

## Scribbler

OCTOBER 2015

ISSUE 85

**Guest Editor's Note: on custom, tradition, obsession, relationship**

We survive by telling stories which reveal our desires and connection, losses and the breeding of memories; we are connected to our past and everyone's experiences and ancestors through our precious human frailty. We long for meaning, for the comfort of relationships among the grit and grizzle of opportunity, unfortunate circumstance or choices--- the day to day grind. Language affords us the luxury to contemplate and discover these moments and reflect on the curious behaviors we have embraced, sometimes random and lucky, sometimes dangerous and possibly healing.

—Tobey Kaplan, Oakland, CA

**Silk**

The women stand in cold water  
spillage from the sink where they  
pull the worms apart, and the  
threads wind onto spools

and their lives come to the spool  
of the factory each day, and the  
threads of their bodies tighten  
around arthritic fingers in the cold

going into their bones, yet they reach  
for the cocoons and capture the  
essence of what could be  
a butterfly that will not awaken

while their own threads of pain tighten  
around knees and wrists which  
move by themselves and all they can  
think of is when they can move away

from the sink, and where they will sit to  
eat the homemade box lunch of noodles  
– in the sun? -- and of how dirty their  
coarse-woven dress becomes as they

stand by the sink, stand in the water  
in cold so cold in fingers and feet  
and reach for another cocoon,  
twisting and turning the threads.

—JoAnn Anglin, Sacramento, CA

**To Find the Opening**

When summer enters fall,  
birds slip in and out  
to make the portal wider.

How quickly people in her world  
come and go,  
each loss feathers into her next.

Her aching shoulders,  
turning into herself,  
arms against chest.

Like sky entering geese,  
as they rise out of dark waters,  
she wishes to be lifted,  
her bones hollow for flight.

In an interstice of her mind  
she's a wing rising.

—Lara Gularte, Diamond Springs, CA  
First published in *The Bitter Oleander*



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**PREVIOUS-ISSUE FINANCIAL REPORT**

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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

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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.

October 9, November 13, December 11, January 8

**CRAZY CHILD WRITING WORKSHOPS (fee: \$80)**

Saturdays, 10am - 5pm, once a month.

October 3 in Oakland

November 14, place TBA

December 12, place TBA

January 9 in Martinez

**10-WEEK WORKSHOPS** poetry, prose, plays, nonfiction (fee: \$400), Mondays, 7pm - 10pm, Temescal District, Oakland. Current sessions end October 7; next sessions start October 14.

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

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

**STRUCTURE OF LARGE WORK**

(fee: \$400 for ten sessions)

For writers with a draft of a full-length play, script, or novel, or who want to start a large work. Our topics are standard repertory, starting with "Whose story is it?" Current sessions end October 9; next sessions start October 16.

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

In this workshop four novelists commit to reading each other's novels and examining how each works as a whole. We'll devote a two-hour session to each novel. Next sessions will be arranged in January.

**WRITING EXCURSIONS: SEE PAGE 8**

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



## The Center of the Forest

I went into the forest and shed words like leaves.  
I was so tall eucalyptus trees grew between my legs  
Hills bumped my breasts. Foxes ate my tongue,  
licking their lips.  
What should have hurt became music and and I danced;  
blues horns grew like mushrooms between my toes.  
Birds nested in my hair.  
I became the land. Long ago I dug with a red tin spade  
in our backyard looking for China.  
Now I put my own roots down in the center of the earth  
tickling gophers and small gods. A snake drank my  
shadow.  
I stood so still I could hear restless wars from half-way  
around the world,  
bombers. flames, tanks while a circle of rabbits  
wrinkled their noses with disgust. I am the land.  
The lovely blue nettle flower and poison ivy between  
lovers.  
And the rose. I hold up my thumb at night and  
blot out the the moon  
Ants climbed the stem of sunflower and at my name,  
what use would I have for a name? Here? Now?  
I am the land.  
I open my mouth and drink the storm.

—Julia Vinograd, Berkeley, CA



## Ridge, Wedge, Ring

I sat on the examining table in a blue plastic outfit, twisting my wedding ring back and forth. As if this were not a dream, the doctor said, *Where bones should be open, rib cage in its place, lungs and liver in theirs, in your body, the organs are constricted.* His cool hand touched me on my right side. Was that pity in his gaze?

I stared at my ring, antique, thin gold in a wide band, shallow diamonds in the centers of three stars. He showed me the x-ray. *Below your heart, the body is tight. We could drive a wedge but it's dangerous.* I pulled the ring over my knuckle, pushed it back.

*Ridge and Wedge*, the doctor said. *Write those words down.* Ridge--meeting line of two upward-sloping surfaces. Wedge--sharpened block driven between two parts to separate them. When I woke, I took off my wedding ring.

And shortly after that, I bought a ticket for the night train. The dark went on and on as I sat at the window and the train climbed through lonely, snow-covered mountains. When did we pass the border? I had lived in the country of marriage for so long.

Years passed. Ridge became a long narrow hilltop I could walk along. Wedge turned into a piece of cheese, a door stop. The ring stayed in a drawer. Sometimes my son's sweetheart liked to try it on. When I'd mutter, *Bad luck ring*, she'd look at the three sparkling stars set in rosy gold. My son would say, *Mom, it's just a piece of metal.* They decided to marry, asked me for the ring. For a long time I didn't know how to answer.

—Catherine Freeling, Berkeley CA

First published in *New Ohio Review*, Fall 2011

## Sitting Shiva in a Baptist Pew

Blessed be you, grinning, I'm sure, before your own  
urn, done at last with righteous pain's  
waves, crackles, stabs.  
Blessed be you, heavy with horsehair and  
honeysuckle,  
full of bursts and booms and bounty,  
light with tales, embraces, tilting airs.  
Blessed be the stacks of paper waiting  
for lines I don't know how to say  
and checks I cannot write.  
Blessed be the lock that may or may not  
succeed in modulating  
the river's forceful flow.  
Blessed be the creaky door, paint peeling,  
that opens slowly, shooting arrow-light  
toward those who keep eyes open.  
Blessed be well-meaning friends who seem  
too cleanly to divide the yolks and whites  
of suffering and blessing.  
Blessed be bagpipe, organ, poem, players, sayers  
who hear beyond background noise  
the music in the moment.  
Blessed be the maple as it leans  
into a dipping sun that lights  
the torch of every leaf.  
Blessed be the Spirit that defies definition,  
fear of every kind, all loud or  
whispered endings.  
Blessed be these poor words I write  
in new combinations on the numb  
pages of my heart.

—Kathleen McCoy, Queensbury, NY

### **bite (a fractured fairy tale)**

your morning oracle  
promises to promote  
the perfect pout,  
preferred angles of neck and chin--  
for glances, whispers, midnights

then she arrives...

her skin,  
river stone smooth  
with a smile of pearls,  
and her emerald eyes dance  
under lashes that curl  
toward the rising sun

you are buried  
under bandaged hope,  
scorched history  
of never-afters

you can't avoid  
the highway veins, the burns, the peels,  
the spots that never disappear

so you brush your newly blackened hair,  
scarlet gloss your lips,  
dangle diamonds from both lobes;  
hide the wrinkles, creases, lumps  
under chiffon and silk

but somehow  
you are still invisible as the wind  
while she dances with birds and words,  
sings of first times,  
exhales teen freshness,  
hungry for love to appear  
in her thicket of dreams

— Marianne Betterly, Kensington, CA

### **All alone I have to pour my own saki**

The legend says that you should never pour your own--it's bad luck. But while I wait for those who share my world and the waitress is obviously unaware of this tradition, I am obligated to pour my own drink. I walk down Castro Street, Friday dinner hour beginning. A weird world we all share, gay lovers and their parents visiting from other places. A world we haven't quite invented yet, just got thrust into the muddled and mixed up between sameness and longing insanity, between virtues of traditional romance and either sex survival, animal instinct mating paring developing one place then moving on nomads. There is no vocabulary. Children restless with images of summer, how we escaped never expecting to be delighted in school. Children just like the old days, selling street corner lemonade. Pulling out the air no images no words, we ask for a world to create children for ourselves for survival. We discover our world not ready for the pictures, drawing sleep out of words touching together sadly the silence that no one can speak afterwards stretching out this light we imagined after the sharing, swimming in the darkness that believes in the shadows we surrender we pour into ....

— Tobey Kaplan, Oakland, CA (earlier version first published in *Androgyny* 9/10 (1987))

### **Ritual**

The house is quiet tonight:  
everyone is ready; the waiting begins.  
Mother lights the blue candles  
perched in the sterling candlesticks.  
Her head covered, in Hebrew she recites  
the blessing her mother, Rebecca – Rifka –  
my namesake, taught her decades ago;  
I wait, squirming from foot to foot, inhaling  
the magic of my mother's chicken  
slowly simmering in the cast iron pot,  
wafting smells of tomatoes and onions –  
the gedempte chicken, the chicken  
of immigrant women.

My mother, tired, has rushed home from work,  
rituals to perform before the sun sets over our valley  
on this and every Friday night. She has removed  
her apron; my father has shaved and wears  
his best tie; I have washed my face and brushed  
my long, dark curls. Our white pottery plates  
stand ready; the chicken calls. Now on foreign shores –  
Tashkent, Vilnius, Cairo,  
Dushambe, Quom – lands where I have traveled,  
where other mothers pray, I eat alone  
on Friday nights, deaf to synagogues' songs,  
while only memories simmer.

— Ruby Bernstein, Oakland, CA  
First published in *Digital Paper*, 2011

## Undertow

The way we cling to each other  
attempting to swim back to shore  
the way we know we could drown  
if we don't separate  
before the tidal flow pulls us  
too far out in the too deep  
sweeps us up in a great sea-wave  
of how we will probably end up  
we try to swim the rip current  
side by side, parallel to the shore  
know the undertow is strongest  
at the surface, not the flow below  
our bodies birthed from the same  
salts and waters we swim in that  
tell me to pull you down, darling  
hanging on, because I love you  
sinkingly.

— Eileen Malone, Broadmoor Village, CA

## Instantaneous auxiliary maxims

that derive from elegant uncompromising  
indisputable mathematics  
flash before our eyes  
and blister the void with unforgivable creation  
that must make its way among the nothingness  
and become something.  
Because of this we stand naked and confused  
beneath a sky that makes no sense.  
But then we begin to sing and dance  
we begin to whistle and fish  
we begin to beat rhythms  
to the sights we see.  
And it all begins to move...  
In that chaotic unscripted way of  
natural invention.  
We become what we are  
and what we wish to be  
matching one with the other  
becomes our destiny  
This is the universe you know,  
we're all going some/nowhere together.

— Matthew Murphy, Coeur d'Alene, ID



## Ghost Puppies

The mother-dog  
keeps searching for her ghost-  
puppies, but they're  
not dead.

Their scent stays  
in crevices and fabric-  
weave, in shadow  
that no sun burns off.

They've gone to new homes,  
new hands  
for petting, voices  
of bidding and praise.

Their mother obsesses,  
as all mothers will, the physical  
bonds that bore them,  
held them for  
a time, her time.

Their scent diminishes  
to morning dew on meadow  
and the ghost-puppies rise  
refreshed.

They've left; gone

beyond her  
to new homes. Their scent  
here and there  
is memory; life giving  
off its sparkle  
in countless flakes  
like snow. Like sun-scurf  
on the air,  
it's everywhere.

— Taylor Graham, Placerville, CA

## Fungible

He said, agreeing with his father, that jobs  
should move like a yoga master  
stretching through sun salutation,  
then catching a plane to another country.  
Outsource is nothing like the locavore bistro  
in search of the freshest ingredients.  
Outsource is the fungible who wait outside  
the supermarket, hands  
outstretched; but this market is far  
from the one where he shops, far  
from a location where private security  
patrols comfortable illusions.

— Carol Dorf, Berkeley, CA

## Vineyard

Knowing too much about one thing so it fills  
all the corridors and nubs, days and evenings,  
scent, texture, shape. Even though soundless,  
it talks, loud and incessant, through dream  
and into the moon's feeble littering of the land.  
He planted all around the house, acres of  
vines, lovingly staked them up. Vines need  
something to climb on, smother with tendrils,  
leaves, longing. And then the watering. Best  
time: evening. Pray for rain, dig trenches,  
run pipelines from river to roots. Clear away  
weeds, watch the skies in spring when bloom  
sets, pray for no rain then and no rain in August  
when yellow ripeness cracks at a single cold  
drop. Cracks, drips, rots away everything --  
attention, pruning, all the nights away from the  
babies and their mother, tramping water courses  
after sunset, insuring that water flows into  
the right path, no gopher holes to suck it  
down the hill, wasted.

—Grace Marie Grafton, Oakland, CA



## Never Leave Your Baby

Because her father has left her she cries  
wide-mouthed in the day  
in the night in her sleep he is dead  
staring inside her little head, his stolen face.  
He hated me as she watched  
from the trap of my arms,  
as he threw the words she caught them,  
as I spat them back  
they grazed her skin,  
enduring weapons.  
She stood at the window, calling Daddy  
until the dust was wet

## Ode to a Diminutive Harley or Horse

I dated a woman with eyebrow rings.  
She had a Harley,  
but it was a very small Harley.  
Riding pillion behind her,  
I had to hold my knees against my chin  
to keep my feet from scraping the Bay Bridge.

On Hispaniola I dated a man with a horse,  
but it was a very small horse.  
He took offense when I called it a pony,  
insisted it was a horse. Some species  
get smaller on islands, so perhaps it was  
a pygmy horse, like the family of hobbits  
whose three-foot skeletons they found  
in a cave on that Indonesian atoll.

I want a woman with a real Harley  
or a man with a real horse,  
not a dyke on a Vespa,  
or a yeshiva bocher on an eohippus.  
Twilight approaches. Though once I rode  
my motorcycle through a hurricane,  
my horseback/motorbike days  
will never come back to me.

A poem in my book about riding at night  
with no lights is not a motorcycle  
between the thighs, any more  
than a poem about an urn can be  
hurled like an urn. If you throw  
a poem against a wall,  
paper just flutters.  
I want the crash,  
the shards.

—Jan Steckel, Oakland, CA

where her eyes met the sill.  
It hurt so much I cry still  
and know it happened. I did it  
wrong, the bitch in my head says  
it is my fault.  
I wished I had never met him  
but that lie breaks her piece from my heart,  
collapsed like the flat life she fills up.  
Daddy never calls, she doesn't know why  
the balloon he blew for her birthday long ago  
shriveled on the floor.  
She kept it for years.  
She can't remember what he looks like.

—Julie Rogers, Oakland, CA

## Silent Marriage

I waited for shadows to deepen  
from day to night  
Expected that special daily call  
at least when night came to overshadow day  
Phone rang  
my heart quickened to happiness  
*I'll get it* I called to mother  
Yes I said lovingly  
ready to hear his calm voice  
ask me to hurry and come to him  
In an instant I could tell he was not  
at the other end of our love line  
A voice calmly asked for me  
then said she regretted  
there was a terrible accident .....

Did not remember hanging up

but did forget to ask where how when  
Remember looking at mother  
her face feeling my pain  
she seemed to know without asking  
Thought the family would contact me  
allow me to be included  
with our mutual grief  
After less than a week of calling  
in death's silent wake  
I heard from friends he and his family  
returned to distant lands  
Lands never for me to know where  
he was laid to rest  
without my pillow of love  
You ask why I am not married  
Oh but I am silently within

— Gloria Rodriguez, Hercules, CA

## STONE COLD

I should never have asked. But my eyes could not escape the framed black and white photo of this handsome, spectacled gray-haired man with an official sash across his chest.

My bed was in the parlor of this tidy Rumanian home in Cluj, a gateway to Transylvania, and it was late, after midnight, and I was fatigued from a long, slow second-class journey from Budapest. The photo rested securely on the top of a small locked étagère.

When I pointed to the picture, my hostess, a gray-haired woman in her 60's, took a handkerchief from her homemade cotton apron and dabbed her eyes. So this must have been her husband, I thought.

She jabbered away in what I supposed was Rumanian, tears flowing softly. I wished for some cognates, but I was too tired to grasp any words that sounded like French or Spanish. And I wished that Attila had remained in the house. The blonde English-speaking ethnic-Hungarian teenager had magically appeared at the train station. He volunteered to lead me to Madame X's bed and breakfast; "Madame X is Hungarian," he boasted proudly. "She keeps a very clean home."

I have a bad habit of nodding my head when I am talking with foreigners even if I don't quite get all of the lingo. So Madame X went on with her tearful story, lovingly glancing at the picture. And I kept nodding. And she kept crying as she passionately told me about what I imagined to be the recent death of her mate.

Unlocking the étagère, from the middle shelf she gingerly fingered an attractive Italian cloisonné box. I was prepared for a souvenir: maybe an Elks Club ring or some kind of a fraternal commendation or a Guerre Mondial medal. But when she cautiously lifted the lid, I stifled a yawn and was all eyes, my brown near-sighted eyes penetrating the small embellished container – I was unprepared for what I saw: The box held at least a hundred tiny, smooth gray stones. I did not need Rumanian to tell me that I was looking at her husband's kidney stones. I clutched my right side, sympathetically, and grasped a used Kleenex from my jacket pocket; Madame X felt for another dry handkerchief. What was there to say. I put my arms around this sobbing widow.

I slept in her parlor for three nights, my eyes turned away from her treasure.

— Ruby Bernstein, Oakland, CA  
First published in *Digital Paper*, 2011.

## WRITING EXCURSIONS

### LAKE COUNTY WORKSHOP

"LET THE CRAZY CHILD WRITE!"

Saturday, October 24, 4 to 6 pm, and

Sunday, October 25, 10 am to 5 pm

Lake County Arts Council Gallery

235 Main Street, Lakeport, CA 95453

Fee \$55. Phone 707-263-6658 to register,

510-654-6495 for details on the workshop.

### WRITING COSTA RICA

January 30 - February 6, 2016

Nosara Retreat Center, Guanacaste, Costa Rica

Fee \$1400

Host: Deborah Tommassini

debratom@aol.com, 212-381-1823

www.NosaraRetreat.com

For a full description and itinerary, AND TO REGISTER, check out Clive's "Excursions" webpage under the Instruction tab at: <http://matsonpoet.com>.

### SCRIBBLER FINANCIAL REPORT

Total expenses: \$441.74.

Total income from donors (thank you!): \$120.

Once again, financial ruin looms. If you don't want to see Clive selling his crystals, or renting out his cat or ping-pong table, please donate.

### THE SCRIBBLER

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