



# the St. Sebastian Review

*a queer Christian literary magazine*

Vol. 3, Iss. 2 First day of Autumn, 2013

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*

*Savannah Grant, Assistant Editor & Poet in Residence*

The St. Sebastian Review is published bi-annually, on the first day of Spring and the first day of Autumn. Manuscripts of poetry and prose, and submissions of visual art accepted via our submission manager. Details: <http://www.stsebastianreview.com/submissions>.

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## *Editor's Note*

“Leap of faith” is an oversimplified concept these days. People make “leaps of faith” when they try a different restaurant, move to a new city, or reach out to old or distanced friends. In common parlance, a leap of faith means no more than trying something new that involves a degree of risk. But in the original philosophical sense, the Kierkegaardian sense, it is a much more difficult idea to pin down.

As with many good existentialist concepts, a leap of faith includes a great deal of anxiety and uncertainty, an almost physical tremulousness. *Fear and Trembling* is no joke. A leap of faith is not a decision to move from something safe to something relatively risky; it's a decision to move from something unsafe to something utterly unknown, probably unknowable. No one would make this leap if he or she were not driven to, be it by some deep need, or exhaustion, or both.

In his novel *Silence*, Shusaku Endo tells the story of a young European Jesuit sent to Japan to find and confront another priest who has apostatized. This priest stepped on an icon of the face of Christ — an almost unforgivable blasphemy. The young Jesuit finds himself alone in Japan, hounded at all turns by a simpering local who betrays him repeatedly, eventually to the authorities who torture him for his faith. In the end, the Jesuit is faced with the same decision that faced the apostate priest before him: Step on the icon of Christ, or be tortured, and allow the torturing of others.

Because I'm not the sort of person who gives away the ends of books, I won't tell you which he chooses. I will tell you that I have read no better portrayal of a leap of faith than the one Endo sets up in his novel. What does faith look like? Does it step on the icon, or does it remain true at whatever cost to itself, to others?

Fortunately, this is not the sort of decision we are faced with every day, but it is the sort of decision we are all faced with. At some point we must decide, beyond any rationalization, any hope of salvation, groping in the dark, where we will step.

Coming out for me was more a decision than a declaration or confession. I could choose my family who loved me, the faith that had been handed down to me for generations, like a quilt or my eye color. Or I could choose what I had come to believe was true — that I was queer, that I could not change it, that trying to change it was leading me to spiritual and, very likely, physical death. And I chose. I leapt. I do not know if it was a leap into salvation, or if I left salvation crumbling behind me.

Of course, I believe I made the right choice, that my current stability and love of life bear that out. But that's just the point — when I jumped, I jumped away from “right.” Now I live in between right and wrong, bivouacing on the edge of the desert at night, waiting for a God who may or may not come. I have not chosen the landing so much as the leap itself. I have not landed yet. Perhaps I never will.

Carolyn E. M. Gibney

Editor

First day of Autumn, 2013

## Psalm for Peace and Beatitude

Dawn, still as sleep. Long hours & long shadows  
Rest by the scratched open sky.  
It bleeds a while & goes blue.

This graveyard, this sunlight  
Severs the earth from the sky.  
Under these tablets these rows of stone teeth  
How do they rest? in pieces or peace?

The only way to praise your beauty  
Is to burst into flames.

The winter fields are fire.

*Steven Fregeau*

## Waiting

A bell clangs, close to my head. Still half unconscious, I slap the top of my alarm clock 'til the ringing stops. Sleep recedes, and the last vestiges of my dreams float just beyond memory; I sense them like shadows, like fairytale wolves. I surface slowly from my reverie and before opening my eyes, I am back home in Guyana. The house whispers secrets, warm and citrus, into my ear. The wooden walls and floors creak and stretch. Below: the sounds of family, of movement, of clinking china and dogs barking in the distance.

Blinking into my awake state, I remember that I no longer begin my days in that familiar bed. Here in this new room, this small London room, the hairs on my forearm tighten in the chill November air. My mouth is dry, and the blue blanket coarse against my hand. Beyond the blanket there is winter. And beyond the worn green curtains; sunshine the color of rancid milk. I should leave my bed, but instead I pull the blankets tighter and duck my head into the musty warmth.

In one hour's time I will be standing by the church. Standing waiting. For him. For Aloysius Ferdinand Gibson. We shared our childhoods: me and Robert, and Mrs. Gibson's son, Aloysius, thrown together when his mother came to work in our family store. But it was really him and Robert; their rough and tumble ways made them fast friends, they got into fights with other boys and fell out of trees, they went fishing in the creek while I stayed with a book under the breadfruit tree.

But the passing of the years and the crossing of the Atlantic changed us. Nowadays I call him 'Lou', though my twin, Robert, hates this. Says it sounds like a little girl's name. Robert calls him 'Al'. When Lou met us from the ship he was kind, and I was glad to have a friend here. Away from everything we knew, me and Lou found a friendship like we'd never had, back home. Nowadays I can talk more easily to him than I can to my own brother.

The distance from bed to fireplace takes three long strides. I turn the knob and strike a match, holding it 'til the flame catches the jet of gas with a whoosh. I take my shirt, my socks, my underpants and hang them on the back of the chair next to the fire, close enough to warm but not to burn. Would God send us to burn? I worry that he would, but Lou doesn't think a good God would punish us so.

I make and pour my tea; the curve of the cup sits well in my palms and heats my fingers as I walk to the bay window. Now, especially in this last month, he is where my mind goes to in repose. He fills the spaces between my thoughts; his presence expands and pushes out other thoughts, other people, even prayers.

Outside, the branches of the chestnut trees have lost their leaves. I look through their dark skeletons to other boarding houses across the road. Maybe there are other men, keeping company with hot cups of tea — each of us in our single rooms. Sometimes I wonder why we left the warmth back home to come here. But then, I think about Lou and a smile forms on my lips.

I pull his photograph from my copy of ‘The Lonely Londoners’ and I look at him. He is perfect. While I sip hot tea, Jesus looks down reproachfully from the wooden crucifix above my bed. Yet still we sin, Lou and me, in the darkness of the night, after we’ve had a little rum to warm us and to help us forget Jesus’ eyes, asking “how could you?” I wonder where it will end, and pray for an answer. But when Lou runs his strong hands down my spine and pushes his clipped fingernails into my flesh, I remember all that is good in this world.

The clock tells me it’s half past nine, time to step outside. I hurry down the stairs and out on to the streets, past the tall, white houses. I cross the park in the confessional grey light of Sunday morning, crunching through brown leaves, white-edged and brittle with frost.

Shortly before ten o’clock we will greet each other, outside St Bridget’s church. If Lou is late, I will stamp the soles of my good black shoes. I’ll clap my hands together and find heat in the slap of one gloved hand against the other. This city can chill a man’s body, right through his overcoat, through his shirt and his skin and on into his blood.

Outside the church, parishioners start to arrive. Mrs. Brady and her five children walk past; we see each other every week and the mother smiles at me, while the children whisper and point. Next a young West Indian chap from the Post Office strides towards me whistling a Calypso tune. I can see his breath when he whistles; he nods when he sees me.

My eyes water with watching for Lou. And finally, finally there he is. The shape and height of him reassures me; his wide pants, long jacket, his hat just so.

His smile is in his eyes, and the creases around his eyes and then his smile is in my eyes. And now I am mesmerized by his smile, and can’t see anything else around him. Not the tall church spire in front of me or the clammy red brick

houses on the street. Not the dry leaves skittering in a sudden gust of wind. Just him. Just Lou.

As he approaches, I recall the warmth of him, the smell of his skin, and I forget the cold air insinuating itself under my collar. If I were a girl, he'd put his arm through mine and pull me close, maybe kiss me on the cheek. But I'm a man, so I take off my glove to clasp and shake his bare hand. The warmth of his palm against mine speeds my heartbeat, and looking into his steady brown eyes, I know that this cannot be a sin.

*Clare Ramsaran*



## Jesus Nazarene

Acrylic

*Steven Fregeau*

## July Was a Herald of It

I wonder if the dog knew  
she was drinking,

weaving through piles  
of mail and clothes.

I remember the color  
of that carpet

at the top of the stairs: tan,  
dirty tan, lighter than I imagine, perhaps

the way I remember it is  
disorder, just staring out a window,

no line I can follow but  
one through the house, past

my mother sunk in the green couch  
and through the bedroom; the bodily pull away.

## Pantry

The walls might have been yellow, but I know I wrote on them once in pencil.  
The door was never closed; I wrote something on the back.

The doorknob was clear glass, a garish diamond.  
I think I wrote something angry, and wanted to erase it but didn't.  
As far as I know, no one's found it yet; no one moves anything.  
The boxes gathered there collapsed slowly.

The unused plates on the high shelves trembled.  
They were waiting for something to make them fall.  
Nothing ever did, but one day a can exploded.  
The rusty splatters might still be there, behind the door.

Who knows how old some things in there still are.  
I tried putting things where they belonged.  
Cans with cans, pasta on pasta, cereal by cereal.

I saw the floor once, light tan wood.  
No arrangement lasted long.  
Food piled on top of food until it probably rotted.

On a dim blue morning somewhere else I pulled everything off the shelves.  
I finally closed the door.

Maybe I wrote it in pen, charcoal.

*Savannah Grant*

# The Fall

Sunday, and six feet above,  
prayer whirls  
to a tatter in ceiling-fanned air,

while this book of days  
in our laps falls  
open and apart, the cross

country atlas consulted  
to scraps, whose lines  
we learn by rote. By windows

leaves curled  
in the peel and burn  
of the calendar year

tear away from us  
in countless colors, like cars.  
They pass like days. And I savor

his deserting  
like aftertaste. I scrapbook  
his patterns of departure. I pray

to a dial tone sky.  
This time I will take  
wild weather for atlas,

I am taking November's advice.  
I undress,  
walk out

into ardor, arms wide  
as a Y, my big yes  
to elements, stripped to my brown

and umbrellaless.

*Jerome Murphy*

## Cucamonga Valley

where beaten flesh kneels before the quiet cross and  
only sleep can overpower the heated scent of cow shit  
being blown in fury by the San Pedro winds.

    imaginary train whistles in the distance  
    the passengers do not hold  
    boarding tickets.

migrants walk the railroads;  
their arid throats close shut as they  
finger Califaztlan grapevines,  
their children sit on dirt mounds  
making crowns of passing tumble weeds.

*Christopher Soto*

## Anniversary 40

Mine is basal cell, yours squamous,  
neither one fatal, or even serious,  
but still the cancer chasm yawns.  
Cut, pulled and stitched,  
we totter at its edge.  
Now always the sun block, sometimes  
the white lotion named Efudex:  
home chemotherapy that first turns  
the lesions red and sore,  
then dry and harmless  
as they fall away.

Though always tired in our bedroom  
lit only by soundless late night TV,  
we do this for each other:  
apply it gently on our foreheads,  
shoulders, the backs of our hands,  
our fingers searching, finding  
the raised edges, small bumps,  
rubbing it in with steady, circular motion,  
rubbing, carefully, before sleep.

*Carol Gloor*

## Small Talk

Had she seen him sooner, Mrs. Goodman could have pretended a sudden fascination with the graves of revolutionary war heroes dug into the hillocks of Boston Common.

“Hello, Mrs. Goodman,” Peter said.

“Pee-ter,” she answered, as if the name consisted of two separate words. It was the first time he had ever heard her speak his name.

“Yes,” he confirmed. “It’s me. In the flesh.”

Her lips formed a soft “o,” small and round as a bubble. She had stopped in their tracks, which made it impossible to start walking again without saying more.

“You’ve heard about Christopher?” Mrs. Goodman asked.

“I’ve heard.”

“I know he meant a great deal to you,” she allowed.

The blazing fuck-you — all the hot pent fury he had saved up during the six years since Christopher had left him to become a priest — deserted him.

“Thank you,” he said.

The new Ritz tower threw a four o’clock shadow on the stone crypt lettered with names like Adams and Cabot and Lowell. No one had been buried here in a hundred fifty years. The wrought iron fence looked like a good place to pike the decapitated head of one’s enemies.

They stared at each other frankly. Mrs. Goodman wore a loose raincoat. A plastic conference identification tag bobbed from a shoelace around her neck. A brooch crucifix was pinned to her lapel. She used to wear her hair up because she didn’t like it in her face, but today it was down made her look softer and Peter was glad to think — fatter.

Peter’s hurry abandoned him. He almost savored the oddness of this unscripted moment, like a taste he wasn’t yet sure he enjoyed, or perhaps had not yet recognized for what it was.

He stepped slightly to the side, so he and Mrs. Goodman no longer had to look directly at one another, and they focused instead on Mrs. Goodman's Boston terrier, which moved back and forth like a school of fish, as if he had absorbed all Peter's hurry and fury and agitation. Every once in a while, the terrier darted to the end of the leash, pulling on Mrs. Goodman's wrist and shoulder, so her whole body jerks like a hanged man.

Peter refused to believe Mrs. Goodman had played the least role in Christopher's decision to forsake their relationship for the seminary. He had determined instead that the impulse most likely marked the onset of an AIDS-induced dementia. It had never occurred to him faith could be stronger than love, which was tangible. Or at least more tangible.

Mrs. Goodman, on the other hand, immediately credited her unstinting prayer for her son's release from Satan's clutches. Her work on earth done, she could die peacefully. That the new drugs prolonged Christopher survival was just a bonus.

Peter had hoped and prayed (yes, prayed!) that the drugs' effectiveness would cause Christopher to reconsider, but if anything, the improvement had seemed a matter of indifference to him. In this, mother and son had been alike: indifferent to the life of the flesh.

The terrier's leash wrapped around Peter's ankle. Instinctively, he leaned down to pet the dog. Mrs. Goodman flinched.

"Are you sick?" she asked.

"Sick?"

"Sick," she repeated with a kind of urgency.

"Oh. No, not me."

"That's good," she said. "I'm glad."

She meant it. Really. But Peter remembered the day she had accused him of poisoning her son. She had described Church teaching, and her uneasiness with their lifestyle and her disgust at seeing two men kiss.

"You can't even look each other in the eye when you make love," she had said. "I can't hold back any longer from you the truth."

It was, she had insisted, an act of love. To do otherwise would be a failure of duty, a failure of motherhood. She had been sure Peter would understand. Peter used to wonder what it was like to have such certainty. Now he saw it as a double-edged sword. In those days, Mrs. Goodman must regularly have fallen short of what she knew to be right and good and disappointed herself. Peter had always been less likely to condemn himself, because he didn't know the answers. And yet, strangely, he had not been immune to disappointment himself. Even with tempered expectations. For months, he had mocked and belittled Christopher and his God, accusing him of entering the priesthood for the healthcare, of seeking a miracle, of seeking forgiveness for what was no sin, of kissing up to the big fairy in the sky so he could play dress-up, make pretend, and wear Prada shoes.

“All this smoke and mirrors,” he had said, “all this misdirection don't you think your all-knowing God's going to catch on to the ruse?”

Christopher had only more thoroughly devoted himself to silence and study, infuriatingly unresponsive but for a kind look or a stroke of the hand, which gestures only scalded.

Now Peter hoped Mrs. Goodman knew nothing of these humiliating exchanges.

“What are you doing here in the city, Mrs. Goodman?” Peter asked bluntly. “Don't you live out in Watertown?”

“Oh, I'm just cutting through, avoiding the crowds from the swan boats and all the couples hand in hand.”

“Coming from the NALM convention and headed over to my book group at the New England Medical,” she said.

“NALM?”

“National Association for Lay Ministry. Which reminds me, I have to call Father Chokwu to tell him I am coming over later. He's Nigerian.”

She quickly ticked through the lists she made to keep herself occupied: the who died, who had a baby, who was sick. Mrs. Goodman had always prided herself on being the first to buy a card, recognize an occasion.

“I keep hundreds of them filed in my apartment, all blank, all requiring me to come up my own words,” she confessed cheerfully. “I enjoy the challenge.”

Peter desperately wanted to wrap breed's leash around her neck and squeeze tight. He wanted to flee. He wanted to shock her with some indelicate sexual escapade involving her son. More than anything, he didn't want to appear small. Yet Mrs. Goodman's very existence, the fact that she had not died a horrible, unpleasant death in the six years since Christopher left him, seemed unfair and incomprehensible, the very type of phenomenon that confirmed his lack of faith in a just God.

This is just resentment, he thought, nothing more, and I'd be ashamed if I let her see it, which would give Mrs. Goodman a strange and unexpected victory.

Mrs. Goodman seemed blissfully unaware of his discomfort. She had found a familiar rut of conversation, an easy lope of words. She could go on like that for hours, happy to speak for the both of them.

But if Peter listened closely, he detected the slightest redeeming catch in her voice, as if Mrs. Goodman were someone who was used to being cut off and shut down, but the authority to which she usually submitted was not immediately present, expected but not yet here.

*Scott David*

## **I'm trying so hard to write about madness:**

tell me about social experiments  
like Theta Zeta Delta and how  
you understand that Jess has to  
“act a certain way” because  
you're going to act like a prophet  
and prophets don't wear shoes  
but they might yell MALCOLM X  
at a football game because today  
is the day our losing team will finally  
win tell me you need my leather jacket  
and maybe the sunglasses are too much  
because you need to remain incognito  
under your warm hat even though  
it's so hot out today take your pants off  
and wander around in public asking  
if there are recording devices  
in this room while I hurriedly strip  
asking you to come back, take my pants,  
here, put my pants on and your legs  
are covered in hateful writing be  
at a surprise party and be afraid  
because even though the magnets glow,  
the lights are dark and it's 2012  
and when someone flicks a lighter  
you tell them the change is too much  
talking about Mayan predictions  
and why the fuck does there have to be  
an “apocalypse” party tonight?

*Grace Molloy*

## My Son Covers His Ears in Church

*Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.* Mark 10:15

He loves music more than any three-year-old I know  
treasures his own guitar, harmonica, even a banjo  
he once took to a bluegrass concert to pick right along,  
just about joining the band when they covered Steve Earle.  
So it could not have been the music itself this morning  
that made him cover his ears, cower in the pew,  
ask to go outside when they finished the song.  
Maybe he picked up on the lyrics' sad suggestion  
All I had to offer Him was brokenness and strife  
and wanted none of it, or maybe he thought the music  
too loud, nearly shrill, for such a small space.  
But more than likely he was just tired of sitting still,  
surrounded by solemn ritual, and simply wanted  
to go outside. Whatever his reason, I took him,  
almost covering my ears, as well, to block such sounds  
as insulted my soul, and we entered a kingdom  
at the edge of a dirt road where we played an hour  
until we stopped to rest in the shade,  
waiting for those inside to return.

## Footnote to Genesis 3:24

It wasn't long  
after the Fall  
that the snake  
scraped itself  
against a pine  
and shed its skin,  
which a flycatcher  
found and used  
to line her nest,  
to make herself  
a home.

*Christopher Martin*

## Contributors

**Scott David** has published novels, a memoir, a guide to wine and cocktails, and numerous short stories under various pseudonyms, most recently in *Evening Street Review*, *Apple Valley Review*, *Ampersand Review*, *Entasis*, *Ray's Roadhouse Review*, and *Fiction Fix*. He lives in Boston and Provincetown, Massachusetts.

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**Carol Gloor** is a semi-retired attorney who has written poetry for 40 years. Her work has appeared in many print and online journals, including *Christian Century* and *Slant*. Her poetry chapbook, *Assisted Living*, was published in March, 2013, by Finishing Line Press. She has work upcoming in the online journal *Vineyards* and in the print journal *Earth's Daughters*. She is a member of the Chicago poetry collective, the Egg Money Poets.

**Savannah Grant** is a poet and artist in her senior year at Smith College. She helped to compile this issue, acting as *the St. Sebastian Review's* first poet in residence. She lives in Northampton, MA.

**Christopher Martin** is the author of the poetry chapbook *A Conference of Birds* (New Native Press, 2012). His writing has appeared in *Shambhala Sun*, *Ruminate Magazine*, *Thrush Poetry Journal*, *Drafthorse*, *Buddhist Poetry Review*, *The Southern Poetry Anthology*, and elsewhere. His poem "Marcescence," published as a broadside by Thrush Press in October 2012, was nominated for a Pushcart Prize. The founding editor of *Flycatcher* and a contributing editor at *New Southerner*, Chris lives with his wife and their two young children in the northwest Georgia piedmont. You can find him online at [www.christopher-martin.net](http://www.christopher-martin.net).

**Grace Molloy** is a senior at Kenyon College in Gambier, OH studying Comparative Literature and working as an intern for *The Kenyon Review*. Her poetry has previously been featured in *The Volta: Evening Will Come* and *Persimmons*, on the "Kenyon Credenza" radio show, and *The Kenyon Review* tumblr. Her favorite color used to be lime green but now is aqua.

**Jerome Murphy** received an MFA from New York University, where he currently acts as Program Administrator at The Creative Writing Program. He assisted Diane Middlebrook in researching *Her Husband: Hughes and Plath, a Marriage*. His reviews have appeared in the column *Outwords*, which he authored for *Next Magazine* from 2010-2011, and in *The Brooklyn Rail*. You can read his critical writing at: <http://www.lambdaliterary.org/reviews/06/15/sacrilegion-by-l-lamar-wilson/>

**Clare Ramsaran** was born in London, England, and now lives in San Francisco. She started her MFA in Creative Writing at the University of San Francisco in Fall 2013. She has had her writing published in anthologies, *The Bay Area Poet's Quarterly Review* and *Quill and Parchment*, amongst others. <http://clareramsaran.blogspot.com/2011/04/cv-links.html>

**Christopher Soto** is a queer latino poet from Southern California who published his first chapbook *How to Eat Glass* with Still Life Press in 2012. He is currently an MFA: Poetry candidate at NYU.