Summer 2015

The Coast Line

Newsletter of the UNCW Department of Creative Writing
PSL: Your writing is populated by many animals, plants and fruits. Why is nature so frequently represented in your writing?

AN: My language and facility for metaphor has always been rooted in the natural world. I feel like there is such a universal sense of wonder and beauty and horror when observing nature, I can’t really help but use the language of science and fable and myth when drafting a poem. My not-so-dirty little secret is that I probably read more science and natural history books than poetry books, but I do feel like Mother Nature is the best poet of all. Most days I feel like I’m just trying to catch up to her, to capture a little of her wonder to record it on the page before climate change mucks it all up for us. I agree with Diane Ackerman who says, “Few things are as satisfying as meeting nature on its own terms, attending to its rhythmic demands, and then trying to snare it briefly in the net of the imagination…”

Aimee Nezhukumatathil is the author of three poetry collections: *Miracle Fruit* (Tupelo Press, 2003), *At the Drive-In Volcano* (Tupelo Press, 2007) and *Lucky Fish* (Tupelo Press, 2011). Nezhukumatathil has been awarded a National Endowment for the Arts fellowship and a Global Filipino Award. She is associate professor of English at SUNY Fredonia. Nezhukumatathil spoke with second-year poet Pernille Smith Larsen about nature writing and undertaking journeys without maps.
PSL: In the poem “Waiting For Him To Speak,” from *Lucky Fish*, you connect the events of your son’s “hesitance” to speak for the first time and the imminent extinction of various wild animals. How has your approach to nature/environmental writing changed over time?

AN: When I first started writing seriously in college, my subjects weren’t very broad. I basically wrote these sappy love and/or unrequited love poems. As I learned about the power and loveliness of metaphor (and as I began to get bored with myself!), I started to draw upon nature as an alternate lens to re-imagine ‘relationship-y’ issues and what it was like growing up Asian American in predominantly white towns.

PSL: During your reading at UNCW, you talked about discovering poetry somewhat late, as a chemistry major in college, and as someone who came from a family in which writing was not seen as a career option. What was your “discovery” of poetry like? How did your parents react to your decision to switch from chemistry to poetry?

AN: The first contemporary poem I ever encountered was Naomi Shihab Nye’s prose poem, “Mint Snowball.” Reading it was, as Emily Dickinson said, very much like the proverbial top of my head was taken off. As I became more and more immersed in finding other contemporary poets, it became clear to me that I wanted to spend the rest of my life writing and reading. My parents were confused and hurt I think – all my life until I was late in college I told them I was going to be a doctor after all – but I know after they saw how committed and excited I was about school again, they said as long as I could tell them I’d always want to be a student, they’d support whatever subject I wanted to pursue.

PSL: As someone who writes to invigorate and challenge the boundaries of nature/environmental writing, who are some other contemporary poets/writers that you’d recommend?

AN: I’m not just saying this because I was just there at UNCW, but my issues of *Ecotone* are so dog-eared, mostly for the poets that appear in each issue. Truly gorgeous and haunting selections every issue! But others in particular include Camille Dungy, Matthew Gavin Frank, Elena Passarello’s animal essays, and pretty much any poet that appears in *Orion* magazine.

PSL: I was wondering if you could talk a bit about the structure of your latest collection, *Lucky Fish*. Has the process of structuring your poems been similar and/or different across your three collections?

AN: Outside of the actual writing of poems, it’s the most difficult but most rewarding part of the book process. It’s fun to step back a bit from the composing and take inventory. For me, there are no hard and fast guidelines, and I went about manicuring the manuscript in a completely different way each time. The only similarity between the three books is that I never set out to write a “book.” That is, I’ve never written consciously with a project or theme in mind. Liz Rosenberg describes assembling a manuscript as trying to go on a “journey without a map,” and I agree, but just like going on a road trip with no map – it can be a grand time, filled with surprise and fun stops along the way, or one giant hot mess and you’re left needing to use the bathroom with no rest stop for miles! I’d love to try a ‘themed’ manuscript one day, but it seems really difficult right now. I just haven’t found a subject I could maintain for 60 poems’ worth, but I’m in awe of those that do. ✍
Patricia Hampl helped launch the rise of autobiographical writing over the past 30 years. She first won recognition for *A Romantic Education*, her Cold War memoir about her Czech heritage. Her most recent book, *The Florist’s Daughter*, won numerous “best” and “year-end” awards, including the *New York Times* “100 Notable Books of the Year” and the 2008 Minnesota Book Award for Memoir and Creative Nonfiction. Hampl’s other books include *Blue Arabesque: A Search for the Sublime*, *I Could Tell You Stories*, *Spillville*, *Virgin Time*, *Burning Bright*, *Woman Before an Aquarium*, and *Resort and Other Poems*.

Hampl has received fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation, Bush Foundation, National Endowment for the Arts, Ingram Merrill Foundation and Djerassi Foundation. In 1990, she was awarded a MacArthur Fellowship. Hampl is Regents Professor and McKnight Distinguished Professor at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, a member of the permanent faculty of the Prague Summer Program, and affiliated with Kingston University-London as visiting professor in the Centre for Life Narratives.

Hampl recently spoke with second-year fiction student Liz Granger about leisure, publishing and generational change.
LG: I know you’re working on a book about leisure. I was wondering about how your relationship to leisure has changed over time and how you would characterize it now.

PH: I’d say it’s more of a longing – more of a desire for – rather than an experience of. You reach a certain point of your life when it’s the busy time, and I feel like I’m on the cusp of entering, or even re-entering in a different way, a more quiet and contemplative and less rushed time.

But there’s a time when you’re in this position between generations. The younger ones want you to be a mentor. And you also maybe have to take care of the older people in your life. That takes a lot of attention and a lot of energy. And you’re no spring chicken anymore. Put all that together and that’s a busy time, not a leisurely one. It’s supposed to be the active time of life. When I started out, nobody was asking me to teach classes, run all over the country like a chicken with my head cut off. Or write letters of recommendation or do anything. So I am probably coming down the end of that to something a little more contemplative.

Also I think I’ve also been kind of interested in subjects related to what I’m calling leisure, which is, a contemplative life, solitude, gazing, looking, observing. Things like that. Things that aren’t active but that are – I wouldn’t say passive – but are attentive rather than active.

LG: When do you think that started?

PH: I think I’ve always had that.

LG: Demeanor?

PH: Not demeanor. I’m a jabberbox. I talk. I’m very sociable. My outer self is not at all like that. I don’t know if you saw the broadside that they did for my reading. That is a childhood scene of daydreaming, of just gazing up. If you read that you’ll see what I’m talking about. It’s the opening scene of my new book.

LG: I think you mentioned that you sold the book about leisure on proposal?

PH: Well, there were pages. And I have a track record.

LG: You do have a track record.

PH: In a funny way, in today’s publishing market, having a track record can work against you. Because they can see exactly how many books I’ve sold. Whereas if you sell a book to them, they think, “You’re the hot new thing. Let’s grab this idea. It looks really good, and the writing’s good. Maybe this’ll be a break-out book that will sell a million.”

So you might get a considerably bigger advance than somebody like me and colleagues at my generational level who are in the game, are taken seriously. We publish with the best places. But, we aren’t – none of my books have been Eat, Pray, Love. We often talk about it. It’s a curious thing.

Now whether that poor soul, that poor young person who gets a half-million dollar advance, or a $2 million advance — or something crazy, from my point of view — will get a second book…

LG: You sold your first book on proposal?

PH: My first book was sold on 50 pages and a proposal. And I wasn’t a known writer at that time.

LG: How much hands-on attention did you get from your editor then?

PH: Then, a good deal. Now, things have changed. I’d say that one’s agent ends up being one’s more intimate connection. I’ve had a lot of different editors, and my new editor — who’s not new in the business; he’s a very long-standing, very powerful editor at Viking Penguin — he seems just wonderful. But I haven’t worked with him before. So I can’t say anything about him. I’ve always had good editors. I’ve always liked my editors, gotten along well with them, but they often move to different houses or I end up going to a different house. I’ve been all over.
But the business has changed – now we’re talking business, not publishing – it has changed and it’s still in such flux. Nobody knows what’s going on and everybody’s very insecure. We’re in… a pivotal, seismic change. As significant as the printing press was. Just as with the printing press, we don’t know where that technology is going to lead us.

It constantly amazes me that young people apply in droves for these creative writing programs, where they’re being taught fairly class forms: novel, memoir, essay, poetry. They still want to study that. This is young people. Instead of saying, “Eh, this is yesterday’s news.” That, to me, would be more interesting than to find out what I’m thinking. I feel like this young generation must know something that I don’t know.

LG: In class you said that you need to have your mess about you in order to start writing a book. I was wondering if you could talk more about that. Specifically, is there a time when you’ve had the mess everywhere and decided that it was time to give up?

PH: Probably. Yeah, I think so. In some ways it was less when I had the mess about me and was when I felt stuck. I wasn’t making more of a mess; I wasn’t generating anymore. My engine was stalled in some way on something or another. Or sometimes it’s just much more practical. I thought I was going to write a book and I did a lot of the travel for it, about going to the footsteps of St. Paul in Turkey and in Greece. I did some of the travel. Did a lot of reading. And then I kind of thought [about]... the scholars who are working on this period in early history, who know the languages. It wasn’t like Paul meant that much to me personally. I felt like, what do I really have to offer? It would be superficial. I called myself on it – not because I was uninterested or because I hadn’t put time in. I could have done something. But I chose not to. I thought: what would I rather read, something personally voiced? Or scholarship? And on this, scholarship.

LG: Are there methods other than writing you use to access unconscious or half-thought ideas?

PH: Oh, I suppose. I like to take long walks. I do garden some. Cooking. But writing is writing, you know. Subject, verb, object. You have to do it. You have to see that as the place where you open yourself. Not just to speaking, but to receiving information.
Christina Clark’s poem, “Aunt L,” appeared in the 10th issue of Cactus Heart, an e-journal.

Jonathan Russell Clark had a review of Tony Hoagland’s new essay collection on The Rumpus, a review of Azar Nafisi’s Republic of Imagination on The Millions, a book review on PANK’s blog and a review of Kristina Marie Darling’s Fortress up at Tarpaulin Sky. Another one of Clark’s reviews was accepted at the Georgia Review. He will have an essay on Hilda Doolittle in the summer issue of Tin House. Clark also has a review on Ali Smith’s How To Be Both on The Rumpus, and a review on Little, Brown’s The David Foster Wallace Reader on The Millions.

Michelle Crouch’s essay about her tattoo was featured in Pen & Ink: Tattoos & the Stories Behind Them, edited by Isaac Fitzgerald and illustrated by Wendy McNaughton. She also has a flash fiction piece, “Wolves Raised by Girls” in Gigantic Sequins 5.2.


Beth Roddy received second place in the Mash Stories Competition 5 for her piece, “One Man’s Trash.” She was also the winner of the Gabriele Rico Nonfiction Challenge 5 for her piece, “One Man’s Trash.”

Megan Ellis received an artist residency at Wildacres Retreat in the Blue Ridge Mountains and will spend one week there this summer.

Jason Hess had a poem, “Modern Frontier Thesis,” in the Winter 2014 edition of Camas: The Nature of The West. Hess also had a review on Creative Nonfiction’s recent anthology and a review of Peter Fromm’s If Not For This on NewPages.com.

Pernille Smith Larsen’s poem “T. Rextasy” appeared on Madcap Review. The poem also placed third in the Jim Stone Memorial Contest of the Springfield Writers’ Guild 2014 Literary Awards. Her poem “Post-Phenology (12 Haikus for the End of Seasons)” will be in the next issue of Stillwater Review, and her “Poem In Which I Attempt to Write L’histoire Centrale by René Magritte” is forthcoming in the next issue of Crab Creek Review. In addition, her poem “Six Phone Messages From Mom” appeared online in Marathon Lit Review.

Veronica Lupinacci had a poem in issue 32 of Haiku Journal.

Catherine Miller’s story “Tomorrow I’ll Miss You”—originally published in YARN (Young Adult Review Network) in June—has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize. The piece was first workshoped in Nina de Gramont’s fall 2013 fiction course, Writing for Young Adults.

Benjamin Rachlin had a piece, “Our Scattered Correspondents,” in the latest issue of Five Dials.

Katie O’Reilly had a piece about Southern activism and women’s rights titled “Choice Rights, and Those Who Protest To Protect Them, Are Alive and Well in the South” on Bustle.com. Her piece, “The Egg and I,” appeared in The James Franco Review, a literary journal founded by Corrine Manning (MFA ’10). Also, O’Reilly was granted an artist’s residency this summer at The Hambidge Center in the mountains of north Georgia.

Corinne Manning had five additional poems published in +. Wilson Rust on their wedding day,” appears in Moth Magazine.

Cathe Shubert will be presenting a project on silence and literature at the Embodiments Research Group conference in Cornwall, England this July. She covered “the white writer’s duty to tackle racism in literature given the aftermath of Ferguson, the somewhat murky process for selecting the ‘best’ literature according to the National Book Awards and the Pulitzer Prize, and, most recently, the media’s complicated response to the brutal Charlie Hedbo killings” on ‘Round Down’ at Plouglshares’ blog, where she analyzes the latest in literary news.

Kirby Snell had two poems — “Island Funeral” and “Geography Lesson” — published in Crab Orchard Review’s special “West Coast and Beyond” September 2014 issue. Her poem “Pelecanus occidentalis” appears on Flyway: Journal of Writing and Environment.

Jacqueline Winter Thomas will have a summer residency at the Vermont Studio Center this July. She had two poems in Tinderbox Poetry Journal, her poem “(Mytho)Poetics” appeared in E•ratio’s online edition, and her long sequence poem, “Visual Field,” appeared in the December print issue of barrelhouse.


Emily Wilson’s poem, “Passport,” appears on DIALOGIST. She received a review by Michael Naghten Shanks, editor of The Bohemyth, for her poem, “Postcard I almost send to an almost lover,” which appeared in their October issue. Her poem “A Train in a Dream” appeared in Green Mountains Review. In addition, Wilson’s poem, “Postcard I almost send to an almost lover” was anthologized by The Bohemyth in their “Best Of, So Far” edition, which highlighted pieces from the past two years, including work from John Mortara (MFA ’14), who selected one of Wilson’s poems to appear in Big Luck’s When he was guest editor: Wilson’s poem, “Portrait: Frank and Gladys Vlach, my great grandparents on their wedding day,” appears in Rust + Mule: Wilson had five additional poems published in Ghost Ocean Magazine.
Hannah Dela Cruz Abrams (MFA ’07) has an essay forthcoming in Southern Humanities Review called “Dog and Wolf: the Time Between (Essay as Ideolocator).” She also gave, as an SHR contributor, a reading and master class at Auburn University. Her essay, “If We Were Really There” appeared in Tethered by Letters, Issue 9. Hannah was featured in Wrightsville Beach Magazine’s January 2015 “14 under 40” special and her short story, “Stone Fruit,” is up at Wraparound South: wraparoundsouth.org/winter-2015/fiction/stone-fruit-by-hannah-dela-cruz-abrams.

Daisy Barringer (MFA ’06) was hired as Thrillist’s San Francisco editor. She writes articles about everything from “The Worst Decisions You Can Make in SF” to “How to Sneak Booze into Music Festivals.” She’s sure her Pulitzer Prize is coming any day now.

Emma Bolden (MFA ’05) was selected as the 2014 Barthelme Prize for Short Prose winner for her piece, “Gifted” by Gulf Coast literary journal. Her poem, “House is an Enigma,” was chosen by Sherman Alexie for this year’s edition of The Best American Poetry. The poem originally appeared in Conduit #25.

Douglass Bourne’s (MFA ’09) screenplay, “70% Water,” received an honorable mention for Best Feature Length Screenplay at the Mountain Film Festival.

Bill Carty (MFA ’07) had four poems in Big Big Wednesday’s second issue, as well as five poems in the summer/fall issue of Poetry Northwest, where he has joined the staff as associate editor/book reviews.

Samantha Deal (MFA ’13) was named a finalist for this year’s Zone 3 Press First Book Award for Poetry for her manuscript, [Taxonomies Something Opened]. Also, her poem “Taxonomy of an Automobile” was a finalist in the Rattle Poetry Prize and will appear in their forthcoming issue.

Daren Dean’s (MFA ’03) novel Far Beyond the Pale will be released by Fiction Southeast Press in May 2015. Fiction Southeast also published two of Daren’s pieces: “The Heavenly Language” and “Why I Write.”

Regina Diperna’s (MFA ’13) poem, “Where My Body Has Been,” was named one of Boston Review’s 20 Top Poems of 2014.

Jason Frye (MFA ’05) has signed a four-book deal with Berkeley-based travel guide publisher Avalon Travel. Of the four titles, two are revisions of Frye’s previous guidebooks, Moon North Carolina and Moon North Carolina Coast Including the Outer Banks, and two—Moon Blue Ridge & Smoky Mountains and Moon Spotlights: Asheville—are new titles.

Jeremy Hawkins’s (MFA ’13) book The Last Days of Video (released in March 2015) received a starred Kirkus review and is nominated for the 2015 Kirkus Prize in fiction.

Christine Hennessey (MFA ’14) was named a 2015 Aspen Summer Words Fellow and will spend five days in Colorado with other writers this June.

Ben R. Hoffman (MFA ’13) received a nice review for his chapbook Together, Apart in Necessary Fiction. Read it at necessaryfiction.com/reviews/TogetherApartbyBenHoffman.

Sally J. Johnson’s (MFA ’14) essay, “Breastwork,” was chosen as a finalist for Sycamore Review’s Wabash Prize in Nonfiction, judged by Leslie Jamison. The essay will be published in the spring issue. In addition, Electric Cereal published five of Johnson’s poems; her poem “The Lavender and Thyme” was published by DIALOGIST; Spoon River Poetry Review Issue 39.2 features her poem, “keeping;” and The Manifest Station published her poem, “Fragment.”

Marcus Johnston (MFA ’03) had a poem, “desertion,” published in the 2015 online version of the North Carolina Literary Review.

Katie Jones (MFA ’14) has a poem, “When We Met During Prohibition,” featured on LEVELER.


Gwendolyn Knapp’s (MFA ’06) memoir of essays, After a While You Just Get Used to It: A Tale of Family Clutter, is forthcoming from Gotham Books in June.
Keith Kopka (MFA ’11) published a poem in *Day One*, a weekly literary journal from Amazon.

Janie Elizabeth Miller’s (MFA ’08) piece, “Lonely Species,” appeared in Issue 69 of the *Bellingham Review*, sharing the nonfiction section with Philip Gerard.

Amelia Morris (MFA ’09) announced the release of *Bon Appétempt: A Coming-of-Age Story*. See the book trailer at her award-winning blog (which launched the book deal!), bonappetempt.com/2015/01/the-book-trailer.html.

Jeremy Morris (MFA ’14) has two poems in *BOAAT PRESS* #4: “Trying to Remember Myself” and “Institute to Forget and Stop Writing the Elegy.”


Kyle Mustain’s (MFA ’12) long-form lyric essay, “The Opposite of Suicide,” in which he interweaves his experiences working as a substitute teacher at the same high school he attended with his musings on bullying, school shootings and education, appears in the winter issue of the *Writing Disorder*.


Paul Pastorini (MFA ’14) has an article featured on rantsports.com, where he writes regularly about mixed martial arts and boxing.

Rebecca Pettruck’s (MFA ’07) *Steering Toward Normal* (Abrams/Amulet) won a Blue Ribbon as a Best Book of 2014 awarded by *The Bulletin* of the Center for Children’s Books, one of the leading children’s book review journals for school and public libraries.

Meg Reid (MFA ’12) edited *Carolina Writers at Home*, an essay and photograph collection for Hub City Press. It features North and South Carolina writers writing about their houses and includes essays from Clyde Edgerton and David Gessner, among other notable authors who served at UNCW as visiting writers.

Erica Sklar (MFA ’14) has an essay, “Tracking Down,” published on *The Activity Report: Adventure Within*.

Anna B. Sutton’s (MFA ’13) thesis was a semifinalist for the Persea Books Lexi Rudnitsky Poetry Prize. She had poetry included in *Tinderbox and Southeast Review*. In addition, she had a piece of flash creative nonfiction published on the Collagist, and another piece of flash CNF published by *Brevity*. She has poems forthcoming in *Copper Nickel* and *Third Coast*. Sutton spoke on a panel — along with Meg Reid (MFA ’12) — for Hub City’s The Writing Show.

Eric Tran’s (MFA ’13) nonfiction piece, “Methods of Anonymity,” was nominated for a Pushcart Prize by *Redivider*. Tran was also named a runner-up in *Redivider*’s November 2014 flash nonfiction contest for his piece, “Syllabus for Knowing the Human Body.” His poem, “The First X-Ray,” appeared on *DIALOGIST*.

Snežana Žabic (MFA ’05) has a piece, “Failing Haibun,” in the anthology *Wreckage of Reason II: Back to the Drawing Board*. A teenage refugee of the Yugoslav Wars, Žabic writes about her experiences in the hybrid memoir *Broken Records*. She is the author of the short story collection *U jednom životu* (In a Lifetime), and co-author of the bilingual poetry collection *Po(e)atry/ Po(jest)zija*. She edits *Packingtown Review* and teaches creative writing at the University of Illinois at Chicago. See more of her publications at spuriousbastard.blogspot.com.
May-lee Chai’s latest book, the second edition of *China A to Z* (co-authored with Winberg Chai), was released in December 2014. This 2015 edition is expanded and revised and features 50 percent new content. She has reviewed two novels for the Dallas Morning News: Miriam Toews’ *All My Puny Sorrows* and Anne Tyler’s *A Spool of Blue Thread*. In addition, Chai’s essay “Neon” was accepted by *Gulf Coast* and will appear in the summer/fall issue.

Clyde Edgerton will be the next recipient of UNC-Chapel Hill’s Thomas Wolfe Literary Award for his “contributions to the literature of South and beyond.” The award will be presented to Clyde in early October during a two-day celebration in Chapel Hill. Edgerton has work forthcoming in the following anthologies: *Amazing Place: What North Carolina Means to Writers*, *A Book of Uncommon Prayer: An Anthology of Everyday Invocations*, *Reflections on the New River: New Essays, Poems and Personal Stories*, *Carolina Writers at Home*, and *The Good Book: Writers Reflect on Favorite Bible Passages*.

Phil Furia hosts the “The Great American Songbook” segment on WHQR 1:30-2 p.m. and during Morning Edition on Fridays at 6 a.m.

Philip Gerard’s essay, “The River Mother,” appeared in Issue 69 of the *Bellingham Review*. His series “The Civil War: Life in North Carolina” was featured in installments in *Our State* monthly through May 2015. The series can be read at www.ourstate.com/civil-war. He is a regular commentator on WHQR. His broadcasts run every other Thursday at 7:35 a.m., 8:50 a.m. and 5:45 p.m., and can be heard at www.whqr.org/people/philip-gerard.

David Gessner’s newest book was nominated for a 2015 Kirkus Prize in nonfiction—one of the richest literary awards in the world at $50,000. An excerpt from the book appeared at orionmagazine.org/article/edward-abbey-s-fbi-file, along with a follow-up blog post. *All the Wild That Remains* was also chosen as a *Publisher Weekly* Pick of the Week.

Robert Anthony Siegel’s short story “The Right Imaginary Person” was included in the February issue of *Elgo de yomu Murakami Haruki*, translated into Japanese under the title “Tadashi kakuu no hito.” The magazine is a publication of Japanese Public Radio tied to the radio show Rajiru-Rajiru, which focuses on “Japanese literature in the world context.”

Emily Smith has three poems featured in the *Southern Poetry Anthology, VII: North Carolina*.

Lynn Watson received an honorable mention in the *Lindenwoods Review*’s flash fiction contest for her piece, “We Passed Upon The Stair.”

Michael White’s poem, “Woman Holding a Pearl Necklace,” was featured on Poetry Daily and can be read at http://poems.com/feature.php?date=16372. His memoir *Travels in Vermeer* was named a “best book” by *Publisher’s Weekly*. He also received a great review from *Library Journal* for his collection of poems, *Vermeer in Hell*.