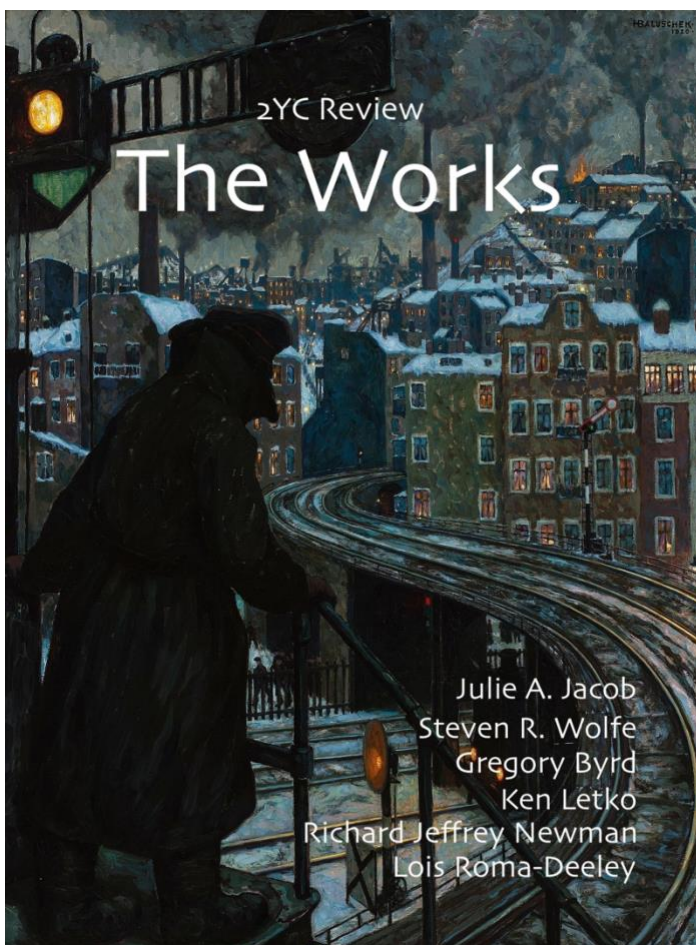


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2YC Review

# The Works

Julie A. Jacob  
Steven R. Wolfe  
Gregory Byrd  
Ken Letko  
Richard Jeffrey Newman  
Lois Roma-Deeley

## 2YC REVIEW

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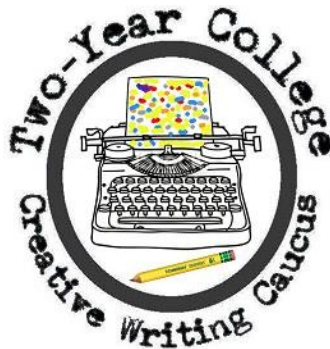
## THE WORKS

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:

Steven R Wolfe's *THE PIT*, Ken Letko's *BRIGHT ANGEL*, Richard Jeffrey Newman's *#24*, and Lois Roma-Deeley's *EMILY DICKINSON TRAVELS BETWEEN TWO POINTS IN TIME* were published individually in *OPEN: Journal of Arts & Letters* between 2020 and 2021. All writers represented here are members of the Two-year College Creative Writing Caucus at AWP.

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## 2YC REVIEW

## THE WORKS

Julie A. Jacob

### TO DAD, WHEN YOU COULDN'T SEE THE STARS

In the photo, you're sitting on a table, one leg tucked under the other, clutching your white teddy bear. You're four maybe five, dressed in black shorts, a white shirt, ankle socks, and lace-up oxfords. Was it your birthday? Christmas Day? You're looking at the camera with a shy half-smile, hope in your eyes. Even in black and white, your eyes are blue, so blue, your eyes, my eyes, your eyes.

Yet by then you already had known nights sitting alone in the backseat of your parents Model T, peering through the frosted window, searching for stars and a glimpse of the moon, wondering and waiting for your parents to come out of the tavern and take you home.

*So cold, you said. I'd get so cold waiting in that car to go home.*

(Did those lonely nights in the car, aching for release, cause your restlessness, the way decades later you'd stand on the front porch on summer evenings, gazing westward toward the dark wall of clouds and the flickering sheets of lightning, watching the storm roll in, until Mom would say, "Jake, come inside"?)

75 years later you wanted to go home. It was the one word you kept repeating in the neurology ICU.

*Home.*

When the ambulance arrived finally arrived -- after nine hours of phone calls, begging for release forms to be signed, prescriptions to be approved, transport to be arranged -- the paramedics stood in the doorway, staring at the legless old man in the bed dying of brain cancer. The bearded one shook his head, his unspoken words, *this one's never going to make it home alive.*

## 2YC REVIEW

But you did, stirring a bit as the ambulance turned off I-94 on the exit toward home.

*His breathing is a little better now*, the paramedic said.

We set up the hospital bed in the dining room. The late afternoon splashed through the window, bathing the room in warmth. You couldn't see by them, your eyes blinded by the tumor, but you could feel the sun and knew you were home.

Mom's picture, the big one you ordered from the funeral home, hung on the wall. Years earlier, ever the engineer, you had picked the precise position on the wall where you could see it from your chair in the living room. (Mom would have loathed that picture, too saccharine for her taste, her face floating in a halo of pastel clouds, *Jake, take that picture down* she must have told you more than once in your dreams, but you loved seeing her smiling at you).

Your hearing would be the last sense to go, the doctor said, so we balanced a CD player on the top of the curio cabinet and played the discs with all your favorite Glenn Miller songs, In the Mood, Moonlight Serenade and String of Pearls, over and over again through the night.

As the battery faded near dawn, so did your life.

You died at 6 in the morning with us by your bed.

We got you home, Dad .We got you home.

## THE WORKS

Steven R Wolfe

### THE PIT

We were wrestling for our scholarships, so we played nice at the varsity matches. Headgear, penalty whistles, sportsmanship . . . it was the Depression, times were rough and we needed that money.

But the university team was just practice. The real story was later, in warehouses or taverns, greasy dark garages. No ropes, only the bodies of the crowd, watching, pushing us back into the pit. The hot smoky air, the men waving wads of cash, the bright-eyed women licking the tips of their cigarette holders with their wet pink tongues, the blood dripping blots onto the floor.

We tried not to break anything; in the daytime we were pals after all. But sometimes somebody moved too fast, or got carried away - the sound was terrible: a nose crunching like when you bite down on candy, or a finger snapping, and suddenly you'd smell it on his skin — the cold pain stink. We all knew: when you stripped down and stepped into the pit, and you'd get that feeling inside . . . you never could tell what might happen. It was a relief after all those books and lectures. Also, let's be honest — didn't people come for the pain, the sounds of agony to make your skin crawl and your girl cuddle up close?

The hardest of all of us was Abie. He was huge, a terror. Quiet and polite during the day, but last a round with him and you'd come out of the ring spitting blood and half-blind from his thumb gouging your eye. He wore a mask over his head for the pit fights — his parents were ashamed, he said, wrestling for money instead of paying attention to his studies.

But what choice did he have? His family had nothing. Once on our way out drinking we went down into the dirty tenements to pick him up. The mother was making some hocus-pocus with candles and a bit of yellow bread, the old man muttering in that language. They were scrawny and pale, cringing from God in their little mouse-hole. But Abie, he was a tough monkey. No hocus-pocus for him.

So one day we're all having a swim out in the river, and Abie disappears into the current, and he doesn't come up. I dive in and claw around. He's deep in the weeds, his arms waving around loose. I drag him up, and he's on the grass not breathing.

They said he came to on the morgue slab, dripping wet. It was in the papers; later the boys told us about it, in a packed saloon down near the American border. How he just sat up suddenly, shaking his head and coughing. "The doctor," Irwin laughed, "he nearly had a heart attack." Abie was sitting at the table, quiet, while they told the story.

Then come fall, instead of university he was on the docks loading sacks of flour. He could carry four where most men struggled with two. I saw it myself, one day when I was passing. He ducked with me behind a bin -- we were smoking cigars in the snow, huddled into our coats, and he talked about the river, how a whirlpool sucked him into the great hole in the mud it until he couldn't swim. He looked at me and smiled, "I couldn't feel the bottom." Then he'd choked on the muddy grassy water, and the next thing he knew he was sitting up on a slab in a dark room, with a white light that must've been a window. "Since then," he shrugged, "My concentration—pfft." He tossed the cigar butt into the dirty snow, slapped me on the shoulder and went back to loading.



## THE WORKS

A couple of months later we happened upon him in a raucous tavern where the whole team had gone to celebrate a midnight smashing of some heavy boys from Winnipeg and a pile of greasy dollars in our pockets. Abie was playing pool, winning a bundle. Late into the night we pushed outside in the blizzard to see a couple of red-faced New Yorkers in raccoon coats lighting into him. Big-mouthed damned kike, they screamed, Coward, Woman — he wouldn't fight, just kept his head down and his legs under him, his guard up tight, bashed against the wall and back.

Their friends circled like a bunch of musk-oxen, but soon a pint glass flew, we piled into them and had a good big riot—we saw teeth in the snow that night, we cracked faces with cobblestones, we gouged, we bit, we stomped with our heavy boots. Somebody got in a good kick to the gut and Abie fell onto his knees barehanded in the snow, vomiting up dark blood.

As the police wagon pulled up his red-swimming eyes caught mine for a second, and he grinned through his clotted teeth. Show over.

After that night the team started drifting away. Somebody would lose a match or two, then he'd stop showing up at midnight, next thing his gym locker would be cleaned out and you wouldn't see him again. Even those of us who stuck around, it was different. I can't exactly explain it; some big boy would come grunting at me across the canvas, his muscles bulging, and whatever used to make me want to knock him down and grind his face into the mat, it was gone.

I never saw Abie after they carted him off. What sticks in my mind, though, is looking down at him on the sidewalk; I swear it wasn't blood, but mud, river mud, that he was vomiting up—thick black sludge and greenish weeds running steaming into the gutter. I think about his feet sucking into the pit and feeling no bottom — only more water swirling into the black. Can you imagine, reaching down that deep for something solid and finding nothing — a void?

Gregory Byrd

MEMORY: WHITE ON WHITE

She was that thin, small, quiet kind of woman  
you see in Bourke-White photographs,  
that quiet-thin woman prettier  
than those pictures, but with the same drawn  
look in her eye, the loose cotton shirt,  
hair tied back, hands used to washing,  
eyes used to waiting for things,  
used to the quiet afternoons of boloney  
for the kid, his nap, her afternoons  
inside with the windows open  
the velvet breezes coming off the Gulf Stream  
in the low nineties.

She is not like  
my mother was once, cutting grass  
and washing others' linens, a thin  
woman who lived for six-pack celebrations  
and the moment in the afternoon  
when everyone was asleep and the breeze  
moved the palm fronds and she could imagine  
she had come here on purpose.  
The white stones of her yard south of Key Largo,  
the low white rented house, her small child  
toddling around, the white pickup  
in which we brought the old refrigerator,  
set it in her rented house, built 1947.

The woman in the low house  
offered us water before we had piled in the truck,  
apologized for the lack of tip money,  
but the water was clear  
and the ice was cold  
and did more on a warm day than cold cash.  
She couldn't have known  
her white blouse and white yard

## THE WORKS

and white house and white day  
would rise up in my memory  
years later

Ken Letko

## BRIGHT ANGEL

gloaming is the time  
of day when ferns  
become deer

the night hawk  
croaks at the bottom  
of a dive into mosquitoes

in my memory suddenly  
from the South Rim  
I'm hiking the Bright Angel

make it to Indian Gardens  
giant cottonwoods shade  
the creek flowing strong

when I look up  
the Milky Way  
is a prayer

blanketing the Tonto  
Plateau above  
in the wavering heat

I camp on the flat  
without a tent  
the deer are so close

I can hear them chew  
their evening browse  
because I wander

## THE WORKS

in and out of sleep  
daylight comes on  
in my own meadow

and the deer  
become ferns  
next to red alders

Richard Jeffrey Newman

#24

From a sequence entitled "This Sentence Is a Metaphor for Bridge."

Strap betrayal's instrument  
tight around your waist.  
Wear the narrow grief  
you practice in your dreams  
like armor. What rises  
will define the limits  
you can test, will map your cowardice  
against the mercies you've received.

Drain your glass;  
leave it empty on the bar.  
The one way in  
remains the one way in.  
What providence is not  
is not to blame.

## THE WORKS

Lois Roma-Deeley

### EMILY DICKINSON TRAVELS BETWEEN TWO POINTS IN TIME

I am the also of your life,  
the farthest town on the  
discolored map, the point to which  
you always turn, in love  
with distance. I know the signs  
of place—here I stand on that which was once  
a nothing bit of road, too thin  
even to hold the dust  
against my shoes—but this mirage,  
you want me to be  
is like desert thunder  
which too soon expands like water  
in a lake of air! So just  
as it may seem to you unwise  
for me to ever talk of US,  
I'll count the days of when and since  
your desire became too much.

## ABOUT THE WRITERS:

JULIE A. JACOB is an adjunct instructor of communications at Gateway Technical College in Racine, Wisconsin. She has an MFA in creative writing from Roosevelt University. Her creative nonfiction has been published in *Midwest Prairie Review*, *Under the Sun*, and several issues of the TallGrass Writers Guild *Black and White* anthology series.

STEVEN WOLFE teaches English and writing at Houston Community College in Houston, Texas. His stories, poems and essays have appeared in the *Houston Chronicle*, *Exquisite Corpse*, *Green Mountains Review*, *Southeast Review* and elsewhere.

GREGORY BYRD's *The Name for the God Who Speaks* won the 2018 Robert Phillips Prize from Texas Review Press. A Fulbright fellow and Pushcart nominee, he has published widely. He's recently finished a WWI novel, *Where Shadow Meets Water*. Byrd has taught writing at St. Petersburg College since 1990.

KEN LETKO's first full-length book of poetry *Bright Darkness* was published in 2021 by Flowstone Press. His poems have also been included in numerous magazines and anthologies and both the *North American Review* and *Poetry South* have nominated his poems for the Pushcart Prize.

As a poet and essayist, RICHARD JEFFREY NEWMAN's work explores the impact of feminism on his life as a man. As a co-translator of classical Persian poetry, he writes about the impact of that canon on our contemporary lives. His most recent books are *WORDS FOR WHAT THOSE MEN HAVE DONE* (Guernica Editions 2017) and the translation *THE TELLER OF TALES: STORIES FROM FERDOWSI'S SHAHLAMEH* (Junction Press 2011). He is also the author of *THE SILENCE OF MEN* (Cavankerry Press 2006) and *SELECTIONS FROM SAADI'S GULISTAN* and *SELECTIONS FROM SAADI'S BUSTAN* (Global Scholarly Publications 2004 & 2006). Newman is on the Board of Directors of Newtown Literary, a Queens, New York-based literary non-profit and curates the First Tuesdays reading series in Jackson Heights, New York. He is Professor of



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English at Nassau Community College in Garden City, New York, where he also serves as secretary of his faculty union.

**LOIS ROMA-DEELEY**'s most recent full-length book of poetry is [THE SHORT LIST OF CERTAINITIES](#), winner of the Jacopone da Todi Book Prize (Franciscan University Press, 2017). She is the author of three previous collections of poetry: [RULES OF HUNGER](#), [NORTHSIGHT](#), and [HIGH NOTES](#)—a Paterson Poetry Prize Finalist. Roma-Deeley's poems have been featured in numerous literary journals and anthologies, nationally and internationally including *SPILLWAY*, *NORTH DAKOTA QUARTERLY*, *JUKED*, *THE HAMILTON STONE REVIEW*, *COLUMBIA POETRY* and many more. Currently, Roma-Deeley is Associate Editor of the poetry journal *PRESENCE*. She has taught creative writing at the graduate, undergraduate students and community levels for many years. Roma-Deeley was named U.S. Professor of the Year, Community College, by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and CASE in 2012-2013, is the recipient of a 2016 Arizona Commission on the Arts Grant as well as a four-time recipient of a Ragdale Foundation Residency Fellowship. She is professor emerita at Paradise Valley Community College in Phoenix, Arizona, where she founded the creative writing and women studies programs. Roma-Deeley is a member of the **Two-Year College Caucus of AWP**.

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