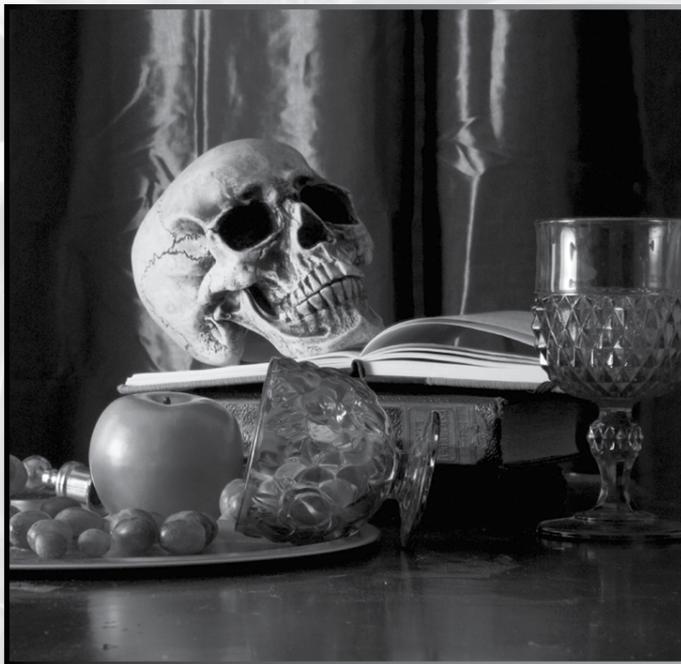


Connections

Fall 2011 Literary Magazine

*INSIDE: Connections Feature—
A Candid Discussion with Poet Jehanne Dubrow*



Connections

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Skull and Goblet *by Lisa Presgraves*

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*“So thanks for taking the time to create a wonderful publication
that adds a little more magic to the world than it had without it.”*
—Julian Cooperman

The Breeze at the Top

Rachel Heinhorst

Waiting my turn to see
what comes at the top
of the Ferris wheel, I think
of the girl two cars down
who must be waiting
for him to reach for her hand,
believing he is the one;
the father below them
with his son, maybe four,
believing this to be a memory
his son will remember;
the four teenage girls
in their bikinis looking down,
pointing out the tan shirtless boys
they'd like to walk with to the beach,
believing romance comes this way;
the family: mother, father, son, daughter
pretending to fly, taking each child
to their next excited desire, dropping them in;
the woman alone, scanning it all
watching each car empty at the bottom,
knowing they all felt the breeze at the top.

Wet Work

Chris Rubenstahl

Joe Brennan's thick fingers were wrapped tightly around a can of Budweiser as he watched one of his daughter's killers laughing and whooping it up at the bar. The Brass Rail was one of those hole-in-the-wall places, a ramshackle affair that stank of sweat, cigarettes, blood, and mold, and was prone to flooding when the swamp out back got too much rain. Country and classic rock blared from the jukebox, drowning out the football games playing on multiple HD screens over the bar. Joe didn't seem to notice as his can buckled and cracked under his hand, the foam and beer spurting out like blood. He had to be patient, he told himself. He was almost fifty years old now, and he had never truly learned the value of patience. Caitlin deserved justice, and justice was nothing if not patient.

The man sitting at the bar with his two buddies had a name, but everyone Joe had talked to just called him Weasel. "Because he's weaselly," a cabdriver had shrugged when questioned about it. The name fit, Joe thought. The man's shoulders slouched forwards as if he had scoliosis, the image completed by a thin, hooked nose and what his wife Andrea would have jokingly called a "child molester moustache". Joe grimaced at that. Once, long ago, when he was still "Mount St. Brennan" on the football field, he would have made that same joke himself. Now, it seemed like a bitter, cruel final joke at Caitlin's expense. Weasel was the first of four, the first one to brag about how he had killed a sixteen-year-old girl. No one had believed him, though, just like they hadn't believed his stories about having once been a Navy SEAL, or about how he had met (and fucked) Scarlett Johansson behind the ABC liquor store one time. Andrea would have had a field day trying to figure out what, precisely, Weasel's issues were.

Even thinking of Andrea made him reconsider what he was about to do. She knew him well enough to know what he was planning. It was hard to read her, though. *It won't bring her back*, Andrea had told him, her voice cracked and accusing. He knew she was right. She was always right. Still, some things just couldn't be ignored, no matter how much you tried to shut their cries out. Andrea hadn't said anything else, at least not with words. Just before Joe had left, though, he had looked back. Andrea had looked at him, eyes wet with tears but cold as steel beneath. She had stopped just short of telling him not to do it. She hadn't begged him to reconsider. Joe knew she had been thinking about Caitlin's last moments of life. Just like he was right now. Just thinking about what had happened, about how Caitlin had suffered, was enough to keep his anger boiling.

Joe had spent an hour sizing up Weasel and his two buddies. Weasel himself would be no problem. The one on Weasel's left, the albino in the wifebeater, was a meathead. Maybe a juicer. Pecs the size of shoeboxes and biceps that an ordinary man couldn't wrap a hand around. No core strength, though, and his legs were rubberbands. Joe could hear his DI back on Parris Island in his head. *Jesus, those aren't legs! They're fucking garden hoses!* The second guy, the wannabe ladies' man with the shirt unbuttoned, was wired, although Joe couldn't have said what he was on. Meth or coke, most likely. The man's moves were whip-fast and just as dangerous. His corded muscles and scarred hands spoke of combat training although Joe wasn't expert enough to discern a style just from watching him duck and dart about the dance floor. Still, all of them had been drinking beer since before Joe had walked in, and in the hour he had been watching them, none of them had gone to the head.

Joe tensed himself as he watched Weasel get off of his barstool. He had hoped they wouldn't, but the two men got up with him and followed him around the pool tables to the

bathroom in back. That would make it harder. Not to commit the act, but to walk away afterwards. The killing muscles were still there, buried under a layer or three of fat, but still aching for blood. It would be hard to keep from killing the two friends instinctively, but Joe was nothing if not precise. He had considered himself a surgeon, not a butcher, even if both the Republican Guard and the Taliban had once had massive bounties on his head.

Joe stood up, the jukebox silent for a moment between songs. Del Shannon's voice rang out as he made his way past the row of pool tables. *As I walk along I wonder, what went wrong with our love...* The bathroom door was still open, the meathead holding it for the addict and Weasel. Icewater flowed through Joe's veins. He hadn't killed anybody in twelve years, and a line of frost ran down his spine as he realized that he was looking forward to getting back to it. The good little Catholic part of him, the man who had once been an altarboy, was appalled at the thought, but the killer was stronger. Joe nodded to the meathead, who held the door for him. *Polite little scumbag*, Joe thought as he stepped into the bathroom. Weasel was already at a urinal, swaying back and forth like his namesake as he yelled to the addict sitting in the stall. The meathead stood at attention, like he was a soldier, guarding the door.

Weasel's eyes went wide as he turned to see Joe. "Oh, shit, it's y—" Weasel never got to finish his sentence. Joe grabbed the back of his head and slammed it into the urinal's chrome top with a skull-splitting CRACK, then rammed it back in again for good measure. Teeth splintered and blood blossomed across the white tiles behind the urinal. Weasel uttered a shrill wheeze, then slumped forwards, urine spilling out over his pants and the floor as his face dropped into the urinal bowl. The meathead tried to rush him, but Joe's engineer-booted foot pistoned out and caught him in the midsection. Something popped inside the man at the point of impact. His face went red, bulging like a

sausage as he grunted and tumbled to the ground. The door to the stall exploded outwards and the addict was there, his hands struggling mightily to keep his pants up. He didn't even get a chance to say a word before Joe's ham-sized fist cracked him in the teeth. Joe grabbed the stall door and slammed it on the juicer's hand before punching him in the teeth again, sending him unconscious to the floor.

Del Shannon was still singing; the music had drowned out all the sounds of the fight. *I'm a-walkin' in the rain... tears are fallin' and I feel the pain... wishing you were here by me... to end this misery...* Joe stepped back, breathing heavily as he looked at the three men. One unconscious, one groaning in agony, the other probably dead. Joe wasn't taking chances that he was simply injured, though, and he straddled Weasel's corpse, the man's face still buried in his own urine. Quick, easy, and efficient. Weasel's body shuddered, his foot twitching when Joe gripped his head and twisted it with a sound like dry branches being broken so Weasel could look up at the ceiling tiles. It was all over in less than fifteen seconds.

Not entirely over, Joe thought as he stepped over Weasel's corpse, looked at himself in the mirror and adjusted his collar and shirt.

One down, three to go.



View by *Paul Toscano*

monochromatic

Joanne Van Wie

either the world is becoming
a monochromatic gray
or i am
fading
again into my own ear music
mumbling under-used words
like *achromatopsic* and
no
until i believe
in them.

in your tongue.
in your quiet.
you will miss the innuendos
and the echoes of
the floorboards giving.
in

this dream
you will enter
through a horizontal line-
through a gray sunset
looking.

at my insides
you will whisper
disappearing words
that i can't pronounce
can't understand
like *love*
and *always*
and and...



Untitled by Allison Gragg

Larry In Memory, August, 2011

Kate Richardson

Your summer blue sky
Holds a cloud much too heavy
And strong to ignore

Loaded brush; bold strokes
Call leaves to startled life
leaping through the fall

Winter trees appear
In grey watercolor haze
Where are the deer?

When you went abstract
Our eyes were nailed by colors
To the doors of spring

We walk round and through
The space you filled with laughter
So many seasons

The Sinking of Gustav

Brett Worrell

Captain Gustav stood by the cabin's rear windows, with his fingers tangled in the curtains. Those curtains sent his thoughts along the river to his wife and his six-year-old son. He knew that they awaited his return. He loved watching their faces as the ship slid into the dock. However, the ship was twelve hours overdue. Only one person would await the ship's arrival now, and he wouldn't look pleased. The dock master wouldn't want the reasons they'd give why they arrived late.

A cough and movement behind him brought his mind back to considering the present situation. The river swirled about the experimental frigate's hull. With all that movement, the ship remained mired without a hope of forward progress. Oars sat on the below decks, unused and useless. The sails hung limply on their yardarms. Reflecting the dark sky above, the water swallowed the lights of the lanterns and stars. It only gave back the black of night. Drawing a deep breath, one could hardly detect the ship's briny scent. A chill enveloped the night air worse than a blizzard at sea. That disturbed the captain since winter was months away. Turning from the window, he nodded to his officers that had gathered in the cabin. They each held a harpoon. Gustav saw frowns on all his officers' faces.

Gustav walked across the cabin and looked out the door's small window. Things hadn't changed since his last glance. The crew had gathered toward the center of the frigate's top deck, shivering, watching. As he watched, a quiet hum rose from the center of the huddled mass.

"Quit that," someone hissed but the humming grew louder. The men squirmed, making the mass of flesh writhe in discomfort. However, the ship remained silent. The quiet night was broken only by the humming. A yelp of pain and

quiet darkness enfolded the group again. Water rippled off the forward port side. One man, stuck on the outside, eased over to the rail and looked into the water. A piece of hardtack fell from his pocket into the water. The center of the ripples moved toward the ship. Then they disappeared. Moments later, the hardtack disappeared below the water's surface. The man ran back and squirmed as deep as he could into the gathered men. As a light thump hit the hull of the frigate, the crew gasped. Stillness returned as Gustav heard murmurs sweep through the group.

“*Dios Mio!*”

“It comes for us.”

“Could it be just a rock?”

“It's your fault.” A hiss quieted them again. Captain Gustav pulled his shoulders straight as he looked at his officers. He'd seen enough.

“It's time,” Gustav said. He snatched the harpoon from beside the door. Hoping to flee the ripples, the crew drifted toward the cabin and the aft of the ship. Their approach stopped when the captain kicked the door open, slamming it against the cabin wall.

Captain Gustav stalked from the cabin with his fellow officers. He led the armed combatants to the ship's bow. Even as the officers reached the frigate's bow, the stern started sinking. Wood creaked as something pulled it beneath the water. As the deck's slant grew, men lost their footing, pushing the mass of humanity along the deck. Gustav and his officers continued their travel, unfazed. With harpoons pointed into the water, they stalked along the frigate's railing, watching the water as they moved. They heard a hiss rise from the ship's hold as a hole opened and allowed water to flow. The crew screamed and ran, moving to the closest thing they could grab. Death grips held the solid objects as the ship continued to tilt toward the stern.

Reaching the middle of the ship, Captain Gustav attached a rope to his harpoon. He hurled it into the ripples. The ripples stopped. Whatever held the ship released its hold. As the ship leveled out, its bow dipped below the water's surface and sent a small wave across the flat surfaces. The deck hands scrambled to gain better footing while the officers stalked past them to throw their harpoons. Each officer found a steady spot, planted his feet, and threw. Finding a spare harpoon near the tiller, the bosun threw an additional salvo into the water. With all the harpoons thrown, the officers grabbed the attached ropes. They dragged them to the center of the ship. Captain Gustav fought against the beast as he dragged his rope to the sail's central turnstile. They didn't take the time to disconnect the limp fabric as they lashed the ropes to the drum. With the ropes attached, the officers pushed on the turnstile's arms. Crew members grabbed the empty arms between the officers. When they pushed, the sails rose to try to catch what little wind they could find.

The ship seemed to return to the stillness it endured before the captain and his officers appeared. Finally, the ropes lost their play and snapped against the deck's wet wood. Under such pressure, the ship lurched from the pull against her mainsail mast. More men scrambled to the turnstile. Other shifts scrambled from below, all trying to help secure the ship. Wood moaned and bowed under the increasing stress that the men and creature put against it. With another lurch, the bow of the ship dropped below the surface of the water then shot high into the air. Men screamed as they flew off the ship and fell into the river. Planking along the side of the ship snapped.

“Prepare the lifeboats!” The second lieutenant yelled.

“Secure those lines!” Another command officer grabbed men and tossed them toward the sail lines. No one heard them over the rush of the water and the damage to the ship. Half the planks on the port side shattered in one tug of the ropes.

The ship could take no more. It burst apart from the pressure. Its deck heaved as the mast snapped and fell astern. The officers' cabins collapsed under the weight of the falling timber, crushing the first officer within it. Crew members gave up trying to remain on the ship and dove over the sides. Any planks that remained attached to the ship's frame sprang from their enslavement, falling into the water in many shattered pieces. Changing directions, the ropes started to circle the dying ship. Every man in the water swam away from the ropes.

The remaining officers drew their pistols and fired into the water. Beneath their feet, the deck broke. Splinters shot in all directions, impaling the captain's mate through the thigh before he fell into the water. Blood splashed Gustav. It added to the chills running through his system. Fleeing the dying and destruction, he ran toward the ship's bow.

The ship lurched and he started to fall toward the deck. His teeth didn't want to sink into the deck's wood. Reaching out, Captain Gustav grabbed a hanging rope. He hauled himself up to the lowest yardarm of the ship's forward mast. His arm wrapped around it but he didn't feel comfortable. Wild swings kept him from aiming his pistol. Growling, he shoved it into his waist band. This changed his momentum so he had a more circular swing. It loosed his grip on the yardarm until only his fingers gripped the wood. His fingers started to slip. The captain couldn't find a way to stop his swinging. It took four tries, but he managed to hook both arms over the yardarm. Trying to calm his rapid breathing, he checked his surroundings.

Lifeboats floated on the water's surface around the sinking vessel as the crew managed to escape. Bodies floated among the broken planks, which caught Gustav's heart in his throat. Too many good men died today. He hoped that their families forgave him, as he wouldn't forgive himself.

The ship's front half started to collapse and water poured into the open decks. As the forward mast continued to sway,

Captain Gustav searched for a way to avoid his fate. He knew he had little time as the mast swung down toward the water's surface. Open water appeared to his left. He hesitated and the mast swung away from the water. On the next swing, his fingers released their hold. Gustav fought the urge to flail. His arms crossed his chest and he pointed his toes toward the water. It didn't matter as it still jarred him as he struck the surface.

After breaking through the surface, he sank beneath the level of the failing hull. He turned to see what killed his ship. His eyes grew wide and he exclaimed his surprise. Water made him splutter and kick to the surface. On top, he continued to splutter. It was impossible. As he calmed, he found his bearings and swam for the nearest shore. People needed to know. He'd gotten a short distance when he felt something grabbing at his shoulders. Fearing what killed his ship, Captain Gustav swam harder, trying to avoid the touch. He traveled another foot before hands raised him from the water and into a life boat. Oars splashed as the boat swiftly cut the water's surface. His men shifted to give him room on the bench.

With no orders to give to anyone and the safety of the wooden hull beneath him, the captain curled on a small bench and shivered. The shaft of a bent harpoon on the bottom of the boat caught his attention. He stretched his fingers out to touch the broken piece of shell attached to the point. Pulling back, he shivered again. A blanket folded about his shoulders. With its touch, Gustav raised his eyes to see the bosun squeezing his shoulder. Another boat passed them, with an officer crouched in its bow. His eyes caught a glimpse of pink on the horizon, suggesting that dawn approached. The long night had finally ended.



Remnants of a Time Long Gone *by GERALYN ADAMS*

first frost

Geralyn Adams

the golden grass
a patchwork quilt of
fall and winter,
frozen dew glistens
and you're just as
cold
as ever

mist of warmth
escapes my lungs,
with each breath
i get colder.
i remember your warmth
mingling with mine

but now you're just
a scarecrow
and I'm the crow
sitting on your shoulder
wanting friendly company.

your dead button eyes stare blankly back
and your stitched smile doesn't fool me;
the seasons changed
and so did you.

Redemption

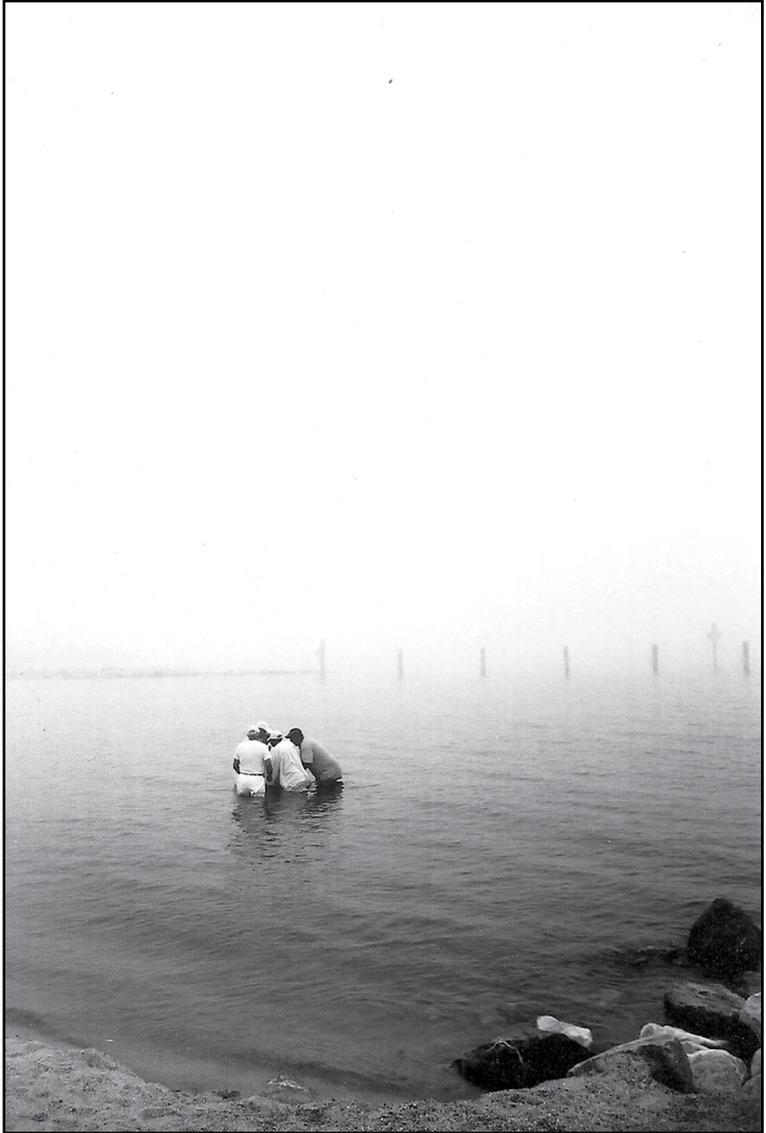
Dee Sydnor

Perhaps when you yelled
that you could have been dying
and I still would not have
heard you and would not have come,
you simply meant that
you needed me, but I did not come,
and when you trusted
me to save you, I did not hear.

You had to save yourself.

Perhaps when you were dying,
and I heard you, and I came –
in some small way –

I saved myself.



Cleansing Waters *by William Poe*

CONNECTIONS FEATURE



A Candid Discussion with Poet Jehanne Dubrow

By Karen Smith Hupp

Continuing its long-standing tradition of connecting established and emerging authors with the community, the College of Southern Maryland's Connections Literary Series recently brought nationally recognized Poet Jehanne Dubrow up-close and personal with a Southern Maryland audience.

Dubrow's latest work, *Stateside*, is driven by intellectual curiosity and emotional exploration, as she centers her collection of poems on a military husband's deployment. The voice speaking in the poems presents the experiences behind the deployment through the eyes of a spouse waiting at home. Dubrow's work has been described as fearless in her contemplation of the far-reaching effects of war on the homefront and her excavation of a marriage under duress.

Author of two previous collections, *The Hardship Post* and *From the Fever-World*, Dubrow is director of the Rose O'Neill Literary House at Washington College in Chestertown,

Maryland, as well as an assistant professor of literature and creative writing at Washington College. She has a master's degree from the University of Maryland and a doctorate from the University of Nebraska.

As part of an author roundtable prior to her Veteran's Day reading at the Leonardtown Campus, Dubrow responded to questions directed by CSM students who had been examining her collection as part of their language and literature classes during the semester. In an hour-long candid conversation with students and community members, Dubrow discussed her marriage, her poetic inspirations, the power of literature, and many other subjects.

CSM Student Theresa Farrell: I have a few questions but the first one is very personal; I'm curious if your marriage survived?

Dubrow: Yes, we are still married. People always ask me that and it makes me realize that the book is much sadder than I think it is. We just had our six-year anniversary and we've known one another for 16 years. We were college sweethearts, but some days the military is harder on our marriage than others.

Professor Wayne Karlin: We have been looking at this collection and really enjoying it. In looking at war literature, one of the things that's been pointed out is that there is really nothing from this point of view of a person who has a military spouse abroad. This is a community where this is a condition for many people and so it hits home for many.

Dubrow: One of the audiences is the military wife. Most think of this time as scary, and it's been nice to talk to my sisters and male military spouses. Today we can talk through the internet, in forums and on blogs. These discussions allow for a great deal of anonymity. But there is still a great deal of silence as military wives fear it may be seen as whining or unpatriotic otherwise.

Farrell: What inspired you to write a story about being a military wife?

Dubrow: I was going along and I'm married to this guy that's in the military, and somehow I thought it didn't impact who I was. I was finishing my Ph.D. at the University of Nebraska and my husband got a billet at the ROTC unit at the university there and so it was the first time in our two years of marriage that we were actually living together. He came home and he told me that he might have to go on a thing called an IA. How many of you have heard of an IA? It's an Individual Augmentation. Not that many people know what they are. The fact that so many people in here raised their hands is pretty impressive. So I said, "What's an IA?" and then he told me that he might have to go to Afghanistan or Iraq.

I started to freak out because it's one thing to imagine him on a ship and it was another thing to imagine him on the ground somewhere holding some kind of gun and wearing bullet-proof clothing. I had a complete meltdown and I suddenly realized I was married to the military.

At the last moment the IA was cancelled but by that point I was already writing the poems and I suddenly was completely afraid, completely terrified and my imagination was wide open about all the terrible things that could happen to him. Even though that particular IA was taken away, I'm very aware that after

his next billet he could easily be sent on one and so that pretty much opened the door to understanding what it meant to be a military spouse.

Somehow it amazes me that I was able to protect myself. Whereas before that, I was, “It is just his job and I’m getting a Ph.D. and that protects me somehow,” that all that education protects me from bad things happening. Then when I suddenly acknowledged that wasn’t the case it was really scary to start digging and seeing what that really meant for me.

CSM Student: Do you write more for a specific audience or do you write for personal insight?

Dubrow: I see any therapeutic value that the writing has as accidental or coincidental. Writing allows you to organize your thoughts in a way that for a moment makes the world feel less scary and more rational. And so that is extremely therapeutic but I’m always writing as a professional writer and so I am thinking about things like the music or the construction of the line. And I’m thinking about that balance between accessibility and something more sophisticated and challenging in the poetry. So I think the answer is that any emotional value that I get from the process is fortunate but not why I’m a writer. I don’t write in order to be better with myself.

CSM Student Christine Hurry: What was the inspiration for “War is Kind” [Dubrow’s poem, “Reading Stephen Crane’s ‘War is Kind’ to My Husband”]?

Dubrow: I just love that poem and I think like a lot of writers I’m really interested in being in a conversation with literature. Writers shouldn’t write in a vacuum. We should be permeable

and influenced by the texts that we admire. I like the irony in Stephen Crane's original poem. When he says, "War is kind," he's really saying it's anything but, and I thought it would be interesting to update that idea and reflect on the idea that it hasn't changed that much. When we speak about the kindness of war we remain ironic but we also remain filled with the admiration for its awful and terrifying beauty. So basically the poem just updates a Civil War poem to 21st century technology but the ideas are the same.

Karlin: Is that how you felt about the *Odyssey* also?

Dubrow: Well, many of you have read the book, and the middle section, the deployment section, is written in the voice of a modern Penelope. Whenever I work on a book project the first thing I do is research and see what's been written on the subject before, what other literary text has addressed this perspective. There haven't been many texts that have addressed being a military spouse, and when I started looking at the literature I discovered that basically the only interesting examples from literature is from Penelope in the *Odyssey*, which is kind of an old book, and so it seems like it might be time to address that lack of representation.

One of the things that literature does, which we don't realize, is that it gives credibility to subject matter. So, when we read a really moving piece of literature on a particular topic, that might cause us to think about that topic more seriously and the validity of certain points of view.

So if the military spouse perspective has never been represented in literature, what does that mean about the way we think about how difficult it is for a military spouse and how difficult it is to

be a part of a military family? If that experience simply isn't being given a voice, what does that say about us? Does that mean we just don't want to hear about that voice or we don't think it matters? Or that military spouses should just be quiet and suck it up?

That is one of the reasons, too, to look at Penelope. She's a really impossible role model for a real woman to live up to. Odysseus was gone for 20 years, 10 years at war and 10 years trying to get back to Ithaca. During that time Penelope keeps her household pious, she remains completely chaste, she's fending off all these bloodthirsty lusty suitors who are trying to take over Ithaca and she raises a son all by herself. And, she maintained a whole kingdom. I think that any real woman looking at that character is thinking I'm in big trouble if I'm supposed to be that. So that was why I wanted to write about her because she's wonderful but she's really an unfair standard to be held to.

Through other questioning, Dubrow described how she began her writing career when she was managing coffee shops and challenged herself to write a sonnet daily. The results she described as some really bad sonnets, but the practice and discipline were worth the effort although "you don't become a poet for the money" as she described her excitement on having two sonnets accepted into a poetry magazine. "I think the two sonnets paid \$400, but just one of those sonnets took hundreds and hundreds of hours to complete."

Sonnets, particularly, provide rules that help Dubrow in writing, as she specifically referenced "Against War Movies" in the collection. It ends, "Each movie is a training exercise,

a scenario for how my husband dies.” Dubrow explained, “The sonnet allows me to say it. I need the 14 lines, the rhyme schemes, otherwise it’s too scary. The lack of that constraint would not have allowed me to get through to the end. Sometimes when I read it, I have to remind myself I’ve read through it all before.”

Her inspiration is “reading a lot, and reading poets whose work appeals to you.” She enjoys iambic pentameter and the lyrical aspects of poetry, thumping the “dah-ta-dah-ta-dah” on the desk as an illustration. Scaffolding is another technique she employs, mirroring structure and building on top of another’s poetry. “You are focusing on the technique and imitation of the structure. That’s how I wrote ‘Eastern Shore.’ It’s built on Robert Hass’s ‘Meditation,’ but got far enough away from it to be its own poem. It took me a long time to get there, but it’s built on top of one of my favorite poems, and it’s a true poem, more personal and autobiographical than any others.”

She has no plans to write fiction, although she says, “I keep trying to tell stories in my poet collections. ... I’m fascinated by poetry. It’s like a little box that you pour your ideas into.” But why write poetry, and not fiction? Because, Dubrow responded, “Poetry chooses you.”

To hear Dubrow read a selection from *Stateside*, visit www.csmd.edu/Connections.

The Anniversary

Julian Cooperman

Roger slid the Wusthof chef's knife delicately out of the box and carefully removed the cardboard lining with small trembling hands. Constance tapped her polished nails impatiently against the counter as the unlucky Williams Sonoma sales clerk continued to fail in his attempt to ring up her new crystal pieces. The scanner was not taking the barcode on the decanter.

"Manager price check" he called glumly, glancing sideways as Constance sneered with a snort of disdain at the boy's incompetence. The knife rose high in the air, hovering for the slightest second of hesitation before Roger's hand drove it home into her chest, through her white Valentino cocktail dress. With a disturbing wet sucking sound Roger ripped the knife free and continued to thrust the knife repeatedly into his wife of twenty-five years, a wild manic grin on his face. Eventually his arm began to tire.

"Will there be anything else sir?" Roger whipped his head towards the sales clerk in surprise. The adolescent boy regarded him with a fake smile and bored eyes. Confused, Roger turned back to find Constance looking down on him with her usual look of disappointment, instantly withering his strength. The knife was still in her chest.

"Jesus fucking Christ, Roger, you can't even do this right. My God, will you look at the mess you have made. And my Valentino!" Roger looked down. She was right. The blood was everywhere. On the counters, the sales clerk, his hands, the floor, a few customers that had walked by ... and of course, her Valentino. Sloppy, much too sloppy.

Roger blinked hard and then shook his head to clear his thoughts and looked up to find Constance staring at him, that look on her face. He had been daydreaming again. It had been happening a lot of late. Quite a lot actually.

“Roger? Roger! Hello? Wipe that halfwit grin off your face and—what do you have there? A box of knives? I don’t think so. Put that away, you would only cut yourself. You know how I hate the sight of blood.” She gestured dismissively to Roger and turned back to the clerk. “No, there will not be anything else. Roger, pay the boy,” she said over her shoulder as she walked out of the store.

Roger put away the knives quietly and handed the boy his credit card.

Lunch at the country club. Roger had a small chicken Caesar salad and ice water. He ate slowly, in short, precise bites. He was on a diet. Constance did not like fat on a man’s belly. She had an untouched salmon filet with vegetables. She was anorexic, but liked to order what sounded pleasing. As the waiter passed, someone else’s waiter, she ordered her third martini. She was talking again now. In his direction, but not really to him. Her lips were moving but he could not hear her. People moved about him in silence as his world slowed down. Constance was cheating on him, had been for years. He was not really sure with whom, nor did he care. Julia, his daughter, came to mind unexpectedly. Small like him, with short brown hair. She had a family of her own now. They had gotten the Christmas card.

They never talked, not since he had let Constance send her to boarding school in France years ago. She was smiling in the picture on the Christmas card. He treasured the card, keeping it in his wallet hidden from Constance. How had he gotten here? Life had seemed so bright in college where they met. So many possibilities. He wanted to be an actor. Constance had wisely steered him into a real job, accounting. He still thought about it some days, the acting.

He got up slowly, his club monogrammed napkin in hand and walked behind his still talking wife. The napkin fit nicely around her neck with just enough length to get a solid grip. He

pulled. Hard. Constance gasped for air, her eyes bulging, her arms reaching out desperately, knocking over her new martini. Nails reached back and clawed deep bloody groves in the backs of his hands but Roger did not let go. With a final shudder and few twitching kicks she gave over, head slouched down, her tongue and lips a purplish blue. Roger release the cloth napkin and breathed in deeply, a sigh of sublime relief, an immense burden lifted from his heart. He heard clapping and looked up to find everyone in the club watching him, some clapping politely, others raising glasses and nodding heads appreciatively in his direction. Even the staff had stopped moving, joining in the celebration. “Well done Roger, well done!” came a cry from the kitchen.

“Roger! Jesus Roger, it’s like I am talking with one of those retard boys Evelyn likes to bring everywhere with her. Listening ears Roger, listening ears!” Constance preened as she got up, ignoring her blinking husband. “Well, I am off for my massage. Do try and not find something utterly miserable this year will you?” He was about to reply but she had already left, martini in hand, before he could find his voice. He finished his salad. Quietly.

Roger’s hand caressed the dark imperial-designed lush curtains on the counter before him at the Royal Shades Emporium. They were so soft and heavy. A feeling of old world luxuriance. Constance would hate them. He smiled.

“Exquisite are they not? We had the material flown in from Naples, Italy and crafted here in New York. I don’t think I have ever sold such a lovely, or expensive set. I hope they are everything you desired Mr. Withers. I do apologize for the order taking so long.”

“They are a dream come true and they are here now, that is all that is important. It is for my wife you see, tonight is our anniversary,” he said smiling intensely, still looking down at the curtains.

“Congratulations! How sweet. She must be a real special lady.” Roger looked up towards the saleswoman at this remark, a mad light momentarily in his eyes and then quickly repressed. “Oh she is, truly a rare gem. One of a kind you might say. And she is all mine,” he beamed, an odd look in his eyes.

“Very good. Ah, almost forgot, here are the curtain ropes you ordered as well. Extra long just as you requested,” she said, handing him a second bag from behind the counter. “I hope she is pleasantly surprised, I know I would be.” Roger laughed then. Somewhere between a cackle and a snort, cut short.

“I am sure it will be the surprise of a lifetime,” he laughed. “My Queen will finally get what she so richly deserves,” he replied, his fingers tightly clasping the velvet ropes beneath the counter.



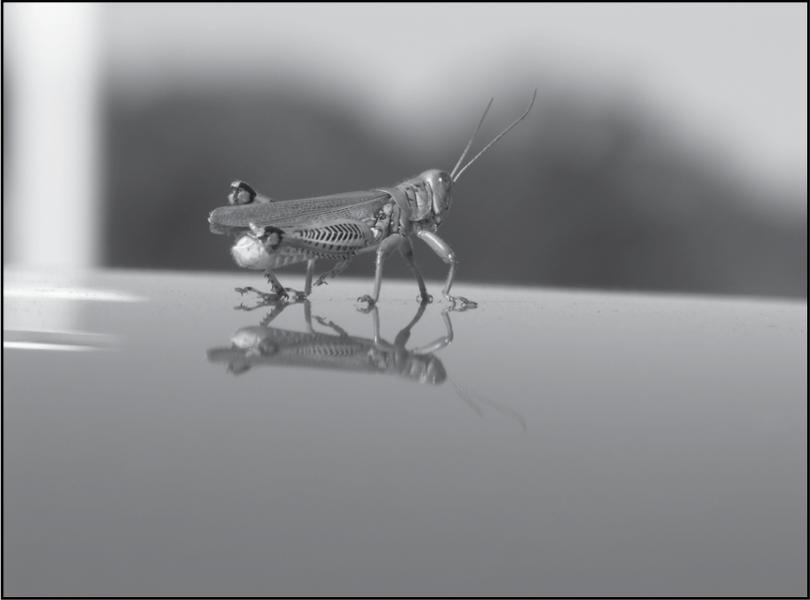
Mary's Welcome by *Linda Cooke Smith*

Light House Keeping?

Judith Allen-Leventhal

Light housekeeping.
Lighthouse keeping.
Light house keeping.
Keeping houselight.
Keeping house light.
Keeping lighthouse.
Keeping light house.

Spacing and ordering
determine
Light
House
Keeping
Meaning.



Grasshopper by *Robin Karis*

Ova

Tabor Elisabeth Flickinger

I ponder my ova: nestled in their leaky basket
each one swells to its potent prime only to fall out
washed away even as the whole set
drifts closer

and closer
to the waterfall of no return

Do I waste them: squander the tiny gametes
eternally unpaired each one an incomplete
puzzle with missing pieces
an artwork never finished

Or do I risk them: unleash the unknown growth
and all the what ifs of a blastocyst
will the neural tube fuse and the digits sprout
will the milestones mark excellence will he be
a good man or she a good woman
too far down the line
to see

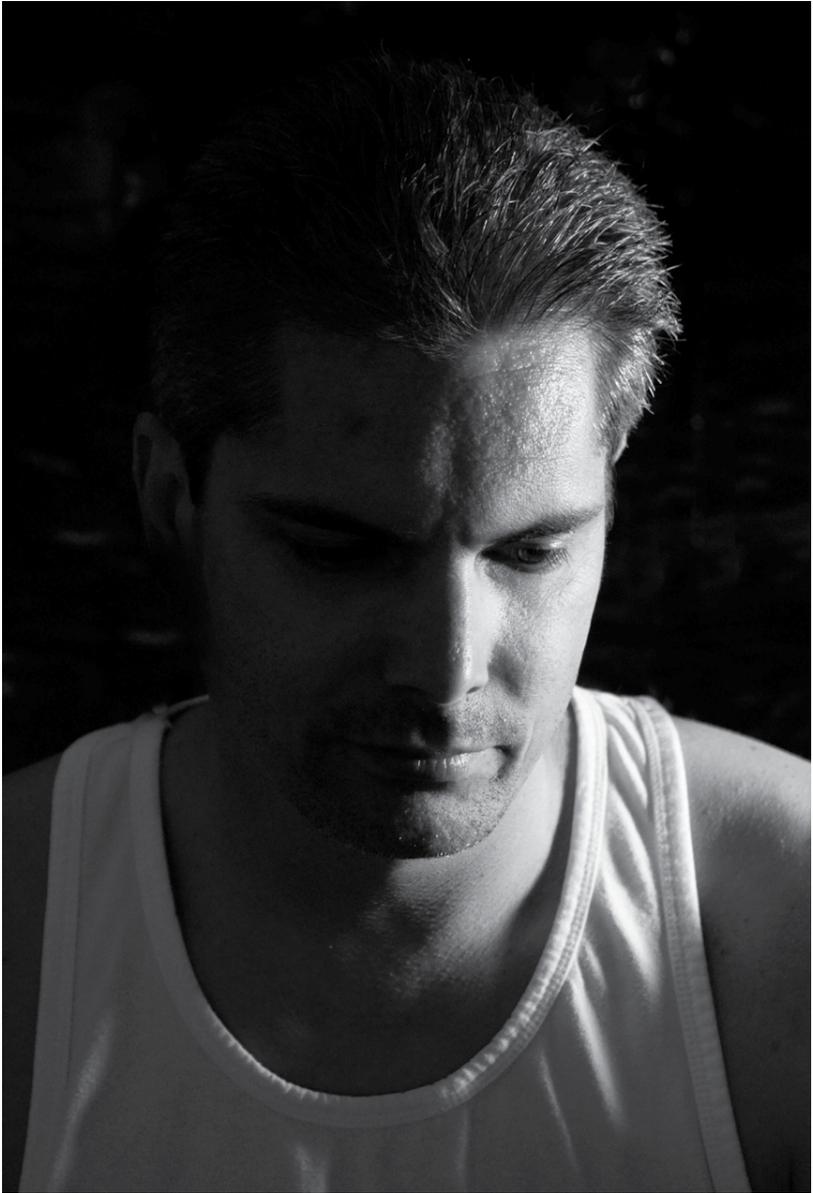


Cart by Brittany Yee

Mother of Ours

Shannon Wilder

Mother of ours
So moody but fair.
So tender with hands
healing body and heart,
Waters of glass,
winds just right,
sunshine so bright.
In a flash it is gone
Your anger so red
You have scolded and
sent me off to bed.
Your weapons,
Rain, water, fire, and ice
The voice in my head
“try again” and “well done”
The “oh, my goodness,
What have you done?”
Calm before the storm,
Devastation at day’s end
But through the years
you remain our mother
our friend.



Shadow of Doubt by *Joyce Vincent*

The Letter

Tyler Scott

Dear friend, I am believing that summer has fallen, and
there is no use for my voice to keep calling.

I accept it. (like losers and winners)
We are separate. (like saints and sinners)

(with time) The burn always heals.
(this time) Maybe memories will peel.

But as far as I can see it, your smile like the sun
Is hidden by the 'Mountain State' of winter.

Your voice fountained like bubbling laughter.
That sweet spring brook was all I was after.

So here's to lessons learned, bridges burned, and
Your forever happiness.

Here's to the unopened, the unsent, and
Your forever deafness to what I meant.

Contributor Notes

GERALYN ADAMS is currently a student at the College of Southern Maryland. She writes short stories (fiction and creative nonfiction), poetry, and prose. She works in the theatre, and will be transferring to SUNY Plattsburgh in fall 2012 to triple major in English writing, English literature, and expeditionary studies (and will minor in environmental science); she is an over-achiever. Her favorite poets are e.e. cummings and Edgar Allan Poe.

JUDITH ALLEN-LEVENTHAL teaches at the College of Southern Maryland in the Languages and Literature Division and lives in Southern Maryland.

JULIAN COOPERMAN is a recent student at the College of Southern Maryland. He discovered his true passion for writing roughly a year back and decided to learn all he could about the craft. He lives in Waldorf with his lovely wife and their two short, moody, and inspiring permanent guests, Ben (4) and Cristina (6). When he is not writing, ferrying the kids to taekwondo, daycare, school, dance class, etc., he is working at an extremely unimportant and generally dull job involving bad managers, technology, deadlines, and marketing (never a good combination). Writing for him is both an outlet and a place to make bright magic happen in an otherwise all-too-often bleak and dull world.

TABOR ELISABETH FLICKINGER is a doctor and a poet who resides in Baltimore, Maryland.

ALLISON GRAGG has been attending the College of Southern Maryland since 2009. She is an aspiring photojournalist and has been doing photography for six years now.

RACHEL HEINHORST is an adjunct faculty member at the College of Southern Maryland in the Languages and Literature Division.

KAREN SMITH HUPP is the senior executive director of the Community Relations Department at the College of Southern Maryland.

ROBIN KARIS lives in Maryland and enjoys reading, 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.

WILLIAM POE is a published writer of poems and essays. He is also a published documentary photographer. His book, *African-Americans of Calvert County* was awarded the Calvert County Public Education Award in 2009. He is also the creator and host of *Voices of Calvert County*, a local cable program featuring vignettes of local African-American residents. He also produced the cinema verite-style documentary film, *The Life and Death of Sharecropper Enoch Tyler*.

LISA PRESGRAVES is an art student at the College of Southern Maryland. She maintains a 4.0 GPA and anticipates graduation after completing the spring 2012 semester.

KATE RICHARDSON taught English, literature, and writing for many years in various institutions: a private high school; a school for the merchant marine; and several community colleges, including the College of Southern Maryland when it was Charles County Community College. She has also written ad copy for an audiobook company and has produced newsletters for several nonprofit organizations. She currently works as an editor for an educational publishing company. Her poetry has been published in *Connections*, *Poet's Ink*, *Weavings 2000*, and *Passionate Hearts*.

CHRIS RUBENSTAHL is an aspiring artist and writer living in Leonardtown, Maryland. He is currently going to college 20 years after high school, and is working towards a degree in sequential art while also acting as an art assistant at the College of Southern Maryland La Plata Campus.

TYLER SCOTT is a student at the College of Southern Maryland.

LINDA COOKE SMITH has been with CSM since 1999 and is the Administrative Assistant for the Languages and Literature Division. She is a mother of one and will soon be a grandmother. This is Linda's first time being published in *Connections*.

DEE SYDNOR is the mother of four, grandmother of one, and wife of Dave for 30 years. She is a senior at UMUC, studying English, works as a document librarian for a local contractor, and is thankful for the many wonderful people she has met through all the different paths she has followed in life.

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*.

JOANNE VAN WIE is a homeschooling mother of seven children in Mechanicsville, Maryland.

JOYCE VINCENT took her first photography class over 10 years ago. Since then, she has developed a passion for capturing the perfect moment. She is currently enrolled at UMUC as a full-time student working towards a BA in communication studies.

SHANNON WILDER is a student representative at the College of Southern Maryland's Prince Frederick Campus.

BRETT WORRELL is a native of Southern Maryland, having grown up in Calvert County and now living in St. Mary's County. He's been writing for more than 15 years. He offers a writing blog to help others at <http://swordsvspens.blogspot.com/>.

BRITTANY YEE is a full-time student at the College of Southern Maryland. Her photo submission was from a project in her Digital Photography II course.