



Editor's Note

POETRY

Stevie Edwards

Anne Panning

Steve Coughlin

David Ebenbach

Rae Gouirand

Tiara Sutton

Joy Ladin

Rachel MacDonald

Three poems

And when you die

Song of Escape

Two poems

Shoes

Age of Consent

Four poems

*Observations at a Boys' Prison
in Jamaica*

ESSAYS

Sheryl St. Germain
Marcia Aldrich

Dancing with Frankenstein
In Color; The Wild Child

FANTASY

Sarah Duffy

Denise Duhamel

Editor's Note

I'm typing this in my new apartment with one spaniel tucked up against my leg (because thunder is scary) and the other sacked out on the couch (because he's 14 and mostly deaf). It's only two dogs now; the oldest one's time came a couple of weeks ago.

My great-grandfather's desk is halved. It comes in two pieces: a bottom half with drawers, and a top with shelves and glass doors. But the carved wooden arch on the top is too tall for the ceiling here, so the pieces sit side by side on the floor.

And I also feel severed, incomplete: I am back in Tampa after a year in my homeland of rural central Illinois. I am back among friends, eager to teach—but I miss my family, and the horses at my sister's therapeutic riding center, and the empty country roads, and the grand sky.

Dealing with loss, with breaks—that's what we do. That's what art does for us. As one of this issue's contributors, Stevie Edwards, said on social media recently: "If you identify as a poet but don't believe that poetry can save lives, please unfriend me."

Sweet readers, our writers believe. We believe. And we hope you will, too.

— Katherine Riegel, Founding Editor

Stevie Edwards

That the Desperate Shall Inherit the Sky

is the hollow I keep licking:
its dual promise of *empty* and *enough room*
fretting me into the disaster glamor
of two wept coats of mascara, a feral mask
to greet the New Year I won't want in the morning:
the mirror, familiar trouble. Bandit, I am
and have been to Love and all its familial heirlooms
gathering dust in the attic apartment I call home
in place of the home that calls me back
with all the salt, butter and gravy God intended,
if he or she or it or they is there
inside cumulous and everything killed for dinner
and less explainable consumptions on nighttime news
footage I don't want to sleep with:
the twenty dead school children in Newtown
and the ones to come that could be mine
if I decide to make things with pulses
and tiny grabby hands that can be ended
in less time than it takes to scold tantrums and messes,
wash off glitter and glue-sticks,
or kiss pancake-syrup-matted hair
for being such a manageable misstep amid the hyper hum
of Saturday morning cartoon explosions.
I am trying to tell the little scoop of hell in me
not everything is a catastrophe:
the mounds of snow on snow, the cooped up dogs
barking at couches and wood-paneling,
the chewed patent heel of a shoe

too dainty for this hill and ice town.

[...return to Table of Contents](#)

sweet

6.3

Not Gently Will I Lose Her

If she were to die, my one, the only Michigan anchor
steadying me in this erudite mess of neologisms
for old truths, this university on a steep gorgeous hill
where we are funded generously to learn
to call our home-hearts trash, to discard them
on the curb for removal or vermin feasting—

If she were to die here as I nearly did in the winter
that did not lack light any more than the Midwest but did
swallow fierce the horizon, my peasant accent, wardrobe,
fifth after fifth of *please, muscles, raise me back into want*—

If I were to find her gone and going away from
me, from her body, if there were blood in her mouth
or shat panties or a neck lynched and swaying
or a note or a thousand other agonies—

I would roar at the many beasts in this landscape,
pull my hair out strand by strand until I am a sight
for sorry eyes, carve her name into every tree
with a butcher knife.

&

I would cradle whatever is left of her cold head
in my hands and cry out to the God I don't have:
No, not this one. You give her back.

&

I would gouge out my eyes, hack off the first hand
that touched death and wander the gorges
searching for a force to finish the job.

&

I would weep a sixth Great Lake to drown in.

Which is to say that I need
with all my flesh & wonder
for you to survive.

[...return to Table of Contents](#)

sweet

6.3

Thanksgiving Poem

R leaves groceries in the cart and drives off
on the Thanksgiving her friend loses a child
to an 11-year bout with cancer

to prove randomness
in the year I tried to die and did not: Ground,

what are you doing
eating the scrappy, fighting hearts,
leaving the fatty ones out in the field?

Cradle, star ladle in the sky so high,
teach me to bless
this death
this boy's body not my loss but lost
by trying to try
by singing praise songs
for the body that keeps me.

...return to Table of Contents

STEVIE EDWARDS is a poet, editor, and educator. Her first book, *Good Grief*, received the Independent Publisher Book Awards Bronze in Poetry and the Devil's Kitchen Reading Award. Her poems have appeared in *Verse Daily*, *Rattle*, *Indiana Review*, *Devil's Lake*, *Salt Hill*, and elsewhere. She is the Editor-in-Chief of *Muzzle Magazine* and an Assistant Editor at *YesYes Books*. She is currently a Lecturer at Cornell University, where she recently completed her MFA in creative writing. She can be found online at www.stevietheclumsy.com. Her favorite confection is tiramisu.

Anne Panning

And when you die

they will wrap you in scraps of skinny jeans tied off neatly at the feet so that only your big toes protrude, polished Totally Toffee but chipped, a little.

And when you die, there will be Styrofoam platters of dragon roll sushi & General Tsao's chicken and carmeled apples from the big grocery store that also sells haircuts and Halloween costumes and snow shovels and prescriptions for Prozac.

And when you die there will be Hardy's chardonnay in a box on ice and small plastic tumblers as transparent as air, and as lovely.

And when you die, friends will sprinkle blue Gatorade around you until the sky turns black and streetlights pop on and fizz like Pop Rocks on your tongue when you were in fifth grade and still thought you had it all in front of you.

And when you die, the Weber gas grill will reduce you to ashes the size of the Rubbermaid most often meant for sandwiches or nails or occasionally hope in a leftover lasagna.

And when you die there will be layer after layer after layer cake. There will be lotioned Kleenex on hand for all 374 of your Facebook friends who will later post on your wall: *Rest in peace, my friend, and Just saw the new Harry Potter movie and laughed at how much you'd hate it and Check out this youtube video of a guy who eats Twinkies and loses 27 pounds—*

And when you die they will tag you in photos like the Halloween you were a 1970s feminist or the Christmas you wore homemade elf hats for the

family photo or the debut of your new eyeglasses which were purple cat eyes with rhinestones that glittered under a new moon that saw you through your 30s with little to no damage.

And when you die, your *Cooking Light* subscription will expire; your bathroom wallpaper will curl like pale eyelashes; the laptop you've been loyal to will fly into the lap of your best friend, Sue.

And when you die it will rain in a way that verges on hurricane and violence and before you know it you'll be swept along into the Erie Canal which will be clotted with rubber ducks and rusted grocery carts and a history that pervades even the darkest corner of your town.

And when you die surely there will be twigs snapping in Minnesota and maybe a loon will issue a mournful cry over Lake Minnewawa where your dead grandparents' knotty pine cabin has magically doubled itself and grown a kitchen island and a 5 stall garage and a deck so high even the hummingbirds can't reach it.

And when you die the walls of your old purple bedroom, slanted like a barn, will slowly part and rise and open to reveal a Midwestern sky more heartbreaking than any you have ever seen, though you almost found it once in Taiwan one lonely April as you turned forty and bought yourself a birthday cake in the basement of the Shin Kong department store while mannequins watched and you emerged into dusk with no idea where you were.

And when you die, the old telephone you'd yielded long ago to cell will fracture the air with its hard lusty ring, and who will answer? What message will be left?

It is your mother: *I didn't really want anything, she'll say. Just watching Martha Stewart and drinking coffee and wondering what you're doing.*

And when you die, these are the last words you'll hear, and inside the static of a long distance line there will be stars, and a rainbow flag flapping, and cereal softening in a bowl of milk, and then quiet, and then a beep.

ANNE PANNING is the author of two short story collections, as well as the novel *Butter*. She has won The Flannery O'Connor Award for Short Fiction, and is currently at work on a memoir, *Dragonfly Notes*. She teaches creative writing at SUNY-Brockport. She loves to eat chocolate chip cookie dough straight from the bowl, salmonella be damned.

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Steve Coughlin

Song of Escape

I celebrate the 972 miles that separate me
from my father's house. And every hotel and vacation rental unit
I pass each time I drive to visit him. Instead of returning
the phone call of my grieving father who--
three years after my mother's death--
still refuses to sit in her spot on the couch,
I want to float like a weightless balloon
across the state of Ohio, high above the bland nothingness
of the Midwest, to any of the elite hot spring resorts
in northern California. Instead of thinking
of the numerous hours my father walks around the neighborhood
avoiding all the rooms that once contained his family,
I want to celebrate the finely aged bottle of Zinfandel
that would be placed before me
atop a table of richly embroidered cloth.
And each afternoon I would most likely visit
all three of the resort's exclusive espresso bars
to indulge in several extra-large, high-fat hazelnut macchiatos.
And each evening I'd disappear into the private library--
adorned with numerous upholstered chairs--
to read from a safe, manageable distance the harsh realism
of any of Theodore Dreiser's major works.
And even if my father discovered where I was
and mysteriously arrived in his black swimming trunks
and lowered his seventy-seven-year-old shoulders
into the curative hot spring water beside me,
Franz--the resort manager--would know to turn the radio dial
from the station repeatedly playing

Bob Dylan's album Blood on the Tracks to the Red Sox game.
Instead of again discussing the lack of nutrition
in my father's nightly dinner of peanut butter and crackers
we would listen in silence to David Ortiz
launch a homerun into the right field bleachers.
And even if my father announced his intention
to spend another few days at this private resort
and that through sheer good fortune
he had reserved the room next to mine
there would still be the double-bolted door
which my father could not unlock
and thick walls to help drown out his blaring television
and there will be state-of-the-art pillows
which would invite me into the deepest sleep
so far from my father
pacing in the next room
that no matter how loud he might call my name
I could not possibly be expected to hear.

...return to Table of Contents

STEVE COUGHLIN has published poetry and nonfiction in various journals, including the *Gettysburg Review*, *New Ohio Review*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Gulf Coast*, *Seneca Review*, *Pleiades*, and *Slate*. He remembers as a child loving a candy bar called Wispa, but now he is not even certain if the candy bar ever actually existed. His email address is coughlin@ohio.edu.

David Ebenbach

In the Chat Room of the Werewolf Pack (Mid-Atlantic Region)

For us, love is a hairy thing, a pup that nestles between the fur and the virtual. Which is to say that everybody

needs friends: MrLongFangs is new to Wilmington; young MoonOverBethesda sniffs for a pack; and ShadowLady

(actually a man, we're pretty sure) seeks recruits for an attack on the vampires of Central Jersey. Our messages

are like the occasional moon. Change me, change me. Even WolfHunter, who shows up with threats of our

annihilation. It's all talk; without us, he's just a loser in infrared goggles, looking for some woods to stalk. We

play along; the chat turns to growls, all teeth and purpose, and then things go contentedly quiet. (Imagine us in our

collective warmth.) Then BrightEyes: Is anyone still on? and it's less than a minute before the barkback from

Furadelphia: Don't start howling, bushy tail. We're not going anywhere.

sweet

6.3

Procedural Drama

I'm going to write my own procedural drama. Mostly it'll be the same as the other ones: first, the dead body, discovered by teenagers in an alley, or by the maid in a gilt bedroom, or at the feet of joggers in a gentrifying park. Then the police officers, delivering the sad news, surreptitiously pressing the loved ones, and then other suspects, until it all clarifies. But then the trial, where despite the evidence the careerist defense attorney brings motion after motion, suppressing the crucial facts. All the while we know who did it, and maybe why. We just want it proven publicly, just want the win, want the murderer shut away. And, like the other shows, the main characters will never develop, episode to episode—each time they'll shake their heads cynically at the body, pursue relentlessly, curse the defense attorney, stoically accept the victory. But then, each time, everyone—the family of the victim, sure, but also the district attorney and the cops—they'll all go back to the alley, the bed, the park, and there they'll fall to the ground, wailing helplessly: *Still dead!* they'll cry. *Still dead! Still dead!*

...return to Table of Contents

DAVID EBENBACH is the author of the poetry chapbook *Autogeography* (Finishing Line Press), two collections of short stories—*Between Camelots* (University of Pittsburgh Press), which won the Drue Heinz Literature Prize and the GLCA New Writer’s Award; and *Into the Wilderness* (Washington Writers’ Publishing House), which won the WWPB Fiction Prize—as well as *The Artist’s Torah* (Cascade Books), a non-fiction guide to the creative process. Ebenbach has a PhD in Psychology from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and an MFA in Writing from the Vermont College of Fine Arts, he teaches creative writing at Georgetown University, and has a particular weakness for anything with salted caramel in it. Find out more at www.davidebenbach.com.

Rae Gouirand

Shoes

In the window
the recent dictates its speech

angled on a
beaming ramp of plexiglass:

so difficult to go in,
remove your old favorites,

align them under
your chair, hoping no one

will notice the darkened
scuffs, the flattened arches,

the sides wet
with snow. Here the clerk comes

with the box,
breaking its tissue seal,

and you hope
your long toes will slip

like sweet muscari
into the sculpted tips,

cooled by the clean

insides, lulled into a perfect

blue fit. And they do,
nearly. So nearly they are

more perfect for it,
fragrant from newness,

neatening your
plans. Under their faces,

thin bones stir,
refracting radiance.

At first, wearing these
is something like a refusal.

With the first step outside
their smooth bottoms chew and exclaim —

not for the world —
touching it reluctantly.

Perhaps it begins
to rain a little, and they turn cold.

Or you kick the door
on your way in and leave a bruise.

Or sigh while taking them
off, blistered cloud from those hard seams

articulating its rise,
rosy, and sad, noting its source.

RAE GOUIRAND's first collection of poetry, *Open Winter*, was selected by Elaine Equi for the 2011 Bellday Prize, won a 2012 Independent Publisher Book Award and the 2012 Eric Hoffer Book Award, and was a finalist for the Montaigne Medal, the Audre Lorde Award, and the California Book Award for poetry. Her new work has appeared most recently in *American Poetry Review*, *VOLT*, *The Brooklynier*, *The Rumpus*, *New South*, *Hobart*, *ZYZZYVA*, *The California Journal of Poetics*, *Barrow Street*, *The Hat*, and in a Distinguished Poet feature for *The Inflectionist Review*. An upcoming (Fall 2014) guest editor for *OCHO: A Journal of Queer Arts*, Gouirand has founded numerous community workshops in poetry and prose online and throughout California's Central Valley and served as an adjunct lecturer in the Department of English at UC-Davis. (allonehum.wordpress.com)

Tiara Sutton

Age of Consent

1.

We stole from the orchard out back, came home with oranges smuggled underneath our blouses.

I remember rolling the clementine between my fingers, the mosquito-bitten orange burning bright in my fist. My tongue ripening inside of my mouth.

Close, then closer, our breath tripped over each other.

The leather tongues of gutted oranges lined the asphalt.

It was our loot, a talisman looped between the thread of our camaraderie.

2.

We're rapidly approaching the age of consent and the moths are gnawing at our blouses.

The skin blushes as wings beat fury against the lining of our stuffed bras.

We climb atop the hood of your car, the husks of cicadas cover the windshield.

I lean over and whisper into your ear, your neck twitches beneath my mouth.

I want your husk, I want every gash. I want you racked with the heat of me.

You've pulled out a brown paper bag filled with bruised plums,
our fused limbs glow under streetlight.

3.

There's a village nestled in the small of my back.

The war woman's cries are thickened with soot and jasmine.

Her sandals tear into vertebrae,

I am smothered in her burning.

She said my body was a room that she wouldn't mind spending the weekend in.

Her hunger eats its way through my hips, burrows beneath the wood of my lungs.

I cry out.

This is how we loved:

Bit by burning bit.

...return to Table of Contents

TIARA SUTTON is an emerging writer who enjoys eating mandarin oranges and other assorted fruits in the summer. She's currently reading *Trace Elements of Random Tea Parties* by Felicia Luna Lumis, and you can check out some of her earliest works on her blog: flowerina.tumblr.com.

Joy Ladin

A Little Bit of Ocean

Children squat on a float in the middle of the water.
The half-grown deer disappears

into a stand of juniper and bullrush. We know shells
were once alive, but it's hard to imagine

what stones once lived. Hard to be a creature of earth
in a world covered with water. I'm not worried

about being happy. I wanted to feel:
Mission accomplished.

I wanted to recognize the shadow I cast,
to cast more light than shadow. My daughter and I

reach the buoys that hold the rope afloat. Beneath us,
darkness, pushing up.

sweet

6.3

August

You haven't, you say, decided to leave me.
Our inconclusive future blinks
like a boy who's lost his glasses.

The sun is going down, the Pleiades
haven't showered yet, half-washed students
flaunt the misery of beautiful young bodies.

We're running away from one another in slow motion,
like thighs of an ambivalent elephant
ripping itself in half. The moon fills

like a basin with milk, ears of corn
ripen toward forgiveness.
I'm starting to die, you're starting to live.

The snake of time
pulls its tail from its mouth
and tells the end to begin.

sweet

6.3

Afterward

After dinner, you browse, leafing through books with small white hands
that make me happy to have a body

even if it's dying
and you are frowning in distant sections

among the acid-free paper of skyrocketing young authors
who make you feel envious and old,

the way I felt before my years
withered and fell away,

leaving me young and empty-handed,
dying quietly among others' poems,

in skin from time to time you touch,
making me happy down to the bones.

...return to Table of Contents

sweet

6.3

Letter to Poetry

Even at your worst, copying copies of your best-rehearsed depressions,
you can be handsome, an olive-green wind of aphorism
lightly rubbed with wisdom,
a courageous widow breathing lyricism

into the suffering you survive
the way a hammer survives,
the way regret survives, pristine and central,
in gardens of good and evil, the way death survives

as your best-loved season, no matter how often
it poaches your favorite singers.
You find a way to sparkle
through busts and battles, bindings and compilations,

and the shy, aristocratic silence
still applauds your voices
as though each of them were new, and you
lived up to each of the endings, the still-great endings,

that listen and love inside you.

...return to Table of Contents

JOY LADIN ,(joyladin@gmail.com), whose favorite sweet is vanilla ice cream, is the author of six books of poetry: *The Definition of Joy*, Lambda Literary Award finalist *Transmigration*, Forward Fives award winner *Coming to Life*, *Alternatives to History*, *The Book of Anna* and *Psalms*; her seventh collection, *Impersonation*, is due out in 2015. Her memoir, *Through the Door of Life: A Jewish Journey Between Genders*, was a 2012 National Jewish Book Award finalist. Her work has appeared in many periodicals, including *American Poetry Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Parnassus: Poetry in Review*, *Southern Review*, *Southwest Review*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, and *North American Review*, and has been recognized with a Fulbright Scholarship. She holds the David and Ruth Gottesman Chair in English at Stern College of Yeshiva University. Some recent publications:

"Balance" in *Lavender Review*

"Letter to Death" in *Extract(s)*

"Letter to Failure" in *Prime Number Magazine*

Rachel MacDonald

Observations at a Boys' Prison in Jamaica

Here are no jumpsuits,
no orange-streak guilty,
no crease between out
and in,
where shadow-thick heat
beats the zenless walls, that
chip-shot blue cinderblock,
and thorn-cropped wire
crowns the yard, screaming
got you, we got you,
we got you.

Here are the boys named
convict, the captured child kings,
tomcat captains of Caribbean
alleys, orphaned princes of symbiosis,
the lords of pot, port sweepers,
lost boys of Odysseus sailing
dirt street ways, land locked
and ready, for bread, for
the father's return.

Here are the skinny gods
with proud backs and thick
knuckles, blue bruises on
still-soft cheeks,

motherless sorcerers with
glacial eyes, freezing
us in awe of their gaze,
got you, we got you,
we got you.

...return to Table of Contents

RACHEL MACDONALD is an emerging writer; she works as an educator, poet, and recently served as an editor at the *Victorian Periodicals Review* (John's Hopkins University Press). She is a chronic hobby adopter, violinist, amateur potter, yoga lover, and baking enthusiast. Her favorite sweets typically include chocolate-fruit fusion, but her signature desert is a delectable carrot cake. Email her for the recipe at remacdonald@ymail.com.

Dancing with Frankenstein

Sheryl St. Germain

It starts as a joke, my husband's, who says he sometimes feels like Frankenstein's monster when we practice tango. We're both learning, and I have to admit that he does sometimes move like he's put together with parts of dead men that don't quite fit. Still, he's of good heart—*that* is his own, I'm sure of it—so I cling to him as he yaws one way and then another. We are like twin moving Towers of Pisa.

As we dance, it seems he will fall over at any moment to either side, or backwards, or forward, who can tell. His arms are wrapped around me as if I might save him from falling, though I can barely save myself. I close my eyes, the better to feel his movements, and blinded, thrash along with him, slightly off his beat as I'm in dire fear of him stepping on my toes, which are already bruised, the nails black from earlier practices. The instructor tells us it's almost always the woman's fault when her toes get stepped on, and I don't want to be at fault, I never want to be at fault, so my dancing feels mostly like trying to avoid his feet. He lurches forward and I list back, tottering on first one foot, then the other, and somehow we make it to the end of the hall.

He's trying hard, and so am I, but at this stage there's so many things to think about—how we hold our torsos, the nature of our embrace, the beat of the music, where to put our feet, where not to put our feet, and how to try to move as one, so it's not surprising the dance itself seems Frankensteinish, all the right parts there, none of them speaking to each other. And since my one job, so the instructor says, is to follow the leader, in this case my husband, we lurch *together* as ghouls, for if he is Frankenstein, I am surely his bride.

We are not virtuosos, we are not like Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire, or Dana Frigoli & Pablo Villarraza who float across the floor, svelte and confident, balanced in their embrace, exuding harmony. Instead, we rock one way, then the next, his foot thumping, mine clumping, the hallway shaking, the fragile parts of us barely holding together for the space of a dance. I close my eyes again, my chest against his chest, and when my heart senses his heart's beat, I almost don't mind that I'm dancing with Shelley's monster, that sentient being whose only wish was to share his life with another like him, a wish that keeps us lurching this way and that til death do us part.

SHERYL ST. GERMAIN's poetry books include *Making Bread at Midnight*, *How Heavy the Breath of God*, *The Journals of Scheherazade*, and *Let it Be a Dark Roux: New and Selected Poems*. A memoir *Swamp Songs: the Making of an Unruly Woman*, was published in 2003, and she co-edited, with Margaret Whitford, *Between Song and Story: Essays for the Twenty-First Century*. Her most recent book, *Navigating Disaster: Sixteen Essays of Love and a Poem of Despair*, was released in September of 2012. She directs the MFA program in Creative Writing at Chatham University.

In Color; The Wild Child

Marcia Aldrich

Twenty minutes after we had left the theater I refused to believe that *The Wild Child* by Francois Truffaut was shot in black and white. The film, based on a true story and set in the France of 1798, is about a young boy who had spent his life without human contact and could not walk, speak, read or write, and a doctor's attempts to civilize him. I had been held rapt from the frantic opening when a small group of hunters and their dogs chase the boy through the woods. The film I had seen was in color and nothing could shake me from my conviction even though it was inaccurate as my companion heatedly argued.

The film's images, cast in the haze of memory for I have not viewed it since that first time, are in color. That is how I experienced the film and that is how the experience lodged in my memory. I see the men chasing the naked boy with his skin covered in red dirt and his hair disheveled running on all fours through a very green forest, robustly, lushly green. He scampers up a tree, branch by branch until he rests in a crux near the top. He rocks in his resting place. There the leaves of the tree frame his face and are green and plentiful—that's how I remember them. Green.

That I saw the film in color tells me more about who I was as a young girl than any factual account could. And it also tells me that watching a film is an act of creation and what we remember or take away continues that creation.

My "mistake" upset the man I was with. What upset him more was that given the correct information, I persisted in remembering the film creatively. There is no doubt that my experience is factually inaccurate. My emotional reaction literally colored the film. Adding color when there was none is some kind of authoring, but it doesn't bother me now and it didn't bother me then. I am as interested in what we get wrong in our accounts as in what we get right.

I was a young woman, shy of twenty, who was encountering art films I never even knew existed for the first time and their impact upon me was sometimes shattering and a revelation. Nothing prepared me for their intimacy or the intensity of my response. The empathetic exploration of the emotional life of the child in Truffaut's *The Wild Child* spoke to me. The boy was bereft, misunderstood, and isolated. He also embodied great spirit and depth of feeling. The image of the boy rocking in the rain is an image I don't need to see again because I carry it with me in my mind's eye. He rocked when

he felt great emotion—was it longing, was it feeling at one with the moon, with nature—I don't know because he didn't name it. Whatever he felt, it was wordless. I had no resistance, no protection to keep this film at bay. I bestowed *The Wild Child* with color it didn't have and I never was aware of the alteration. It just happened.

I remember the film so vividly because in watching I felt a kinship with the boy and understood something essential about myself—I understood how the child had to relinquish the wildness in himself in order to take his place in the social order, to be part of a community structure, to be accepted into a family. If he persisted in his nonverbal, gesturing animal ways, he would not be granted affection or companionship. He would be sent away and institutionalized. Yet, something fundamental at the heart of who *The Wild Child* was, who I was, nurtured by nature and not social interaction or family, something beyond language or before language, was being assaulted in order for him to survive. I felt those pressures myself—I felt that who I was in solitude, outside the family home, with animals and in dirt was my primary home, my primary identity and that it was wordless. The enormous challenge of the artist is how to acquire and use language without losing that wordless world at the center of identity, at the center of art.

The Wild Child ends without entirely resolving whether the boy will thrive because by now we no longer know exactly what thriving would be. Would it be the muting of the wild and the acquisition of language and manners? Or would it be a return to the wild? Either resolution comes with loss. The ending points to a future that includes his growing socialization. I felt a terrible sadness that I doubted others felt, a sadness because I could viscerally feel the wildness at the heart of him being ripped out and replaced with something more acceptable and ordinary. I knew most viewers would feel his survival was a triumph. If he hadn't been broken and able to learn, his fate was dismal. He would languish in an institution. Still I felt the violence at the core of his learning, how he had to be forced to let go of the soundless joy inside him, and it pained me. We were at the end survivors in a captive world.

Thinking about this film reminds me of how much trouble I had thriving when I was young. Like the wild child, I learned how to stand in the doorway, half in, half out, aware of what I was losing.

[...return to Table of Contents](#)

MARCIA ALDRICH is the author of the free memoir *Girl Rearing*, published by W.W. Norton and part of the Barnes and Noble Discover New Writers Series. She has been the editor of *Fourth Genre: Explorations in Nonfiction. Companion to An Untold*

Story won the AWP Award in Creative Nonfiction. She is at work on *Haze*, a narrative of marriage and divorce during her college years. Her website: MarciaAldrich.com.

Dear Denise Duhamel,

I first fell in love with your poetry after reading "Delta Flight 659," your poem to Sean Penn. I thought: Denise Duhamel is brilliant! Denise Duhamel is original! Denise Duhamel is my kind of poet! I thought: I didn't know that I could write to celebrities or about celebrities. -Sure, I had read "(Lana Turner has collapsed!)" by Frank O'Hara in college, and I had read George Bilgere reference Beyonce in the poem "Say My Name." But this—this was different. This was, to state it in colloquial terms: mind-blowing. It blew my mind because of the extent of its cleverness and its level of linguistic word play.

So, years later, I was looking for a book of poetry to read for pleasure as a new grad student in Florida and I saw your book *Two and Two* on the University of South Florida Library bookshelf and I picked it up. Back story: A week earlier, I had written a poem about not having money for food and about the things I had to do to survive. So of course to my surprise, when I opened your book to the poem "Egg Rolls" at the end of a long and grueling day, and there was a familiar momentum and sense of desperation as you wrote about being in grad school at Sarah Lawrence in New York and the things that you had to do (like work crazy jobs and not sleep much and ration your food and consider spending your bus fare on some delicious sustenance, etc.) that uncannily echoed my experiences, I thought: She knows! She gets it! -And there is nothing more comforting to someone who is sacrificing and struggling to make their so-called dreams come true (namely, becoming a publishing poet with their own collection of printed poems) than to see a poem like this in a collection like *Two and Two*. But, my love of your poetry moves beyond an intangible bond and eerie parallelism (although, I love that mystery of connection and chance that I find in poetry very often, like when I stumbled upon Franz Wright's "Our Conversation" -but that story is for another time and place). Yes, Denise—I must say, my love of you and your poetry goes deeper.

Two and Two is rich, and full of what you are thinking. The poems in *Two and Two* are conversational—it feels like you are talking directly to me (and in some cases you are—speaking to the reader directly: "If you, the reader, have any other keys to unlocking this dream, please send them , in / the form of a poem or prose poem, to the publisher of this volume." (And YES! to you writing your dreams and their interpretations—hell, YES!))

Two and Two is full of imagination that stems from statistics, and historical commentary with a twist of blurred timelines (i.e. "Noah and Joan"). You make your own rules, Denise! I love that. I love when you wrote about Joan of Arc being "good with swords / and, presumably, power tools."

Two and Two gets down to the nitty-gritty, the nuts and bolts, the ins and outs—like in "Egg Rolls"

when you mention the dented cans you bought on clearance, working early mornings at a health club, and how you had to shower in the dark to not wake your roommate. I loved that you didn't use punctuation in that poem. I loved that you wrote in long blocks of continuous writing to emphasize the cycle—the desperation, the thick of things, like you don't have room to breathe as you are in it and doing it and living it. It is full of images and setting. It is oh-so-visceral.

I guess what I'm really trying to say, Denise, is that I love the possibility in your poems. I love what you do (all of it, every single thing that you do!) in your poetry. I love what you write and how you write it. I love your love of language. I love your stories and your metaphors and your pop-cultural wit. I love that you talked about and wrote to Woody Allen about your concerns, commenting on and questioning the scenarios involving him and the actresses in his movies. I love that you can write an entire poem with chronological alphabetical groups of slang words. I love that you can write a list poem using warning labels of any and all kinds to talk about how not to read the poem you had written. I love that you write about mysterious and taboo things like incest and sex and body image and _____ (fill in the blank because it's all in there). I love that you are you! I love that your poems are about you and me and women and the media and anyone who uses words and lives in this pop cultural and literary world. I love the abundance. I love the obsession. I love that reading your poetry feels real and authentic and familiar. And I love that you seem unafraid to write about anything under the sun--under your sun, under my sun. I love that you are part memoir, part journal, part image master. I love that you are present in your poems vividly, vibrantly, and without shame. I love that you are biblical and base. And now, I've noticed that I have transitioned from talking about your poetry to talking about you and how you inhabit your poetry—but, Denise, that is what you do to me—you make me feel that you are inseparably connected to your work, and I feel that by reading your poetry I am reading you, which is what I want to do in poetry, and in my poetry. So, thank you, Denise! Thank you for writing some damn fine combinations of words on paper that make me excited to be a poet and a writer and that teach me that it is possible to be me (in so many ways) on paper, in and through my poetry. Thank you for being contemporary and confessional in the most freeing of ways.

Love always,

Sarah Duffy

[...return to Table of Contents](#)