
Alchemist Review

2006

Editor

Denise H. Long

Review Panel

Nicole Overcash

Melissa Beran

Christina Butler

David Kim

Nick Roman

Elizabeth A. Nelson

Cover Design

Jeff Robinson



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**Reading is a means of thinking with
another person's mind; it forces
you to stretch your own.**

— Charles Scribner, Jr.

On behalf of all the contributors in this year's *Alchemist Review*,
we invite you to stretch your mind.

Table of Contents

Poetry

"Kissing Water"	1
"Snide"	2
Thomas Webb	
"The Old Barn"	3
Julia Gentile	
"avoiding what's under the kilt"	6
samBdavis	
"Sleater-Kinney Concert"	7
"Love Poem"	7
Meredith Dumyahn	
"Sunset Slides"	8
Jenifer Maseman	
"Ransom"	9
Patricia Hartsfield Martin	
"The Sound of Nothing"	10
Faisal Nsour	
"Interview"	11
Lola L. Lucas	
"Kill Shot"	12
Tyler McHaley	
"Soneto"	14
Carmaleta Williamson	
"Required Reading"	15
Shawna Mayer	
"Time Management"	16
Jennifer Morgan	
"Memory"	17
"And the Good Book Says"	18
Rajeane Gallagher	
"Andífrica"	19
Veronica Espina	
"An Age of an Orange"	20
Farah Salim	

Short Fiction

"The Watcher"	23
Rachel Wilkinson-Frye	
"Letters"	30
Mollie Buechel	
"When the Plague Comes to Europe"	32
Nick Roman	
"Labyrinth"	37
Jenifer Maseman	
"See Me"	39
Carol Manley	
"Solemn Stillness"	44
Edward Beekman Myers	
"Forbidden Love"	49
Joey Henry	
"Trinity"	51
Freddie Silva, Jr.	
"Tea and Comfort"	54
Elizabeth Nelson	

<i>Contributor Biographies</i>	60
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Kissing Water (For N--)

Thomas Webb

I practiced kissing
on the surface
of the water
in a full tub

steam rose to meet my mouth
like your breath

our noses touched in the reflection

my lips
warmed up

Snide

Thomas Webb

Standing

in the middle of the room
naked
fumbling for an album
that
will set the mood

with an erection

as hard as

solomon

She said

standing there
like that

I looked like I should be
in a picture in a Sex Ed Book

standing there
like that

Looking back at her

I pick
Bitches Brew

The Old Barn

Julia Gentile

On just the right day
it could be seen from the highway,
rising
from behind a grassy mound,
a lonely silhouette,
its dark peak
emerging tall,
pointing ever higher,
as if
hands
lifted in prayer.

Off the highway
down an unmarked road,
at the end of an ever narrowing path
soon to be
swallowed
under
rests the old barn
safely tucked in a sea of thistle.

Sounds of the highway,
though near,
fall oddly silent;
the quiet
broken only by the sound of a door,
somewhere,
banging open and shut,
as though by a sharp wind
neither felt nor heard.

Its face,
once a deep crimson
vivid only in memory,
bearded a silvery grey
but freckled with traces of scarlet
that whisper of its former glory
so never to be forgotten.

Windows
all around
full of old, wavy glass
and wondrous expectations
revealing nothing
but,
like mirrors,
one's own reflection.

Doors,
wide and grand,
slammed shut,
a iron shank bolted across
rusts in place
and, just to be sure,
a single timber
hanging by a mere thread of nail
falls against the locked portals,
embedding itself
to the
hard
black
earth
beneath.

Up high,
an opening,
hollow
but for a single rope
suspended
from somewhere,
something;
remnant of days of use and purpose,
falling
aimlessly
helplessly
only to vanish
into the thorny fortress
waiting patiently below.

A slender stream
snakes its way past
glimmering in purples, blues and reds
in peaceful unison.
And resting,
just beneath the silent, shimmering surface,
are grains of gold,
still visible,
still ripe,
out of reach
for birds
nowhere in sight.

Interview

Lola L. Lucas

The employment interviewer said, "Imagine
For a moment that you were born blind.
Describe blue to me."

I replied, "The sky is blue, or so I'm told;
Jazz is blue, the blues are bluer still
And Lenny Bruce, well, he was so blue
As to be off-color. There's ice blue
As opposed to red hot, so it's cool, cool indeed.

"Blue is a shape of raised dots
Under my fingers when I read of Bluebeard,
Little Boy Blue, or the bluebells of Scotland.
Blue is twilight and midnight; I gather
It has something to do with the Navy.

"But mostly, blue is what I'll be
If I don't get this job—there's kibble
To be put in the bowl for my seeing-eye dog."

Even so, they hired someone else.

Required Reading: A Metaphor

Shawna Mayer

Stuck behind a semi
in a no-passing zone,
four hours into
a twelve-hour drive.

The glare of the sun
gives me a headache
and the unfamiliar terrain
has me hopelessly lost.

The radio only plays slow songs.

There are people
who spend their lives in this place,
savoring every contour of the landscape,
and drawing shapes in the clouds.
Analyzing the artifice
some dead stranger
worked so hard to construct.

I know I don't belong here.
Nothing speaks to me.

They tell me
I'll come back to this place,
when I'm older,
I'll appreciate it.

I tell them
when I get where I am going,
I will build my own city.

Andifica

Veronica Espina

Between the Andes and the Pacific,
I raised this altar,
my shelter,
a refuge,
created with rocks of imagination and
a sacred mud of reality,
surrounded by an emotional state,
a way of being,
like a knife on my wrist,
full of colors, casitas on a hill,
and the beach.

It is what hurts and bleeds
what laughs and sings,
my lover and my mother,
Almendra and a father,
it is being South and blue,
being impalpable
yet required to carry a passport,
authorizing my cheek bones to play.

On this land,
I always am,
In this way I can only be,
Sur, azul, invisible,
Belonging, exiled, invincible.

The map never existed,
everyone of us got there by accident
and evolutionary guilt,
it recognizes us like a natural child,
this magical tour of being both,
ancient and modern,
illegitimate virgin,
Sudamericana.

An Age of An Orange

Farah Salim

Little droplets of orange scent
hold hands as they come together.
They are the weak:
the soft, the vulnerable culmination
of the underbelly,
slowly aging
under the rough,
outer warriors of the skin.
Some are dying;
they are peeling away,
succumbing to a
sinful, juicy, pleasure.
The orange knows no time.
It merely is:
a handful of
delight
manifested by
transient
drops of color
and light.

Letters

Mollie Buechel

"Daddy?" Annie spoke quietly to her father, slumped and stubbled in his recliner. She inched closer, peeling her feet from the floor where beer had dried. "Daddy?"

"Hmmmph?"

"I'm riding my bike to the park. I'll be back before dinner."

She grabbed the red leather purse off the kitchen table, and departed through the side door. The sun beat down in a mid-afternoon melancholy, glazing everything underneath it in the honey-golden hue that ushers in the dusk. Annie wadded up the handbag and pressed it securely into the basket on her handlebars, anchoring it under the heft of her piggy bank. She straddled the body of her purple Huffly and flicked a sneakered foot reflexively at the kickstand.

Standing on her pedals, she pressed into them stiffly, hauling her bike and all her basket's cargo over the hump at the end of the street. The twisted metal of the jungle gym and cracked cement of the dry fountains rose into view. The aroma from fresh cut grass and hot dogs sparked her hope as she maneuvered her bike into the rack.

She plucked out the piggy bank and covered the purse with her filthy pink jacket. Her eyes darted dizzily looking for the man she had come to see. It was almost dinner time, but with luck, he'd still be here.

She spotted the bobbing colored bulges, jostling like molecules above the topiaries. Clutching the bank to her heart, she sprinted into the park.

Annie struck the piggy-bank hard against the sidewalk. It shattered like her mother's car. Fragments sprayed the man's toes. She crouched down, gathering coins, counting as she piled the cool pieces in her palm; the faces of Susan B. Anthony and John F. Kennedy stoically preserved.

"Twelve dollars. Is that enough?" She held out her cupped hands, overflowing with the currency that had weighted each one of Grandma's cards for all the minor holidays.

"Well sure," said the man with the balloons, "that'll buy the whole lot."

His rubber rainbow struggled toward the reddening sky. The bulbs of color squeaked and bounced off each other with the cadence of the breeze.

"Can you hold them for me? I have to get the letters."

"Sure darlin', just slide your money into my waist belt."

He was wearing a canvas apron. The kind dry-wallers use to hold nails.

Annie dropped the coins into the pouch. They flowed off her fingertips like cold flat marbles falling to a stop with a deep, solid clank.

She ran to her Huffy and unzipped the old leather purse in the front basket. The red wrinkled leather of the handbag spilled over the front of her wicker basket, crushing one of the plastic daisies that rimmed it.

She grabbed what she needed and ran back into the park, her soul inflated.

"I have them. I'm coming. I'm coming." She shouted before herself as her dilapidated Converse sneakers dug into the concrete, but when she returned to where she'd been, the balloon man was gone. Annie stood in the shards of broken piggy-bank. Her hands fell to her sides. The little slips of paper slid through her fingertips and swirled in the wind at her feet.

Contributor Biographies

Mollie Buechel is a student in the Online English Program at UIS. She has previously been published in *BUST* magazine. When not writing, she enjoys painting, fashion, and documentaries. Mollie works from her home in Virginia, where she lives with her husband and daughter.

Between gigs as axe thrower and photographer, **samBdavis** lived many lives. Since discovering poetry in 1995, he has written over 1,500 poems, has released twelve chapbooks, and his poems have appeared in several publications, including *Byline*, *Black Creek*, *Illinois Times*, and *Appaloosa Plaintiff*. He currently lives in abject poverty and spends his time writing and creating pastel landscapes.

Meredith Dumyahn is a Communications major at UIS. She will be graduating in May and hopes to get a job working with television or photography. She has enjoyed reading and writing occasionally as long as she can remember.

Rajeane Gallagher recently returned from Chicagoland, having spent several years trying to save the universe and guarding parking spots in front of her house. An artist, activist, mother, and worker, she likes chopsticks with her Jasmine rice and occasionally speaks of herself in the third person to avoid confusion.

Julia Gentile was born in Chicago, and found her way to Central Illinois and into one of Jacqueline Jackson's classes at UIS. Julia credits Ms. Jackson with encouraging her to keep writing, no matter what.

Joey L. Henry is a non-traditional junior in Business Administration, who enjoys reading, writing, railing against The Man, and non-court-ordered community service.

Lola L. Lucas has been a UIS adjunct faculty member in the Career Development Specialist program since 1996. She holds a B.A. in English and an M.B.A. Her first book, *At Home in the Park: Loving a Neighborhood Back to Life*, is a collection of essays on historic preservation and reweaving the bonds of community in Springfield.

Carol Manley has an M.A. in English from UIS. She has received a Ragdale fellowship, an Illinois Arts Council Artist's Fellowship, a Friends of Lincoln Library Writer of the Year Award, First place in literary short fiction from *Writer's Digest* magazine, and the Jacqueline Jackson Award for creative writing.

Patricia Hartsfield Martin is a local poet whose work has appeared in a variety of publications including *Eureka Literary Magazine* and the anthologies *At the Edges of our Comfort* and *All the Women Were Heroes*. She is an active member of Brainchild Writers and has participated in many public readings.

Jenifer Marie Maseman is in her final semester as a graduate student at UIS. Her passions include reading, writing about unique topics, and her family. While this is her first experience at being published, she has been encouraged enough to submit more pieces in the future.

Shawna Mayer has a B.A. in English from Quincy University, where her fiction and poetry won several regional writing awards. She has written for the *Quincy Herald-Whig* and has had two 100-word stories appear in the *Illinois Times* as a part of their "Short Attention Span" contest.

Tyler McHaley just began the Master's program in Political Studies at UIS. His love of poetry dates to his youth. Tyler says that through having a disability—cerebral palsy—writing became his primary means of expression. Yet, without the love and support of his family, he would never be what he is today.

Jennifer Morgan hopes to pursue a career in publishing—writing and editing—upon graduation from UIS in May. While writing, she leans on personal experience and relies heavily on her service in the National Guard. She writes short fiction mostly but enjoys sculpting words into sonnets as well.

Edward Beekman Myers is a recent UIS M.A. graduate and has been accepted into the Ph.D. program at the University of Wales. He has published several short stories online and in print, and he is currently shopping his first novel, *The Totally Gnarly Adventures of the Galactically Bitchin' Comet Sweat!*, to book publishers.