

# T A B

## THE JOURNAL OF POETRY & POETICS

VOLUME 1  
ISSUE 11  
NOVEMBER 2013

SORROW'S ARGUMENT *and* WHAT OF BIRDS?  
Kelli Allen, p. 4–6

HAIKU, LATE SUMMER (A PRAYER) *and*  
BEFORE WE TRY "I LOVE YOU"  
Karen Craigo, p. 7–9

BOOK REVIEW: *DEADBEAT* BY JAY BARON NICORVO  
W. Todd Kaneko, p. 10–12

BOOK REVIEW: *INCARNADINE* BY MARY SZYBIST  
Sandra Lim, pp. 13–15

© TAB: The Journal of Poetry & Poetics. Volume 1. Issue 11. November 2013.

No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, without prior written permission from TAB. Rights to individual submissions remain the property of their authors.

Department of English  
Chapman University  
One University Drive  
Orange, CA 92866  
[www.chapman.edu/poetry](http://www.chapman.edu/poetry)

ISSN: 2169-3013

THE CENTER FOR POETRY AT CHAPMAN UNIVERSITY

T A B U L A  
*p o e t i c a*

 CHAPMAN UNIVERSITY | WILKINSON COLLEGE  
*of Humanities and Social Sciences* | Department of ENGLISH

*Editor:* Anna Leahy  
*Creative Director:* Claudine Jaenichen  
*Graduate Assistant (Digital Coordinator):* Michael Tesauro, English  
*Criticism Editor:* Brian Glaser  
*Translation Editor:* Alicia Kozameh  
*Book Review Editor:* Karen An-hwei Lee

*TAB External Board of Consultants:* to be announced

*TAB Internal Advisory Board:* Joanna Levin, Chair of English; Mary Litch, Director of Academic Technology; Drew Farrington, Strategic Marketing; Laura Silva, Wilkinson College; John Benitz, Theatre; John Boitano, Languages; Penny Bryan, Education; Douglas Dechow, Leatherby Libraries; Menas Kafatos, Sciences; Rei Magosaki, English; Lisa Nashua, Office of Development; Kevin O'Brien, English

The internal Advisory Board represents a variety of disciplines and perspectives; is consulted individually and/or as a group for advice and ideas; meets once each semester for reports, updates, and needs of the journal; and is invited to assist in other ways as needed. The Chair of the Department of English, the Director of Academic Technology, Wilkinson Account Manager in Strategic Marketing, and Wilkinson College's Publicity Coordinator hold standing positions on the Advisory Board. Each additional board member serves a three-year, renewable term.

#### **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.

K E L L I   A L L E N



### 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 day-  
dreams, 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 jealousy, 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.

K A R E N   C R A I G O



**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.

W . T O D D K A N E K O



*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 unstarred 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.

S A N D R A L I M



*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.

"Annunciation in *Byrd and Bush*" and "Annunciation in *Nabokov and Starr*" anachronistically borrow language from Senator Robert Byrd, George W. Bush, *Lolita*, and the Starr Report and focus on girls caught in the nets of history and language.

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 from 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

KELLI ALLEN

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.

KAREN CRAIGO

Karen Craigo teaches English to international students at Drury University in Springfield, Missouri. Her work has appeared in the journals *Poetry*, *Indiana Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Puerto del Sol*, *The MacGuffin*, and others. Her chapbook, *Stone for an Eye*, is part of the Wick Poetry Series.

W. TODD KANEKO

W. Todd Kaneko lives in Grand Rapids, Michigan. His work can be seen in *Bellingham Review*, *Los Angeles Review*, *the Normal School*, *Barrelhouse*, *the Collagist*, and elsewhere. He has received fellowships from the *Kenyon Review* Writers Workshop and Kundiman. He teaches at Grand Valley State University. Visit him at [www.toddkaneko.com](http://www.toddkaneko.com).

SANDRA LIM

Sandra Lim is the author of *The Wilderness*, which is forthcoming in 2014 from W.W. Norton and was selected by Louise Glück for the 2013 Barnard Women Poets Prize. Lim is also the author of *Loveliest Grotesque* from Kore Press. She is an Assistant Professor of English at the University of Massachusetts, Lowell.