

# Yggdrasil

---

A Journal Of The Poetic Arts

August 2016

VOL XXIV, Issue 8, Number 280

Editor: Klaus J. Gerken

*European Editor: Mois Benarroch*

*Contributing Editor: Jack R. Wesdorp*

*Previous Associate Editors: Igal Koshevoy; Evan Light; Pedro Sena; Oswald Le Winter;  
Heather Ferguson; Patrick White*

ISSN 1480-6401

# Table of Contents

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Jonathan Beale**

There is no reason

## **CONTENTS**

### **Jonathan Beale**

Natural History

Rosh Hashanah 1978

Convex reflections from an old bar on Beale St

The cat in the Garden

### **Michael R. Collings**

XIII Sonets on Sounds and Sanity

Evidence of the Senses

In the Horror-House

I Want

Receiving a Bill of Divorcement on the Grounds of Physical Incompatibility

(Church Organist—1958-2014)

Bang!

Necessary Evil

Sonette for a July Night

Counting

Sometimes

An Observation

Just Talking

Buzz of Flies

Sleep Aids

**Carolyn Gregory**

FOOL'S GOLD

ON POWERLESSNESS

ESPLANADE (for Rosemary)

GHOSTS

REMEMBERING THE FOURTH, ca. 1958

**POST SCRPTUM**

**Carolyn Gregory**

PAINTING OLD FEELINGS (for Frida Kahlo)

# Introduction

## Jonathan Beale

### There is no reason

The garden gate always swings open  
Breaking the infinite circle  
Still the long white picket fences  
Barricade and covers the ancient Ha - Ha

Those lines upon lines of suburban  
Façades, mask the belief as  
The advertisers' mantra creates,  
And somehow. "There must be a reason!"

The foil and epees slide and screen  
Keep the mind and body sharp –  
as they move along to another leaving  
as another door defies 'The Selfish Gene'

Every new cosmos, of every another day  
Hesitates before the next "On guard"  
Behind every new close quarters behind  
Every new door '*there is no reason*'.

# Jonathan Beale

## Natural History

(Untitled) 1982 mural on boundary wall of natural history museum Maputo by Malangatana Valente Ngwenya

The vastness of the eye:  
Ready to drink until the cup is full -  
Full – is something the eyes  
Do not know. *“More please,  
Can I have some more, please”*

There is no abstract:  
No abstract here, not of knowledge  
At least we are here and understand  
The world in its vast contorting  
Colour and majesty.

Searching round, behind,  
Looking up, looking down  
And around and again  
And again, look behind  
Again. It changes daily.

We are one!  
In full orchestration the dove  
Punctuates the whys  
Everyone in their place  
The sun sets on enquiring minds.

## Rosh Hashanah 1978

We accidentally we found ourselves  
Together in Hayes Town.  
In the arcade destroying beings  
from other worlds.  
*Space Invaders, Defender, Asteroids:*  
The talk grew from nothing  
Until, the day's noise and song:  
The feast of trumpets  
To go and on....  
Not like your New Year or Hogmanay  
It's the year 5739. It's 1978. He laughed  
As we left the grey Hayes horizon.

"Come round,  
We'll eat, eat, eat."  
"This is Aunt Norma."  
Seeing an endless sea of food the table invisible  
He nudged me and whispered we have to eat  
Chicken with Almond Stuffing, white fish in white wine  
Lekach, Matoke, Sweet Quince, Aunt Norma's Kugel  
Uncle Jack came in looks serious  
My 14 years a nothingness.  
Uncle Jack ate like man after a day's labour  
Then drank  
And began to regale with anecdotes, jokes, and story  
And closed with its us Jews  
Who put the 'Oy' in joy.

## **Convex reflections from an old bar on Beale St**

There, under toned from sullen day givens.  
Deep Whiskey sunsets break the crapulous morning  
As the Southern Comfort cuts across the days median  
The lines written on a napkin stained in burger relish.  
Rhymes lost in rhythm – Thelonious Monk smokes on -  
Fingers rolling up and down round along chipping a rift.  
The bar man and barfly in their private strange marriage  
Unplanned and different each night.  
The mirror behind the bar reflect the ugly beauty that eyes cannot  
Some bar blues echo's; the ambiance is the mood  
Outside there diamonds on every windshield  
Blindly beating on a finite paradiddle for which there is no cure.

## The cat in the Garden

*Tree would bend when it bears fruit." (Azerbaijani proverb)*

Blind as a ballerina swirly against the air  
Still: remaining; broken by her stealth and motion  
As being shark like through the waters draw  
Extracting pollens bunkum that breeds the sharpened killer  
As nubile across her generation  
She flirts dances in the breast of her Mother who bore her  
White, blotches-of- black highlighting  
Some moral erroneousness  
She licks and flicks the swaying dandelions'  
As potential suitors  
Then casually flicks them away  
They as she in centre under some magisterial  
Mirrored orb – just is  
She plays and looks for nothing  
Seeking nothing, she wishes for nothing  
Other than plain admiration  
of nothing more than herself in play -  
Than my secretly eye viewing her in the Garden  
Her sleek black and white greyless torso  
Twisting, turning and  
Leaves determinedly  
Across the wall  
Home.

# Michael R. Collings

## XIII Sonets on Sounds and Sanity

*White noise*: also white sound; a steady, unobtrusive sound sometimes used to mask unwanted sounds.

*Polysemy*: many meanings or significations found within one word; from Greek *polusēmos* having many meanings, from *poly-* + *sema*, a sign.

### Evidence of the Senses

I knew she understood. That was never  
To be doubted. She saw too much, felt  
Each moment as I struggled, spent too many  
Faithful hours in the middle of the night.

But I truly *knew* that afternoon on  
The patio. A Mason jar with six  
Screws. A wound alarm clock. She held them up  
To each child's ears, rattling the jar.

"This is what your father hears, every  
Moment, every day." Bright eyes widened.  
Breaths paused. Then, one by one, each sought  
To look at me...and failed...and tried to smile.

They began to understand. And never  
Stopped. But she...she knew it from the first.

## In the Horror-House

In the Horror-House,[\[1\]](#) the ceiling leaked each night—  
Four long years it leaked, but only after  
We had gone to bed, turned out the light,  
And I could hear the water splash the rafters.  
I checked every room, searched anxiously to place  
Where it was coming from, inspected each  
Crack in every corner just in case  
One gave the leak away...each shadowed niche;  
Because the house had slowly wrenched alee,  
Walls split by inches, floors upheaved and sloped—  
The builder was a cheat, a thief, and we  
Were living in his guilt. At first I moped,  
Sure that I somehow had caused this shell  
To punish me with nights of watery hell.  
    But now I know  
    There was no water overhead,  
    No drip or leak or flow  
    But that which roiled in my head.

## I Want

a childhood, dammit, give it to me—at least  
false memories of mudding by a river,  
listening to the unfiltered hum of wind,  
cycling with friends, returning worn

and panting. Walking silently out a door—  
give it to me, dammit, take away  
facile pride in never having been  
a child but from my earliest self an adult

in an adult's world, answering  
commands not mine but signifying who  
I could be should be must be. I want it dammit.  
give it back...too late to live it, soon

enough to recall sunlight on water, breath  
on leaves, sounds falling lovingly *on* ears

## Receiving a Bill of Divorcement on the Grounds of Physical Incompatibility

(Church Organist—1958-2014)

For fifty years and more we two were wed—  
She and I—her trilling pipes gave voice  
To feather-touches on her keys—I read  
Black notes to melodies—we had no choice.

A traitor came—innocuous at first—  
Some *crackle-hum*—a *buzz* I barely heard—  
We sensed no future severance till bursts  
Of *sizzle-rattle-hissing* interfered.

My faithful She—I heard notes never played  
*Clink-clattering* in my so-unfaithful head—  
Notes that she would never sing—and prayed  
For time—more time—But deafness fell like lead.

Our concord stilled—the surging swell of song  
Obscured—and neither guilty of a wrong.

## **Bang!**

A door slammed shut. There was no door, of course,  
At least not near enough to where I sleep  
To move still air with sheer dynamic force  
When I sat up, my mind and heart aleap.

That's not what distressed me. I have heard  
So many nonexistent sounds that one  
More *bang!* is barely worthy note—unheard  
By outer ears, but registered in my brain.

What bothered me, and bothers still, was that  
This sound seemed much more energetic, vibrant  
Than others: against the susurrus, flat  
And white, this was as a streaming hydrant

Abrupt, overpowering, gushing sound—  
All hope of sleep manifestly drowned.

## Necessary Evil

White Noise persists, insists on separating  
Us from bitter, blacker certainties  
That otherwise engender madness. It  
Grants us respite from the constant grating  
Of the world, stark evils and deformities  
That human monsters willingly admit;

Yet, sporadically, sad truth breaks through,  
Confronts us with such foul enormities  
That we are shaken by a fragment bit  
Of darkness overwhelming light—a view  
That only brevity permits.

-

## Sonette for a July Night

It's night. It's hot. Muggy. Even mute air  
Roils angry, tense. Below, milling crowds  
Shout. Sing. Flail placards. Gesture. Spit and swear.  
Thick fury percolates, hangs in ragged shrouds.

A shot. More—*pop!pop!pop!* and screams. Blue turns red.  
Black. Blues huddle a child. Fire back. Proud. Unbowed.  
Blues protect. Aftermath: Seven bled. Five lay dead.

## Counting

Sixty today. Yesterday, thirty; the day  
Before, fifteen. Or was it twenty-five.  
It's difficult to remember the faceless play  
Of gruesome photographs on Facebook or live-  
Streaming from cellphones capturing screaming prey  
No longer human—workers fleeing a hive,  
A nest disturbed, distressed that suddenly they  
Are targets...half-ashamed to have survived.

And so it goes. Tomorrow it may be  
Nineteen. Or one. But some will surely die,  
Victims of another's fear or hate  
Or skewed beliefs. Too many pay the fee  
For others' entry into heaven, sigh  
Dying breaths, no time to curse their fates.

## Sometimes

Sometimes the noises just occurred, weren't caused  
By desperate chance or conscious human choice.  
Sometimes a gene mutated, some hormone paused  
Key growth at a crucial stage...and the noise has voice.

There is a change. A twist. An ear deforms.  
Hygromas swell, choke hope of breathing air.  
A leg grows wrongly. A faulty brain performs  
Aberrantly, hears sounds that are not there.

We don't know how we should behave. We halt,  
Consider, try perhaps to act as though  
There were no noise—as though there were no fault  
While knowing lives will trickle, never flow.

The noise separates us—us from them,  
Starting though we do from the selfsame stem.

## An Observation

I watched him—surreptitiously, I hope—  
Watching two young men at the sandwich bar.  
In his teens, he had long since learned to cope,  
But the longing in his face was enough to jar.  
I never saw his eyes; his thickened brows  
And thickened fingers and coarse brown hair concealed  
Them. Shoulders hunched, he kept his head ducked low,  
And watched them. Stopped. And then again, he'd yield.  
Anger? Sorrow? Wistfulness? What  
Must he feel as he shrinks into his collar?  
I could only guess; and it wrenched my gut  
That I sometimes vaguely wish that I were taller.  
None dare call him "handicapped" today;  
The word may fade; the truth within it, stay.

## Just Talking

Heard people talking down the hall today.  
A woman and a man, discussing something—  
Couldn't quite hear what but knew that they  
Were speaking calmly, quietly discussing

Some common situation, chatting, as  
It were. Just mumbled sound, rising to  
Occasional accents. Stepped nearer. Was  
Surprised the voices jumbled, vowels askew.

Stopped outside the bathroom door. Nothing  
Voice-like anymore—odd swirls and gurgles.  
Shook my head to see if I could control  
The always-chattering in there. Buzzing  
Shifts up-key, becomes swishes, burbles  
Of vagrant bubbles in the toilet bowl.

## Buzz of Flies

He lies. She lies. He buzzes on about  
Her; she whines about him. White noises rise,  
Murmur retorts from ear to eager ear,  
Obscure what lies beneath. They surround  
The flak disgorged by both—the *buzz* of flies  
Mutes overtones of odium and fear.

While underneath—*aye! there's the rub*—still stirs  
That Which Must Not Be Named...coarser than lies,  
Perhaps...truths inelegant and sere:  
That things are worse—inestimably worse—  
    Than they appear.

## Sleep Aids

I take the pills (doctor-approved) to aid  
In sleep. I swallow them, then poise my limbs  
In rigid restfulness and wait until  
The noises falter and rich dreams emerge.

Snap! A twist of leg. A twitch of arm.  
And dreams evaporate to sullen hope.  
The noises scream their vicious exultation,  
Settle helmet-like around my skull.

Night weaves—oppressive through oppressive sounds.  
Each individual moment lingers, lengthens,  
Attenuates toward infinity,  
Borne upon the constant, droning burden:

Sleep might come...or not. The pills remain  
To dull and deaden, drain and stultify.

---

[1] We lived in this house for a quarter of a century (1981-2006). When we bought it, it was already twenty-five years old. At first it was the only house we could afford; then after we discovered its huge structural problems, we didn't want to sell it and saddle others with its faults.

# Carolyn Gregory

## FOOL'S GOLD

All that glitters is not gold  
nor rising high with glass windows,  
marquee screaming the builder's name  
in Art Deco letters

nor does fool's gold stand  
in a good scrubbing by truth seekers  
who read deceit among the promises  
built on the graves of refugees sunk  
in harbors here and there,

called names by those  
keeping gold stockpiled  
in their counting houses.

They can pretend to know the score  
by adding wives at a price.  
They can claim their casinos  
and pink homes make them  
an American success

though the ones they have cast aside  
will come back in a huge ship  
full of the power and glory  
of their reckoning  
when they demand their country back.

## **ON POWERLESSNESS**

They would have us powerless,  
bombarded by flies and old newspapers,  
grown moldy in our lockers,  
silent with persecution for our differences  
of color, money and privilege,  
our libraries closed down  
and transit futile.

They would put bars on our windows  
to keep us in our place  
away from a vision of grace  
offering a view of canyons  
and mountains,  
the rolling ocean that accepts  
all of us, equally.

They would build jails for many,  
cemeteries for others,  
the silent empath who love  
animals and nature,  
those of us who roam between borders  
with the opening hearts flowering  
with all we have seen in travel,  
the small human dramas aching  
to be written.

## **ESPLANADE (for Rosemary)**

We followed cobbles down the avenue  
where soulful dogs walked.  
Joy spilled out along the topiary  
and orange petaled roses.

We descended to the river,  
sparkling fire on dark blue.  
Sailboats darted across the harbor  
with water wings.

I remembered the photo I had seen  
of a cottage with its bright blue roof  
rooted in a forest of yellow leaves  
and how the philosopher wrote  
very little is needed for a happy life.

Out on the water, two red sailboats  
glided by two white  
when you told me  
how your neighbors claimed money  
for roofing on your home  
they did not complete,

how your trust was broken  
when they tried to sell you  
aluminum siding and sunken windows.

Let the light fill the holes where pain settles,  
free us both to let our sails unfurl around us,  
drifting among docks  
no longer moored to holding us back.

## **GHOSTS**

Love has left me behind  
to watch the rose petals  
falling on couples,  
walking hand in hand  
along the boulevard.

I live among my ghosts,  
happy with photos,  
surrounded by tiger lilies  
and stories

of standing in the harbor  
with my wet dress,  
watching the sunset.

## **REMEMBERING THE FOURTH, ca. 1958**

The rocket's red glare  
gave me nightmares,  
charging around in the skies  
threatening Sputnik.

I crawled into my mother's bed  
at night to hide from apocalypse.

No picnics in sunny backyards  
filled in the big hole in America  
where kindergarten teachers preached  
obedience and the flag  
though some of us knew better.

# Post Scriptum

## Carolyn Gregory

### PAINTING OLD FEELINGS (for Frida Kahlo)

Sweet Jesus, my tongue is stuck  
in my mouth,  
no words come to mind  
to share my feelings.

Will he go off with my sister  
to her red room,  
forget our vows?

He used to love me,  
called me his little secret  
but men have fickle hearts,  
swearing allegiance as if ready  
to do battle for you.  
Don't you believe it!

I will paint my feelings  
graphically when need be,  
show the split self, one side  
with its own heart losing blood,  
sitting in a hospital room  
for another procedure.

I will drink the warm milk  
from the black mother of the forests  
whose breasts flow constantly  
though she wears a mask.

In my all-white dress,  
I will hold the Mexican flag  
like a mayor's wife  
between the ruins  
and the chimneys of American  
factories bellowing out fire and smoke  
through robots who eat old skulls.

I am resolute though broken,  
knitted together with staples and hooks,  
my arms free to pick up the paintbrush  
with red and yellow strokes,  
pull up the blanket of roots  
around me at night and begin again.



# Copyright Information

All selections are copyrighted by their respective authors.

Any reproduction of these poems, without the express written permission of the authors, is prohibited.

YGDRASIL: A Journal of the Poetic Arts - Copyright (c) 1993 - 2016 by Klaus J. Gerken.

The official version of this magazine is available on Ygdrasil's World-Wide Web site <http://users.synapse.net/kgerken>. No other version shall be deemed "authorized" unless downloaded from there or The Library and Archives Canada at <http://epe.lacbac.gc.ca/100/201/300/ygdrasil/index.html> .

Distribution is allowed and encouraged as long as the issue is unchanged.

Note that simultaneous submissions will not be accepted.

Please allow at least 90 days for a reply.