

Fall 2010 Literary Magazine
College of Southern Maryland

Connections



*Featuring an interview with
author Olga Grushin*



Connections

COLLEGE *of* SOUTHERN MARYLAND
Fall 2010 Literary Magazine

volume 18 number 1



Snowy Dawn by *Valerie Nyce*

EDITOR

Neal Dwyer

CONNECTIONS WEB SITE EDITOR

Paul Toscano

ASSOCIATE EDITORS

Sonia Fernandez

Mary Lohnes

David Phalen

David Robinson

Paul Toscano

EDITING ASSISTANCE

Brenda Jones

Kim Yellman

PRODUCTION AND DESIGN

Brenda Jones

Carol Wade

Connections is published at the
College of Southern Maryland in December and May.
Opinions expressed by the authors do not necessarily reflect
the official views of the College of Southern Maryland.

Please see the College of Southern Maryland web site
for submission guidelines at:

www.csmd.edu/Connections

Table of Contents

POETRY

Djinn in the Basement , <i>Tabor Elisabeth Flickinger</i>	5
A Lesson For My Daughter , <i>Rachel Heinhorst</i>	6
Boys , <i>Wendy Kibler</i>	7
The Photographer , <i>Janice McCue</i>	18
The Happy and the Sad , <i>Christopher Wilkins</i>	20
Loss , <i>Judith Allen-Leventhal</i>	29
First Woe , <i>James Michael Brinkmann II</i>	30
Flapper Mom Photo , <i>Roger Horn</i>	32

PROSE

The Reading , <i>Jackie Hahn</i>	9
Literary Sacrifice , <i>Janis Einfelds</i> (translated by Inara Cedrins)	15
Do You Remember, Charles? , <i>W. Elliot Smith</i>	22
One Hour , <i>John Brinkmann</i>	43

CONNECTIONS FEATURE

Interview with Olga Grushin , <i>Mary J. Lohnes</i>	34
--	----

PHOTOGRAPHS

Landing Geese , <i>Valerie Nyce</i>	cover photo
Snowy Dawn , <i>Valerie Nyce</i>	title page
The Lonely Giant , <i>Jessica Lima</i>	8
Noon , <i>William Poe</i>	14
Underwater , <i>Paul Toscano</i>	17
Sarge , <i>Paul Toscano</i>	19
Flock of Snow Gulls , <i>Robin Karis</i>	21
Oxymoron , <i>Allison Gragg</i>	28
Female , <i>Juliette Seymour</i>	31
Contrast , <i>Audrey Poe</i>	33
Shirts , <i>Thaddeus Wright</i>	42
Southern Maryland Life #2 , <i>Shannon Wilder-Miller</i>	47

Djinn in the Basement

Tabor Elisabeth Flickinger

A single breath slides across
The back of my neck
As I descend,
Each room is adorned
By the nimble work
Of connoisseurs of dust –
A delicate art disturbed by every
Shuffle of my feet.
Crates of glass bottles sit
Strung together, cobweb-laced.
Vials of turpentine, faded canvas,
Shells and polished stones,
Boxes of photographic slides –
All relics of past tenants.
In a room lined with shelves of lanterns
Deftly mottled with rust,
Eyes flicker.
Unless my flashlight
Glances off a metal edge.
But refractions don't laugh.
Lurking just beyond the rim of senses –
Hints of crackling embers,
The dark mirth of flint.
Like those who came before me,
I share this house
With spirits sprung from fire
As I was formed of dust.

A Lesson For My Daughter

Rachel Heinhorst

I need to make sure I tell her
to never fold a man's underwear
unless he folds hers, and she
needs to know that some men love
to cook spaghetti and hand make
the meatballs the way their grandmothers
did it with their moms and their moms
were smart enough to show their sons
the proper steps to take before
oiling the pan. I need to tell her
that men read books too and some of them
have *Goodnight Moon* memorized
and can lay in the dark next to a child
whispering it until they both fall asleep.
She needs to know that dusting is important,
but it is not what makes a good wife; she
needs to know that love does exist
and it is equal if those in love know
what equal means. She needs to know
that making money is important too, but living
is more important and there are some men
who will agree. I need to tell her about my mistakes
before she can never escape them.

Boys

Wendy Kibler

At recess, in sixth grade,
we'd shoot out from school like marbles
The girls would go make dandelion chains,
play jump rope,
hopscotch with rock markers found in the grass
where boys chased each other in PF Flyers
or, sometimes, after a rain, chased *us*, swinging fat worms from
pinched fingers

On the monkey bars, we practiced skin-the-cat,
legs upside down vs skirts and dresses and shoelaces dangling
over blacktop
We never fell
Boys hovered nearby like yellow jackets around jelly sandwiches,
eyeing our underwear

Fridays were marriage days on the playground
Girls who caught boys were married for the day
Whatever that meant
Whatever that means

Grown-up boys still play and chase and scare us,
Still thrilled by our underwear
And still, like their playground selves, come Monday,
have cooties again



The Lonely Giant by *Jessica Lima*

The Reading

Jackie Hahn

Byran Robertson, a pale, tidy man of 5 feet 8 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches, played by the rules and believed others should do so too. When his GPS warned him that he should not attempt to make route adjustments while driving, he tapped the “Agree” button wholeheartedly. Once he had input his destination and selected his favorite light classical radio station, he pulled his grey Toyota Camry out of his driveway, hoping to arrive at Western Michigan University in 54 minutes as the screen legend promised, but having added an extra 10 minutes for contingency. After a while, “Miles,” as Byran liked to call the British voice option, precisely enunciated his recommendation that they should merge onto Interstate 94 toward Kalamazoo.

At exactly 9:59 a.m., Byran knocked on the office door of Professor Frost, chair of Mathematics and Computer Science at WMU. He straightened his tie, repositioned his glasses, smoothed his thinning hair and cleared his throat before opening the door at the professor’s invitation.

“Ah, punctual as ever, Bryan!” said the professor, standing and extending his hand.

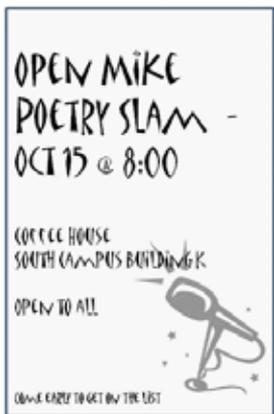
“Actually, it’s Byran,” said Byran, ignoring the proffered handshake.

A slightly puzzled Professor Frost glanced at the Taylor Coleridge Publishing order confirmation on his desk. “Oh, I’m so sorry, it says here ...”

“I know what it says,” said Byran. “It’s taking the company an awfully long time to update its records.” In fact, company records had been updated seventeen years ago, immediately after Byran had filed his legal change of name, but nobody ever seemed to observe the amendment—this included Professor Frost who had met Byran several times before. Byran cleared

his throat. “Anyway, Professor Frost, you had some questions regarding the custom IT textbook you commissioned?”

Had his life gone according to plan, Byran would have had his own name embossed in gold on the door of a sumptuous office in the Languages and Literature Department of the University of Michigan, or somewhere very much like it. Instead, after a 2-year stint at Southwestern Michigan Community College in his hometown of Dowagiac, abandoning his course of study before completing a degree, he found himself nearly 25 years later a sales representative for a company that peddled computer science textbooks to schools and colleges. As he walked the corridors of WMU towards the exit, closed classroom doors on either side, a hum of learned discussion emanating from each, Byran recalled his college experience. After all this time, he was still incensed at the partiality he had



encountered in his teachers. He thought it absurd that his passionate analyses of the metaphysical poets, the Romantics, the Victorians, had been met with such scorn, and that his own creative writing, his heart and soul on the page, had not received the adulation it so obviously deserved. Still partly absorbed in this outraged reflection, he glimpsed a poster tacked askew on the student bulletin board. “Open Mike Poetry Slam,” it boasted. He stared at the curled sheet of paper as though it were a dispatch from the nine daughters of Zeus. He took a small, leather-bound notebook and sharp pencil from the inside pocket of his sport coat and copied down the date and venue. He thought “slam” a rather vulgar way to characterize a contest of elevated language and passion, but Byran resolved to show the students of WMU that a fancy college education could not compete with half a

lifetime of worldly experience. And he would show his younger sister too.

“You’re going to do what?” his sister Sylvia demanded. “Don’t you remember what happened the last time you read your *poetry* at one of these affairs?” Byran detected the sneering emphasis on the word “poetry” and his hackles rose. Sylvia was a tax lawyer, the most prosaic of occupations as far as he was concerned, a graduate of the University of Michigan. She was referring to a writers’ workshop Byran had attended a couple of years ago, one that he believed had been infiltrated by political subversives who had had the audacity to point out that this was now the 21st century and that he should take his Victorian broom handle out of his ... Byran could not quite recall the last part.

“If that’s the way you feel, I’d rather you didn’t come,” Byran pouted.

“O come on, Byran!” Sylvia went on, her tone rather gentler. “Isn’t it time you stopped writing all these tortured apostrophes to Annabel? I mean where does it get you? Wasn’t it humiliating enough when she dumped you in the middle of a class, in front of the entire poetry workshop? Do you need the next generation to know all about it too? Look, you’ve suffered for your art. You dropped out of college because of her. How long are you going to keep this up, Byran? It’s been over 20 years!”

“Ever since Annabel passed away ...” Byran began.

“O for God’s sake Byran! She’s not dead. She’s married to a used-car salesman, in Detroit of all places, not some fucking kingdom by the sea!”

“Language!” Byran admonished her, and hung up the phone.

At 5:00 p.m. on October 15, once again entrusting his journey to Miles’s capable hands and refined tones, Byran steered the Camry out of his driveway. He had paid heed to

the advice to get there early. During the drive, he mentally rehearsed his poetry, lengthening certain pauses, adjusting the stress on specific syllables until he felt the cadences were perfect. He smiled at his reflection in the rearview mirror, settled his glasses, straightened his tie and brushed an imaginary speck of lint from the collar of his brand-new, crisply starched white shirt.

Arriving at the coffee house on WMU's south campus, Byran was rather disappointed to find it an even more casual venue than he had hoped, and one no more intimate than any local Starbucks. Still, he was pleased to see that he was the first poet to arrive and he printed his name in meticulous lettering at the top of the list. For what seemed like hours and was in fact almost 2 hours, he looked around the café as students gradually trickled in—a rather savage-looking bunch, he concluded. Most took seats immediately while a few added their names to the list of competitors, peering at the topmost entry and looking around to see if they could put a face to the name. Quite a few pairs of eyes had settled on Byran with curiosity.

Eventually, the “Slam” was declared open, some 25 minutes late as Byran observed rather disgruntled, and the audience was admonished regarding catcalls and the throwing of missiles. It was as well that Byran had been too absorbed in his mental preparation to hear these warnings as he took position in front of the microphone. He inhaled theatrically and began his recitation to a crowd of incredulous onlookers.

O wondrous Goddess of my Utopia.
Let not the ravage of my hyperopia
Dissuade you from partaking in the cornucopia
That is my love for you, my love.

Byran knew that nothing had changed since his own college days. He attributed the sniggers and heckling to the jealousy of inept rivals and shook his head at such youthful folly. Making a few mental edits to the poem—one or two rhythmic nuances that could be enhanced—he decided to submit the work, along with the ten other poems in the cycle, to one of the literary journals that had not yet rejected him. Adjusting his tie in preparation to leave, he noticed Professor Frost approaching him, beaming. In his head, Byran prepared a modest yet gracious response to his anticipated compliment, for Professor Frost was surely a man of culture.

“Bryan!” said the professor. “So fortunate to run into you. If you have a moment, I have a question about the addendum in the reprint for IT326.”



Noon by *William Poe*

Literary Sacrifice

Janis Einfelds

from *The Feast of Liars*, pub. 2009, Dienas Gramata, Riga

Translated by Inara Cedrins

Overall these lines didn't have the slightest meaning. It was necessary to mince with a knife stories, pages, stanzas, words and letters. Crossed out a line, and the little accidents dissolved, leaving an emptiness in the thoughts. There a quiet stream of smoke climbed into the air, and only a gentle shadow broke over the stone. The shadow of a word already showed disintegration. The torn off covers of books fluttered like wings, but the breathing died out, upon grazing the color of typography. Witnesses to the thoughts grew distant, wouldn't compromise at all, not with the hot rainbow, nor the scaly belly of the lizard.

I understood this in several ways, also as a false witness against myself. But have no fear, I am vigorous, I circle the hope chest because it has been gathered by her, my intended. I'll sacrifice books, only reply to my pain, my caresses. Like a slow snake of fire the pages will shrivel, descriptions and words. I'll catch up. That's partially due to love. No more ticks and checks, they've entered nonexistence, falling readily through my hands, and driven by the chill wind, rain falls on the fire. The burnt flakes whisper, flames smothered.

But I have dedicated books. The books die, the dedication remains. Squeezing my heart in my hand, after the work is done I hurry to her. No, she won't marry me. She won't sleep with me. Perhaps a kiss and spending Saturday at the sea. In the sand she took off her high-heeled shoes, and her stockings sank into it, I took off my shoes and thrust them into the pack, then

embraced my beloved with one arm. She didn't react. I gazed into the coiled waves of hair that fell over her neck. I devoured them, and my death became greater. We ate lunch with one spoon. We drank ale from the neck, smoked marijuana, grew dizzy together and drew apart. The attraction grew great, while I swam in rosy labyrinths of the brain.

Until, when the sweet smoke flooded away, I woke, leaving the beautiful dream, and looked around me. She wasn't there any more. Receded with the sea. I—alone. Drove off the sadness, drawing in the sand: that's for you, that's for you. Too bad that there weren't books to read, because I'd choked out deep thoughts in the very embryo. Grimacing I set a mouth organ to my lips, so that melody would give me wings and I could join the screaming gulls high in the air.



Underwater by *Paul Toscano*



The Photographer

Janice McCue

He steals men's souls.

"I take their pictures."

Exactly.

He takes them, without asking.

"They would pose if I asked."

So he strolls past strangers,
camera hanging from the strap around his neck,
his eyes alert to the stories of the city.
His arm swings naturally by his side,
then imperceptibly brushes against his camera.

Snap.

The old man waiting at the corner,
his gnarled hands resting on his walking stick.

Snap.

The tired eyes of the veiled woman pushing the double-seated
stroller,
heading home from the park.

Snap.

The resignation engraved on the face of the homeless man,
preparing himself for another day on his bench.

Snap.

He captures the souls of the city,
bringing them together to share their stories
from his gallery walls.

Snap.



Sarge by Paul Toscano



The Happy and the Sad

Christopher Wilkins

You can see it when you peel a carrot wrong.
Thin end to fat, or fat-to-thin? The first decision.

The first incision: bris the tip or hack the base?
Swish and flick the strong blade first, *maestro*,

but on the second stroke, down-and-in like amputating a thigh, the knife might skip or the fingertip catch and bleed, a total clash with the carrot-colored root-and-board thing you've got going on—

and now you have a problem. What to do? Whom to curse? Another smackdown with the knife,

dammit, makes it worse, plus now it stings, so: the dish towel? No, the stain'll set, but God,

where's a cold tap when I need it?
Don't shake, you'll get blood everywhere.

Oww, oooh, ahh—Water. Pressure.
Now I've still got to peel and I can't

hold or get the angle right it's like trying to screw in a Honda bulb but if I just use the

2nd knuckle to balance just, ah, thin-to-fat
I guess there, just like in life and then you know,

you're a sad man, a sad, sad man;
you're a sad, sad, sad, sad man.



Flock of Snow Gulls by *Robin Karis*



Do You Remember, Charles?

W. Elliot Smith

DID THE BULLDOZER OPERATOR intentionally leave that clump of brushy weeds standing like an island in a sea of newly leveled dirt? Dirt of a pale orange hue, marked by dozer tracks, lined with low ridges and cross-hatchings.

Perhaps he spotted the rabbit nest from his perch high on the seat of the dozer. I picture him now, a weary man, running the rumbling machine back and forth across that open space that began where the road ended after the Hendersons' house. That flat open space that stretched to the tree line where the ground rose toward the gravel pit. To the south was the swamp, to the east and north the few dozen ranchers that constituted our suburban outpost in the countryside outside of Washington.

He carefully averted the nest. I see him now, backing the dozer, lifting and dropping the scoop, a plume of sooty diesel puffing up from the vertical exhaust pipe. A tired man doing his job, spotting a clutch of bunnies in the tall weeds, his attention suddenly drawn by the mother darting off at the yellow beast's approach. Darting off toward the swamp where the high brush had not been cleared.

"Hey, look," Charles said, "a rabbit's nest!" He had almost tripped over the weedy clump. We'd been dashing over the razed area, throwing dirt clods at one another, using the idle dozer as cover. It was a war game with Nazis and American G.I.'s.

We gathered around the brownish tuft of low weeds.

"Wait, don't touch them," Charles cautioned, protecting the nest with an outstretched arm.

"I wonder where the mother is?" I said.

"She's hiding," he responded knowingly.

We leaned over the nest. Tad was there and Ricky Jones and Mark Woods.

The rabbits lay nestled in a pile, soft and brown and silent, pulsating with life, breath, and fear.

“What if the mother comes back?” Tad said.

“She can’t hurt us,” Ricky bragged.

“I bet she could bite,” I said.

“Shhh!” Charles whispered emphatically.

He cocked an ear toward the uncut brush, listening for any sign of the mother. He scanned the area toward the swamp with his piercing eyes.

“She’s abandoned them,” he said. “We’re going to have to take them in.” (The grave tones of a battlefield commander.) Grey clouds blotted the sky. From the direction of the gravel pit came the low rumble of heavy machinery.

“What’ll Mom say?” Tad put in.

Charles ignored him. “Lieutenant,” he said, “we need a container. See what you can find.” It was like the television program *Combat*.

“Yes, sir,” I said.

I, being number-two son, was always Lieutenant. My younger brother Tad was always Corporal.

I rose and went in search of something to put the bunnies in. I wound up back in our basement, emptying a cardboard box of some canned peaches my father had brought home, out-of-date samples from the food wholesaler he worked for. When I returned with the box the others were throwing rocks toward the swamp, seeing who could reach the open water where we captured bullfrogs.

“Put it here,” Charles said, gesturing toward a spot near the nest.

He knelt down.

“This must be done very carefully,” he whispered knowingly, as if he were a seasoned veterinarian. Charles was a master at interjecting drama into everyday events. He gingerly lifted the bunnies out of the nest, one by one, then placed them into

the cardboard box. They made faint, high-pitched noises and panted nervously.

“Corporal, we need some bedding!”

Tad began to rise.

“On the double,” Charles snapped.

Soon we were padding the box with the dried grass of the previous autumn, culled from the edges of the swamp where it lay battered by winter storms.

Then we took up the box, each holding a corner, and made our way out of the open space to where the road ended at the Hendersons’ house.

It was a Saturday morning. My father was somewhere playing golf. My mother was doing housework, as usual.

Do you really believe, Charles, that Mom and Dad knew they would die from the first, like you said yesterday?

And why are we, grown men and no longer young, discussing bunnies?

But of course it wasn’t about bunnies. It was also about the swamp and the gravel pit and the grey clouds blotting the Saturday sky. And about that open space that started where the road ended at the Hendersons’ house, where the bulldozers came every two years to clear away the brush, but the road was never extended, nothing was ever built. The swamp remained in all its sweet and silent majesty, the brush would grow back, rabbits and other wild things would return.

The bunnies transformed our house. We put the box in the bathroom, where from the window above the tub you could see over the back yard past the Jones’ house and toward the swamp. Mom was there with us, her warm presence responding to something in the bunnies. The bathroom with its hard surfaces and water, its plastic shower curtain and Mom’s shower cap hanging from the shower head, was now infused with something new and altogether different—something furry and warm and frightened, perhaps even trusting as we fed them milk from an

eye dropper. Mom threw herself into the project, digging in the closet for that eye dropper and warming milk on the stove. It was almost like Friday nights when Dad was out playing poker and we all made doughnuts together in the kitchen.

The bulldozer operator, weary or perhaps not, running the dozer back and forth across that space, the scoop lifting and dropping, clearing the brush and leaving hundreds of strange cross hatchings like the markings on a prehistoric tool, markings with a definite, if indecipherable meaning. And certainly he left that clump of weeds standing because he saw the nest, his attention drawn when the mother darted toward the swamp at the dozer's approach. He was a humble man, not an educated man, but a man with a good heart who saw the rabbit nest and wanted to give the bunnies a decent chance. A simple country man with the soil of the rich bottomlands of Prince George's County in his blood. He got down off the dozer. He went to the nest. He bent over to look at the small, fragile things.

"She'll be back," he said to himself through his chaw. "She'll wait til I'm gone and then she'll come back for 'em—sure enough. I can leave that spot til next week when I finish up over toward the swampy area."

He left that clump of brush standing, standing like an island in a sea of newly leveled dirt.

The bunnies had a smell. Sweet like all baby things. A milky smell, a smell of new flesh and fur and innocence. We hovered over them, stroked them tentatively and fed them warm milk from the eye dropper. We made sure the mongrel Scrappy did not come upstairs from the basement. A certain peace suffused the house. Dad didn't bark at Mom. Mom, instead of yelling that breakfast was ready, walked down the hallway to our rooms and placed a soft hand on our sleeping shoulders. We boys quit fighting with one another. Even Scrappy seemed more content than usual, lying on the dark blue linoleum downstairs near the fireplace.

The bunnies nestled together in the box, their breath quick and shallow, not seeming frightened anymore but only hungry. I wondered about the mother, where she was and whether she was looking for them, whether she cared.

“She won’t take them back anyway,” Dad said. It was received wisdom in Prince George’s County that a mother animal would reject her young once they had been handled by humans.

On Monday the dozer operator returned to work and we returned to school. We saw the big dull-yellow machine rumbling back and forth near the swamp when we came home, sending white puffs toward the blue sky. Mom had a snack waiting, cheese and crackers and tea, but we forewent that happy homecoming ritual and forgot also that Superman was on the tube. We even neglected Scrappy and went straight to the bathroom to look in on the bunnies. Out the window over the tub I caught a glimpse of the dozer working near the swamp.

The operator had been happy when he returned to his work that morning and found the bunnies gone. Surely he was happy. “Sure enough,” he said to himself, “she’s come for ‘em. Good thing I didn’t handle ‘em.” Then he climbed onto his dozer in that early April sun and started the engine. He began by taking out that clump of brush that stood like an island in the newly leveled dirt.

As the days went by the bunnies began to fade. Their breathing became more shallow, and they seemed to be hunkering down for the inevitable. They made fewer noises and quit taking milk from the dropper. We hovered over them more than ever with no idea what to do. What they needed was their mother, but it was too late for that—we had touched them, not once but repeatedly. The first one died that Thursday. Another one Saturday. As they dropped off one by one we carried them solemnly into the woods and buried them, some kind of unvoiced dirge playing within us.

My mother fretted.

“Poor little darlings,” she would say.

And again I thought of the bunnies’ mother. Where was she? Was she agitated, beside herself with worry, scouring the brush near the swamp, looking for her babies? Did she feel an irreparable sense of loss, like a part of herself had been taken away? Or was she now mating with a new sire, leaving the whole tragic episode behind her?

But what does it all mean, Charles? I mentioned it to our mother when we spoke on the phone the other evening. She remembered very little.

“Your father helped,” she said in her perky way.

“Really?” I said.

“Yep, he helped too.

Then she added, “They didn’t last long.”

The trees outside my window have gone yellow; another summer season is coming to an end. Perhaps it means that life is a very fragile thing, that all we have is one another.

I know that sounds corny.

The following summer we captured a bunch of frogs at the swamp. We put them in a five-gallon bucket that we filled with the back yard hose. That yard without trees—utterly open to the searing strength of the July sun. We went off into the woods—more war games. When we returned late in the afternoon there was no water in the bucket, only a strange matting of flattened, desiccated frog carcasses.

We were hell on animals.

Then there are other things I won’t write about, like the dirt road that ran past the swamp and on to the gravel pit, and the big cherry tree by the broken down fence, and Moore’s store...

Do you remember, Charles?

Do you remember?



Oxymoron by *Allison Gragg*



Loss

Judith Allen-Leventhal

Even
an earring:

One lost,
the pair is
incomplete.

The one left behind?
frantic, searching.

What
remains
after
such a loss
is also
loss.

Each is lost.
Both are lost:
the one gone
the one not.

Even
an earring.

First Woe

James Michael Brinkmann II

Blinding, piercing light so bright. Penetrating into the soul of
souls. Do you have the key?

Bright billowing haze and fog. A flood of choking blinding smog.

Congealing, Coagulating, Carefully forming a curious cavalry.

Crowns on heads of chitinous plates and silken hair.

Gnashing canines and grinding molars seeking satiation of their
desire for destruction.

Forsake the foliage! Hold your hunger for execution!

Affliction! Agony! Ache! And Anguish!

Bare those who bear the sign of signs and show them pity.

All others will feel the sting that spasms the soul and tortures
the mind.

Swelling sores of pox and puss. Maladies of misery.

But none can finish the job.

They will slash and slit and hang and shoot.

But none can finish the job.

Crying! Clawing! Cursing! Why would they praise such treatment?

Abaddon! Apollyon! One and the same.

Will guide the sickness and suffering only until the sixth is sound.



Female by *Juliette Seymour*



Flapper Mom Photo

Roger Horn

This ancient photo, Mom, I found of you
though you had kept it hidden. I begot
both proper you from memories and new
you, sexy flapper, made when Kodak caught
a farmer's daughter. Did the dry land teach
you flirting eyes may aid escape? Shy smile.
Do you have hope a lover's help will reach
to greener pastures? Bobbed red hair beguiles,
you learned from *Mantrap*, watching Clara Bow.
Do you have a flivver hidden? If I peek
out back perhaps I'll see a waiting beau
who will save you, but make my future bleak.
A paradox. If he saves you I'm missed.
He can't be Dad. Without Dad, I don't exist.



Contrast by Audrey Poe



CONNECTIONS FEATURE



Visiting Author Interview

Olga Grushin Finds Hope Universal

by Mary J. Lohnes

As a preview of her seminar and reading at CSM, celebrated novelist Olga Grushin discussed her new book, *The Line*, with writer Mary J. Lohnes.

Lohnes: Your first novel was compared to the Russian authors Nabokov, Tolstoy, Bulgakov, etc. How do you work toward your own vision when readers and critics have so many expectations for your work?

Grushin: There is a natural tendency, I think, to compare people writing within a certain literary tradition to what came before them, so whenever a new Russian-American author appears, especially one writing about Russia, you will often find him or her being compared to Nabokov or Tolstoy. Of course, it can be flattering, and I do indeed draw on the Russian tradition. I grew up reading the Russian greats, which formed my ideas of what true literature could do, and I pay tribute to the Russian classics in my books, whether openly or with hidden references and allusions. And, as it happens, Nabokov really is one of my greatest influences. At the same time, though, I strive to speak with my own voice, to accomplish something original, to develop my own brand of storytelling. I love the idea of linguistic inventiveness, and the stories that attract me tend to combine the universal emotional and philosophical dilemmas underlying much of the nineteenth-century Russian literature with the stylistic experimentation characteristic of the twentieth-century Western literature, a literature I've gravitated toward since coming to America two decades ago. I think that my straddling of two cultures and two languages has helped me form my own style, which is neither purely Russian nor American.

Lohnes: In *The Line*, you use a composite of three different Russian time periods (the repression of Stalin's 1930's, the hopefulness of Krushchev's late 50s/early 60s, and the stagnation of Brezhnev's 1970s) to create the setting of this novel. What kind of freedom did this composite setting offer you as a writer?

Grushin: It was very liberating not to be unduly constrained by facts. This allowed me to borrow from whatever history best suited my story. *The Line* is based on a real event that took place in Leningrad in 1962, when people waited in line for an entire year to buy tickets to a concert by Igor Stravinsky. I briefly debated the merits of writing an actual historical novel. But I understood very quickly that what I was most interested in was telling a sort of fable, free of time, free of place, a universal tale about human dreams and hopes. I saw it as a dark fairy-tale set in a Soviet dreamscape of sorts, a historical amalgamation to which the reader could hopefully relate without knowing much about Soviet history. And I think this particular story needed this kind of historical freedom, as there were plenty of narrative constraints I imposed upon myself in structuring the novel.

Lohnes: You have mentioned that your writing is greatly influenced by your father. Who or what are your other influences?

Grushin: My father was not a literary influence per se—he did write books, but he was a scholar rather than a writer. His is the deepest influence on my approach to work and life in general: I've never known anyone as uncompromisingly devoted to his vision, as hard-working, or as honorable. As for purely literary influences, Nabokov and Gogol come to mind, followed by Chekhov: I'm indebted to both the realist and the fantastical aspects of the Russian literary tradition. And, of course, there are many things outside of literature that I'm interested in and that find their way into my writing. In *The Dream Life of Sukhanov*, I used my studies of art to attempt writing a highly visual book which would, in some sense, merge the domains of literature and painting, while *The Line* draws on my early experiences with ballet dancing and my love of music.

Lohnes: In the beginning of the novel, an old man beckons Anna to the kiosk and tells her they are selling “whatever you’d most like to have. What would you like?” Could you talk a little bit about the power of dreams and hope in the novel?

Grushin: Hope is one of the two central themes of *The Line*, the other theme being time. At the heart of the novel is a family of four whose lives are drab, devoid of purpose or excitement. Then one day a mysterious kiosk appears in their neighborhood, with a promise of something wonderful, something new, and gradually all of them begin to long for a change. Ostensibly the kiosk will sell tickets to a concert by a brilliant exiled composer, but over time this coveted concert ticket comes to mean something entirely different for each of my characters. I tried to make them complex and multi-dimensional, of course, yet at their very core, their motives boil down to simple, universal human desires: Anna, the wife, wants her husband’s love and familial happiness; Sergei, the husband, dreams of creating eternal art; their teenage son Alexander longs for travel and adventure. The line itself is many things—a menacing mob, a Greek chorus, a sociological experiment, a means of killing time, and so on; but most importantly, it is a physical embodiment of human hope: the idea of waiting day in, day out, come rain or snow, for something you want, something you think you want, though the actual act of waiting, of interacting with the people around you, may change the very nature of your desire. *The Line* explores the many ways in which individual hopes clash against one another and change with the passage of time, as well as the ultimate power of hope to transform people’s lives.

Lohnes: The novel is written from five distinct voices, four family members each with their own perspective of the events, and the communal line. Which voice was the hardest to write and why?

Grushin: They all presented different challenges. The grandmother's voice was the most challenging from a technical point of view because it was indirect: she has no narrative of her own but is always overheard or even dreamed about by the others. Alexander's story allowed me more stylistic experimentation: he is prone to fantasies, not to mention a few episodes of drunkenness, and his frequent sojourns into the in-between states of consciousness were fun to write. Anna's story was the simplest, perhaps, and the challenge there was to make sure that her parts of the book were not proceeding at a different, slower pace than the rest. In general, whenever you have several voices there is always a danger that the reader will prefer one particular voice to the others and will want to stay with that character, so the main challenge, I suppose, was an overall one of making each voice distinct from the others and exciting in its own right.

Lohnes: Returning to the grandmother, how hard was it to blend her voice into the other stories so that it would complement rather than disrupt the flow?

Grushin: The grandmother, Anna's mother, is the only character in the book who faces back, not forward. Maya was a prima ballerina before the Revolution, and has secret memories of a beautiful, bright past, as well as a mysterious connection to the returning composer. I wanted to portray her as someone living entirely in the past, and a past frequently misremembered or perhaps misrepresented. The trick was to tell her story in a continuous fashion without ever giving her a voice of her

own: instead, her voice slowly seeps into the others' dreams, is overheard through the walls, is mistaken for a neighbors' radio, and so on, almost like the voice of a ghost. I loved writing her bits, loved the technical challenge involved. I don't think I'd ever be interested in telling a simple linear story in a simple linear fashion, as it would be boring for me as a writer. And, to be honest, when I write I don't worry about how challenging it might be for a reader—I do what feels right for the story. In Maya's case, if it seems confusing to the reader at first, it's intentional, as Maya is hidden from the other three family members as well: these sections are supposed to have the feel of dreams, surprising explosions of fairy-tale beauty and color in the midst of drabness. As the book goes on, Maya's story gradually does come into its own, becoming more and more crystallized.

Lohnes: Could you talk about how community and friendship come into play not only in the formation and rules of the line but in the politics of the society in the novel?

Grushin: There are basically two opposite ideas that I was interested in exploring in my book. One is a notion of human loneliness: we can never truly know someone, not even someone we live with, and each and every one of us is essentially alone. This premise is illustrated by my family of four. Each of them has his or her secrets; each of them sees the same events in an entirely different way. Their points of view, in the beginning of the book, are strictly segmented, isolated. Then the line comes into their lives, and with it, an idea of togetherness. I envisioned the line as a system of mirrors: each character is a distinct mirror reflecting his or her own corner of the line from his or her own angle; yet gradually the reflections begin to merge into a coherent whole. The boundaries between their voices start to blur; their lives become less isolated; they are forced to form

relationships, first with the strangers in the line around them, then, often through the mediation of these strangers, with each other. And of course there is a political aspect to the concept of togetherness, just as there is a political aspect to my exploration of change and hope. This is not just any community; it's a community that forms in the face of repression. On some basic level, this story, of hoping, of waiting, could have been set anywhere—say, waiting in line to audition for *American Idol*—but the Soviet setting allowed me to explore additional aspects of oppression, danger, and trust, and how the darkest times can bring out the worst and the best in ordinary people. Some will betray their fellow men; some will risk their freedom and lives to help one another. Historically, the sense of community among like-minded people, the whole subculture of the so-called kitchen conversations, was very important in Russia, and it helped people through the worst times in Soviet history. This background lends drama to the universal story in *The Line*.

Lohnes: You are a fairly young writer. Which of your contemporaries do you admire and wish people would read?

Grushin: To be completely honest, I tend to read writers long dead. Some years ago, I embarked on a rather ambitious project: to read the whole of world literature in chronological order. I am still perusing Virgil. At my current pace it will probably take me another two hundred years to get to the twentieth century. I do, of course, read a living writer now and then, and I can mention a few names: David Mitchell, Jeff Talarigo, and Paul Lafarge from my generation, and, from the older generation, John Banville, John Crowley, James Lasdun, and Steven Millhauser. These are all wonderful writers.

Lohnes: What are your current obsessions as a writer?

Grushin: I'm a very curious person by nature, and I'm always interested in many things on a daily basis, ranging from ancient Greek history to Florentine church frescoes. At any given time I will have a couple of subjects—a particular period in history, a particular artist, a particular place—that I find myself studying in depth. Some of these inquiries translate into writing, but most of them don't. I don't think I have anything that qualifies as a current literary obsession short of my passion for literature as a whole.

Lohnes: You mentioned in another interview that as a child you were prone to retrospection and on your thirteenth birthday had wrote, "My life is halfway over, and I've achieved nothing." What is your proudest accomplishment so far and what would you still like to accomplish?

Grushin: I'm afraid I still feel the same way I did at 13, except now my life really is halfway over. I suppose my proudest accomplishment so far is writing in a language not my own. But I would still like to accomplish absolutely everything. There are so many books I want to write.

Lohnes: What advice do you wish someone had given you when you started writing?

Grushin: None, really. I discovered everything about writing on my own, through reading and writing. I've never taken any writing classes or seminars, never been in any writing groups, never considered getting an MFA. I do like reading books on writing, to learn how others do it and what works for them in terms of craft and daily writing rituals. In the end, though, I'm glad to have made both my own mistakes and my own discoveries.



Shirts by *Thaddeus Wright*



One Hour

By John Brinkmann

The overlarge metal hanger they were in was stuffy and quiet. This was the day. Three weeks of intense training from four in the morning till after dark. Hot, muggy sweat-drenched days in Georgia. For about the millionth time he questioned his sanity. Joining the Army about six months ago, he knew it was coming, but up until this moment the idea of jumping out of an airplane at eight hundred feet hadn't been real.

He looked around at all the other candidates, wide eyes, pale faces, sweat, nervous grins. No one was allowed to talk, move, or stop "sitting at attention." "Sitting at attention" is a lot harder than you think with ninety pounds of equipment strapped to your crotch. The head-strap of his helmet was constricting and itching; the straps of the parachute crushed his shoulders and tugged at his crotch sadistically. His thighs ached from the metal bars of the ruck sack gouging into them. His feet were numb, his back ached, and he was pretty sure he was going to throw up.

Then they heard it. That low drone of a C-130. Unmistakable. It sounded like thousands of angry hornets beating around the inside of a glass jar the size of a house. The Airborne Instructors started barking commands, rushing around bellowing at anyone who moved or tried to look around. The sweat was pouring off him now. His breathing became more rapid and his hands were ice cold as the adrenaline raged through him. "WIPE THAT PIECE OF SHIT SMILE OFF YOUR FACE PRIVATE! WHAT THE HELL DO YOU THINK THIS IS!? A FUCKIN' CARNIVAL!?", screamed one of the instructors about three inches from his face. He'd eaten something with a lot of garlic for lunch.

They all stood and turned smartly and began the wobbling rush out to the newly landed cargo plane. Walking up the back ramp into the outrageous noise and heat was the most awe-inspiring experience of his nineteen years. The instructors shoved and cussed and jostled everyone into their places on the uncomfortable fold-down nylon seats. He was second in line to jump behind a Marine corporal on the left side. He swallowed hard as his knees pressed against the two soldiers in front of him. They interlaced their rucks and knees so everyone could squeeze into the cramped seats.

The doors closed. The Safeties were walking on the rucks and legs to get to the front or back, screaming and cussing over the engine noise. That noise stayed with him forever. So loud and deep you could feel it in your guts, vibrating and overpowering. The plane took off. No turning back now. There was never any turning back. If you quit you were done. Never to return, and always wondering. Intestinal fortitude they called it. Balls. Guts. Cajones. The whole army ran on it like fuel. Cowboy up and love the suck men! He still thought he was going to barf.

They flew long enough for some semblance of calm to take over. He felt strangely aware, every second was an hour, every minute an eternity. As he progressed in his career, he heard troopers call it “facing the elephant.” You knew something bad was going to happen but you stared it down and spit in its face and laughed.

ONE MINUTE! Cold sweat. Shakes. Adrenaline. Deep breaths. Don't hyperventilate. **OUTBOARD PERSONNEL STAND UP!** The soldiers across from him stood, white faced, grinning, folded their seats up and stood facing the back of the plane. **INBOARD PERSONNEL STAND UP!** He stood with the rest of his side and faced toward the back of the plane. **HOOK UP!** He clicked the end of his static line over the tow

cable hanging from the ceiling. Left arm up, holding the thick yellow nylon cable attached to his parachute. Right hand over the small, almost dainty reserve chute right over his belly button.

THIRTY SECONDS! The doors opened with an explosion of light and wind. Somebody behind him screamed. His heart was jack hammering in his throat, he could see out the door at the ground below. Little trees and roads and a lake... so small it didn't seem real. **STAND IN THE DOOR!** The Marine in front of him handed his static line off to the safety standing next to the door and stood, hands over his reserve, left foot forward, right back and faced the elephant.

He moved up to be ready to go as soon as the Marine threw himself out the door. The little stop light above the door went to yellow...Don't hyperventilate. Hand off the static line cleanly. Kick your legs out. Head down, legs locked and at an angle to your body. Count to four and feel the opening shock..... **GREEN LIGHT GO!** Training took over. Slow motion, the Marine took two steps and he was knees in the breeze. He quick stepped forward and handed his static line to the safety, turned smartly to the right and threw himself out of the plane.

Light. Wind. Ears popping. Green, blue, green. Then his chute opened. He looked up at it and saw the risers twisted. He scissor kicked until they were straight. No holes, everything looked undamaged. Then he looked down. The realization that he was eight hundred feet in the air floating on a round, green, army, made-by-the-lowest-bidder parachute hit him like a ton of bricks. He checked his spacing with the rest of the jumpers, all good. The ground was rushing up. He pulled the cord to drop his ruck down a hundred foot lowering line, then unhooked his weapon case and slid it down after the ruck. He was drifting right with the wind so he reached up and pulled the left front and back risers down in a chin up motion and prepared to land.

Feet and knees together, bent slightly. He braced himself... Impact. He rolled into the fall, kicked his feet into the air and lay there.

He looked up as his green silk canopy drifted down to his right gently and gave way to more chutes and blue sky. So blue that sky. He laughed, deep and loud and long. Until the Instructor on the ground ran up to him. "HEY PARATROOPER! WHAT THE FUCK ARE YOU DOING ON THE GROUND!? GET THE FUCK UP PARATROOPER!" Paratrooper. He'd called him a Paratrooper. He felt his chest swell and his whole body tingle. He jumped up, harness and all screaming "AIRBORNE!" and started to collect his equipment under that blue Georgia sky.





Southern Maryland Life #2 by *Shannon Wilder-Miller*

Contributor Notes

JUDITH ALLEN-LEVENTHAL is a full-time faculty member in CSM's Languages and Literature Division.

JAMES MICHAEL BRINKMANN II is a sophomore at CSM. Before attending CSM, he was a paratrooper in the United States Army. While in the Army, he experienced a terrible accident. To deal with the emotional adversity, he has turned to poetry.

JOHN BRINKMANN is but mad north-north-west; when the wind is southerly, he knows a hawk from a handsaw.

INARA CEDRINS is an American artist, writer, and translator who went to China in 1998 to learn to paint on silk, and remained for five years to teach writing and lecture on art. In 2003, she went to Nepal to study the technique of thangka painting. After the king's coup d'état in 2005, she relocated to Riga, Latvia, started a literary agency called The Baltic Edge, and taught Creative Writing at the University of Latvia. She returned to the US in 2006 to live in the Santa Fe/Albuquerque area. The Chicago Artists Coalition awarded her an artist's residency at the Merchandise Mart from April through October 2010, during which she continues to work on her own writing and translations.

TABOR ELISABETH FLICKINGER is a poet who recently moved to Maryland from Virginia. She currently resides in Baltimore, where she works as a doctor. She makes time for her creative life and enjoys writing poetry.

ALLISON GRAGG is a student at CSM and an aspiring photographer. She has taken photography for four years and plans to become a photojournalist some day and work for *TIME* magazine or *National Geographic*.

JACKIE HAHN is an adjunct instructor of English and violin for CSM, and is also assistant concertmaster of COSMIC Symphony. Her daughter is a chef and her son is currently a CSM student with a view to becoming a lawyer. This could be very handy in supporting what she anticipates will be her misspent dotage.

RACHEL HEINHORST is a graduate student, attending Goddard College in Vermont for an MFA in creative writing, an instructor for CSM, and a mother of three super intelligent children who are currently writing the world.

ROGER HORN is a professor emeritus who taught poetry for 40 years without having a clue how difficult it is to write. Finally, retired, he tried it for himself and learned.

ROBIN KARIS lives in Maryland and enjoys photography and writing. She also enjoys working on her family tree, in the hopes that she'll find a relative who lives in a land far, far away, who maybe has a castle she can visit.

WENDY KIBLER, an adjunct instructor in CSM's Languages and Literature Division, has read her poetry at various venues, including libraries, bookstores, coffee houses, and colleges. She has been a featured poet in Annapolis and Leonardtown. In 2009, she received an honorable mention in the *Baltimore Review's* annual poetry competition. She has had the honor of studying under Lucille Clifton. Currently, she is working on a novel.

JESSICA LIMA is a writer, photographer, and painter from Honolulu, Hawaii. She received her bachelor's degree from Portland State University. Over the last seven years, she has lived in six different states across the country. As an avid traveler and lover of adventure, she one day hopes to live in Spain. Her work can be found through her blog at <http://thewhitefoxes.tumblr.com/>.

MARY J. LOHNES is a writer for CSM and several other publications and organizations. In addition to writing, she is interested in urban sustainability and food production/availability issues.

JANICE McCUE is a professor in CSM's Mathematics, Physics, and Engineering Division.

VALERIE NYCE has worked as the CSM photographer for more than ten years. As a long-time resident of Charles County, she has come to appreciate the beauty of the surroundings, capturing light and nature as it presents itself.

AUDREY SUNDANCE POE was born in Calvert County, on May 6, 1997. She plays the piano, guitar, and cello. Music is her main interest, and some of her favorite bands are MGMT, The Doors, and Vampire Weekend.

WILLIAM POE is a Maryland home improvement contractor and part-time oral historian for Calvert County. In 2009, he was awarded the Calvert County Public Education Award for his book, *African-Americans of Calvert County*. He is the creator of "Voices of Calvert County," a local cable program which shares the stories of local African-Americans. He also directed and produced the documentary film, *The Life and Death of Sharecropper Enoch Tyler*. He has published essays, poetry, and photographs in local magazines and periodicals.

JULIETTE SEYMOUR's passions have always been reading and writing. When she hit high school, she got another passion: photography. Since then, her idea for what she wants to be has shifted slightly to a photojournalist, but the idea of being an author still is there. "As long as I can help one person in my lifetime, I know I've done something. And that is all I could really wish to achieve with my work," says Seymour.

W. ELLIOT SMITH's eco-fiction novel, *Tanaki on the Shore*, was published in 2006 by The Portal Press of Washington, DC. He has since completed a second novel and is revising a third. He continues to produce short fiction and revise earlier stories. He now resides in Montgomery County but grew up in Upper Marlboro.

PAUL TOSCANO has been on the staff of CSM since 1980. As a certified professional counselor, he looks for the human element and emotion in his photography. His photographs have been published in *Southern Maryland: This is Living, Agora*, and previous editions of *Connections*.

SHANNON WILDER-MILLER is a second-year student at CSM, currently majoring in criminal justice. Additionally, she is also a phlebotomy student at CSM. She is a lifetime resident of Calvert County and a single mother of four children. In her "spare time," she enjoys the outdoors, karate, coaching children's soccer, and photography.

CHRISTOPHER WILKINS is a professor of English and communication at CSM, is an Episcopal priest, and wears hats.

THADDEUS WRIGHT states that photography is more than a hobby for him—it's a passion—the way he captures and celebrates life. He studied photography at CSM for four years, and owes a great deal of his success to his instructors George Bedell and Ben Laurie. His work has appeared in previous editions of *Connections*, has been featured in the Student Juried Show for the last three years, and he has several pieces in the permanent collection at the college.

