

# Gnarled Oak

*an online literary journal*



Issue 13: Once Upon a Linear Time  
Aug-Sep 2017



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*Gnarled Oak* is an online literary journal publishing poetry, prose, artwork, and videos four times per year. This issue was originally published online from Aug-Sep 2017 and is archived at [gnarledoak.org/category/issue-13/](http://gnarledoak.org/category/issue-13/)

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**first day of school**

*Anthony Q. Rabang*

first day of school

the sun's warmth

in my lunchbox

## Once Upon a Linear Time

*Marianne Paul*

i don't believe in space wormholes, time travel, events  
unravelling counter-clockwise. what is becomes what was.  
time is an arrow. resurrection comes only in memory, the  
rising of the dead, the rolling back of the stone in mind and  
dream. this is the dimension of ghost where physical laws  
don't rule and time isn't an arrow shot from a bow. the  
constant struggle to keep from slipping into randomness.  
forces weakening until connections loosen like petals falling  
from the autumn flower. although once upon a linear time  
everything was as simple as leaping over a puddle in spring.

the lilac not yet  
in full bloom and already  
florets in decay

## **Before We Stepped Outside**

*James Croal Jackson*

you  
painted  
my head  
white

soft hands  
planted roots  
on my scalp  
spring warmth

cherry blossoms  
in your laugh

petals  
on our tongues

## **Trees and Names**

*Clyde Kessler*

Trees are eating a road near Chernobyl.  
They have rooted through asphalt like insanity  
and hunger, and have cloned many more willows  
full of birds. We hope all of this is the health,  
the recovery, three times more like a new heaven  
baptizing itself in the songs of wrens and kingfishers  
at the edge of starlight. Yes, the trees feed  
shadows to the nests, and a few stray tabbies  
claw into the scents and voices, so we learn.  
Yes an old woman follows us, and relinquishes  
her name because it was carved into a small tree  
by her first lover more than seventy autumns ago.  
The name is illegible now inside her mind.



## **Saving Face**

*Mary McCarty*

After it's over  
I'll count my spoons  
and line the plates up  
and swear no one ever  
took anything from me  
I wasn't ready to give.  
If I do this well enough  
I might even convince myself.  
But I feel the cracks  
spreading underneath  
my fresh plaster,  
and the pipes are leaking  
somewhere in the cellar.  
I don't think I'll get away  
with my pretense  
of order smooth as an egg  
without a cloud or question  
to mark its perfect surface.  
I think I must go down  
with all the other  
tatterdemalions  
too rough and raggedy  
to let in the house,  
too mad to expect  
anything less.

## **Natural Light**

*Anna Kander*

The desire to be seen is  
transforming.  
Slide a mirror to me,  
under the door,  
here in this dark room,  
and I will find a way  
to flash semaphores.

**In the Temple**  
*Marie Craven*



View Marie Craven's video "In the Temple" at  
<http://gnarledoak.org/issue-13/in-the-temple/>

## Boat

*Olivier Schopfer*



**abandoned home**

*Billy Antonio*

abandoned home  
the weight of dust  
on a cobweb

## On the Way to the Ocean

*Marianne Szlyk*

The black plastic bag  
flutters across the street  
in the spring breeze.

Bright pink and yellow candy  
wrappers bloom in the grass  
that belongs to no one.

Venti cups of last night's  
mocha frappuccinos  
roll in the gutter with empty pens

on their way to the ocean.

### Three Poems

*Tara Roeder*

#### **ocean poem**

an anemone. anonymity. sink to sea lush carpet,  
tentacles grasping  
ungraspable gold filters, tiny algae. a vibrating star.

#### **grass poem**

wistful field mice burrowed homes around  
our heat, the heat of our fingers, our breath.

#### **sky poem**

slow lick of clouds, soft pink descent.  
when we were sky geese dotted our bodies like freckles;  
lightning crackled our veins.

**There might have been starfish**

*Jeanie Tomasko*

The seas of October  
were calm and

the moon hung  
like a small ocean

in the sky  
Little globes

of Noctiluca  
spilled liquid fire

and animals tinier than  
radiance sparkled visible

in the cold metal sea  
It was as if

a mirror had been created  
to slip through,

and so I did  
as a sand grain drifting

between rain and sea moss  
Under the wind

a fisherman's oar—  
abandoned.

Darling, if  
the sky



was sustained  
under water

the beauty of things  
should return

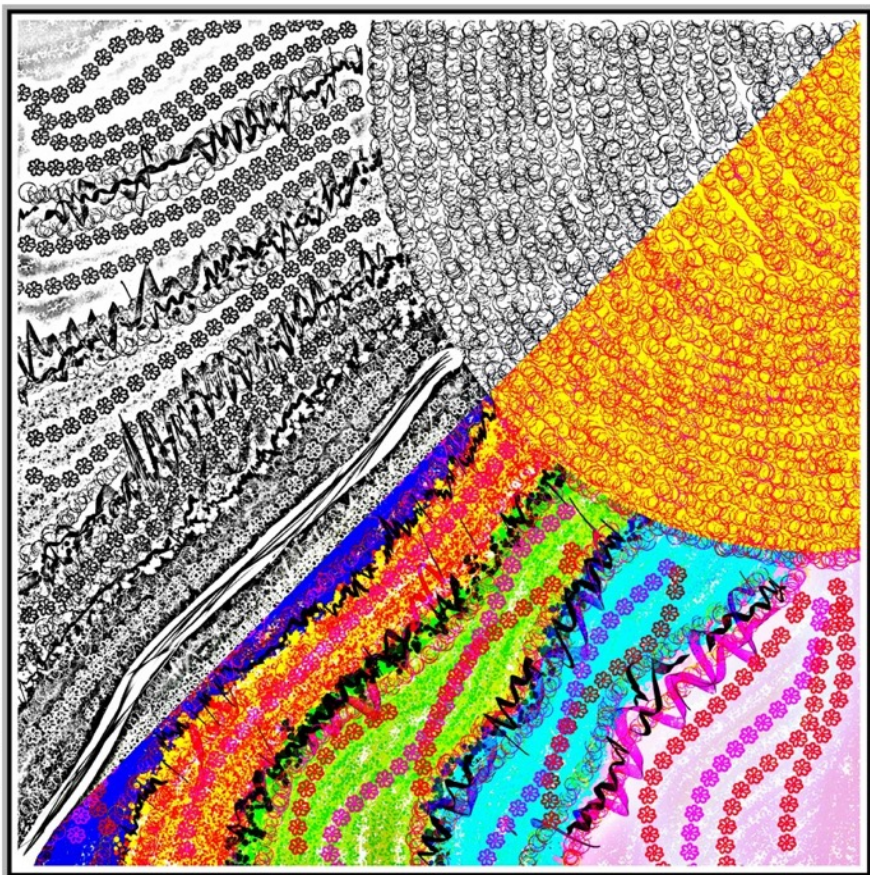
**summer heat**

*Mark Gilbert*

summer heat  
fingerprints  
in soft chocolate

into the night  
*Marianne Paul*

marianne paul  
20



into the night the two halves of me

## **Hollow**

*Steve Klepetar*

Hollow out the darkness.  
There will be a tunnel of night.

It won't have a name,  
but you will learn to call it

love-soft words as your breath  
turns to glass. At the end,

someone slips you a handful  
of coins. You buy fish and bread

and ale. Tomorrow you wake  
to a hollowed out sun.

On your stoop, the newspaper  
burns. You read through flames

until your eyes ignite.  
Better, sometimes, to be blind.

The tunnel yawns as it waits  
in the glossy dark to swallow your life.

## **Skeletons**

*Alix Brobby*

There is a skeleton  
in the bathroom mirror:  
starved and sexless.  
So hollow I use her  
clavicles and ilia  
as percussion instruments.

Maybe I should be scared  
of her wooden smile,  
and empty glances.  
But strangers stop me daily  
to compliment her beauty,  
and who am I to disagree?

## **Bad News**

*Helina Hookoomsing*

From an over-decorated kitchen –  
leafy vegetables wilting in the fridge –  
a fly caresses the only orange  
in an all but empty glass fruit bowl.

A woman imagines the mountains  
of the swirling sea, that spirals  
down her stainless steel  
sinkhole.

She loses her kitchen knives,  
the covers of her pots and pans,  
the partner to each pair  
of slipper-socks,  
the gunsmoke arguments,  
her medical results,  
and her keys.

The safety of her youth slips –  
under the locked door and  
out onto the streets.

parachute silks

*Debbie Strange*



**our tracks**

*Marilyn Fleming*

our tracks

to the woodshed

deepening

soon there will be

that first bold lie



## At the Edge of the Forest

*Ben Groner III*

*after Fall Landscape by Julian Onderdonk, oil on board, 9in. x 12in.*

In the first days of October,  
the clearing always looks the same—

A sea of frenzied tawny tangled grass  
keeping the bones of the birches  
with their ochre crowns at bay,  
and the colossal tree my grandfather  
showed me as a boy,  
set apart from the others, holy,  
seeming to know more about  
storms and droughts and seasons  
than the rest of the woods,  
its branches twisting and sprawling  
(like all of our histories, he said)  
and clothed in plumes of  
chestnut and fire and wine

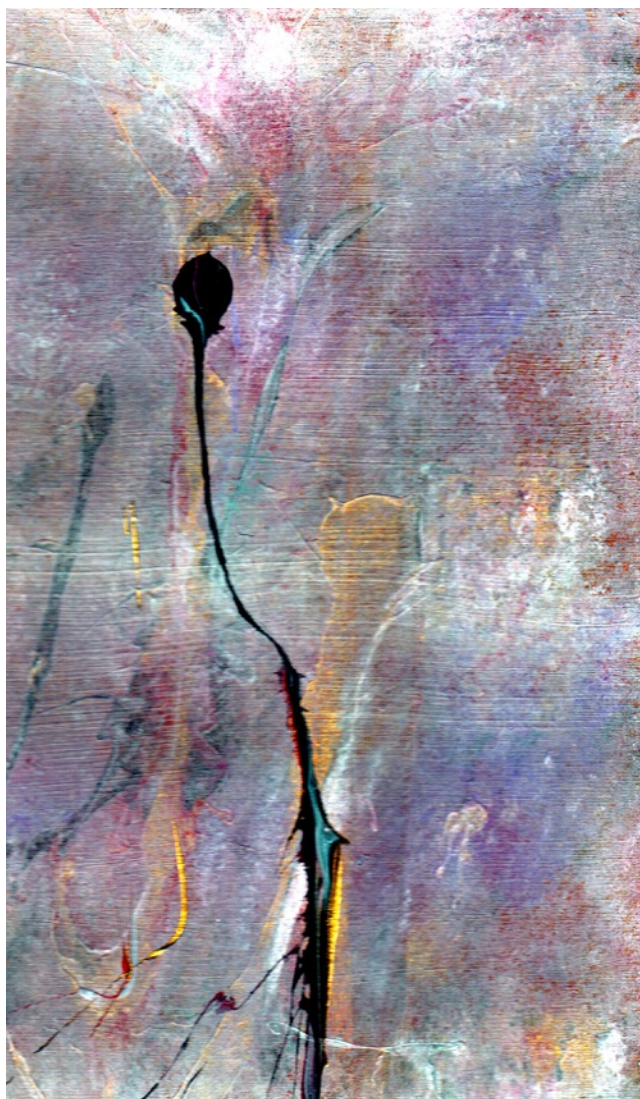
But the breath of autumn is passing  
as he did; softly, swiftly,  
with only the sound of a branch  
breaking, a hip cracking,  
taking with it the knowledge  
that the tree is just another scaffolding;  
a sweat-beaded promise, a protest  
against decay, a hope born of  
pattern and chance and time spent  
straining toward the sun; a desire  
blossoming from a hundred years of  
memory and anticipation as it bears  
the weight of a robin's egg blue sky

caught between summer and  
winter, morning and night,

somehow utterly unlike all  
the other skies that came before it.

## Growing Alone

*W. Jack Savage*



**In the Wadi**  
*Devon Balwit*



*after "Armor" by Cristina Troufa*

Just beneath my skin sits a wadi of thorns;  
a fissure deepening as the years rage through.

If you would travel there, protect yourself.  
Carry water for when the sirocco desiccates,

a blanket for the midnight chill. Adapt  
to the granular, the sere, alert to the biting

things that live in the cracks. Meet each  
directly. In time, like any who complete

a quest, you will be rewarded with a lush  
bloom, a small season of furious reprieve.

## In Homage to Those Who Metamorphose

*Sarah Bigham*

Lithe and tanned, tattooed and bandana-ed, he caught every eye in an evening class of adult learners sharing notes and dreams plus breath mints and chips from the snack bar two stories below.

He tracked the action with a non-blinking gaze and shared deep-exhaled ideas, throaty words caressing the room-life truths from a biker Yoda in boots.

One evening toward the end of May he told the hushed room of imprisonment for violent offenses; anger management classes; parole; loss of parental rights; drug abuse; total, utter, visceral despair; and hate—mainly for himself, but directed at others.

*You wouldn't have liked me very much then,* he said, striding out the door, leather-clad, helmet in hand.

## Death Meditation

*Marie Craven*



View Marie Craven's video "Death Meditation" at  
<http://gnarledoak.org/issue-13/death-meditation/>

**country road**

*Jennifer Hambrick*

country road  
even if we never  
get there



## Editor's Note

I tend to say yes when volunteers are needed, which is how I wound up coaching soccer and leading a Cub Scout den (and getting way behind on *Gnarled Oak*). I did both of those things growing up and now that my son is old enough for these sorts of activities, I'm happy to help make them happen for him. It's fun.

As a Cub Scout leader, I had the pleasure of taking a bunch of first grade boys for a nature walk last week. Being quiet to listen for birds was tricky, but they discovered so much: rocks, caterpillars, mushrooms, dragonflies, fish and turtles. It was a joy to see these kids look beyond the playground and themselves to the natural world that exists even in one little pocket of the suburbs.

It's a beautiful thing to open your eyes on what is old and all around in such a way that it all seems new. Seeing things through their young eyes was a gift, and it made me think of *Gnarled Oak* (because I was running late) and how through it we experience so much made new.

And I'll leave it here because this issue ran so late. So, without further ado, let me just say thank you to our contributors for their work and our readers for their time. See you in a few weeks for an October issue that will hopefully be more on time.

With gratitude and thanks,

James Brush, editor  
Oct 2017

## Contributor Bios

**Billy Antonio** is a poet, writer, and public school teacher. Some of his fiction and poetry have been published in *Tincture Journal*, *Poetry Quarterly*, *Red River Review*, and *Anak Sastra*, among others. His poetry has won international recognition. He lives in the Philippines with his wife and daughters.

**Devon Balwit** writes and teaches in Portland, OR. She is the author of five chapbooks, which, along with her poems, can be found if you look for them. When not writing, she is her dog's best friend.

**Sarah Bigham** teaches, writes, and paints in Maryland where she lives with her kind chemist wife, their three independent cats, an unwieldy herb garden, several chronic pain conditions, and near-constant outrage at the general state of the world tempered with love for those doing their best to make a difference. Find her at [sgbigham.com](http://sgbigham.com).

**Alix a Brobbey** has loved writing since her childhood in a small Dutch town. She hopes work published in *Canvas*, *The Battering Ram* and others will lead to a career as a world-renowned author someday, but for now is content to obsess over Harry Potter and publish posts on her blog: [Alix a Writes](#)

**Marie Craven** (Queensland, Australia) assembles short videos from poetry, music, voice, stills and moving images by various artists around the world. Created via the internet, the pieces are collaborative in a way that belongs to the 21st century, with open licensing and social networking key to the process. In 2016 her video 'Dictionary Illustrations' was awarded best film at the Ó Bhéal Poetry-Film Competition in Ireland. To see more: [vimeo.com/mariocraven](http://vimeo.com/mariocraven)

**Marilyn Fleming** is a writer of Asian forms of poetry primarily, tanka, haiku and haibun, and is currently studying sumi-e painting to add to her poetry collection. She loves the 'less is more' simplicity of Asian forms of poetry. She is a Wisconsin native who enjoys nature, poetry, gardening and retirement. She hopes to have her first book of tanka published by the end of the year.

**Mark Gilbert** is a published writer of short poetry and prose who was first inspired by Raymond Chandler and Jack Kerouac.

**Ben Groner III** (Nashville, TN), recipient of Texas A&M University's 2014 Gordone Award for undergraduate poetry, has work published in *Appalachian Heritage*, *Third Wednesday*, *New Mexico Review*, *Fourth & Sycamore*, *Texas Poetry Calendar*, and elsewhere. You can see more of his work at [Ben Groner III – Creative Writing](#)

A Pushcart Prize nominee, **Jennifer Hambrick** is the author of *Unscathed* (NightBallet Press). Her poetry has been published in dozens of literary journals and anthologies worldwide, including the *Santa Clara Review*, *Third Wednesday*, *Mad River Review*, and *Modern Haiku*, has been translated into five languages, and has won prizes in numerous international competitions. A classical singer and public radio broadcaster, Jennifer Hambrick lives in Columbus, Ohio. Her blog, *Inner Voices*, is at [jenniferhambrick.com](http://jenniferhambrick.com).

**Helina Hookoomsing** is a short-story and poetry writer based in Mauritius. She was raised in London and is currently doing doctoral research in the field of anthrozoology. She has published poetry in the local Mauritian press and her short-stories have been published in editions of the trilingual Mauritian literary anthology, *Collection Maurice*. She facilitates

creative writing clubs and workshops, and has performed at spoken word events around the island.

**James Croal Jackson's** poetry has appeared in *The Bitter Oleander*, *Rust + Moth*, *Cosmonauts Avenue*, and elsewhere. His first chapbook, *The Frayed Edge of Memory* (Writing Knights Press, 2017) is forthcoming. He is the 2016 William Redding Memorial Poetry Contest winner in his current city of Columbus, Ohio. Visit him at [jimjakk.com](http://jimjakk.com).

**Anna Kander**, MSW, earned her social work degree in the Midwest. Her poetry and fiction are slated to appear in *Breadcrumbs*, *The Journal of Compressed Creative Arts*, and elsewhere. Find her at [annakander.com](http://annakander.com).

**Clyde Kessler** lives in Radford, VA with his wife Kendall and thier son Alan. Kendall illustrated a book of his poems that has just been published: *Fiddling At Midnight's Farmhouse* (Cedar Creek Publishing).

**Steve Klepetar** lives in Saint Cloud, Minnesota. His work has received several nominations for Best of the Net and the Pushcart Prize, including four in 2016. Recent collections include *Family Reunion* (Big Table), *A Landscape in Hell* (Flutter Press), and *How Fascism Comes to America* (Locofo Chaps).

**Mary McCarthy** has always been a writer, but spent most of her working life as a Registered Nurse. She has had work published in many print and online journals, including *Third Wednesday*, *Earth's Daughters*, *Verse Virtual*, and the *Ekphrastic Review*. Her electronic chapbook *Things I was Told Not to Think About* is available as a free download from Praxis Magazine.

**Marianne Paul** is a Canadian poet and novelist. She won the 2016 Jane Reichhold Memorial Haiga Competition multi-media category, and the 2016 Vancouver Cherry Blossom

Festival Haiku International, Canadian division. To learn more of her work, visit [mariannepaul.com](http://mariannepaul.com) and [literarykayak.com](http://literarykayak.com).

**Anthony Q. Rabang** finished his BS Biology at the University of the Philippines – Baguio in 2015. He started writing haiku, senryu, and haibun while soul-searching in January 2016. He has poems published in the *Asahi Haikuist Network*, *The Mainichi Failed Haiku*, *World Haiku Review*, *Contemporary Haibun Online*, *Cattails*, *Wildplum*, *Akitsu Quarterly*, *Akisame*, *Makoto*, *Presence* and *Under the Basho*. Website: [Short Pauses](http://Short Pauses).

**Tara Roeder** is the author of two poetry chapbooks, and her work has appeared in multiple venues including *The Bombay Gin*, *THRUSH*, and *3:AM Magazine*. She is an Associate Professor of Writing Studies in New York City.

**W. Jack Savage** is a retired broadcaster and educator. He is the author of seven books including *Imagination: The Art of W. Jack Savage* ([wjacksavage.com](http://wjacksavage.com)). To date, more than sixty of Jack's short stories and over nine-hundred of his paintings and drawings have been published worldwide. Jack and his wife Kathy live in Monrovia, California.

**Olivier Schopfer** lives in Geneva, Switzerland. He likes to capture the moment in haiku and photography. His work has appeared in *The Red Moon Anthology of English-Language Haiku 2014 & 2016*, as well as in numerous online and print journals. He also writes articles in French about etymology and everyday expressions at [Olivier Schopfer raconte les mots](http://Olivier Schopfer raconte les mots).

**Debbie Strange** is a Canadian short form poet, haiga artist and photographer whose creative passions bring her closer to the world and to herself. She is the author of *Warp and Weft: Tanka Threads* (Keibooks 2015) and the haiku collection, *A Year Unfolding* (Folded Word 2017). Please visit her archive of published work at: [Warp and Weft ~ Images and Words](http://Warp and Weft ~ Images and Words).

**Marianne Szlyk** edits *The Song Is....*. Her chapbook, *I Dream of Empathy*, was published by Flutter Press. She is working on another chapbook. Her poems appear in a variety of venues including *Of/with*, *bird's thumb*, *Solidago*, *Figroot Press*, and *Cactifur*.

**Jeanie Tomasko** is the author of several books of poetry, *The Collect of the Day* being the most recently published. Two other chapbooks are forthcoming in 2017. She lives in Wisconsin with her husband, Steve and two new beehives in the backyard.

**Cristina Troufa** is a Portuguese artist born and based in Porto, Portugal. Cristina holds a Licentiate Degree in Painting (1998) and a Masters Degree in Painting (2012), both in FBAUP (University of Fine Arts of Porto). Since 1995 she has participated in collective and individual exhibitions, in Art Galleries and Cultural Spaces of Portugal, France, Spain, Italy, Australia, Canada, Denmark, Taiwan England and USA.