

A JOURNAL OF
CREATIVE
EXPLORATION

Synonym



Mission Statement

Where can you share your work with lecturers in the English department, MFA graduates, and current MFA students?

This is a quarterly publication just for us!

Read the submission guidelines on the back of this, our flagship issue.

Neli Moody & Linda Lappin—
editors

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Safe Houses

There seems to have been a resurgence of interest in the Civil Rights movement with releases of films like *Selma*, *The Help*, and *The Butler*. Such films point out the danger and rewards in taking risks. The Oscar and Golden Globe winner *12 Years a Slave* tells the story of slavery’s brutality and how fraught with danger and tenuous the journey to freedom was, literally and metaphorically. I just finished reading Leonard Pitts Jr.’s *Freeman: A Liberated Slave in Search of Family*, a book about the aftershocks of the Civil War as African Americans struggled to define “freedom, to reconstruct family, and to redefine their place in emancipated America. Vine Deloria Jr.’s *Custer Died for Your Sins*, catalogues the endless stream of broken treaties as the indigenous peoples battled and bargained to keep their land or make a life on new and unfamiliar land. America is a story of lost people. Jews, South Americans, West Indians, the persecuted and the fortune seekers in search of asylum, in search of possibility, and this deep desire to venture into the unknown points out how complex an idea freedom is. Our lives are shaped by how willingly we embrace the known and the unknown and how successfully we negotiate the territory between safety and risk.

Safe House by Neli Moody

I believed across the threshold
Were solid doors with frames of blackwood and floors
Of thick oak and a foyer
With a broad swath of staircase that wound upwards
To a vista where all of nature
Was in its proper place.

But nature does not care about men
And the deer is felled as easily as the woodlands is stripped
Of trees to make way for those seeking a second chance.
The rabbit trembles in the tunnels it has made
And the wary fox flicks its sylvan tail cautiously dancing
In the eggshell light of the crescent moon.

Perhaps, my ancestors crept down by the river
In rough and ragged cloth, the sweat of their flight
Caught on mulberry bushes past their fruiting
And perhaps their urgent footfalls barely missed the black smooth skin
Of the cottonmouth, who had only just awakened.

Across the Ohio, they believed they would find
The safe house, and the boots of the slave hunters
Would be muffled like a sound far far away
And the whip would not crackle in the air,
A place where life itself would pass,
Without incident.



www.libertyraymondtaavern.net

The Line Between Two Worlds: Tracy K. Smith and Elizabeth Alexander in Conversation

Tracy K. Smith recently read here at San Jose State. I like what she said about risk in this interview which appeared in *American Poets Magazine*, 2014.

“In Spain, I saw the people of Roma descent who offer to bless you with good luck in the streets, and I heard the music that Lorca worked so hard to describe and ‘translate’ for people in other parts of the world. I think I was also dealing with the beginnings of certain tough realizations about my life that wouldn’t be fully clear to me until much later. What struck me was a thread linking all of these contexts and voices and glimpses together and to me, and it had quite a lot to do with survival, with staying alive and intact despite all the influences and evidence to the contrary. I’ve said this before, but I really do believe that the *duende* challenges us to recognize that we are always walking the line between two very distinct worlds. One is based on logic and skill and preparation, and the other is based on energy, on marrow, on the fearless or foolhardy willingness to take powerful risks. What’s interesting to me about recognizing this is the fact that it means consenting to an ongoing conflict, living and functioning in the day-to-day, and committing to feed and maintain a magical, urgent, irrational side of the self that is often threatened or negated by the former.”

Late Hike by Paul Douglass

On my way home I left the path

And sitting on a lichened stone I watched

The rose horizon through the trees

Shadows sank through the fir and ash

Cloaking the wild grass and the maple saplings

And the green green moss

The blue sky purpled, and I remembered

The lighting of a kerosene lamp long ago

And water I hauled in a galvanized bucket



That slopped on my sneakers, rubbed my hands raw—

Remembered soaping my child’s body in a tub

By the fireplace as steam rose from the hearth.

I lingered at this spot, though the trailhead lay

Not twenty feet ahead—above bats danced

In jerky swoops of dusk-pleasure,

And day drew to its close,

As lives are drawn in loops

Too long to follow with the eye....





Events and Readings and Other News

Mark Heinlein and Vuong Quoc Vu at Well-Red, February 18 at 7:00 p.m. Works/San Jose, 365 South Market St. \$2 donation suggested.

Poets@Play. Edwin Markam House in History Park, 1650 Senter Road, San Jose, CA 95112. Free admission and parking.

PCSJ had readings the third Thursday of every month at 1157 Minnesota Avenue.

Congratulations to:

Darrell Dela Cruz for publishing “Last Thoughts” in the *William and Mary Review* And “Buddha’s Wardrobe”, “Photograph of the Old Town of Kai Xian: Swimming Pool”, and “There is No Joy in Scandal” published in *Flights*

Evelyn So has two poems appearing in *Red Wheelbarrow’s* new national edition and a nonfiction story included in the anthology *Three*, coming this fall from PushPen Press.

Rachel Escamilla for winning the Willow Book Grand Prize for her book of poems, *Imaginary Animal*. Congrats!



Neli Moody read at El Pazote in Hollister in February. Thanks, Rachelle for a wonderful evening and a great group of supportive and diverse listeners!

If you have photos of your event, send them to us.

In other news, instructors with MFA’s from SJSU will not get a pay boost. You earned that degree. Know that the union is working on your behalf in this matter. Support your union. You have a voice.

Next issue: Make a suggestion!

Before submitting your poem or short short, please make sure you have read and adhered to the following guidelines where applicable:

1. Submit three to five of your best poems or a short short story.
2. Poem must be 30 lines or less, including stanza breaks but not including the title, and lines may be no more than 60 characters across, including spaces.
3. One poem per page.
4. Be sure to proofread your poem for any grammatical errors.
5. Submit the poem in the format you intend. We cannot guess at formatting and we want to maintain the formatting.
6. Art, original and otherwise, is permitted, but you must have permission to use it.
7. The editors will make an effort to respond to your submissions in a timely manner.
8. Simultaneous submissions are allowed, and previously published material with acknowledgements will be accepted.
9. Send your poems to synonymeditors@gmail.com.
Send poems as Word doc attachments.
10. We look for fresh imagery, evocative language and surprising perspectives.



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I know the topic is safe house, and how we find safety in the world. I am embarrassed at my neurosis, coming as I do from the relative safety of a blue collar suburban home. The extenuating circumstances were that both my parents were Marines and their three daughters were not expected, somehow. They had parties, I mixed cocktails, my sisters picked up ashtrays. That was our homeschooling. We were kids, so when the rents were not about, we were in our own world. This poem is about a time when mother through a party for my 5th birthday and invited the children of the families she wanted me to associate with. An act of social climbing, perhaps. All did not go as she planned, though kids had a good time anyway.

Linda Lappin

hey—it would be wonderful to hear from you—to post your poetic missives too.

5 talents

The cake was BIG and yet
there were these oddly fluffy
little girls to share it with...
The presents didn't look big enough
to hold the very thing I hoped for.

And the woman standing over all this
was my aproned mother,
cigarette ingloriously dangling from
her pinched mother lips.

In that box would not be the rocket ship
To take me outta there.
None of these little girls mother's
would accidently gather me up with their stuff
and take me into a home with sheets right off the line,
pancakes for breakfast.

But, for my part,
after all she'd done for me:
built me out of herself
with her DNA, her ten talents.
there I was, a 5-year old
And nothing more.



Synonym



Departure

Darrell Dela Cruz

When the train stations the exhaust
spews fog that clings on to exiting passengers. They merge:
fog, person, walkway, then amble. Past

a man on the sidewalk waving roses like a torch. He is
ignored by those who don't carry
cash in their wallets. They cannot feel the abrasions
on his thumbs which plucked out every thorn
so anyone could give affection: a rose, a kiss on the cheek,
wilting a petal at a time. Past

newspapers bundled on a stand. The guilty verdict of a regular
manslaughter on page fifteen. The headline
has something relevant (why else would it be so bold)
– an economy falling and falling like an empire – maybe like Greece,
then Rome (same gods). Or perhaps a spread on candidates – the photo
of the oracle in color, but his prophecy printed in black and white.

And inside a train, the sleeping person can only fog the window.
And outside the train, the sleeping person can only breathe in.



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