

From the Executive Editor:

Welcome to the twentieth-anniversary issue of *Water~Stone Review*! It's hard to believe how green we were when we started this venture, publishing our first issue in fall of 1998. We were plagued with questions: Who will submit to us? Will the contents fulfill our expectations? How will we market ourselves and grow submissions? Will our magazine—with such high hopes behind it—stand the test of time? What does that even mean: stand the test of time?

It doesn't mean simply that we're still here, still publishing, though that's no small thing. It doesn't just mean that our literary and design content has improved over the years; that our range and reputation have grown exponentially; that some of the emerging and first-time authors we've published have gone on to forge admirable careers; that we went from one editor doing everything to five editors—executive, fiction, poetry, CNF, and managing; that a number of our MFA editorial board members have used their experience with *W~SR* to start their own presses and literary magazines; that our poems, short stories,

and essays have been published and cited as notables in the Pushcart Prize, *Best American*, and other anthologies; that our experience with *W~SR* inspired us in 2015 to launch *Runestone* (www.runestonejournal.com), a national on-line undergraduate magazine, that last year won the AWP National Program Directors' Prize for quality of content.

It means all of this, of course. Mostly, however, it means that we can look at the design and content of each issue with pride and be gratified and provoked as we read each page, knowing that we have fulfilled our lofty goals and intend to go on meeting them.

The choice of the poppies from artists Kathleen Hawkes and Misha Bolstad's "Thousands of Poppies" series for our cover image is very intentional, as this decision always is, but there's an eerie coincidence built in. I finished a novel titled *About Face*, set in the final months of World War I in England, at the same time that we began work on the production of this twentieth-anniversary issue. We had chosen our title—*Field. Body. Country.*, inspired by the Poetry Prize winner "Aftermath" by Chelsea Dingman—before I left in June for a two-week trip through parts of northern Italy, France, and Switzerland. As my husband and I drove through numerous countrysides, poppies abounded in the fields. The lines of John McCrae's poem "In Flanders Fields," which still hangs above my writing desk, floated through my mind: "In Flanders fields the poppies blow / Between the crosses, row on row."

When I returned to the States, I saw the options for the cover. Of course, the poppy image jumped out at me. How could it not? Because the tissue-paper poppies made by Kathleen Hawkes and Misha Bolstad for their installation look but are not *real* (and isn't that what we try to do as writers, create the authentic illusion of reality?). Because the artists, interested in the idea of excess and saturation, were drawn to the poppy field from *The Wizard of Oz*, which for them represented a kind of liminal state (i.e., that sensory threshold that, like our issue, beckons you in). And because of what the real poppy, the common field type also known as *Papaver rhoeas*, represents. The poppy, needing light to germinate, can lie dormant in the earth for many years. Once that

earth is disturbed, as it was by the ceaseless shelling of trees and earth during World War I, poppies grow. Hundreds, thousands of poppies sprouted in the churned-up fields and along the pitted roadsides of the Western Front. After the Second Battle of Ypres, John McCrae, a Canadian doctor, saw poppies growing amidst the graves of a mass cemetery and wrote his poem. The remembrance (silk) poppy became the symbol used by generations afterward to memorialize the dead, not only of World War I but of World War II and other wars to follow.

The poems, stories, and works of creative nonfiction in this issue travel deep into the multiple meanings evoked by our title: *Field. Body. Country. Field* as earth—landscape—in all its glory and vulnerability. *Body* as root of our many complex identities; the body birthed, nurtured, assaulted, destroyed, imprisoned, hidden, revered; the body, in Barrie Jean Borich’s words, from her essay review “The Lens Looks Back,” as “the first point of contact when we think about who we are in relation to what we have to write about.” *Country* as in the place we come from and travel to and identify with and believe in and fight for and tear down and flee.

This year’s creative nonfiction includes a rich mix of personal, lyric, and flash essays. They plumb the violence and callousness in the larger world, travel through dizzying landscapes—cultural and physical—grapple with and seek what Alison Townsend calls “the concept of Inner Light, that seed of brightness the Friends believe every human soul contains.”

What is the way? Steven Harvey asks in “Another Way.” The parts in his essay coalesce and then splatter like the words falling in beads of water in Julius Pope’s graphic waterfall, “Bit, Fall,” referenced in the essay. Water being the connecting force in the essay’s lyric moments as well as in the photographs and data culled from NASA studies of the surface of Mars.

In “Alive Girl Walking,” Angela Morales recounts her decision after her high school graduation in 1985 to travel—not to Acapulco or Mazatlán as her friends were doing—but to Eastern Europe, Russia, and Asia via the Trans-Siberian rail line. She is undeterred by her Sputnik guide and reminders

everywhere of America's Cold War with Russia. After climbing Mt. Fuji in Japan, she leaves, convinced that life is made up of unrevisable moments.

Michael Kiesow Moore's lyric "Manning Up in the 21st Century" explores the confusing terrain of gender and sexual identity while Katrin Arefy revisits memories of home that include neighborhood bombings and a long-lost cousin who escaped the revolution as a teenager and ended up in a refugee camp. "Verdure," a lyric essay by Marjorie Hakala, is a hymn to green—green as color, as root to other colors, as living thing, as memory.

Alison Townsend draws on the medieval Book of Hours as inspiration and structural guide for "Flower Moon: A Wisconsin Book of Hours," set mostly in or near her home on a drumlin hill in Wisconsin overlooking idyllic Island Lake. Townsend calls out the "importance of pausing" so we can "feel the shape of time and how it has moved—the weight of history and change and hours alive in the earth beneath me—my own life a late addition, layered over the palimpsest of many others."

This year's *Meridel Le Sueur* Essay, "What Wonder Can Do" by Aimee Nezhukumatathil, is a lovely and compelling lyric essay that weaves her own and her children's mixed-race heritage into reflections on such natural phenomena as axolotls—tiny, boneless amphibians with infectious smiles that spend their whole lives underwater—catalpa leaves, and fireflies, all leading to the contemplation of wonder: "it takes a patience and it takes putting yourself in the right place in time. It requires that we are curious enough to suffer the small distractions in order to find the world."

Like the CNF writers, who search for the way, the fiction writers in this issue seek solace and strength in the face of family dysfunction, aging, midlife complacency, sexual predators, cultural displacement, incarceration, and homophobia.

In Susan Power's "Backseat Rider," one of three short short stories in this issue, a ten-year-old Indian girl sitting in the back seat of her mother's car must fend off the sexual advances of a drunken stranger whom a friend of her heedless mother has brought along to an Indian protest. The convict in Kathleen

Coskran's "Gull Man" spends his time feeding a gull—first bread and cake, then bits and pieces of clothing and other personal items from his cell—to take to the other side. And in "The Bookstore," a small boy's enjoyment of reading is tested by his strong-willed mother, who charges him to read in her native Spanish rather than the English he hears all around him.

Two recovering addicts living in a halfway house in Tyler McAndrew's "How I Came to See the World" dream of making enough money—by participating in medical research studies—to move west and start a new life. Their dream is upended when one of them takes in and shelters a seemingly harmless skunk.

Sean Padraic McCarthy spins a tale in "Silens Nox" of a kind but mentally ill man who lives in the big shadow cast by his older, very dysfunctional brother. Leaving a chaotic family dinner on Christmas Eve, the narrator spends his evening with an aging nun at a soon-to-be-closed-down local convent.

The ailing father of the narrator's partner becomes the "Third Person" in Celia Laskey's short story about a couple living together in a homophobic small town in Kansas. Having taken the father in after a stroke, the couple must adjust to the unwelcome change in their daily lives, all while experiencing midlife and relationship doldrums.

Who deserves and doesn't deserve our natural human empathy? This is the question a mother in Linda Downing Miller's "Threat Response" grapples with as she befriends the mother of the boy who set off the bomb that killed several students and severed her own daughter's three fingers.

The collection as a whole, but especially the poetry, captures that juxtaposition and balancing of opposites that was so much a part of the vision of the poet William B. Yeats. Integral to this system is not only the ever-present tension between contraries, but the inevitable movement toward unity, that (albeit temporary) state of emotional completion when these antithetical forces reach a state of harmony. This tension is at play in Michael Schmeltzer's "Joy Apoptosis," where he captures the speaker's daily teetering act between his awareness of ever-present war, the reality of aging, and "a maple-dark

exhaustion,” and the simple joy and gratitude derived from tucking his children in and kissing their heads, blending his body with theirs. Angela Torres’ “Between” explores the complexity of this “between” condition, including the interval, the coming together, the sharing, the choice, the transition. Mary Jo Thompson writes, “Yet demise in fall / is beautiful, a calloused widow who cringes and sighs / while a mélange of nectar and fond red fields try to recall her honey” (“Fall Dead, Limb”).

These poets do not hold back in their anger and sorrow as they take on racial injustice, war, catastrophic attacks like 9/11, miscarriage, adoption, cultural assimilation, loneliness. John Sibley Williams’ Halloween images include razor blades in apples, “crazed eyes of pumpkins,” ghosts in the alders (“All Saints”). Deborah Keenan’s “Saint of Childhood Says No to the Dreamland Tree”: “No to talk of tomorrow. No to four saints / at the four corners of the bed.” Benjamin Naka-Hasebe Kingsley creates haunting pictures of a father fleeing home and family in a country at war (“An Essay in Verse”) and an Indian child fleeing from the Indian school where “They cut / your black hair. Cut / the true name / out your raven’s / tongue” (“Escaping Carlisle Indian Industrial School”). Jonathan Greenhouse creates a series of grim portraits in “You’re the deciduous forest”: “In architectural terms / you’re what’s referred to as a vacant lot. You had potential / but you’ve wasted that.”

Sorrow and joy abound, often together. A young schoolgirl’s black body in Maya Washington’s “Chorus Girl” is singled out for its agility while denied its rightful place in the show: “I was cast in the chorus and not a lead / I was the only black person in Drama.” Andrea Hollander’s bold Jewish girl in “Contrition” contemplates the meaning and forgiveness of sin, a word she learned in her friend’s Catholic church: “as if anything said / or not said anything / done or not done / could ever truly be / *Mother of God* / erased or forgiven.”

The mother in Emily Tuszynska’s lovely “With Julia in the Milk Bed” luxuriates in the small cocoon she’s made in her bedroom with her newborn daughter, the two of them “falling, drifting / down into the wilderness below thought, / into pure perception” while outside, in the larger world,

she knows children are dying—caught in a war-torn country or as refugees fleeing in a small boat.

Ed Bok Lee dazzles with “Will of a Prince,” his own version of a last will and testament for the musician Prince: “To my life-long relationship with God, I offer the faithful / dot of my naked body bowing under the great curvaceous mystery / of His question mark.”

In “Transmutation Ode,” Ann Keniston mourns the loss of those who died on 9/11 even as she admits that artists have “stopped trying to find / new ways to retell that story.” Still, those who died live on in the memories of their loved ones, in their possessions, some of which are still displayed around Ground Zero. It is “our seeing that changes them,” that transmutes them into something new.

Then there’s that moment of wholeness, when we enter what some might call a sacred space. We find it in love, in art, in nature. “*With words I fetched you back, / wrote the poet*” in Beth Marzoni’s “After *Thou-less*.” “Our subject is never the chair, / but that to which it points: / the poet said *it is the weight / holding back the void*.” The speaker in Jennifer Bullis’ poem claims the existence and then the memory of this moment: “During my making, when the gods poured in / through my fontanelles, / I tried then to close my skull around them / for safekeeping.” But even as the gods left the body, as gods do, they leave the echo of their voices behind: “All around me, softness chimes” (“Mornings, when the stars pack up their bells”).

Our writer’s interview this year is with poet and memoirist Nick Flynn, who visited The Creative Writing Programs in early October. The interview, done with Patricia Weaver Francisco and Christopher Vondracek, is smart, revealing, funny, and instructive. It covers a wide range of subject matter—the choice of poetry versus memoir for certain projects; the surreal experience of participating in the making of *Being Flynn*, a movie about *Another Bullshit Night in Suck City*, and then writing about that process in *The Reenactments*; the fallibility of memory; the constellation of images arising from one’s own history and memory that appear again and again in our work; the internal

landscape of creative nonfiction; meditation versus obsession; collaboration; writing as daily practice, and more.

The photographs and cover image for this issue were selected by Dana Cheit, who completed her MFA in visual studies last spring at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design and will be teaching part time at MCAD in the fall. Dana writes: “In preparation for this retrospective issue, I searched through the work of over 120 photographers whom *Water~Stone Review* has featured since its first date of publication. What I encountered in this process was a gift in itself, and I would like to commend and extend thanks to all of the artists in our creative community for their powerful work. I wanted the folio of images contained within Volume 20 of *Water~Stone Review* to elicit in the viewer the same sense of transience that the words within contained for me. In this issue you will find images of captivity and open skies, skin sticking to hot vinyl, and the smell of vacant lots in need of weeding. In the folio you will find photographs that serve as a kind of response: tenderly held lovers; storefront windows frosted with winter breath; a child, harnessed to a tree, in the desert. Collectively, the contributors to this issue evoke in us the desires and fears that bind us to each other, offering up for our contemplation the unanswerable questions that we and our bodies pose to the world.”

A special feature in this issue is Robert Hedin’s essay “Snapshots,” in which he shares his memories of attending poetry readings over a period of fifty years. These are precious snapshots of poets, many long dead, reading—and sometimes working with Hedin as a mentor. Writers such as William Stafford, John Haines, Allen Ginsberg, Howard Nemerov, Richard Hugo, Carolyn Kizer, Gary Snyder, Ted Hughes, and Maya Angelou, among others. These experiences for Hedin were, by turns, exhilarating, awful, painful, funny, and deeply felt.

We are happy to welcome back Barrie Jean Borich to *W~SR*. Until she left to join the faculty at DePaul University in Chicago and found the digital journal *Slag Glass City*, Barrie was for many years the creative nonfiction editor of the review. She was also a student of Judith Kitchen, our first essay reviewer

in creative nonfiction, so it is fitting that she writes “The Lens Looks Back” for this anniversary issue. In it, Barrie explores the question of *looking*, which she believes may be the central nonfiction question of our time. “As practitioners of the essay art, artists of actuality—in other words, as world observers and social documentarians—what are our positions in relation to our subjects? Where do we stand as architects of representation and as lyric detectives whose work it is to reveal both surface and infrastructure?” Lauret Savoy’s *Trace: Memory, History, Race, and the American Landscape* “unearths the racist infrastructure of American places.” *Imagine Wanting Only This* by Kristen Radtke explores “what the artist sees when she encounters landscapes of ruin—both the ruin of abandoned places and that of her own life.” And Paisley Rekdal’s hybrid *Intimate: An American Family Photo Album* addresses the “limits of the observing lens, and the intensions of the rendering lens.”

“Voices & Silences” is Stan Sanvel Rubin’s eighteenth essay review for *Water~Stone Review*. He has been our essay reviewer in poetry since the fall of 2000. This year, he plumbs the role and inner workings of poetic voice and silence, starting his essay with Kazim Ali’s question, about poetry: *When one speaks, who answers back?* Stan explores this question, and the role of voice and silence, as he travels through four books of poetry, all published in 2016: Alice Notley’s *Certain Magical Acts*, whose poetic voice is all flow, “a dazzling performance of a poet who refuses silence”; *Look*, a first book by Solmaz Sharif (and finalist for the National Book Award), whose voice is “most of all, interrupted” and “must find itself amid the gaps of emigration, the languages and labels of bureaucracy, displacement, war”; Cynthia Cruz, who delivers her poems in *How the End Begins* “in a chiseled voice, but at an emotional pitch somewhere between quiet desperation and surrender”; and Kevin Goodan (*Let the Voices*), a poet “drawn to the narrow space between word and silence” whose “relationship to silence is a physical, experiential one, as well as a spiritual call.”

Field. Body. Country. Ruined ground that holds the bodies of a generation of young men is, for the poppy, the path to life. The airport finches in Gabriel Spera’s final poem do not live in a bucolic woodland. They make their nests

“within the immense / steel I-beams of the groined and vaulted concourse, /
thatched with soda straws and lined with a forced / and frail civility, a thick
and impotent silence.” And yet, as birds do, “they swoop and bank through
incandescent glory, / light-bodied flotsam on joy’s pure convections.”

We invite you through the sensual threshold of this commemorative twentieth-anniversary issue of *Water~Stone Review* to enjoy, in Aimee Nezhukumatathil’s words, “so much bounty and life” recorded on the page.

Mary François Rockcastle