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**DESIGN STATEMENT**

The print issues of **TAB: The Journal of Poetry & Poetics** are special editions, each published at the beginning of the calendar year. These issues reflect **TAB**’s mission to create an environment that celebrates poetry in various forms and venues. The annual print issue engages the reader with poetry as a material object and asks that the reader negotiate between image and text. The design of the first issue does not assume a traditional role of quietly framing content; instead, design actively shapes the reading of the entire page. The special print editions of **TAB** will continue to experiment and explore the intersections between form and content, object and space, and reader and reading.

Monthly electronic issues follow each annual printed issue. Using these differing formats—print and digital—allows experimentation with design and materiality in a time when print and electronic dissemination coexist. **TAB** will not force either format to adapt to the other. The reading experience in virtual spaces is different than that of a printed journal. The electronic issues are shaped by Open Journal Systems, a federally funded, open-access system from the Public Knowledge Project designed to serve the public good globally. While the electronic files can be printed, each electronic issue will be formatted for ease of reading on the screen. Decisions about page size, typography, and composition are driven by the online reading experience, rather than to merely mimic a print version. **TAB** also makes use of the audio/video possibilities of digital dissemination.

To order a copy of the print issue, please send a check for $10 made out to Chapman University to **TAB: The Journal of Poetry & Poetics**, Department of English, Chapman University, One University Drive, Orange, CA 92866. **TAB** will be available at the AWP book fair.
SORROW’S ARGUMENT

On the day before we learn to distrust it, grief is welcome. It soaks us with heavy wet gratitude in being able to feel anything at all. We take grief down into our throats and hold it thick just above our bellies. The not quite fullness reminds us of the way back up and through, past our lips, is breath and, eventually, song. There are four words for this: waiting, resistance, sigh, alchemy.

The day it arrives fully announced and inconsiderate of our daydreams, we pretend its calls are to others and leave the door soundly shut. Grief, when eaten too quickly, burns the stomach bright with holes meant for falling through, inside out, and no well equals the pitch and pull we glimpse only after we tumble over the edge. There are four words for this: bags, root, turning, final.

In the days after, grief is christened soft sorrow, seeming as white snow piling all afternoon while children sleep. Sorrow is a mysterious thief taking wasps carrying our grief into an unknown, distant summer. We should be thankful and blink, laugh. They are neighbors, grief and sorrow, as their trickery is our acceptance of blindness, our desire for something sweet. There are four words for this: attachment, underbelly, heft, charity.
WHAT OF BIRDS?

We credit the feather’s shape for their momentum, but our own battered skin flutters unseen, toward errors of unknowing. We are spoons turned against capturing wetness, slick curves refusing to bow inward. To communicate softness in avigation, we must forget impulses tentative, and just, as they do, these birds, dive behind currents. This is saying hide; this is saying it’s too much to care. When I ask you if there has been a difference in one thousand years of eyes trained upward, forced through certain jealously, into awe, I expect an answer laced through with an erudition enough to make me properly jealous. It is too easy to accept the son overtaking the father, a breeze breathing the young higher, the aged remaining an immobile windmill by the barn. This is my response to your response, leaving us no closer to reprieve. We might never know how to explain what hurts us as we travel through one alliance after another, no closer to our own waxless flight.
HAIKU, LATE SUMMER (A PRAYER)

Father, forgive me
for wavering unfaithful
here, amid sparrows.

Someone’s radio
just won’t quit playing love songs.
Leaves pin me to grass.

I’ve cut down an elm
to carve out a monument
to scattered petals.

Lightning in the west
advances this direction,
cracks in the ceiling.

Let me use plain words:
I don’t think I can handle
this autumn alone.

The leaves curl upward,
have learned to count on each drop
of water you give.
BEFORE WE TRY “I LOVE YOU”

We’ve tested the word obliquely.  
On the phone, buffered by a dozen states,  
we’ve admitted we’d love to be together.  
That we’re lovers. That there are things  
we love, each about the other. So easy,  
proclaiming adoration for football, for chocolate,  
for the road that links us, for days  
like today. But when we speak of each other,  
something catches the word at the trap door  
of our throats. It’s like that egg  
the magician deposits in the cave of his ear,  
then draws whole from his mouth.  
Seems impossible, something so large, hiding  
in the space above the tongue. We suspect  
a kind of trickery, until he cracks it into a glass  
and we see it, a sun bobbing through its own  
clear sky. We love days like that—  
how everything seems possible and everything  
surprises. Think of the finch, singing  
by your window—how his burst of song  
first amazes you, then strikes you as  
the only thing he could possibly sing,  
the only thing that makes any sense at all.
Book review

DEADBEAT BY JAY BARON NICORVO
FOUR WAY BOOKS, 2012, $15.95

In the first poem of his debut book, Jay Baron Nicorvo introduces us to the title character, Deadbeat, “without a toupee, / shirt unbuttoned to his navel, a gold V dangling / the Patron Saint of Audited Tax Evaders.” At a child-support hearing, Deadbeat’s son looks at his father and catches a glimpse of the future: “the veteran asleep on the subway” and “an unstarrered urban night / like a leather hood drawn over his face by an older man.” In a move characteristic of Nicorvo’s book, the poet subverts the quirky, comedic beat, redefining the sleazy loser as a tragic figure who poses inadvertent but serious danger to himself and those he loves.

This dichotomy between tragedy and comedy is a great part of the energy in Deadbeat, a book embodying a mature, nervous masculinity that is not driven by sexual energy or self-deprecating wit. Deadbeat is a character stranded in the aftermath of loss, a man marked by his inability to do right. Here, a boy cannot grow up and into his place in the world. Instead, Deadbeat discovers himself floundering where the old codes of manhood have failed. His recipe for lamb is more conscientious dismemberment of a carcass than construction of a tasty dish. He butchers a dead bird on the side of the highway to find a talisman that reminds him of carving a holiday turkey. Deadbeat lingers among strangers on barstools and sits alone in the back row of movie theaters. He lives on the margins until he eventually ventures underground in search of other folks who swim through darkness like he does.

We get to know Deadbeat across the five sections that make up the book. While he begins as a “Deadbeat Dad,” the character’s failed relationships with his wife and son are just the start. Consider “Deadbeat in Dear Immerse,” in which our hero meets a woman who seems to be a kindred spirit. They are “singles at a date movie / the sorriest of the lot.” When Deadbeat makes an effort to connect, he sees himself in her gaze, an indistinct desire for both companionship and solitude. Deadbeat becomes the heartbeat yearning to go to her and say, “Don’t be afraid! I live that way too!” Nicorvo weaves these moments of alienation with lateral moves that explore the nature of Deadbeat’s name. In “Deadbeat Takes a Job in the Service Industry,” we see Deadbeat stuck in his dead-end job, and in “First Weather,” we witness Deadbeat’s failing hometown, its death throes resembling a cataclysmic end of days.

Later in the book, Deadbeat transcends his physical self to become Odysseus rebuked by Telemachus and become the president confronted with the ruins left in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. He is at once a man and the world reflected in his tarnished image, a broken likeness so real that birds crash into his body in “Mistake the Window for the World.” Ultimately, we learn that even God is a version of Deadbeat, a “blind voyeur” who neglects the world he has created, a place where disregard and negligence are the natural order of the universe.

In “Hot Knives,” Son of Deadbeat follows his father’s pattern of drug use. By the end of the book, the boy has a wife and son of his own, but he also has Deadbeat’s desire to abandon them. This might be the greatest tragedy of the book: Son of Deadbeat has inherited his father’s curse, and all Deadbeat can offer in response are the last thoughts in “Deadbeat’s World Ends with a Whimper”—“Oops.”
Throughout the book, Nicorvo touches on images of impotence, estrangement, and rupture. A man’s regret is always tempered with the inevitability of what passes, his decisions with the consequences of his actions. *Deadbeat* masterfully creates this portrait of bungling, negligent masculinity, not as a critique but as an acknowledgement of all our shortcomings regardless of gender. We all run the risk of becoming Deadbeat. “Last Poem” declares “Deadbeat is alive and well” shortly after eulogizing his death in previous pages:

By the time you read this,

he might be dead, hell,
you may be just as dead.
Book review

INCARNADINE BY MARY SZYBIST
GRAYWOLF PRESS, 2013, $15.00

Mary Szybist’s luminous second book of poems, Incarnadine, lingers on the moment of encounter; it takes up the marvel and violence of the annunciation as it is depicted in a range of settings. No matter what the context, Szybist appears captivated by the instance of annunciation as a moment of supreme change. And it is thrilling to see this poet think and feel through the inconsistencies and mysteries of suffering change. The distinct situations of annunciation that she conjures are surprising and unexpectedly dynamic. The poem, “Annunciation (from the grass beneath them),” for instance, gives us the famous story from the point of view of the grass:

the girl tilted and lurched and then
we rose up to it, held ourselves tight
when it skimmed just the tips of our blades
didn’t you feel softened
no, not even its flickering trembled.


Particularly astonishing is the poem “Annunciation as Right Whale with Kelp Gulls,” which gives an account of the violence implicit in all encounter:

I tell you I have seen them in their glee
diving fast into the sureness of her flesh,
fast into the softness of
her wounds—have seen them
peel her, have seen them give themselves
full to the effort and the
lull of it—

The poem intensifies the sense of violation in the image of the kelp gulls swiftly accumulating:

For they
eat her alive. For they take mercy on others and show them the way.

At high tide, more gulls lift form the mussel beds and soar toward her.
For they do sit and eat, for they do sit and eat
Szybist echoes the last line of George Herbert’s great poem “Love (III)” with the line “For they do sit and eat” and reinforces the notion of a self being overcome in order to receive divine mystery.

This feeling of being overwhelmed or prevailed over and the spiritual and carnal mystery of love are further explored in Szybist’s poems about motherhood and childlessness. She often conflates the poet Mary with the biblical Mary in scenes where the speaker speaks frankly about the longed-for condition of motherhood or meditates on her own fascination with mothers who kill their children. “Mary tells herself that if only she could have a child she could carry around like an extra lung, the emptiness inside her would stop gnawing,” she writes in “Update on Mary.” In “So-and-So Descending from the Bridge,” the speaker says that the mother who throws her two children off a bridge is what “out-nights” her, and the unfathomable mother seems at once to horrify and captivate her.

It is estrangement in which Szybist is most interested, or what estrangement can let into an existence. The various shapes that rift may take seem only to enlarge the poet’s imagination, to hold out other systems of contemplation. In the gorgeous “Knocking or Nothing,” the speaker passionately asks, “Oh my out-sung, fierce, unthinkable— / why rattle only the world / you placed in me? Won’t you clutter the unkissed, / idiot stars?” The poet chooses the word “incarnadine” instead of “incarnation” as the title of her book. Though the idea of something incarnate, made flesh, inheres in the word, I kept returning to it as a verb as the collection moved forward. To redden, to deepen in that color, is perhaps one pure and soundless image of change in all of its beauty, violence, ambiguity, and insufficiency.

But what a tender funny bone this serious poet has! The closing poem of the book, “The Lushness of It,” imagines what it would be like to be loved by an octopus: “If it touched, / if it tasted you, each of its three / hearts would turn red.” She deftly brings together the notes of spiritual questioning and the world’s irrepressible immediacy in the final couplet: “Will theologians of any confession refute me? / Not the bluecap salmon. Not its dotted head.”
CONTRIBUTORS

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Kelli Allen’s work has appeared in journals and anthologies in the United States and internationally. Her Pulitzer-nominated poetry collection, *Otherwise, Soft White Ash*, arrived from John Gosslee Books in 2012. She served as Managing Editor of *Natural Bridge* and holds an MFA from the University of Missouri. She is a Professor of English/Creative Writing at Lindenwood University.

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