

Scribbler

APRIL 2014

ISSUE 79

Editor's Note:

I'm pulling double-duty for this issue. Our fearless leader (Clive) gathered the gems in this issue for your reading pleasure. We've got someone lined up for July. But if you'd like to gather, arrange, and say a few words about the contents of the Scribbler (be Guest Editor) in October, or in Jan. 2015, simply contact Clive.

The common theme of this issue's pieces might be darkness and light, with plenty of water and a bit of fear thrown in. It can also help to go on a writing vacation! See the two pieces below.

-Jean Hohl, April 2014

Angel with Shit On Her Hands

Blood seeps into the gut
And mixes with warm feces

Blackening as it pools then
Spills out uncensored
Smelling horrible.

One cracks a window
Regardless of winter.

One, although he loves him
Waves a hand before his noise
And leaves

Over and over he is washed
And changed by one kind sister
Until he is emptied

Until the green garbage bag is dragged
To the curb and everything
Is finally contained.

-- Dawn Ramm

Costa Rica

Breeze rush rattling Palm Fronds. Shade
for this board elevated by stump and cement.
I want to lie down here on the hard surface
comfortable in inflexibility.

Ocean monotone lullaby. Tired and heat sapped.
Prone without pillows the hump of my shoulders tilts
my head back painfully. Treasure the chirp of quick bird
sight of butterfly. Yet this place too quiet and hollow.

See that scrawny tree, limbs branching like a slingshot.
I would hurl myself over the jungle waking up
monkeys and exotic birds.
Howl and sing.

Meanwhile, in the center of this clearing, a pile
of logs drying for a fire. Who lights? Who circles?
Who dances in the velvet night.

-- Dawn Ramm

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next Oct. or Jan.?)

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Dawn Ramm

Daniel J. Coles

A. M. Stanley

Maureen Williams

PREVIOUS ISSUE FINANCIAL REPORT:

Issue 78: 400 printed, 363 mailed

Expenses: copy and fold, \$189

Stamps: \$177.87

Collate, address, seal, and stamp: barter

Total expenses: \$366.87

Total income (from donors): \$300

DONORS:

Deborah Janke, Erin Matson, Judith Matson,
Carolyn Mumm, Susan Nachimson, Stuart Watkins



Subscriptions:

Participants in Clive Matson's creative writing workshops receive copies of the Scribbler for two years, and for as long thereafter as the recipient shows interest. If you are interested in receiving copies of the Scribbler, send an email with your name and mailing address to: clive@matsonpoet.com

Submissions and Editorial Policies:

Basic Acceptance Policy: If the current editor likes a piece, it gets published; if not, it is passed on to the next editor who will either use it, or return it to the author. All rights are reserved. Send submissions to: scribbler@matsonpoet.com

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SCHEDULE AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

POETRY SALOON (drunk on poetry!)

Meets at 472 44th Street, Oakland, the second Friday of the month. Potluck at 6pm, reading at 7:30pm. Bring poems or prose by you and others to share, or come just to enjoy. Hosted by Kayla Sussell. Apr. 11, May 9, June 13, July 11.

CRAZY CHILD WRITING WORKSHOPS (fee: \$80)

Saturdays, 10am - 5pm, once a month.
Apr. 12 in Oakland, May 3 in Middletown,
June 7 in San Anselmo, July 5 in San Rafael.

10-WEEK WORKSHOPS poetry, prose, plays, nonfiction (fee: \$400), Mondays and Wednesdays, 7pm - 10pm, Temescal District, Oakland. Current series end May 19 and May 21. Next series start June 2 and June 4.

NOVEL AND CREATIVE NONFICTION WORKSHOPS (fee: \$400 for ten sessions)

One ongoing, intensive workshop meet for three hours every other Monday in Marin. Writers bring ten pages to each session. Limited to five writers.

THE NOVEL'S ARC (fee: \$500 for four sessions)

In this workshop four novelists commit to reading each other's novels and examining how the novel works as a whole. We'll devote a two-hour session to each novel. Current sessions end in April; next sessions start in May. Dates to be arranged.

HARBIN WRITING SEMINAR (fee: \$325, \$225 for Harbin residents; \$50 early registration discount, dormitory lodging and five catered meals)

Friday, July 18 at 6pm to Sunday, July 20 at 4pm. Harbin Hot Springs, Middletown, CA 95461 (To register, contact Elaine Watt 707-987-2339 x72 or accounting@harbin.org)

WRITING EXCURSIONS: SEE PAGE 8

For more information about any workshop, visit matsonpoet.com or phone 510-654-6495. To register (unless otherwise noted), phone 510-654-6495 or email clive@matsonpoet.com.

Water

Come on honey and make it rain.
Yes, you baby, the female presence.
What we call love.

Come on sweetie open the storm door.
Drop your high pressure ridge.
We have lives that need to be lived.

She puts a brick in her toilet tank to lower the flow.
If it's yellow it's mellow.
If it's brown flush it down.
She's beautiful, but her bathroom stinks.

He stops with cottonmouth at a gas station store.
Crystal Geyser is a buck a pint.
He gladly pays the eight dollars a gallon.
He can drink gasoline at half the price.
This doesn't sound right.

The tornadoes grow to two and a half miles across.
Her warm ocean gush swallows lower Manhattan.
The aquifer's water tastes like cosmetics.
Thank you, Cover Girl and Maybelline.
She always looks and smells better without you.

Her hot temper is flaring and California hasn't been caring.
Gone are the small farms of last time.
We ripped out the tomatoes and planted a patch
work of packed in attached homes.
And filled them with Joan and Joan who knows who?
They're all busy eating and pooping too.

Gualala, California is ninety miles north of San Francisco. A few years back the Gualala River mostly dried up. The taps ran dry. The town sits perched and parched overlooking the vast Pacific Ocean. An entrepreneur towed an iceberg down from Alaska in a plastic bag to the mouth of the river, let it melt. It turned out to be too expensive. Twenty miles or so south is Duncan Mills on a sweet bend in the Russian River. The Casini Ranch has fresh water from a huge underground aquifer that bubbles up in a green-lily covered mill pond. Paul Casini runs a fleet of dripping water trucks. They haul water up the treacherous winding coast road over Meyers Grade to Gualala. California's dry town buys every drop of water the residents flush down. No building permits are allowed.

Last time during the big drought they built a water pipeline on the bottom deck of the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge to save Marin. Since then we've been building square after square of gated communities and even a few casinos. Oh, don't worry friends, the golf courses will stay green and white kids caught with powder cocaine won't do time. Catch a black kid with a piece of rock and he'll be able to talk to you about the five to ten he did in a maximum security state pen cellblock.

Oh hell yes, we can all save every precious drop along the way. Yes, little tubs in the sink so the water doesn't disappear down the drain. Shorter showers and dead lawns oh-my, oh-my, come on sweetie make it rain. Come on honey and make it rain so we don't have to deal with this pain.

The central valley with air too thick to cut with a knife looks like a darkened night at daylight. The Kraft Velveeta factory pumping future heart attacks into giant stainless steel tanker trucks that blow plumes of black diesel smoke from twin stacks as they shift gears down highway ninety-nine. There's never blue sky, not ever-ever not anytime, Oh my!

Well hell, what's a cowpoke to do? Rent a water truck and haul four-thousand gallons at a time down from the ranch. That'd be seventy-two fifty-five gallon plastic drums. Heck you could charge deposits on the drums and rent people the pumps too. At twenty five bucks each it's two thousand a load. Yep, the old cowboy could make a thousand a day and it's legal too. Just like ordering a bottle of Alhambra except it's a fifty-five gallon plastic drum.

Water oh water. I know a guy with a truck. He's got a Peterbuilt tractor-trailer. Every morning he picks up a forty-foot empty shipping container at "Matson Lines" at the Port of Oakland. He gets coffee and drives empty over three hundred miles up highway 505 to highway 5 into Weed, California. He drops the empty container and picks up one loaded with those precious-little pint plastic bottles of Crystal Geyser. He hauls it back to the Port of Oakland. Longshoremen load the container on a ship that burns an equal amount of bunker fuel sailing under the Golden Gate to power thirty-thousand commuters in cars. Bankers in earthquake proof Tokyo high rise hotels pay eight bucks a bottle for

radiation free California water. Thanks, Roxanne
sixty-four dollars a gallon.

Come on baby, come on honey, oh please sweetie.
Bring your torrential spring rain.
Wash the piss and shit away.
Market Street needs your help in a big way.

I'll buy my ten plastic fifty-five gallon drums.
With my 4-cylinder truck and a little trailer, I'll
drive five hundred and fifty gallons a week down
from the ranch.

-- Daniel J. Coles

The Dry Oranges

I always recognize one
when it is sliced up on the plate.
I know it will be dry.
I know the tree it came from
did not receive much water or rain.
I eat it anyway.

I've watched the dry oranges being picked
by a man who balances astride on the limbs
as if riding a horse.
I sit under the arch of wisteria
and recall how once limber
I balanced on cherry trees
flung my legs round the strongest, barest branch,
swung my body upside down
then to and fro, again and again.

Today I sit below the wisteria arch
wanting to crayon house walls
like a child with a fever and no cure.
Instead, I watch the dry oranges being picked
on this sunny, cold day.

The man sways the branches with his stride.
He shakes the crown of blossom scent down
until I believe the tree will collapse
from canopy to ground.

I sit quietly and watch the dry oranges being picked
my cane close at hand.

-- A. M. Stanley

Untitled

The ocean swallows into itself, up churned in light.
A vase that could never contain it—gentler, tame,
devoid of force
is taken by it.

A window that once emitted a glow of rain is taken.
An old oak tree overtaken by an ivy vine is taken.
A paper dragon that once swam air now swims
ocean.

Paper flags of the eight auspicious symbols slither
a wave crest.

A Buddha's head statue that graced a lawn
has spilled into the sea that spills into itself,
omits nothing.

The ocean spins and churns up last week's calendar
pages,
spills and swallows in the brickbat from brownstones
in neighborhoods of happier childhoods,
the bathroom faucets of the perfectly content,
the books of the living and the dead.
Room is found for Little Red Riding Hood's dropped
red jacket.

The ocean does not apologize as it undertows
Hansel and Gretel into their early graves.
The ocean swallows itself and swallows feathers,
stones, talismans, candles
becomes overwrought with objects
that bound up and down in its rip waves,
surface from its undertow half digested
identities rendered half out of
reach.

-- A. M. Stanley



Don't Fight with Your Sister

(an excerpt from *My Bodyguards*)

It happened during one of the rare times that my sister, Flo, and I were living separately. She had a small apartment in Berkeley and was preparing to give it up and go on a long awaited trip to a beautiful Greek island. I was living in a small downstairs apartment in a lovely older home on a shady street in Oakland.

That evening we had met in Berkeley and attended an est seminar at a hotel there. I think its topic was something like "Be Here Now." It was 1974 and est (Erhard Seminars Training) was just beginning to become popular in the San Francisco Bay Area as a new sort of awareness course. Flo and I had done a three-day training session in 1973 and found it quite confidence boosting. It was based on a theme of personal responsibility – seeing ourselves as the creators of all our experiences in life and letting go of viewing ourselves as victims.

We had gone to the last session of this evening seminar. Flo had walked over from her apartment in Berkeley and I insisted on driving her home. It was late, after 10 PM, and I thought it wasn't safe for her to walk all the way home alone. When the seminar let out, she said goodbye and started to walk away. "Wait!" I called. "I'll drive you home."

"No, I'm fine. It's only a few blocks." It was a warm, summer evening and she preferred to walk.

"It's after 10. I think I should drive you," I said.

"It's not Detroit, Mo. It's Berkeley. I'm fine."

"Yeah. Well, please me anyway. Don't you want to see my new car?"

I'd just traded in my old Detroit car, a blue gas-guzzling '65 Chevy Impala Supersport, for a new little silver Toyota Corolla.

"Yeah, this I've got to see. Have you told Daddy yet that you've betrayed your Motown heritage and bought a Japanese car?"

"Not yet. I figure I'll just surprise him next time they come out to visit."

We both laughed, picturing our loyal lifetime GM-employee dad in the airport parking lot when

he saw that Maureen had gone over to the dark side and bought a foreign car. Mom would be easier to sway to our side once we convinced her how economical it was on gas.

We walked to the parking lot together and I drove Flo to her apartment. On the way we started arguing. I don't even recall what it was about now. I think it was something we interpreted differently in the seminar. Though she said she got a lot out of the training itself, she saw the seminar as rather silly and irritating. I thought it was deeply profound.

"Be here now. Be here now," she said, repeating the mantra the seminar leader had said over and over. "What the hell else can you be? Tell the truth, Mo," she teased. "You're not any more into this 'be here now' stuff than I am. You just like that handsome seminar leader."

Though there was some truth to that, I definitely wasn't going to admit it and felt insulted by her tone. I argued that the content of the seminar was important and she should have been paying attention. Then she was insulted and the battle began. We argued all the way to her house about my irritating sense of superiority and her refusal to listen to the wisdom of the ages. When she got out of the car, we shouted to each other, "Goodnight!" "Goodnight!"

I drove off, irritated as hell that she was so damned stubborn and would never admit when she was wrong. She stomped into her apartment, probably thinking the exact same thing about me.

When I got to my street, I noticed "No Parking" signs in front of my house and several other houses on my side of the street. This was apparently in preparation for some kind of street repair to take place the next day. All the parking spaces were taken on the other side of the street so I had to park up a couple of blocks on a side street that I wasn't familiar with. I found a well-lit area, parked, locked the car, and started walking.

As I walked away from the streetlight into a darker area, I heard someone quickly approach behind me. Nervous, I hastened my pace and was nearly home when the person quickly walked up

close behind me and said, "If you don't move into the shadows, I'll blow your head off!" I remembered my mom's voice when I was a kid in Detroit. She told me if anyone ever came after me in the dark, to run under a streetlight and scream. I headed into the street under the glow of a tall street lamp.

As I walked toward the light, I quickly looked around to see a rather short teenage boy with blonde hair and bangs. I didn't see a gun and he was wearing big round glasses that made him look like John Denver - not scary at all.

My Detroit sarcasm came to the fore. I looked him in the eye and said, "Why don't you just go home, sonny." Big mistake. This infuriated him and he came after me, grabbed me and tried to drag me out of the light. I fought hard and tried to get away - and for the first time in my life, I realized in a split second that I didn't have the strength to fight this person off. I was alone and I wasn't going to win. Terrified, I let out a scream so piercing and loud it surprised even me. I heard the sound of a shade going up in a neighbor's window. The boy ran off and I ran to my apartment.

My shaking hands double-locked the front door. Panting and with my heart beating rapidly, I ran and checked all the windows and made sure the back door was locked. Then I went back to the living room, sat down on the couch and cried. Sitting in that sunny yellow room with my cheery and romantic French Renaissance prints, colorful Persian rug, and dark green couch cover that I'd made myself usually lifted my spirits. But not tonight. Tonight I was just alone and scared.

I remembered my mother's voice again, telling me as a child, "Don't fight with your sister."

I reached for the phone and called Flo. When she heard my voice, she knew something was wrong. I told her what had happened and I said, "Let's not argue like that anymore, OK?"

"OK," she said. "Do you want me to come over?"

"No. I'm OK. He didn't hurt me."

"I think I should come over."

"No," I insisted. "He ran away. I'm not hurt.

Just let's not fight about stupid things anymore."

"OK," she said. "Did you call the police?"

"No," I said.

"Jesus, Mo! Call the police! I'm coming over!"

"No, Flo! He could still be out there! I'll call the police. I'll see you tomorrow."

We hung up. I called the police. They came, took a report, and I went to bed.

-- Maureen Williams

Untitled

The city he carries like a rabbit's foot barks at the island of death like a rifle - it touches everywhere softer than snakes louder than glass breaks in head on collisions.

The city is soft.
The city is loud.
The city he carries stretches beyond him.

He attempts to feed it, to appease it.
It barks and complains softer than a snake in the late night roadside diner.

In hysterical fluorescent light he has taken this city he carries - sat all its plush existence down and still it will not be content.

It barks like a rifle.
It fires, misfires.
He lifts it up and carries it away.

The neon diner sign is still bright numb, sleeping, OPEN.

-- A. M. Stanley

In the Beginning

The moon shone through Adam and Eve's flesh—
something the sun would not do.
So Adam and Eve began
to like the moon better.
Eve could follow the pulsings of Adam's blood
along his legs, his thighs, his stomach.
Adam could follow Eve's blood
along her arms, her neck, her breasts.
The moon was luminescent.
The sun was just needed for survival
for plants and fruits to grow.
They hid from the sun, danced beneath the moon.
Adam and Eve's skin would glow a pale amber hue.
They could see each other's hearts.
This never happened when the sun was out
and it was *Eat from this tree, not that*.
The seraphim at the boundaries of the garden
shrieked at night—the sounds of the voices
of one thousand non-existent angels.
This did not bother Adam and Eve.
Finally, Lucifer shrieked and begged to be Adam,
had his wings lopped, landed in Eden,
lumbered belly up a tree, spoke to Eve...
Adam and Eve were still content.
The days were full of slipping silent as snakes
away from something named God and the sun. At night
the moon shone through the flesh of Adam and Eve.

-- A. M. Stanley

Vultures Don't Sing

They smell the landscape for death.
Yet sacred, raising the eaten flesh
up to heaven on broad black wings
of dagger pointed feathers.

In Costa Rica they travel in packs
roost hunched on bare branches
resembling my own aged bending.
They face the ocean watching with us

the downward journey of the sun
to the horizon and the cape of color
it flings over us before leaving.
The sea a chorus of sound.

I turn away. Put on my shoes.
Walk up a dark path.

-- Dawn Ramm

To Focus

The small yellow butterflies dart
quick and bright against soft
green of leaves as if looking
for somewhere to focus.

Not lighting on my elderliness
where age imitates wisdom
so that the Hopi Indian
respectfully lowers his eyes

as I do to track the pattern
of dry cracked earth telling
a story of lack and shriveling.

Then look up at limbs, one
becoming the other.
Indistinguishable.

The birds sing. Each unique
and to my damaged ears
a composition arranged
for the space I empty.

-- Dawn Ramm

The Black Lab

After they wheeled him out,
his dog lay for days at that door
and cried until he also died.
I am remembering
as I shed my patients chart.

How the dog lay his head on his masters chest
and whined, then trotted to the patio door
growling, then back to the still breathing
body to cry again—
repeating this for an hour.

In the meantime, his wife
felt the weight of his hand lift
But when she looked, it still rested
on hers and from that time on
he began to die.

Then the dog stopped his pacing,
cautious and attentive
as if waiting for the signal
telling him the way he must go.

-- Dawn Ramm

WRITING EXCURSIONS 2014

June 15 - 22

"Feather River Art Camp"

Oakland Feather River Camp

Quincy, California, fee: tbd

<http://www.featherriverartcamp.com>

June 24 - 29

"Writing Your Way In"

Lendrick Lodge in Scotland

Fee: £450 + food and accommodations £275

(approx. \$749; \$458 for food, accommodations)

August 6 - 15

"Writing Highway 395" at Pine Cliff Resort, June Lake at Lee Vining, California, fee: tbd

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www.matsonpoet.com/classes

Closer to home: MIND/BODY WRITING WORKSHOP

(fee: \$85) with Tressa Berman

Saturday, May 17, 10am - 5pm in Oakland

DID YOU READ THE SCRIBBLER FINANCIAL REPORT?

Total expenses: \$366.87. Total income (from donors): \$300. Almost in the black, close enough that Clive didn't have to skin the cat and sell the fur as a wig. Please help Clive (and the cat) pay for this journal!

THE SCRIBBLER

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