



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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Editor's Note

Recently, my alma mater has been embroiled in a public struggle over LGBTQ rights and where they fit into an Evangelical Christian context. In early July, Gordon College's President, D. Michael Lindsay, [signed a letter to President Obama](#), asking for an exemption for religious groups from a then-forthcoming executive order that would mandate workplace protections for LGBTQ individuals. Queer rights organizations in Boston got wind of this, and the backlash has resulted in several local organizations cutting ties with the college.

As of this writing, Gordon has held its ground in relation to any policy changes, [publishing numerous statements](#) defending its position. One of the most recent was an [essay](#) written by a professor of Biblical studies that was emailed to current students; it goes verse by verse, through all those verses we've heard so many times, explaining why the college still holds to its traditional understanding of the text.

Perhaps because I'm a masochist, I read the essay. And if you take it at face value — an exegesis of very specific texts scattered throughout the old and new testaments — it can be quite convincing. Not least because its author takes pains to assert that, whatever she may believe, the church has been wrong to treat queers the way it has.

I couldn't put my finger on why I found this essay both so frustrating and so compelling, but eventually, it occurred to me. What's at stake here is the question of truth: what it is, and how we find it.

The assumption underlying this well-thought-out essay (and, in turn, much Evangelical thought on the matter of queerness) seems to be that using critical and rigorous exegesis on Biblical texts is the only way one can arrive at unalloyed truth. The truth is hidden deeply in the words; we must only take out our scalpels, our pins, and find it.

Granted, there are worse assumptions on which to ground the salvation of one's soul (*see also*: Fred Phelps, The Heaven's Gate Cult, etc.). But still this assumption seems unjustified, and in this situation proves itself to be so, because it leads to conclusions that are untenable. The organizations this professor praises as having the most correct exegesis are also those that advocate reparative therapy — the idea that, with prayer and sacrifice, we queers can be un-queered. This is simply not the case, as too many of us know too well — and as psychology, sociology, and a host of other empirically based disciplines have come to agree.

Where does that leave us? In all honesty, I have no idea. And it has taken me a long time to come to that unknowing. I admit there is a silence that buffers what I am capable of grasping when it comes to truth, that forces me to confess my ignorance, a fundamental epistemological lack. This perhaps is why the appeal of exegesis is so strong; if we can know the truth, we needn't face that penetrating silence. Truth can become an idol.

So we wait for the sign, the wonder. We wait in hope, and fear, with dread and dancing, sacrificing certainty as a burnt offering to God, wherever and whoever she turns out to be.

Carolyn E. M. Gibney
Editor
First Day of Autumn, 2014

The Light Under the Door

Patterned pillars stipulate
Solomonic solidity,
offering probity through propriety.

Flying buttresses cast out mass
and implore veneration.

The spiraled view unearthing
a glimpse of divinity:

Works built for respect, and reverence, and revelation.
And wonder.

Yes, it's wonder most potent,
ringing above from the carillon
and within cryptic cadence,
not rampant ecstasy,
but Jobian marvel,
with no pillars, nor abutments, nor towers;
no bricks, no stone, no tar, no mortar.

Kevin Tobia

Checkpoint: Brest: USSR, 1980

(for Arvo Pärt)

I think of him, of them,
he and his wife, Nora

she, the *tintinnabuli* to his
cantus firmus, perhaps

crouched in the snow,
seven bags atumble, hearts in their

record player,
as he, the composer,

had shown them score
after tightly notated score

and, pulling their cold guns across
their backs, how the soldiers had

asked to hear it, this *Cantus*,
that *Missa*, and how Nora had

carefully unpacked the
music-making machine,

imparting prayers not aloud,
that there, their mechanized

hearts might know what it was
to sing again, to feel sound transform

spirit, hushed snow a symphony
all its own about them.

Brian F. McCabe

The Urn

It is this heavenly tale, that the child in one could wish for, that keeps me awake tonight, on the eve of my sixtieth year, fearing death and wishing for grace, not knowing what either is, or even if either is, though the unbreathing stillness of bodies has me fairly convinced of the former, and of the latter I have seen so little as to doubt what I have seen as aberrant, some twist in the air and light that, so full of desire for the magic of exemption, I have deluded myself, half knowing I lied, half believing my own white lie. But by sixty I've come to believe that the only grace is the goodness of the rational mind, and the only evil the old instinctive animal brain, the knob of the cerebellum, seeking its own satisfactions of food and sex and selfhood, the ultimate isolate one, that yet does not understand that we are together in this flowing, amazing hologram, with or without a creator that may or may not care; that, come alive, we have every right to judge the nature of existence, for, however arrived at, our brains are analytic, not made to hunker down in obeisance to riddling gods, nor to any phantom that hides in a cloud of unknowing. For we have one another and have courage and the hope of courage and the practice of courage, to help us, and, when the wind is calm, and the waters lean down for the moon, we have lonely senses to share till at last our time has run out. Now, as I think in the night, somewhat afraid of the day that will see me another year older and that much closer to death, I mark the speed of time that has seen me, a moment ago, a child walking home from school, or a man going off to harm's way, or this or that or the other; and think of these things that we have, of others and courage and love, of human intelligence used as it plainly was meant to be used, and I think that I'll sleep and awaken less anxious than I was considering a heavenly tale, for in the realist reality, the closest thing to the truth, there is finally a peace of mind that is a grace in a sweet surrender. It is the heavenly tale that the child in one should wish for. *It* will allow me to sleep in the night of my sixtieth year.

E. M. Schorb

Lucky

The girl with the red hair tells us she was afraid to come out to her mother. It's National Coming Out Day, and we are telling stories. The tiny blonde girl with the long ponytail is still crying from having shared hers. When she told her mother, the woman tried to beat her. Later that night, when the father took her to a hotel room in order to keep her safe, her mother called to inform the two that she had painted their linoleum floor with blood. They rushed home to find her sprawled out on the kitchen tile, wrists cut open like skinned fish from the market.

This girl though, the one with the short red hair, is telling us she was afraid for an entirely different reason. "I knew my mom would be embarrassingly supportive," she says, and our eyebrows furrow in mutual confusion. "Ever since I came out, she's stopped buying the normal kind of goldfish. You know, the snack? Now she just buys the rainbow ones."

Some people in the room are genuinely amused. I choke out a hiccup of a laugh, while my eyes dart nervously to the girl with the blonde ponytail. She is still staring at her jeans, still trying to stop the influx of tears.

Next, we hear from a straight ally. I am sure she is going to share with us a story about a friend. A cousin, a parent, a friend of a friend, but somehow it's about her. "In high school, everyone thought I was gay. No matter how many times I told them I was straight, they insisted I was a lesbian because I never had a boyfriend. One day I just shouted, 'I'm not gay!' until they finally believed I was straight. You have no idea how frustrating it was."

My chin skims the floor. I want to crawl inside this girl's head, examine her decision making, her level of basic comprehension, ask her if she knows where she is and who she's sitting with, because she looks around the room with a smile as big as her ignorance and says, "See? Straight people have their stories, too!"

The blonde girl with the long ponytail has stopped crying. Her head does not move, but I can see her stare ascending, red rimmed and ready to burn.

I am struck with a memory so powerful that I have to look away. From the blonde girl, from the ally, from the girl with the short red hair.

Suddenly, I am two years ago. I am two years ago and seven days, seven days after having come out to a friend. A week after my unveiling she calls me. "So I've been doing some thinking, and it looks like I'm a lesbian."

I am surprised, but mainly by the tone of her voice. There is no tremor, no intake of breath; she sounds almost bored. "Are you okay?" I ask.

"Oh yeah, I'm fine," she tells me. "The only disappointment was my parents' reaction."

Now I am nervous, more nervous than she sounds. I think back to the day I came out. Maine. Winter. Snow up to the door. My body brimming with Xanax after my third panic attack of the day. The mental image of my girlfriend — no, stop it, *ex-girlfriend* — under the hot Arizona sun. All of these things biting at my innards as the words spill out. The Reverend, my father. The Pastor's Wife, my mother. The church right across the street. All three of us, parked in the parsonage living room. Every bitter huff, brittle laugh, a sneer that turns sour in the mouth and stains the tongue.

"Oh God," I say. "What happened?"

There is a sigh, forlorn and full of disconnect. "They didn't even care. I mean, they were both so chill about it. No yelling, no questioning. It was just so anti-climatic. It wasn't, you know . . . *exciting*."

Someone is staring at me. No, a room full of people. I am back at this meeting, this GSA. I am the only one who hasn't spoken and now they are waiting. I open my mouth, feel my tongue curl into my throat. Maine. Pine trees. Snow you can never shake off, thick and fast like a fist.

I look to the girl with the blonde ponytail. She is looking at the wall farthest from our table. She is looking at nothing and everything. "I don't really have a story," I say.

The room nods in self-righteous understanding. You can hear their thoughts from the other side of the school. *Poor thing's just hurting. Yes, yes, we understand. The wound must be too fresh. There is no other explanation.*

Sometimes, late at night, I wonder if they ever got it out, the girl with the blonde ponytail and her father. All that blood. Who scrubbed at the grout, toothbrush and peroxide in hand? Where was the mother? The psych ward, her bedroom, a chapel maybe all three.

I wonder if they ever got it out, and consider myself lucky.

Diana Clark

A Row of Words at the Top

the gist of one's center
slightly to left of solar plexus ganglia
in pit of stomach
squeezing earlobe to relieve
tedious *te deum* tinnitus

the will to apprehend
a direct unmediated
meeting with a gnostic savior

Put first two phalanges into His gaping side
finger into each palm's nozzle
intussuscepted near the thenar

and missing church not attending
one sunny Sunday
not knowing what day it is, what year, who's
President

under awning wracked by longing
incapable of removing volition for passive
receptiveness

barred from partaking
due to impious irreverence

Versicles

Instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree
- Isaiah 55:13

driving rattling tetrahedron canister
of consecrated Hosts
over inter-state lines, owing to mid-West priest shortage

stopped by state trooper
blouson jodhpurs, size 13 boot

stubbed toe on flower? getting out, darn sandals

a couple of thousand Christ-bodies in back seat,
all identical
as if seeing The Seamless Garment through a fly's eye

Beelzebub tentacles wizening at effulgence

flat tire re-inflating without human intervention

My driver's license shows talcum powder mortal coil

Jeffrey Jullich

metarrhythmisis

i.

When we were four or five years old Seth McHenry [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] talked me into getting under the covers with him in his bed
[REDACTED] He kissed me on the lips, [REDACTED] and we rubbed them
against each other.

[REDACTED]

What did surprise me was his father pulling the covers off of us and finding us together
[REDACTED] Seth holding a girl doll, me holding a boy doll.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Five or six years later I told my mother all about it in the driveway of our house, in her
darkened station wagon. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

I bring this up because it was what I was thinking about as I stood in church singing
"Away in the Manger" on Christmas Eve, 1997, and Seth McHenry was across the aisle, one pew
back, standing with the girl he had been dating for over a year.

*Be near me, Lord Jesus,
I ask Thee to stay
Close by me forever,
and love me, I pray.
Bless all the dear children in thy tender care,
And fit us for heaven, to live with Thee there.*

It was about fifteen minutes after I had come out to my sister Kari and her fiance.

they were late getting into Galesburg on Christmas Eve. I hung back at the house to wait for them and then ride with them to Grandma and Grandpa's church for Christmas service.

We were bundled up in our coats, just about to head out the kitchen door, when I stopped them.

"There's something I need to tell you."

I looked away, at the fridge, at the old wooden clock on the wall, at the new island standing in the middle of the room, something Mom had always wanted but for some reason waited years to get. I was leaning against the counter I used to sit on so Mom could tie my shoes when her belly was full with the pregnancy of my future brother Kirk. I had always been a child in this house, and now I was going to have to start doing the things that would make me become a man. Before I could begin living my life the way I had always wanted to live it, I was going to have to get used to telling people about myself.

*Hark the herald angels sing
Glory to the newborn King!
Peace on earth and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled*

[REDACTED]

"I'm a—," [REDACTED]

"You're a what?" [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Maybe this wasn't a good idea
after all.

[REDACTED] what letter it begins with?"

[REDACTED] B [REDACTED]

"You're a bastard?" [REDACTED]

"If I am, you are!"

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] She was trying to come up with more funny B words.

[REDACTED] bisexual. [REDACTED]

It is so fucking, unnecessarily difficult to come out to people in the first place, then add
that you're bisexual, and they freak the fuck out.

[REDACTED]

How many people have you told?

Just you, and [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] and some [REDACTED]

Oh God! Why'd you tell [REDACTED] ?!

Hyperventilating

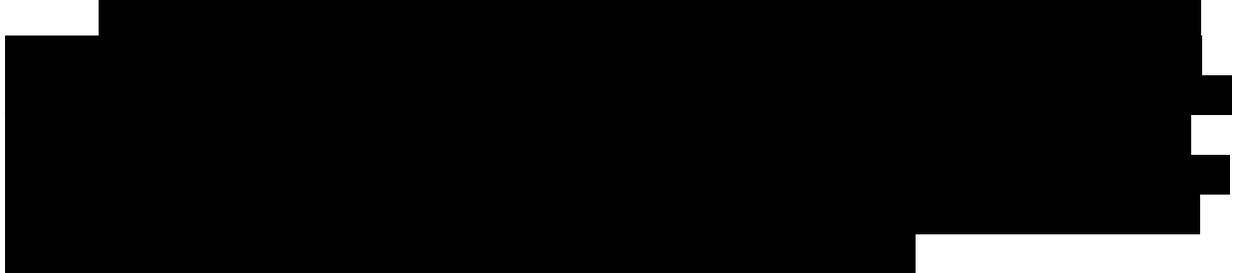
Have you told Kristi yet?

No!

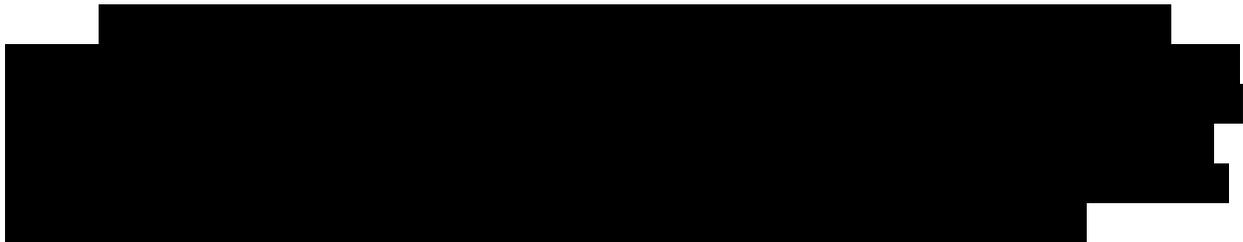
Good. Of course if you told her I would know by now. Ha ha!

Honey, we're running late for church. How about you, me and Keith go out to the farmhouse and have some beers later. I think we're going to need some drinks to discuss this!

*Was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay;
In fields where they lay, keeping their sheep,
On a cold winter's night that was so deep:
Refrain Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, Nowell,
Born is the King of Israel.*



*No more let sins and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make His blessings flow
Far as the curse is found,
Far as the curse is found,
Far as, far as, the curse is found.*



[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

*He rules the world with truth and grace,
And makes the nations prove
The glories of His righteousness,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders, wonders, of His love.*

Seth took the Eucharist. He must have been confirmed at his church. Is it respectful to take the Eucharist, even if you're not in the same denomination? I've been to Kristi's ex-husband's Catholic church before, and I took the Eucharist. My sister Kali is the only one in my family who is not confirmed. When she goes up to the preacher, she crosses her arms across her chest and bows. Why does it even matter? Can't she just say she's 'down with Yeshua,' eat the little wafer and drink the grape juice anyway?

I guess I kind of wanted Seth to not take the Eucharist. Like that would be our unspoken protest against the Church's **treatment of gays**. I wanted to make a stand, to be able to say, "Thanks, but no thanks!" maybe flip over the bread tray. It would have been a lot easier if Seth was onboard with me. *Just don't take the fucking wafer, Seth! Read my mind, dumbass! Quit pretending you don't have gay telepathy! We'll run out of here arm and arm, even though we're not in love with each other. But, gay rights!*

Had he even made up his mind on all the gay stuff, like I had? Was his strategy to date a girl and just hope that would make him straight? Was he having the same nightly fights with himself in the mirror that I was? What was going on with him? What the hell was going on with me? If I'd just kept my mouth shut that could be some girl and me, sharing the same hymnal, laughing to each other over how to pronounce "myrrh," my grandfather and parents looking on with pride in their eyes.

I wanted that; I really did. I wanted them to look on with pride in their eyes. I wanted to look like Seth and Patty did, like I was carrying on this great big long tradition and I was just like everybody else. But the more I thought about it, I would rather have a man standing there with me; one of the many, many boys I had been attracted to and inadvertently, uncontrollably fallen in love with over the years. As much as I wanted to assimilate and be accepted into normality, I had this grave feeling that it would feel a million times better to be standing there with my boyfriend and have that be the acceptable thing to do.

O come, let us adore Him,

O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him,

[REDACTED]

Without going into too many details I told her I had already "had an experience" with another boy during the summer.

The usual questions were asked.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

She wanted to be there when I told Mom and Dad.

[REDACTED] maybe, just maybe
—and hear me out—maybe this was something I needed to do alone.

[REDACTED]

What I needed her and Keith for were support for *after* the meeting.

It's a multistep process.

[REDACTED]

you have a good shot with Mom.

[REDACTED]

Dad is the wild card."

[REDACTED]

"Of course there is another wild card," [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

"Kenton."

[REDACTED]

"Don't you think that's the kind of conversation we should have in person?"

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] He'll probably have some things to say to you about it."

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Believe it or not, he and I have had many discussions over this subject."

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] stuck her cigarette into one of the ashtray's grooves [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] "I'm going to need another beer if we're going to talk about this."

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] had an intense relationship with his cheerleading coach."

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] what you didn't know is that Daniel is the one who talked Kent into quitting the football team in the first place."

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] fucking manipulated [REDACTED] fucked with his head so bad [REDACTED]

hating Mom and Dad. [REDACTED] ready to cut the whole family off [REDACTED] never speak to us again. That's how fucking crazy Daniel is."

[REDACTED] tried to convince Kent he was gay.

[REDACTED] Do you understand how a person could do that?"

"That would take, like, a very conniving person."

[REDACTED] psychology is totally a hobby of mine."

[REDACTED] that sounds like he was just trying to be Kent's friend."

[REDACTED] sometimes it's hard to tell between someone who genuinely wants to help you, and someone who wants to control you.

[REDACTED] None of that was fucking true, Kyle! Do you see what he was doing?"

"Not really."

[REDACTED] crying.

[REDACTED] he packed up his things and moved back to Galesburg

[REDACTED] live in San Diego. He started anew.

Kent had called on Mom's birthday, two days before Christmas Eve. Before he got off the phone he asked to speak to me privately. He called me on the teen line and we had a little heart-to-heart. He was, of course, excited that I had started partying. He couldn't wait for when he'd be in Galesburg again, so he could get drunk with me.

[REDACTED] I'm not sure
Kent won't be here for Christmas. I talked to him two days ago. Before we got off the phone he
hinted he was going to do something to surprise us on Christmas."

[REDACTED]

*Fall on your knees!
O hear the angel voices!
O night divine,
O night when Christ was born;
O night divine,
O night, O night Divine.*

There was Neal Zilke and his wife [REDACTED]

I remember getting a funny feeling about Mr. Zilke. The same funny feeling I got about
Seth McHenry; [REDACTED]
something womanly about the way he talked. Like his sentences were curvy.
[REDACTED] I could
sense my grandfather's shoulders tensing up.

[REDACTED] my mother
finally spilled the beans about Mr. Zilke
[REDACTED] "caught with his pants down with a young boy."
What exactly did having his pants down mean? And how
young was the boy?

[REDACTED] he was never charged with anything [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] they all banded together and took care of him, totally in-
house." She rolled her eyes as she told me about this [REDACTED]

Whatever became of the boy he exposed himself to?

*What child is this, who, laid to rest,
On Mary's lap is sleeping?
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet,
While shepherds watch are keeping?
This, this is Christ the King,
Whom shepherds guard and angels sing:
Haste, haste to bring Him laud,
The babe, the son of Mary.*

Christmas Eve service at Coldbrook Church always ended with the entire congregation standing in a giant circle around the cathedral, singing "Silent Night."

Joseph and Mary were so poor
let them stay in the manger with the livestock. Mary and Joseph did not have the sex that created the life. The Holy Spirit did that.

after the fact to mythologize Jesus's birth. Makes perfect sense to me
more appealing to people
really backs up his word.

what if *he* made the whole thing up?
some people
were doing really well for themselves, but others were suffering needlessly.
make some adjustments in people's attitudes
teach
people sympathy, if not empathy. Why
would a rich person listen to him?

he must have been a very lonely guy, that Jesus,
extremely brave
the burden of bravery: being alone.

Even with all the friends I had acquired since I started partying,
There were some

serious things going on in my life that needing taking care of

Seth McHenry and Mr. Zilke from across the cathedral, I
Poor Zilke,
was a full-blown pedophile suppressed homosexual targeted a young boy
safer than trying to seduce a man. trapped into marriages
naturally shouldn't in the first place. Seth, making the same
mistakes we shouldn't have to anymore.
never turn out like that Daniel guy.

coming out what other
people thought do this for myself proud singing

*Silent night, Holy night
Son of God, love's pure light
Radiant beams from thy holy face
With the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord at thy birth
Jesus, Lord at thy birth.*

candles glowing in the darkened church faces, vaguely known
to me, something good, something outside myself

hot fluid tears
me gotten lightheaded circle of light surrounding
my mother was there to catch my

*Fall on your knees!
O hear the angel voices!
O night divine,
O night when Christ was born;
O night divine,
O night, O night Divine.*

popped his head in my bedroom door
"Kyle, your brother is here."

kyle mustain

Contributors

Diana Clark graduated from Lynchburg College of Lynchburg, VA in May of 2013, where she majored in English with emphasis on Creative Writing. Since having graduated, she's attended Skidmore College's New York State Summer Writers Institute, where she participated in their two-week program. She hopes to continue her education by earning an MFA in the near future. Until then, she's writing what she hopes will one day be her first published novel.

Jeffrey Jullich has two books published: *Thine Instead Thank* (Harry Tankoos Books, 2007) and *Portrait of Colon Dash Parenthesis* (Litmus Press, 2010). His poetry, criticism, and translations have been published in a variety of literary journals, including *Poetry*, *Fence* and *New American Writing*; poems of his were included in the online journal *EOAGH's Queering Language* web anthology; audio recordings and videos of him reading from his poetry are included on the Poetry Foundation website and YouTube. Videos of *American Lit: The Hawthorne-Melville Correspondence*, an opera whose libretto he wrote that was premiered by American Opera Projects, are also available on YouTube. He has poetry forthcoming in *Boog City* and *The Equalizer*.

From a diverse Catholic background, **Brian F. McCabe** is a Jesuit-educated doctoral candidate in English from Claremont Graduate University. His poetry focuses on contemporary issues including politics, social justice, spirituality in the modern world, and LGBTQA sexuality. His academic focus includes the study of poetry movements in America in the 20th and 21st centuries, and contemporary Irish literature about the Troubles.

Kyle Mustain is a 2012 graduate of the University of North Carolina, Wilmington's MFA program for Creative Writing. His essay, "The Opposite of Suicide," will appear in the winter issue of *The Writing Disorder*. He currently resides in his hometown of Galesburg, IL, working as a substitute teacher.

E. M. Schorb's prose poems have appeared in *The Carolina Quarterly*, *Quick Fiction*, *The Mississippi Review*, *Illuminations*, *The Chariton Review*, *Mudfish*, *The Asheville Poetry Review*, *Slant*, *The Potomac Review*, *Gulf Coast*, *The New Laurel Review*, *The North American Review*, and *Gargoyle*. A number of them are also forthcoming in *Main Street Rag*, *Poetry Salzburg Review*, and *Oxford Poetry*. Aldrich Press recently published a collection of his prose poems called *Manhattan Spleen*. In reviewing the book, X.J. Kennedy wrote: "Manhattan Spleen is mighty cool, I think, and if anyone writes better prose poems these days I don't know who they are."

Kevin Tobia is a graduate student in philosophy at the University of Oxford.

Brita Kate Zitin is a librarian who lives and works outside Chicago.