

Chestnut Review

VOLUME 1 NUMBER 2 AUTUMN 2019



FOR STUBBORN ARTISTS

Chestnut Review

Volume 1 Number 2 Autumn 2019

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Cover: Christy Sheffield Sanford,
“Pink Fog from the El Greco Cape Series”
2018

Introduction

And so, autumn. It has been a wild ride so far. We are more grateful than we can say to those of you who have left notes and wishes for our debut. And here we are with our sophomore effort. As I write this, the Review has processed over two thousand submissions, both free and paid, with no sign of stopping. We appreciate, as ever, you sending your best work to us.

This issue's release represents five months since our formation. We're pleased that on the whole, things have been working out as we planned--testament to a practical, realistic sense of the challenges inherent in starting a literary magazine. We were able to put out our first issue early, in July, and that's a good thing. We have many plans for the future, but you, as the artist, are at the heart of everything we intend to do. These pages would be nothing, empty and white, without your contributions, your creations, and your daring to send them to us despite all the barriers the world puts in the way. Though it is impossible for us to comment on every submission, please know that everything you send is read, considered, and thought over--which is one of the things I believe all artists wish for. We may not be able to feature everything in the magazine, but we will always give it our attention.

All seasons invite different types of reflection. Autumn's can be melancholy, and certainly there are elements of that in this issue's works. But also hope, and an acceptance that we think you will find enlightening.

Consider: **Kelly Wise** enthralls us with the tale of a single tree (and we should note that we received many tree-themed submissions given our journal's name, but this one stood out). **Terry Barr** captures the human foibles on display while tramping through Italy in "Florentine Circles." **Russell Rowland** perfectly depicts the Halloween ritual in "Putting Pumpkins Out." **Julie Allyn Johnson** describes a near-crisis at night in "The Orientation of Your Deathward Momentum." **Claudia Buckholts** renders a perfect slice of personality in "The Bicycle Messenger." **Sharon Suzuki-Martinez** presents a bird saved and a bird saving in "Rescue." **Stephen Toskar** creates a poignant meditation on returning home in "The Onion Harvest." **Shevaun Branigan** contemplates time and mortality in "The spring they found the lump, Frank collected wind-up watches, learning the art of their repair." **Gloria Heffernan** contemplates the limits of what can be taught in "Reflexology Lesson."

Our cover art, "Pink Fog Cape from the El Greco Cape Series," is by **Christy Sheffield Sanford**, and we are pleased to feature the paintings "Song" by **Villania Wen** and "Dis-sociation" by **Daisy St. Saveur**.

We hope you'll spend time with all of these pieces, and appreciate them as much as we did. Until winter, then. Keep creating, and being stubborn about it all.

James Rawlings

Aspen

Our roots were entwined from my birth, Aspen and I.
I was her confidant, I knew her routine-
She knew most of mine.

She mostly talked to me in autumn afterlight,
When people forgot about both of us.
That suited me anyhow.

I think we were kindred in all ways except height.
She was always taller than me.
Always prettier, better.

On All Saints Day 1993, I vowed to not visit anymore.
She let me free-fall and break my femur.
Enough of childhood games.

November 2, 1993 I found an ax in the garage.
Father deemed her absolutely rotten.
We flogged her at her base.

I pressed a leaf from her into chapter four.

Florentine Circles

I

Street signs in Firenze hide. As we disembark from the train, people push by, rushing to somewhere they know. We know nothing, just a hotel, Kraft, like the macaroni-cheese product we bought for forty-nine cents when our children were small. We see the hotel on our group I-phone, an indistinct symbol. We see ourselves, a throbbing red circle. But we don't know which exit to take, up or down, east or west. It's cool and raining. We follow our throbbing selves, eyes down, single file. We are almost run down three times by scooters and Fiats. I still can't see the signs, and when I do find one, I don't know anything more than "Via Lorenza."

II

To access our room, we must go up one floor. The elevator fits one person with a suitcase comfortably, but three of us get in. When I look out from our win-

dow at the street below, more people are wandering. My wife and I will sleep on two twin beds pushed together with a noticeable gap in between—a gap big enough to fall through. Our daughter says "And look at my bed," a day bed with cushions. "It's like your grandmother's," I say. Her look says, "An old-lady-bed." She is kind, but twenty-five, sleeping in a room with her parents on a bed she can't place. The bureau tries for art nouveau but needs painting. The hair dryer works for only five minutes and tires.

III

We go exploring. We don't need a phone-map now because we have no real destination. The beloved couple and their daughter, whom we're traveling with, believe we need to see Il Duomo. We pass plazas of late afternoon diners, those waking from the long afternoon's sieste. We search for the one place that has fresh gelato, cold bierre, something more than just sandwiches, and find a café owned by two late middle-aged women who speak to us in Italian as if we understand. The sandwich we get is mainly bread with a thin layer of cheese. The gelato is not fresh. The Moretti is cold and plentiful, the cappuccinos, just the opposite. Our bill comes to thirty euro.

IV

We find Il Duomo. The entrance is dark, though many walk through. “Who wants to go inside?” one of our friends asks. “I do,” our daughter says. “I’ll go with you,” I say, because I want to be where she is. “Well,” our friend says, “you don’t know the price yet, and anyway, you have those stairs to walk.” We look up at the dome tower. People stand out looking down and out. I am afraid of heights, but feel uncomfortable backing out. “I don’t think so,” my daughter shakes her head. We circle Il Duomo, and on the opposite side, we find a leather store owned by two Persians, the ethnic origin of everyone in our party but me. We buy a leather purse for our other daughter, who worries about us.

V

“It’s my feeding time again,” our friend says. We see a Magnum chocolate shop. My wife orders a dark chocolate bar with dark chocolate sauce topped with sprinkles of dark chocolate, a concentric circle of Magnum. “Dark chocolate is healthy,” she insists. I try a bite, and feel as if I have fallen through a gap between two single beds. It begins to rain, and we must protect the leather, so we walk faster,

heavier, once more in single file. Though it is only five o’clock, my wife greets everyone with “Buenos Noches.” She knows where we are, or at least says she does. We pass Gucci, Zara, and many market stalls. In one, I see a plastic pink child’s purse. It says “Ciao Bella,” costs five euro.

VI

We pass a doorway to a small shop. An attractive woman stands in the doorway. In front is a scruffy black dog, a spaniel-hound mix. The dog seems friendly, or at least passive. I stop and let him or her sniff my hand. I miss my dog, whom I almost refused to leave in the days before our journey. I pet the scruffy dog’s head. We have a moment. The owner smiles and then as my party walks on, she helps me by calling the dog to her. “Ciao bella,” I say to the dog. He barks and runs back to me. Tail and body wagging, he circles my legs. I look at the owner. “He doesn’t like to hear ‘Ciao,’” she smiles. “Arrivaderci, then,” I say as he quiets and considers my passing.

VII

The Uffizi gallery is sold out. Undaunted, we pay double the amount for a tour led by Firenzen art students. Our guide, Martina, tells us she is really

from Sienna, Firenze's traditional enemy. The sign at the entrance says "Beware of Museum Touts," meaning the ones guiding us. Martina says, "The one thing you must not lose is your ticket. There are two checkpoints at the beginning, one at the end. The end doesn't matter, because the worst that will happen is you will spend the night in the museum, pacing from hall to hall, while I am having my dinner." I am uncommonly afraid of disobeying any direct order, and we have paid 100 euro for this tour. My daughter says, "Should I hold your hand?"

VIII

At the first checkpoint, two of our group can't find their tickets. We wait ten minutes while the tall, white-haired husband searches through the same pockets that continue to produce nothing. He speaks sharply to his wife who, my daughter testifies, has undergone numerous facelifts. Martina finally intervenes with the guards and obtains two more tickets. "Now, please hold on to these." At the next checkpoint, the same man searches again through his pockets. This time, after only two minutes, he produces the duplicate pair. Later, despite Martina's warning, he stands too close to a Botticelli while shooting with his phone, and a siren blares.



Daisy St. Saviour, "Dissasociation"

IX

We checked our hotel umbrella in at the cloakroom, for long umbrellas may not exist where we are traveling. Martina says that Raphael stole from Leonardo and Michelangelo to paint his “own” Madonna and child. Martina prefers Michelangelo. Art is political, and so is its criticism. We thank her for the tour and proceed to exit through the bookstore. A sign says, “Cloakroom” but points ambiguously to our left. We retrace many steps, through hall mazes and Carvaggios, and then descend again. Other ambiguous signs appear. Finally my daughter sees the cloakroom and retrieves our red umbrella, though the clerk shows her others like it, abandoned by forgetful wanderers.

X

A crowd gathers before a two-story house on Via Dante Alighieri, a sign I see easily. It is his house. “I’ve taught *Inferno* many times,” I say. “That’s why I love you,” my wife responds. “Because I teach Dante?” We pass a young American family. “Dante lives here,” the wife says. “Who’s Dante?” her husband replies. “Ughhh,” she rolls her eyes, and then catches mine. I smile, so does she. My daughter sees the husband’s sheepish grin. So many sheep here in

Firenze, lost in the continuing rain. The next day, our flight is delayed; the incoming pilot cannot land in a thunderstorm. We lose connections, keep circling, and land days later in the Carolina summer, lost no longer but sweating still.

The Orientation of Your Deathward Momentum

Two-fifteen in the AM,
my heart stops cold.

I sense hesitation,
those phantom fingers.
The fine adjustment
of my pink
chenille spread
as you wrangle the covers down,
slow and exacting,
over my exposed
ankles and toes.

My eyes flash-open
to a still and empty room.
A quarter-moon shines
through an arched transom
window, skyward just shy of
the three-bedroom ranch
across the street.

Curious about
the placement of constellations
I can neither name or identify,
I pull back the curtains,
search the night sky.

*The feeder needs refilling.
I'll have to mow tomorrow.*

I switch on the light,
grab my readers.
Settle in with
Pillars of the Earth.

Nothing's changed.

I make it
through the night
and don't die,
always a good sign.

Putting Pumpkins Out

All-Hallows has forfeited its holiness.
Rolls of toilet paper hurled into trees
become pallid phantasmagoria, hang
like ghosts of the lynched. It is time
for decision about our pumpkins: set
them out on the steps, or keep them
in, like cats perching on windowsills.

Outdoors they will too easily become
someone else's pumpkins, our stoop
vacant at sunrise. Or else we waken
to find smashed shards of orange on
the road. Such tricks are not a treat.
Still, we've dared the banality of evil,
the wretches who kill from boredom.

They opened fire in schools—but we
will see our young ones onto the bus.
In churches—but we will lay our gift
upon the altar. In hospitals—yet we
will continue to visit the bed of pain.
We set pumpkins, just as vulnerable,
outside beneath the guardian moon.

Bicycle Messenger

A bicycle messenger races through
wet streets, bent over the handlebars,
athwart a racing saddle. Wind's his
enemy, his friend. Cars pile up,
the lockstep of evening nears, he
twists through a corridor left open,
arrives at a flame-colored building.
He carries a document wrapped
in plastic against rain, up carpeted
stairs, into an elevator, a wall of glass
from which he can look down over
the entire city, boats turning restless
in the marina, trees canted toward
water, brick rowhouses. When the
bicycle messenger hands over the
document, a white-gloved man says,
You came too late. It would be better
you had not come at all. The bicycle
messenger lifts his racing goggles
to reveal a smooth face, a diabolical
look crouching in his pale eyes.
Nevertheless, he says, you'll pay.

Rescue

“Remember, Hope is a good thing, maybe the best of things, and no good thing ever dies.”

–Stephen King

In the palm of my hand, the hummingbird looked up at me with the calm of a summer night. Encountering such trust always melts my jaded heart; lures my inner mother bear out of her cave.

The exhausted Anna’s hummingbird had become tangled in rope of spiderwebs. Hummingbirds like to pluck bugs from webs like hors d’oeuvres served up on paper lace doilies. But this hummingbird’s soiree had almost turned into a death trap.

Resting in my hand, she felt like a dandelion puff roiling with concentrated energy. Hummingbird hearts beat 1260 times per minute, 12 times faster than human hearts. To power such an engine, she must eat about 7 times an hour, or starve to death.

I fed her by dipping my finger in sugar water and offering it to her beak. She drank instantly—with a tongue I could feel, but not see. A few sips later, she zipped out of sight. Far into the night, her optimism ran through my veins like lightning.

The hummingbird continues to flirt with death amongst our garden’s spiderwebs. I look at her perching on her favorite branch, pausing from her hunt for bug amuse-bouches and pomegranate flower nectar. She looks back at me.

What is the word for the crazy hope you feel at sunrise, that morphs into hope that cries in its beer by noon, pierces its own heart in the evening, and heals itself overnight to gloriously resurrect every morning? I believe the word is hummingbird.

The spring they found the lump, Frank collected wind-up watches, learning the art of their repair

5 o'clock, the notes read, 2 cm from areola.
Frank held my wrist to his ear to hear the ticking.

The tension in winding the crown of a watch
is sudden--I tell you, the lump
was nothing.

 Before release,
we sat in the waiting room,
listening for my name to be called.
Frank checked his watch, worried
it had stopped. Twice,
he offered to get me water.

Inside the machine, my breast clamped,
arms about the machine's casing,
fingers stretching past the wall
to Frank, scrolling through

the auction sites, looking for the broken lecoultre,
or a stout and sturdy tank missing its band,
the moon phase and its perpetual night,
the diver and its stuck bezel,
a cracked crystal,
the paused red second-hand.

The technician told me when
to hold my breath, the machine a movement
around me.

 Frank, the night before,
had held gears in tweezers, placed serrated gold
in my palm. It wasn't,
and I say this with confidence,
that he was trying to fix me;
the timing was coincidental.
We were in bed,
flanked by tables coated in watch parts,
their tools, resting on books on watch repair.
We lay there in silence,
his fine fingers touching my breast,
and because there wasn't any ticking around us,
I was grateful
for this fractured sense of safety;
this absence of time.

The Onion Harvest

I exit the highway at the off-ramp nearest Okadama Airport and turn at the first traffic signal, driving beside a dimly lit runway that disappears into farmland shadows. A metallic bitterness lingers at the back of my tongue from the black coffee I'd left in the cup that morning. Then an unexpected sweetness from the grounds. I feel my hands relax on the steering wheel now that my headlights are the only illumination on the road. It took three years to find this route, navigating the maze of countryside asphalt with only a dashboard compass, unable to read Japanese maps or afford a GPS. Then as the headlights snare in drifting smoke, my fingers clench and go numb.

The four-month snows come in a month, but in the morning you can already see long greenhouse tunnels where the onion farmers have begun tilling orange soil rich brown with compost from manure and straw, stretching vinyl sheets over metal pipes

stuck in the earth like the exposed ribs of prehistoric beasts. In March the skin will glow a faint neon green, and then they'll peel it back in May so their tractors can scatter onion seedlings over bare fields like wilted pine needles.

The smoke clears on the curves and my lights pick out wooden crates with onions curing inside them in the cold, 1½-meter cubes of weathered slats on a side, stacked three high down a long tractor path, blue tarps tied to the tops. But I have to look twice driving through haze rising from the onion harvest's smoldering debris as my lungs fill with smoke reminiscent of maple leaves several months before I turn four. My sister and I are raking leaves into piles, waiting for an adult with a lighted match. I'm also waiting to be scarred for life when her bamboo rake's teeth expose another side of loss hidden within the flaming color of maple leaves before burning, when both cupped hands also fill. At odd moments I see her rake inscribe that same arc in slow motion. Then I touch the scar furrowing my left brow and listen to my mother scream in our foyer. It was impossible to explain then – still difficult today – but my own blood was all the proof I needed that beauty lay concealed inside me.

I follow winding roads out of Okadama, far past the local airport and smoke, then hit a wall of fog, not uncommon in late fall, that lasts through Shinoro and into Tonden – a single narrow bridge before coming into Hanakawa and feeling my hands again. The kids squeal and search my briefcase for gifts, returning empty-handed and sullen to the TV . . . mistaking me for a delivery man at the wrong house?

You barely lift your eyes from the dishes, then nod toward my covered plate of food. Your first streak of gray hair is shining in the light of a 60-watt bulb over the sink – fine trickles of milk spilling over black rock. You ask if I know what time it is, just a bit louder than the splash of dishwater. There is no way to answer such sadness.

I'll bathe the kids and put them to bed. Later, on the futon, the cool shock of your back against my stomach, the warmth of your breasts in my hand, if it is not already too late, I will try to peel the years, one layer at a time, down to another awakening of your weary skin.



Villania Wen, “Song”
Acrylic on canvas, 24x24, 2019

Reflexology Lesson

Take a firm hold of the foot.
Slowly apply pressure.
Listen to the foot's response.
When it twitches or jerks
it is telling a story.

Though your hands
will never leave the feet,
you will touch every part of the body,
every crevice and appendage,
every nerve and muscle.
You must think of it
as a sacred act.

Don't worry about incense
or candles or music.
Let the rhythm of the breath
fill the room.
It is music enough.

When the client thanks you,
and says she has never felt better,
don't let it go to your head.
You can cure nothing.

You only provide a quiet space
for the body to heal itself—
if only for a little while.

Take meticulous notes.
there will come a time
when it will be important to know
that your right thumb
pressing the reflexes along the
anterior ridge of the left foot,

helped bring thirty minutes
of dreamless sleep to the client
who was tormented by insomnia
in the months before she leaped
from the 11th story window.

CONTRIBUTORS

Terry Barr's essays have been published in *storySouth*, *The New Southern Fugitives*, *Under the Sun*, *Coachella Review*, and *Lowestoft Chronicle*, among other journals. He lives in Greenville, SC, with his family, and blogs at medium.com/@terrybarr.

Shevaun Brannigan's work has appeared in such journals as *Best New Poets*, *AGNI*, and *Slice*. She is a recipient of a Barbara J. Deming Fund grant, and holds an MFA from Bennington College.

Claudia Buckholts has received Creative Writing Fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and Massachusetts Artists Foundation, and the Grolier Poetry Prize. Her work has appeared in *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *Indiana Review*, *Minnesota Review*, *New American Writing*, *Prairie Schooner*, *The Southern Review*, and other journals; and in two books, *Bitterwater* and *Traveling Through the Body*.

Gloria Heffernan's poetry collection, *What the Gratitude List Said to the Bucket List*, is forthcoming from New York Quarterly Books. She has also written two chapbooks, *Some of Our Parts* (Finishing Line Press), and *Hail to the Symptom*, due out later this year from Moonstone Press. In addition, her work has appeared in over fifty journals including *Chautauqua Literary Journal*, *Stone Canoe*, *Columbia Review*, and *The Healing Muse*.

Julie Allyn Johnson enjoys long walks in the woods with her puppy, riding her bicycle, travel, photography, crochet, and hiking in the Rocky Mountains with her husband where they hope to bag a 14er this fall. Her poetry has been published in *Lyrical Iowa*, *Persephone's Daughters*, *Typishly*, *The Esthetic Apostle* and *Coffin Bell* with work forthcoming this fall in *The Loch Raven Review*.

Russell Rowland is a seven-time Pushcart Prize nominee and has two chapbooks with Finishing Line Press. A full-length collection, *We're All Home Now*, is available from Beech River Books. He writes from New Hampshire's Lakes Region, where he has judged high-school Poetry Out Loud competitions.

Sharon Suzuki-Martinez's first book, *The Way of All Flux*, won the New Rivers Press MVP Poetry Prize for 2010. Her work has recently appeared in *Gargoyle*, *South Dakota Review*, *Duende*, *Okay Donkey*, and elsewhere. She was a finalist in the 2018 Best of the Net anthology, was awarded a residency to the Anderson Center at Tower View, a fellowship to Kundiman, grants from the Arizona Commission on the Arts, and a scholarship to the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown. Originally from Hawaii, she now lives in Arizona.

Stephen Toskar is a longtime US expat resident of Japan. His work has appeared in *Exposition Review*, *Arc Poetry Magazine*, *Chattahoochee Review*, *The Pedestal Magazine*, *LA Progressive*, *Hollywood Progressive*, *Tokyo Poetry Journal*, *Dissident Voice*, and *Poetry Nippon*, among others, as well as in the anthologies *Sixty Four Best Poets of 2018* (Black Mountain Press); *Enough* (Public Poetry, forthcoming); *Manifestations* (The D'arts Literary Anthology); and *Farewell to Nuclear, Welcome to Renewable Energy* (Coal Sack Press). He co-translated *Selection from Mother Burning and Other Poems: Parallel Translation of Selected Poems of Soh Sakon*. Living on the northern island of Hokkaido, he is a professor of English at Hokkaido Bunkyo University in Eniwa.

Villania Wen has been painting for several years, and has used her studies in biology and medicine to merge with her love of art and music to create inspired images meant to evoke a sense of calm and nostalgia, as well as a dreamlike quality through images. She was born in China and is studying medicine in Chicago after graduating from the University of Virginia in 2018.

Kelly Wise is a young author mostly interested in writing free-styled poetry and short stories. Her goal for everything she works on is to produce something meaningful. She wants to show people that there is always a hidden purpose to every word, especially in works by the next generation of authors.

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Chestnut Review

for stubborn artists

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