



ARTS & LETTERS
PRIME

ARTS & LETTERS

PRIME 2.2

Issue 2.2

Spring 2013

EDITOR

Martin Lammon

MANAGING EDITOR (2012-2013)

Benjamin Mitchell

MANAGING EDITOR (2013-2014)

Claire Helakoski

ASSISTANT MANAGING EDITOR

Rachelle Bowser

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

David Muschell

ARTS & LETTERS

PRIME 2.2

Table of Contents

Masthead	i
Table of Contents	ii
Welcome Back	iii
Three Poems by Kirun Kapur	6
Poetry	7
You Give Me Fever	9
From the Afterlife	11
Two Poems by PRIME Poetry Prize Winner Jerry Mirskin	13
I Called My Uncle	14
No Ideas But in Things	16
A Poem by Kevin Stein	18
Sputnik Summer	19
Artwork by Mackenzie Burgess	21
Mud Series	22
Play by Jean-Michel Ribes , Translated by Brooke Budy	28
Tragédie /Tragedy	29
Two Poems by Jesse Delong	38
[So]	39
[A lump of snow...]	40
An Essay by Sean Prentiss	41
The Wind Whispered	42

ARTS & LETTERS

PRIME 2.2

A Play by Terence Patrick Hughes	48
Recess	49
Three Poems by Eric Nelson	57
The Body Smells	58
The Fence Line	59
Men	60
Ask Alice #5	61
Special Thanks	62

PRIME Rewind

Welcome to the new *Arts & Letters* PRIME 2.2. As you may notice, after a few months on hiatus, we've adapted a complete new look for PRIME. This design change was prompted by both technical and editorial challenges. First, the program we had been using to create PRIME (which is in the ePub format) finally posed too many problems for us; for now, we are using the iBooks author program to create PRIME.

Second, starting fall 2013 (PRIME 3.1), our digital journal will become more truly a supplement to the print journal. In print, we will continue to feature outstanding literary work from both new and established authors. From the print edition, we will select work to be featured in PRIME, which will offer enhanced audio content of authors reading their works.

Distribution has also posed some challenges for us. For now, we will make the most current edition of PRIME available for free to all who submit work to *Arts & Letters* (whether online via the *Arts & Letters* submittable link or through regular mail) and to those who subscribe to the print journal. Past editions of PRIME will be archived and available for free at the *Arts & Letters* website.

And so in the future, PRIME will mostly become an enhanced supplement of our print journal. But we will continue to feature new work available only on PRIME (the newest "Ask Alice" program, graphic arts content, and more). For example, PRIME 2.2 features our "reader's theatre" programs: "Recess," by Terrence Patrick Hughes and "Tragédie," by Jean-Michel Ribes, translated by Brooke Budy. Both audio programs were produced and performed by *Arts & Letters* Drama editor David Muschell and assistant editor Tori Lee Averett.

PRIME 2.2

The opportunity to provide such enhanced content is exactly why we started the PRIME experiment. Another important reason: the opportunity to introduce *Arts & Letters* readers to new and established graphic artists. In PRIME 2.2, we feature new artist Mackenzie Burgess, whose memorable series of photographs are included here. Ms. Burgess also offers an audio artist's statement providing a personal context for her stunning photographs.

Congratulations also to our second PRIME Poetry Prize winner Jerry Mirskin, winner of the \$401 PRIME prize. Kudos also to runner-up Kevin Stein, whose poems are also published here (he'll earn our normal \$41 PRIME contributor's honorarium). Thanks to distinguished poet Alice Friman who selected these poets' works from among all those submitted to the competition. The third PRIME poetry prize is accepting submissions (via [submittable](#) only) from May 1 to July 31, 2013, and the winner will be featured in PRIME 3.1.

And so the experiment rewinds, but continues. Right now we are focusing on versions of PRIME for the iPad that can be read in iBooks. But we hope to develop new ways to access PRIME content via other digital readers designed for enhanced eBooks. We will also begin working on creating digital versions of *Arts & Letters* print editions (past and future).

So stay tuned: As always, go to <http://al.gcsu.edu> for current details.

Martin Lammon, Editor

Watch Martin Lammon's original "Why Prime?" [video introduction](#) featured in PRIME 1.1.

Kirun Kapur grew up in Hawaii and has since lived and worked in North America and South Asia. Her work has appeared in *AGNI*, *Poetry International*, *FIELD*, *The Christian Science Monitor* and many other journals and news outlets. She has been a poetry fellow at The Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, Vermont Studio Center and McDowell Colony. Currently, she lives in Massachusetts, where she is the co-director of The Tannery Reading Series. The following three poems won the *Arts & Letters* Rumi Prize in Poetry for 2013 and were also published in *Arts & Letters* print edition.



Three Poems by Kirun Kapur

Poetry

You Give Me Fever

From the Afterlife

[Listen](#) to Kapur read her poems

Poetry

No need to shout:

Not under my roof!

Because I said so!

My crimes: misused newspapers from Islamabad

(He'd waited 15 weeks to hold)

To make a papier-mâché penis,

For science class, of course; refused

To wear a proper dress; for guests,

Recited limericks I'd learned from Timmy Prinze.

He quoted Hafiz—

His Persian arced above my head,

A shock of glittery finches arguing—

Or Mir, whose Urdu was a scatter shot

Of words I knew and words I didn't:

Pop pop pop,

It struck like heels tooled by the roadside cobbler

Who chatted while he hammered nails into my soles.

I thought I understood

The message: I was too ignorant

To grasp the depth of chastisement I'd earned,

Too ignorant to warrant further talk. That was enough

To stop me cold.

Now, I read those poems for myself,
Those moments we were wholly foreign to

Each other, that defied

Their plain translated meaning,
But linked vowel to gaping vowel,

Crashing rhyme to rhyme. I remember,

Line after line, his furious mouth
Controlled by meter. Truth is,

I loved to anger him

Sometimes, loved for us both to feel too much
For speech. He said enough

To strike me dumb, to make me

Struggle for some sense. He was arming me
With shoes to wear, with fury, feathers, flight.

You Give Me Fever

Slowly, ceiling fans wheel over me,
The air on my face, a hand
With roughened fingertips. It doesn't hurt

To be made of other's sadnesses. Your own
Will be kept company. This, I say
To the doctor wearing a pained smile

And soup stains on his pressed, white shirt,
Then avert my eyes. I can't stand straight
But I'm still mannerly. I can wait

For the quarrel on the telephone wires to be resolved:
That abacus of birds endlessly recalculates
What is added and taken from the sum of us—

Fate contained in the smallest bodies.
There is no medicine for this. The fire has to burn
My imperfections out, the soup-stained doctor says.

My mother's voice is like milk in the drain;
The sheets are stiff with bleach and river dust.
I am a citizen of beds and heat.

For once, I have no need to say, *Yes*.
I can carry it: rags and broth bowls are borne away.

PRIME 2.2

For once, I don't have to keep

My eyes open and I am not hungry.

From the Afterlife

I wanted to be a bone—white like
the Taj Mahal, hard as a puritan—

when vein and wish are stripped,
still able to rattle the essential notes.

But no music gets made when you pit
your self against ideas of yourself.

Dust suits me better. Grey-brown fleck—
I can mix, move into the smallest space,

spark the grittiest tunes. Divide me
into fifty states: winsome, wondering, crazed, my face

scattered by teaspoon. Over the Great Basin
of played out mines and salts rising in a haze,

over hard farmed heartland, the bent
fair-headed wheat, the combine's cloud,

silt along the fat lip of river bed. Semis
hissing and grumbling in tongues.

I can still feel the hum of the telephone wires,
running from one life to another. I filled the lines

case a story is a body, in case we lose our place.

Hello? Friend? I can touch everything,

but can't stop thinking. Turns out, thoughts
granulate. Turns out, I never was a girl, I was all

those girls, a girl statue, torch raised, you know the one—
standing in the harbor, wearing a sari.

The tide foams up. Now, I'm so much dust,
I am a continent, absorbing—a thimble full

of mother, angry powder, laughing specks, froth,
filth, lover, crying cinders, particles of mineral wind.

I'm proof that nothing is lost.

You can breathe me in.



Jerry Mirskin is the winner of the 2013 *Arts & Letters* PRIME Poetry Prize. His first full-length collection, *Picture a Gate Hanging Open and Let that Gate be the Sun*, was published by Mammoth Books Press after winning the Mammoth Books Prize for Poetry. His recent collection, also published by Mammoth, is entitled *In Flagrate Delicto* and, according to the author, is rated PG-13. He has worked as a herdsman on a dairy farm, a carpenter, and a New York State Poet-in-the-Schools. He lives in Ithaca, NY and is an Associate Professor at Ithaca College.

Two Poems by PRIME Poetry Prize Winner Jerry Mirskin

No Ideas But in Things

I Called My Uncle

[Listen](#) to Mirskin read his poems

I Called My Uncle

I called my uncle. I had something to tell him.

Out of the clear blue, he sent me five hundred dollars.

He was giving gifts to his nieces and nephews.

I was living in Binghamton, working as a substitute teacher and living in a crappy apartment.

I didn't know if I would have work from day to day.

I didn't know why he was giving me a gift, but when I saw the check, I was grateful.

My uncle was old school. When he died, a friend referred to him as "a diamond in the rough."

I thought about what I knew of him. He had been in World War II.

There were some stories. Hard times. At his funeral, his brother

— my dad—

told a long rambling story about how my uncle took my father to a baseball game when my dad was young. My father stood by the grave and recounted. He remembered that on that day the famous player, Joe Dimaggio, hit two home runs.

It seemed like a funny story to tell at a funeral. And even more odd was how my dad referred to the baseball player as, "Joe D."

Looking at the hole in the ground, he said, ".... and Joe D hit two homers."

He hesitated, as if trying to find a few more words. Nothing.

Then eventually he said, "I liked him," and took a small step back.

I wasn't sure whom my dad was referring to: the baseball player or my uncle?

And then I realized it must be my uncle— his brother.

He was talking about his brother.

It was a year earlier that I called to thank him.

PRIME 2.2

I felt my uncle had looked down from somewhere and saw where the dark was collecting in the corners and wanted to do something for me.

When I called, I told him I wanted to thank him. He didn't say anything.

I said it was a surprise. I listened, waiting for a response, wondering if there were something else I could say.

That's the hard part: knowing what to say.

I imagined my father's brother in his Bronx apartment, the way he was the last time I saw him. How he came to the door in his underclothes and then rested in bed while we talked. I hadn't seen him like that before.

It was the beginning of his physical decline.

Before that, he was all strength and good humor.

Now, on the phone, it was as if we were both standing in the dark.

The undivided dark that we all share, but must abide alone.

Maybe it was that that made me really feel the simplicity of his gift, and I told him I didn't think I deserved it. It was then that the silence on the other end of the line seemed more intense. I heard a sound like someone trying to breathe.

And then I realized, he was crying. Quietly sobbing.

Years later, after giving a poetry reading, a friend of my father's came up to me and shook my hand, and then he surprised me.

Holding my hand a moment longer, he said, You're not nothing.

We were standing in the doorway. I wasn't sure what he meant.

I still remember that. I didn't know, but I sensed it was meaningful.

After some time, it came to me, and I knew what to say.

Thank you, Uncle George, I said. I love you.

And before I hung up, and then for some time after, it seemed my uncle and I were dwelling together in a timeless place.

A different place. Not this one.

No Ideas But In Things

*So much depends
upon a red wheelbarrow
glazed with rainwater...
WC Williams*

Sometimes at the end of winter
the my of me battered by having traveled
too many miles in the dark, I catch myself
by the window, looking and longing
like an artificial flower, in flagrante delecto
checking the horoscope of the snow
the dial of the rain.

It used to be I'd take the dim and grey
as a horse takes shoes.

What do we have but expression? Give me a word
as solid as ice. Pithy and worthy as wood.

The end of winter is a dirge. Soft in the tooth.

It is the querulous sound of dripping water
the ground is not prepared to take in, as I am not
prepared for the snow's ignoble decline.

Put it this way, In another country
they'd seize the window for making the world so poor.

Here things are different.

Across the way, a black bird stops like a hammer
in the broken tines of a tree.

And a squirrel, nimble as the limb it ambles on climbs
to the end of the earth and the beginning of sky.

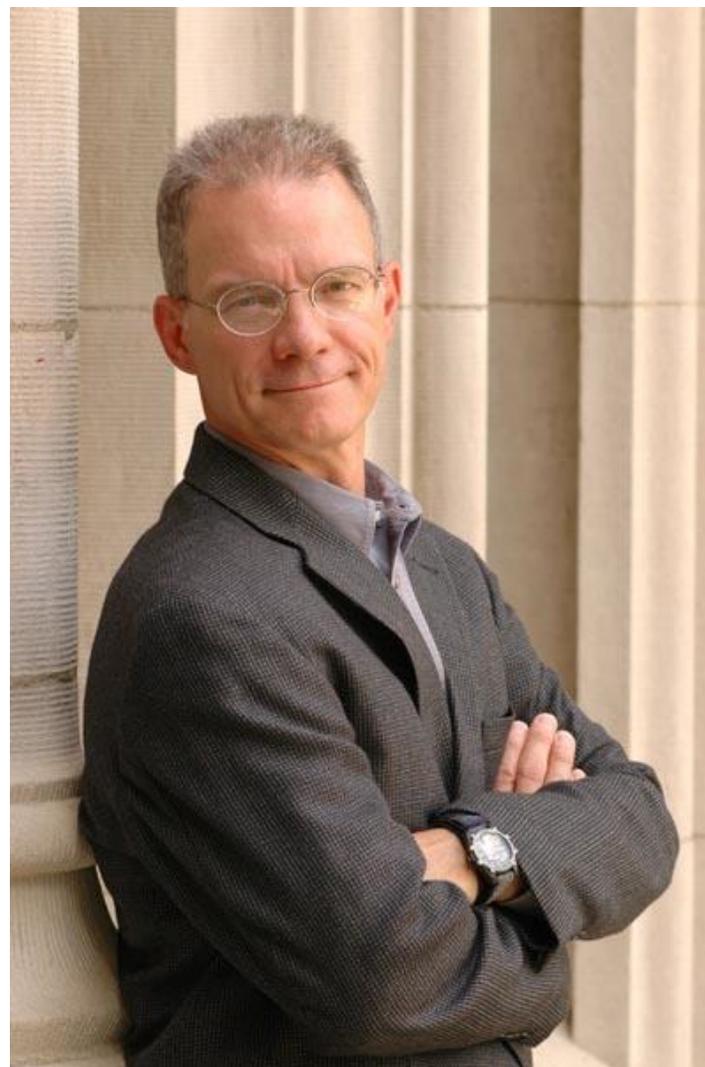
If the tree were a document, the squirrel would be the nib
that gives the world its imprimatur.

We live in a college town.

Down the street, a red sofa chair is lodged upside down
in the crotch of Maple. You can't say that the trees
around here aren't playing their part. Black veins
they take over the neighborhood like Rorschachs of trees.
For some reason, I take the sofa in the tree personally.
As if it were not only my sofa, but my idea to put it there.
I think the precocious fraternity who made that petition
should have to stay after. Stay until they learn
how much thinking it will take to get spring here again.
How far the rains will have to go.

So much depends upon a red wheelbarrow
glazed with rainwater, I say to my wife
who is taking a bath. She doesn't care for Ars Poetica.
I know she loves me, the way one loves an old horse.
This old horse goes into the bedroom
opens the window and pulls a three foot icicle from the eaves
and brings it in the house and into the steamy bathroom
where she floats like an Italianate fairy.
When she sees the gleaming stick jutting up between my legs
she yells, Don't put that thing in here!
and laughs, and I laugh, and for a moment it feels
like it will all be o.k.

Kevin Stein has published ten books of poetry, criticism, and anthology. His forthcoming collection *Wrestling Li Po for the Remote* includes the poem “Sputnik Summer” and will appear in spring 2013 from Fifth Star Press. Recent books include the essays *Poetry’s Afterlife: Verse in the Digital Age* (U. of Michigan Press, 2010) as well as the verse collection *Sufficiency of the Actual* (U. of Illinois Press, 2009). His poems and essays have appeared in *American Poetry Review*, *Arts & Letters*, *Boulevard*, *The Kenyon Review*, *Poetry*, *TriQuarterly* and elsewhere. He teaches at Bradley University and since 2003 has served as Illinois Poet Laureate.



A Poem by Kevin Stein

Sputnik Summer

[Listen](#) to Stein read his poem

Sputnik Summer

You could borrow a guy's mitt but not his cap,
that summer
sun's cauldron boiled the bowl of sugar maples
arcing
the outfield fence and pitching down the ditch
where old men
tipped paper-sacked Mogan David and no ball
ever came
back. Even nuns' yardsticks hadn't saved us,
so we'd screw-you
the bastard drunks then run because we could.

Fearing priests more than Commies, I didn't pray
for world peace
when Jigger's fastball Sputniked off my bat
then rocketed
the road where ambulances birthed stretchered
progeny,
nor when the ball reentered earth's atmosphere,
dropped ballistic
through animal cracker clouds then crash-glass-
landed
upon the hospital window's dirt-scrawled steppe.

No one yet fretted what the inscrutable Russkies
were up to
when sirens wailed Tuesday noons. Feet etched
a diamond
upon the sparse grass, its bases can lids tossed

in dust,
home a ketchupy mess black ants relinquished
with one stitch
across the batter's sockless ankles. The limits
of chain link
and our power kept a score we knew by heart.

If the Battle of Waterloo was won upon Eton's
playing fields,
Vietnam was lost amid our strike-outs and dropped
pop ups.
So we first heard then saw them, their unstoppered
voices
pouring out the window-mouth's broken *Oh*:
the polio ward's
stick kids clutching crutches, metal-braced in place,
the ketchup-haired boy
back-flat within his iron lung's antiseptic dystopia.

They hooted their clattering metal, rubber-tipped cheer,
our audience
announcing they were not fit for pity. We did not offer
a sweaty cap
salute. We did not curse crooked fate's twisted limbs,
nor wipe
the febrile brow of luck with the cotton of our prayer.
I stood
stiff as they, moved but unmoving, raising the silly
stars and stripes
of ignorance up the pole of my able body.



Mackenzie Burgess is a photographer from Augusta, GA pursuing a career in photography in the advertising field. She concentrates in portrait photography and loves creating new ideas and images that produce raw feeling.

Artwork by Mackenzie Burgess

[Listen](#) to Burgess's Artist's Statement















Jean-Michel Ribes is a French dramatic author, director and movie enthusiast. Since 2002 he has directed the Théâtre du Rond-Point in Paris. He is author and director of twenty-some pieces, many of which have won significant prizes, including the “Prix Plaisir du théâtre” and seven Molière nominations. He writes for television and cinema as well as for the stage, and in 2011 he received the SACD (Society of Dramatic Authors and Composers) Grand Prize for the entirety of his works.

Photo by Giovanni Cittadini Cesi at Théâtre du Rond-Point (Paris), November 2012

Brooke Budy traveled to Paris to meet Jean-Michel Ribes in 2008 while he was a graduate student in literary translation at the University of Iowa. In 2012, Budy produced the world premiere of his English translation of Ribes's play, *Theatre Without Animals*, on stage in Portland, Oregon. Budy works as tour guide and bilingual real estate broker in Oregon and France.

A Play by Jean-Michel Ribes
Translated by Brooke Budy
Tragédie/Tragédie

[Listen](#) to the reader's theatre performed by Tori Lee Averett and David Muschell

Tragédie/Tragedy

for Sydney

by Jean-Michel Ribes

translated by Brooke Buddy

CAST:

LOUISE

JEAN-CLAUDE

SIMONE

SCENE: *They are chic. In gala dress. LOUISE is tense, walking quickly. JEAN-CLAUDE shuffles along behind her, his expression stiff. Stairs, hallways—they're searching for a name on a door.*

LOUISE: "Bravo," all you have to tell her is "bravo," that's it.

JEAN-CLAUDE: *(Sighs.)*

LOUISE: You don't have to kill yourself trying to compliment her, just say bravo.

JEAN-CLAUDE: *(Sighs.)*

LOUISE: Listen, make it shine, don't force it, but don't mumble.

JEAN-CLAUDE: I can't do it.

LOUISE: You can't say "bravo?"

JEAN-CLAUDE: No.

LOUISE: Even a little bravo?

JEAN-CLAUDE: No.

LOUISE: What is it? Is it the word that bothers you?

JEAN-CLAUDE: No, it's what it means.

PRIME 2.2

LOUISE: Oh! What it means, what it means... if you say it like “hello” it already means a lot less than what it means.

JEAN-CLAUDE: Well, doesn't it still mean “congratulations,” just a little?

LOUISE: Yes, but not much more. Nothing more, really.

JEAN-CLAUDE: I hated tonight. Did you know that, Louise? I hated everything—the costumes, the set, the play and Her, especially Her!

LOUISE: Exactly! This way you don't have to tell her that you didn't like it, you just say “bravo,” a little bravo and it's over, no discussion, your part is done and then I take over... Here's her dressing room.

JEAN-CLAUDE: I won't be able to do it.

LOUISE: Jean-Claude, you know she gave us those seats, six rows from the front, with all the local celebrities, she didn't have to do that, we're not famous, we're the opposite of famous, she did it to make us happy.

JEAN-CLAUDE: It didn't bring me the least bit of happiness.

LOUISE: That's why I'm not asking you to say “thank you,” okay; “thank you” could sound a little hypocritical especially if you were really bored, but “bravo,” please! “Bravo” is nothing, a smile, not even a half smile, just a twitch of the lip...

JEAN-CLAUDE: I told you I won't be able to do it!

LOUISE: So then say it twice.

JEAN-CLAUDE: Twice?!

LOUISE: Yeah, “bravo, bravo.” Say it twice and it flows out all by itself, you barely realize you said it and it's out there, you don't even have time to think about what it means. It's a little like “forgive me.” When you say “forgive me” you don't get the idea you're really asking to be forgiven, that you want to be absolved of your sins, no, it's just a couple of words that come out of your mouth, but the guy you just spilled your beer on who's about to strangle you will cool off if he hears you say “forgive me!” and because he won't believe his ears he'll say, “I beg your pardon?” a phrase he doesn't really grasp either, otherwise the very

idea of falling to his knees before you to beg your forgiveness would keep him from ever saying it in the first place. But he does say it! Then you go your separate ways, no insults, no war, almost like friends, proof that ten thousand years of civilization have not been in vain, because we've managed to replace the human impulse for strangling with politeness, and that's why, Jean-Claude, I'd really appreciate it if you'd just say a little bravo to Simone, so she doesn't think my husband has dropped out of civilization... Do you understand?

JEAN-CLAUDE: What's gotten into you, talking to me like that non-stop?

We've just heard your sister do nothing but talk talk talk for almost three and a half hours, it nearly killed me, and now you're going on at me!? Are you crazy? Is it contagious or what? If you're going to keep this up, tell me right now, because I'm warning you, it won't be the same with you as it was with Simone, I'll leave, I'll get the hell out of this theatre and I won't come back! Do you hear me, Louise, I'll never come back... I've had enough.

LOUISE: All this because I'd like you to be polite to your sister-in-law?

JEAN-CLAUDE: Because on stage she was polite?! Because if it's art it's polite?... Because if it's classic it's polite? Because if it rhymes it's polite? Is that it?

LOUISE: Are you trying to tell me that Racine wasn't well-bred?

JEAN-CLAUDE: Louise, do you understand, your sister tortured me, she tortured me the entire evening.

LOUISE: You are aware, I hope, that in Japan the greatest honor for the mortally wounded samurai is to say 'bravo' to his opponent.

JEAN-CLAUDE: That's a bad example. I hate Japan.

LOUISE: Too bad, a little of the Orient could've been good for you.

JEAN-CLAUDE: Good for what?

LOUISE: To help you understand, to help you understand yourself, by forgetting for one little minute your stubborn Occidental head.

JEAN-CLAUDE: I'm warning you, Louise, don't push me, I've really had it!

PRIME 2.2

LOUISE: Because you know what, when the mortally-wounded samurai says ‘bravo’ to his opponent, it’s not to congratulate him, it’s to humiliate him.

JEAN-CLAUDE: Oh really?

LOUISE: Of course. It’s the highest form of revenge. Your sword can slay my body, but my soul is intact and says “bravo.” That’s true victory! “Bravo”... In the end saying bravo to your opponent is like saying bravo to yourself... bravo for saying bravo to your executioner... Now if you refuse to say bravo to yourself by saying bravo to Simone, that’s your business...

JEAN-CLAUDE: A man who didn’t scream during this performance can’t say bravo, Louise! I can’t believe I endured this torture without budging, like a coward, without saying anything, for exactly two hundred and twenty-three minutes and seventeen seconds!

LOUISE: Oh yes! I saw that, I saw you looking at your watch!

JEAN-CLAUDE: The entire time! At one point I even thought it had stopped, during her long monologue with the bearded guy, the husband, it wasn’t moving anymore. I was thinking, the bitch is keeping us all here, eight hundred people stuck in their seats in front of her, she’s even stopped the clocks to make it last longer!... I don’t know how I made it through, I have no idea...

LOUISE: Oh, stop exaggerating, you’re not dead.

JEAN-CLAUDE: Yes, that’s true... and do you know why, Louise? Because I kept repeating one word to myself, over and over, one magic little word: intermission! Intermission!... But it never came, never! Five acts without one second of intermission, Louise, that’s what you call civilization?

LOUISE: Fifteen years, Jean-Claude, Simone has been waiting fifteen years to perform at the National Theatre! Now it finally happened, she was hired! And miraculously, they offered her the role she’s always dreamed of! This evening, for the first time in her life, she appeared in Phaedra in the most prestigious theatre in Europe, and you, her brother-in-law, you’re refusing to say “bravo” to her, just a little bravo! What have you become? An animal?

PRIME 2.2

JEAN-CLAUDE: She just performed Phaedra for the first time in her life!? Are you joking or what? Have you forgotten our wedding day? She recited an excerpt right in the middle of the meal, just like that, without warning anyone, even after the kids started crying and none of the guests wanted to dance and my father kept yelling at your father! She royally fucked up the party with her acting and her alexandrines!

LOUISE: It was Mother who asked her, as a surprise for us.

JEAN-CLAUDE: The surprise was that I almost left the table, Louise, left the table on the most beautiful day of our lives! I really had to be in love with you to sit still for twenty minutes with a knife stuck in my lamb chop, while that hysteric bellowed her poetry as she fondled her breasts! And twenty years later she's doing it again, this time the full version, and you want me to say "bravo" to that fat cow!

LOUISE: Jean-Claude!!

JEAN-CLAUDE: Jean-Claude what!? Simone's put on twenty kilos, true or false?!

LOUISE: It's human, it's the anxiety of waiting for this role, fifteen years of anxiety, of course she had to make up for it with food... but frankly that's not what matters here.

JEAN-CLAUDE: When you're wearing a toga, it matters a little!

LOUISE (*glares at JEAN-CLAUDE and asks him calmly*): Why did you come, Jean-Claude?

JEAN-CLAUDE: Sorry?

LOUISE: Why did you come with me to this premiere?

JEAN-CLAUDE: Are you joking?

LOUISE: Not in the least—you know what Simone looks like, you knew she was going to play Phaedra, why did you come?

JEAN-CLAUDE (*screaming*): Because for three months you've been bugging me day and night about your sister's opening that we can't miss under any circumstances. February 24th has been highlighted in red on all our calendars and all

PRIME 2.2

our date books; it's turned into a family holiday... This year, at our place, we'll have had Easter, Christmas and Phaedra! And on that note, I'll remind you that neither your father, your mother or your brother were here this evening!

LOUISE: She only had two tickets for the opening!

JEAN-CLAUDE: And why did she have to give them to us?! Why!!!

LOUISE: What about o?

JEAN-CLAUDE: Huh?

LOUISE: O? Can you just say "o?" When she comes out of her dressing room, I'm sure she'll look at you first. Give her a big hug and say "o" to her, you don't even have to say it loudly, just whisper into her ear: O!

JEAN-CLAUDE: O...?

LOUISE: Yes, I think what matters most with "bravo" is the o, the other letters are as good as useless... After the play when everyone was clapping, you could hear them shouting bravo (*she imitates them*), vo! vo! vo!... Above all it was the o that resonated, vo! vo! And to be honest, it was accompanied by a barely audible v, vo!... That's it, "vo! vo," that would be perfect.

JEAN-CLAUDE: Are you asking me to say "vo" to your sister?

LOUISE: Please.

(*Pause.*)

JEAN-CLAUDE: Vo?

LOUISE: Yes.

(*Pause.*)

JEAN-CLAUDE: Louise, I think the time has come for us to take another look at our relationship.

LOUISE: I knew it! Escape, evasion, denial... once again you're trying to avoid doing what I ask you. You never make any effort to understand me or satisfy my needs.

JEAN-CLAUDE: Oh and you make an effort?

LOUISE: I do, Jean-Claude, I really do!

PRIME 2.2

JEAN-CLAUDE: Whatever!

LOUISE: Don't forget, for example, that I suggested removing 75% of the word 'bravo!'

JEAN-CLAUDE: After making me sit through four and a half hours of your sister!

LOUISE: Three and a half hours!

JEAN-CLAUDE: And the hour we're wasting in front of her dressing room, isn't that worth something?

LOUISE: She's freshening up! You can't consider Simone in Phaedra the same way as Simone in the shower!!

JEAN-CLAUDE: Right now you're the one I'm considering, Louise! You wear me out as much as she did on stage! With you plus your sister, I've got a double dose! I can tell that in a theatre you two are the same, one just as boring as the other!

LOUISE (*hateful*): Stop fooling yourself, Jean-Claude, I am nothing like Simone! If a curly-haired young man with leather straps laced up his calves walked into my life, you can be sure I'd run off with him right then! right there! Without a moment's hesitation, without looking back, I'd run away with Hippolytus... to Skiathos, Skopelos, Mykonos... wherever he wants, and I'd leave you here, you and your coelacanth brain! (JEAN-CLAUDE, *unmoved, doesn't answer. He remains silent, staring at the wall. Disconcerted, LOUISE takes a step in his direction.*) You're not going to say anything?

JEAN-CLAUDE: No.

LOUISE: That didn't bother you?

JEAN-CLAUDE: What?

LOUISE: What I said.

JEAN-CLAUDE: No.

LOUISE: If I ran off with Hippolytus, that wouldn't bother you?

JEAN-CLAUDE: No.

PRIME 2.2

LOUISE: Even to a Greek island?

JEAN-CLAUDE: No. (*Pause.*) Was “coelacanth brain” in Phaedra?

LOUISE: No.

JEAN-CLAUDE: It seems like it could be.

LOUISE: Of course, it’s from the Greek koilos, or “hollow,” and akantha, “spine”... It’s a big fish... our ancestor... before the monkey...

JEAN-CLAUDE: Well, what do you know...

LOUISE: I’m sorry I spoke without thinking... You don’t love me anymore?...

(*JEAN-CLAUDE doesn’t respond.*) And you’re telling me at the National Theatre...

JEAN-CLAUDE: I get the feeling neither of us will have a good memory of this place.

(*He steps away. LOUISE is startled.*)

LOUISE: Where are you going?

JEAN-CLAUDE: Out for a beer.

LOUISE: Are you coming back?

JEAN-CLAUDE: I don’t think so.

LOUISE: Be careful not to spill it on the person sitting next to you...

JEAN-CLAUDE: I’ll try...

(*He walks toward the exit.*)

LOUISE (*stricken, cries out*): Jean-Claude!

(*JEAN-CLAUDE disappears without answering. LOUISE bursts into tears, leans against a wall and, distraught, lets herself slide onto the floor. The dressing room door opens and SIMONE appears in a silk dressing gown, beaming.*)

SIMONE: Oh my dear, you’re here! Did you like it? (*LOUISE’S crying doubles in intensity.*) Oh, my poor dear, you were so deeply moved.

LOUISE (*hiccuping*): It’s because... it’s because...

SIMONE: I know, this play speaks strongly to women.

LOUISE: No, it’s because... because...

SIMONE: Because it’s moving to see your sister applauded for twenty minutes...

PRIME 2.2

LOUISE: Jean-Claude left meeeee...

SIMONE: Your husband?

LOUISE: Yeeees...

SIMONE: When did he leave you?

LOUISE: Here, now, he left meeeee...

SIMONE: Before the end of the play?

LOUISE: Nooo...

SIMONE: Oh you gave me a fright!...

LOUISE: Jean-Clauuude...

SIMONE (*suddenly realizing*): My dear, this is incredible!... Jean-Claude left you on the night of my opening in Phaedra, and do you remember what I performed for you the day of your wedding?!

LOUISE: Of course I remember, you miserable bitch! (*She backs away toward the exit.*) Slut! Skank! Fat cow!

(*She disappears at the end of the hallway. SIMONE stays back for a moment then begins to run after her sister, shouting.*)

SIMONE: Dearest, my dearest, what happened? Did I say something wrong?

Louise... Don't you have anything to say to me...? You won't even say "bravo"?...

Louise... not even a little bravo?

Jesse Delong is an MFA candidate at the University of Alabama. His work has appeared, among other places, in *Best New Poets 2011*, *Mid-American Review*, *American Letters and Commentary*, *Indiana Review*, and *Painted Bride Quarterly*. His chapbook, *Tearings, and Other Poems*, was released by Curly Head Press, and you can listen to him reading from it on [Slash Pine Press' website](#).



Two Poems by Jesse Delong

[So]

*[A lump of snow weights on a branch &
eventually collapses it: the mound falling & some
specks rising & catching the light of the air:
how I feel when I think of you]*

[Listen](#) to Delong reading his poems

[So]

Why bother to make sure the woman snoring beside you doesn't run off with the man who fixed the leak but made the water run Why bother to fill the dusty room of a rundown apartment with aggression & then retreat Why bother to drive ten miles into town because you forgot the limes for lentil soup & why bother even to wait for the soup to cool Who cares how many taste buds are burnt when you are hungry & who knows maybe you'll get hit by a bus Wouldn't that just be the works Worth it even To know its steel & cheapseats are coming You have to decide Life is & must be as if you are continuously thudding against a sandstorm mouth masked in a handkerchief a rag really You have to smell your own teeth

[A lump of snow weights on a branch & eventually collapses it: the mound falling & some specks rising & catching the light of the air: how I feel when I think of you]

Huffed onto the edge of the couch—one I'd found, legs sawed, cushions torn, behind my neighbor's thrift store fence—because the woman I'd moved into the mountains with last winter had left me for the pickled fish of South Korea, I watched the man who, snow on his windshield, came to repair my satellite, breathing inside a glass of water, the water trembling from his thirst, & when he, hail in his hair, fingers red, felt warm enough to lose his heat to the cold again, he offered, that gracious man, his hand, large enough to hold the burden of mine inside, & in my eyes he looked as if he saw, as I once did, the winter filter through her hair, her in front of the porchlamps as she plucked an iris growing, somehow, in the garden's snow. We are all damaged, frost or not, & only hope no one will notice the way we're never ready for the weather. No, not me he saw but who I should be. Not me—just something the snow did. Not me but myself, my hand in his.



Sean Prentiss splits his year between teaching in the Green Mountains of Vermont at Norwich University and spending summers at his cabin in Colorado's Saguache Mountains. He is co-editing an anthology on creative nonfiction, *The Far Edges of the Fourth Genre*, which will be published in 2013 by Michigan State University Press. His piece *The Wind Whispered*, along with two other pieces, is being considered for a Pushcart Prize

An Essay by Sean Prentiss
The Wind Whispered

[Listen](#) to Prentiss read his essay

The Wind Whispered

Our Always Love

You and I live in the Cabin, upriver from the Rapids. We have always lived in this quiet Cabin, upriver from the Rapids. These past eleven years. Our quiet evenings, there are only geese of night and herons in flight and you, always, leaning back into my chest as we watch the Sun kiss the Hills of here goodnight.

Eleven years of marriage as if a day [or a dream].

As if just yesterday I [or the Wind] whispered, *Yes*, when you asked.

Our History

You and I have lived in the Cabin for eleven years. Since I [or the Wind] whispered, *Yes*.

We have always lived in the cabin. Those three rooms are the only home we know.

The Truth

All of this was true yesterday, is true today, must be true tomorrow.

Our History

Eleven years ago, you and I floated in a battered aluminum canoe on the quiet River.

We were stuck so perfectly in the Eddy. We spun in slow circles to nowhere but love.

The Sun kissed the Hills of here. The Sun, it kissed us too.

Who We Are

There is you, my wife. You have never been my ex. Not even once. Not even in a dream.

There is me, the husband to you, always you. I never once said, *No*.

There is the River that you and I have lived along for these eleven years.

The River currents with our love.

There is the Cabin we have lived in these eleven years. The Cabin you asked me about.

There is always the Wind, and this Wind might have whispered, *Yes*.

The Hills and the Sun are the other characters in this story of eternal love.

So is the Eddy spinning us in circles and circles.

And even the turbulent Rapids.

Things You Must Have Misremembered

What makes you think I ever moved from your arms?

Or even learned the word *Lonely*.

What does that even mean?

Regret?

Our History Again

Eleven years ago, we floated circles in a canoe on the River. We floated circles so perfectly in the Eddy, spun slow circles to nowhere but love and love and love and love.

The Sun kissed the Hills of here. The Sun, it kissed us too.

Our Ever Life

I sometimes struggle to sleep at night. It is not the fat moon through the windows of the Cabin that keeps me awake. I just struggle to believe that this, this is my life.

A life as beautiful as the River kissing its bank, eroding deeper into the Hills of here.

Our Cabin

For eleven years we've made a home in these three rooms. This cabin that is as much the Hills as it is itself. And we are as much the Cabin as we are ourselves. We are each other, we are these cabin floors, we are the dirt of these Hills, we are the Sun kissing our shoulders, and we are, always, the current of the River, pulling us down toward those turbulent Rapids.

Our History Again

Eleven years ago we spun circles in a canoe on the River. You and I stuck so perfectly in the Eddy. We spun in slow circles to nowhere but love.

The Sun kissed the Hills of here.

The Sun kissed us too.

Things That Have Never Happened

Can someone tell me of crying?

Can someone tell me of sobs so big that tears become a river?

What I Know

We still sit beside the river every evening.

Every evening since eleven years ago when I [or the Wind] whispered, *Yes*.

Eleven years as if a moment [or a dream].

The Beginning of More of Our History

Eleven years ago, we spun in slow circles to nowhere but love.

The Sun kissed the Hills of here.

While the Sun kissed us too, you asked to the Hills, to the River [to the Wind?], *If we owned that cabin upriver...*

Your words trailed off.

Your words.

Your words.

Your words.

They hovered just above the River.

Hovered like fog.

The Middle of More of Our History

The Wind kissed your words.

The Sun kissed your words.

The Hills hugged your words tightly as you whispered, *If I owned that cabin upriver, would you marry me?*

Our Home

Outside the cabin, the rusty green pump pours golden water. I rinse my face with the cold waters on cool mornings. I bring you home water for a bath. For eleven years this water tastes only of love.

These last eleven years I have never tasted loneliness.

Things That Have Never Happened

I never moved faraway to escape heartache.

I have never learned that one can never outrun heartache.

That lesson is as unneeded as a sixth finger because all I know is our love.

Things That Always Happen

Autumn nights we keep the windows open to feel the cool kiss of the night air.

At dawn we watch fog lift from the River.

You hold me the way the River holds the banks, so close.

Things That Have Never Happened

There was never a breakup.

You never tasted heroin.

I never had a long love affair with booze.

There were no burning joints sending ghost-smoke to our souls.

More Things That Never Happen

Never passed out on the floor.

Never splitting headaches from drink.

Never drunk drives home from bars because bars must be home.

How can bars be home when you are home?

You and the Hills and the Sun and the Eddy and the Wind and the River.

The End of More of Our History

Eleven years ago, we spun in slow circles to nowhere.

Your words trailed off.

You whispered, *If I owned that cabin upriver?*

You whispered, *Would you marry me?*

You looked away, toward the Hills, toward someplace safer than this battered old aluminum canoe floating somewhere above the Rapids.

Your words, they hovered just above the River.

If I was a fisherman, I would have cast my hook toward those words.

Before they floated away.

Things I Will Never Admit

I let those words float away.

Things I Have Never Done and Things I Have Never Said

When you asked me [or the wind], I never paused.

When you asked, I never looked away, toward, maybe, the Hills.

And I never once whispered so quietly that only the river could hear.

No.

The Truth

There is no other truth but this truth.

There is no other way things could have gone.

This telling was true eleven years ago. It must be true today.

It must be true tomorrow. Tomorrow. Tomorrow.

Whisper it with me [or the Wind], *True, true, yes, always true.*

No, whisper it with me. *True.*

Terence Patrick Hughes's plays include *LINES* with the Horse Trade Theatre Group, *Finding the Rooster* and *A Muse in Manhattan* with the 13th St. Repertory Theatre, and the award-winning *Farewell Evenbrook* at Theatre Row. His new play, *Goodnight Sunshine*, was developed with Horse Trade



Theatre and was presented at the 2012 Centre Stage New Play Festival as well as Boomerang Theatre's First Flight Festival. He is currently crafting a ten-play cycle entitled, *The Trials of Oscar the Great*, which he says is "...a look back at the American experience in the 20th century and a glimpse forward to our future as a people in the 21st century through the comic and tragic events in the life of a native son." The cycle's most recent play, *The Kiss of Caiaphas*, was developed at the Lark Theatre and was a Finalist for both the 2011 Centre Stage New Play Festival and the Ashland New Play Festival. Born in Lawrence, Mass., Hughes, his wife, and two children share their time in New York City and Woodstock, NY.

A Play by Terence Patrick Hughes

Recess

[Listen](#) to the reader's theatre performed by Tori Lee Averett and David Muschell

Recess

At Our Lady of the Bleeding Heart, Mind, and Spirit – Once Reformed

NANCY: Female, of teaching age.

BILL: Male, same approximate age but a little younger.

PLACE: A schoolyard

TIME: Late spring, present, mid-morning

SCENE: Children are heard at play, a sound which subsides as dialogue begins.

NANCY enters stage left, reading a book while also keeping watch on offstage left and stealing glances toward stage right. BILL is offstage right voice is heard shouting.

BILL: (*offstage*) Kevin! Kevin Martin if I see you do that one more time I will send you right back inside the classroom. Do you hear me? It's dirty and disgusting!

(BILL *enters stage right and sees NANCY.*)

BILL: My god that kid and his balls.

NANCY: What?

BILL: He won't stop licking them.

NANCY: What?

BILL: Kevin Martin. He licks all the schoolyard balls so the other boys won't play with them.

NANCY: Did you talk to his parents?

BILL: Yes. They told me to lock him in a dark closet.

NANCY: They didn't.

BILL: It's virtually impossible to discipline a sixth-grader who then goes home to the Gulag.

NANCY: I'd say you do just fine.

BILL: The problem is I blame myself. You know if I was a better teacher then Kevin Martin wouldn't lap schoolyard toys. Or if I was more interesting then Roy McMillan wouldn't have to pee every ten minutes. I swear by the end of the day my conscience is licked and peed to death. Anyway, how are we making out over on planet Venus?

(NANCY *looks offstage left.*)

NANCY: OK. I guess. Ann-Marie Baxter leaves an extra button open on her blouse. Susan Healy wears just a hint of eye-liner. And yesterday Jessica Bond raised her hand in art class and asked 'what's an orgasm?'

BILL: Did you send her to the nurse?

NANCY: I said it was an endangered species.

BILL: See I never get direct questions. In my classes they pass notes. I feel like I'm teaching science and math to the French Resistance.

NANCY: The kids love you.

BILL: Because I'm the new guy. It'll wear off come next year. Besides, they love you, too.

NANCY: No. They appreciate me. I'm like the older sister they never had and if they did they'd never talk to her.

BILL: I like that about you.

NANCY: You do?

BILL: Sure. It takes all the pressure off the rest of us. When they come out of my classes they're climbing the walls. But when they come out of yours, they're...I don't know, almost passive. What do you do teach them little ten-year-old mantras?

NANCY: At the end of the lesson, I shut the shades and let them lay their heads on their desks.

BILL: Is that legal?

NANCY: It relaxes them...helps them to be in the moment. But, Bill, don't be ashamed of exciting the kids. Some of us...them, I mean...need some excitement.

BILL: You're right. I am exciting, too.

NANCY: I know.

BILL: You should see me take apart a Euclidian equation.

NANCY: It has been a long year.

BILL: Take solace...summer's almost here.

NANCY: Feels more like fall.

(Slight pause).

BILL: Isn't it so predictable?

NANCY: The weather?

BILL: Teaching. It all starts out so rough in the beginning, just a blur of names and faces and then...things slowly change, just like the seasons, the lessons get easier, dialogues take root...then the winter cold subsides and spring nears and you really start to warm to their little personalities. You...I guess you fall in love with them in a way. Don't you? Because you know once the school year ends, you have to let them go.

NANCY: Yes.

BILL: Although in some cases you still want to strangle a parent or two for even considering the idea of conception. *(Shouts offstage)* Kevin, I'm warning you! No tongue!

NANCY: He's just acting out.

BILL: You know what Freud would say? He'd say 'what an utterly revolting habit.'

NANCY: They should let them play together.

BILL: Who?

NANCY: The children. All this division isn't good for them. At choir practice, sure, you can't sit a tenor next to a soprano but out here...I mean to send them

off to junior high without ever having played kickball at recess with a member of the opposite sex seems so...Victorian.

BILL: I think they're afraid they'll hurt each other.

NANCY: In seventh grade they let them play soccer together. Talk about instant confusion.

BILL: They'll be all right. There's always a nun on the field handing out 'thou shalt nots'. And hey, when I was in junior high I was crazy about...confusion...but things turned out OK with me.

NANCY: They drove Sister Elizabeth crazy. Do you know she's going on leave?

BILL: Do you know Sister Elizabeth spikes her coffee with whiskey?

NANCY: No way.

BILL: In a hurry I grabbed her cup by mistake in the break room. One sip and I couldn't breathe correctly for days.

NANCY: She does fall to her knees a lot but I thought she was just being pious. Now they have to find a new teacher pretty quickly. It takes weeks to...

BILL: They found one.

NANCY: Oh, I'm so glad. That's so great.

BILL: Yes, it...

NANCY: They came to me, you know? Sister Catherine said I was first in their minds. First in their minds! I'm not sure if you're familiar with these things...

BILL: As a matter of fact...

NANCY: ...but it's really quite a complement because for years they tended to... (*quieter*)...promote from within the sisterhood...you know, take care of their own.

BILL: It's a hard habit to break.

NANCY: So I sure thought about it .Don't get me wrong, it involves much more work but also more money. Anyway I turned it down. And ever since then I've been wracked with guilt...both professional and Catholic.

BILL: You turned it down. Why?

NANCY: Well...I...mean...don't you think we have it good here?

BILL: Sure but...

NANCY: You're new and it might take a while but...you'll find that it's pretty special here. I know some of the nuns may not act exactly like Mother Theresa but...they do know how to make a place feel safe. And we all need a safe place in our lives to learn and grow and become what we...I went to college at a small school...in Rhode Island which is a small state and you got to know everyone else...what they were studying, who they wanted to be...well...I wanted to be a doctor. And not only did I want to be a doctor but I wanted to be a surgeon. And not only did I want to be a surgeon but I wanted to be a surgeon in a war-torn foreign country that never stops blowing up.

BILL: You know what Freud would say. He'd say that's crazy.

NANCY: I thought it was my calling. Then one semester I took a course on mental health. The instructor suggested when we meet people we should try to reason at what age in childhood they stopped developing.

BILL: For me it's was ten years old. Star Wars. The Bee-Gees. Farrah Fawcet. Why go further?

NANCY: Well I went out onto campus...and I talked to everybody. Friends. Friends of friends. Enemies of friends. And what I found was that my little liberal arts college of young adults was no more than an ivy-covered elementary school. I discovered five-year olds...six years olds. Most upper-classmen hardly ever got past eleven. So I dropped out of pre-med and studied to become a teacher. Because...all these countries, the wars, and the violence...I really think it's because we're all just children and we need to learn how to stop hurting each other...or none of us will ever have a safe place...to grow and become who we are.

BILL: That's really beautiful, Nancy. I got into teaching so I could get my wisdom teeth out.

NANCY: But I see how you talk to the students when they're misbehaving...or when they have a problem. And you're so different with each of them. You know how to handle the special cases.

BILL: Bats and mice.

NANCY: Bats...

BILL: I grew up in an old farmhouse. It was big and roomy but also plenty full of pests, especially in the summer, bugs, bats, mice. I'd go with my father to the hardware store and watch him talk to the man about which traps would catch the most mice. And I'd go with him out to the woods in the morning as he emptied the traps into a little gully that he called Disneyland. But...with the bats...he just let them be. We'd stand outside and watch them swooping around the yard at dusk and I remember asking him 'dad, how come we don't set traps for the bats.' And he told me that they were good citizens of the world that sometimes eat their weight in bugs overnight. But eventually one would find its way into the house and my father would put on a football helmet and chase it out with a broom. Or he'd use the barbecue tongs to grab it out of a hiding place it had found. And I'd go with him then too, out to the woods to get rid of the bat but we wouldn't go to Disneyland. He liked to take the bats down to the creek and he'd say 'watch how fast they take to the air' and then he'd lay the tongs down real gentle on a rock and when he let go *whoosh* this little thing, this flying mouse really, would spread these massive wings and be in the air and gone in seconds, off into the moonlight to...anyway...that's the way I look at my job...every year I have a little mice and bat collection...for the ones that will fill the houses of the future I do my part to set elaborate traps to keep them from becoming a nuisance to others...but for the bats, the ones that will take to the air, I try to let them be...and hope some day they'll open up those wings and fly off into the moonlight...to eat their weight in bugs. (*Slight pause*)

NANCY: You've got such a way of...you know...before you started here I shared recess duty with Mr. Wyatt.

PRIME 2.2

BILL: The janitor?

NANCY: Yes. He used to teach fifth grade. He doesn't take coffee with his whiskey. We were here every morning like you and I are now and we talked a lot, I guess you have to when you're...and Mr. Wyatt would sometimes...suggest...that we...that he...and I should...

BILL: Play a bit of kickball?

NANCY: Every day I prayed for rain. But I don't anymore. Because I get to...I didn't want to go to work on the other side of the building. We'd never...except for maybe staff meetings...I'd never see...you and I would never get to...

BILL: I took the job.

NANCY: Huh?

BILL: The 7th grade opening...I took it. (*Slight pause*). I mean, it wasn't like...they didn't offer it to me. I asked about it. But I didn't know that...

NANCY: You're...going?

BILL: I need the money. I'm trying to finish my master's at night so...hey...hey...if you want it, if you've changed your mind then I'll back out right now. I just...

NANCY: I don't want it.

BILL: I wish they told me. That's the problem with catholic school hierarchies; everyone ultimately reports to God so nothing gets...you know what I'm going to do? I'm going tell them to forget...

NANCY: I said I don't want it!

(*NANCY moves away. BILL reaches for her.*)

BILL: Nancy, please...

NANCY: Don't touch me.

(*BILL stares at the ground. The recess bell rings. NANCY begins to exit.*)

BILL: Hey.

(*NANCY turns.*)

PRIME 2.2

BILL: I think you're right. They...they should let them play together. It's important. I mean at this age...at any age...there's so much to learn and I'm sure that...no one would get hurt.

NANCY: You know what Freud would say? He'd say some one always gets hurt.

(NANCY exits. BILL watches her go. A small red ball rolls in from offstage right. BILL picks it up. And then immediately drops it, wiping his hands on his shirt.)

BILL: That's it, Kevin Martin. I want you to march into the classroom right now and lick the blackboard one hundred times. You think I'm kidding? You need to learn that actions have consequences. It's simple math, young man. *(quieter, to the departed NANCY)* For every action...there is a consequence.

[Lights down]



Eric Nelson has published five poetry collections, including *The Twins* (2009), winner of the Split Oak Press Chapbook Award; *Terrestrials* (2004, Texas Review Press), winner of the X.J. Kennedy Poetry Award; and *The Interpretation of Waking Life* (1991, U. of Arkansas Press),

winner of the Arkansas Poetry Award. His poems have appeared in *Poetry*, *The Southern Review*, *The Oxford American*, *The Sun*, and many other journals and anthologies. He teaches in the Writing and Linguistics Department at Georgia Southern University.

Three Poems by Eric Nelson

The Body Smells

The Fence Line

Men

[Listen](#) to Nelson read his poems

The Body Smells

No wonder dogs love us, they who love to smell.
We must be music to their noses,
An orchestra of odors— clang of armpits,
Morning breath, earwax wafting
Via Q-tip and fingertip; feet freed from socks
Locked in shoes all day; genitals mummified
Every morning, unwrapped, unleashed each night;
All our internal functions and fluids— asparagus
Scent of urine, periodic table of blood, tears, shit, vomit,
Weeping wounds; the low comedy of farts.
Our essential selves slipping out—
Brine and oil oozing from our pores into the famous
Smell of fear. Hope's chemistry rising
From us like warm bread.
And the whiff we are always chasing, sweetness
Elusive as déjà vu on the tip of our tongues,
A whistle too high for us to hear that dogs
Absorb in their sleep, their wet nostrils flooded
With the truffle-deep, loamy aroma of love.

The Fence Line

All day workers
Have been raising a stockade
Fence between my neighbor's yard and mine.
I don't mind— I'm cynical
Enough to believe good fences
Make good neighbors.
What rattles me is how terrible
The noise, how battle-like
The intermittent whining saw,
The rapid fire and random
Clank, echo of iron, splintering ricochet.
When it stops at last and everyone
Is gone, I go into the quiet afternoon,
The sun a soft red ball, to view the aftermath.
From end to end the fence
Runs plumb, the look of true
Craft and art— all that chaos
Hammered into line— fresh pine
Sweetening the air. And already
A mockingbird perching repeating
What it heard all day.

Men

During an exuberant party that promised
To rage on long into the night
The baby in the upstairs bedroom woke up
And cried relentlessly. Finally
The baby's young father took him
To the back of the backyard and stood
In the quiet dark cradling him, whispering,
Swaying slightly from side to side.
One at a time four or five of his friends
Came looking for him and eventually
They were all standing in a circle saying nothing,
All of them swaying in exactly the same way.
They stayed like that long after the baby fell asleep,
The light and music and laughter streaming
From the house not quite reaching them.

Ask Alice #5: Alice Talks About Poetry,
MFA Programs



[Watch Ask Alice #5](#)

Alice Friman is the Poet-in-Residence at Georgia College & State University and professor emerita of English and Creative Writing at the University of Indianapolis. She is the author of five books of poetry, including most recently *Vinculum*, which was released by LSU Press in spring of 2011. Her work has appeared in *Ploughshares*, *Gettysburg Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Five Points*, and many other national magazines.

Ask Alice is an *Arts & Letters* exclusive web show featuring Alice. In each show, she answers questions submitted by readers on just about any subject related to writing and the writing life. Visit the *Arts & Letters* [website](#) to view previous episodes, and go to our [submission page](#) to submit your question to Alice for free. She may select it for a future episode of Ask Alice.



Special thanks to the [Digital Innovation Group](#) at Georgia College.

Another thanks to Tori Lee Averett and David Muschell for their work producing our reader's theater recordings.