

Semper Fi of Appalachia

Angela Kelly

Clogging

Tap, stomp, kick heel and sashay, little girl.
Reel, shuffle, clatter, little man.
Whirl together, hands a tremble, heart of ash.
Blood stomps down hard so
Look away from that pretty child cousin.
The Lord says Look away. Wheel off.

Buck Dance

In the Buck Dance, the Male dances alone,
Though given Women's Lib, some women are now
High falutin' enough to seize attention, dance solo.
Kick skirt high up the thigh. Milk skin.
Always certain men will step right up to trouble,
Bound to lay down later with a pallet of grief.

Flat Footing

It's a-pretty, each turn high, tight.
Sliding close in, no stepping away or out,
This is home, rhythm riding true.
See it, how there is jig beauty here,
like how a lone jack-in-the pulpit stands
pale, thrived by the rot of the stump.

Hoe-Down

Center stage show-outs, even the preacher man.
He's called out many a daughter,
reared up sons, both Cain and Abel.
Pentecostal dark as that crate of rattlers,
yet stomping up straw and rooster name
in a full moon Saturday barn dance.

Sister Ada

There's that picture of Jesus
hung in the kitchen hall.
Glass pane hard broken,
dry wall busted alongside.
The monthly bills are there,
held inside the metal scallop frame:
Carolina Power & Light,
county water bill,
Reeves Hardware, Shanks Feed,
doctor bill from that female operation.
And she's still laying in the back room
under her granny's quilts,
not saying a damn word.

Brother Amos

Seemed he'd always lived alone.
In his last years he had that one-legged chicken, Carlos,
claimed he was some kind of Spanish rooster.
Amos kept trying to tie on a wooden leg,
made them himself, out of oak, chestnut, dogwood, cedar.
But that rooster would peck everything out from under,
then he would fly at Amos like a demon.
That old leathered man would say,
there now, Carlos, there now,
then give the fowl his daily feed and
his coo hood every night. How his shit littered the shack.
Then one morning, Carlos was dead, cold arc
of feathered gold, black, crimson cockscomb.
And Amos walked into the river in December.

Etta Dean

When she was sixteen, Elvis Presley came to town,
posters in the drug store, ecstasy in the girls' bathroom.
She stole out the back door with Mary Ruth and those Cole brothers,
the auditorium smelled of sawdust, Pinesol and rancid popcorn oil.
But she and Mary Ruth had screamed and danced,
drinking Coca-Colas laced with the Cole boys' bourbon
and after midnight, it was the Cole boys who kissed and
fondled them going home, no matter if they dreamed of Elvis or not.
And when her daddy whipped her, on the back porch,
only five belt lashes, and he was silent as usual,
she stared up at the spattered stars cresting the orchard,
she breathed in *apples*, hornet glazed, ground rot, October.
And she dreamed of her first heartbreak,
the beautiful curled lip of a bad man's mouth.

Coraline

Rat's nests, what're you doin' with yourself?
Her mama tries to drag a comb through her waist length red hair.
Coraline bends her long neck, keeps her eyes closed
because truth can leak right of your eyes.
These is sweet gum leaves right here in your hair
How far are you goin' ?
Her mama tugs even harder with the comb.
I doan no sweet gum nearby here.

Coraline doesn't say *I go as far as the old graveyard*
up beyond the ridge. She doesn't say, *I lay down*
beside that angel grave. The angel headstone has
a broke off wing and the name of the dead, time has erased.
It might be some of her kin, it might not. The dead are just dead.

Don't go too far, Coraline. There's dangers in the woods.

Coraline knows full well that danger, a tall boy
named Cort Duluth, he's tracked her sometimes all the way
up the ridge, he won't come past the graveyard markers.
But he stays with her there the whole time,
even in rain, he watches her from the stand of sweet gum,
fierce, but silent, shy as a deer.

Roscoe Deakins

A-course I made moonshine, my daddy did, my uncles.
Once I drove Daddy's 49 Plymouth all the way to Madison County,
I was maybe fourteen, it was about Christmas, snowin' like blazes,
I was cold as a witch's teat 'cause the heater never worked right.
I's scared them bottles in the trunk was jitterin' loud enough to wake
the dead.

Another time when I was taking a load to Cullowhee,
that new sheriff, Wainsley, put the blue lights right on me,
I had to pop the trunk and he stood there thinking a while,
then he give fifty cent for a dollar bottle and I had to nip with
him, finally he said he ain't never seen me. Better not again.
That night, I was about drunk going back up Pritchard Creek.

I reckon I was about nine that summer when Mama
started getting' me up even before the rooster crowed,
I'd walk up the holler to the still in the grove
to keep the fire goin' so Daddy, Uncle Rev and Walt
could go on home and sleep before the second shift at the mill.

Lunch time my cousin Denny would come up,
bring mama's biscuits with sausage or ham,
sometimes just sorghum molasses. I liked it just fine.
I never did take to schoolin' like Mae Ann or Buddy,
but Mama taught me to read the Bible, she taught me
her roots and herbs and medicines which we sold.

On Saturdays I drove my sister Pearl into town
and she always wore her good blue dress,
it was light as sky, the skirt floated around her
little bitty self just like some kind of cloud.
And she could sell anything to anyone walked by,
be it a scour wife, a tobacco man, or even a snake oil salesman.

When she died of the TB, she was but twenty year old.
I've took on seventy-eight years of age now, and
I still see Pearl putting Mama's wares in the basket and
I swear to Jesus, the blue sky still don't look right to me.

Semper Fi; also Semper Fidelis: Semper (Latin) sempiternus
Semper meaning always, + aeternus meaning eternal
Fidelis (Middle English: fidelite, Old French: fidelitas)
meaning faithful, of allegiance, devotion, fealty, loyalty

Angelita Burrows

Right after Wink Burrows got killed in Korea, his brother Ramey went about crazy. There's too many accounts of what all he got into to even be true, but it was known that Sheriff Milkey told him to leave the County. Maybe even the state.

So he went down to South Carolina, he was down there maybe about four, five years, said to be working the peach orchards. That probably oughtna been true, Ramey was the smart one of the Burrows, he coulda been a banker or a store keep, though his Aunt Wynona, who had prophesized before, dreamed on his birth night, he was gonna be a lawyer, she testified she'd seen thick books and the justice scale.

Years passed and when Ramey came back home, he had him a wife, her name was Angelita, she was Mexican or some such and some didn't like it, they'd didn't cotton to the Cherokee women either, that Hoss Goodlow and Mac Earl had married, you was supposed to marry your own kind.

But if you saw that woman on the street, Angelita Burrows, say outside Sup's Diner, or the Merchantile, you'd fallen down in some kind of stupor. Nothing this side of the Garden of Eden should look that fine. Though some said her eyes and her heart was black.

Eva Grace

She liked to tell people she'd been raised in a brothel in New Orleans. It sounded better than that dirt shack up in coal mine country. She had a ruby on a silver ring in her navel, said that was proof, an homage to the red light district and her sweet mama, Evangeline, looking at such a jewel, any man would pull out his money then. Sometimes they weren't lucky, she'd just play zydeco music on her record player, swaying across the room in a yellow dress, singing in her whiskey voice. Some was fine, paying for just that, their hearts was loner than the body.

what Thomas Earl kept talking about in the throes of his dementia

That mutt collie dog I brought home that spring kept killing the chickens. That was food on the table on Sundays, Mama wringing their necks on Saturday, us kids plucking the feathers on the porch, the pieces floured, fried in lard in a cast iron skillet after church.

I'd named her Lady, her head was high as a queen, coat cascading fine as silk, I brushed ever evening after chores. In real bad weather, we could let her in, she'd lay up in the bed between me and little George and he would get so tickled by her, it was really fine for us, that furry heartbeat.

But one weekend, the coop was about torn down, feathers everywhere, floating like snow, though August. Mama said, "Earl, go get the shotgun, you gonna hafta lead her on up the holler. Once a dog starts killing chickens they ain't no use. We can't have this."

So I called Lady and Mama shadowed me up the lane. She said, "Call her out in front and put that muzzle to the back of her head." I said, "Mama, I can't do that." She said, "Yes, you will. Ain't no choice here." My daddy was gone, on the chain-gang, we was alone.

I did it, three, four times, put my gun up against that good blonde skull. I was cryin' so hard, I was only eleven. I said it again, "Mama, I can't. Don't make me do this." She put her hand against my back. "Thomas Earl, we ain't gonna go hungry this winter. That's a chicken

Killing dog. What's got to be done, has to be done now." Finally I closed my eyes, pulled the trigger. I still feel it. When I looked up, Mama was long gone, she was high-tailing it down the lane, that red gingham skirt flying like a kite. She'd left me a handkerchief and a shovel on the ground.

Preacher Dwayne Whiteside

went into the Magnolia Nursing Home right after the Easter service, in the Year of Our Lord 1979. He'd been in need of retirement for some time, but that Easter, he misspoke considerably. Eating donuts on Good Friday would not send anyone to Hell. The Lord Jesus did not have a jet airplane and the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse had not been sighted charging the Mayor's house.

Sister Bessie, who claimed to be a third cousin, recorded his removal thusly, "Unforgivable, the Church has voted for the dismissal of the Lord's very arrow." Sister Bessie had never married and she tended to the melodramatic. She'd written down most of the family history, though after she died, in the Year of Our Lord 1994, her journals were found to be an odd fiction, she was not well in her recollection, nor thought process, though everyone remembered her mama, Eula, the church organist, with great affection.

But there was one entry in Sister Bessie's journal about the last days of Preacher Whiteside in the Nursing Home that gave us all pause:

"The nurses have complained about Preacher Whitesides' horned toes. One called them "terrible little devils under the sheets" and they said, that even the strongest of nail clippers were useless against them. How, even seemingly unconscious, the Preacher would aim a foot at any person who approached and slice them open easy as a razor to an apple. Eventually, they had to call in a gardener with a pair of hedge shears, how everyone on the hall heard the man curse the Lord as he clipped. And the Reverend, who had not spoken in nigh eighteen months, gave answer in a strange tongue, almost like the grunt of a hog.

Arthur Ray at his Mama's Funeral

He hung up the phone, said to us, "Funeral's Thursday." Left the room. She was old, sick and his visits had trailed away somehow.

In other words, she'd been gone from him a long time. During the last year, he'd even spoken of her in the past tense.

Always a broad stout woman, she'd shrunk down like a puppet. He mumbled to himself, *that ain't even her in that box.*

He wore his only suit, which had grown tight across his belly. The room seemed full of strangers and whispers.

Early on, he planted his back against the chipped wall of the hall. Allowing no cousins, old neighbors or church folk to approach him blind.

They were so gray, so old, full of the Jesus Pentecostal shit he hated. And when the preacher (certainly a stranger) called them to the parlor,

Like an altar call, saying, "Brothers and sisters, let's join hands to pray." He laughed aloud, "Preacher, you ain't never gonna jerk a tear outta me."

As most filed to the coffin, he walked to the filling station on the corner. The old man at the counter, had a familiar name and a Parkinson's tremor.

They had a cup of bad coffee, talked of the weather, the closed textile mill. When the dark hearse passed by, they fell silent, listening as a Mechanic in the garage cursed a Chevy transmission like the devil himself.

Tara Lynn Mayes, 1975

You went away to a fancy Northern college so nobody could call you hillbilly. You lied to explain your corn-pone accent, said you were an army brat, had lived everywhere, all over the world. You'd studied your countries.

Freshman, sophomore year, it worked out for you, perfect deception, but then that boy from Sevierville showed up with hound dog eyes, said he could smell mountain on you, said you was so lonesome.

He was a drink of water, but you hid him, from everyone, even yourself, then he went back home to the farm, no degree to show, or even wanted. You graduated a year later, alone, a month after your mama died.

You ain't been home since, and twenty years later, you still remember that lanky Tennessee boy, Miller Coates, how he kissed you fierce, sharper than a toothache, and how you're sitting in your big house

now thinking about a dead time, a gone boy, remembering the Valentine card he shoved under your dorm room door, it was the best thing ever, that pink heart slip of paper: *I love you better than the devil loves fire.*

Jebbediah, Coming Home

He's an old man now, in suspenders. He won't even say the years. There's a shopping center now where Gran Pappy's farm stood.

But Aunt Lilith's old home place is still backwoods, snake bait, house long burned down, but a righteous chimney still standing,

Something of a hearth drowned in weed, rhubarb out back, blackberry bramble, crows cawing in the storm broke crabapples.

He remembers drinking whiskey behind the church at age thirteen, killing hogs before November frost, the charred smell of the smoke house.

A Christmas dance in the Vance's barn, the sharp clean of his new shirt, how Adeline pulled the collar off his neck and kissed the life out of him.



Angela Kelly, of Spartanburg, SC, is the author of four poetry chapbooks, most recently *Post Script from the House of Dreams* (winner of the 2006 South Carolina Poetry Initiative Prize, published by Stepping Stone Press). Her full length poetry collection *Voodoo for the Other Woman* is forthcoming from Hub City Press in March 2013. Additional indi-

vidual poems have been published in numerous journals including *North American Review*, *The Bloomsbury Review*, *Nimrod*, *Kalliope*, *Rhino*, *Yemassee*, *Inkwell*, *Rosebud*, *The Ledge*, and *Rattle*. In addition to the Linda Flowers Literary Award, Kelly was awarded the South Carolina Fellowship of the Arts from The South Carolina Commission of the Arts in 1999, received the 2011 Carrie McCray Nickens Fellowship presented by the South Carolina Academy of Authors, received the 2012 William Matthews Poetry Award from the *Asheville Poetry Review*, and has been awarded fellowships from the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts and the Vermont Studio Center.

LINDA FLOWERS LITERARY AWARD

The North Carolina Humanities Council invites original, unpublished entries of fiction, nonfiction, or poetry for the 2013 Linda Flowers Literary Award. Submissions should celebrate excellence in the humanities and reflect the experiences of people who, like Linda Flowers, not only identify with North Carolina, its people and cultures, but also explore its problems and promises.

For complete submission guidelines and prize details, see the North Carolina Humanities Council website at www.nchumanities.org. Questions may be directed to Donovan McKnight, program officer at 336-334-4770 or dmcknight@nchumanities.org.

DEADLINE: postmark date August 15, 2013

The North Carolina Humanities Council was privileged to have Linda Flowers as one of its members from 1992 to 1998.

*That my book about Eastern North Carolina might touch a chord with some people... I had not anticipated. What [they] are responding to in *Thrown Away*, I think, is its human dimensions: the focus on real men and women having to make their way in the face of a changing, onrushing and typically uncaring world... This humanistic apprehension, I tell my students, is as necessary for living fully as anything else they may ever hope to have.*

~ Linda Flowers, in a letter to the North Carolina Humanities Council Membership Committee, July 1992

PREVIOUS RECIPIENTS

Karen Gilchrist (2001)

Joseph Bathanti (2002)

Heather Ross Miller (2003)

Barbara Presnell (2004)

Kermit Turner (2005)

Kathy Watts (2006)

Susan Weinberg Vogel (2007)

Kristin Hemmy (2008)

Katey Schultz (2009)

Traci Lazenby Elliot (2010)

Nancy Dew Taylor (2011)

Read more previous winning submissions at www.nchumanities.org/linda-flowers.

2012 SELECTION COMMITTEE

Magdalena Maiz-Peña
Council trustee and professor of Spanish at Davidson College

Rebecca Black
poet and assistant professor of creative writing at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro

Lenard Moore
poet and assistant professor of language and literature at Mount Olive College

Katey Schultz
2009 Linda Flowers Award recipient