing.

“Mr. Farley!” he called out.

But Jack had turned to walk away. The sudden rainstorm had passed, and the night’s stars emerged like pinpricks in an indigo canvas. He tossed his cup into a trash barrel and jogged toward the park. Crazy Ron had abandoned his post to enjoy a turkey dinner with his watchful parents, and as Jack passed that corner, he lifted his head and offered a friendly salute to a passing car.

He continued to the park that had been his home for as long as he could remember. He curled into a fetal position under the safe cover of the grand gazebo. Nobody would bother him that chilly night, but a peculiar change in the winds sent the surrounding signs waving back and forth and set the merry-go-round spinning in a creaky twirl. The rush of air in his ears was like a cheering crowd seeing him off into the night.

When he awoke the next morning, tiny icicles dangled from the eaves of the gazebo, and droplets patted the pathway in a steady pulse. Jack made his way down Main Street and was waiting at the door of Luigi’s when Von finally arrived. The burly restaurant owner approached with his head hanging, and he said (without lifting his eyes from his set of keys), “Sorry about last night. I had family in for the holidays.”

As he propped open the door to allow Jack to pass, he was startled by the blue eyes staring squarely at him and even more so when a voice spoke he hadn’t heard clearly in twenty years:

“You need someone to wash dishes?”

Streetlight
Kaytlan Smith

In
cloudy skies
and
neon nights,
the glowing streetlight
gleams.
Come,
rainy skies; come,
teary eyes. Come
over-hurried scenes.

This
street-
light
will
still
be
glowing.
Through
a window,
on
the
sidewalk,
this
streetlight
will
still
be
glowing.
I can see it out my window now.

Stir-Fried Past

Tricia Baker

A traffic jam of conformity in Chinatown
smells of sweet-and-sour
exhaust and pavement.

It feels rushed, hot, and sweaty—
a frenzied kind of calm.

I taste stir-fried cabbage, noodles,
and an era which escaped me.

It sounds like old cars, white walls,
and a language I do not speak.

New Life in Old Skin

Lisa Myers

They say not to pour
New wine in old skin.
I know the reason why.

Old skin's comfortable, molded just right,
And new wine, with its explosive life,
Rips and tears and causes skin to weep.

Would it not be better to leave the skin abandoned
Than to force it into something new?
Let it remain soft in memory
Of the body that once filled and swelled.

But life is a demanding sort,
Disrespectful of old skin.
Get up; move on.
Let me fill you once again.

Psyche in Texas

Doris Davis

The Devil rocked my bed, all right—
a bony-assed man
with a short, fiery temper.

Come morning, though,
he was gone, with just his shadow
hanging in the wrinkled sheets.

Then one night he didn't
come at all . . . or the next,
and I hadn't dropped
no hints of his sleazy self.

Called his mother at last—
*A wife, she said,
a wife and two babies
in Dallas. Never mind,*
I said, and I hung up.

Now the days line up
like so many stumps
under a yellow sky,
and the foot in my belly
kicks its own blasted path.

It's a Hell of a Bliss—
that social worker says
with her placid smile—*You gotta
count the days, stretch the dollar.*

*Prevention, she mouths,
that's the answer.*

Mornings

Amber Smith

I love an easy-dress man—
Never gives a promise with a catch.
Socks first, then pants—
Insatiable hunger below his belt.
Afraid of the V-neck T-shirt,
His only tie binds my heart.

Star

Susan H. Maurer

There isn't much time.
I run from my trainer to the Bowery.
It's casual there for New Year's Day,
the reading.
I read the untyped poem
and see Joan filming.

I wrote a poem about *him*,
love sounding his name in it.
When finally we are intimate,
fireworks and all,
"Okay," he says, "this is between us."
He's lied; now he says a girlfriend
must never know.
But, oh, Ignacio, today was the
day I was going to say the poem
with your name on it is on
YouTube.

Seabright Seabridge
Susan H. Maurer

When she went to sit,
its chairness did not hold;
 legs splayed (out) from under her—
 clunk—she hit the floor.
Things fall apart.

Ran to the seabridge,
 in with the breakage, two, three, four . . .

The tide, tattletale,
 threw it back up on the shore.

Her dad, back from work,
 saw the evidence
 red with rage.

YOU, he said to her, *will not have a wedding chair.*
 (Three for the three daughters.)
YOU, he said to her, *will not have a wedding chair.*

FINE, she screamed and tried to run.

The other two now sit in *her* kitchen, quiet
 and still,
 like good children.

Floating Crayons

Kaytlan Smith

Well, you know.

It happens. They always come back, right?

And the same scribbling lines

that seemed so awkward and illogical,

so confusingly loud, simultaneously all-enveloping and chasing away . . .

you remember this.

But it changes, somehow.

The piece seemed so controversial that you hid it

in the darkest corner of your closet,

but now those overpowering expressions draw

you right back in.

Suddenly, the chaotic reds and browns and grays,

the fiery splashes and the earth tones,

the darkly smeared charcoal,

the energetic markings,

and all the magic moments that somehow seemed to fade to gray . . .

it all melts into paint,

and, somehow, now it's new.

Just like the meaning.

The Ice-Cream Man
Kourtney Maynard

The song is heard on a
Hot and sunny summer day.
Every child stops when the
Ice-cream truck rolls into view.
Cheers of joy are heard from
Eager children racing to the front of the line,
Cold and wet on their tongues—
Running, dripping ice-cream mess.
Each child is satisfied by the
Angelically sweet treat.
Mothers tuck their children into bed and
Make the promise of more money for the next singing truck.
Asleep in their beds as
Nighttime falls, children dream of more sugary treats.

Grand Mal

Ann Atchison Nicholas

What's shocking is the suddenness.
One moment conversant, the next
stopped—mid-sentence, mid-thought,
cerebral synapses crashing
to the kitchen floor
in a death-mask grin.
Bestial.

I call 911.
Don't do anything.
Don't do anything?
My son is dying, but
I don't cry. I just wait
and wait and wait and wait . . .

Like Michelangelo's *Pieta*,
I hold him; I rock him,
and while soothing words belie
my screaming soul, I wait
for a different resurrection.

Creatures That Move along the Ground
David Starkey

Characters

CHRISTINA, a nineteen-year-old girl
CHRISTINA'S MOM

Time and Place

The action takes place in a house in Brentwood, California. The time is the present.

(CHRISTINA'S MOM sits in a chair reading Mother Jones magazine and sipping a glass of wine. CHRISTINA is on her cell phone, pacing the room.)

CHRISTINA: Okay. Okay. I'll call you at noon tomorrow, okay? 'Bye. *(Beat.)*
I love you, too.

(She hangs up.)

CHRISTINA'S MOM: Who was that?

CHRISTINA: It was Jack. Who do you think it was?

CHRISTINA'S MOM: Oh. I didn't know. *(Beat.)* How's Kentucky or wherever?

CHRISTINA: Kentucky is really cold. It's snowing there.

CHRISTINA'S MOM: Hm.

CHRISTINA: What's that supposed to mean? "Hm"?

CHRISTINA'S MOM: Nothing. I was just thinking that it never snows in Brentwood.

CHRISTINA: Some people like snow. I liked it when I went out there.

CHRISTINA'S MOM: You wouldn't like it if you had to live there all the time. All winter. (*Beat.*) Yuck.

CHRISTINA: Mom, you're always looking for reasons to hate Jack. It doesn't matter what they are.

CHRISTINA'S MOM: That's not true.

CHRISTINA: It is true—you don't want me to have a boyfriend.

CHRISTINA'S MOM: Christina! That's *not* true.

CHRISTINA: It seems like it's true.

CHRISTINA'S MOM: Well, it's not. (*Beat.*) So what's he doing tonight? Jack.

CHRISTINA: (*Dreamily, thinking of Jack.*) Nothing. He just got back from McDonald's.

CHRISTINA'S MOM: *McDonald's*? What was he eating, a *hamburger*?

CHRISTINA: (*Immediately realizing her mistake.*) God, Mom.

CHRISTINA'S MOM: I thought you said he was a vegan.

CHRISTINA: I didn't say that. Exactly.

CHRISTINA'S MOM: Yes, you did. That's exactly what you said: "Jack's a vegan."

CHRISTINA: I just said he'd thought about becoming one. (*Beat.*) A while ago.

CHRISTINA'S MOM: Okay, Christina, I'm starting to put all this together now. It's a sham, isn't it? All the positive things you say about Jack . . . you're making them up, aren't you?

CHRISTINA: I'm not, Mom.

CHRISTINA'S MOM: Like joining in that protest against those goons who threw live hens into a wood-chipping machine just because they were "spent." He didn't really march against egg-farming, did he?

CHRISTINA: He told me he thought that was sick, what those people did.

CHRISTINA'S MOM: But he wasn't out there on the front lines, holding up a sign, like you said?

CHRISTINA: I'm not sure . . .

CHRISTINA'S MOM: I'm stupid, aren't I? Being idealistic must make you stupid.

CHRISTINA: No.

CHRISTINA'S MOM: Well, it *seems* like it does. What was I thinking? You told me he was a Republican. What Republican wants to become a vegan?

CHRISTINA: God, Mom.

CHRISTINA'S MOM: Name one.

CHRISTINA: Jack does, okay? Like, someday . . . maybe. (*Defensively.*) You think that just because someone doesn't live in California, he's a total loser.

CHRISTINA'S MOM: No. I just think you hardly know this guy. This Jack. You've only been around him two times. For a total of, like, six days. I just think you're too young to have a long-distance relationship. Especially with someone you don't even know.

CHRISTINA: He's a nice guy, Mom. I wish you'd just see that. I love him, okay? I really love him, and I want to make this work.

CHRISTINA'S MOM: Christina, you don't know what love is. You're in love with the idea of love, but you don't know what real love is.

CHRISTINA: Like *you* do?

CHRISTINA'S MOM: Yes, I think I do. First of all, it involves being with someone who shares your same beliefs. You're a vegetarian, right?

CHRISTINA: You know I am.

CHRISTINA'S MOM: Doesn't that put you off? Being with someone who eats meat?

CHRISTINA: We talk about it all the time, Mom. It's not like it never comes up. We joke about it.

CHRISTINA'S MOM: You *joke* about it? Eating animals? I don't think that's funny.

CHRISTINA: You have to admit, Mom. You're pretty over the top. Not everybody feels as strongly as you do.

CHRISTINA'S MOM: That doesn't mean I'm wrong. I'm wrong because other people are wrong? Is that what you're saying?

CHRISTINA: I'm just saying you can be a decent human being and still eat meat.

CHRISTINA'S MOM: There must be something wrong with my hearing.
(*Tapping her hand against her ear as though the organ is defective.*) Is there something wrong with my hearing? I don't believe this.

CHRISTINA: Believe it, Mom. I want to make up my own mind about things.

CHRISTINA'S MOM: Like killing animals? Do you want to go hunting now? Is that what he's telling you, that you have to go hunting to be with him?

CHRISTINA: No, Mom, he's not telling me that.

CHRISTINA'S MOM: Do you want me to buy you a gun? A forty ought seven? A double-barrel elephant gun? A machine gun, so you can go out and massacre little squirrels?

(CHRISTINA'S MOM makes machine-gun sounds and mimics mowing down a field of helpless squirrels.)

CHRISTINA: God, Mom, you're impossible.

CHRISTINA'S MOM: *I'm* impossible? I'm not the one who wants to go around exterminating cows. Like Jack.

CHRISTINA: Mom, Jack is a nice guy. He had a dog when he was growing up, okay? Flippy. He totally loved it. He likes cats.

CHRISTINA'S MOM: That's what he tells you. I'll bet he was one of those teenage boys—on Halloween they shove a firecracker up kitty's ass. *Kaboom!*

CHRISTINA: Okay, Mom, I'm leaving now. You're really making me mad. You're so unfair.

(Short beat. CHRISTINA does not leave.)

CHRISTINA'S MOM: I'm not unfair, Christina. I'm just realistic. You have this "boyfriend" you meet over the Internet. You sleep with him a few times. All of sudden, you're changing. All the values I thought you held are just gone. I can't help but think he's brainwashing you.

CHRISTINA: Mom, I told you, I just want to make up my own mind about things. Everything I believe is because you told me to believe it. You don't care about my opinions. You're just like *your* mom.

CHRISTINA'S MOM: That's hurtful, Christina. It really is.

CHRISTINA: It's true. Don't you think I have the right to make up my own mind about things?

CHRISTINA'S MOM: Yes, I do. *(Short beat.)* To a certain extent. But if you want to go around with some guy who probably spends his time making fun of PETA, I don't agree with that. Is he one of those people who calls it "People Eating Tasty Animals"?

CHRISTINA: He doesn't make fun of PETA, Mom.

CHRISTINA'S MOM: So you mean he doesn't believe in the ethical treatment of animals? Your boyfriend, he, like, hates PETA?

CHRISTINA: Are you even listening to *anything* I'm saying? No, he doesn't. God. He's just not a vegetarian.

CHRISTINA'S MOM: So he eats animals. Their butchered, roasted bodies.

CHRISTINA: Okay, Mom, most *animals* eat animals. Did you ever think about that?

CHRISTINA'S MOM: (*Sarcastically.*) Gee, Christina, I've never heard meat-eaters make *that* argument before. Hopefully, humans have evolved beyond that point. Animals don't have a choice. We do.

CHRISTINA: So anyone who's not a vegetarian is what? Morally bankrupt?

CHRISTINA'S MOM: You said it. I didn't.

CHRISTINA: (*Suddenly very upset.*) You just don't want me to be in love! You hate the idea that I'm in love!

CHRISTINA'S MOM: Christina, you know that's not true.

(*CHRISTINA'S MOM goes over and puts her hand on her daughter's shoulder. CHRISTINA pulls off her mother's hand.*)

CHRISTINA: Get away from me!

CHRISTINA'S MOM: Christina, honey, I just want what's best for you. I want you to marry someone who's not going to make you conform to his twisted beliefs.

CHRISTINA: (*Crying, but not very hard.*) He's not "twisted," Mom.

CHRISTINA'S MOM: (*Conciliatory.*) Okay, maybe he's a nice guy. I don't know. You're right. I've never met him. But listen. Do you know that holding pen for cattle on I-5, on the way up to Grandma's in Sacramento?

CHRISTINA: Yeah. What does that have to do with anything?

CHRISTINA'S MOM: Don't you think that's disgusting?

CHRISTINA: Of course I do.

CHRISTINA'S MOM: A bunch of cows all herded together, living in their own shit, waiting to be slaughtered. Do you find that picture appetizing?

CHRISTINA: No.

CHRISTINA'S MOM: Well, your boyfriend eats those cows. He eats them.

CHRISTINA: Mom, you're off the map. You really are. You're totally on another planet.

CHRISTINA'S MOM: Does he eat at Kentucky Fried Chicken?

CHRISTINA: Probably. God, I don't believe you.

CHRISTINA'S MOM: Live scalding and debeaking. Throats slashed. That's inhuman. Or it's the worst of humanity. Don't you want to be better than those people? Those *carnivores*.

CHRISTINA: Mom . . .

CHRISTINA'S MOM: (*Fed up; she's not the conciliatory type.*) What's your boyfriend doing right now? Eating another hamburger? Is he one of those guys who can't eat just one hamburger, he has to eat two or three? Why don't you call him up, on *my* phone bill, and see which particular animal he's eating right now? A goat? A buffalo? A fox? Maybe he's eating a yak. Does he like yak burgers?

(*CHRISTINA goes to the door.*)

CHRISTINA: Okay, I am truly leaving this time. You've gone so far beyond where *anyone* has a right to go. You're just so *extreme*. I can't take it anymore. Maybe I'll move out there with Jack. Quit college. We'll go hunting every day. Eat yak burgers. Wear mink coats.

(*CHRISTINA waits at the door. CHRISTINA'S MOM sits back down in her chair, takes a sip of her wine, and picks up her magazine. Beat.*)

CHRISTINA (CONT.): Aren't you going to say anything?

CHRISTINA'S MOM: What do you want me to say, Christina? You've made up your mind. You're nineteen years old. What am I going to do?

(CHRISTINA'S MOM flips through her magazine, ignoring her daughter.)

CHRISTINA: Mom, say something. Anything. Tell me about the Canadian seal slaughter . . . or testing chemicals on bunny rabbits . . . or the poor starlings being caught in glue traps. *(CHRISTINA'S MOM continues to ignore her.)* Come on, Mom. Tell me my boyfriend's a beast.

CHRISTINA'S MOM: *(Looking up over her magazine.)* He may be a lot of things, Christina, but he's not a beast. *(Clearing her throat, quoting.)* "In that day will I make a covenant for them with the beast of the field, and with the bird of the heavens, and the creatures that move along the ground, and I will betroth myself unto thee to eternity."

(Beat. CHRISTINA doesn't know whether to laugh or cry.)

CHRISTINA: How many glasses of wine have you had tonight? That's, like, the Bible, isn't it? Since when have *you* started quoting from the Bible?

CHRISTINA'S MOM: I just thought, since you're all right-wing and everything now, that it might make an impression on you.

CHRISTINA: *(With supreme sarcasm.)* Oh, you did, huh? Well, thanks. *(Beat.)* By the way, could you say that quote again?

CHRISTINA'S MOM: *(Self-righteously.)* "In that day will I make a covenant with the beast of the field, and with the bird of the heavens, and the creatures that move along the ground, and I will betroth myself unto thee to eternity."

CHRISTINA: Okay, that totally does not make any sense. First of all, who's talking? It sounds like God's talking. Are you saying God wants to, like, marry the creatures that move along the ground? Or that you do?

CHRISTINA'S MOM: You're the Bible-thumping Republican. You tell me.

CHRISTINA: Whatever, Mom. Okay? I mean, *whatever*. You are so not pulling that “creatures that move along the ground” shit on me. It’s ridiculous. I’m going to my room now. If you want to have a sensible conversation, just let me know, but I don’t want to talk to you until you do.

(CHRISTINA’S MOM shrugs. CHRISTINA exits. CHRISTINA’S MOM goes back to her magazine. She finishes the rest of her wine in one long swallow. Long beat. CHRISTINA pokes her head back into the room.)

CHRISTINA: Mom?

CHRISTINA’S MOM: Yes?

CHRISTINA : *(Beat.)* Good night.

(A slight smile of victory appears on CHRISTINA’S MOM’s face, but she says nothing. Beat. Blackout.)

Surprise Snow
Agnes Tirrito

I'm stirring up a poem
on a white March day.
The snow falls down
in white whispers,
a layer of light
like frosting on a
celebration cake.
I look out the window
and try to capture
a perfect quiet moment,
a new start,
a clean slate—
the gift of a promise
in the surprise
of March snow.

Sunset: *Pont Neuf*
Wendy Taylor Carlisle

He cried, the boy not quite a man—
maybe nineteen—into the hand that covered
his left eye and brow; the other hand held
a cell phone pressed to his ear.

The red sun fell; the clouds went salmon
over St. Germaine; his left hand
rubbed his eye then dropped,
and he got up and turned his face away

from us, the strangers who'd usurped his spot,
who'd noticed (or had not) how he had wept
at nine one night on a stone bench
above the Seine while we pretended not to see,
uneasy, somewhat old, who'd also wept and turned
away and might again, depending on the call.

Hope¹
Agnes Tirrito

Like a moth,
I come closer
to the light,
marveling at the
luminosity
of a lantern held
by fragile hands.
I leave,
return,
leave,
return
to this beckoning.
Hope spills out
her secrets
in bold colors, bright flames,
warning me to look now,
know
the night won't last forever.
Tomorrow's dawn
will blaze even brighter
than this.

¹ This poem was inspired by Judy Wright Walter's *Safe Passage*.

Ars Poetica, 1970

Anne Britting Oleson

for Gray Jacobik

Past midnight in the hushed house.
On her knees before the window,
her fingers pressing clouds into the glass:
inside the dark room at her back,
her sisters, breathing sleep,
exist only in her dreams.
Outside, what summons her—
serpents of fog, furling about
the bent limbs of an apple tree
shimmering in the full moon,
a pale disk in the sky. All is gray:
the mists snaking along the grass,
around the trunk, always
coiling back upon themselves, silent.
Kneeling before the night,
she doesn't remember waking,
leaving her bed, anything up to
this moment when she feels the breaking open
of her breast, the flowing out of herself,
and sees the moon, her heart,
trembling all over the world.

Exploration

Kaytlan Smith

All birds can dream. Every flower grows.

Here is joy.

Kites lift my nights on pink, questioning, radiant skies.

Travel up, voyager, wanderer.

Explore your Zion.

A Boy and His Dog

Christy Turner

A funny story about a
Boy and his
Cute little
Dog:
Everywhere the boy went, his dog was sure to
Follow—
Going up the
Hills and around the
Island;
Jumping and running while flying a
Kite; or
Lying in a grassy
Meadow.
Neither the boy nor his dog would go their
Opposite ways—
Partners for life through the
Quietness of the days.
Rusty and
Spot were always
Together.
United in
Victory, they were
Winners in life. The two would relax while listening to their
XM radio. They would begin
Yawning so much, they had to lie down and catch some
Z's.

Daffodils

Kaytlan Smith

I.

My eyes started wandering around
all the flowers placed around her closed coffin,
on pedestals before and to both sides of her,
climbing the couple of steps,
reaching over the wall above her like ivy.

They were beautiful, all of them.
The ones that first caught my attention
had these big beautiful orchids and lilies—
the type of flowers that you might imagine sitting
on the kitchen counter in a condo in Hawaii,
where palm trees, pink skies, and blue
waters dominate the scenery.
But they weren't out of place here.

My eyes moved on.
So many different kinds of flowers.
It made me think of her garden.
Of irises, of okra and tomatoes,
of the fairy-something—
the flowers brushing up against the tree
in the front of the yard.
Of pecans.
Of thousands of bright little somethings
that looked like they could grow
in the wild, but she'd tamed them.

And then I saw them.
An arrangement beautiful in its simplicity . . .
and the daffodils.
I felt the tears well up
behind my eyes the moment I saw them.
Instantly, I turned around, looking for my mother.

She'd picked out the flowers for us to send;
I knew that they were ours.
And it was perfect.

II.

I returned to childhood.
I became a part of the pile of grandkids
on my grandfather's four-wheeler
on a dirt road in early spring.
Just like every year,
an old abandoned property called to us
down the road from my grandfather's house
before we reached his mother's garden . . .
my great-grandmother, still before me.
He owned the land.
He'd open the gate and we'd ride in.
It was always overgrown.

An abandoned well was hidden there
somewhere, off to the right. No cover.
He always told us not to go near it,
emphasizing the danger of it.
I'm sure everyone has heard those stories . . .
some poor child
falling into the well . . .
but this forbidden quality
made it all the more appealing—
beautiful in its disrepair.

III.

Off to the left, surrounded by trees,
was this beautiful little patch of nothing but
daffodils
and daffodils
and daffodils,
bright yellow, peeking
through the trees before you got there . . .

I can still feel the spots of heat
on my back, reaching through the branches,
and the sweet-smelling wind
blowing around my face.
It was my heaven, my escape, my spring felicity.

Farther on in the property were the remains
of a burned-down house.
It was the closest thing to the catacombs
I would ever see at that age—
an archaeological site.
The floor was falling through
and rotting; I had to be careful with my stepping.
Forgotten belongings scattered the floor.
An old dish or piece of silverware,
some something that,
in reality, no one cared to salvage, was to me . . .
evidence of life
in a place that now belonged
to *nature*, and had long forgotten
any *human* inhabitants.

I thought of sneaking out there
and surviving in the wilderness, unknown
to anyone else. My secret place.
I'd collect water in the creek that streamed
through nearby, from the waterfall
a towering two feet off the ground.
You could barely notice it from the road,
but just a step into the woods
and there it was.

I could live off the nectar of honeysuckles,
and when summer came
I could sneak out to the road and collect
the blackberries that dotted the fences
of that old country road. Pearce Lane.

Sometimes, I still want that.

Daffodils
Kaytlen Smith



Rainbow Fish

Kourtney Maynard

Green fish of ten—
half with one pink fin.
Purple fish of nine
marked with a solid white line.
Red fish of eight
awaiting their dates.
Blue fish of seven
conversing about Heaven.
Yellow fish of six—
all with brown cowlicks.
Orange fish of five
doing the jive.
Black fish of four—
each with a big red sore.
Gray fish of three—
trying to be Gypsies.
Teal fish of two
who belong in the zoo.
A peach fish of one
all by his lonesome.

Humorous Epitaphs

Joe

Kaytlan Smith

Here lies Joe
Beside the brook.
Too bad his mother
Tried to cook.

Sam

Kaytlan Smith

Here lies Sam,
My favorite cat.
My brother's tire
Made him flat.

Matt

Brittany Gillespie

Here lies Matt,
Who hated school.
He fell asleep
And drowned in drool.

Sassy

Brittany Gillespie

Here lies Sassy
On the floor.
Her face was flattened
By the door.

In the Afterlife

Doris Davis

I remember everyone's name—
first *and* last—even if I haven't seen them
for half a century.

All words come readily to mind—
all quarter of a million the Oxford experts claim—
and each falls easily into a parallelism
even Dr. Johnson can admire.

I never confuse *solecism* with *solipsism*
or *paeon* and *paeon*. Mrs. Malaprop is confined
to Sheridan's world

and *lie* and *lay* bed down in sweet accord,
nestled by *infer* and *imply*, who know their places.

I even remember high-school Latin
and shout "*Britannia est insula!*"¹
and "*Alia iacta est!*"²
with authority.

I never have to think,
Why didn't I say that?

In the afterlife—poems write themselves
while I enjoy rereading
Clarissa, crying out only in exultation
over flawless epistles.

¹ Britain is an island!

² The die is cast!

In the Meadow
Melanie Gloster



Darfur Calls

Michael Hardy

Kathleen Kardon

Rachelle Neuman

Characters

AFRICAN DANCERS

AFRICAN DRUMMERS

JERRY ALLMON/JEREMIAH

TRACY ALLMON

DR. MELVIN BOOKLEY, a psychologist

BILL (OR ALICE) GLIB, a reporter

INTERVIEWED MAN

INTERVIEWED WOMAN

BOBBY NABOR, an elementary-school student

OMISSIONER 1

OMISSIONER 2, an elementary-school student

OMISSIONER 3

PAT (PATRICIA OR PATRICK) POWERS, a politician

SILENT VILLAGER

VILLAGER 1

VILLAGER 2

WITNESSES

NIFISA ABBOD, a Darfur victim

MOLLY GIVEN, a middle-school student

AL TRUITT, an aid worker

SARAH (OR SOL) WISENBERG, a Holocaust survivor

Z

Time and Place

The action first takes place during the recent past in a village in Darfur and a refugee camp in Chad; the action then takes place during the present in a kitchen and a courtroom in San Antonio, Texas.

Pre-show

Before the house opens (as well as after the show), the following exhibits are suggested: (1) photos depicting Darfur victims and refugees in Chad; (2) videos such as *The Devil Came on Horseback*; and (3) tables staffed by volunteers knowledgeable about Darfur who can readily answer questions and provide information about how people can assist the crisis in Darfur by purchasing fundraising items (such as Darfur dolls, T-shirts, photos, and artwork) or by making cash or check donations exclusively to Darfur relief.

By the time the house opens, all of the trial witnesses should be camouflaged among the rest of the audience.

At least five minutes before the dance begins, dancers and musicians (preferably two percussionists using hand-held African drums [*djembe*s]) must take their places.

Scene 1

(Lights rise to reveal a village in Darfur. Recorded African music plays—not boisterously or loudly—as dancers go about the business of everyday life. Women fetch water; men work in the fields; children play; and villagers converse. These actions are mimed; no props should be used. The set goes dark, and the music stops. Lights shine on the AFRICAN DANCERS only. As the dance begins, the sound of live drums fills the theater. The tone begins with a cheerful feel and gradually turns ominous and horrific. The volume and pace of the drumbeats reflect impending danger. The AFRICAN DANCERS dramatize the destruction of the village and the raping and killing of villagers by Janjaweed men. The dance should last about ten minutes. One female dancer, SILENT VILLAGER, lies in anguish downstage. Blackout.)

Scene 2

(Lights rise on a refugee camp in Chad. Drums play softly. VILLAGER 1 and VILLAGER 2 walk together, surveying a multitude of sufferers. They approach SILENT VILLAGER, who cradles an imaginary baby in grief. The drums fade out. VILLAGER 1 gestures at SILENT VILLAGER and speaks to VILLAGER 2.)

VILLAGER 1: Can't we do something?

VILLAGER 2: What? She does not speak to anyone. She barely eats, and when she weeps, there are no tears. She is as silent as her child.

VILLAGER 1: It's been days since you got to the camp, and she still can't let go. What else is she holding?

VILLAGER 2: She carries a piece of his shirt.

VILLAGER 1: Whose shirt?

VILLAGER 2: Jero, her husband. He was young, strong—beautiful. A leader in our village. A good man.

VILLAGER 1: What happened?

VILLAGER 2: Janjaweed killed him. Then they threw his torn body in a well to spoil the water. She saw it all.

VILLAGER 1: There are many like her here.

VILLAGER 2: Even in sleep, there's—

VILLAGER 1: But can she sleep?

VILLAGER 2: Hardly at all. There's no escape. No rest from nightmares. *(Drums play a steady heartbeat rhythm.)* Nightmares of Janjaweed. Nightmares of a wolf devouring a lamb. Nightmares of lost lives.

(Resolve enters the drumbeat. Lights fade out as the VILLAGERS exit.)

Scene 3

(Lights rise slowly on the Allmon family's kitchen, only revealing the family's members at first. TRACY sits at the table, gulping breakfast cereal from a bowl and clanking the bowl's bottom with a spoon while she reads her homework paper. MIRIAM stands at the table, finishing a bagged lunch for TRACY. JERRY sits

spread-eagled staring at a television [a very small portable model placed on the table's edge]. This household is busy; the action moves quickly.)

JERRY: *(Shaking his head disapprovingly.)* I can't believe this.

(TRACY quickly finishes the cereal. She takes a half-swipe of her mouth with a napkin, which she tosses on the table. She rushes toward MIRIAM with the homework paper. She holds up the paper and reads from it.)

TRACY: What important person has a name beginning with the letter Z?

MIRIAM: I still don't know, honey. I have to keep thinking about Z names.

(She gives TRACY the bagged lunch along with a kiss on the cheek.)

TRACY: *(Disappointed.)* Aw, Mom. *(She starts to exit, but she suddenly turns back.)* Mom, is it okay if I go to Bobby's house after school?

MIRIAM: All right, Tracy, but call me as soon as you get there.

TRACY: *(Hurriedly.)* 'Bye, Dad.

(TRACY begins to exit, jogging. JERRY looks toward the departing TRACY and clears his throat to catch her attention; he points to his cheek. TRACY gives JERRY a quick kiss on his cheek, and she rushes out as JERRY smiles.)

JERRY: 'Bye, Trace. Have a great day! *(He turns back to the television, occasionally looking toward MIRIAM.)* Can't you get news in the morning? Before my dad went to work, he turned on the TV. He got news. Now what ya get? Part reality show, part freak show. A contest where the winning couple gets an all-expenses-paid wedding. Ten minutes on what it's like to live in a house with twenty kids. An expert on interpreting dreams. Warmth and fluff and, if you're lucky, a few sound bites on world events. *(JERRY finishes his rant and looks at MIRIAM.)* Hey, you're awfully quiet. *(No answer.)* Is something wrong? *(No answer.)* It's my fault, and I apologize.

(He smiles. Beat.)

MIRIAM: I read an article last night that's got me turned inside out.

JERRY: And?

MIRIAM: It's about what's been happening in Africa.

JERRY: Yeah?

MIRIAM: Jerry, I was upset. After a long while, I finally closed my eyes, and drifted off to sleep.

(Lights gradually dim as she speaks, and dream-chimes sound. MIRIAM then speaks darkly; her voice should reverberate like it's coming from inside a tunnel.)

I heard drumbeats.

(Drumbeats rise and increase in volume and pace.)

They got louder and louder. In rhythm with the drums, my heart beat faster and faster. And then came the slaughter.

(The drums take on a periodic high pitch, echoing the Janjaweed dance.)

Killing after killing . . . in slow motion, like a never-ending dance of death. And when that horror was over *(The drums abruptly stop.)*, there was no relief. As if my heart had burst, I felt myself tumbling into oblivion, and—

(Lights fade down completely, and the sounds—including the drumbeats—convey that the dream has become more intense.)

Scene 4

(Lights rise until a courtroom set for a pretrial is lit dimly. Z joins MIRIAM at the defense counsel's table [preferably MIRIAM's kitchen table sans tablecloth]. Throughout the trial sequence, actors will stand from their places in the audience, loudly deliver their lines, and sit.)

MOLLY: *Tikkun olam*. Repair the world.

(A drum—preferably a tympani—sounds like loud gavel.)

PAT: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

(The gavel-drum sounds.)

BOBBY: Stop the hate.

(The gavel-drum sounds.)

NIFISA: If one is enslaved, we are all enslaved.

(The gavel-drum sounds.)

AL: Am I my brother's keeper?

(The gavel-drum sounds.)

MELVIN: Justice. Justice shall you pursue.

(The gavel-drum sounds.)

SARAH: *(With increasing volume.)* Never again. *(The gavel-drum sounds.)*
Never again.

(The gavel-drum sounds.)

ALL: Never again.

(The gavel-drum sounds. Lights gradually brighten to illuminate the courtroom fully.)

Scene 5

(MIRIAM and Z sit alone in the courtroom. Beside Z on the defense table is a short stack of papers; on the floor is a tattered briefcase. MIRIAM looks around in bewilderment.)

MIRIAM: Where am I? What's going on?

Z: I'm your advocate. (*Warmly extending a hand.*) Call me Z. I know a good deal about omissions' law—just about everything from A to Z. (*Shrugging.*) By the time I got my advocacy commission, Z was the only letter left. At the very end, though, you'll find you can count on Z.

(*JEREMIAH enters confidently with a fancy briefcase. When he reaches the prosecution table, he opens the briefcase. MIRIAM looks in disbelief at JEREMIAH; she calls out to him.*)

MIRIAM: Jerry? (*No reaction.*) Jerry! (*Still no reaction. She turns to Z.*) What is he doing?

Z: Jeremiah?

(*JEREMIAH glances at Z, who flashes a greeting in the form of a salute. JEREMIAH, with eyebrows slightly raised, smiles softly and confidently; he takes a file out of his briefcase and begins arranging papers. The stack of papers is much larger than Z's stack.*)

For years, he's been one of the top prosecutors. This is my first case with him, but don't worry. You're in good hands. Some say, "Stick with Z, and you'll be scot-free."

MIRIAM: What in the world?

(*Three loud drumbeats like bone-rattling thunderclaps announce the OMISSIONERS' entrance. JEREMIAH adopts an official voice.*)

JEREMIAH: All rise.

(*House lights come up. JEREMIAH gestures with uplifted hands for the audience members to rise. If the audience members do not stand, JEREMIAH says, "The gallery will rise." If the audience members still do not stand, he adds, "The audience shall rise." Three OMISSIONERS wearing white choir robes walk through the audience in single file to their elevated places on the stage. They represent different generations, genders, and ethnicities. OMISSIONER 2 is TRACY. OMISSIONER 1 should be the age of a grandparent. OMISSIONER 3*

should be the age of a parent. When MIRIAM first sees OMISSIONER 2, she lurches toward TRACY, but Z restrains MIRIAM.)

OMISSIONER 1: Please be seated. *(He waits for the room to settle down.)* The Omission Review Board will come to order. We sit to consider alleged offenses of omission. As you know, this panel of Omissioners does not make the final decision. At the appropriate time, we provide our findings in the form of a recommendation to a higher authority.

(The three OMISSIONERS look skyward in unison and then resume gazing straight ahead.)

Miriam Allmon, you are charged by the prosecution with responsibility by omission for the atrocities in Darfur. How do you plead?

(Z lifts the dumbfounded MIRIAM to her feet. She does not know what to say. She can only stare at OMISSIONER 2.)

Z: *(Confidently.)* Not responsible, Your Omissioners.

(Z helps MIRIAM sit down.)

OMISSIONER 3: Witnesses for both parties will rise.

(Sitting scattered throughout the audience, they stand. If possible, these people should be bathed in spotlights.)

Raise your right hands. *(They do.)* Do you swear or affirm that the testimony you are about to give will be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?

WITNESSES: I do.

(They sit. Lights lower on the audience and focus upon the courtroom. OMISSIONER 3 looks at JEREMIAH.)

OMISSIONER 3: Call your first witness.

JEREMIAH: If it please Your Omissioners, we call Nifisa Abboud.

(Covering each movement to and from the lectern are drumbeats, perhaps a variations of a heartbeat. NIFISA stands at the lectern.)

JEREMIAH (CONT.): Good evening. Your name is . . . ?

NIFISA: Nifisa Abboud.

JEREMIAH: Where do you live?

NIFISA: For the last six months, in the United States. Before that, in Darfur—in Sudan . . . in Africa.

JEREMIAH: Please tell us why you no longer reside in Darfur.

NIFISA: One year ago, my people were forced from our village by Janjaweed to a camp in the land of Chad.

JEREMIAH: Who are the Janjaweed?

NIFISA: Murderers. Men with guns who ride horses.

JEREMIAH: Tell us what happened on the day the Janjaweed came into your village.

NIFISA: Horses rumbled from the hills behind. *(A soft drumroll sounds.)* Suddenly, Janjaweed were upon us. *(The drums stop.)* We ran. People I've known all my life—friends, family—scattered in every direction like a stampede of terrified cattle. Janjaweed burned our homes. I saw many people fall dead on the grass. I grabbed my baby and hurried to my eight year-old son. "Come! Come!" I cried. I ran as fast as I could with my baby in my arms and my son running close to me. One Janjaweed grasped my arm. *(A loud drumroll sounds.)* As I struggled to get away, he yelled, "We will exterminate you. Nothing can save you." Then he grabbed my son and took him away. *(She screams.)* Stop! *(A loud drumbeat punctuates her cry; the drums go silent for several beats.)* One of them forced my child from my arms. I tried to stop him, but he was strong. He dropped her under a tree. Her cries echoed in my ears, but I could do nothing. He dragged me into the bushes. I felt his dirty hands on me—his breath on my face. No, no! I kicked and clawed at his arms, but he—he laughed and threw me to the ground. I wanted to die right there. *(Screaming and crying.)* Allah! Why, why, why? *(Beat.)* He

NIFISA (CONT.): hit me over and over, but I felt nothing. His filthy body on mine. *(Long beat.)* My son was gone. I never saw him again. I never saw my husband again . . . and if I had, it would not matter. After what Janjaweed did, I could no longer be his wife. *(Beat.)* I have no village. My way of life is gone forever. *(Beat.)* Left to die, I heard a distant sound. *(She strains as if hearing the noise.)* My baby. My only reason for living, for being here today.

(She sobs. JEREMIAH approaches her. He takes a handkerchief from his upper jacket pocket and presses it lightly on NIFISA's arm. She wipes tears from her face with the handkerchief, which she keeps. JEREMIAH is moved.)

JEREMIAH: Can you go on? *(NIFISA nods.)* How did you get to the United States?

NIFISA: There was a British doctor at the refugee camp. My baby was very sick. She needed help he could not give her. He called an American friend of his—also a doctor. The doctor spoke to the people of his church. They raised money to bring me and my baby here. *(Several beats pass.)* I am shattered, yet I am also grateful.

(JEREMIAH gestures to Z with an outstretched arm.)

JEREMIAH: Your witness.

(He sits.)

Z: Hello, ma'am. Have you ever seen this woman before?

(He points toward MIRIAM.)

NIFISA: No.

Z: Has she ever done you any harm?

NIFISA: No, not that I know of.

Z: Thank you.

(Z sits. JEREMIAH rises quickly.)

JEREMIAH: Well, has she ever given you any help?

NIFISA: Not that I know of.

JEREMIAH: (*Mocking Z.*) Thank you.

(*Z rises and points at JEREMIAH.*)

Z: Has *this* man ever helped you?

(*NIFISA shakes her head and is about to speak, but JEREMIAH appeals to the OMISSIONERS.*)

JEREMIAH: Objection!

(*Z raises a hand and sits down.*)

Z: No further questions.

(*OMISSIONER 1 turns to NIFISA.*)

OMISSIONER 1: Please step down.

(*OMISSIONER 1 nods at JEREMIAH.*)

JEREMIAH: Call Al Truitt. (*AL takes the witness stand.*) Mr. Truitt, what is your occupation?

AL: I'm an aid worker funded by various organizations. For the last two years, I've spent almost all of my time in Chad, where we assist Darfur victims.

JEREMIAH: Is that where you met Nifisa Abboud?

AL: Yes, we were at the same camp. Not long ago, the same magazine reporter interviewed us.

JEREMIAH: What have you seen?

AL: Sheer devastation, and on a magnitude I never thought possible. Over 400,000, dead Darfurians—men, women, and children. Countless villages eradicated. Millions displaced and overcrowding our refugee camps. Disease is rampant, claiming hundreds of lives every day. To help those in need, we simply don't have enough of anything—water, food, clothing, shelter, medical supplies. You name it. We're so overextended, we've got folks living under trees. *(Beat.)* And we have critical security problems.

JEREMIAH: What do you mean?

AL: When the displaced leave our camps for water or firewood, Janjaweed attack them. Men are castrated and left to die. Women are raped—a dishonor so grave in their culture that their own husbands no longer accept them. Darfurians are sometimes repeatedly victimized by the same culprits.

JEREMIAH: How have some people helped your efforts?

AL: There are mighty generous people out there. Of course, there are a few people who come to where the action is full time and work directly with victims. Others—many thousands—donate supplies or money. We're thrilled with anything we get—small, medium, or large. Those of us on the front line know that this kind of assistance alleviates pain.

(JEREMIAH crosses to MIRIAM.)

JEREMIAH: Before today, I asked you to check organizational lists of persons donating any assistance to Darfur victims. *(He points at MIRIAM.)* Did the name Miriam Allmon appear on any of those lists?

AL: I don't believe so.

(JEREMIAH looks grimly at MIRIAM. Then he gestures at Z with an outstretched arm to show that he is through with this witness.)

Z: What's the cause of the killing in Darfur?

AL: It's complicated. The problems have gotten worse over time. It involves hatred between two Muslim groups. One group, the people of Darfur for the most part, are farmers. The other group, which includes the Janjaweed, are nomadic

AL (CONT.): herders. Several years ago, the bottom fell out. Some Darfur farmers couldn't stand living in poverty in an oil-rich country. They armed themselves with guns and challenged Sudan's government. Sudan's president reacted with extreme force. He paid local tribal militias—now known as Janjaweed, or “devils on horses”—who burned the villages of Darfur, raping and killing as they went. The Sudanese government even used airplanes painted white—a color reserved by law to indicate humanitarian aid—to attack Darfur farmers and anyone trying to help them.

Z: So the people harming Darfur farmers are the Janjaweed and the Sudanese government?

AL: That's correct.

Z: Miriam Allmon isn't a Janjaweed, is she?

AL: I suspect not.

Z: And, to your knowledge, Miriam Allmon isn't an agent of the Sudanese government. Isn't that true, Mr. Truitt?

AL: Yes, that's true.

Z: Thank you. That's all.

(AL sits. JEREMIAH calls the next witness.)

JEREMIAH: Molly Given.

(She takes the witness stand. She smiles at OMISSIONER 2, who is self-absorbed. Then she smiles at MIRIAM, who returns the smile.)

Hello. What is your name, and how old are you?

MOLLY: My name is Molly Given. I just turned fourteen.

JEREMIAH: Were you part of a school project to help Darfur victims?

MOLLY: Yes, sir.

JEREMIAH: Please tell us about it.

MOLLY: In eighth-grade English class, we learned about the Holocaust. Our teacher told us it was important to study the mistakes of mankind so that we don't repeat them. She showed us an article about genocide in the world today, and that's when I found out about the people of Darfur. After talking about it in class, we decided we couldn't just sit back and do nothing.

JEREMIAH: So what did you do?

MOLLY: Our teacher found a project through her synagogue called "Dolls for Darfur," and we all voted to participate. We sold these doll pins. *(She holds one up.)* We earned almost five thousand dollars that went into a fund for Darfur.

(JEREMIAH points at the pin.)

JEREMIAH: May I have that?

MOLLY: Sure.

(She removes the pin from her blouse and hands it to JEREMIAH, who contentedly looks at it. He hands it to OMISSIONER 1, who gives a warm smile to MOLLY. JEREMIAH sits.)

Z: Have you ever met this lady?

(Z points at MIRIAM.)

MOLLY: Sure. The Allmons are friends with my family. I always see Mrs. Allmon at PTA meetings. She makes the best chocolate chip cookies—super chewy.

Z: Has she always been nice to you? And helpful?

MOLLY: Sure has. Almost like a second mom.

(Z smiles broadly at MOLLY. MOLLY and MIRIAM exchange smiles. Z looks at JEREMIAH, who nods and makes a sweeping gesture that indicates he has no further questions.)

Z: Thank you.

(MOLLY sits.)

JEREMIAH: We call Sarah Wisenberg.

(SARAH takes the witness stand. MIRIAM turns to Z.)

MIRIAM: How can this be?

(SARAH and MIRIAM survey each other. JEREMIAH addresses SARAH.)

JEREMIAH: Ma'am, please tell us who you are. *(SARAH continues to look at MIRIAM.)* Ma'am. *(No response.)* Ma'am! *(She looks at JEREMIAH.)* Your name?

SARAH: I am Sarah Wisenberg.

JEREMIAH: Where do you live?

SARAH: I live no longer.

(WITNESSES in the audience intone the following words in a stage whisper: "Never again. Never again. Never again.")

JEREMIAH: Where and when did you grow up?

SARAH: I was born in Vienna around 1910.

JEREMIAH: Why are you here?

SARAH: I am here to testify because I have experienced hate. I know how hate can swell in the heart of a man until it spreads through an entire country. I have lived—and died—in a concentration camp, and—

Z: Objection! With all due respect, this hearing has nothing to do with omissions relating to the Holocaust. This testimony is irrelevant.

JEREMIAH: If Your Omissioners will allow me some latitude, I will show a connection with these proceedings.

OMISSIONER 1: Proceed, but connect it up quickly.

JEREMIAH: Please continue.

SARAH: I would like to say that genocide is not a disaster that is natural. It is man-made and can be stopped. It can be stopped if people care enough about others. Elie Wiesel . . . Elie Wiesel taught us that the greatest evil in the world is our indifference. I know this to be true. It comes down to the actions of individual human beings. Everyone can do something. *(Beat. She listens.)* Did you hear that?

JEREMIAH: Pardon me?

(SARAH gestures broadly with her arms and hands as she cranes her head and neck to hear.)

SARAH: Sh. *(Beat.)* Listen. *(Beat.)* Don't you hear the moans? Moans and weeping from the people of Darfur. Echoes of the Holocaust. *(Beat.)* I thought we swore, "Never again."

(WITNESSES repeat, "Never again. Never again. Never again.")

JEREMIAH: One last question. *(He crosses toward MIRIAM.)* Do you know Miriam Allmon?

(He turns back to SARAH while gesturing at MIRIAM.)

SARAH: She is my granddaughter—the granddaughter I never met . . . until this night.

(WITNESSES repeat, "Never again. Never again. Never again." JEREMIAH looks piercingly at MIRIAM and then at Z, who indicates he has no questions. SARAH and MIRIAM continue to look at each other until the scene ends.)

JEREMIAH: Your Omissioners, the prosecution rests.

OMISSIONER 3: We are in recess.

(Blackout.)

Scene 6

(Lights rise to reveal the hallway outside the courtroom. BILL stands with INTERVIEWED MAN and INTERVIEWED WOMAN. A spotlight is brought to bear on each interview session.)

BILL: Sir, I'm with Channel Four Early Morning TV. May I speak with you?

INTERVIEWED MAN: I guess so.

BILL: What do you think about the killing in Darfur?

INTERVIEWED MAN: I think it's a damn shame.

BILL: Have you personally done anything to stop it?

INTERVIEWED MAN: What can I do? I'm one person. This is much bigger than me.

BILL: May I ask you another question?

INTERVIEWED MAN: No, I don't think so.

(He leaves. BILL crosses to INTERVIEWED WOMAN.)

BILL: Let me ask you a question, miss.

INTERVIEWED WOMAN: Yes?

(She fiddles with her hair and pushes it out of her face.)

BILL: What do you think about what's happening in Darfur?

INTERVIEWED WOMAN: It's a terrible thing. I've tried to keep up with the news, and I'm glad that some attention is being brought to the situation.

BILL: Would you say you share responsibility for not doing enough?

INTERVIEWED WOMAN: I have to admit that I'm often too wrapped up in my own life to even think about the people in a country so far away. I'm a bit embarrassed to say that my children seem to know more about what's going on than I do . . . but I did bring refreshments to a school assembly that addressed the subject, and then I helped my kids write letters to Congress.

(BILL mouths "Thank you." He turns to the audience.)

BILL: We'll keep you posted as developments warrant. Covering the Miriam Allmon trial, this is Bill Glib for your Channel Four Early Morning TV.

(Blackout.)

Scene 7

(Lights rise on the courtroom.)

OMISSIONER 1: The defense may proceed.

Z: We call Pat Powers. *(PAT takes the witness stand.)* Mr. Powers, what office do you hold?

PAT: My name is Pat Powers, and I'm proud to represent the great state of Texas in the United States Senate.

(NOTE: The state PAT represents may be changed according to where this show is performed.)

Z: Have you served on a committee studying the Darfur crisis for the last few years?

PAT: Yes, I have.

Z: What are some of the main obstacles to achieving peace in that troubled part of the world?

PAT: The United States is interested in doing all that we can as part of the world community. However, the United Nations is an entirely different story. The UN has been unwilling to step up to the plate. For instance, countries like China, who have veto power over UN decisions, have large financial interests in Sudanese oil, and they don't want to do anything to offend the Sudanese government. Diplomats from the European Union and Canada have been expelled from Sudan for "interfering with domestic affairs." The EU was invited back only after offering an apology, but this sort of thing goes on all the time.

Z: Despite pressure exerted by the United States and other powerful countries, do you believe that a peaceful resolution is close at hand?

PAT: For reasons I've already noted, I'm afraid not.

(Z turns to JEREMIAH.)

Z: Your witness.

JEREMIAH: Of course, you can't predict the future with certainty, can you?

POWERS: Of course not.

JEREMIAH: So the future actions of governments, groups, and individuals could suddenly change the course of events in Darfur for the better?

PAT: Ah, I suppose that's true.

JEREMIAH: It certainly is.

(JEREMIAH sits. Z gestures for PAT to leave the stand.)

Z: Dr. Melvin Bookley, please. *(MELVIN takes the stand.)* What kind of work do you do?

MELVIN: For the past thirty years, I've been a professor of psychology at the University of Texas. My specialization is the study of human response to traumatic events.

Z: Have you testified previously as an expert in human psychology?

MELVIN: Hundreds of times, including before this tribunal. I've written extensively on the subject in textbooks and professional journals; I'm regarded as authoritative in the academic community.

Z: Please tell the Omissioners about your most recent work.

MELVIN: I've been researching how Americans respond to genocide.

Z: What did you learn?

MELVIN: To put it in a nutshell, most people don't focus on what's happening outside of their own circles. It's the way the human being is wired. There's a process those in my field call psychic numbing that causes us to deflect our attention from genocides—it is a natural brain response, a self-protective device to keep us from being debilitated by grief and depression.

Z: So you're saying, when faced with genocide, it's not our fault that most people don't tend to act.

MELVIN: True enough. In a way, our brains do too good a job of protecting us from being overwhelmed.

Z: Can you give us an example of how this principle works?

MELVIN: Well, as humans, we're far more likely to identify with a single victim. Statistics from research show that. For example, who doesn't remember the outpouring of sympathy for baby Jessica, who was trapped in a well in west Texas? The tidal-wave of responses from others occurred because most everyone could easily identify with harm to a single child.

Z: Doesn't it make sense that the greater the number of lives affected, the greater our response would be?

MELVIN: You would think so, but research indicates otherwise. We seem to become immobile in the face of immense man-made disasters.

Z: By the way, did you teach Miriam Allmon at UT?

MELVIN: Why, yes. She was one of my best students.

(Z sits.)

JEREMIAH: Perhaps you taught her too well. How do you account for the fact that thousands and thousands of people—who probably didn't read your books—have found a way to do *something* to help those suffering in Darfur?

MELVIN: Certainly *some* people are capable of acting in response to genocide, but they're relatively few. The odds are against it—like actually overcoming a drug addiction.

JEREMIAH: So if some act and others don't, it really boils down to each individual person's strength of will, doesn't it?

MELVIN: That's an oversimplification. You can't ignore the science. The inner workings of the human brain help explain why the overwhelming majority or people are repelled by, rather than drawn to, acting when confronted with a genocide.

JEREMIAH: You've got to be kidding. We might as well trash the whole idea of personal responsibility.

(Z stands to object, but before he can, JEREMIAH waves at MELVIN with contempt.)

That's all.

(Z gestures to MELVIN to leave the stand, and he does.)

Z: Bobby Nabor, please come forward.

(BOBBY takes the witness stand; he smiles at OMISSIONER 2, but she is self-possessed. He smiles at MIRIAM, who returns the smile.)

Z (CONT.): Bobby, how old are you?

BOBBY: Ten.

Z: Where do you live?

BOBBY: Right next door to the Allmons.

Z: You mean right next to the house where Miriam Allmon lives?

BOBBY: Yeah.

Z: How often do you spend time with the Allmons?

BOBBY: Almost every day. Tracy (*He looks toward OMISSIONER 2.*) and I ride the school bus together. Then, after school, we take turns going to each other's house to do homework.

Z: Bobby, have you found Ms. Allmon to be a kind and giving person?

BOBBY: You bet. She bakes awesome cookies for our Cub-Scout troop. She stays up late sometimes to help me with my advanced math; my parents don't know how to do it. She's always kissing Tracy—and me. Sometimes she takes me and Tracy when she drops off food for the homeless people.

Z: Thank you, Bobby.

(*Z sits.*)

JEREMIAH: Bobby, you've heard of Darfur, haven't you?

BOBBY: Yeah.

JEREMIAH: Have you done something to help?

BOBBY: My whole family joined in a walk for Darfur. We had sponsors who promised to give money for every mile we walked.

JEREMIAH: Did you tell Ms. Allmon about the walk?

(He begins walking gradually toward MIRIAM.)

BOBBY: I think so.

JEREMIAH: Did she walk with you?

BOBBY: Um. I don't think so.

JEREMIAH: Was she one of your sponsors?

BOBBY: Not that I can remember.

(JEREMIAH looks grimly at MIRIAM and then at Z, who shakes his head.)

JEREMIAH: Very well, Bobby. Please step down.

(BOBBY and JEREMIAH sit.)

Z: May I have a moment, Your Omissioners?

(OMISSIONER 1 and OMISSIONER 3 nod. Z sits next to MIRIAM.)

Looks like we're about done.

MIRIAM: Maybe I should testify. If I could just speak to that little judge, then maybe—

Z: Probably not a good idea. I don't think the prosecution has made its case, and with you off the stand, we avoid Jeremiah's cross-examination.

(MIRIAM, unconvinced, is about to speak, but Z continues.)

You know, it's a timing thing. This hearing's really about what actions you took before, not what you say now. With Omissioners, sometimes less is more.

(MIRIAM relents. Z stands and addresses the OMISSIONERS.)

Z (CONT.): Your Omissioners, the defense rests.

OMISSIONER 3: Argument for the defendant?

Z: Miriam Allmon is wrongly accused. She is *not* responsible by acts of commission or omission for causing the tragedy in Darfur. She has never been to Sudan—let alone committed a murder, rape, or village-burning there. She has never had any association with those who are directly responsible: the Janjaweed and the Sudanese government. Nor has she ever interfered with any relief effort, as have China and France. Her offense, according to the prosecution, is that she has failed to do anything to alleviate harm she had no part in causing. The prosecution's condemnation goes too far. What cannot be relieved by countries like the United States and organizations like the UN cannot be laid at the feet of Miriam Allmon. On account of the way we're built, you can't single out Miriam Allmon for guilt. Forces responsible for the ongoing Darfur tragedy are much bigger than any single person. Because of human nature, genocides will be repeated in the future, as they have repeatedly occurred in the past: Stalinist Russia, Nazi Germany, Cambodia's Khmer Rouge, Serbian Bosnia, Rwanda's Hutus, Iraq's Hussein regime.

(After each name, a sharp, high-pitched drumbeat sounds.)

Because of the way we're made, the vast majority of people are paralyzed by horror on such a grand scale. For what she has in common with most of humanity, Miriam Allmon should not be condemned. Miriam Allmon is no more responsible for the Darfur suffering than for high interest rates, prison overcrowding, or global warming. Of all people. Of *all* people, why would this body brand Miriam Allmon? *(He places his hand on her shoulder.)* She is kind and loving. She cares for her family and her community. She nourishes the minds and bodies of those people like Bobby who participate in the Darfur relief effort. Restore her to her family. Humanity's mission has not been hindered by Miriam's omission.

OMISSIONER 1: What says the prosecution?

(JEREMIAH remains seated. He is engrossed in thought.)

JEREMIAH: The defendant must be held responsible, or humanity is doomed. *(He stands.)* After all, what is the response of humanity if not the response of each individual added together? *(He moves forward and stops at the lectern.)* You

JEREMIAH (CONT.): heard the evidence about what the defendant did to lessen the suffering in Darfur. She was aware of the genocide. (*Sharp, high-pitched drumbeats sound a cadence.*) She was capable of doing *something* to help, but she did . . .

(*He gestures; the movement is punctuated by a final drumbeat.*)

. . . nothing. (*He walks toward MIRIAM.*) The defense holds up the defendant as a model for human behavior, but inaction in the face of genocide cannot be an acceptable standard. It is instead a recipe for failure. If everyone imitated the defendant, none of the genocides mentioned by the defense would have ever ended. The defendant's approach mocks the cry of "Never again."

(*WITNESSES whisper, "Never again. Never again. Never again." JEREMIAH moves closer to the audience.*)

The defendant's obligation to act flowed not only to the Allmon family but also to the family of humanity, of which the Darfurians are a part. She has failed to meet that obligation. Although she has many fine qualities, we urge that you find the defendant responsible in this case and, in so doing, save us all.

(*OMISSIONER 1 and OMISSIONER 3 exchange words the audience cannot hear. OMISSIONER 2 listens intently. Z reassures MIRIAM.*)

Z: It'll be over soon.

(*OMISSIONER 2 nods, agreeing with her colleagues. They turn to MIRIAM. OMISSIONER 2 gestures for MIRIAM to stand.*)

OMISSIONER 2: Please rise.

(*Z helps MIRIAM up, and then he sits down. MIRIAM is very much alone. She awaits the judgment with great trepidation. OMISSIONER 2 stands and addresses MIRIAM.*)

We find the defendant, Miriam Allmon—

(*Chimes sound. Blackout.*)

Scene 8

(Lights rise on the Allmons' kitchen. JERRY and MIRIAM sit facing each other at the kitchen table.)

MIRIAM: And, then—at that very moment, all of a sudden—it was over. But I can't get it out of my head.

JERRY: Wow! That's a lot to digest. Where's a dream expert when you need one? Tell you what. We'll talk about it tonight when I get home, okay?

(He kisses her quickly on the lips and then walks backwards away from her.)

I've got to get to work. *(He looks at his watch.)* It's getting late.

(He exits quickly.)

MIRIAM: Yes, it is getting late, so here's what I'll do

(Blackout.)

Scene 9

(Lights rise to reveal the cast members standing in a semicircle.)

MOLLY: *Tikkun olam.*

AFRICAN DANCERS AND DRUMMERS: Repair the world.

(The gavel-drum sounds.)

PAT: Do unto others . . .

OMMISSIONER 1 AND OMISSIONER 3: . . . as you would have them do unto you.

(The gavel-drum sounds.)

BOBBY: Stop the hate.

NIFISA: If one is enslaved, . . .

AFRICAN DANCERS AND DRUMMERS: We are all enslaved.

(The gavel-drum sounds.)

AL: Am I my brother's keeper?

(The gavel-drum sounds.)

MELVIN: Justice. Justice shall you pursue.

(The gavel-drum sounds.)

SARAH: Never again.

(The gavel-drum sounds.)

JERRY, MIRIAM, AND TRACY: Never again.

(The gavel-drum sounds.)

ALL: Never again.

(The cast members turn as one and exit through the audience in dignified single file as African drums cover the exit. Blackout.)

Morning Light
Richard Karnatz



About the Contributors

Tricia Baker has taught in the classroom for twelve years. She spent last year teaching at Bossier Parish Community College, and she looks forward to teaching in McLeod, Texas, from 2009 to 2010. She holds a BS in English from Texas A&M University-Texarkana and a MEd from Louisiana State University-Shreveport.

Wendy Taylor Carlisle is the author of two books: *Discount Fireworks* and *Reading Berryman to the Dog*. Her work has appeared in *The Poets Grimm*, *Is This Forever, or What?: Poems and Paintings from Texas*, and *Letters to the World*. Her chapbook, *After Happily Ever After*, was the fifteenth collection in the *2River Chapbook Series*. She has recently finished a new chapbook, *The Storage of Angels*.

Gretchen Cobb was born in Washington, DC, and she has lived in Texarkana for fifteen years. She received her BS degree in deaf education from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. She is currently pursuing a master's degree in English from Texas A&M University-Texarkana. She has been teaching English and other high school subjects for sixteen years. Her hobbies include reading, interpreting for the Deaf¹, and coaching gymnastics. However, her number-one hobby is writing (she started keeping a journal at the age of fifteen).

Randall Cobb is a lifelong poet, an A&M graduate, a native of Texarkana, Texas, and a member of the Texarkana Poet Society. He won his first competition slam against the Hot Springs Poet's Loft team in 2001.

Tim Cotten was born in Texarkana, Arkansas, at the old Michael Meager hospital on September 10, 1947, and he has lived most of his life in Texarkana since then. He graduated from Texarkana College with a two-year degree and then earned his bachelor's and master's degrees in counseling psychology. He is self-employed in his family business, and he enjoys writing both prose and poetry. He plans to continue writing forever, trying to improve in every way in the field.

¹ The capital *D* acknowledges the *culturally* deaf community.

Doris Davis is an English professor at Texas A&M University-Texarkana and the director of the East Texas Writing Project. She enjoys playing the piano and spending time with her grandchildren.

Brittany Gillespie is an undergraduate student at Texas A&M University-Texarkana.

Melanie Gloster secretly wishes to work as a photographer for *National Geographic*. In the real world, she is pursuing a degree in English from Texas A&M University-Texarkana. Prior to returning to college, she worked as a fundraising and public relations professional for Opportunities, Inc., a local non-profit organization. Melanie's hobbies include spending time with her husband and children, lugging a camera to parts unknown, cooking, and studying Tudor history and culture.

Michael Hardy is an Assistant United States Attorney and a member of the Beth-El Players, a community theatre group in San Antonio, Texas.

Kathleen Kardon is a retired teacher and a long-time member of the Beth-El Players, a community theatre group in San Antonio, Texas.

Richard Karnatz was born in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, in 1961. After working as an apprentice for five female artisans at Calabash Pottery and Clayworks and sculptor Frank Williams in Fayetteville, Arkansas, he began his college career at the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville. He completed his schooling at the University of South Florida, earning a BFA with honors in photography. He has worked in New York and New Orleans as a studio manager. He currently lives in Texarkana, Texas.

Gary W. LaVigne is a native of New York, but his love of theatre has taken him to hundreds of locations in Europe and the United States to perform in plays, musicals, soap operas, and cabaret shows. With degrees from the State University of New York and graduate studies at Baylor University and Trinity University in Texas, he has taught speech and drama from the elementary grades to the college level. In Naples, Florida, Gary founded The Naples Players Children's Dramatic Academy (now known as Kidz Act). He also directed a traveling troupe of musical children known as The Prime Time Kids. When not writing and composing, one may find Gary appearing in plays or musicals or touring with his solo act (featuring a repertoire of over four thousand songs).

Susan H. Maurer has published six little books, and she has received four Pushcart Prize nominations. Her latest book (*Perfect Dark*) is available online at www.ungovernablepress.weebly.com.

Kourtney Maynard was born in Cincinnati, Ohio, where she also grew up. She currently resides in DeQueen, Arkansas, with her husband (Josh) and her dog (Sessel). She is a full-time student at Texas A&M University-Texarkana pursuing a degree in elementary education. (She would like to teach third-grade, fourth-grade, or middle-school math in the future.) She enjoys playing golf and visiting her family in Cincinnati.

Patricia Moore traveled around the United States and the Middle East before moving to New York in 1994. While in Greenwich Village, she lived in a senior center and participated in art classes. Her wonderful teacher always motivated and encouraged her talent. Although a late bloomer as an artist, she has always found creating art both relaxing and challenging.

Lisa Myers, a graduate of Texas A&M University-Texarkana, is a teacher at Redwater Independent School District who teaches eighth-grade English Language Arts and dual-credit English. She currently lives in Texarkana, Texas, with her husband of twenty-five years and her daughter, Morgan. Lisa recently completed her MS degree in adult education (with a specialization in English) at Texas A&M University-Texarkana. She enjoys writing poetry and creative nonfiction.

Rachelle Neuman graduated from the University of Incarnate Word with a bachelor's degree in drama. Some of her scripts include *Brown Pigs and Burgers*, *The Three Faces of Yitzhak* (performed in Akko, Israel), *Hattitude*, and the timely *Darfur Calls*. Several of Rachelle's original short plays have been performed in San Antonio, Texas, by the Renaissance Theater Guild and Steven Stoli's Theater. She has also directed original folk plays at San Antonio's Temple Beth-El for children of all ages. She enjoys working with her friend and musical partner, Linda Kaufman, who has a million tunes bubbling in her head. She thanks her husband, Sterling, who always encourages her to challenge herself.

Ann Atchison Nicholas is a graduate of Texarkana College (AA, 1975) and the University of Tulsa (BS, 1977). She lives in Texarkana, Arkansas, where she works as a ballet instructor, a county clerk, and a voter registrar. She volunteers for community service regularly and serves on the board of directors for TexRep, Texarkana's regional theatre organization. She has three children (Martha Grace,

Rebecca, and Hamilton) and three grandchildren (Anna Elizabeth, Ethan, and Lauren).

Anne Britting Oleson is a writer supporting herself by teaching high-school English in the mountains of Central Maine. Her work has been published in journals both national and international, including *The Valparaiso Poetry Review*, *The Cafe Review*, *The Cimarron Review*, and many others. Her chapbook, *The Church of St. Materiana*, was recently published by MoonPie Press.

Melba Peña was born in Brownsville, Texas, on January 17, 1949. She began writing poetry to help relieve the stress she felt while enduring difficult times. She also began painting with acrylics after she turned fifty. She made a late start with her creative endeavors, but she is passionate about her writing and painting. If she can reach one person, her efforts will have been worthwhile.

Christina M. Rau is the founder of Poets in Nassau, a reading circuit in New York. Her poetry has been published in magazines like *New Graffiti* and *Chronogram*. She writes an entertainment column about reality shows she should be ashamed of watching for *RealityShack.com*. Outside of writing, she teaches English at Nassau Community College.

Amber Smith received her BA in English from Texas A&M University-Texarkana in 2006, and she will complete her MS in education at Texas A&M University-Texarkana in 2009.

Kaytlon Smith is an English major at Texas A&M University-Texarkana. For her, writing and other creative projects are means for both self-expression and self-discovery. She enjoys reading, painting, and organic cooking. In addition to spending time with family members and close friends, Kaytlon also loves spending time in nature, especially while indulging in activities such as hiking, camping, and canoeing.

David Starkey had his first full-length play (*Soccer Moms*) produced in 2002 in North Hollywood at the Secret Rose Theatre. His *Julianne Caesar* premiered in June 2004 at *Teatro La Tea* in New York, and Lovecreek Productions staged *The Recovery Room* in New York in 2005. Starkey's most recent full-length script (a play about Emily Dickinson entitled *How Red the Fire*) received a staged reading at North Coast Rep in San Diego in the summer of 2005; the show was given a full production at Santa Barbara City College in February and March of 2007. In

addition to being a playwright, Starkey has authored several collections of poems and more than 400 poems for literary magazines. He currently directs the new Creative Writing Program at Santa Barbara City College and hosts a local television program (*The Creative Community*).

Dan Timoskevich is a writer, a musician, a video editor, and an avid backpacker. When he is not traveling around the globe, he makes his home in Texas.

Agnes Tirrito is employed by Texarkana Independent School District as a master teacher at Westlawn Elementary's Professional Development School, where she mentors teachers in training and teaches fourth grade. She is an adjunct faculty member at Texas A&M University-Texarkana, and she is a co-director for the East Texas Writing Project (a National Writing Project site). Her interests include cooking, photography, fishing, and the arts.

Christy Turner is a student at Texas A&M University-Texarkana who is currently working on her education degree in arts and sciences. She hopes to become an English teacher at the secondary level. She lives in Ashdown, Arkansas, with her husband and their three children.

Teresa Wilder holds graduate degrees in English and history from Texas A&M University-Texarkana. She currently lives and teaches in Fayetteville, Arkansas.

Glenn L. Wiley is a native of Ecorse, Michigan, a suburb of Detroit. He retired from the United States Navy in 1993 after twenty-one years of service. He has studied martial arts for thirty years, and he was recently promoted to the rank of third-degree black belt by Master Spydr Akau. Glenn thanks God for his health, his children (Jonay, John, and Joni), and his extended family in Detroit. Currently, Glenn writes poetry and provides security services in clubs throughout San Diego.