

Gnarled Oak

an online literary journal



Issue 2: The Velocity of Night
Jan-Feb 2015



Gnarled Oak
Issue 2: The Velocity of Night
Jan-Feb 2015

Gnarled Oak is an online literary journal publishing poetry, prose, artwork, and videos four times per year. This issue was originally published online from Jan-Feb 2015 and is archived at gnarledoak.org/issue-2/

Editor and publisher: James Brush

Cover: "No One's Home" by Michele S. Cornelius
Title: from "riding pillion" by Debbie Strange

All copyrights are retained by the original authors and artists.

Website: gnarledoak.org
(please visit the website for the current issue,
submissions info, and past issues)

Like on Facebook: facebook.com/gnarledoak
Follow on Twitter [@gnarled_oak](https://twitter.com/gnarled_oak)

Contents

Tales of the Forest — Michele S. Cornelius	1
Big Red Hands — Howie Good	2
nail art — Angelee Deodhar	3
my shadow — Chen-ou Liu	4
hibiscus and jasmine — Marianne Paul	5
Bend Back and Sigh — Pamela Sayers	6
A Walk on the Tame Side — Vivienne Blake	7
Leave-taking — Dave Bonta	8
she's here — Angie Werren	9
Day's End — Shloka Shankar	10
Burn Job — Lawrence Elliott	11
No One's Home — Michele S. Cornelius	15
a thread of scarlet — Nic Sebastian	16
night jasmine — Laura Williams	17
motionless — Shloka Shankar	18
A Poem by Cardboard Suitcase — S.Eta Grubešić	19
Rise Above — Michele S. Cornelius	21
silver birch — Caroline Skanne	22
all your broken promises — Olivier Schopfer	23
Some Notes toward an Ode to Yarn — Sherry Chandler	24
Love Tortures Me Like the CIA — Howie Good	26
riding pillion — Debbie Strange	27
Winter's Music — Margo Roby	28

Wintry Seascape — Massimo Soranzio	29
grackles — Angie Werren	30
Yellow — Sherry Chandler	31
Notes on the Videos	32
Editor's Note	33
Contributor Bios	34

Tales of the Forest

Michele S. Cornelius

Let me tell you of the forest,
stories written in earth tongue
transmitted by mycelial mat.
Bare limbs severed,
raw splinters,
rib cages buried in moss.

Big Red Hands

Howie Good

The top stories today are hacking and theology. That would explain the relentless spiral of hallucinations in which the bones of your mother and father have been incorporated. Dammit! Why ask me how I am? You're the one overwhelmed by electronic exposure to the rest of the world. A disturbed childhood with acne and big red hands follows you almost everywhere you go. It's why I avoid lingering while you try to hang a fallen apple – is that a bite taken out of it? – back on the apple tree.

nail art

Angelee Deodhar

nail art—
the guitarist's fingers flash
the colors of Advent

my shadow

Chen-ou Liu

my shadow
accidentally
walking across
the white neighbor's driveway ...
he yells, *Go back where you're from*

hibiscus and jasmine

Marianne Paul

hibiscus and jasmine
the whiff of other places
in my tea

Bend Back and Sigh

Pamela Sayers

Flickers outline this courtyard,
where they carry their young
to turn to ash.

This is where death-pigeon eyes
burn biblical.

Then the phone rings;
and everything seems too clean.

A Walk on the Tame Side

Vivienne Blake

I set out this morning
to take a pot of jelly to a neighbour,
caught a flash of white on the door next door.

A louer, it says: for rent.

Where have they gone, my little friends
who played on the slide and the swing?

You can't rely on anything
to stay the same
except the mallow growing wild
and a small brown butterfly.

Leave-taking

Dave Bonta

the trees react to colder nights by stripping naked
the meadow too

it's as if they're about to set off somewhere
all excess baggage is left at the gate

the sun too is a budget traveler
abandoning most of the sky
the days are so quiet now

take me with you
even if there's nowhere to go
even if it means leaving myself behind

she's here

Angie Werren

she's here
a whirlwind light and fabulous then
she's gone
how quiet the sound
of her dog's wondering sigh

Day's End

Shloka Shankar

Life stagnates as people start trickling back to their houses. Some look forward to the expectant faces of their children, while some others dread their churlish wives. As they saunter along doggedly, the day's events play like a broken record in their heads – a mimicry of sanity. A crow caws somewhere as though lovesick. Streetlights come on and fireflies hover in a daze. Bicycles, cricket bats, and skipping ropes are lugged back home by children who are repeatedly beckoned by overbearing mothers. Almost in a trance, the buzz of the day fades away as a feigned tranquility descends.

molten skyline...
an earthworm buries
itself deeper

Burn Job

Lawrence Elliott

Some days in the life of a carpenter feel like any other; a thin slice from a continuum of work carried out by a fraternity of craftsmen dating back to the pyramids and stretching out into the space age. All in all, an honorable way to make a living.

And then there are the days I walk into a burn job.

There is something deeply objectionable—obscene even—about a home consumed by fire. Whatever the reason—an overtaxed extension cord, a somnolent smoker, or a forgotten project boiling dry on the stove—fire is an elemental force that teaches us of our impermanence. The amount of time it takes for a guttering teardrop of flame at the end of a match to become a life-consuming pyre can be measured in an eternity of seconds counting down with complete indifference to our existence.

The first time you walk into the remains of a life destroyed by fire is a moment you never forget. It reveals to you that you've never truly known what it means to say that something is destroyed, but the appalling, indiscriminate obliteration of a fire will teach you. There's this visceral, involuntary revulsion that rises up in you from some ancient racial memory passing down through eons of ancestors, all running for their lives through fields of flame and heather.

Even to those that make a life of it, a burn job is a bludgeon to every human sense, no matter how many times your footfalls land in that ashen world. The stench can fill an entire block, and when you step into it, the sooty campfire smell instantly fills up your olfactory pallet to saturation, blotting

out everything else. The fire may as well have happened in your mouth.

The whole thing is a frieze of chaos: clothing, carpet, and children's toys melted into a single, indistinguishable mass, cooled together into frozen magma flows. All the synthetic fibers, the man-made substances—the end-state of unthinkable ancient bones—meld into piles of amalgamated slag, forever one. Overhead light bulbs ooze into grasping tendrils like soot covered icicles. Television screens flow and slump in molten surrender to unthinkable heat. DVD's, beer bottles, remote controls, couch upholstery, X-Boxes, all fused into surrealist sculptures that must be chiseled apart with pick-axes and pry bars.

Even the things that don't burn are covered in an ephemeral film of the finest ash, shellacked in oily resins whose chemical makeup is a list of compounds never intended by nature. Everywhere lay heaps of the burnt-edged confetti of photos, junk mail, novels, college degrees; the documentation of an entire life reduced to tattered remnants, unrecognizable even to those that lived it. A testament to the transformative power of fire.

And then there's us. The strangers that come into the smoking ruins of what you've got to show for your life. We gather up a hundred thousand dollars worth of clothing, appliances, knick-knacks, electronics, books, dishes, cutlery, musical instruments, fitness equipment, computers—everything you worked irretrievable hours to amass—and we throw it all into endlessly revolving dumpsters. We find the pot stash, the porn stash, and the dildos; every secret is revealed as we disassemble your life one piece at a time. What took four months to construct will take us a week to dispense with, one bite-sized piece at a time. We'll take

hammers, crow bars, saws, jackhammers, even the occasional chain hooked to the bumper of a truck, and reverse-engineer the process of creation, finishing what the fire started. All the while punching the clock, whistling a work-a-day tune.

"St. Peter don'tcha call me, 'cause I can't go..."

This process of deconstruction is unbelievably taxing because it all happens by the brute power of sinew, bone and sledgehammer, and then every scrap of it is transported to the inexhaustible dumpsters manually, by trundling laborers blackened head to toe by soot and ash. As the ringing of tireless blows resounds through the house and the cacophony of collapse goes on and on, a blizzard of ash swirls continuously through the air. Only our respirators stand between us and the black-lung heartache, as even a single step through this wasteland wafts up micro-flurries of carcinogens from a thick sediment of plaster dust, fiberglass and asbestos piled and drifting across the floor. Each blink of our eyes is like a windshield wiper clearing the scrim of soot from the gelled surface continually; the little wrinkles, nooks, and wattles of our faces become etched depositories of the blackness.

All the while you can only pray that nobody died in this one, because it's creepy enough to live and work in the world of Old Man Fire without dancing with the ghosts of the ones who almost made it, or those that never saw it coming. Nobody ever asks because that workaday tune can seem a lot like whistling your way past the graveyard otherwise. It's said that the world once ended by water and will one day end again, this time by fire. Some days I find that easy to believe.

What can I say? It's a living. A weird, disturbing, brutal living. Still, I can't count how many times I've handed a shiny brass

set of keys to a homeowner at the completion of their job and actually had them say, "The fire may be the best thing that ever happened to this place. It went from an old wreck to a modern palace overnight!" And really, that's the payoff. When you take what feels like the single lowest, most irredeemable moment of someone's life and turn it into something new and hand the keys—that precious metal—back to them.

Of course some things are irreplaceable; I can't give back a wedding dress, kids' finger paintings on the fridge, or family heirlooms. But that's life. It isn't a boutique, or a wish granting factory. It gives and it takes away. The best you can hope for is decent insurance.

No One's Home

Michele S. Cornelius



a thread of scarlet

Nic Sebastian

a thread of scarlet

lost oboe
or the shortest distance

between the shadow
of the elm
and your keening mind

this is the house
we will not live in

this is the exhausted gardenia
asking why the twilight
no longer beckons

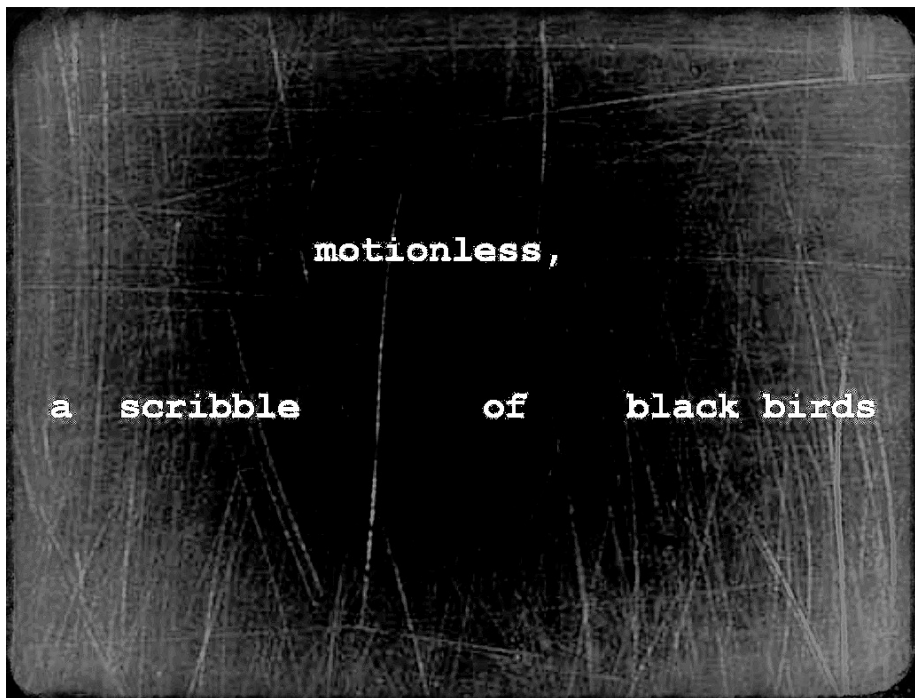
night jasmine

Laura Williams

night jasmine
for a few days I forget
about the moon

motionless

Shloka Shankar



A Poem by Cardboard Suitcase

S.Eta Grubešić

One day
I will be torn to pieces
By a pack of dogs
At the train station
Next to the man
Stenched of slaughtered
Pigs' blood
They will pull
My intestines out
Plastered by the rain
To the city's pavement
In the horridness of mud
And smell of ground
A voracious raven
Will land on me.
I have been hounded
By the curse of the right hand
Of the thumb that fingers
The handle by
An unfelt sorrow
It carries me away and away
Without counting border crossings
Searching for secret paths
To my old home.
Oh, when gray shadows of fog
Let go of me, I shall open my heart
Overwhelmed by blood
Among roses
Of my former garden
And build a nest out of birds' bones
Let it sing...let it sing...

Don't take me
To the abandoned room
Where black, woodworm infested
Closets reign...
Life is not just a heartless
Train station.

Rise Above

Michele S. Cornelius



silver birch

Caroline Skanne

silver birch
throwing gold coins
to the winter sun
everything about you
makes me smile

all your broken promises

Olivier Schopfer

all your broken promises cactus flowers

Some Notes toward an Ode to Yarn

Sherry Chandler

YO

means yarn over,
a maneuver
used to create a hole
surrounded by a strand.

Dear one, the impulse
to poke
a stick
in a hole
is irresistible.

Delay tying off the knot,
a foreplay of thread
whereby the linear
becomes a plane
length becomes breadth

Some people do it to relax.

I'm not sure Dickens understood knitting—
Mme Defarge, nemesis in sabots
with a clicking of needles—
but he knew how to string
us along, make us yearn
for the yarn
to go on,
how to build our expectations
to a climax.

Dear one, I don't know how to gauge you,

so I ply you with wools and acrylics,
rayons and cottons, worsted weight
and fingering,
play you with hooks,
but you know which string
to pull to unravel all the knots,
leave me stranded with a box of yarns.

Love Tortures Me Like the CIA

Howie Good

That winter I walked and walked through the frozen, dreary streets as if I might outwalk my sadness. I missed you and your gentle strokes, your iridescent glance. What we once said would last forever lay toppled inside us. I searched everywhere there was to search, but had to settle for the knowledge that geologists who don't predict a deadly earthquake aren't killers.

riding pillion

Debbie Strange



Winter's Music

Margo Roby

Sleet has a beat,
a syncopation:
it crackles when it hits
like the rat-a-tat-tat
of dried beans
pouring into a pot.

Wintry Seascape

Massimo Soranzio

Orangey to dark red sun over the flat, still,
greenish lagoon that no passing boat will stir
nor crease, nor move to compassion.

All shades of blue, the blues of a still life
by the sea, blend with the strokes of sunset
above the old church on the island,

waiting for the next fisherman
to come and deliver
his vow.

grackles

Angie Werren



Yellow

Sherry Chandler

When forsythia splashes
winter's gray
with Pollack color,

and daffodils dare
the sun to match
their bright with warm,

when dandelions dot
the lawn with
smiley faces,

the goldfinch sheds
his olive drab and
the yellow tom caterwauls,

both in search of something
we'll call love,
the time has come

to stow our scratchy
wools and plant
our onion sets.

Notes on the Videos

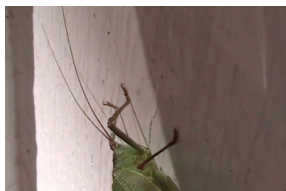
This issue of *Gnarled Oak* included the following videos. Check them out by following the links.



The Convert

Marie Craven

Link: gnarledoak.org/issue-2/the-convert



Leave-taking

Dave Bonta

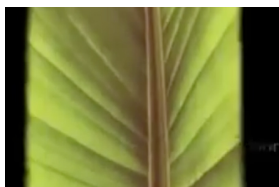
Link: gnarledoak.org/issue-2/leave-taking



a thread of scarlet

Nic Sebastian

Link: gnarledoak.org/issue-2/a-thread-of-scarlet



Spiders

Carolyn Guinzio

Link: gnarledoak.org/issue-2/spiders

Editor's Note

It seemed a funny thing to have a “winter issue” when some of *Gnarled Oak's* contributors and readers are in the midst of summer. Weird too, since here in Austin, winter isn't so much a season as a collection of random days interspersed between December and February. So this is now *Issue 2: The Velocity of Night*, the title from Debbie Strange's “riding pillion” with Michele S. Cornelius's “No One's Home” on the cover.

What is the velocity of night anyway? How fast the sky darkens is determined by season and latitude. But there's more there. Fast or slow, it can come with joy or sorrow, anticipation or apprehension, and it seems all that can be found in this issue. Though unthemed, themes emerged: homes in transition, leaving and returning; love with its beginnings and endings; and, of course, the way winter shifts to spring (and back again as it's doing here today).

I'm happy with the way this issue came together, the diversity of the work—poetry, prose, videos, artwork—and voices from all around the world made this especially fun. I can get lost staring at a map, and it's exciting to me to be able to present work from so many writers and artists representing so many corners of this little blue world.

And so, sincerest thanks to all who allowed me the honor and privilege of publishing their work, all who submitted work to *Gnarled Oak*, and everyone who read and helped to share the wonderful writing and artwork found in this issue.

With gratitude and thanks,

James Brush, editor
February 2015

Contributor Bios

Vivienne Blake, a late developer, started writing poetry during an Open University Creative Writing Course in 2007. Since then her work has been published in various magazines and anthologies, in English and French. She lives in rural Normandy. Her poetry, fiction, memoir and quilts appear regularly at [Vivinfrance's Blog](#).

Dave Bonta edits [Moving Poems](#), a site devoted to videopoetry and poetry film, and is in his third year of making [daily erasure poems](#) from the 17th-century diary of Samuel Pepys.

Sherry Chandler's second full-length book of poems, *The Woodcarver's Wife*, celebrates the cycles of life on her small farm in Kentucky. She has been nominated three times for a Pushcart. She has been published in a number of online and print publications, most recently in the *Blue Fifth Review*, *Kestrel*, and the *Louisville Review*. She posts micro poetry on Twitter as [@BluegrassPoet](#).

Michele S. Cornelius spent years chasing clouds on the back roads of the west, but is now settled in Southeast Alaska where she wanders in old-growth forests, admires the sea, and works to capture ephemeral bits of nature. Her website is [michelescornelius.com](#).

Marie Craven is a media maker and musician from the Gold Coast, Australia. She has been engaged in online collaboration since 2007 and has contributed to works with artists in many different parts of the world. Website: [pixieguts.com](#)

Dr. Angelee Deodhar, an eye surgeon by profession, is a haiku poet, translator and artist from India. Her haiku, haibun, and haiga have been published internationally in various books, journals and on the internet. Her work has been translated into many languages including Japanese, Croatian, Romanian, Russian, German, French, Serbian and several Indian languages. She considers haiku to be a medium for international friendship and peace.

Lawrence Elliott is a journeyman carpenter of seventeen years. He enjoys playing the guitar and creative writing. He blogs about autobiographical oddities at [Scratched in the Sand](#).

All proceeds from **Howie Good's** latest book of poetry, [Fugitive Pieces](#) (Right Hand Press), go to the Food Bank of the Hudson Valley. Visit [Right Hand Pointing Books](#) to learn more.

S.Eta Grubešić of Croatia is an ex-journalist, short story writer, poet and photographer. Her works have been published in various books, literary e-journals and portals, including: *Bones Journal 5*, *Under the Basho Journal 2014*, *Hedgerow*, *Sonic Boom journal*, *Brass Bell*, *Newsletter*, *Silver Birch Press*...

Carolyn Guinzio is a poet, photographer and occasional filmmaker. Her books include *Spoke & Dark* (Red Hen, 2012), *Quarry* (Parlor, 2008), *West Pullman* (Bordighera, 2005) and the forthcoming *Spine* (Parlor, 2015). Find her online at carolynguinzio.tumblr.com.

Chen-ou Liu is the author of five books, including *Following the Moon to the Maple Land* (First Prize Winner, 2011 Haiku Pix Chapbook Contest) and *A Life in Transition and Translation* (Honorable Mention, 2014 Turtle Light Press

Biennial Haiku Chapbook competition). His tanka and haiku have been honored with many awards. Read more of his poems at [Poetry in the Moment](#).

Marianne Paul is a Canadian poet and novelist. Recently, she has been focusing on minimalist poetry – primarily haiku and tanka. You can learn more about her work at mariannepaul.com or on Twitter [@mariannpaul](https://twitter.com/mariannpaul).

Margo Roby lives in Atlanta, Georgia, where she focuses on her writing, while her husband works so they can eat. Margo also runs a poetry blog, [Wordgathering](#).

Pamela Sayers is an English teacher living in Mexico. She traded in her city high heels for Doc Martens and a different, spicier life thirteen years ago. She writes mostly about what she sees going on around her. She now lives a stress-free life with her happy animals (a dog and two cats).

Olivier Schopfer lives in Geneva, Switzerland, the city with the huge lake water fountain. He likes capturing the moment in haiku and photography. His work has appeared in *The Red Moon Anthology of English-Language Haiku 2014* as well as in numerous online and print journals. He also writes articles in French about etymology and everyday expressions: olivierschopferracontelesmots.blog.24heures.ch

Nic Sebastian is the author of *Forever Will End On Thursday* and *Dark and Like A Web*, both published under the poetry nanopress model with partner editors. She co-founded and curates [The Poetry Storehouse](#), which showcases “great contemporary poems for creative remix.” Nic blogs at [Very Like A Whale](#) and her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Yew Journal*, *Valparaiso Poetry Review*, *Anti-*, *MIPOesias*, *Blue Fifth Review*, *Snakeskin* and elsewhere.

[Shloka Shankar](#) is a freelance writer residing in India. Her work appears in over two dozen international anthologies including publications by Paragram, Silver Birch Press, Minor Arcana Press, Harbinger Asylum, Kind of a Hurricane Press and Writing Knights Press among others. Her poems, erasures, haiku & tanka have appeared in numerous print and online journals. She is also the editor of the literary and arts journal, [Sonic Boom](#).

Caroline Skanne, Rochester, UK, is obsessed with anything wild and free. She is the founder of [hedgerow: a journal of small poems](#). Find her @ [facebook.com/caroline.skanne.9](https://www.facebook.com/caroline.skanne.9)

Massimo Soranzio lives about 20 miles from Trieste, on the northern Adriatic coast of Italy, where he teaches English as a foreign language and English literature. He's been a journalist, a translator, and a freelance lecturer on Modernist literature and literary translation. In April 2014, he took part in the *Found Poetry Review's* Oulipost challenge. Some of his poems can be found on his blog, massimosoranzio.tumblr.com or published online.

Debbie Strange is a widely published tanka and haiku poet, as well as an avid photographer. Her current passion is for creating tanshi (small poem) art. You are invited to see more of her work on Twitter [@Debbie_Strange](https://twitter.com/Debbie_Strange).

[Angie Werren](#) lives (and writes) in a tiny house in Ohio. Sometimes she takes pictures of things in the yard.

Laura Williams has been studying and writing short form poetry since 2012. She lives in Southern California where it never rains. Visit her at [Look for A Lovely Thing](#).