

# Silk Road

a literary crossroads

No. 10



Number 10  
Winter/Spring 2013



# Silk Road

a literary crossroads

Pacific University

# Silk Road

a literary crossroads

---

EDITOR IN CHIEF

Kathlene Postma

SENIOR FICTION EDITOR

Stacey Jean Barron

SENIOR POETRY EDITOR

Jaydn DeWald

ASSOCIATE FICTION EDITORS

Claire Foster

Derek Wade

ASSOCIATE POETRY EDITORS

Laura Hirschfiel

Matt Terhune

SENIOR NONFICTION EDITOR

Tabitha Blankenbiller

FIRST CHAPTER EDITORS

R.H. Sheldon

Laura Simko

ASSOCIATE NONFICTION EDITORS

Tammy Dietz

Hannah Pass

Kathryn Wilson

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Sharon Harrigan

EDITOR BRITISH POETRY SECTION

Robert Peake

MANAGING EDITOR

Quinn Ramsay

DESIGN MANAGER

Margaret Schimming

BUSINESS MANAGER

Megan Cramer

WEB MANAGER

Roberta Kelley

### ASSISTANT EDITORS

Jacquelyn Burgett, Kelly Chastain, Cayla Davis, Michele Ford,  
Jazzlynn Garrett, Stephanie Johnson, Roberta Kelley, Kacey  
Killingbeck, Samantha Kitchen, Samantha Mulholland, Kathleen  
Rohde, Niklas Streng, Wilhelmina Van Royen, Johanna Wood,  
Elizabeth Vandermolen

### SUBMISSIONS

The editors invite submissions of poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction,  
translations, and first chapters of novels all year round.

Submission information can be found on our website:  
[silkroad.pacificu.edu](http://silkroad.pacificu.edu).

All rights revert to author upon publication.

### SUBSCRIPTIONS

Subscriptions for *Silk Road* include two print issues per year.

Visit our website for more information:  
[silkroad.pacificu.edu/Subscribe.html](http://silkroad.pacificu.edu/Subscribe.html)

### PERMISSIONS

Abi Curtis' poem, "Hare on the Road to Malham," first appeared in  
the collection *The Glass Delusion*, published by Salt (2012).

### PUBLISHER

*Silk Road* (ISSN 1931-6933) is published semiannually by  
Pacific University in Oregon and funded by the  
Department of English and the College of Arts and Sciences.  
Copyright © 2013 by Pacific University

Cover: rin3 by Eleanor Leonne Bennett  
Cover Design: Margaret Schimming

# Contents

## 10

---

Editor's Note 8

### Fiction

**Ellen Kombiyil** The Opposite of Gathering 50

### Nonfiction

**Michael Heald** This is Not About Sex 19

**Crystal Bevers** Habits 91

**Danielle Geller** Ya' at' eeh, I say 128

### Poetry

**Matthew Sherling** [What If We Experience  
Anticipation Without Anticipating It] 15

**Raphael Kosek** Landscape sans Christina 16

**Ken Arnold** Paraíso 27

**Kathleen Hellen** Japanesque 48

**Dorothy Barresi** Walnut Acres 100

Vegan Heaven 103

Art and Decay 123

August Explanation 126

## First Chapters

<b>Priya Chandrasekaran</b>	Two Women	10
<b>Diane Lefer</b>	Emerson Bustamante	33
<b>Mark Baumgartner</b>	Mariah Black <i>Small Parts Isolated and Destroyed</i>	107

## British Poetry Special

<b>Robert Peake</b>	What is unique about British poetry?	58
<b>Patience Agbabi</b>	Sharps an' Flats	60
<b>Fiona Benson</b>	Zitherixon Idol	62
<b>Katy Evans-Bush</b>	Oxford Circus	63
<b>Liz Berry</b>	The Sea of Talk	64
<b>Diana Bishop</b>	Future	66
<b>Mark Burnhope</b>	The Clobber Shop	68
<b>Abi Curtis</b>	Hare on the Road to Malham	70
<b>Isabel Gallegymore</b>	The End of the Year	71
<b>Helen Ivory</b>	Sunday Morning	72
<b>Frances Leviston</b>	The Bridge in the Mirror	74
<b>Ira Lightman</b>	Skelelittle	75
<b>Rob Mackenzie</b>	The Organist	76
<b>Chris McCabe</b>	First Day at School	78
<b>Esther Morgan</b>	Essentials	80
<b>Claire Trevien</b>	Impression, sunset	81
<b>Andrew Philip</b>	A Child's Garden of Physics (1)	82
<b>Paul Stephenson</b>	Fifteen	84
<b>Tiffany Atkinson</b>	Roaming	86
Glossary		88

# Photography

<b>Eleanor Bennett</b>	Speak to Another Or Live in A Lonely World	9
	eBay 238	18
	P1180039	32
	Okay Museum 564k	47
	Almosts	56
	London WPO 236	73
	Sea	90
	K600	106
	Rekinde 0899	122
	The Photographer Who Goes the Extra Mile	134

<b>Author Biographies</b>	135
---------------------------	-----

# Two Women

Priya Chandrasekaran

Early in the morning of October 18<sup>th</sup>, two women, age seventy-six, arrived at the emergency room of St. Joseph's private hospital in Bangalore, both unconscious. They were placed in adjacent beds in a corner of a busy hospital room with their heads and feet in the same direction. Each woman's face was attached to an oxygen mask, as each woman's oxygen was measured and found to be low, hovering just above eighty-five percent.

The first to arrive was Mrs. Yogam Subramanian, the wife of Mr. Kalyanam Subramanian, a retired mechanical engineer and Brahmin of both high and low repute. Her presence was announced by the blare of sirens and a din of voices, the loudest of which belonged to her elder daughter Lakshmi. She was clad in a silk salwar khameez that crumpled like tissue paper as she strode beside her mother's cot, overseeing each movement of the nurses with an assuredness that proclaimed her to be in the medical profession.

The second to arrive was Savitri Sanathkumar, a widow. She did not so much arrive as materialize with ghostlike silence in the vestibule of the hospital and cradled in the arms of her son Ganesan, who waited by the hospital doors until a nurse beckoned him to come. He fished a folded paper from his pocket and showed it to her. She read it, took in his ripped trousers, glanced at his mother and left. When she returned, she said the doctor Padmini had left months ago to work in the United States, but as the note was handwritten and there was a bed available, they would give his mother basic care for a day, the most they could do.

The nurses and strangers who paced in and out of the hospital room took no special notice of the women. They were two sick

in a room full of the sick in a hospital meant for the sick in a country where the elderly were many, people died in masses, and there was always someone you knew who had just crossed or was about to cross that threshold that crowns the monotony of days stockpiled with dreams and trivialities and perhaps one defining act of greatness. There was, undeniably, an air of urgency surrounding these women, as exists when the sick are teetering between life and death and the top that has spun so elegantly begins to wobble and skip. But there was also an air of dispassion. The women were old enough and sick enough to render the ever inevitable also imminent.

Mrs. Yogam Subramanian, the first woman, was dressed in an expensive cotton sari with a floral print that was threadbare in places from having donned it every other day for almost two years. In her bedroom was an armoire full of silk and cotton saris; in reds and indigos and emeralds and sapphires, with gold brocade peacocks and paisleys embroidered on the palloos, they were filed away like a catalogue of the richest hues. Many were gifts from weddings and holidays. Only recently her younger daughter had chastised her for not wearing them and she had replied that she hadn't enough occasions to wear them, and she never would, for her time was short, the saris were many, and what she wanted most at this stage in her life was to be comfortable because God didn't care how good she looked.

She was overweight, gradually making her way to obese, with disproportionately thin legs, large, shapeless breasts and a soft, round stomach that reached everywhere a couple of seconds before the rest of her. As she lay on the hospital bed, her upper body elevated to facilitate her breathing, her breasts and belly hung in lax undulating folds from whose secret crevices emanated just the faintest scent of sandalwood and talc. Her hands, with their blue veins protruding through her fair, elastic skin and their long delicate fingers designed for playing instruments they'd never touched, rested, limp, on either side of her. Her plait, which resembled a small garden snake, and not the shiny horse's mane

# This Is Not About Sex

Michael Heald

She rolls up my sleeves, swabs my shoulders, and wants to know what I'm having. I'm kind of in the mood for bee stings, I say. Those come in the tall or the grande, she says. Whichever one is the medium, I say. We talk about her weekend. She lives in the North Bay and wears mascara and it was one endless bachelorette party. I'm flirting with her because she'll be taking care of me if and when things go wrong. After ten minutes she examines my shoulders. On bad days she makes me wait another ten minutes but usually she just lets me go. I pass the Korean embassy, ignore Ferlinghetti off in the distance, and hang a right just after the Vogue. I sidestep the pile of mail on the landing and climb the stairs to my apartment. It's almost 5pm and I'm on my own in San Francisco. I have what might become a career. Friends who love me. Parents still happily married. I have savings. In theory I can do whatever I want. What am I doing: I'm curled up on the ratty green armchair on the back porch smoking yellow American Spirits, coaxing my airway to stay open. I'm convinced that if I stop smoking it's going to close. Twice a week I ask the nurse to inject me with bee venom, and twice a week I feel like it's going to kill me.

The rest of the time, I'm supposed to be teaching math and grammar to fifth graders at a private school for the talented and gifted. For 31 grand a year—coincidentally, my salary—my students get to spend six hours a day in a converted mansion atop a woolly hillside listening to me talk. I make a few extra dollars riding the school bus back and forth from the city. I'm always trying to fall asleep in a way that says *don't fuck with Michael*, but

## *This Is Not About Sex*

most of the time the kids won't let me get away with it. One kid is always pulling my headphones off and making me tell him what album I'm listening to. The next morning he'll have it on his iPod, plus the B-Sides, which he can't believe I've never heard. This kid, not Natalie Portman, burns me out on The Shins. Another kid wants to know: do I have a wife, have I ever done drugs, what do I do at night. Another kid just wants to talk sports. He hates Barry Zito. I love Barry Zito. Barry Zito thinks too much, I explain, his mind is everywhere, he's like us. I change the kid's mind about Barry Zito. The truth is, even though I pretend to be annoyed by the attention, I need it. I need to know I won't be forgotten. Friday afternoons I get to teach what I want: Hitchcock, pinochle, *Seinfeld*. Wednesday mornings the fifth grade team has a 7:30 meeting where we find out which kids are going on which meds. Almost everybody's on something. I wonder what I should be taking.

I get them after work on Mondays and Thursdays. Mondays and Thursdays I try not to make plans. It takes a few whiskeys to get through the late afternoon and by the time I know I'm not going to die I'm staring at a pile of old photographs or a shaky-looking paragraph in my journal. This is not happy hour. I'm wearing headphones so I can't hear the phone ring. My roommates aren't knocking on my door because they still think of me as the guy with the girlfriend, the guy they don't want to walk in on. And it's true: they don't want to walk in on this.

Let's say you start with a shot that contains 1/100<sup>th</sup> of the venom of an ordinary bee sting. This is kind of like popping Advil and calling it heroin. But a few months later you're getting 1/10<sup>th</sup> the venom. And a year later you're basically sticking your arm inside a fucking hive. Which all kind of makes sense, but my problem is this: I don't trust the people making the venom. It's a little different than making honey.

# The Opposite of Gathering

Ellen Kombiyil

**1** Dr. Meade

It's dim when I come in, the cot pushed along one wall of the living room. He doesn't know he's dying. It's not for me to decide, and besides Mrs. Chambliss acts as the conduit, refusing to let me speak directly to him. I have no way of knowing how my words are translated in the murmurs she purrs close to his ear. Usually he talks to her out loud, makes plans for "when he's out of this." But today it's different. He squirms on the bed with a low rhythmic moaning.

"I came as soon as I could."

Mrs. Chambliss murmurs and strokes his head. She doesn't turn around.

I walk to the back corner where Jane waits with the clipboard and charts. An armchair's been pushed here to make room for the bed. The TV is on, volume turned down.

"Forgive me," the man on the cot says. His voice seems to come from another realm. It's stronger than I expected, but gravelly, like a gully gone dry. "I'd go now so as not to disturb you," he says. But he cannot get up and go. Mrs. Chambliss puts her face next to his head and whispers what, I wonder. A prayer?

I hate this. I am not a doctor, I am a timekeeper, nothing more. There is no treatment for death, only the opening into the unseen.

“Ready 200mg of morphine,” I tell Jane, and am ashamed because I know it’s more to ease my own suffering.

“Will he do it?” he says from his cot. I wonder if he’s speaking about me.

I approach the cot with the syringe. Mrs. Chambliss puts up her hand to tell me *stop*.

I don’t know if he hears her words that continue now in a steady stream or if he’s immersed in his own world. His breath is slow, almost automatic, a remembering. His exhalation tapers into a nether place, like ether let go from its vial, dissipating into the surrounding air.

## 2. Estelle Chambliss

His mind is in either world, half here, half beyond, and I wish he could tell me what it looks like. At some point Dr. Meade strolls in, although I’m barely aware. Since morning I’ve been focused on Vincent. He awoke agitated.

“Who’s drinking from my canteen?” His eyes were wild, not seeing.

Jane emerged as if from the white walls themselves, rubber shoes, dress crumpled from sleeping slumped upright on the couch, folded hat slightly askew.

“Mr. Chambliss, don’t be alarmed. It was only a dream.”

My voice overlapped hers. “Vincent, you’re home now, home from the war. Come now, darling, I’ll bring you some water.”

He was soothed when I held up his head and gave him sips. The