



# *Bitterzoet Magazine*

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## ***Note from the Editors:***

The holidays are hardly a time to think of creative writing, so we sincerely thank the contributors to this magazine for braving snow, relatives, turkey sandwiches, and more to bring us these wonderful pieces. We hope that with the end of holiday craziness, you can find time to tuck yourself away in a quiet spot to enjoy some reading. Make a cup of hot tea, nibble on a couple of stale holiday cookies, and immerse yourself in gentle ideas that are not yours. May 2014 bring you plenty of fine writing, creativity, and warmth, both in heart and hearth.

Warmly,

***Pattie Flint &  
Wes Solether***

# ***Menu:***

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## ***Poetry***

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**4** untitled, the twin origins of morality  
***Carol Shillibeer***

**7** Blank Canvas  
***Merrill Edlund***

**10** Crete, The Pisan Cantos  
***Colin Honnor***

**15** IV.  
***Bekah Steimel***

**16** Litter  
***Thomas Michael McDade***

**19** My Spiral Galaxy, After a  
Nightmare, The Best Advice  
***Howie Good***

## ***Art***

---

**6** untitled  
***Aaron North***

**18** Anchorage  
***Trystan Mackendrick***

## ***Fiction***

---

**8** Canned Laughter  
***Amaryllis Gacioppo***

**12** Price Paid  
***Breann Landry***

untitled

*Carol Shillibeer*

For his daughter, Harry would give Sunday morning.  
Up the forest hill-cut they would tread, late  
summer grass razed under power lines steeling the long view,  
blue cape of sky at hill's crest pulling the girl  
past a forest garden, unwitting,  
onto the downhill slope to the road.  
Wet plimsolls and a brown-buttoned jumper,  
from the cuffs, the girl's finger pointing,  
this one and that; trees identified by name.  
All sycamore, he'd say, and she'd not know  
if it were true, not 'til long past that blue crest,  
past home and Sunday mornings.

Years later,

hospice call, woman on a plane flying south,  
the daughter gave the last Sunday. All the forests  
gone, only patio's banana tree,  
leaves fizzing brown in the shadow  
of the concrete wall, bedroom door open  
to the tree's dying; out from under  
the white sheet, his feet, yellow-horned nails,  
arches curled, pushing out their last flexing,  
his daughter pointed down, sycamore she said.

the twin origins of morality

*Carol Shillibeer*

breathing into loss  
your lungs never hitch  
this is how I knew you

love's sharp needle

followed always by oxytocin's thread

:

the first bleat from a snow bank

still enroute  
we will never know if the lamb survives  
the way the year unstitches its birthing



4



5



Untitled

*Aaron North*

Blank Canvas  
*Merrill Edlund*

I wanted to render the landscape  
as easily as rotating a kaleidoscope.  
Amass arbitrary patterns: sprinkle in  
the changing seasons with a brush stroke. Blue

intersected by ginger leaves. Stipples of unruffled winds exhaling  
smidges of pine scents. And below, paint broad strokes of barren beaches where  
young lovers might have lolled, wrapped in Cowichan knit sweaters serenaded  
by James Taylor singing *you've got a friend*.

I should not have used black paint: I got carried away  
with small arrow shapes that started out as a flock of geese cloaking

the entire sky,  
eventually  
shrouded the sand  
like a murder of crows. Until

it was one immense black hole

I fell  
into  
You

seized my arm on the downward spiral,

*don't cut off your ear yet you said*

## Canned Laughter

*Amaryllis Gacioppo*

We sold canned laughter on the boardwalk, my ma and me. This was how I spent my youth - hawking giggles as the sea wind blew my dress every which way and seagulls squawked and swooped, swiping soggy chips from tourists as they strolled past. During the day we sold good times, and during the night we produced them. When I was a kid she'd tickle me until I spewed shrieks and then she'd hold the cans over my mouth and watch as the laughter convulsed out of my body and into each can. As I got older things became more democratic. We'd take turns cracking jokes over the kitchen table, the other one depositing their laughter into the cans.

Ma was the expert on laughter. She could tell you the subtle but significant differences between chuckles and chortles, giggles and snickers, howls and roars. She could rattle off the different mental and physical effects of each kind of laugh, what laugh was best for those looking to reduce waistlines, for old friends remembering the past, for over-the-moon newlyweds, for the bitter looking to hurt their betrayers. She'd learned that laughter keeps best in warmth, so she knitted covers for the cans, stacking rainbows on our boardwalk card table. The laughter market had grown pretty scant over the last few years, and as unpaid bills made towers in our kitchen, the manufacture of our high spirits waned. Sometimes it wasn't so easy to keep laughing through the worry.

Even so, we liked to keep a can or two for ourselves. When times were really tough we'd sit around the old kitchen table, a three-legged driftwood job, and we'd split a tin, taking turns sipping and letting the giggles bubble under our skin and warm us in our knitted shawls. Winter laughter was the rarest kind of laughter in those times, but also the most

potent and when you popped the seal on the can, the aroma of cinnamon and cloves permeated the room, the hearty chuckles spicy and warm as they tumbled down into your chest. While we shared the laughter my mother would regale me with stories from the fruitful time in her youth when the sitcom was king and the canned laughter trade was booming. Her father would pile the kids in the back of their Fuego and they'd join him while he made his deliveries to the T.V. studios. Ma said that the actresses would flock from the lots to the car and lean into the passenger window, taking sips from the can he would offer them and chuckling huskily with lowered eyelids.

Once I asked her what had changed between her youth and mine. She said, It was the times that did it. People don't want to be told when to laugh anymore. Problem is - they don't know how or when to do it. They forget.



Crete

*Colin Honor*

Stukad through the day, the air screams  
in the open boat their bones are keel-strakes  
their faces ribs the ribs planed to hunger  
they unfold from salted wet leather  
their girls in Oxo stockings, the Mae Wests  
breast each others' suns in their eyes, soak  
and one by one slip off the gunwhale  
to blood flowering in shrapnel-ploughed troughs  
as seawater drives mirage of veiled palms,  
lips float in brines of madness, hunger  
they slide to the oblivious empire  
one holding the salt-black wallet  
with faded wings stamped upon it.

The Pisan Cantos

*Colin Honor*

white lightning on serpent river  
and the light comes  
granite through mist  
as pale grey eyes  
and whispers of immortality  
flake from cloud  
palpitations of water

echoes of water, memories,  
reflections  
of carrion waves  
sun's red carpet soiled  
with blood above Mycenae

the wind in the olive trees  
broken leaves, twigs, sodden  
fable von dem froschen  
die Sturk

accused and condemned of plunder  
exacts a horrid revenge upon the frog colony for  
as she avers, they are too many and must be  
culled.

the youngest bud drops to fall  
to flower into leaf  
to bloom again  
she says  
paterfamilias hooped  
in rope

Fifteen years Tion had sought it.

It was a legend: the greatest treasure known to mankind. So the greybeards said, and Tion had believed, though others shook their heads and scoffed. Since childhood he had desired it; now for fifteen years he had been searching, following every lead, squandering wealth and reputation. He had seen much and endured much in the course of his quest. He had nearly been killed a number of times. His face now bore strange scars: one ran from the outer corner of his left eye down to the corner of his mouth, another angled across his forehead. His clothing was black, and worn and tattered, and a long knife, curiously shaped and much dented, hung at his side.

He had broken all kinds of laws, human and otherwise, to attain his goal. He was not ashamed to admit it. He had lost—nay, wilfully squandered—all his once-plentiful possessions: all he had left were his knife and the clothes on his back. He did not care. His body was lean and tired as an aged fox's, although he was not much more than thirty. But his eyes were alive and bright with the desire which had gnawed him for fifteen years; and at last, after fifteen years, he was here.

Kneeling before the casket, he drew his knife, feeling out the edges of the lock with knowing fingers. Metal rasped against metal as he inserted the tip of the curiously shaped blade in the opening. With a swiftness which would have amazed any onlooker, he picked it, broke it, unclasped it, lifted the lid, and remained gazing motionless for a long moment at what was inside. At length, reaching out a hand, he lifted it with a twisting motion and held it suspended, like a young moon or a conglomeration of stars or a phoenix's egg or he knew not what. It was beautiful, and the word "beauty" did not describe it. It was more fabulous than even he, the fool, the gullible one, the wild-goose-chaser, had imagined. Light emanated from its curved surface in a myriad of

colors, his own face reflected among them, small and clear, as from a great distance. He turned it in his hand to watch the colors glide and dance, and with a sigh of pleasure, slipped it inside his shirt. Rising to leave the chamber, he laughed aloud for sheer triumphant joy, like a boy who has captured a lizard, and his laugh rang off the walls of the little stone room as if they too shared in his triumph.

But their echo did not die away at once. Turning, he saw that he was no longer alone. In the shadows of the chamber's door he saw the man who for nearly fifteen years had been his archenemy and rival standing and chuckling. Abruptly, however, his laughter stopped.

"So, Tion, you see that I am here," said Black Andreo with a grin, stepping forward; but Tion noticed that he was fingering his knife-hilt as he spoke. That was always Black Andreo's way: act casually, almost genially, just when you are looking to spear your enemy against the wall.

"I knew that you followed me," said Tion scornfully.

"Give it me, or die." Andreo's voice was soft and genial even yet.

Tion's laugh rang out again as he unbuckled his curious knife and tossed it across the room.

"I prefer the latter," he said lightly.

Andreo's face grew ugly.

"Do you think you can keep it from me, cur? I know that you have it."

"As do I," conceded Tion.

"Let me see it," blurted Black Andreo, his eyes flickering with an eagerness almost as great as Tion's had been a few moments before.

"If you like," said Tion and reached a hand into his bosom and drew it out.

Black Andreo staggered backwards, shielding his face with his hands, cowering into the shadows as if he had witnessed some unnameable obscenity.

"Put it away," he gasped, voice rising shrilly with the pain. "Put it away, Tion, for mercy's sake. Hide it from me or I will die!" He broke off and his voice melted away into harsh sobs as he shrank against the stone wall.

Tion laughed.

"Did you not know, Andreo," he said stepping forward, but not

putting the treasure away—not yet—“did you not know how I have hungered and thirsted for this thing? Have you given up all you had to possess it, as I have? Have you let all other treasures pass from you, and your reputation go black? Have you let virtues and vices fall from you like a cloak for the sake of it? I thought not. Know, Andreo, that only one thing is required of one who would possess this treasure: that he forsake everything else. I have done so, and it is mine.”

He replaced the treasure in his vest and left the chamber. Andreo remained cowering behind.

Tion strode away smiling, with the weight of the Pearl against his chest.



IV.

*Bekah Steimel*

I am always smoldering  
like a stubborn campfire  
or a pair of new lovers  
two months into their affair  
I am not a flickering candle  
fearful of the wind  
or even a strong set of lungs  
I cannot be snuffed out  
blown out  
You could rid the planet  
of umbrellas  
gather every drop of water  
in this world  
and the next  
collect even the morning dew  
and my embers would still burn  
and glow  
stoke me and roll the dice



Litter

*Thomas Michael McDade*

As if it strikes them  
as too good to be  
ever true  
goldfinches darting in  
and out of tall brush  
ignore a mound  
of fresh bird seed  
in the corner abutting  
the self storage sheds.  
A weedy splendor  
of chicory blooms  
as blue as eyes  
and negligees  
illuminates even  
the slimmest of asphalt  
crannies and the poorest  
of surrounding soil  
in this parking lot  
I walk mornings,  
fitness less a goal  
than wool gathering.  
One large discount  
store survives,

the other, once a tad  
classier languishes as does  
Praise The Lord Gifts  
and a Hallmark Store.  
A condom,  
its tenure as wallet  
fixture long  
ago done browns  
on a truck starved stretch  
leading to a loading dock,  
a latex lesson  
in litter longevity  
but hardly as effective  
as a rubber  
in memory --  
one girlfriend  
playfully Trojan  
rolling down  
and jokingly  
tying off  
and tossing  
the bag  
of seed after.



Anchorage  
*Trystan Mackendrick*

My Spiral Galaxy  
*Howie Good*

I'm searching for a woman who likes to laugh during sex, but her address keeps changing. By the time I head back toward home, more and more people are refusing to use a dictionary. Living things erupt from the ground. It was Mencken, I think, who described God as the night watchman at a zoo. A man peering through the fence seems to be debating whether to go in or not. I see red, blue, and purple flame. The notion that we're made of material left from the Big Bang is just the kind of complication that we professors adore.

After a Nightmare  
*Howie Good*

I can't go back to sleep. Is that fair? I'd call my union representative if I knew who it was, the impatient ringing of the phone sounding strangely like sobs. I was brought up to believe that there's no such thing as a stupid question. Now everything I do is treated as if it were a violation of U.S. airspace. Like this morning, while the coffee boiled, I counted four deer - or four people disguised as deer - just standing in the yard.

## The Best Advice

*Howie Good*

Nothing matters if nothing connects. The torn gum wrappers are one small hint; elderly tourists covered in cameras, another. I used to love the dark or just after, when there was no fundamental difference between stopping and quitting and what may really only have been planets looked like stars. I believed at the time that everything was interesting. It's why I always carried around so much shit in my pockets. The best advice is to avoid lingering. Even things like a computer can be a horrible ghost, something only for people who wake up automatically and feel refreshed.

## Author Biographies

**Merrill Edlund's** writing has appeared in *Blue Skies Poetry*, *Worth Architectural Magazine*, *Crazy Pineapple Press*, *Fieldstone Review*, *Four Ties Lit Review*, *Spring vol viii*, *Misfitmagazine*, *Sugar Mule Literary Magazine* and *Joy, Interrupted* an anthology on motherhood and loss. She teaches English and Creative Writing online in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada.

**Amaryllis Gacioppo** studied writing in Sydney, Australia. She is currently a drifter, and has had fiction published in three editions of *The UTS Writers' Anthology* and *Going Down Swinging*.

**Howie Good**, a journalism professor at SUNY New Paltz, is the author of the forthcoming poetry collection *The Middle of Nowhere* (Olivia Eden Publishing). He co-edits White Knuckle Press with Dale Wisely.

**Colin Honnor** is a widely published poet in numerous magazines in print and online; Collections, mostly from small presses and private presses include *From Underground (Mirabilis)* ; *Dante*; *Cavafy*; *The Somme*; (*Yew Tree Press*). English Poetry is forthcoming from the University Press of America. He is a former editor of *Poetry and Audience* and runs a fine arts press in the Cotswolds.

**Breann Landry** is a poetess, head case, classics student, and amateur actress living on Vancouver Island, Canada—the most beautiful place in the world. She publishes her stories and poems, including this one, on a personal blog (<http://gogaily.blogspot.ca/>) read by her friends and almost no one else.

**Trystan Mackendrick** is a fine art and commercial photographer, digital printer, novelist and forensic psychologist. His work has been exhibited on both the east and west coast, as well as internationally, and has been published in periodicals such as *Collage*, *The Chronicle* and *Peripheral ARTeries*.

**Thomas Michael McDade** is a former computer programmer living in Fredericksburg, VA with his wife, no kids, no pets. He served two tours of duty in the U.S. Navy and graduated from Fairfield University.

**Aaron North** | b. 1987 | is an American artist, who grew up in Texas and Colorado. His artistic beginnings were in street art and screen printing, which progressed into his present day material. North's interests and influences range from the Flemish Renaissance and Surrealist Movement to the non-visual works of Philip Glass and Haruki Murakami. He and his fiancé currently reside in Providence, RI.

**Carol Shillibeer** is born of a union between an artist (ethnicity 2c) and a scientist (ethnicity 5b), Carol Shillibeer believes in fertile connections. Multiple ways of thinking, of hearing the world speak: adenosine tri-phosphate is a fundamental life metaphor. Her poetry and/or images and/or sound files have appeared or are forthcoming in many journals. You can find her at [carolshillibeer.com](http://carolshillibeer.com).

**Bekah Steimel** ([www.bekahsteimel.com](http://www.bekahsteimel.com)) is an internationally published poet living in St. Louis and working on a first collection, chronicling one lesbian's struggles with addiction, fidelity, mental illness, and mortality. You can find her work in publications such as *Gutter Eloquence*, *Sinister Wisdom*, *TRIVIA: Voices of Feminism*, *Vayavya* and *Verity La*.