



RCP Summer Sampler 2017

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Edited by April Pameticky
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Introduction

Wichita. We're a rich and diverse community. Often overlooked as *fly-over* country here in the middle of the United States, we pride ourselves on minding our own business and welcoming strangers with a smile. We're a city of cowboys and airplanes and the Arkansas River—of tribal pow wows, spillover jazz, and wind that never stops blowing. We're a city of contradictions, too big to be just a town, too small at times for our own ambitions.

Some poets are just passing through. Others intend to travel on and instead find themselves, somehow decades later, content to survive the weather each year.

In our inaugural issue, we at *River City Poetry* intend to start as we mean to go on... celebrating that strange confluence where poetry meets life. And where writers have been known to gather, on accident or otherwise, to the betterment of us all.

It's a rare and beautiful opportunity to share poets of this caliber in the same package. We thank you, the new reader, for taking time to explore our Summer Sampler 2017.

April Pameticky, Editor, *River City Poetry*

Michele Battiste

3 Poems

Remora, Ocarina

for the Gypsy King

Your quip about the codpiece? Please.
Uncles on her father's side –
firemen, snowplowers, roughly
aware of every dirty mind

a girl encounters – know the joke
and tell it better. What a kid
grows up with: low-throated crowing
drunk on Elvis, hints of a fix

in the seventh, the high romance
of Pretty Please Me, Electric Jade,
another C-note down and don't cry
baby, we've always got the eighth,

roasted corn, a bag of buck-shot
rabbits, a dog named Muggins, beer.
Behind the house, abandoned dove-
cotes, pigeon shit and feathers seared

to dry rot. How could you expect
different from a railroad worker's
daughter who believed she's better,
who expertly worked her poker

face when the poorhouse smell of Pine-
Sol and boiled chicken fat hit
her at the door? She grew, she left
Schenectady, she tried to miss

the old-time aqueducts eroding
onto abandoned tracks. See now
how she steals words still wet in your
mouth – remora, ocarina –

tempting and glistening like jewels.
That's what she wants, what she expects
from you: the glamour of elsewhere,

the luxury of intellect.
But what about you? The thieved from,
the one with fingers digging at
your tongue for something exquisite.
You're no Pope. You don't need this crap.

So she smiles, so she gestures,
and she tries to get you to stay.
And what she recklessly offers
up: buckshot, dovecote, Elvis, jade.

Reversible Paperwork

I couldn't decide
whether to write about
reversible hats or divorce
paperwork. Seeing how
it is four days before
the new year and
my son's father
is how I now refer
to my husband and
for Christmas I received
a negligee from another
man and seeing how
once when we were dating
my husband changed my
blown out tire and I
latched on to that
kindness and use
its memory to feel
tender at times, like now,
and seeing how any one
of us could die soon
and my son uses his
reversible hat from Peru
as a nest for his stuffed
kitten named Silver,
who is, at this moment,
giving birth to five
babies and my son
is cooing into that hat
like the Earth's
revolution depends
on it, I sometimes, like
now, wish things could be
undone.

Ruination

Like the first unearthed bloodroot
or a black beast pacing the cattle fence – an omen.

Mama said a bird
in the hand isn't safe
from the one who holds
it. A stumble can take
anyone down, wreck
what they treasure.

One man said where some see
chance, he sees decision. Not the day
I pulled the cat off the infant rabbit, its neck
wet and red but not yet fatal.
He means the day I left. He means the man
I found.

Salvation looks like a tree flush with stone fruit, skin bursting.
Salvation looks like a man on his knees at the foot of a mountain.
Anything can look like salvation if it is not behind you.

Mama said we lose
what we leave, but no
matter. We lose
what we hide away,
lose what save
for later.

I search the underbrush for small
wounded animals. They are not
easy to find.

Roy Beckemeyer

3 Poems

Night Sounds

These are the voices that heal
the day's wounds at night:

train traversing the edge of perception,
moaning blue from indigo to black,

screech owls soothing silence with trills,

wind lispings its way through wisteria,

raindrops testing the tuning of pails,
splashing into puddles that shimmer
like a membrane separating parallel worlds;

these are the voices that dot
the dark landscape like rippling
prayer flags, like standards,
like portents of hope.

Pretense

The new knife is a serrated,
heavy razor. He allows its heft
to carry it through the ripe
tomato, uses his hand merely
as a pivot, a fulcrum, a
turning point, just the way he allows
life to happen, events to drop
into place, with never a thumbs
up, thumbs down, with never a push,
a nudge from him, never a lean
to left or right, a raised eyebrow.
a nod, an inclined or tilted head.

He imagines letting the knife ride
on the corrugated tendons of
his wrist, drawing it across,
watching it wobble up and down
over gristle, blue veins, imagines
it slicing, each serration sinking
lower, viscous blood leaking
onto the cutting board, slowly
dissolving into the tomato's
watery leavings. He wouldn't
have to push down at all, he
thinks. This weight, alone,
would suffice.

Mayflies Rise

*"... one Mayfly's day holds
one eternity." - Mark Zelman,
from his poem, "I Could Say"*

Mayflies rise
from water like mist,
mark the still air's breath
with long thread-tails,
kite and drop and dodge
and dance the day's
delirium.

The water, dappled
where they left
diver's suits
of crumpled skin,
lies gold-foiled,
mirrors their flight
in circular intersections,
captures,
in the Mayflies' leaving,
their eternally vanishing
reflections.

Raylyn Clacher
3 Poems

Deer Heart

Let me be the sky you hold
in your surroyals, the hearth
you hang your head upon.

Anchor your antlers at my feet
like tree roots, perfect black eyes
fixed open, on me,

unwilling to shut.
Lay beneath me –
chest cleaved open,

heart apulse, the screaming bulb
of a newborn, not red,
quiet and true

like a cartoon. Ask me again –
will you open your palm,
give it a room, some place

to unfold?

Family Portrait with the New Wife

She gloats from the picture
in her pride. Witches hang
from the mantle – a wedding

gift of rope, baubles, eyes,
pointed hats cast aside and boots
whose tops peek through the grass

like hungry cubs. New wife,
when you marry a cemetery
expect ghosts. Bones should not surprise.

Your husband seated next to you
shines, a magician high
off his latest trick.

Babies on the brain,
the dead witches clap
for his coup.

How We Make Peace

A fish is a flying thing,
no swimmer, I swear.
Those fins are sails,

made for air, not water.
The ocean is sky.
We walk in this water

we call ground,
stare up from the bottom,
hook the words that fly

with string,
hold them down

until they speak,
until we drown.

Kyle Laws

3 Poems

The Bell and the Glass

—An installation of Duchamp's
The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors
and The Liberty Bell

Philadelphia Museum of Art

Again, in front of *The Bride* I sit,
bared before leaving Pueblo,
a Colorado town on two rivers,
stripped back to an apartment
on Tulip Street down from SKF,
Swedish ball bearing factory just
over the Tacony-Palmyra Bridge.
I'm 18, commuting to high school,
crossing a bridge in a Tempest.
On Tulip Street, I park on a hill,
hope the brake holds. Days when
it doesn't, neighbors call out
and I chase the Pontiac down streets
marooned near tracks so Father
can form steel.

There's a mechanical apparatus in
the lower pane of Duchamp's glass.
Three windows that look out come later,
in a studio in Pueblo with a pull-out bed.
Duchamp's glass broke when traveling
between Philadelphia and Brooklyn—
Father's birthplace. There's a pattern
to the break. It did not harm the piece.
It added texture, something you could feel.

“Can salvation have the marks of sin
that others can see?” I asked before leaving.
“Because you may not like the marks,
the cracks in glass or brass,
anything containing that much liberty.”

Canvas Anchored to Shore

Philadelphia Museum of Art

Arc of drawn bow holds Diana's breast
and a native maize out of Diego's field.
Kay resented my Englishness, the wiry
elongation, the bow I drew to her words.
She wanted blonde, boxy, someone to follow
her arrow to tapestry wall, a canvas of ships
anchored to shore.

A report on St. Peter's Basilica unfinished,
the Catholicism I could not commit to paper,
I escaped to the shore on a bus with wooden
benches where a sluice drained into the bay.
In Philadelphia, pressed against an abbey wall,
water dripping in a courtyard fountain, torn
down and reconstructed on a museum floor,
my view is of windows dark, narrower than
square, to say rectangular would be geometric,
based on math and logic, unlike the meetings in
an abandoned Cathedral school where blue tiles
wrap the building as gods in a classical frieze.

Like Duchamp's *Box-in-Valise*, miniatures
carried from place to place, I carry poems
in a suitcase that held stockings for years,
black and nude with lace on thighs. Inside,
in a gathered pocket, a clipping from *Stars and
Stripes* says the Ironwood almost went down
with shoes for an orphanage in Osaka Castle.
“Three times larger than the fort in St. Augustine,”
my brother says in a letter asking me to get well
that summer I spent in bed with whooping cough.
I wrap the clipping and letter in the same silk I
cover thighs with as winter draws near.

I'm forced into the third dimension, the building
bought the year I was born, first Fagin's Saloon,
then the Fishing Club, more real than any painting:
a flat surface with color I can stand back from.
Here, I am up against women leaning on temples

with plaits of blonde hair that do not ripple in
the wind, palms pressed in prayer like Kay's until
her first Manhattan—hands, what are severed first
when statues step forward from the wall.

Portrait of Brother As Fo'c'sle and Fantail

The only recognizable parts of the ship
that Brother retired from drawn by a man
down on his luck who he helped on the wharf.
His work now commands a high price.

He sent me a photo of the *Thank you* pen and ink
after I told him I'd opened a gallery in Pueblo.
"Is his work mostly maritime?" I ask,
wondering how well it would do in the desert.

Brother hasn't said this much since the Stage Four
diagnosis of throat cancer, so I keep him talking
while he points out the flag on the fantail and the flag
on the fo'c'sle, which I have to ask how to spell

because it was originally forecastle, a syncope.
Eventually I see the ship and the waterline,
what's above emanating from the moon and stars,
and all that's below churned up as he fled

a fishing village, no place to go other than the docks
to pack fish starting at 4 a.m. when crates rolled up
on a dolly. First the fish went in, then they were iced,
and then he'd throw crates, five feet high, onto trucks.

The step up from there was the commercial boats,
but Brother says those guys looked old by thirty,
so he joined the Coast Guard, walking the streets
of Tokyo by eighteen.

Kevin Rabas

3 Poems

The Shouting Incident

Our admin yells at a student admin downstairs,
and the volleys of emails, like shellings, begin,
the explanations, the summaries of the incident,
the demands and calls for reprimand. Evenings,
I sleep too long, nurse a new lump
along the back of my head; stress, I think;
and when dawn comes, I imagine white doves, lifting,
fluttering home, carrying olive branches
to people we hardly know.

For Lisa, a Valentine

You grasped my hand,
and we took
to the icy sidewalk
on our way
from your city apartment
to Barnes & Noble,
the plaza holiday lights
like fireflies—
that candle night, blink
love signals
across an indigo sky,
like my eyes flash
when I catch yours,
hold sight.

Grocery, Between Stops

I go to the grocery store,
get a green pepper and one that's orange,
little boiling onions, pineapple chunks in a can,
and ask if Reebles has kabob sticks,
and the lady with the machine in her hands
says yes, leads me.
I browse around the pre-made meals;
vegan, I find three-bean salad among the meat
and potatoes, and take the vinegary mix,
which drips in my car,
near the stick and on the seat,
and I pop the trunk, pull
a beach towel out
and wipe the drops. It's like
being an adjunct
again, eating between stops.

Art Zilleruelo

3 Poems

Dirge for Coal Country

I. Shamokin

You're a hole full of black lungs,
but she still had to drag me out of you
with her teeth halfway through my tongue.

II. Bloomsburg

Nothing blooms here
but the bodies of grubs
looming in white irony.

III. Mt. Carmel

She loved you
until the night you brought that old man home
and watched him
put his hand up her shirt.

IV. Pottsville

Lager for blood
makes your heart a happy drunk,
but one day you'll find your inheritance
gone skunked in the kegs.

V. Kulpmont

I stole your daughter.
We drove away laughing.
At night she lays bare your faults;
she forgives your portrait every morning.
When I say your name I have to spit the taste out.
I refuse to lie for you
at your trial or your funeral.

VI. Irish Valley

I stamped cigarettes out in the grass,
pissed in the streams,
broke into the church and played the pipe organ with my hard-on.

VII. Sunbury

The rich kids pronounced it
like the yellow fruit of an imaginary tree.
We pronounced it
like a star torn from its orbit
and shoveled under the mud on the riverbank.

VIII. Centralia

Who now can doubt
that the earth hides fires,
that the earth can manifest many mouths,
that some dark mountain husbandry
has converted these lands to a larder?

IX. Hymn for the Coal Cracker's Divorce

If you ever see me again,
it will only be for a day,
and once you've fed me and fucked me,
I'll need to get back to making you miss me.

Shapes

I.

So she is revealed in push and sepia
In draughts of sap in dramas of geography

How grave the ague
And how long expected the contents of envelope

Bathes her feet in polar gore
Writes vague ordnance to towers of aught

Graphing coordinates of thaw
She is plush ghoul impacted

Pulse flood and the dearth of tact
Earth furnace she is ordinary law

She I theorem she
Is the tantamount describe of older physics

Aching she inculcates the alder
Archon and she wields far rod

Doors there are to fens and moors
Source and plea the flaunt of Venus

Mortal male as venison to her table
Gnosis crypt she is prejudice brat and cosmic

Geology lodging
Over human muscle and under human skin

Fragment of high substance
The sunlight incarcerate

Oven of many
She is parody math escorted

Triangle shadow
She is pale in summer

Many Histories

So I return from strange travels
Altered

Some integrity faltered
And bent to the will I bear back threat and influenza

Bad fire in the tissue
Threshold state and the roots will out

Cutthroat trout I slipped in stream from the summit
Of it I drank and therein was I lost

Rife with issue I am drain theory
Cold meltwater the knife of time

How I complain how
Have I borne mountain in my matter down the mountain

Forlorn I image other pasts
Mock pain and clatter of the overclock

Gavels in the limbs of last things
Beneath breathing flesh the bright bones

Read the fable of erasure
Panic the fiction of beta soma

Lay down dollars the limits of light
Sense the incommensurable membranes it's urgent

Blight all similitudes of crown
Hobble the salts of document

Exile fugitive whispers and forgers
No mountain once stood where you speak with me now

Is there trail to the topos
Veiled in the clustered clouds

A fire waits somehow upon the snowpeak
To know me by the contours of my face

Revelation in the vectors of my footfall
Confession to the ashes of my race

The storm a recitation
A calligraphy of license

Knowable not readable
Around me hung significance and import

But closer lacks attend me now
A dead thing to skin and wrap my feet

A stream to follow down into the world
Deep burns to crust over with snow

And in that a terror too high to own
Do not ask me if I climbed or was I lifted

Contributing Poets for the Summer Sampler 2017

Michele Battiste is the author of two full-length poetry collections: *Uprising* (2014) and *Ink for an Odd Cartography* (2009), both published by Black Lawrence Press. She was a finalist for the National Poetry Series and is the author of five chapbooks including *Left: Letters to Strangers* (Grey Book Press, 2014). Her poems have appeared in *American Poetry Review*, *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *The Rumpus*, *Memorius*, and *Mid-American Review*, among others. Michele has taught poetry writing workshops for Wichita State University, the Prison Arts Program in Hutchinson, KS, Gotham Writers' Workshops, and the national writing program Teen Ink.

Roy Beckemeyer, from Wichita, Kansas, has recently had poems published in *The Midwest Quarterly*, *Kansas City Voices*, *The Syzygy Poetry Journal*, *Dappled Things*, and *I-70 Review*. His collection of poetry, *"Music I Once Could Dance To,"* (2014, Coal City Press), was selected as a *2015 Kansas Notable Book*. He won the 2016 *Kansas Voices* Poetry Award, and was Kansas Authors Club Poet of the Year for 2016.

Kyle Laws' fifteen collections include *This Town: Poems of Correspondence* with Jared Smith (Liquid Light Press, 2017); *So Bright to Blind* (Five Oaks Press, 2015); *Wildwood* (Lummox Press, 2014); *My Visions Are As Real As Your Movies*, *Joan of Arc Says to Rudolph Valentino* (Dancing Girl Press, 2013); and *George Sand's Haiti* (co-winner of Poetry West's 2012 award).

Awarded two residencies in poetry from the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (MASS MoCA), she is one of eight members of the Boiler House Poets who perform and study at the museum.

She is the editor and publisher of Casa de Cinco Hermanas Press. www.kylelaws.com

Kevin Rabas teaches at Emporia State University, where he leads the poetry and playwriting tracks. He has seven books, including *Lisa's Flying Electric Piano*, a Kansas Notable Book and Nelson Poetry Book Award winner.

Art Zilleruelo's debut full-length poetry collection *The Last Map* will be published by Unsolicited Press in May of 2017. His chapbook *Weird Vocation* was published by Kattywompus Press in 2015. His poems have appeared in *The Cincinnati Review*, *Pleiades*, *Western Humanities Review*, *Phantom Drift*, and other journals, and he has poetry forthcoming in *Hayden's Ferry Review*. His poetry has twice been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and has been anthologized in Lost Horse Press' *Of a Monstrous Child*.