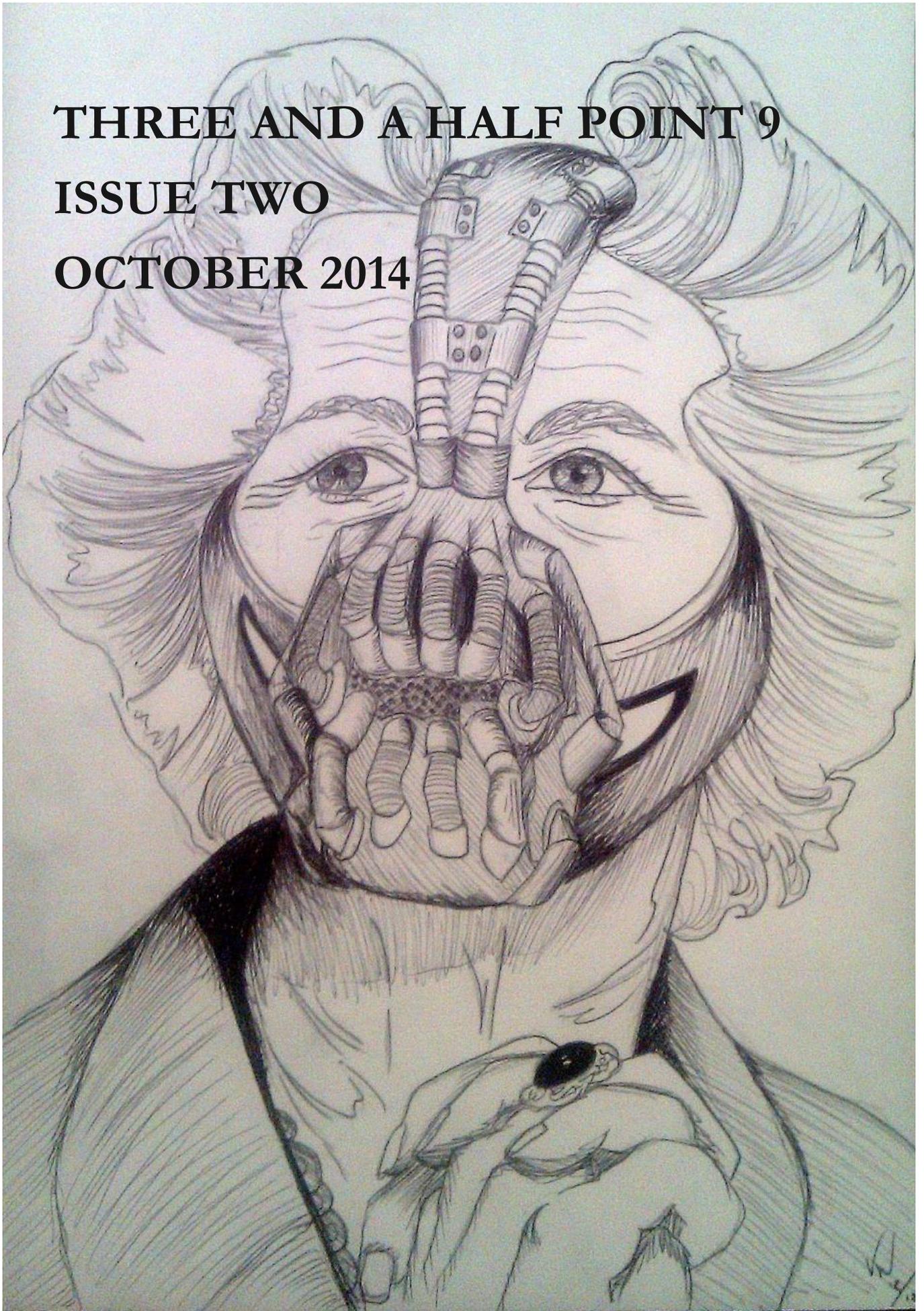


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Three And A Half Point 9

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Retirement Present

Brad G. Garber

The second hand brushes the diamonds
86,400 times a day as if such opulence
would make the journey less arduous
less boring, this endless running around.
Went on a hike past orchards in Tibet
women bending in the fields every day
men in mountain snow for the tourists
and they never seemed to look upward.
My friend milks cows twice per day
this is how he tells advent from ending
the red barn rebuilt sturdy and cleaner
a passive timepiece of biological necessity.

I rise to daily horror and fresh coffee
the same leg going first into the pant leg
same swipes across the stubbled face
on the way to a rushing stream of words.
Salad dressing and gravy is what it is
something to cover up the bland flavor
bury the grass, enliven the dead meat
“lazy susan” spinning ‘round and ‘round.
I look at the watch and see that I am late
as is everything else.

IF WE WENT THERE

Brian Michael Barbeito

If we went there we might see the mural of the tall ship cast up by pot lights in thick green grasses. Or, the coastline streets where sand and salt intermingle with clothing such as hats and shirts and shorts and shoes. If we went there we would remember the flaxen roofs and benches or the piers that race out to meet some spectre, old men fishing lines dispersed in waters. If we went there I would sit and watch the evening crowd where electric lights throw glows on stucco walls. I would stare like an autistic or a would-be poet or painter or designer of vessels by the shore. If we went there something would happen, in the going, in the being, in the seeing.

Lèse Majesté

Bruce McRae

Another quiet night in the afterlife,
a chilled hush, snow falling,
every window dark but one,
a room lit from within, its tenant absent,
only mice curled in sleep's warm hand,
eternity the dust in need of sweeping.

But where are the visionaries, the miracle-men,
the prophets bent on foretelling doom?
There's not even a sigh of lamentation
to guide us through the soundless earth.

Where are the nameless souls at the threshold?
The apes transformed into angels?

A snowbound village in the Great Beyond,
but where are the prayers you wanted to tell?
Where are the bells of the self's redemption?
The last of the preacher's breaths?

Secret

Craig Kurtz

I wonder if the neighbors know.

They see me carrying two plates

back and forth. And of course

the walls are thin; I doubt it

sounds like a TV show. Then again

who could surmise? This secret

is so curious: I've got an angel

in my room.

I wonder what the neighbors think.

They notice that I've drawn the blinds

and, maybe, the scent of bouquets. Mainly

it's my festive step, or this blissful

countenance. It's true there's stirrings

in the night; you never know what

people hear. Nonetheless, it's my own business:

I've got an angel in my bed.

There are days of disbelief:

I've always been a stern skeptic;
I rub my eyes and gasp sometimes:
the fantastic caught me unawares.
I've lived my life by plebiscite:
I've never talked to plants or clouds;
I've scoffed at genies and fairy tales
. . . but now that strategy's kaput.

I wonder what the town suspects.
It's obvious mischief is up with
this and that. Nothing's amiss yet
there's a hint something's afoot.
I come and go like such and such
still I betray some oddity. Perhaps
a smile unwarranted divulges private
joyousness: an angel tucked into my life.

Alejandra
Erren Kelly

The only time I ever
Chose a town over a woman

She was Mexican and Russian
Tall and lovely
She was a painter in potrero hill,
San Francisco
I spent 3 years checking her
Out at open art studios
Some would have called her “unattainable”
But I was either too brazen
Or too dumb to take “no “
For an answer
Like Anna Karenina
Alejandra was a goddess
But I had to at least try

One day, at a coffeehouse
I saw her
I had decided to say
“goodbye” to America
After John Kerry lost the
Presidential race
My plan was to go to Mexico
And work my way down into
South America
(Brazil, that is...)

Alejandra was in the coffeehouse
Looking lovely as usual
So, I went over and talked to her
Told her my plans of my next adventure
When she dropped paradise
Into my lap
“Why don’tcha come to Mexico City
And stay with me?”

After nearly 3 years of
Risking rejection, thinking
I had no shot
Alejandra just comes out and
Offers herself to me
And I looked at her face
And I looked at her body

Never ask me a rhetorical
Question...

I spent two months learning
Everything I could about aztec and mayan
Culture
Learned about what to eat
And what not to eat in mexico
I learned how to stay clear
Of the federales and the
Bandidos

Everyone knows if one
Don't get ya, the other will
Even brushed up on my
Spanish
So I wouldn't sound like
A gringo

To be with a tall girl
Like Alejandra was
Worth it

But the itch inside my soul
Kept bothering me
The one that tells me
I need more adventure
The one that tells me to
Take chances, even if it is risky
The one that tells me to talk
To that girl, even if
It means getting shot down

It said “follow the cliché
Follow your soul
New York city is where
A writer should be”

And I changed my mind

I changed my bus ticket
And instead of carnival in
Rio de janeiro
It was greenich village and
Brooklyn

And I didn't care
If another man had claimed
Alejandra
I didn't care if another man
Had her legs wrapped
Around him

Everything in life is about
Risk and chance

There is no safe place
There is no sure thing

I have no regrets about the
Love I gave up
Nor, do I regret, the fun
I should've had
Cos when fate closes a door
It opens a window

But I do have dreams of Alejandra
And me
Walking the streets of
Mexico city, hand in hand
Or spending mornings
Making love under a lazy sun

In a place English knows no home
Where Alejandra smiles
As she lies with me
Her body glowing like the sun

Noggin'

Frank Diamond

Your hair, that hair of yours
No, of course, it doesn't define you
Curly, bouncing, bold, boyant
Light brown with tints of red
That's what I said (you set me straight)
People pay to look that way
You didn't even go to a hairdresser
For ten easy years. Remember?
Perfect prelude to cascading laugh
Sways like a searchlight's pivot
Lets your eyes shine hope, joy
Toward the children you've taught
To old people drawn to warmth
Never like the other girls
Wouldn't bother carrying a purse
One — that's right — one pair of shoes
Of the earth, by the sun, to the sea
But what feeds on you eats at me
Right here in Buddy's Barber Shop
Where photos dim every inch of wall
Tumble down, down like a pyre's end
"I'm not going to let this beat me. Watch!"
Not if have any say it won't. (I don't.)
Love discovers from now back to start
As your beautiful noggin' steals my heart

Insomniac

Frank Diamond

Outerbridge voices
Reach from rest
Nothing lays still
In nether fog

Spread blankets
Over graves
Burgundy sipped
As midnight rises

Bloated at world's end
Fold newspaper
Horoscope out
Dead swamp, dark layers

Save for future
Space in the attic
Like one more box
Where dust descends

Wait for deliverance
As purgatorial voices
Gather in layers
Outside rotted doors

Non-Narrative Trashcan

Johnathan Harper

Two good friends and a pewter bowl filled with grape stems and ghost limbs, one sets the table, the other presses the napkins

Two friends and a failing sport like golf, a hundred little courses closing over a summer and polished greens overgrown with absence and squirrel feet and birdwing and

Two friends with their legs crossed and longing for a toilet but with a sigh that says “No one is leaving this room alive”

Two friends with two computers but only one mouse

Two friends, a mountain like a torn limb and a view of who’s watching who’s watching who overlooking

Two friends and one that believes in God and another that believes in his broken, worthless hands

Two friends, a text, broken glass, bleeding palm

Two friends and a shame slow cum-drying

Two friends who step in a café then out repeating never ordering just trying to go

Two friends and the fish-eye knots in the tables between

Two friends with a manicured lawn and small garden shovels and a bag of teeth

Two friends and their two uncles making out

Two friends and a sock with holes used to wipe away the blood

Two friends and a city of roads and limber buildings doing gym tumbles in and out their rooted lives

Two friends with a stack of stilts and no hands for holding

Two friends eating olives, popping the skin between their teeth, running salt over their blistered tongues and juice down their chins

Two friends swimming an ocean and their feet over something old and bottomless, kicking at it

Two friends and only enough mercury in the water to kill one

Two friends like a land bridge now covered by a ripening sea

COMPREHENSIVE HEALTHCARE IN THE BAYOU

Johnathan Harper

“Describe your favorite bulls,”

says the therapist in gator leather.

Tiny lizard babies nipping at his toes.

It was summer! Bacteria had been

greeding--growing in green

pools on the back porch but also on

a little girl's teeth. She smiles and waves.

Fanged snakes slithering in the grass

behind her, like a moon backdropped

with tiny pinpricks of copper, lemon,

even an eggshell white!

“He's got one horn and lion teeth

and is often confused for a monarch

butterfly because he just carries

himself in bright robes like a queen.”

We took kayaks to wander the waters,

mites pinching our skin but the malaria
mosquitoes couldn't drill past
our callouses. Not even the ones on our eyes.

"I'm floating like a log and the ocean is ahead,"
says my therapist, "Please help."

Sometimes we are paying for every little thing.

A hangnail that turned into a viper
and bit off my thumb, my uncle's nine toes
in a lawnmower accident, the spot on Roy's
tongue that was green, so we cut it out,
and then laughed when we noticed
the jawbreaker in his mouth.

The ocean is big. But not in a "more water
than any of us could drink on a Sunday afternoon" way.

Big like my therapist's mouth
where anything could be waiting inside.

My therapist a mouth-open alligator,
I reach down his throat, shoulder pressed
to his teeth, and grope in the dark

like reaching into muddy water with my brother
just to see what we got: fish, crawdad,
snapping turtle, a snake bite that went from red to black.

Ode to Conjunctivitis

Lu Pierro

You were the pinkness of my eye,
not a pimple, not a sty,
a disease of some contagion,
a lonely pathogen.
Before you blessed my eye
I thought I'd never meet my guy.
I was love's perfect cynic
till I met you in the clinic.
There was something quite erotic
in your antibiotic,
how you swabbed my lid, and said,
"Here's looking at you kid."
For underneath that crust,
you found some healthy lust.

Citadel

M. A. Schaffner

A little bit of Shangri-La and maybe
sand from the Walrus and Carpenter's beach --
we all eat oysters but some of us cry.

It's good to have an air force, though, and ships
to steady the world on its proper course,
and youths with guns and candy bars and smiles.

It gives us our wealth and independence,
drowning out all fear of becoming poor,
though not the ads -- no, never the bleeping ads.

There's someone I wanted to look like today
but fashions changed so I'll never lose these shoes
or my shirt from the previous century.

And my lover, where is she but hidden
within a cell surrounded by her screens,
where I'm but one of the flickering dreams.

Torch Song For Contralto

M. A. Schaffner

As I went walking by, the winter trees
stood out from the snow and cocked their branches
in ways that seemed both anxious and resigned.

As I went walking by, the bursting bulbs
splashed the green with a radiance that felt
joyously mocking to anyone alone.

As I went walking by, the fountain poured
its heart out to a family of ducks
who paddled for the heavily scented shade.

As I went walking by, a carpet formed
of leaves in a slowly dimming brilliance,
and hawks appeared, enchanting with their flight.

As I went walking by through all unseen,
the lady simply standing there said Stay.

War

Morgan Bazilian

A memory unfading,
After years of deliberation
Détente, liberation,
After years of quiet.

The mortar awakened,
To remind the young,
To ensure a lineage,
A transition to history.

The sound still shocking
Forty years from fear,
Continents and presidents removed
From burned monasteries.

The pine forest now still
The floor not soft enough
To dampen the impact
Or remove the smell.

All kinds of words.
They are dancing now,
Separating.

Becoming letter and notes,
Derived from copper strings
Reverberating against wood.

The dictionary avoided, mistrusted
Returning to fragments
To families placed on paper

A song not sung
A book unwritten
The effect forgotten.

Checklist

Nels Hanson

By now you know the routine, backwards
and forwards. Everything check three times,

now a fourth. Dot every i, cross your t's so
all's shipshape, brakes and tranny, radiator,

oil, gas, back-up canisters secured, strapped
taut beside fresh set of heavy-duty mud tires,

generator, power tools. Be sure each loaded
gun is on full auto, safety off, extra ammo

ready at hand, night-vision goggles, strung
laser hunting bow, quiver filled with wedge-

tipped arrows, grey plastic fletching. Spring
water for a year, canned food and dry, razor

butchering knife, whetstone, webbed-steel
vest, carbon helmet from NATO's Germany,

scuba gear, sun-speckled tanks for day, med
kit stocked: antacids, aspirin, sterile scalpel,

sealed syringe, 10 morphine vials. Or forget
rain-proof radio, tarp, raft, pump, white-gas

lantern, stove or down-lined camo uniforms
unzipped like that to summer use, for close

engagements three jars of lampblack to hide
your face is human. All set? Good job! Well

say so long to weird doomed friends you'll
never see this side of heaven no one really

believed in anyway. It's been hard haul, X-
hour approaches. Nights drive to hide by day

until your longest journey – counting June
moose hunt in Alaska – is finished. Knock

wood, you'll reach bright spot on stolen map
bought for peanuts off the Web, secret place

Earth's last brave man has chance to almost
live forever, flourish at ease perfectly alone.

[KILLING : TIME]

Sea Sharp

Once upon Time,
I bit then spat,
blowing rigid, ticking
chunks from twixt my teeth.

Tormentingly, it tocked back,
refusing to properly die,
twitching it's hand to the right,
it waved condescendingly, goodbye.

Scrapping the sidewalk,
Time crawls past
our bodies of bleeding gums,

slowly ticking,
slowly tocking.

Dear hiring manager,

Skylaar Amann

I am your perfect employee.

The decision is easy. See,

I'm a tireless worker, a searcher

of shipwrecks and shorelines.

A seeker of the meek, the moaning,

the drowning. I've downed more men

than I can count, and I won't stop

till I'm the top.

I've taken apart

tall ships single-handedly jib-by-jib.

I've increased productivity

with only a skeleton crew.

Turned salty barnacles

into an arsenal of unstoppable

operatives. I'm a multi-tasker,

a casket-bearer, a cutthroat salesman

with a pitch as smooth as ice.

I've convinced hardened criminals,

fishermen, and demons to take a turn

in my whirlpool, take stock in my locker,
moor in my mausoleum.

They pay me for plots, cough up cash
for my coffins, beg for my bone yard.

I'm the manager you've been asking for.

I command all the labor you could ever need.

Lost souls to bend and mold.

No more phone calls,
groans, or going home.

Just endless work
down to the bone.

Sincerely yours,

Davy Jones

Winter Chopsticks

Sonya Groves

I hear the winter in the trees
tiny leafless branches clacking
like chopsticks. It's a hundred
diners clack clack clacking
away. An eatery full of life
unlike this copse of trees.

I only hear the clacking
no other sound around.
Am I the only breath,
the only heart abound?
I shake the trees, I wake the dead
broken branches - clacking stopped.

The hikers found me later
roots grown into my hair
bark married to my clothes
it seems the diners fed their full
clack clack clack clacking.

Drowning

Sonya Groves

stacks of bills, I owe 10k
stacks of work enough for 8

weeks of time untaken
hours of sleep denied

lines of cars in the exit lane
lines of carts in the checkout

weeks of time tethered to nothing
hours of daily deaths incurred

stacks of notes, reminders, & lists
stacks of sighs, regrets, & resentments

&

Oceans of drowning pedestrians

&

Oceans of drowning pedestrians

GEOLOGY OF SELF

Walker Bass

When the earth was young, it rocked upheaval,
blew magma into molten rivers,

went through phases like an angry teenager,
rebelled, iced over for an age.

I too have had my volcanic youth. Anger rumbled through
everything I touched, set off quakes,

repercussions still felt. Dig through my
geological layers. You'll find

Georgia red with reproach. She still sees
the youth I was, has no room

but the color of ochre. Disrespect's slap –
all those years gone – colors with blood.

I've grown through the largesse of Texas –
indulged in my thirties like I was still

in my twenties. Texas was limestone, limestone everywhere –
the solid footing of rock yet somewhat more brittle.

Now shot through with gray, I've done my share of bouldering,
climbed straight ups, slick downs, scrambled.

Tennessee lays loam on top, claims me with rich earth.
Soon you'll find loved ones buried beneath

and this deposit will be bones. Then will come further layers,

results of compression.

When finally I lie down,

I hope to give someone

strong ground to stand upon.

CONTRIBUTORS

Brad G. Garber lives, writes and runs around naked in the Great Northwest. He fills his home with art, music, photography, plants, rocks, bones, books, good cookin' and love. He has published poetry in *Front Range Review*, *Black Fox Literary Magazine*, *theNewerYork*, *Ray's Road Review*, *Meat for Tea*, *Gambling the Aisle*, *Fiction Fix*, *Screaming Sheep Magazine*, *Off the Coast*, *Apeiron Review*, *Stoneboat Journal*, *Brickplight*, *Shuf Poetry*, *Rockburst Review*, *Penduline Press*, *Eunoia Review*, and other quality publications. Nominee: 2013 Pushcart Prize for poem, "Where We May Be Found."

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Erren Kelly is a Pushcart nominated poet from Portland, Oregon. He has been writing for 25 years and has over 150 publications in print and online in such publications as *Hiram Poetry Review*, *Mudfish*, *Poetry Magazine* (online), *Ceremony*, *Cactus Heart*, *Similar Peaks*, *Gloom Cupboard*, *Poetry Salzburg* and other publications. His most recent publication was in *The Rain Party and Disaster Society*; He has also been published in anthologies such as "Fertile Ground" and "Beyond The Frontier." His work can also be seen on Youtube under the "Gallery Cabaret," links. He is also the author of the chapbook, "Disturbing The Peace," on *Night Ballet Press* and is currently working on another book. He received his B.A. in English-Creative Writing from Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge. He loves to read and travel, having visited 45 states and Canada and Europe.

Frank Diamond has 30 years writing and editing experience for newspapers, magazines, and television, and is currently the managing editor of *Managed Care Magazine*. Diamond has released a novel, *The Pilgrim Soul*, and a short story collection, *Damage Control*. He's had hundreds of articles and columns published in outlets including the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, *Philadelphia Daily News* and the *Philadelphia Bulletin*. His short stories have appeared in *Innisfree*, and *Kola: A Black Literary Magazine*. His poems have appeared in *Philadelphia Stories*, *Fox Chase Review*, *Black Bottom*

Review, and *Feile-Festa*. Diamond lives in Langhorne, Pa.

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Lu Pierro received a BA from Douglass College and an MLS from Rutgers University. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Ars Poetica*, *Natural Awakenings*, *US1*, and *Blast Furnace*, among other journals. She is the recipient of both the Dodge Foundation Scholarship and the Dorothy E. Laurence Scholarship from the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, Mass. She lives in New Jersey with her husband and Odious, her cat.

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Morgan Bazilian's last fourteen poems were published in: *Exercise Bowler*, *Pacific Poetry*, *Angle Poetry*, *Dead Flowers*, *Poetry Quarterly*, *Garbanzo Literary*, and *Innisfree*. **Morgan Bazilian's** last seven stories were published in *Eclectica*, *South Loop Review*, *Embodied Effigies*, *Shadowbox*, *Slab*, *Crack the Spine*, and *Glasschord*.

Nels Hanson has worked as a farmer, teacher and contract writer/editor. His fiction received the San Francisco Foundation's James D. Phelan Award, Pushcart Prize nominations in 2010, 12, and 2014, and has appeared in *Antioch Review*, *Black Warrior Review*, *Southeast Review* and other journals. Poems appeared in *Word Riot*, *Oklahoma Review*, *Pacific Review* and other magazines, and are in press at *Sharkpack Review Annual*, *The Straddler*, *Four Chambers Press*, *Stoneboat*, *Meat for Tea*, and *The Mad Hatter's Review*. Poems in *Outside In Literary & Travel Magazine* and *Citron Review* have been nominated for 2014 Pushcart Prizes.

Sea Sharp is a Creative Writing and Literature graduate of Kansas State University with forthcoming work published in *Storm Cellar* and recently appearing in *Flyover Country Review* and *NEAT*. Sharp is a Great British resident and a vegan who enjoys "sensible amounts" of scotch and dancing with a hula hoop.

Skylaar Amann is a writer and artist living in Portland, Oregon. Her poems have been published in *Cirque Journal*, *Prime Number Magazine*, *Jersey Devil Press*, and elsewhere. She is a 2012 finalist for Poetry Foundation's Ruth Lilly Poetry Fellowship.

Sonya Groves is a teacher of English in San Antonio. She has poetry publications in over 20 journals, the latest including *La Noria*, *The Voices Project*, *Aries*, and *FLARE: The Flagler Review*. Currently she is pursuing her Master's degree in English at Our Lady of the Lake University.

Walker Bass received a certificate from the Writer's Loft (MTSU) in January, 2013, where Jeff Hardin was his mentor. Walker currently works as a caregiver for his father-in-law, prepares his meals, etc. From 2008 to 2010 he ran a neighborhood soup business – taking orders, making and delivering soup. Walker has “thru-hiked” the Appalachian Trail twice. Both were six month endeavors. He now studies and practices Mindfulness. Beauty, exercise and the rising heart are important to him. Walker has been published in the journals Blast Furnace, Number One and Third Wednesday. He and his wife live in Nashville, TN.