

Kestrel

A Journal of Literature and Art

Issue 47

Kestrel:
A Journal of Literature and Art

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From the Editors

Sean Sexton

This Land

Having no literary past to speak of, no
ruin or olden scroll buried in this land
find the imprint of fallen leaves, news
shining on grass; unheard rumors
amid shimmering fronds.

With no forespoken hardness, no igneous
reaches to heaven, and at loss for precious
mineral and ore, look to swollen clouds
in the distance, the glassine, horizonless
underlands, empty as a widow's joy.

Heed here today, gone tomorrow whispers
in the air, voices fading in a shoaling river
overtaking metes and bounds where tree-
telling ditches and nothing less recent amble
through scrub and marsh to a murmuring sea.

Nothing happened here that isn't happening now.

Forsake all allusion, all memory, and doubt
any worth of this land, save the fervent mist,
half-hiding, half-revealing come and gone dreams
consigned to the sky. Wonder anew if this day
or another begins your journey to a directionless
realm, a final embarkation into light.

Shall we fall from the world like a stone, fail time
as a weakening heart and be lost, one place to another?
Is a life but lapsed upon a crust, set beside a dark
selvage to which we've been ever flowing, *water-like*
to the end of the eye, gathering mindward
as we go, a meager, barely remembered story.

Anthony Gomez III

Let's Learn from Cowboys

Rodolfo, a stranger outside of a relationship that had sprung
through work, knocked on the window of my yellow car to hand me
a photo and to tell me Jonatán had died this morning. I nodded at the
news and grabbed the picture, shamefully thinking it would be one less
driver on the road to ferry tourists to the beach and back. The photo
featured Jonatán and I with cowboy hats on during a forgotten night of
drinking, and I put it away before my fingers or memory could leave
a print. What I wanted to ask was how it happened or how his family
intended to mourn, except Rodolfo walked away on account of an open
door.

A young boy, no more than five or six, stepped inside, one foot
out on the street. He looked at me from awful blue eyes and mimicked
an adult:

“Excuse me, what do you run to get to San Paz?”

Unsure how to proceed, I humored him, answering seriously.

“It's a flat rate. Give me thirty and I'll have you and whoever
can fit in my car.”

He nodded and walked away. I thought that was it but then I
heard a young shout for all to hear:

“Here!”

The boy returned to the car. His dad, a tall man with ashy hair
slid inside next, and then his wife, a quiet woman with long hair that
might have fallen further than what I remember. It was initially down,
and she reached up and tied it as she sat.

The image of the three looked absurd. There was no reason
why the parents should squeeze themselves side by side while the boy
could stretch near the side door.

Almost challenging this conclusion, the dad spoke:

“We try to put him in the middle. He gets sick on us.”

The woman stared out the window; she had probably heard the
excuse many times before. I smiled into the rearview mirror.

“Well, San Paz isn't too far of a drive,” I said.

When I started the car, I turned it around to move south,
gesturing farewell to Rodolfo. He didn't see, and I thought I caught
him crying as I passed.

The open road allowed us to quickly move out of the town.
The quiet family seemed particularly late arrivals for tourists—this
period of summer usually too hot. A half-kept smile on the dad said he
might have liked a word, some sort of reassurance about the journey.

She, however, kept looking away, never once joining the group.

Twenty minutes out and the same left to go, I thought to try my best to cut through the tension by offering this estimate when there came a surprise interruption.

“Wait!” the wife yelled. “Up there. Please stop!”

There was a grey and white bricked building to the side, more a folly than a structure. It was largely left alone because of its distance from town and the cross at the top. As I passed it, I caught her eyes turning down, her thinking I ignored the request. But on this dirt road, I had to slowly move into a stop to protect the car’s wheels.

“Let me have the camera,” she said.

The moment it was in her hand she was out.

Stairs led to a curved wooden door. From the rearview mirror I could see her walking upward to place a hand on it. Tiny compared to the structure, she was a dot against the façade. Statues on each side, two saints mirroring the other, looked up toward heaven. Above them, a different pair, cast their arms out—prayer in action. The colors of the place felt washed. Despite this detail, a certain beauty rose from pretending time had washed the structure of its initial character, of looking up and asking oneself what it once resembled. To me, the whole place was amiss of a quality uniquely Mexican. Its dome top, where the cross was settled, was a gold that too strongly bore the influence of a different country, religion, and region of the world.

“It’s safe?” the dad asked.

“Why wouldn’t it be?” the child said before I could answer. “All sorts of people use this path.” If he was older, I would have described the comment as condescending, but the dad, whatever his reasons, nodded and treated the response as further reason to worry. He leaned an ear toward me to hurry an answer.

“Yes,” I said. “It’s sound.”

“Not the building,” he hissed. “The place.”

“What could get her out here without us seeing?”

He held up a finger, like he could lecture me to change that point. With that gesture I guessed schoolteacher or consultant—some occupation in which he was paid to correct others.

“What is her interest in that thing, anyhow?” I asked.

“It’s what she studies. Buildings and architecture. She loves the old stuff. Colonial architecture. Signs of resistance and reclaimed traditions.”

“Sir, that’s not old at all.”

“What do you mean?”

“It’s an old prop we never lost. To a film. A cowboy film, as you call it.”

“So, my wife’s taking photos of some John Wayne crap?”

“Not a John Wayne one. Though his aren’t bad.”

She was starting back, her face down, examining the photo she took of the set.

“Let’s not say a thing,” the dad said, rushing each word before she crowded the back. The boy nodded.

“Thank you,” she said. “It was interesting. To think that’s just right there in the middle of nowhere.”

Nowhere? The single word illuminated so much. I wanted more than ever to turn and spoil her enjoyment, to steal her superficial appreciation for my own shallow enjoyment.

The final leg of the trip was a quiet one. Every few minutes the woman opened the camera and stared again at her pictures. Out of respect to her privacy, what she saw remained hers.

When the ocean was in view, I skidded into a halt to grab their attention. They were ready to temporarily leave me behind.

“And you’ll just wait here?” the dad asked.

“Sometimes I fish for pleasure. Sometimes I read. Today, I might walk around.”

He nodded his head and got out of the car. Lights from within came on, though the sun shone bright enough they were hardly noticeable. Holding a hand up above my eyes, I could see other cars scattered in far spots. Other families were below, keeping a distance. To talk to a fellow countryman would ruin the holiday image of an undisturbed hideaway.

My passengers were out there already. Towel on the ground, sunscreen on, both dad and son raced to the water. Water kicked and splashed the air. Below it, in a skewed perspective, the woman caught my eye. In a white tank top, red swimming bottoms, and sunglasses, she looked toward me and not the ocean. While I shifted, uncomfortable, I stole one last look.

She returned to her family.

An hour passed and I still had not walked, having absorbed myself in a Spanish book about Western films. Halfway through the making of *Rio Bravo*, a shadow ruined the words.

“What are you reading?”

It was her. She must have been in the water moments before because spotted patches of water clung to her skin.

“It’s just a book about Westerns.”

“Films?”

“Yes.”

“I hate those movies. Wayne. Mitchum. Gary Cooper. None of them interest me.”

“Really?”

“What good are they for? Racist and stuck stereotypes?”

“I don’t know. I think there’s a lot that cowboys could teach us.”

“Like how to kill an Indian?”

“Like how to kill loneliness.” Her face fell into a brief and curious squint, like I had given her a motive to watch me. Pressed into the spotlight of needing to justify the remark, words I might not have typically chosen came tumbling out. “They’re vagabonds, leading an itinerant lifestyle. There is nothing out there except what’s in their path.”

“Yes. That is one way of looking at it.”

She picked up her camera and snapped a photo away from the beach. I tried turning to see what she saw and all I could see was the dirt road. As if aware of this bent toward the banal, she held up a finger and pointed as she spoke.

“I’m just remembering it for myself, how it starts from that and becomes that.” Her finger dragged from the dirt and dust to a different region of endlessness. Out there, water roared.

The woman’s partner was with their son, building something along the shore, laughing each time the wave crushed a hurried sculpture.

“It is something to see. And you three are, okay?” I addressed the question to her group, aware that Americans were easily slighted from miscommunication.

It didn’t matter; she avoided the question.

“You never took a walk,” she said. “Brett—my partner—worries too much about this country. He suggested I bring you along. Would you like to take one?”

“And that’s alright?”

“We’ll be in sight of him.”

I followed her down, kicking off shoes at the center of the sand. Though she had invited me to join her, we stayed steps apart as she started along the beach’s sands, moving closer to the water when she was well past her family.

It was not until the ocean had a rhythm to my mind that she stopped, and her voice might as well have emerged from the waves.

“Do you think us cold? I’m sorry if we seem so, it’s just been such a miserable time.”

“Excuse me?”

“We hardly talk. As a family. One stares at the other and the one pulls back.”

“Not at all,” I hurried to say. “You three are a lovely family.”

“We’re not. The boy irritates me simply because he’s from his ex-wife. I’m telling you this because I don’t want to always be seen as an unloving person.”

Unloving? What did the opinion of one man in a separate country amount to?

I tried to fathom a particular reason for her confession, a detail about me that could motivate one stranger to another to rid herself of all her secrets. I was unsure. Being lost as to what to say, I returned to a commonality, a question I had wondered about her since the start.

“Your parents,” I asked. “Where are they from?”

“From outside San Paz,” she said. “That’s what motivated the trip.”

“Really?”

I thought she would elaborate, but the thread was either uninteresting to her or not what she wanted to share. Rather, she surprised me with a return to a different conversation.

“How could you stand it?”

“Sorry?”

“Those films. Dirty, racist, and ragged things. Whatever I watch—Ford, Hawkes, or Leone—the men merely create types. The west never belongs to anyone else but those men.”

“You’re wrong,” I said. “It belongs here. *The Magnificent Seven*. Filmed in Mexico. *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*. Bob Dylan and Peckinpah made it in Mexico. John Ford came down here with Henry Fonda and made *The Fugitive*. These films are so much more; they show us something. The Western is wide open, it belongs to everyone.”

I had not convinced her. She turned around and continued for another several steps. The tide had seemed to recess, to pull back as if unwilling to touch her. This woman could terrorize the ocean into submission I joked to myself.

Behind us, her family continued to rescind from view, and as I tend to do when my taste is criticized, I felt a need to defend myself.

“You could never understand,” I said. “There is so much north of that border that is tamed and controlled. Down here? Baja is a desert to itself. To learn and live it, one must be a cowboy. It takes that sort of attitude to live each day.”

“I’m sorry,” she said. “I don’t mean to criticize what you like. It’s a personal thing. All I have ever considered about the films are the stereotypes. When I was looking for work, when I still wanted to act, I told myself to never choose a Western. Secretly, I think I liked the thought of having a gun—a fake one, I mean—and taking law the into my own hands.”

“You’re an actress?”

“Was is more like it. But yes, I once acted. And I was once in a Western. I think it’s the real reason why I don’t like them.”

“Actually?”

“The experience on set and that movie was not what you

know.”

“Describe your scene.”

“Nothing much. It was just a death scene.”

“Please. Say more.”

“If you must know, it was years ago, and it’s during filming that the boy happened.”

I tried to remember all the Westerns I watched, the new and the old. Her face, which took on an unreliable familiarity with the new information, seemed unfairly modern for the knee-length garments of the old west.

“The funny thing is it’s what I wanted—to act. I received the offer just when I think this path is dead. Things with Brett were settled. I just grew scared of routine. Each morning a new anxiety appeared, telling me I was trapped. That was that; I apologized and ran off toward the set. He called and called and, three months after, he stopped. In the meantime, I noticed an indoor set with a fake dirt floor and a half-built saloon. Mexico, maybe—the film was unclear.”

“You were what?” I asked. “A cowboy? A tavern worker?”

“No. It was just a death scene. I was the dead wife.”

“That’s all?”

“You’ve seen them. You know how it is, those films always want to kill the innocent people early and quickly. Wives die simply to get the man alone. It’s a horrid thing.”

“That was you.”

“Yep, watch the first ten minutes and you’ll see me die once. What’s funny is I repeated that scene a dozen times.”

“Really?”

“The first time I simply fell after being shot. The second I screamed. The third I did it without noise. On and on. One time, I staggered after being shot. That might be the clip they chose.”

“So you got used to dying in Mexico?”

I heard a single laugh from her. A grimace more than a smile lingered as evidence.

“I don’t know how funny that is considering where I am right now.”

As I listened, I continued to search my mind for this film. However hard I tried I also couldn’t shake the sort of Mexico she was familiar with, a sandbox of a place behind closed walls and in front of cameras. Since the film, Mexico had its grip on her, and right now, she wanted to leave a type of person she was behind.

In this actual place, she believed that escaping this anxiety required understanding, a listening ear that she thought incapable or unimportant in judgement. I could not help fathoming what I wanted, however. Too often I knew tragic stories as the one she acted, and what

I wanted were the adventures of the cowboy.

“It’s my fault, you know. Went to work just to die and when it’s all done, I wonder why I left for that job. When I returned to our city, I didn’t announce a thing. Once, I saw Brett, and I hung back and watched. A little sadness ran around his eyes, but actions did not so much change. Routines did not differ. All the same but he was with a different woman. The world checked on.”

She stopped talking to catch a deep breath. The story had ended for now.

“The boy is older. When did you meet again?”

“About nine months ago. With his divorce.”

“And this film, was it worth it?”

She snapped, as if to accuse me of not asking the right question. A tiny shake of the head might also have happened, though I would not stake a position on the matter. From where we stopped, the dad and son were sparks on the sand, out and away from the water that seemed capable of swallowing them up. We had reached a certain end, and it was time to head back.

“Filming that movie was a mistake. Finding Brett was a mistake. When we caught up again, he was in the process of divorcing her. All I did was speed it up and all I had was that one credit that did nothing to my name.”

Now, I think she might have wanted silence, but I began to think there was a more elaborate word to offer. All those death scenes on film and she had not learned what it is like to live. That is a reality of cowboys.

“There was a Western made here,” I said. “I remember it, though because of its shootout. A glorious Gary Cooper-type who stoically took down a town’s raiders from a church before riding off alone. Perhaps that is a lesson. Take all the punches thrown at you, but maybe at the end of the day, you still sometimes remember you are alone in that empty world.”

She backed further away. Whatever effect it had, I do not know. She started to head back, and I let her gain ground. Once, she looked over her shoulder and confirmed some parts of my expression did not go to waste.

“I should learn from those cowboys.”

I thought that was the end to the family, but several days later I sat with Rodolfo in a warm cantina listening to a story when the boy appeared. At first, I did not see him. I was too engrossed in remembering a dead man.

“Let me tell you, Jonatán never messed around because of the time he did. It was back when he was your age. Walking down a street

when he was living near San Paz, he sits and waits at an apartment door to kill time. However, he hears a woman call him from above. ‘Hey,’ she yells. ‘Are you coming or what?’ He doesn’t know who she is or what she refers to, but he hears the door buzz open. What the hell, he thinks. Up the stairs the woman attracts him enough to come, and he’s on the fourth floor and the door is open and he walks in and . . . bam! Her and a guy rob him on the spot. Bastard forgot to keep his guard up. Never again, though. He . . .

The why and what of the story were lost. Rodolfo stopped to stare, his curiosity stretching his face into a strong surprise. I felt a hand pulling on me before I saw its owner.

Behind my shoulder, holding onto the loose end of my shirt, was the boy from before. No concern or apology, as if it was common for children to interrupt adults here.

“What is it?” I asked.

“It’s Mariana. She won’t let us into the room.” The name did not register at first and I realized I never learned it.

“Yeah?” I was unsure of what to say or what he wanted.

Rodolfo must have had the same thought because he asked, in Spanish:

“¿Qué quiere el chico?”

The boy continued to stare, messy brown hair and blue shirt on blue shorts—style a child gets away with. He might not have understood the language, but he intuitively knew we questioned his motive because he tugged again.

“It’s the woman who rode with us,” he said. “My dad’s wife.”

“Yes, I know, kid. What do you think I could do?”

“It’s the set. She said she learned it was fake. My dad blames you for that slip.”

Our conversation had not ventured to that topic. Whatever his reasons, the dad could blame me; it was what they always did. Blame the foreign man whose country you visit, blame him for ruining your dream even when they make it possible.

“Can you talk to her?”

I sighed. Hope for the night was to drink with Rodolfo, to celebrate a dead acquaintance, and to sleep early to make it to a film outside of town the next morning. No reason existed to doubt these three goals wouldn’t happen except an unproven fear saying this would not be easy.

“What could I do?”

“Come.”

I turned to Rodolfo and said I’d try and hurry back. He shrugged and shook his head, obviously disappointed I would allow myself to mix with tourists. The child started for the door, and I had to catch up to him. Each few steps he stopped and waited, an obvious

impatience at my slow step. I would hurry, but I wasn’t going to run.

Finally, a block or two later, he understood the pace I’d keep. He slowed to walk near me, taking the position of guide when I knew the town like an extension of my life. There were shorter routes, but his path, made of the fewest turns, was the simplest. Silent about the directions, I did ask a question as we came close.

“Does your dad know where you went? This can be a dangerous town.”

“No. He kept talking to her.”

“He doesn’t know I’m coming?”

“No.”

The hotel was one of several places with lights radiating in all directions. A bellhop helped someone from a car and guided them inside. Familiar to me from the days I used to shuttle tourists from the hotel, he waved hello when we approached.

“His mother’s inside,” I said. “Seems it’s something I did that I need to fix.”

“She’s not my mother,” the boy said. Anger flurried in his eyes at the remark. In different circumstances, he might not have cared where this woman was.

“Sure,” the bellhop said, “but you must have misheard him. It’s not the mother that’s there. It’s the father.”

“Maybe.”

The boy looked away. Already, his story started to crumble. What was inside was different than what motivated me here. I was about to see it, and I didn’t have to go far.

Brett stood in the lobby, talking to two hotel workers until he saw us approach. He waved them off, and he grabbed the boy close.

“Where did you go?” he snapped.

“To get him,” the boy said, pointing a gunned finger toward me and shrugging his shoulders. Indifference won out, and whether it was trust in the boy or simple relief at his being safe remains unclear.

“He thinks you can help?” Brett asked. “I don’t know.”

Around us, another family walked through the hotel, two parents and two kids, a smiling bunch to highlight the frustration in this one. They fell into the elevator and disappeared. Brett watched this sequence test his own hopes.

“Go up to the room,” he said.

Part of me assumed the boy would protest the order, fight for his right to stay and help. Instead, he slid off the lobby chair. I remembered how he described her. The child was right; this was not his mother. He had done his part. Whatever happened now, could happen. When the elevator next rang, it was to see the kid up.

“When we got back the other day,” Brett said, wasting no time

to tell his side of the story, “Mariana sat on the bed with that camera of hers, flicking through photos. I don’t know what she was thinking, but then she put the camera down. A thought slipped her mind. Too low to hear. ‘What’s that?’ I asked. Louder this time, I heard: ‘It’s not real.’”

He had asked me to remain quiet about the set. That was a mistake, but whatever she caught that alerted her to the truth was unknown. I would have liked to see these photos, to see if I could catch the same lie. Of course, that was not the issue here.

“Alright,” I said. “So what happened next?”

“She mentioned something strange when I asked her what was wrong. Mariana said that she was ‘going to just accept it like a cowboy.’ I didn’t know what it meant but I caused the next problem. I asked her how she found out it was a set. She didn’t take to the question. ‘You knew?’ she said. ‘The guide,’ I said, ‘he was the one who knew.’ I tried to blame you. It didn’t matter. She was out the door.”

“And you’ve looked?”

“In the hotel, the restaurants nearby, and along the taxi lines.”

“You expect me to know where to go?”

“I don’t know what it is, but she talked to you on the beach, and you know this town. Maybe that’s nothing, but maybe it’s not.”

“Why would . . .”

“Just do it and we’ll figure out a way to pay you.”

“You would trust me?”

Brett was not so comfortable as his pleas suggested. He had ordered the boy upstairs, but, despite his reservations about leaving him, came along.

“You know where to go?” he asked.

“It’s just an idea.” He paused to stare as we climbed into my car. “No. It’s not what you were thinking.”

“That’s not convincing.”

“I don’t know her. Never had till yesterday.”

“Except on this?”

“Except on this.”

Past the taxi line that was now empty—too dangerous to accept strangers at night—and past the streets without streetlights, I drove us just outside of town.

Not a long journey, it was just long enough to experience the quiet. Other cars were nonexistent on the road. Other dreams were too. Both of us, even if we did not say it, could imagine an unsavory ending. Not finding her was a possibility; her not wanting to come back was one too.

He played with the mirror because he wanted to see behind

him. I needed it, but I let him continue to study the emptiness. We wouldn’t need to bury ourselves far because there was only one place I knew to check.

More a small warehouse than a theater, the structure was a clay building repurposed over years and years. Chairs inside weren’t installed but foldable objects the proprietor had found and collected from every corner and store around. A single screen was less a screen than a blank wall painted white. On that wall, a projector from the archive, launched old films. As we neared, the board on top coincidentally read *Rio Bravo*.

“Let me go,” I said.

“Why?”

“We’ll need someone to watch the car.”

Brett simply nodded.

The usher at the ticket-office was gone. Probably inside, overseeing the movie. The doors were unlocked. The whole theater was dark, the screen grey, and the lights not yet on. Moving through each aisle and reviewing the two sides to the left and right, relying on the floor lamps to look, I realized I had come in at the end. The room was soon illuminated from above. I could see only three seats filled with people at all.

It wasn’t hard to find her.

Mariana stood up and saw me first. A look of disappointment flashed across her face, but a sigh and brief closing of the eyes suggested a thankfulness as well.

“Is this a coincidence or did he send you?” she asked.

We continued together to the exit.

“Both, probably. It was the boy who got me, though.”

“Really?”

“Showed up at the cantina and everything. How he knew where to look for me is a separate question.”

“What did he tell you?”

“He told me you found out the structure you photographed was fake. He told me you ran off, and he told me it was my fault.”

“No. It couldn’t be. I asked to see a movie. This is where I was brought. The fact that it was a cowboy movie was the difference. You were the one who said I could learn something from them.”

“Did you?”

“Something.”

Outside, Brett waited by the car. I brought Mariana to it and opened the door for her to climb inside. After, he leaned over and whispered:

“This doesn’t look good.”

Who the line referred to was unclear.

We made it to the road and started to head back to their hotel. Silently, they sat with a space between them and stared out different windows. In the rearview mirror, adjusted so much I could see more of what was to the side than behind, I recognized a hotel name. It was the same hotel from Rodolfo's story, where Jonatán proceeded to help a woman and wound up with a headache and a lighter wallet. The same pain grieved me, and I hoped I wound up better than him. The photo Rodolfo handed me earlier was still there in the car. Untouched, I would keep it that way.

Michelle Cacho-Negrete

Drive-In

When my sons were still quite young, we lived in a small house, sandy back yard, newly built, in a barely-there town. It was on a short block being transformed from old, comfortably drafty homes to quickly erected houses in the service of some real estate developer. We shared a back yard with a drive-in movie which gave us speakers to compensate for noise. Before we bought the house, I asked the elderly couple next door if the noise bothered them in the summer when windows were open, and they assured me it didn't. I didn't know they both wore hearing aids and were spared the blare of sixty-five speakers. Perhaps it wouldn't have made any difference if we'd known because my first husband was determined to move into this house that he felt we could afford.

My husband worked until very late at night and often on weekends. I was street-smart but naïve in other ways, and believed his excuse of needing overtime. One night however, alarmed when he wasn't home by one a.m., my calls to his office unanswered, I called the police asking if there had been an accident. The police officer said no and was I sure he was at work.

"Is working late unusual?" the police officer asked.

"No," I answered. "But never this late."

There was silence, then he asked, "Lady, it's one o'clock, are you sure he's working?"

I knew what he was implying but, despite a nagging suspicion I deeply buried, I refused to consider it.

"Thanks for your help," I said and hung up.

In the bedroom I examined myself in the full-length mirror. I'd gained some weight after two children, but my skin was smooth and clear, I was still reasonably trim, my hair was professionally straightened to please my husband. His aunt told me at our wedding that Cuban men sometimes strayed but not to take it personally. I assured her that wouldn't be true of my new husband, and she only smiled and nodded.

I'd been married to my second husband for fifteen years when my first husband died. At the funeral, his widow, in a low, quivering voice, asked if I thought our mutual husband had cheated on us, sequential infidelity. I assured her, without hesitation, that he had loved her deeply, much in the same way my sons had assured their thirty-years-younger sister that their shared father had always said she was the smartest of his children. I'd hoped I'd given enough of a

Notes on Contributors

Cameron Barnett is a Pittsburgh poet and teacher, and an editor for *Pittsburgh Poetry Journal*. He's the author of *The Drowning Boy's Guide to Water*, winner of the Autumn House Press Rising Writer Contest, and Finalist for an NAACP Image Award. Cameron's work explores the complexity of race and the body for a black man in today's America, more of which can be found at cameronbarnett.net.

Joseph Bathanti, former Poet Laureate of North Carolina (2012-14) and recipient of the North Carolina Award in Literature, is author of eighteen books. Bathanti is McFarlane Family Distinguished Professor of Interdisciplinary Education at Appalachian State University in Boone. He served as the 2016 Charles George VA Medical Center Writer-in-Residence in Asheville, and is the co-founder of the Medical Center's Creative Writing Program. A new volume of poems, *Light at the Seam*, is forthcoming from LSU Press in 2022.

Jan Beatty's sixth book, *The Body Wars*, was published by the University of Pittsburgh Press, 2020. In the *New York Times*, Naomi Shihab Nye said: Jan Beatty's new poems in "The Body Wars" shimmer with luminous connection, travel a big life and grand map of encounters. Beatty won the Red Hen Nonfiction Award for her memoir, *American Bastard*, 2021. Books include *Jackknife* (Paterson Prize), *The Switching/Yard*, *Red Sugar*, *Boneshaker*, and *Mad River* (Agnes Lynch Starrett Prize). Beatty worked as a waitress, abortion counselor, and in maximum security prisons. For years, she directed the Madwomen in the Attic workshops at Carlow University.

Paul Brooke is a professor, poet, and photographer. He is the author of five collections of poems and learned Lakóta while a graduate student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Most recently, he published *The Skáld and the Drukkin Tröllaukin: Photographs and Poems of Iceland*.

Fleda Brown's tenth collection of poems, *Flying Through a Hole in the Storm* (2021) won the Hollis Summers Prize from Ohio University Press. Earlier poems can be found in *The Woods Are On Fire: New & Selected Poems*, University of Nebraska, 2017. Her work has appeared three times in *The Best American Poetry* and has won a Pushcart Prize, the Felix Pollak Prize, the Philip Levine Prize, and the Great Lakes Colleges New Writer's Award, and has twice been a finalist for the National Poetry Series. A memoir, *Mortality, with Friends*, is from Wayne State University Press, 2021. She is professor emerita at the University of Delaware and was Poet Laureate of Delaware from 2001-07.

Kestrel

Brian Bulta lives in Arlington, Texas, and works at Texas Wesleyan University. The poems in this issue are from a larger manuscript titled *A Thursday in June*, written in the wake of his son's suicide at age 16.

Michelle Cacho-Negrete is a retired social worker in Portland, Maine, and the author of *Stealing; Life in America*. She feels very fortunate to have four essays among *Most Notable of the Year*, two essays as *Best of The Net*, one essay a winner of The Hope Award, five in anthologies, and to have an acceptance of this essay to *Kestrel*, an admired journal.

Roger Camp is the author of three photography books including the award winning *Butterflies in Flight*, Thames & Hudson, 2002 and *Heat, Charta, Milano*, 2008. His work has appeared in numerous journals including *The New England Review*, *Phoebe, Folio*, and the *New York Quarterly*. His work is represented by the Robin Rice Gallery, NYC. More of his work may be seen on Luminous-Lint.com.

Claire Cox earned her MFA from Hunter College in 2013; by day, she is a public high school teacher in New York City, where she lives with her family. Her short story "Look At You," a finalist for the Jeffrey E. Smith Editors' Prize, was published in *The Missouri Review* in fall 2020 and nominated for a Pushcart Prize; several of her essays were published last year in *LitHub* and *Necessary Fiction*. Her novel *Silver Beach* won the 2020 Juniper Prize and published by UMass Press.

Nicelle Davis is a California poet, collaborator, and performance artist who walks the desert with her son J.J. in search of owl pellets and rattlesnake skins. Her poetry collections include *The Walled Wife* (Red Hen Press 2016), *In the Circus of You* (Rose Metal Press 2015), *Becoming Judas* (Red Hen Press 2013), and *Circe* (Lowbrow Press 2011). Her poetry film collaborations with Cheryl Gross have been shown across the world. She has taught poetry at Youth for Positive Change, an organization that promotes success for youth in secondary schools, MHA, Volunteers of America in their Homeless Youth Center, and with the WITS program. She is the creator of The Poetry Circus and collaborator on the Nevermore Poetry Festival. She currently teaches at Knight High School and with the Migrant Education Program in the AV.

Arkansas native **Michael Gills** is the author of eleven books of fiction and nonfiction, including the forthcoming novels *New Harmony* (Raw Dog Screaming Press) and *Before All Who Have Ever Seen This Disappear* (Madville Publishing). A fourth collection of short fiction, *Burning Down My Father's House* will be published by Texas Review Press in 2023. Gills is a Distinguished Honors Professor at the University of Utah, where he lives in the foothills with his wife of thirty-five years, Jill.

Anthony Gomez III is based in Brooklyn, New York. An emerging writer and current PhD student at Stony Brook University, his research explores questions of race, diaspora, and the Anthropocene. His stories have appeared, or are forthcoming, in *Shenandoah*, *Gone Lawn*, *The Acentos Review*, and others. Read more at www.anthonygomeziii.com.

Lea Graham is the author of two poetry collections, *From the Hotel Vernon* (Salmon Press 2019) and *Hough & Helix & Where & Here & You, You, You* (No Tell Books 2011); a fine press book, *Murmurations* (Hot Tomato Press 2020), and three chapbooks, *Spell to Spell* (above/ground Press 2018), *This End of the World: Notes to Robert Kroetsch* (Apt. 9 Press 2016) and *Calendar Girls* (above/ground Press 2006). She is also the editor of the anthology of critical essays: *From the Word to the Place: The Work of Michael Anania* (MadHat Press 2021).

Paul Graseck, lifelong educator, also plays clarinet in a Providence-based "Honk!" band. Occasional character portrayer, he generates interactive dialogues with his audiences. He has published in *Persephone*, *The Decadent Review*, *Star 82 Review*, *Potato Soup Journal*, *History Matters*, and elsewhere. Former editor of *The Leader*, a national social studies supervisors' magazine, he lives in Pomfret, CT.

Amanda Hartzell is an artist and writer living in Seattle, WA. Her work is primarily digital, acrylic on canvas, clay, and poetry. Her pieces seek out and embrace all that is feminine, spectral, and powerful.

Max Heinegg is the author of *Good Harbor*, which won the inaugural Paul Nemser Prize from *Lily Poetry Review*. His poetry reviews have appeared in *Rain Taxi* and the *Atticus Review*.

René Houtrides holds an MFA in writing from Bard. Her short stories have appeared in *The Georgia Review*, *New Ohio Review*, *Mississippi Review*, *Crack the Spine*, *The Vincent Brothers Review*, other publications. One of her *Georgia Review* stories was included in that journal's 2011 retrospective issue of finest short stories from the past twenty-five years. She was also a staff writer for *The Woodstock Times* for five years, during which time she received a New York Press Association Award. A story of her's, "Joan of Arc," received an award from the Hudson Valley Writers Guild. More than half a dozen of her essays aired on WAMC Public Radio, and she has written articles for numerous magazines. In addition, she was a theater critic for *Other Stages*; one of her plays, *Calamity Jane*, was produced in New York City; and a great deal of her original theater material has been performed at theaters throughout the United States and on national television. She was born and grew up near New York City's Chinatown and Little Italy. She recently resigned from her position on the faculty of Juilliard's drama division.