



THE  
FIELDSTONE  
REVIEW

ISSUE 4, 2010



POETRY  
&  
PROSE



# the fieldstone review

[home](#) [current issue](#) [past issues](#) [events](#) [editors](#) [contributors](#) [submissions](#) [contact](#) [links](#)

## **The Revolutionary**

Raymond Fraser

My cousin's family  
had a bathroom  
in their house  
all chrome and tile  
and pink and blue  
so luxurious were  
their lives

My cousin's friends  
were rich as well  
They asked  
my sister once  
how our father  
earned his bread

He's a janitor she said  
She was innocent that way  
Oh said they  
giving us — what?  
No look really  
just not knowing  
what to say  
while I stood  
furiously ashamed  
hating them

And then there came the day  
the Revolution came to town  
and I rode in on Main Street  
and tore their city down  
wiped it from the map  
like so much bourgeois crap  
sitting on my throne  
my fur-lined toilet seat

[next](#)  
[contents](#)  
[printer friendly](#)

[home](#) [current issue](#) [past issues](#) [events](#) [editors](#) [contributors](#) [submissions](#) [contact](#) [links](#)



# the fieldstone review

[home](#) [current issue](#) [past issues](#) [events](#) [editors](#) [contributors](#) [submissions](#) [contact](#) [links](#)

## After Opaque Visibility

M.J. Golias

Like waiting for the dead to return  
wearing the clothes they were buried in  
I left cheese and baguettes for my missing hero and heroine.

[next](#)  
[previous](#)  
[contents](#)  
[printer friendly](#)

There is always a need.

My hero has eaten the last of the figs,  
backed into the tree with his Benz — he left  
no note for me.

There is always a need.

My heroine — well, she had wings (which she had hid from me).  
She is now a star in Italian films — she left  
no note for me.

There is always a need.

There *was* a need pulling at the hairs on my arms.  
I glimpsed empires

while hero and heroine spoke of fleeing to Europe  
with leftover drachmas in their pockets —  
I was invited. I was invited  
to alter myself like a loose suit — become anyone else  
even a heroine

someone's heroine

speaking empires and audible whispers.

(My mouth now sewn shut like the dead's.)

There *will* always be a need.

[home](#) [current issue](#) [past issues](#) [events](#) [editors](#) [contributors](#) [submissions](#) [contact](#) [links](#)



# the fieldstone review

[home](#) [current issue](#) [past issues](#) [events](#) [editors](#) [contributors](#) [submissions](#) [contact](#) [links](#)

## **Self Portrait with Forecast**

Jeff Schiff

You have a wife an appealing babe adjusting to the face of corporeal treachery still no one's afterthought two children: one rasping at those outskirts that fail now to fascinate or lure & another whose penance (when generous you call it succor) is common distance: a furlong for every indigestible antipathy & a mutt-Dalmatian who trotted recently into the dangling biscuit of your kindness & kinged you by utter mistake There is a job: yada yada: trespasses tortured diplomacies all the piddliness and rigmarole you'd expect from insufficient recompense but there are laurel saplings too: strivers oily green & sun-fuddled & quirky hedges that demand your focus or deliberation or depth of faith or some such amalgamated pretense multiplying as they do at some encroaching edge

[next](#)  
[previous](#)  
[contents](#)  
[printer friendly](#)

[home](#) [current issue](#) [past issues](#) [events](#) [editors](#) [contributors](#) [submissions](#) [contact](#) [links](#)

All Material Copyright The Fieldstone Review and the Original Authors



# the fieldstone review

[home](#) [current issue](#) [past issues](#) [events](#) [editors](#) [contributors](#) [submissions](#) [contact](#) [links](#)

## Bullets or Glass

Nicole Pakan

they wind through the morning  
alleys, the steady squeak

pause

squeak of pursuance, bottle  
clink, labels unravelling, glue

unclung to side  
ground off by friction or

nervous fingers  
again

[next](#)  
[previous](#)  
[contents](#)  
[printer friendly](#)

[home](#) [current issue](#) [past issues](#) [events](#) [editors](#) [contributors](#) [submissions](#) [contact](#) [links](#)

All Material Copyright The Fieldstone Review and the Original Authors





# the fieldstone review

[home](#) [current issue](#) [past issues](#) [events](#) [editors](#) [contributors](#) [submissions](#) [contact](#) [links](#)

## A Smiling Phiz for Hindlegs

Tom Tracey

After the birth of rose in May,  
grimly glad fleckering harp-souled Anna  
scaled the horse and tore desire  
from a flesh of chestnut's pith;  
swung the knotted heart of kith  
& dashed her flail at brother Big's,  
He still bellowing in the furnace  
of that dead-end lovely dog day,  
burnished in the memory  
like a gloating shirt of skin:  
"Let me take your Head off, sis!"  
(thereabouts the gist of Him)  
"I am tired of all sings,  
want to slip off into God"  
as needle to a magnet drawn  
in rose & gold of twilit din.  
Great tree-climber, high magician,  
tall above all moss & harping,  
jack-knife-whittling, hale halloing,  
never was a man so smiling;  
hailstorm voice from sky descending:  
"Mercy me, was ever man so pelted!"  
who beat the dragooned thistles there with sticks.

[next](#)  
[previous](#)  
[contents](#)  
[printer friendly](#)

[home](#) [current issue](#) [past issues](#) [events](#) [editors](#) [contributors](#) [submissions](#) [contact](#) [links](#)

# the fieldstone review

[home](#) [current issue](#) [past issues](#) [events](#) [editors](#) [contributors](#) [submissions](#) [contact](#) [links](#)

Erich Reichmann

Brad Congdon

next  
previous  
contents  
print friendly

Even Erich Reichmann was once a child. It is an idea I grapple with even now, so many years later. Back then, it was not a thought that ever crossed my mind. In fact, I never had one on the streets, at night, with thoughts always hurried me home, where I felt safe from him. Only once did I hear his name spoken within our walls, when mama said of him, quite unhidden: "That boy, he looks like he is made out of nails." An accurate description, Reichmann was a hard man, all corded muscle and scar tissue.

A feared street braver, Reichmann held our little neighbourhood in the palms of his cold, brutal hands. Surely his life of crime started in some schoolyard, where he must have terrorized the other children as soon as the teachers turned their backs. I knew him as an angry young man who drunkenly stalked our streets at night, muttering to himself, most often under a street lamp or in the shadows. It was then, at night, when he was least dangerous, for though he was not a danger, his long limbs were slow and pendulous. Easy to avoid. In the light of day, Reichmann spent his time stealing from the local shops, or breaking into people's houses. Those who angered him when he was sober were less likely to escape unharmed. Many were said that he'd even killed, once or twice. This was done out of anger, and never for money; the bodies were found with wallets still stuffed to overflowing with *Rentenmarks*.

I was twelve years old when the Wehrmacht introduced the *Rentenmark* to replace the *Papiermark*. One *Rentenmark* equalled one million *Papiermarks* – it sounds like an astronomical sum! Both were totally useless. That winter we burned money in our little stove. It was cheaper than wood. I tell you this, so you will understand why my brother and I were so eager to take a job from Max Kolb, the baker's son. Kolb could offer us something better than *Rentenmarks*; he offered us bread, one loaf each! All we needed to do, according to Kolb, was go out into the woods, a mile out of town, to a spot which I knew. There we would dig.

How big of a hole?

"Deep enough to stand in," Max Kolb said. "Wide enough to lie down in." I understood.

The hole was to be dug before sunrise. Josef was only nine then, but he knew the value of food. He did not complain when I woke him so early. We found the shovel – the only one we had – in the corner of the house, careful not to wake mama and papa. Only, when we stepped outside, we discovered a sky full of ominous clouds. We grabbed my father's umbrella, the one with the brass handle shaped like a duck's head, the one he cared for so much.

It was still dark when we reached the stated spot. The clouds continued to loom threateningly, but not a drop had fallen. Immediately we set to digging; I went first, and when I tired, Josef took over, but never for long.

"Albrecht," Josef finally asked, "what sort of bread will it be?"

"Don't be stupid," I replied. I said this often to Josef. Kolb promised it would not be that disgusting fake stuff some were baking – half bread, half glue and sawdust. "He is a baker's son," I explained. "It will be baker's bread." This seemed good enough for Josef.

"Why didn't the baker's son dig this hole himself?" Josef asked, without much of a pause since his last question.

"He has something better to do," I said. "Enough questions."

Josef nodded, and was silent for a moment. He looked up at the sky, probably wondering if the rain would come. Then he began to sing. It was an old song that mother used to sing to me. She sang it now to Josef, since I was too old for such songs. His shrill, child's voice seemed too cutting for the work at hand.

"Quiet!" I hissed. I handed him the shovel, hoping that he'd hush if kept busy. For the next while, we worked with only the sounds of the rustling leaves and the chirps of a few curious birds to break the stillness around us.

Kolb entered the woods shortly after the sun made its appearance. With him was a man I had never seen before, a silent man with a ragged beard and a serious expression. Between them they led a mule. The mule was pulling a cart; in the cart, tied down with cord, was a heap of bloody sheets. They'd made no effort to hide it.

Kolb and his friend did not complain that the hole was not as big as specified. Instead, they busied themselves with unloading the cart, cutting away the cord with a familiar razor. The two men grunted as they heaved the mass of bloody sheets onto their shoulders. Of course I did not. I had to, immediately, or perhaps even before they arrived. Why else the hole? Then the two men walked over to the mouth of our shallow grave and threw their burden in, just like that:

"Bury him," Kolb said, slouching back towards the cart. "Your bread will be waiting for you at home." His silent friend lit a cigarette, clutching it awkwardly in his hand as he looked Josef and me in the eye. His knuckles were badly bruised.

But I did not pay attention to Kolb or his friend for long. You see, when they had tossed the body into our little hole, the face had come uncovered, and now it was staring up at me.

"Albrecht," Josef whispered to me, once the two men had gone. I had not even noticed their exit. "That's Erich Reichmann!" Of course I knew it was.

He was looking at all the blood. "They stabbed him a million times!"

"Don't be stupid! Maybe six or seven!"

"Albrecht," Josef asked, after what seemed like a long stretch of silence, "why aren't we digging?"

Why not? In fact, I was horrified of Reichmann, even then. I wanted nothing more than to run. But what then? No bread, that's for sure. And my brother, little Josef, he would think me a coward.

I started to take the soil onto Reichmann's body, hoping to get it over and done with, but Josef, stupid boy, had lain papa's umbrella – the one with the brass handle shaped like a duck's head, the one he cared for so much – at the mouth of the grave. One careless swing of my shovel, and in it went.

"Albrecht," Josef gasped in horror, watching as the umbrella fell.

I stopped dead.

The umbrella had landed next to Erich Reichmann's uncovered face. The duck's bill was touching his sunken cheek, as though kissing him.

"Leave it!" Josef pleaded, eyes frantic.

"Don't be stupid!" I shot back without even looking his way. I took a deep breath. I considered the umbrella, the body.

With my courage gathered, I slid down into the grave.

"It's not so bad!" I said, showing Josef that I was not afraid. One foot was braced against the loose, earthen wall of the grave, the other planted between the body's legs. I feared that my foot would slip on the sheets, and I would fall. The thought terrified me.

"Albrecht! Get out of there!"

I inched toward the umbrella, testing each step on the bloody sheets, fearing that I'd stumble on them or on the loose soil. I tried to keep my eyes locked on papa's umbrella, but they kept rebelling, shifting instead to the face that had terrorized my neighbourhood for so long. Slowly, I reached for the umbrella, my heart in my throat. I almost had it!

And Erich Reichmann coughed.

Already I was scrambling out of the hole, my frenzied movements causing little avalanches of soil. Josef grabbed my arm, pulled me up.

Then Reichmann coughed again. Blood came out of his mouth, and his eyes opened slightly. He saw us – *he saw us!* Josef clasped at my arms, and at his. Reichmann's lips moved, but no words came out, only a rasping, desolate sound.

Josef's watery blue eyes were filled with fright. What to do?

"Dig!" I yelled. With shovel, with hands, we forced the soil back into the hole, covering up Erich Reichmann – starting with his face, so he would stare at us no more. We worked in a fury, gasping and straining but never once stopping, finally putting the soil flat with our palms when it was done.

And then we ran.

Papa never asked us what happened to his umbrella. It wasn't until years later that I realized that he must have thought we had traded it to Max Kolb for those two loaves of bread he found on the doorstep that morning. A prudent man, he must have accepted it as a fair trade.

Back then, though, I never thought of my father's reaction. I did not care. All I thought of, for days, for months, were Reichmann's pleading eyes – and some nights, when I slept, I dreamt of Erich Reichmann arriving on our doorstep, his clothing soiled and bloody, clutching my father's umbrella in his cold, brutal hands.

[home](#) [current issue](#) [past issues](#) [events](#) [editors](#) [contributors](#) [submissions](#) [contact](#) [links](#)

All Material Copyright The Fieldstone Review and the Original Authors



# the fieldstone review

[home](#) [current issue](#) [past issues](#) [events](#) [editors](#) [contributors](#) [submissions](#) [contact](#) [links](#)

## The Census

Raymond Fraser

I was home but nobody came  
nobody at the door  
with pad and pencil to take my name  
and ask those questions I'd heard they asked  
and were you working and what you made  
and what you paid  
for your apartment  
and if you had a toilet  
was there hot water in your tap  
and what was your nationality

[next](#)  
[previous](#)  
[contents](#)  
[printer friendly](#)

I was going to say occupation poet income nothing  
but nobody came  
with pad and pencil to take my name  
(Chatham, 1961)

[home](#) [current issue](#) [past issues](#) [events](#) [editors](#) [contributors](#) [submissions](#) [contact](#) [links](#)



# the fieldstone review

[home](#) [current issue](#) [past issues](#) [events](#) [editors](#) [contributors](#) [submissions](#) [contact](#) [links](#)

## Watching Westerns

Michael Baker

In "Red River," near Abilene,  
Monty tells the Chicago moneyman,  
"The cattle ain't exactly housebroken,"  
and everyone hoots and hollers  
except me, a second banana, yelling  
at other manics that despair has many names  
but no primetime show, begging Monty  
to suck out all of the arrow's poison, ranting  
slap me, slug me and tell me about Roy Rogers  
and Mad Cow Disease. These are tough times  
but nothing, not even God, makes John Wayne flinch.  
He is angry and he is drunk. Monty shanghaied  
his cattle. He looks like he wants to kill me.  
That snapped twig I just heard  
is probably the newspaper boy.

[next](#)  
[previous](#)  
[contents](#)  
[printer friendly](#)

Some scenes are not for naïve viewers.  
I sit near the wall, mattress propped  
against the window, worrying that the four men  
in black hats are just joshing,  
that Gary Cooper will be OK,  
that Grace's farewell train  
would go that more goddamn fast.

There's no real bliss in the West.  
Sons slay fathers; Indians always  
aim too high; only the landscape has logic.  
A lovesick cowpoke yodels, Trigger  
sends smoke signals to the Apaches,  
and I quit gambling, refusing  
to raise a perfect stranger  
my new set of false teeth. The cattle,  
all but one thousand, get to Kansas City  
and are sold. Drinks and hugs  
for everyone! No one, however,  
can hear the Princess's train  
and on Hoboken's west side  
near my ten by ten territory  
teenage girls in halters  
in droves walk by, waving,  
ready to serve and obey  
this month's lawman, who unfairly  
avoids fame from his onrushing death.

[home](#) [current issue](#) [past issues](#) [events](#) [editors](#) [contributors](#) [submissions](#) [contact](#) [links](#)



# the fieldstone review

[home](#) [current issue](#) [past issues](#) [events](#) [editors](#) [contributors](#) [submissions](#) [contact](#) [links](#)

## Halloween Blind Date

Katherine Hüslér

Rain pats the windows of the Greyhound. The shadow of the pen  
hovers on the gleaming rubber floor. I am warm. Outside  
in the dark, red lights, racing

[next](#)  
[previous](#)  
[contents](#)  
[printer friendly](#)

white lines. The shadow of the pen hovers above  
me when we walk across the street and you pull  
my neck. We hit heads. *Hi buddy,*

this feels good. When I hover above you, the shadow delineates  
the contours of your breasts. I take off your shirt and the pen  
gets lost in ebony skin, in its glare. My head gets lost

in the long grace of your fingers. I'm a sailor  
and you are my captain, the best  
looking person on the Titanic. *Sit on my lap,*

you say. Your best friend Oscar Wilde plunges on top  
of me and we tumble on the floor. Take my hand,  
you dance better than me, you are the lead. You claim

that you only appreciate women bent over  
with a bag on their head. I exhale, request paper  
instead of plastic. Tonight I follow

a shadow; it hovers between three shining gravestones  
in an ill-lit front yard. Three skinny kids dressed in white  
and charcoal lie in the grass. I am drunk and balance

on the edge of the sidewalk. The world  
is quiet. There's no more moaning. There's no moon. You tug  
at my blazer until I close my eyes and topple into darkness.

[home](#) [current issue](#) [past issues](#) [events](#) [editors](#) [contributors](#) [submissions](#) [contact](#) [links](#)



# the fieldstone review

[home](#) [current issue](#) [past issues](#) [events](#) [editors](#) [contributors](#) [submissions](#) [contact](#) [links](#)

## You Know Too Much About Flying Saucers

Jéanpaul Ferro

I dreamed a hole through her head, where blue  
cathoray spilled out over space and time,

ten seconds of my stare, my eyes pretending to look  
at the red Coca-Cola sign flashing up behind her head,  
blinking on and off in reds and whites over and over:  
*Drink Coke — You Dope!*

People say we are like Siamese twins, but really  
we are more like Tiananmen Square, 1989;  
six murdered sextuplets on a Sunday;

*You're crazy. We can't be together*, she says — this is  
every time right before we go and remarry down in old  
Mexico;

I love the crazy flashing skies over Acapulco, an  
emerald stain the way George Stevens got to do it  
on film,

both of us with bare feet, dancing under moonlight,  
over broken bottles of glass, arms flailing, waving madly;

every day another séance to stop the Nuclear bombs,  
all night long as we pray against the missiles landing  
in someone else's backyard —

wet and on fire; a wave, ten thousand surfers going out  
from the storm atop another tsunami; I can taste it! I can bury it  
in the morning with my foot down to the floorboard;

water, napalm, flying about; I will fly; sea turtles flowing  
in my veins to the other side of the earth; my mouth: it's  
got a direct line to Jehovah's red ear, splitting my own  
chest open to get down to that vodka with a straw;

swinging, dancing, spinning, tango atop the cobblestones,  
both of us shivering along the gold spires, our souls being  
pushed up hard against doors, in heavenly colors, azure-blue,  
emerald, until we are falling one thousand years into the future —

down to the ghost of your words as they whisper out to me:  
*"divided together; and so we fall apart."*

[next](#)  
[previous](#)  
[contents](#)  
[printer friendly](#)

[home](#) [current issue](#) [past issues](#) [events](#) [editors](#) [contributors](#) [submissions](#) [contact](#) [links](#)



# the fieldstone review

[home](#) [current issue](#) [past issues](#) [events](#) [editors](#) [contributors](#) [submissions](#) [contact](#) [links](#)

## **God's Fingers**

Graham Jensen

God's fingers fan out, dangle and  
freeze! as icicles, as nice as seconds  
between sleep and something still  
deeper, steeped until the slow caves of thought  
submerge in ice.

Do not be afraid, be a child instead and  
reach! for substance, for fear embodied boldly  
in a point made sharply still  
spreading, the miracle of earth's blood bolted  
to a roof.

Such miracles do distend, do beg, portend  
plenty! for when they fall, the shatter is a cool  
and violent glimpse of love;  
in the pieces rest a thousand pierced reflections  
melting, minders of the miracle remaining —  
of the hanging that was done!

[next](#)  
[previous](#)  
[contents](#)  
[printer friendly](#)

[home](#) [current issue](#) [past issues](#) [events](#) [editors](#) [contributors](#) [submissions](#) [contact](#) [links](#)



# the fieldstone review

[home](#) [current issue](#) [past issues](#) [events](#) [editors](#) [contributors](#) [submissions](#) [contact](#) [links](#)

## **Mona Lisa 1998**

Dave Margoshes

(for Jennifer Sloan)

[next](#)  
[previous](#)  
[contents](#)  
[printer friendly](#)

Beneath soft hair and the smooth curve  
of temple, the devious brain ticks, a grid  
of steel enmeshing thought. Behind  
serene eyes, a rusted coil pulsing  
with the sad echo of motion. Behind  
the fine curved nose, a mouse trap  
waiting to spring. And the smile, ah,  
beneath that smile — glittering teeth  
pronouncing your name.

[home](#) [current issue](#) [past issues](#) [events](#) [editors](#) [contributors](#) [submissions](#) [contact](#) [links](#)

All Material Copyright The Fieldstone Review and the Original Authors



**NON-FICTION**



# the fieldstone review

[home](#) [current issue](#) [past issues](#) [events](#) [editors](#) [contributors](#) [submissions](#) [contact](#) [links](#)

## Visibly Vulnerable

Lisa McNally

She turns from the bar and spots them talking, animated. She attaches herself to the nearest group, feigning quiet interest in their words, and watches. The one she loves puts her hand on the other's arm as she mutters a confidence. A friendly intimacy — they're just friends, have been for years. They're laughing now, swaying closer (too close?) and then away again. They were always so close — She stops herself; *enough of this ridiculous paranoia*. She loves her. Sophie. Sophie who's not so sure, needs more time, couldn't possibly commit right now, with everything so tricky, *you know how it is*. But they'll find each other later, a little drunk. They'll leave together hand in hand, walking back to Sophie's — a destination they've agreed upon without mention. They'll have sex. Tomorrow morning, groggily hung over, they'll play it down, as always. Another drunken slip. But secretly she'd hoped, this time, maybe — Stupid of her to forget; it's agreed: they remain a sort-of, occasional, maybe-maybe-not couple. That's how it works; she knows by now. Or she should — pesky hope still seduces her. Why does she fall for it when she knows it's wrong?

[next](#)  
[previous](#)  
[contents](#)  
[printer friendly](#)

She's staring — has anyone noticed? No, they're all immersed in their own conversations. She feels far away. Brief panic makes a decision — she crosses the room. The one she doesn't love smiles, infuriatingly knowing, but Sophie spots someone that-a-way and, she's sorry, but she really must — She's gone. Flitting away on a social demand. *Nothing personal, just coincidence*, she tells herself painfully. She can hear Sophie later, casual, asking *Did you see? Neil was there. I spotted him and had to say hello — haven't seen him for ages*. An alibi? And a test. The account can't be contradicted. She saw the hurt, but she didn't mean it, she says. *You thought I did that to upset you, on purpose?* A pathetic, too-sensitive interpretation. Convenient. The one she doesn't love shifts awkwardly. *She doesn't know what to say; wishes we wouldn't play out our desire quite so publicly, save our dramas. What am I meant to do? Apologize?*

†•†

12/03/2009

I sit at my computer and absent-mindedly navigate *The Guardian's* website, filling time. A headline catches my eye; I click on it and read: "one of the first women to live openly as a lesbian in Kwa Thema," South Africa, "brutally beaten," "raped and killed." I shiver at this too-close, too-distant news. A well-read copy of Eve Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* sits by my keyboard and a page of half-thoughts, scrawled at random, on the public and the private. I imagine a woman, her face grim as she hears the news of a death. She didn't know the woman well, but respected her. She shakes her head, disgusted. Bitterly, she thinks, *they killed her. And why? Because they couldn't bear to hear of her desire, our desire. Cowards. But they won't win — we'll speak louder, together, until everyone hears. We owe her that much. She died for speaking this desire; she died so that it might be spoken.* Furious, she thinks, *no more silence.*

I construct this picture from echoes; I see crowds and shouting and the volatile force of a fledgling politics, a liberation movement dizzy with — my eyes drift across my notes — the "potency, magnetism, and promise of gay self-disclosure." Under this phrase, an arrow points to cautionary words, also Sedgwick's: by "glamorizing" the closet we risk "presenting as inevitable or somehow valuable its exactions, its deformations, its disempowerment and sheer pain." Somewhere within its logic a woman in South Africa died. I return to the article, scrolling down the page: "since then a tide of violence against lesbians in South Africa has continued to rise." I picture another woman, sitting with her arms wrapped around her legs, hugging them to her chest. She's afraid. *I don't want to die. They'd kill us all, until the desire died. And then what? Better to guard this desire, protect it from harm.* She thinks of those she loves, whose deaths she couldn't bear. *Be careful — please. Look after the desire we love — keep it close.* I hug myself. *Keep it safe.*

But then they'll say it never existed, I frown.

†•†

Sophie's ex — or is she? It's complex; I forget the latest developments — is watching, intensely. She's making me nervous, a bit. I've heard the tales. Gossip moves quickly; who's fallen for whom, who's losing who, the dissymmetries and the injustices. So we all see her hope and her disappointment. Covertly, in tentative glimpses which keep us marginal, uninvolved. Officially, we haven't witnessed a thing. But they must sense those semi-glances. Does it make a difference to the desire, I wonder? Do the spectators skew the performance? We don't merely observe from a distance, of course — we know when to step aside, understanding who's to be left alone with whom. Well, everyone else seems to know; I usually wreck this elegant choreography. The too-subtle politics confound me and I mostly wish for genuine ignorance of the complexities. She's nice, the ex, and no one deserves to be messed around like that, but it's nothing to do with me; if she could just direct her gaze elsewhere I'd really be very grateful.

No? Alright then, keep looking. We both know she's there. I laugh a little longer than necessary, as if that might drown out her gaze. I feel as though I'm playing for an audience. Or that I've landed a bit part in a play Sophie directs. After all, it's Sophie, not me, who might want to make her jealous. It worked, if that was the aim — here she comes, finally. I smile and step back, admitting her into the conversation with a *we were just saying*, but no one's listening. Sophie's diving off, extricating herself from an encounter she'd rather avoid. The ex looks morose while I reject apologetic words; I'm sure she didn't mean... would only make it worse. I try to conjure a light remark as the silence stretches.

[home](#) [current issue](#) [past issues](#) [events](#) [editors](#) [contributors](#) [submissions](#) [contact](#) [links](#)





**REVIEWS**



# the fieldstone review

home current issue past issues events editors contributors submissions contact links

John Livingstone Clark – "Man Reading 'Woman Reading in Bath'"

Ole Schenk

[next](#)  
[previous](#)  
[contents](#)  
"TARGET="new">printer friendly

Clark's ninth book closely dialogues with the poetic vision of Anne Szumigalski, unfolding an elegy of personal friendship through shared questions. Most of the collection's poems take their titles from a single line or word from Szumigalski's poem "Woman Reading in Bath." Clark often returns to the same line and selects different words, thus sustaining a richly nuanced poetic dialogue.

"*Man Reading 'Woman Reading in Bath'*" begins with twenty-five pages of "ghazals," a couplet form originating in ancient Persia and growing in popularity among Canadian poets. Clark's ghazals ignite sudden insights. His couplets combine familiar images from the Saskatchewan landscape or rural prairie life with painful emotions, exemplified in "river valleys embracing the plains- / the heart quickly broken," and "tiger lilies like a mind's last thought-/ who knows where beauty travels?" Other ghazals combine internal reflection and violent natural images, as in "sparrows tear through a spider's web - / chaos and rain-." Human judgment, "chaos," describes the torn web even as the rain drops fly in the sparrow's wake: nature and beauty fuse in a single moment of tearing action. Clark's "*Faltering Ghazals*" provides a fitting prelude to the lyric dialogue with Szumigalski. The ghazals leap, follow, and drift between interconnected thoughts, drawing the reader into a dance and weaving together images and insight.

Two thematic images predominate in the book's second section: the self floating alone at sea, and a mythopoetic confrontation of a bathing woman with the god of patriarchal monotheism. Explicating Szumigalski's first line, "I am alone swimming on the dark sea," the first third of the dialogue considers the self as both present and alien. Alone in the overwhelming space of open ocean, Clark's speaker asks a question insistent as the waves, "Who is swimming?" Even as the self considers its utter solitude, however, the body insists on the physical fact of its continued movement: "stroke after stroke - / aorta pumping its own / sanguinary cheer -." Thus the self moves from the despairing search for identity to the "encouragement" that "still the heart pumps out its own," as the body provides rhythm and "direction immaterial." The self, swimming alone, finds vitality in the relations of language, thought, body, and the openness of the sea. This conversation breeds transformation: as the speaker now imagines himself a manta ray, "gliding seas with great wings," the self's indeterminacy comes again into the foreground, "honestly was I ever a man?" Only the facts of the ocean tide remain constant to the self floating alone toward death.

Secondly, the series of lyrics turn to the central encounter of Szumigalski's poem: her speaker describes the collapse of God, who first looms up before her "clutching the slippery wet sides" of the tub on his "stick legs like a fat bird," before flopping down "gasping and stranded," a feast for crabs and birds. Clark's speaker expands upon Szumigalski's lines and images, celebrating the fall of the "One and Only God," who thought he could "carry himself erect" in "a world of water / in a universe shaped for floating." Simultaneous with the fallen patriarch, the first poems that represent Szumigalski's own voice appear, as the lonely male floater hears her voice declare "I am swimming." The final poems thus express a redemptive solidarity between swimmers even in a sea of unanswered questions. Clark's speaker proclaims that "a woman's body is a rich coral reef," and listens to the wisdom of the great female swimmer, the "crone," far ahead of him. The most beautiful poem in the series is the last, where the woman poet-prophet directly addresses herself together with the male swimmer:

You will never be given

a second chance-

and now we go! she cries

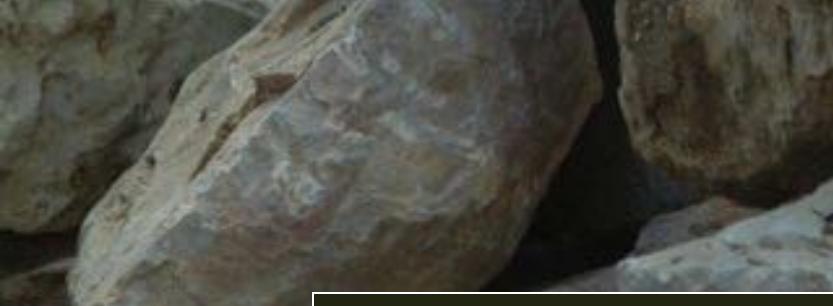
over the swells

legless weightless

clouds in a saffron sky

Spiritual life and physical existence blend into one. Patriarchal monotheism fades before the richness of duality birthed through the differences of woman and man, sea and sky, body and language, distance and intimacy. Clark's is a gentle poetic vision, fleshing out the verbs of floating and drifting, meandering with the tugs of sea currents and expanding slow healing reveries. At times, the gentleness approaches a quiet acceptance of oblivion, or the latitude of free floating endorphins (or "en/dolphins"). Other times, the poems achieve excruciating honesty and the pain of spiritual depth. Either way, Clark reaches out to his intended reader, never basking in his own profundity or distancing his reader with an overuse of allusion. Clark's poetic dance drifts with beauty and insight.

home current issue past issues events editors contributors submissions contact links



# the fieldstone review

[home](#) [current issue](#) [past issues](#) [events](#) [editors](#) [contributors](#) [submissions](#) [contact](#) [links](#)

## **Breaking the Cycle of Innocence in Michael Kenyon's *The Beautiful Children***

Jonathan Sherman

[">>previous  
contents  
printer friendly](#)

Michael Kenyon's *The Beautiful Children* captures madness in both literary form and content, creating a visceral experience that both tantalizes and disturbs the reader. With short, stream-of-consciousness prose decorated in poetic flourishes, Kenyon bombards the reader with images and unsettling language that destabilizes the typical beauty of romantic description. This is not a love story, but it reads like one in all its insanity and confusion.

The plot of the novel centres on Sapporo, a man who wakes a hospitalized amnesiac. Unable to remember his former life, wife, or family, Sapporo quickly deteriorates, wandering though a magic-realist landscape of stray children, snow capped mountains, and seemingly ubiquitous eggs. With the repetition of plot from both Sapporo and his first son Starling's perspectives, the reader is subjected to the madness of a circular, continual tragedy of deplorable parenting, violence, and delinquent street children.

To facilitate the destabilization of common human behaviour, Kenyon turns to the animal world. Sapporo is described in animalistic terms as he traipses across the landscape: a "hunter" (58) eating eggs and growing "paws" (55). Children are constantly compared to birds and eggs are symbols of innocence. It appears that once the "birds" are released into the world (once they are hatched) they become corruptible, just as the innocence of children is at risk once they are born. One consequence of Kenyon's comparison of children to animals, however, is that it promotes the primitivism of these children and works against the reader's sympathies toward young characters. The children's innocence is damaged by an animalistic juxtaposition in contrast to Thistledown's description of *The Beautiful Children* as an "elegy upon innocence."

Kenyon's description of the street gang resembles the sporadic motion of a flock of birds as they weave and dip between the horizon (or perhaps a more juvenile gang of "droogs"). The "gang of birds" (69) is not innocent in action: the children kill, rape, deal and use drugs, are prostitutes and thieves. While these actions are necessary for the children to survive without parental support, more attention is placed by Kenyon on the ferocious nature of these children than creating sympathy in the reader's mind for their abandonment. In effect, these are not beautiful children at all, rather a depiction of children abused by the absence of parental guidance.

It is dangerous, of course, to view *The Beautiful Children* (or any fictional literature for that matter) as a parental guidebook; however, in portraying the complex relationship between children and adults, it is difficult to ignore Kenyon's advocacy for the presence of parents in the lives of children. When Sapporo is present with his son's "arms holding the bat got stronger every time we played and he seldom missed the ball" (29) the value of parental involvement is clear. In the parent's absence Starling is left to run rampant in the streets, drawn into prostitution and thievery to survive. The physicality of the characters is enforced through the direct discussion of how the body changes in relation to intimate contact of loved ones. Just as the text threads a course through the abstract and the physical affecting the reader's body in stomach turning child abuse details, such as child pornography (84), the characters themselves experience the world's intensity through the body as they "vomit and shit at the same time" (60) or "flapped and soared over the city, dealing and holding and shooting up" (83). This is a physical book, one that attempts to bridge the mind and body of the reader to that of the characters with substantial success.

Although the novel threatens toward a clichéd cyclical resolution, Kenyon resists this temptation and breaks the pattern. It is in this breaking of the cyclical convention that Kenyon finds his greatest innovation in the text, refusing to allow the reader a settled conclusion. If the reader is in search of closure in Kenyon's novel, it may be a futile affair. *The Beautiful Children* is not a book that breeds contentment or resolution once the final words are read. It is a struggle through imagery and disturbing content, a journey that may end in missed opportunity - but it is a valuable journey nonetheless.

[home](#) [current issue](#) [past issues](#) [events](#) [editors](#) [contributors](#) [submissions](#) [contact](#) [links](#)



# CONTRIBUTORS



<a href="#">Leveraging the Power of the Cloud</a>	<p>Cloud computing has transformed the way we work, providing businesses with access to powerful computing resources without the need for physical hardware. In this article, we'll explore the benefits of cloud computing and how it can help your business grow.</p>
<a href="#">The Benefits of Cloud Computing</a>	<p>Cloud computing offers a range of benefits, including cost savings, increased scalability, and improved accessibility. In this article, we'll discuss the key advantages of cloud computing and how they can benefit your business.</p>
<a href="#">How to Get Started with Cloud Computing</a>	<p>Getting started with cloud computing can seem overwhelming, but it's easier than you might think. In this article, we'll guide you through the process of getting started with cloud computing and help you choose the right provider for your needs.</p>
<a href="#">The Future of Cloud Computing</a>	<p>Cloud computing is here to stay, and it's only going to continue to grow. In this article, we'll look at the future of cloud computing and what it means for businesses of all sizes.</p>
<a href="#">Case Studies: Success Stories in Cloud Computing</a>	<p>See how other businesses have successfully implemented cloud computing and achieved great results. In this article, we'll share some inspiring case studies and show you how you can do the same.</p>
<a href="#">FAQs About Cloud Computing</a>	<p>Have questions about cloud computing? We've got answers! In this article, we'll address some common FAQs about cloud computing and provide clear, concise answers to help you understand the technology better.</p>
<a href="#">Conclusion</a>	<p>In conclusion, cloud computing is a powerful tool that can help your business grow and succeed. By leveraging the power of the cloud, you can access the resources you need, when you need them, without having to invest in expensive hardware or infrastructure. So why wait? Start exploring the world of cloud computing today!</p>

