

S t. Sebastian R eview



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the St. Sebastian Review

a queer Christian literary magazine

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The *St. Sebastian Review* is an LGBTQ Christian literary magazine, founded to give voice to a community often disenfranchised and unheard.

We exist as a forum within and from which LGBTQ Christians of any denomination can engage both critically and compassionately the culture in which they find themselves.

We are purveyors of fine poetry, fiction, nonfiction essays, and visual art from among the LGBTQ Christian community and its allies.

Carolyn E.M. Gibney, Editor

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Our strength has never been in our numbers.

Many times over this past year, in the midst of my clumsy attempts to get this journal going (It's sort of felt like learning stick shift all over again: You think you've got it, then you lurch forward violently for a few seconds, sit stunned for a moment, and start the damn car once more.), I've had people – mostly genuinely concerned and gentle people – ask me: Why would you create a journal for queer Christians? How many of you are there?

My answer is always the same: Twelve. There are twelve of us. (At this point in the conversation I smile and tell them I'm kidding. Which I am. Mostly.)

It's true that this seems like a bit of a strange niche. Queer Christians tend to fall into the section of the Venn diagram that most people either A) don't think exists (which in most cases is easily rectifiable), or B) vehemently deny is metaphysically possible. 'You can't be gay and Christian!' they say.

Word on the street, though, is that metaphysics can only take you so far. (Buy Martin a beer and he'll tell you why, in the end, he never could finish *Being and Time*.) And, in any case, the problem, unfortunately, has never been metaphysical. The problem is not whether gay Christians can or should exist. The problem is that we do exist, and that people still consider our existence a metaphysical question.

The question of being queer and Christian is deeply, terribly physical. And immanent. And quotidian. ('See my hands?' I would like to say back. 'See, here: Touch the wound in my side.')

That's partly why I started this journal. I want to affirm that the question of the intersection of queer and Christian has moved, must move – entirely and completely – from the realm of the metaphysical to the realm of the ethical. The question, now, dear friends, as I'm sure you already know, is not 'What?' but 'How?'

In my search, I have found nothing better to confront these ethical questions, with all the honesty and intensity required of the task, than literature. Poems, stories, essays grow from the ground of what we've lived, and, in turn, shape how we continue to live. We live what we've created, and because we create.

So, the question stands: How do we do this again? How do we hold what sometimes feels like the opposing sides of two magnets together? I know there are others – you, even now, reading this – who have struggled with this, and have something to say about it. I started this journal mostly for selfish reasons: I want to know what you've figured out. I want to hear what you have to say. And I want other people to hear it, too.

And the secret that we already know is that it doesn't matter how many of us there are. Numbers never have and never will determine worth when it comes to human beings. The secret is that we are, and, because we are, and because we have had to affirm that we are in the face of those who would say we cannot, should not, must not be, we have learned a few things about what it means to exist. And those things we've learned we can now offer.

Carolyn E.M. Gibney
Editor
First day of Spring, 2011

The God of Spring

Your face may not be for my eyes,
but your legs are enough for me,
I can see them in the shafts of sunlight
as they step over pliant pines
setting your feet firmly on the unshaven face
of my dead lawn,
waiting for me to kiss your toes,
to bow to the conqueror
whose naked legs
tower over my measly mortal world,
the house now reduced to something ridiculous
like the snow shovel still guarding the storm door,
the unmated glove lying on the porch floor,

but you are a patient god,
you give me a whole warm afternoon
plus your muscular legs to hug
as you wait for the snow on my forehead to melt,
for my prayers to open up
like the crocuses and the front door;

Will you accept something from my empty hands?
The memory of spring birds,
the chattering scent trapped
in a closet with summer clothes?

I'm ready to fling open the doors,
the welcoming hands of the house;
come closer
even if your next step
kicks over the roof.

My prayer lies underneath
as bare
as your sunshine.

Paul Sohar

Upon My 39th

For Joshua, my Artful Dodger

Sometimes Saturdays I would bike to visit
books I kept like two secrets shelved in the public
library neither had left: their insert sheets blank,
unstamped by due date.

Only one was shameful, but you'd have had to
crack its cover to figure why: its pencil
illustrations less innocent than the title—
Guide for a Young Man.

One sketch in particular drew me inside.
Days healthy boys ought best to spend outdoors in play
I would squander for a peek at a drawing
of a youth sleeping.

Covers tossed aside in a tangle, hand caught
there in the secondary hair, like the David's,
grown-up, curling around the sleeper's
unknowing fingers.

Take an hour when nobody's home, the book said.
Learn your muscles. Explore, the book encouraged.
See your reflection. This is your new body.
the book said, Love it.

Unable, I went instead in search of The Raindrop,
spine so thin it was easy to miss in Children's.
There I fixed upon its H₂O hero
hurled from a storm cloud,

spat by a gust into a world of forces
bent to transform it. Glint in the beaded
droplet—constant through liquid falling, rising vapor,
crystallized, flying.

Flimsy tatters of memory captured, I shiver
cold, plummeted by the approach of Winter,
see myself the first time in a lake mirrored,
changed into ice lace.

The Flannel Lord

“Includes 13 felt figures to teach your children of Christ's love and sacrifice for all of us. Perfect for Easter or Passover. This felt board story...includes Story and lesson activity, Scripture Reference, and Coloring/Sequencing page. [This set is available](#) pre-cut or as a kit to cut out yourself.”

Flawed and faulty. All
nature could muster was flakes
blustered in the brown backyard the hurried
whirl of a dozen, a flurried
snow without the fall.

Takes little warmth for quakies
to twig, fuzz, prepare to bud out.
Could've had that had the day mattered.
Celebrated anyhow and scattered
plastic grass for Eastersake. *He's*

risen indeed. Took felt cutouts,
remnants of a Sunday School past,
(manila enveloped) to sister's pink privacy
next door. Lessoned alone by the lacy
bed, spread the fabric figures, shut out

the day. The felt shapes caressed
with dye became: the relics, places
people; the water basin, purple robe, the scourge;
the crown, thorns soft as the urgent
shroud the Marys weaved and pressed

before they wrapped; their rapt faces
readied for sorrow, for surprise;
cloth Calvary, tomb, stone to roll it closed.
Story unfolded. Flannel board posed
for the vanish without trace. *He's*

not here. Just lilies, an angel, the skies.
Backs to me, my family glued to the tube,
while bluesuit apostles read from the screen.
Wanted to tell them, explain them, to mean.
Unpocketed Jesus. Smoothed out his eyes.

Would've known what to say to
them. Had the day mattered at all.
There would have been blooms, not the muttered
"Hush." Not my held back stuttered
"I—I—I" instead of Allelu.

Jon L. Jensen

Speak to Your Heart In Silence Upon Your Bed

*Tremble, then, and do not sin;
speak to your heart in silence upon your bed.
--Psalm 4*

Early in my studies, early in endeavor
to connect Christianity to Buddhism,
to master mind of Thomas Merton in his
Tennessee cell, the Merton before trip
to New Mexico's Monastery of Christ
in the Desert, detailed in slim volume
picked off shelf of used book store
as pink crab apple blossom harboring
spring, before he spent as much time
tracking down a particular beer while
looking for new monastery, new home,
I read elsewhere that Allen Ginsberg
almost found solace, almost found his
lifelong study based on Psalm 4, but
depressed, despondent, cloistered in
a New York apartment, wrapped in a
mother's Kaddish, he had to find
another way; he had to break free.

Aaron Copland's *Billy the Kid*

Chile cioppino simmering on stove,
Copland quote on jacket cover for
disc replacing collection of vinyl
propped against furniture and wall,
door open onto maple floor,
golden light through trees
and stained glass salvaged
from a house next door to
familiar surroundings as
generations of black cats
with same body and oriental eyes
belong to this neighborhood,
Copland composed *Billy the Kid*,
in sympathy for the outlaw,
the outsider, the homosexual.

Kyle Larus

not with the old leaven

butch girl half face painted towels the pink off her cheek
glassy tear tacked to her eye hard as man hands reaching up
to scrape the red from her kiss she does this boy beside her
strapped dress peeled from square shoulder the half-shorn
field of his jaw reaching up she reaches up draws a red rose on his broken lip

**

the rich man died, and was buried

even before frozen in brainstroke daddy your smile always meant nothing mouth
corner yanked up as heaven's withdrawn ladder
so we ran into the rain cold and waiting for lightning it's come
to this bare-ass bed where your bitter sweetheart rolls you over now your sinking
body the first god I knew the first fate
I try to see under you try to see me

**

for Cain and his offering he had no regard

how does a man go straight through the eye of a needle
picture us breaking the machinery of women snapping the threads
of our soft garments for needles are cheap as recruits
from a two-pins town where bleeding makes a man picture us walking
across a floor of bent needles our faces giving out nothing

**

if your eye offend you

mud is not as warm as your bound hands brother more than
brother we cannot say as the picnic parade traipses on the road
past our ditch men with wives and baskets of fruit too sweet
for us, too shapely tongues are not as blind as our bound eyes
don't ask for mud don't beg to be opened

**

ecce

the holy would only see one body it's very old and has stopped
bleeding nearly it's not blue like your tongue has no
bulges like your eyes it hung on a hill on a sunset postcard
not over the coffee machine the stack of copied hymns bowels
released neck twisted burned nobody expects the inquisition
to dress so badly denied flames and red dresses you are every boy
who swallowed an infection believed the Lamb was not death enough

**

even the dogs

pull up a golden plate the whore brings a priest to paint her toes the
demon brings his pigs they fell over the cliff of love
like opera singers pick up a crystal knife but one is missing
him with his hand in the bowl keep him out says the thief's
head under the soldier's arm says the professor who held
the killers' coats the whip-swishing angel but
no I am under your table no I am on my knees

Jendi Reiter

Passing On

Six years and still I'm finding notes,
like the one taped to the bank where you put funds away for extras –
a Mahler record in seventy-two, a wine decanter in eighty-eight.

*I received this desk from Sheila, today's note begins,
who bought it from her co-worker, Beth McKinley,
who inherited it from Helen Smith, a friend dear to us both.*

I found it taped to the underside of your small wooden desk –
mine since Father sold the house, dispersed of things that wouldn't fit.
The desk you used as a dressing table –

where you'd darken the edges of your eyes
and make your lips a modest pink; where I, too, would sit,
sneaking in to make the face that played it straight.

It is written on a piece of scrap paper –
something about a meeting at church on the back –
and has two rough edges where you folded the paper

to tear it down to size. And tape, brittle and brown
where it stuck to the wood and the wood stuck back.
Until today, when the note fell off during dusting.

Tucked, for years, from view,
like the queerness you passed on,
that you received from Ida and she passed on from Lizzie –

passed on until it opened out inside of me,
falling out of hiding. The queerness that is mine now.
Ours. Along with this.

Lisa Dordal

On The Nature Of

ripped, the raiment. is
given (call it skin) split side of

to believe in. *there* where you would place your hands

after birth, & before death,
the state of being

torn. (call it soul) alive

*

between body & mind:

not the newborn's livid bruise.
not the pentimenti-haunted face, its frescoed age.

I tell you he who doubting

truly touches to see.

emptiness, issuing from where God
le silence de

(call it veil)

*

would be behind
Dieu est Dieu

if He were. possible. no,
thing inside every
that which is sought

(call it covenant)

to be found. beginning & ending rent

opening into what we, the living reft

fall into, have already

wanting only to heal

*

(call it wound)

our without which. as if

to hope, while wounded, within

— as if to be hurt were to be holy

— as if to, while wholly doubting, still

reach *verily I say unto you* reach for

*

I, John, testify

what is not there. *here*

what's been broken by you, for you

— as if you've never known belief as nails

— as if you've never felt for faith through holes

Like A Partial Lunar Eclipse In February

maybe moon alone knows far more faithful than
everliving sun occluding stars

how long that antebellum oak must undress
under wind's careless fingers grass like ghost hair

leaves curled inward your briefs
hibernating in my laundry heap all winter

shoveling cinders & cigarette butts
into the gutter in shorts & flipflops

a tatter of a tshirt your promises
that I believed still so hot to the touch

if ice might scour every afterimage
you inked onto my inner eyelids

(if hyssop could've cleansed David I would be
washed whiter than snow)

if my heart might be made clean
clay again not a dung-covered bowl blackened

your firebrand hands breath
like a kiln days without rain

& heart's only oracle turned upside down
no more able to lie than the moon

ravaged eye hooked wish
bone bead split in half for

sooth an ache that damned faultline
between memory & truth sky does roil

upon the body touch tattoos
& now months absent your silent polyphonics still

sound brushstroke burns vegetable stains
storied on my skin as sunrise spells out

my wreck of a room
tear-streaked St. Jude's cracked face

John D. Fry

Her First Name Begins With 'J' and She Would Hate Me Even More Than She Hates This Poem

Hasn't it been a slaughter?—these choices I've made.
I look up at Christ's star and think about the December
I lost her. It's like gravity fell on me, went from make-believe
to real—Santa Claus reality, that break when you learn.
I wish my life would have stayed in the bedroom.
She got cancer, breast cancer, and a sick part of me
was relieved, because her happiness was perfect
after she left me for her girlfriend with her Halle Berry eyes
and my life so filled with beer. I'm as lonely
as mistletoe on Easter. I need a well-lit house.
The deprivation of sunlight is getting at my lungs.
Shadows sneak in my backyard. How
do you pray when you feel damned? condemned?
In an ocean of drag queens, I'm the dead one.
I'm lost in houses, but I've heard over and over again
about redemption and wonder if you can do a perfect
Liza Minnelli and still have God lamp your life
like you're one of the lucky ones.

R.A. Riecki

as with a senryu's lost innocence

the past is rendered
point of view as opening
into vulture eyes

notice the wild lines –

one's wry novel as construct
one's worries allayed

one's house in water
submerged, neck-deep, rising flood
quiet effacement

this memory as traction
to old ways that line the page
and thumb the obvious

the absence as bold a door

Desmond Kon Zhicheng-Mingde

Notre Dame de Chartres

July 9, 2006

The dream of transcendence – in marriage and literary work, in travel and faith – is conditioned by gravity.

Christopher Merrill

In the Cathedral at Chartres, Mary rises,
surrounded by carved adoring angels,
Her son hanging below on a gold cross
so much smaller, almost like an afterthought
or an offering: She is the focus here.
The organ chords throb throughout
the arches, fill the stained-glass windows
with the spirits of the dead. The calm ecstasy
of Her eyes and arms outstretched,
His agony dangling below.
And Mary, loosing from the statue,
rises from octave to octave. I wish,
for this moment, I could join the angels
and ascend, swirling in the air,
and for now, I feel air
between me and the seat:
now, nothing more, my feet
flat on stones that will not budge.

Brian Cronwall