



The Windhover

The Windhover

22.2

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Fall 2018

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Cover: *Barn in The Smokies*

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University of Mary Hardin-Baylor Press

Dr. Randy O'Rear, President & CEO

Belton, Texas

The Windhover is published twice a year, in February and August.

Subscriptions are \$22 (two issues).

The most recent issue is \$12.

Back issues are \$6.

For full submission guidelines, subscription and purchasing information,
and samples of back issues, please visit *The Windhover* homepage:

<http://undergrad.umhb.edu/english/windhover-journal>

The Windhover is a proud member of CLMP
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LARRY D. THACKER

Poet or Lover of Poetry

And what if God is more
of a software writer
than some hand-sweeping,
galaxy forming gesturist
strolling leisurely
about the Present and Known
Universal Creation (PK.UC),
the all-seeing eye hunkered down,
fingers typing too fast for our minds
to comprehend on some
retro PC it recycled for fun
from some back-alley pawn shop,
pumping out code:

// this barley field turns green to brown
here along the north end of the barn
which appears lovely on a Tuesday in spring
in 2018, mid-May, as a golden bolt of sunlight
travels along the roof then over the waving heads
of grain, inspiring the balanced sentiments
of a poet driving by with a camera, stopping
for the shot, then writing a short piece later
that is eventually recognized by a low-circulated
but well-admired poetry journal //

BARBARA CROOKER

Today the River

Today, the brouillard, a wispy drape of muslin,
covers the Garonne. Thin, insubstantial, it won't last,
will burn off under the hot lamp of the October sun.
Unlike the solid stones of Chapelle Sainte-Catherine du Port,
patron saint of river workers, boatmen and sailors. And I've sailed
out of my everyday life to live by the river in an old mill,
near this chapel from Carolingian times. Mine's such a new country,
nothing in our history stretches back this far. So much to learn
from history's long reach. When they tried to torture Catherine
by tying her to a wheel, she shattered it with a touch. Mist rises
from the past, stones on which this chapel lies. Frescoes
from the eighteenth century peel and flake, but we can still see:
ships plying the river. Sails. A stained glass anchor.
Models of boats given in thanksgiving for safe journeys.
Sainte Catherine, I'm traversing this life without a compass
or sextant, and the current is treacherous. Burn off
the fog of doubt and uncertainty. Steer me
on a course toward home.

DAVID WRIGHT

Instructions for Using a Slide Rule

A 1961 University of Illinois ID shows a picture of a 20-something white man with a crew cut: “Charles Wright, Department of Mathematics.” Next to the ID, his slide rule nests in the cardboard box, there with a pile of old pens and postcards, a few dozen foreign coins.

Take out the leather case, as long as your forearm. Finger the smooth cowhide and flip open the holster. Hold the surprisingly heavy object in both palms. Weigh it. You have no idea how to make it work.

Recall: your father used this every day for decades. He could make it sing. Make it make meaning. Use it to be more powerful than he was. Did it feel heavy in his hands? Did it lighten things for him?

Trace the tiny silver rivets that hold this thing together. Slide the center in and out and back again. Feel it click into place. Put it back in the holster and secure it to your own leather belt. Your waist, now, at fifty-one, is not as large as your father’s, but you can wear his jackets, his sweaters.

Remember when you found this in the office drawer, pulled it out and pretended it was a weapon. You were seven, maybe eight. He had brought you to work for the day because you were sick. Or maybe bored and pretending to be sick. You made the shooting noises with your mouth. Pew. Pew-pew.

Realistic sounds, you thought, though you’d only seen guns on television westerns and cop-shows. And that one Thanksgiving when your cousin shot a rabbit in the snow at your Aunt’s farm. Blood stained the snow in the cornfield. He asked if you wanted a shot. You wish you had said *yes*.

“You know what that is?” your father asked, looking up from a set up papers he was marking. When he finished one, he always folded it in half, lengthwise. You have seen him do this hundreds of times. “David, do you know?” You shook your head *no*.

“Slide rule. More powerful than a gun.” You knew it wasn’t a pistol, or a little rifle, but you had wanted it to be one, had made it one in your mind.

He takes it from you and shows you how to calculate a logarithm. He talks about astronauts and computers. While he keeps talking, you lock on that one word, *logarithm*, and think it is a musical term. You take piano lessons on Wednesday nights. Like with many things, you are wrong. He tells you so.

You liked it better when it was like a complicated wooden gun. And now, holding it in your fifty-one-year-old hands, you slide it from the holster again. You aim it at nothing in particular. Pew. Pew. Louder than you mean to be.

CARA HOWARD

Postmortem Theology

Twenty minutes after we met, she uncovered her wound, right there in the church parking lot.

I'd never seen her before. The coordinator assigned the new volunteer to shadow me as I assisted our food pantry shoppers. Dressed in a turquoise t-shirt, cropped jeans, and running shoes, she blended in with the crew. The barrette pulling back her chestnut brown shoulder-length hair revealed the sharp angles of her tanned cheekbones. I assumed it was shyness that fueled her nervous energy until my innocent question unlocked her tragic story. It was a case of small talk gone awry.

“How old is your son?”

She'd mentioned him in passing, contributing an anecdote to a light-hearted group discussion as we snaked through the aisles of groceries. I followed up to be friendly. But when I spoke those words, the atmosphere sharpened. The light disappeared from her eyes as if I'd tripped an invisible switch. Just before she looked away, her face flickered and hardened. I got no answer.

Unsettled, I pushed through the awkwardness with a rambling monologue of upbeat small talk. The two of us rolled the stocked cart outside to wait for our shopper, who had gone to get her car so we could load the bags into her trunk. After the guest drove away, she pulled me aside and told me the truth.

Her words exploded in flashes. Snapshots of memory fleshed out the story in rapid-fire rhythm. The drunken game of Russian roulette in her kitchen. A deafening blast that made her come running. The gunshot that took two lives, one of them her only son. The hot, sticky blood pouring from his head into her trembling hands.

Maternal guilt prevented her from dulling her pain with heroin, complicating bereavement with withdrawal. The calendar kept count: so far, she'd survived forty-one days clean, each one haunted with nightmares. She confessed her anger toward God for allowing this to happen.

When she finished, aftershocks pulsed through my brain and heart. I choked out pithy phrases in a clumsy attempt to comfort her. Blindsided by her vulnerability, I stood dazed in the charged air, as if struck by a rogue lightning bolt out of a cloudless blue sky.

* * *

Images of the dead birds flew through my mind, discoveries made after a recent hailstorm. Clumps of spring leaves ripped from healthy branches littered the lawn. Icy quarter-sized bullets had claimed innocent victims. Plucked in various stages of development from their nests, they rested where they fell: on the sidewalk, under the pear tree, in the side yard. Translucent reptilian skin stretched over tiny frames, the still-forming flesh painted in deep-bruise colors: purples, pinks, and yellows. Bodies knocked out of cracked shells curled into balls. Upturned beaks made no noise.

After the shock passed, I realized further indignities loomed. Better to bag their bodies and throw them into the trash, I reasoned, than leave them to suffer the curiosity of neighbor's dog, the wheels of roller-skating children, or the blade of the riding mower. I scooped them up with a garden trowel. Their bodies hardly added any weight.

* * *

I couldn't hide the fact that I was rattled. The violence of her story clashed with the peaceful privilege of my own. We'd lived the same number of years but in alternate realities. I didn't know what to say. We hugged. She wiped the corners of her eyes and thanked me for listening, then stiffened back into her shell. We pulled ourselves together and headed back to work.

Reentering the building, we were approached by an older woman, a regular client at the pantry I'd met a few times before. My lips formed a greeting and my cheeks slapped on a smile. We exchanged pleasantries while my untethered thoughts floated overhead. The lady started in on a story before I knew what was happening. We listened, helpless, as she unloaded into our ears.

Without warning, she fired out harrowing details. Her grown son in line to buy a sandwich. A stranger with a gun. The cold metal barrel pressed against his forehead. The empty click of a pulled trigger. The echoing silence and absence of pain.

The man's maniacal laughter left stunned witnesses and lingering terror. Two weeks later, her family remained shaken. In the telling, she exuded gratitude for God's protection.

As soon as the gun was drawn, I longed to take cover and prevent whatever followed from ramming into fresh grief, but the collision was unavoidable. There was no time to delay the impact or swerve out of harm's way. The woman sensed she'd hit a nerve. I stared at her, speechless, afraid to turn my head and assess the damage.

“Have you had a gun-related incident too?” she whispered, looking at my fellow volunteer.

“Yes,” my new friend admitted.

“Did it end...OK?” Her question hung suspended in the space between them, a dissonant note, aching for resolution.

“No. No, it didn’t.” Her eyes pooled.

* * *

I thought of the other birds in my rising body count, fully-formed and intact, lying along my path. Black and yellow feathers encircled one corpse like a stray flower blown from its stalk. Layered wings blanketing another evoked the folded paper of an oriental fan. Stiff, curled claws formed haunting sidewalk shadows. Open eyes stared straight ahead, seeing nothing.

I bent down to examine their intricate designs, awed and confused by this opportunity for close inspection. I could only imagine how they’d landed there. Had they, too, fallen in the storm? Been attacked by an animal? Shot out of the sky? With no blood or teeth marks, there was no way to tell. It felt senseless. Random. Wrong.

Tiny beings, still and silent at my feet, arrested my attention, not with their graceful freedom, but their paralysis. Like ghosts inhabiting the twilight between worlds, their presence, marked by absence, lingered long after I walked away.

* * *

The blessed and the cursed stood side by side in the aftermath. As the two women grasped hands, grief surged through them. The stunned survivors stumbled over words of apology and relief, attempting to make sense of what had happened and what had almost happened. I held my tongue, chastened. In the presence of pain, silence seemed best.

RENEE EMERSON

Anne Hutchinson

You have stepped out of your place, have rather been a husband than a wife, and a preacher than a hearer; and a magistrate rather than a subject.

—Reverend Hugh Peter of Salem

Not a wife—a Jezebel
Not a preacher—a witch
Not quiet—speaking
Not beneath you, not bending down,
I have stepped out
of my place, I have
removed my black frock
and petticoats and stamped
them in the mud.

Sometimes the preacher gives
us winterberries, growing
under packed snow
for the mittened hand to paw out.

Sometimes the preacher gives
us blueberries, growing
in thickets for the black-stained
hand and tin pail.

Sometimes the preacher gives
magnolia leaves, glinting
waxed and green, with
shocks of white flower between.

Sometimes the preacher gives
stones; and we throw
them into the rivers, into the fields,
at each other.

I took the sermons, teased
them out, laid them flat,
for all the men and women,
gathering in my living room.

What charge can you bring against me?
I go into the world
bearing no arms, only God's
truth.

I go into massacre,
with my bonnet hanging
down my back
the sun bleaching
my fine golden hair.

NATHANIEL A. SCHMIDT

The Kiss of Peace

The patristic fathers would call this a love-feast:
rotisserie chicken fragrancng the deli
where a dozen of us meet to discuss scripture;
linoleum tiles and shelves of discounts
decorating our evening's upper room.

Across the cheap table sits an athletic blonde,
dressed in sweats, her hair fashionably curled,
fingers tracing new prayers in a journal
as we bumble about the mysteries of faith,

and she wouldn't be anything remarkable,
just another attractive girl in the group,
had not twelve years prior, back in college,
her face hovered its grace before my own:
surprising by slipping her tongue between my lips
to be the first woman I'd ever kiss.

As the word *First* there denotes, she wasn't my last,
my past a litany of lessons and mistakes
leading me out of Eden to Salem,
saving her from me, permitting her to promise
I do to the man who reads Acts alongside her;
their beaming newborn bouncing on her knee.

She was supposed to be a memory, but Life
can be funny when crafting our stories:
her pale-blue eyes miles away from my mind
when I stepped into my car this evening,
but, as though some celestial order plots us,
she stares her pupils once more into mine
so her tongue can surprise one final time:

praying for me, and for my fiancée,
the lover she just learned will be my wife—
her fellow woman who'll kiss me at the altar.

DEREK OTSUJI

Homeless Woman Reading a Bible on a Tree-Shaded Park Bench at Dawn

The yellow light clings to leaves
in the shadow-latticed tree
in which a small wind moves,
like a thought rustling.

She's stepped into her mind,
the Holy Book open in her lap
to a passage over which her finger
has found reason to pause—

A message traverses
the twilight space of centuries,
finding place in the acolyte
of the listening heart.

When a wind ruffles the edge
of the page she hushes it,
repositioning her hand
to keep the page still.

But what you hear
are wings of the dove lift
from the page, fly skyward
with the dawn's white cry.

CONTRIBUTORS

DAVID ATHEY's poems and stories have appeared in various journals, including *The Iowa Review*, *Southern Humanities Review*, *The Windhover*, and *Tampa Review*. He teaches creative writing at Palm Beach Atlantic University, and his latest novel is *Joan of the Everglades*.

MAGGIE BLAKE BAILEY has poems published or forthcoming in *Ruminate*, *Tar River*, *Tinderbox*, and elsewhere. Her chapbook, *Bury the Lede*, is available from Finishing Line Press, and her debut full-length collection, *Visitation*, will be available from Tinderbox Editions in 2019. For more work, please visit www.maggielakebailey.com.

CHRISTINE BOLDT, a retired librarian, has lived in Texas for thirty-eight years. She was a Peace Corps Volunteer in Nigeria in the 1960s, and lived in Italy during the 1970s. Her poetry has appeared in *The Christian Century*, *The Windhover*, *Texas Poetry Calendar*, *Enigmatist*, *Bearing the Mask*, the *Poetry Society of Texas Book of the Year*, *Red River Review*, *Ilyia's Honey*, and *Encore*.

MICHELLE BROOKS has published a collection of poetry, *Make Yourself Small*, (Backwaters Press), and a novella, *Dead Girl, Live Boy*, (Storylandia Press). A native Texan, she has spent much of her adult life in Detroit.

ALLISON CHESTNUT has been published in *Foliate Oak Literary Magazine*, *Caveat Lector*, and the *Emerald Coast Review*. In 2016, her poem "County Road 518 at County Road 24" received an honorable mention in the 2016 AWP Intro Journals Project competition. After 30+ years of college teaching, she has leapt over the classroom desk and recently graduated with the MFA from Mississippi University for Women. She has read poetry at SAMLA, SCMLA, Mississippi Philological Association and the Conference on Christianity and Literature. She holds the Ph.D. from Louisiana State University and is currently professor of English at William Carey University.

MICHAEL DEAN CLARK is an author of fiction, literary nonfiction, and digital literature. Co-editor of *Creative Writing in the Digital Age* and *Creative Writing Innovations*, his creative work has appeared most recently in *Pleiades*, *The Other Journal*, *Hoosier Lit*, and *Angel City Review* among others.

BARBARA CROOKER's work has appeared in many journals, including previously in *The Windhover*, *The Christian Century*, *America*, *Sojourners*, *Saint Katherine Review*, *Perspectives*, *Literature and Belief*, *The Cresset*, *Tiferet*, *Spiritus*, *Assisi*, *Dappled Things*, *Ruminate*, *Rock & Sling*, *Relief*, *Seminary Ridge Review*, *The Anglican Theological Review*, and anthologies such as *The Bedford Introduction to Literature* and *Imago Dei: Poems from Christianity and Literature*. She is a recipient of the Thomas Merton Poetry of the Sacred Award.

CHRIS ELLERY is author of four poetry collections, most recently *Elder Tree* and *The Big Mosque of Mercy*. He has received the X.J. Kennedy Award for Creative Nonfiction, the Dora and Alexander Raynes Prize for Poetry, and the Betsy Colquitt Award. A member of the Texas Institute of Letters, Ellery teaches literature, creative writing, and film criticism at Angelo State University.

RENEE EMERSON, the mother of four daughters and wife to a Presbyterian music minister, was born in Tennessee and resides in Arkansas. She has published poems in magazines such as *Perspectives*, *Still*, and *Valley Voices*, and currently teaches online courses for various universities. She has published two books: *Keeping Me Still* (Winter Goose Publishing, 2014) and *Threshing Floor* (Jacar Press, 2016).

JENNIFER STEWART FUESTON lives in Longmont, Colorado. Her work has appeared in a wide variety of journals, most recently *Pilgrimage*, *Ruminate*, and *Rise Up Review*. Her poem, "Trying to Conceive," was a finalist for *Ruminate* magazine's 2018 McCabe poetry prize. Her chapbook, *Visitations*, was published in 2015. She has taught writing at the University of Colorado, Boulder, as well as internationally in Hungary, Turkey, and Lithuania.

DANIEL GLEASON lives in Dayton, Tennessee, where he teaches literature, composition, and creative writing at Bryan College. His poems have appeared in *Rosebud*, *Tipton Poetry Journal*, *Sharkpack Poetry Review*, and elsewhere.

PATRICIA L. HAMILTON is a professor of English in Jackson, Tennessee. She won the 2015 and 2017 Rash Award in poetry and has been nominated for three Pushcarts. Recent work has appeared in *Whale Road Review*, *Split Rock Review*, *Not Very Quiet*, and *Valley Voices*. Her first collection, *The Distance to Nightfall*, was published in 2014 by Main Street Rag.

MARYANNE HANNAN has published poems from her Psalm manuscript in *Anglican Theological Review*, *ARTS: The Arts in Religious and Theological Studies*, *Christianity and Literature*, *The Christian Century*, *The Other Journal*, *Spiritus*, *Seminary Ridge*, *The Windhover*, and the anthology, *The World Is Charged: Poetic Engagements with Gerard Manley Hopkins*. She lives in upstate New York.

CARRIE HEIMER teaches and writes in Fairbanks, Alaska. She is especially interested in poetry that hears others into speech. Her work has appeared in *The Windhover* as well as *Rock & Sling*, *Relief*, *Dappled Things*, and *The Comstock Review*. Browse her work at poetryissalt.com.

LAURA REECE HOGAN is the author of the poetry chapbook *O Garden-Dweller* (Finishing Line Press, 2017). Her poetry has appeared in *The Christian Century*, *PILGRIM: A Journal of Catholic Experience*, *The Penwood Review*, *The Windhover*, *Plum Tree Tavern*, and other publications. Her book, *I Live, No Longer I* (Wipf & Stock, 2017), examines Paul's spirituality of suffering, transformation, and joy. Laura lives in Southern California with her family. Find her online at www.laurareecehogan.com.

CARA HOWARD is a contemplative writer who strains to listen to the Spirit's whispers. She finds unexpected metaphors while taking walks in the woods, reading dictionary entries, and engaging in the mundane moments of motherhood. She lives with her husband and two children in central Indiana.

JOSHUA HREN teaches fiction writing and literature and philosophy at Belmont Abbey College, where he is the assistant director of the Honors College. He has published poetry and fiction in a number of literary and other magazines. His first collection of short stories, *This Our Exile*, was published by Angelico Press in January of 2018, and his first academic book, *Middle-earth and the Return of the Common Good*, is forthcoming through Cascade Books in 2018.

DAVID JAMES has published three books and six chapbooks, has had over thirty one-act plays produced, and teaches at Oakland Community College, yet his personal claim to fame is the fact that he has six incredible grandchildren to love.

KATIE KARNEHM-ESH teaches writing and English at Indiana Wesleyan University in Marion, Indiana, where she is also a 500-hour Registered Yoga Teacher. She graduated from the University of St Andrews, Scotland, with a Ph.D. in Creative Writing and an emphasis in creative nonfiction and poetry. Her publications include *Fourth Genre*, *The Other Journal*, *Topology*, and *The Windhover*. She writes about yoga, travel, faith, and holistic health at annesleywritersforum.com and katiekarnehmesh.com

JULIA KENNEDY is vibrant and curious. She is joyful in hope, patient in affliction, and faithful in prayer. Julia is an English major at Abilene Christian University in Abilene, Texas, where she spends the majority of her time writing, reading, and training for triathlons.

BLAKE KILGORE lives in Burlington, New Jersey, with his wife and four sons. People there treat him with kindness, and he is at ease living among the old and tall forests of the Garden State. His lingering accent, however, verifies that his heart is still Texan and Okie. Blake's writing has appeared in *Blue Fifth Review*, *Lunch Ticket*, *Rathalla Review*, *Midway Journal*, *Forge*, and other fine journals. To learn more, visit blakekilgore.com.

LAURIE KLEIN's prose has appeared in *New Letters* (Dorothy Churchill Cappon Prize for Creative Nonfiction winner), *Saint Katherine Review*, *Rock & Sling*, *Louisiana Literature*, *Tiferet*, *Arts Medica*, *Passager*, and numerous anthologies. She has a poetry collection, *Where the Sky Opens* (Poema Poetry Series), and a chapbook, *Bodies of Water*, *Bodies of Flesh*. Learn more at lauriekleinscribe.com

SARAH LAW lives in London, United Kingdom, and is a tutor for the Open University and elsewhere. She has published five collections of poetry, and has recent or forthcoming work in *Psaltery & Lyre*, *Saint Katherine Review*, *The Merton Seasonal* and elsewhere. She edits the online journal *Amethyst Review* for new writing engaging with the sacred.

MICHAEL HUGH LYTHGOE has talked on poetry and painting at the Morris Museum of Art in Augusta, GA, and in classes for the Aiken Academy for Lifelong Learning at USC in Aiken, SC, where he lives. He will be a featured poet in Birmingham in November at a Christianity and Literature conference. He was a featured poet at the SC Humanities Conference last spring in Aiken.

MEGAN MCDERMOTT is a 2018 graduate of Yale Divinity School and Yale's Institute of Sacred Music. She is in the process towards ordination to the priesthood in the Episcopal Church. As an undergraduate at Susquehanna University, she double-majored in creative writing and religious studies and discovered both poetry and preaching as powerful places for those interests to be in conversation.

DEVON MILLER-DUGGAN has published poems in *Rattle*, *Shenandoah*, *Margie*, *Christianity and Literature*, and *Gargoyle*. She teaches creative writing at the University of Delaware. Her books include *Pinning the Bird to the Wall* (Tres Chicas Books, 2008), *Neither Prayer, Nor Bird* (Finishing Line Press, 2013), and *Alphabet Year* (Wipf & Stock, 2017).

LAURENCE MUSGROVE is a professor of English at Angelo State University in San Angelo, Texas, where he teaches creative writing, literature, comic studies, and mindfulness. His collection of poetry, *Local Bird*, is from Lamar University Literary Press. His poems have appeared in *Southern Indiana Review*, *Concho River Review*, *Buddhist Poetry Review*, *Southwestern American Literature*, *The Windward Review*, *Drunken Boat*, *Ink Brick*, and *riverSedge*. He is co-editor with Terry Dalrymple of *Texas Weather*, an anthology of poetry, fiction, and nonfiction on the power and beauty of the weather of the Lone Star State. His collection of aphorisms and illustrations, *One Kind of Recording*, has also just been published.

AMY NEMECEK lives in northern Michigan with her husband and son. Her work appears in numerous print and online publications, including *Stirring*, *Topology*, *Ancient Paths*, *Snapdragon*, *The 3288 Review*, *Mothers Always Write*, and *Indiana Voice Journal*. She is a graduate of Cornerstone University and has led workshops at the Breathe Christian Writers Conference. When she isn't working with words, Amy enjoys long walks along country roads.

DEREK OTSUJI's work has appeared, or is forthcoming, in *Missouri Review Online*, *Puerto del Sol*, *Salamander*, *Sycamore Review*, and *Threepenny Review*.

NATHANIEL A. SCHMIDT's first collection of poems, *An Evensong*, is available from Resource Publications, an imprint of Wipf & Stock. Holding a Bachelor's degree in English literature from Calvin College, and a Master's

degree, also in English literature, from the University of Illinois, Springfield, he currently is studying for his Master's of Divinity at Calvin Theological Seminary. He lives in Muskegon, Michigan, with his librarian wife, Lydia, meaning that life is a perpetual story-time.

LUCI SHAW was born in London, England, in 1928. A poet and essayist, since 1986 she has been Writer-in-Residence at Regent College, Vancouver. Author of over thirty-five books of poetry and creative non-fiction, her writing has appeared in numerous literary and religious journals. In 2013 she received the 10th annual Denise Levertov Award for Creative Writing from Seattle Pacific University. *The Thumbprint in the Clay*, essays on beauty and purpose in the universe, was released in 2016, as was *Sea Glass: New & Selected Poems*. She lives in Bellingham, Washington.

BILL STADICK has published poetry and creative nonfiction in various publications, including *The Windhover*, *First Things*, *Wisconsin Academy Review*, *Conclave*, *The Cresset*, and *The Christian Century*.

MARJORIE STELMACH has published five volumes of poems, most recently *Falter* (Cascade, 2017). Previous volumes include *Bent upon Light* (University of Tampa Press) and *Without Angels* (Mayapple). Individual poems have recently appeared in *American Literary Review*, *Boulevard*, *Florida Review*, *Gettysburg Review*, *Hudson Review*, *Image*, *The Iowa Review*, *New Letters*, and *Tampa Review*, among others. A group of her poems received the 2016 Chad Walsh Poetry Prize from *The Beloit Poetry Journal*.

JACOB STRATMAN's poems have been published (or are forthcoming) in *The Lullwater Review*, *Plough Quarterly*, *The Christian Century*, *The Penwood Review*, *Rock & Sling*, *Nebo*, *Wordgathering*, *Cave Region Review*, and others. He teaches in the English department at John Brown University in Siloam Springs, Arkansas.

DAVID SWANAGIN was born in the South Carolina low country and grew up in Augusta, Georgia. A self-taught artist and professional drummer, he resides in Nashville, Tennessee.

LARRY D. THACKER's poetry can be found in over a hundred publications including *Spillway*, *The Still Journal*, *American Journal of Poetry*, *Poetry South*, *Mad River Review*, *The Southern Poetry Anthology*, *Mojave River Review*, *Town Creek Poetry*, and *Appalachian Heritage*. His books include *Mountain Mysteries*, and the poetry books, *Drifting in Awe*, *Voice Hunting*, *Memory Train*, and the forthcoming full collections, *Feasts of Evasion* and *Grave Robber Confessional*. His MFA in poetry and fiction is earned from West Virginia Wesleyan College. Visit his website at: www.larrydthacker.com

DAVID WRIGHT teaches creative writing and American literature at Monmouth College (Illinois). His poems have appeared in *Image*, *Ecotone*, *Poetry East*, and *Hobart*, among others. His most recent poetry collection is *The Small Books of Bach* (Wipf & Stock, 2014). He can be found on Twitter @sweatervestboy.

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CONTRIBUTORS

David Athey

Carrie Heimer

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Larry D. Thacker

Daniel Gleason

Michael Hugh Lythgoe

David Wright

Patricia L. Hamilton

Megan McDermott

Maryanne Hannan

Devon Miller-Duggan