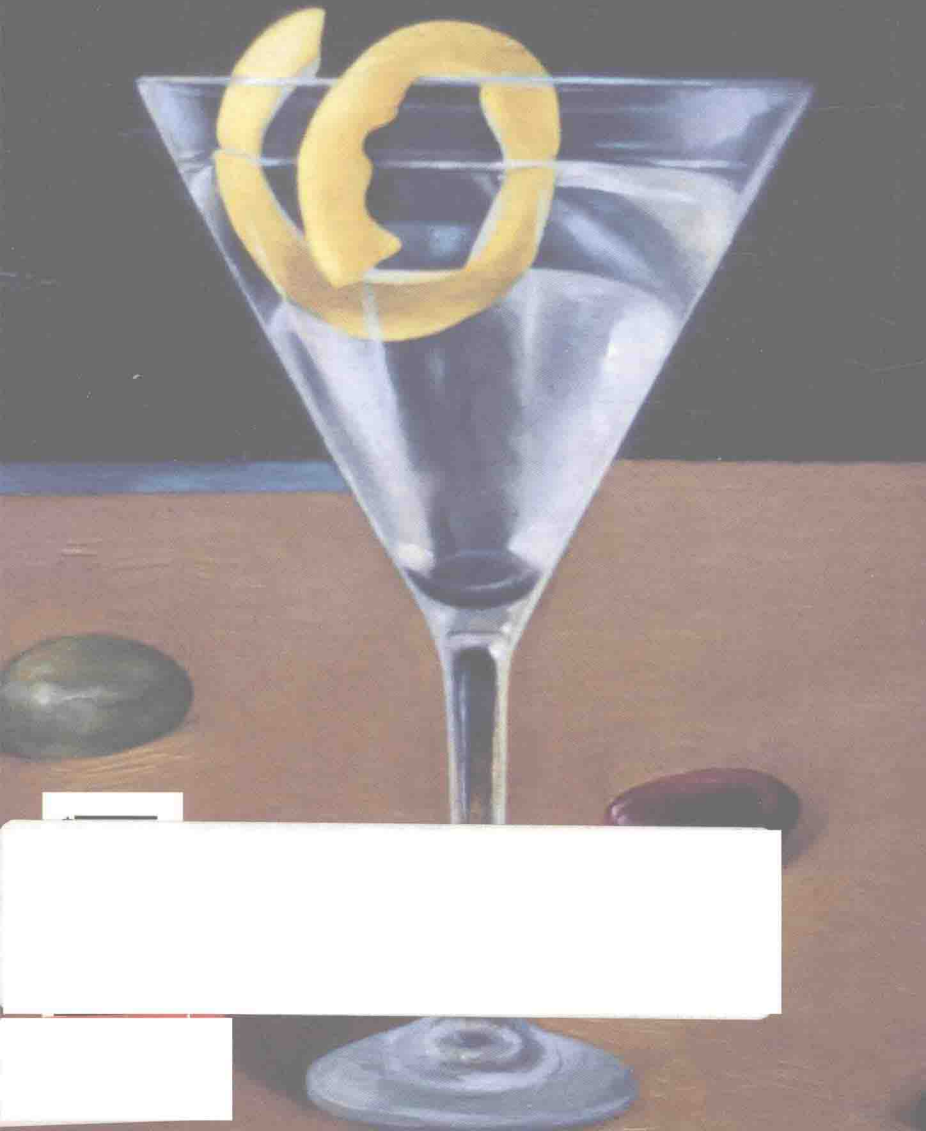
Ploughshares

WINTER 2003–04 AT EMERSON COLLEGE $10.95

Emerging Writers Issue

edited by

David Daniel & Don Lee



PLOUGHSHARES

Winter 2003–04 · Vol. 29, No. 4

PLOUGHSHARES, a journal of new writing, is guest-edited serially by prominent writers who explore different and personal visions, aesthetics, and literary circles. PLOUGHSHARES is published in April, August, and December at Emerson College, 120 Boylston Street, Boston, MA 02116-4624. Telephone: (617) 824-8753. Web address: www.pshares.org.

ASSISTANT FICTION EDITOR: Jay Baron Nicorvo. EDITORIAL ASSISTANT: Reem Abu-Libdeh. BOOKSHELF ADVISORS: Fred Leebron and Cate Marvin. PROOFREADER: Megan Weireter.

FICTION READERS: Kathleen Rooney, Maureen Cidzik, Eson Kim, Matthew Modica, Joanna Luloff, Asako Serizawa, Christopher Helmuth, Simeon Berry, Leslie Busler, Cortney Hamilton, Erin Lavelle, Wendy Wunder, Megan Weireter, Hannah Bottomy, Leslie Cauldwell, Michelle Mulder, Scarlett Stoppa, Laura Tarvin, Jeffrey Voccola, and Tammy Zambo. POETRY READERS: Kathleen Rooney, Simeon Berry, Zachary Sifuentes, Christopher Tonelli, Megan Weireter, Robert Arnold, Tracy Gavel, Scott Withiam, Jennifer Thurber, and Elisa Gabbert.

SUBSCRIPTIONS (ISSN 0048-4474): $24 for one year (3 issues), $46 for two years (6 issues); $27 a year for institutions. Add $12 a year for international ($10 for Canada).

UPCOMING: Spring 2004, a poetry and fiction issue edited by Campbell McGrath, will appear in April 2004. Fall 2004, a fiction issue edited by Amy Bloom, will appear in August 2004.

SUBMISSIONS: Reading period is from August 1 to March 31 (postmark dates). All submissions sent from April to July are returned unread. Please see page 230 for editorial and submission policies.

Back-issue, classroom-adoption, and bulk orders may be placed directly through PLOUGHSHARES. Microfilms of back issues may be obtained from University Microfilms. PLOUGHSHARES is also available as CD-ROM and full-text products from EBSCO, H.W. Wilson, Information Access, and UMI. Indexed in M.L.A. Bibliography, American Humanities Index, Index of American Periodical Verse, Book Review Index. Full publisher's index is online at www.pshares.org. The views and opinions expressed in this journal are solely those of the authors. All rights for individual works revert to the authors upon publication.

PLOUGHSHARES receives support from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Massachusetts Cultural Council.

Retail distribution by Ingram Periodicals (800-627-6247, La Vergne, TN). Printed in the U.S.A. on recycled paper by Capital City Press.

 ISBN 0-933277-39-3

Ploughshares Patrons

This nonprofit publication would not be possible without the support of our readers and the generosity of the following individuals and organizations. An additional list of donor acknowledgements may be found on p. 232.

COUNCIL

William H. Berman
Denise and Mel Cohen
Robert E. Courtemanche
Jeff and Jan Greenhawt
Jacqueline Liebergott
Turow Foundation
Eugenia Gladstone Vogel
Marillyn Zacharis

PATRONS

Johanna Cinader

FRIENDS

Anonymous (2)
Tom Jenks and Carol Edgarian

ORGANIZATIONS

AOL Time Warner Book Group
Emerson College
Houghton Mifflin
Lannan Foundation
Massachusetts Cultural Council
National Endowment for the Arts

COUNCIL: $3,000 for two lifetime subscriptions and acknowledgement in the journal for three years.
PATRON: $1,000 for a lifetime subscription and acknowledgement in the journal for two years.
FRIEND: $500 for a lifetime subscription and acknowledgement in the journal for one year.

CONTENTS

Winter 2003–04

Cover art: *Spiral Twist* by Richard Baker
Oil on wood, 12″ x 12″, 2000 *Note: The cover image was digitally extended.*

PLOUGHSHARES

Winter 2003–04 · Vol. 29, No. 4

PLOUGHSHARES, a journal of new writing, is guest-edited serially by prominent writers who explore different and personal visions, aesthetics, and literary circles. PLOUGHSHARES is published in April, August, and December at Emerson College, 120 Boylston Street, Boston, MA 02116-4624. Telephone: (617) 824-8753. Web address: www.pshares.org.

ASSISTANT FICTION EDITOR: Jay Baron Nicorvo. EDITORIAL ASSISTANT: Reem Abu-Libdeh. BOOKSHELF ADVISORS: Fred Leebron and Cate Marvin. PROOFREADER: Megan Weireter.

FICTION READERS: Kathleen Rooney, Maureen Cidzik, Eson Kim, Matthew Modica, Joanna Luloff, Asako Serizawa, Christopher Helmuth, Simeon Berry, Leslie Busler, Cortney Hamilton, Erin Lavelle, Wendy Wunder, Megan Weireter, Hannah Bottomy, Leslie Cauldwell, Michelle Mulder, Scarlett Stoppa, Laura Tarvin, Jeffrey Voccola, and Tammy Zambo. POETRY READERS: Kathleen Rooney, Simeon Berry, Zachary Sifuentes, Christopher Tonelli, Megan Weireter, Robert Arnold, Tracy Gavel, Scott Withiam, Jennifer Thurber, and Elisa Gabbert.

SUBSCRIPTIONS (ISSN 0048-4474): $24 for one year (3 issues), $46 for two years (6 issues); $27 a year for institutions. Add $12 a year for international ($10 for Canada).

UPCOMING: Spring 2004, a poetry and fiction issue edited by Campbell McGrath, will appear in April 2004. Fall 2004, a fiction issue edited by Amy Bloom, will appear in August 2004.

SUBMISSIONS: Reading period is from August 1 to March 31 (postmark dates). All submissions sent from April to July are returned unread. Please see page 230 for editorial and submission policies.

Back-issue, classroom-adoption, and bulk orders may be placed directly through PLOUGHSHARES. Microfilms of back issues may be obtained from University Microfilms. PLOUGHSHARES is also available as CD-ROM and full-text products from EBSCO, H.W. Wilson, Information Access, and UMI. Indexed in M.L.A. Bibliography, American Humanities Index, Index of American Periodical Verse, Book Review Index. Full publisher's index is online at www.pshares.org. The views and opinions expressed in this journal are solely those of the authors. All rights for individual works revert to the authors upon publication.

PLOUGHSHARES receives support from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Massachusetts Cultural Council.

Retail distribution by Ingram Periodicals (800-627-6247, La Vergne, TN). Printed in the U.S.A. on recycled paper by Capital City Press.

ISBN 0-933277-39-3

CONTENTS

Winter 2003–04

Cover art: *Spiral Twist* by Richard Baker
Oil on wood, 12″ x 12″, 2000 *Note: The cover image was digitally extended.*

Ploughshares Patrons

This nonprofit publication would not be possible without the support of our readers and the generosity of the following individuals and organizations. An additional list of donor acknowledgements may be found on p. 232.

COUNCIL

William H. Berman
Denise and Mel Cohen
Robert E. Courtemanche
Jeff and Jan Greenhawt
Jacqueline Liebergott
Turow Foundation
Eugenia Gladstone Vogel
Marillyn Zacharis

PATRONS

Johanna Cinader

FRIENDS

Anonymous (2)
Tom Jenks and Carol Edgarian

ORGANIZATIONS

AOL Time Warner Book Group
Emerson College
Houghton Mifflin
Lannan Foundation
Massachusetts Cultural Council
National Endowment for the Arts

COUNCIL: $3,000 for two lifetime subscriptions and acknowledgement in the journal for three years.
PATRON: $1,000 for a lifetime subscription and acknowledgement in the journal for two years.
FRIEND: $500 for a lifetime subscription and acknowledgement in the journal for one year.

DAVID DANIEL

Introduction

This special *Emerging Writers* issue features forty poets and ten fiction writers who have yet to publish a full-length book, nominated by authors who have. When we put out a call for submissions to the issue, our hope was that writers who had already established their literary careers would be inclined to help others get their start, and we weren't disappointed. It was enlivening to see such a spirit of generosity out there, with hundreds of teachers, mentors, and colleagues willing to offer their enthusiastic support. Admittedly, however, this structure was not perfect. Namely, it excluded writers who lacked sponsors with published books, particularly those unconnected to M.F.A. programs. Yet our door is open to all comers during our regular reading period, and, in a less formal yet equally mindful way, this is what we try to do every year, all year—discover and promote new voices.

This issue was edited by the *Ploughshares* staff editors: the poetry by our then Associate Poetry Editor, Susan Conley, and me; the fiction by Don Lee, Maryanne O'Hara, and Gregg Rosenblum. As expected, we received nominations from a variety of writers, from famous elder statespersons to younger authors who themselves were just a short step away from those they nominated. And, as we'd hoped when we conceived of this issue, the nominators' letters of endorsement (excerpts of which are available on our website at www.pshares.org) provided a fascinating glimpse of their tastes, their relation to the world of letters, and, above all, their passion for unheralded work. I hope this passion, while echoing the mission of *Ploughshares*'s founders, will provide both encouragement and solace to writers at any stage of their careers. The poems and stories brought together here offer up their own passions, of course, and a variety of pleasures as well, not the least of which is the promise of good things to come. Since the work in this issue represents just a fraction of the worthy, eminently publishable work we received, the promise seems to be a very great one.

KATHERINE BELL

What Remains

Mabel brings her husband home in an urn provided by the funeral parlor at no extra charge. It reminds her of the trophies he used to win in darts tournaments at the pub: unnaturally bright like margarine, and already beginning to tarnish around the rim. She is not sure what should be done with it. She considers the cupboard in the sitting room with its shelves already full of respectable yet somehow shameful objects—her bottle of sherry, George's medals concealed in velvet pouches, James and Lorraine's satin-bound wedding album. Perhaps, she thinks, it would be disrespectful to put George out of sight so quickly. He was a proud man, although occasionally lacking in taste, and if he were here he would be pleased and even flattered by the urn. Arriving at the proper decision, Mabel grants her husband a place of honor next to the clock above the fireplace. Then she goes into the kitchen to make herself a cup of tea.

Mabel is not devastated by her husband's death. She has not lived alone in almost half a century, but still she manages to struggle out of sleep every morning, a deep-sea diver straining for the surface. She treats each day like a knot on a rope, something to be counted off, an aid to memory. It is not that she hadn't loved George. She had loved him, and that plain dependable love had been the underpinning of the last forty-four years of her life. But George had begun leaving her years ago, and he had continued to leave her bit by bit, slowly vanishing into the upholstery of his favorite chair. When her son left, that was different. Sudden, like a stroke.

After a month she has had enough of the urn. She takes it down from its shelf and carefully loosens the cover. Although George was not a large man, there are more ashes than she expects. They are fine as talcum powder and studded with bone. Sifting through the dust, she cuts herself on a sliver of his spine or perhaps his skull. There is only a tiny slit like a paper cut in the loose pad of her finger, which doesn't bleed but brings a stinging to her eyes.

Mabel collects herself. Before she proceeds, she decides she must put him in a more sensible container. At the back of the pantry she finds a silver jubilee biscuit tin. With its flags and crests the tin seems both ordinary and ceremonious enough for the occasion, and it is precisely the right size. She has chosen to do this on her own, although her daughter-in-law, Lorraine, will fly into a solicitous rage when she finds out. But it seems to Mabel that it is the final clause of her compact with George, her last requirement as a wife. It is a chore that requires a certain kind of reverence, and Lorraine—despite her many fine qualities—has never been any good at reverence.

George's tools are arranged neatly inside the shed, each implement hung on a metal hook. There is still some of last year's dirt clinging to the tines of the gardening fork. George had loved his garden with a passion he applied to little else. The way he managed to disappear into the small fenced and flowered space as if into another country had infuriated Mabel. Now she chooses the lightest of his shovels and prepares to do battle with the roses.

She has only begun to wrestle the first rosebush free when she hears a door slam and her next-door neighbor navigate more slowly than strictly necessary down the four steps from her patio to her lawn. Mabel has never been invited to Next Door's house, but she knows the layout of the garden—exactly the same as hers.

Mabel's house is prewar and semi-detached, which is how she thinks of herself these days, more often than not. The neighbors on the unattached side are a nice enough young couple with a boy so blond he is almost transparent. The child makes Mabel nervous whenever she sees him playing in the garden. After her grandson, Addison, was born and she got used to him, Mabel began to think that white babies looked so vulnerable they were almost obscene. It upset her to see the blue workings of their circulatory systems. She couldn't imagine how she had coped with James as a baby, with his oniony skin and soft bare skull.

Mabel sits still on her haunches, breathing quietly and balancing her weight on the shovel, waiting for Next Door to leave. She doesn't want her to start snooping around, to peer over the fence and ask questions.

She can hear muffled fabric sounds as Next Door hangs her laundry. In Mabel's opinion she owns surprisingly tame lingerie for

someone in her profession. She has seen the occasional black lacy item and more polyester than cotton, but there is never anything red or sheer. No animal prints. Still, Mabel suspects the rumors could be true. She has watched unidentified men ring her neighbor's doorbell, their cars parked in her driveway for an hour at a time.

When she hears the back door close again, she begins to dig in earnest. Clots of earth form a damp pile, decorated by fringes of grass. As she works, airplanes crisscross the sky, heading for Heathrow. When she was a girl, the word was spelled differently: *aeroplane.* She wonders who decided to change that, and when. The planes come in so low she can make out details on their bellies: metal seams and landing apparatus, wheels descending like claws.

It is as hot as it ever gets in London, and soon Mabel is dripping with sweat. Despite arthritic pangs in her knees and her wrists, the work feels good, surprisingly good. She can feel the shapes of her limbs, that her body still has its uses. She remembers one of the gentle admonishments her mother used to recite. Horses sweat, men perspire, and ladies, what do ladies do? She can't remember. It was supposed to be delicate, even fragrant, nothing like the acrid wet now collecting in the pleats of her skin.

Suddenly she is reminded of James and Lorraine's wedding. She can't recall the date, but it would have been about this time in June, with weather just as brutal. She remembers worrying about stains under the cap sleeves of her pink mother-of-the-groom dress as she entered the church on the arm of one of Lorraine's brothers, a tall black man she might have been afraid of if they had met in other circumstances.

"Not hard to tell which side you're on, is it, Mrs. Clarke?" he whispered, before depositing her in the first row next to George. She was quite sure he was joking, but perhaps it had been the wrong decision to allow the pews to be divided in the traditional way, with the bride's family on one side of the aisle and the groom's on the other. At least Lorraine's half of the church was more mixed up, with neighbors and friends as well as family. So many people came for her that they spilled over into James's territory, which evened things up a bit.

Lorraine was thin then, veiled and nervous and beautiful, laughing at everything. James was nervous in his own way, which was darker and, in retrospect, a cause for concern. George, who