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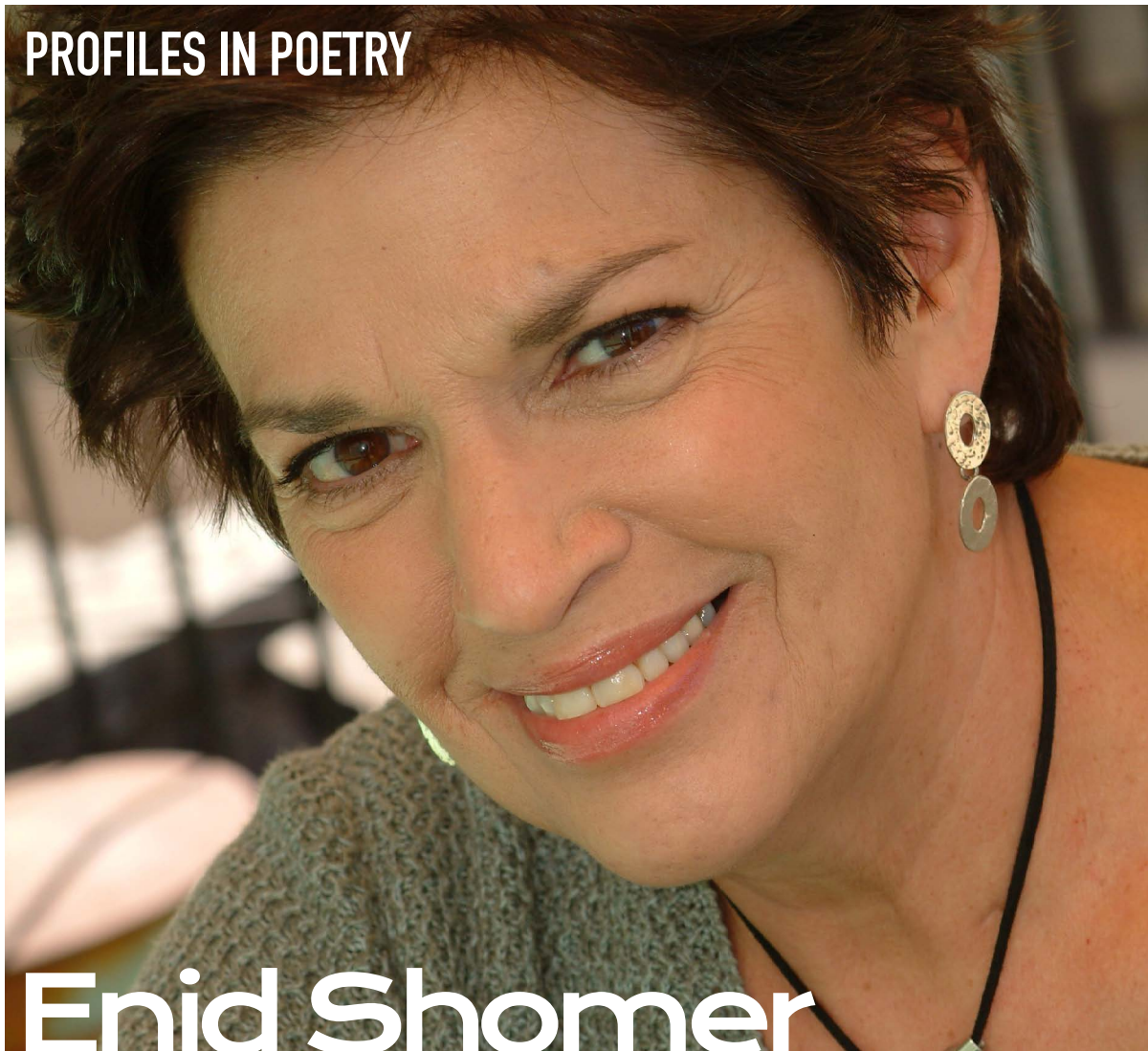
Enid Shomer

Cover photography by Beth Kelly

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PROFILES IN POETRY



Enid Shomer

Photo by Beth Kelly

FSPA's Shutta Crum chats with Enid Shomer about Enid's Work

CRUM: Welcome, Enid! Thank you so much for agreeing to be interviewed. A lot of the poems in *This Close to the Earth* have to do with fishing or hunting, or are set outdoors. Were you a real outdoorsy kind of kid? And if so, when/how did the interest in writing start?

SHOMER: I have always been drawn to and moved by the natural world. I grew up at a time when children could play unsupervised in playgrounds, yards, streets, and woods. So I was able to spend a lot of time outside. In fact, I was hardly ever inside. My yard, while ordinary in the extreme, was a treasure trove for me as a youngster. Even the dirt, with its earthworms and brilliant flakes of mica was endlessly interesting to me.

In my neighborhood we had alleys behind the houses where trucks made deliveries and picked up garbage but the majority of the time were empty of traffic. These alleyways were fiefdoms for the neighborhood children. We invented all sorts of games in this private hideaway. If a truck did come along we scurried to the sides and clung to the chain link fences like squirrels. I remember as a very young kid weaving jewelry out of flowers and

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grasses, so I found the natural world pliable as well. I spent a lot of time fishing with my family on the Chesapeake Bay and in South Florida, so I have always liked fishing and the water—the beaches, bays, and rivers.

As for my interest in writing, I can't remember a time when I didn't want to be a writer. I published my first poem in the *Washington Post* when I was nine years old, so right from the get-go I was writing poems. However, other than write, I did not know what to do about this ambition! In my generation women were nurses, secretaries, or teachers. And of course you were supposed to get married and have children, that was your main job according to the culture at that time. But I also knew you could write on the side and that many women writers had done exactly that. So I always harbored the ambition and figured I would find a way to do it one way or another.


After college, living abroad, marriage, and the birth of my two children, I went back to graduate school though there was nothing in my field (Sociology and Anthropology) nor were there any writing programs nearby. I was living in Miami then and decided to pursue graduate work in American Studies, which sort of combined both my interest in how cultures shape people as well my desire to explore the world in poetry and prose.

As a pre-teen, I read Emily Dickinson, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Keats, and Shakespeare. When I was thirteen, I discovered Allen Ginsburg, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, *et al.* Someone gave me a subscription to the *Evergreen Review*, an important avant-garde/Beat magazine that started up in 1957. At night, I listened to rock and roll and my favorite disc jockey was an African American who spoke exclusively in rhyme, a precursor to Rap. So this mishmash was my earliest artistic influence.

CRUM: As a reader what kinds of poetry are you drawn to? Any type(s) you particularly dislike?

SHOMER: I read as widely as I can with as little prejudice as I can and I move around in time—a little Sappho, a bit of Adam Zagajewski, Elizabeth Spires, Wislawa Szymborska. I keep Shakespeare's sonnets in my night table drawer but there are countless contemporary poets whose work I admire and return to—too many to name. For sixteen years, I edited the poetry series for the University of Arkansas Press and firmly believe that we are living in a golden age of literature. Never in history have so many people been writing. This is thrilling because it means there is a plethora of innovative work and because, as Grace Paley said, "This is what makes justice in the world, to bring these voices into the light."

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*Enid and Coco the cockatoo
photo by Susan Williams*

CRUM: What would you say are the through-lines/major concerns your poetry deals with and how has living in Florida shaped those through-lines?

SHOMER: My grandparents settled in Florida 96 years ago and I've spent most of my adult life here. One critic wrote that I don't make a distinction between where my body ends and where the landscape begins; they are contiguous. She put it this way: "Shomer writes of her landscape the way a lover describes the body of her beloved, with attention to each freckle, cleft, and scar." My poems are full of praise and wonder for Florida's spectacularly diverse natural world, but now, because of what is happening to the planet, many of them are elegies.

CRUM: You write mainly poetry and short stories, and now you have a novel. Which feels the most natural? Which is more of a struggle and why?

SHOMER: All writing is challenging. And though I focus mainly on poetry and fiction, I have also written my share of book reviews and essays which have appeared in the *New York Times Book Review*, the *Women's Review of Books*, *Ploughshares*, etc. I collaborated on a couple of plays which were performed in New York City at La Mama and elsewhere.

I suppose my greatest area of interest is in language itself and perhaps that is why poetry seems to come more naturally to me. So, I began with poetry but soon realized that you can't really address character in poetry unless you write an epic or book-length poem (which I later did, about the aviator Jacqueline Cochran). So I turned to short fiction early on. For me, poetry is ultimately about language and fiction is ultimately about time—that is, how people change over time or respond to circumstances. Poetry often explores the ways we are deceived or misled. As James Baldwin put it, "The purpose of art is to lay bare the questions which have been hidden by the answers." Poetry is language-driven, metaphor and image driven, and that really appeals to me—uncovering the truth by refashioning the language, by giving the reader the thrill of recognition of something familiar which he or she has never seen articulated before.

CRUM: How do you think your poetry has changed since your first book?

SHOMER: My poems have become more complex, longer, and more ambitious. The poems in my first book were shorter because I didn't yet know how to write a long poem.

Although I started out writing free verse, I quickly realized that for me it frequently produced flat and boring poems with too little verbal texture. I became interested in form after a residency at the Atlantic Center for the Arts with Maxine Kumin, and I consider myself a formalist. Sometimes I work in received forms, such as the sonnet, villanelle, sestina, but most often I write in nonce forms, that is,



Shomer giving her acceptance speech for Florida Lifetime Achievement Award for Writing from the Florida Humanities Council

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forms of my own devising, most of which are not obvious, and that's the way I like it. Form has always been a creative constraint for me, a limitation that spurs me to enlarge the metaphoric and substantive reach of the poems. In fulfilling a formal requirement I am pushed to create fresher imagery, greater concision, more subtle patterning, and music. Luckily, because I studied Latin, I learned scansion and meter in high school, which has served me well.

Most readers, even of such august publications as *The New Yorker* and *The Atlantic*, don't care about form as long as the poem works—stimulates or moves them. I don't care whether my readers recognize that a poem is a sestina or a villanelle because the vast majority of readers, myself included, don't give a fig about cleverness or any conceptual scheme outside of the poem. The poem is like a sea creature, a chambered nautilus or other mollusk. It secretes its own unique shape. Sometimes the form is clear to me from the beginning and sometimes it isn't, but it should never overwhelm the poem or be obvious. I use very little dead-on rhyme because it lightens the poem and to my ear it blares like a tuba. The vast majority of my poems appear to be free verse poems to most readers.

CRUM: When you come across a poem you love, what do you do—other than simply sitting with it a while?

SHOMER: I read it again and again for pleasure. After I have extracted as much pleasure as I can, I observe how the poet achieved the effects—the rhetorical and structural strategies. Was there a tonal shift? A change in rhythm or diction? A surprising revelation? Unusual chronology? Often this involves following the way the emotion is revealed through the various surprises poetry is capable of delivering.

I spend almost no time analyzing my poems or anyone else's, and in the various workshops that I have taught or taken we don't emphasize analysis *per se*, but rather how to improve a work in progress. Even in literature courses, analysis can pretty much kill a poem. The emphasis on "the meaning" is a legacy of high modernism. A poem is not a hidden idea waiting to be decoded; it is not a telegram in pretty images designed to convey a message. A poem creates/recreates an experience, frequently by mimicking the idiosyncratic, often chaotic way the mind/body perceives the world moment by moment.

CRUM: I love the metaphors in your poem "Freestyle on the First of Tishri." Are there particular literary techniques you're enamored of? Others you may not care for?



Enid with students at Young Harris College where she served as the Byron Reece Distinguished Visiting Writer in 2011

SHOMER: Metaphor and figurative language are important to me. Here is a central tenet I hold: metaphor grasps what logic can't, is subtler and more resonant. Metaphor contains more sensory information. For me, figurative language is at the heart of the poetic experience.

CRUM: Many of your stanzas have three lines. Unrhymed tercets. When do you decide where to make your breaks? Does it come naturally during first drafts? Or placed later? In your opinion, is there something special the tercet gives to a poem?

SHOMER: I use many forms depending on which works best for the poem. For a while I was writing a lot of couplets for their airy, elegant look on the page, their capacity to explore the idea of pairs (whether compatible or contradictory), and for the stunning enjambments couplets often invite.

Regarding line breaks: None of my line breaks are random or arbitrary. I always have a reason, usually a formal one, to break the line, whether it's for enjambment, meter, rhyme, syllabic count, whatever.

CRUM: What are your first steps in putting a collection together? Does an overall theme strike you first? How do you consider which poems/sections fit together? In your reading at the Dali Museum you said that "every book has its challenges." What challenges really stood out in putting together *Shoreless*?

SHOMER: Often, I lay the poems out on a big table or the floor, because initially I put a collection together the same way I write a poem—viscerally as opposed to cerebrally or logically. In many ways a book is essentially a long poem. Assembling it means discovering the narrative or dramatic arc(s) of the book as a whole. Of course, I do think about my themes because the shadings, even the meaning of a poem, change depending on where you place it in a collection. The same concerns hold true for a collection of short fiction.



Enid with former Florida First Lady Ann Scott at the Lifetime Achievement Awards, 2013

Once in a while, the order is quite straightforward. For example, in my poem biography *STARS AT NOON: Poems from the Life of Jacqueline Cochran*, I decided to use birth to death chronology as the organizing principle since the book covers most of her life. There are no flashbacks or flashforwards, no kinks in time which I always use in my fiction and frequently in my poetry. In *STARS* I devised a key strategy which obviated the necessity of including long explanatory narrative poems. At the beginning of each of the six sections, there is a short prose paragraph summarizing key events in Cochran's life during the time period the poems cover.

In assembling *Shoreless*, the biggest challenge resulted from the fact that I had written the poems over a long period of time. In fact, I had not had a book of poetry for 18 years. So I had to guard against disruptive changes in style or content in the sequencing of the poems. I asked other writers for their input because it's hard to have perspective on your own work. My friend Julie Raynor was particularly insightful about the order of the poems.

The second challenge of putting together *Shoreless*, which is probably my most autobiographical collection, was that there is a lot of pain and illness in it, and I didn't want the book to fall into pathos, or to scare off my reader. I tried to arrange the poems without undue emphasis on illness and yet stay true to my story. I believe writing about illness is one of the last taboos, so one must handle such material with kid gloves. Another theme in *Shoreless* is aging and its effect on even the healthy body. Again, this is not particularly happy material. As people live longer I think we will be hearing a lot about this subject.

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CRUM: In *The Twelve Rooms of the Nile*, your word choices struck me as particularly masterful. You really captured the feel of the time and place. Kudos! Are you fluent in Arabic? French? And why a novel?

SHOMER: Yes, the vocabulary for *The Twelve Rooms of the Nile* was essential to the book. I threw myself into 19th century primary sources. I lived in the year 1850. I even acquired a copy of the guide book that my characters relied on as well as the letters and books they wrote about their journeys. It took me seven years to write this novel, much of it devoted to research. (Also, the book turned out to be much longer

than I predicted—470 pages instead of 250!) Throughout, it was essential to simulate the voices of my two main characters, Gustave Flaubert and Florence Nightingale. He was lubricious, even obscene, and she was quite prim and proper. The way they spoke and wrote revealed much about them.

Regarding languages: I have lived in the Middle East and have studied Hebrew and French, though my speaking knowledge of French has largely atrophied. I can curse in Arabic, but that's it!

You ask why a novel. That is a terrific question. I had decided that I would never write a novel, and always hoped my short fiction felt like condensed novels. I thought about them as short stories with deep pockets of feeling and time, a sense of the character's personal histories. But of course, the reading of them was nothing like reading a novel. In retrospect, this notion seems incredibly naive!

I wrote the novel because it called powerfully to me, demanded to be written. In short, I fell in love with the material. I think this happens to many writers—they are subject to a pleasant obsession that enables them to live an alternate life while they are writing the book.

The obsession that led me to my novel began with an essay by William Styron about his cruise down the Nile with the Aga Khan. His quotes from Flaubert were charming—droll and brilliant and sexy—so I decided to read Flaubert. I began with his books and letters about Egypt, but ended up reading his entire oeuvre. Meanwhile, I had discovered Nightingale's *Letters from Egypt* and learned that the two of them toured Egypt at the same time, and well before it became a clichéd, packaged destination with Cook's Tours. Though they were often in the same place on the same day, they never met. Except in my novel. I wanted to explore that collision of unhappy, passionate geniuses who had yet to find their métier. It was a very satisfying project.

CRUM: What made you decide to do the anthology *ALL WE KNOW OF PLEASURE: Poetic Erotica by Women?*

SHOMER: I wanted to read such a book and one did not exist. By the way, every time I give a reading from this book, the audience asks if there will be a sequel! The poems in it are sexy and explicit without being pornographic or in bad taste. Many of them are love poems as well.

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Enid holding her anthology, *All We Know of Pleasure*, with her dog, Rookie, who is wearing the bronze IPPY Award medal the book earned.

Photo by Allyson Hoffman.

CRUM: What words of wisdom would you give to an aspiring poet?

SHOMER: In writing poetry you must concentrate on two things at once: the language and form of the poem as well as what you are saying, or the content. These two aspects are joined together in the dynamic fusion of the poem. There will be bumps along the way. And lots of rejections. After he had won the Nobel prize, Isaac Bashevis Singer still received mostly rejections of his work. This is a sobering fact.

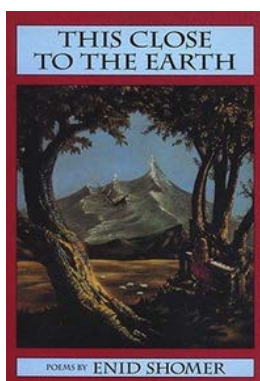
I'm a great believer in poetry prompts because it's extremely important to avoid the ruts in your mind and to allow your subconscious to surface. One of my favorite exercises is what I call a "guesslation." In this exercise, you present yourself and/or your students with a poem in a language that none of you speak. I frequently use German, sonnets by Rilke. German and English are related but there aren't enough cognates to make the meaning of a German poem clear to an English-only speaker. When you "translate" without knowing the language, the first draft will be utterly zany; it will not make sense but you may create some fabulous tropes and imagery. In subsequent drafts you abandon the original German and work with what you have. If you are lucky and persistent, eventually you'll produce a poem that is different from anything you've ever written, makes sense, and still shows your fingerprints but in a totally new way.

The other suggestion I would make to writers of any genre is twofold. First, follow the feeling, especially when you're stuck. Second, make something happen! Move your characters around, change the scene, or the time or the angle of your camera.

CRUM: What's on the horizon? Another novel?

SHOMER: Poems are always bubbling up so I am perpetually at work on a new collection. But I am primarily working on a memoir in the form of a series of essays. Some are short and some long, some already published and others new. It's challenging work because looking back over your life requires a degree of honesty that one cannot afford while one is in the thick of things. I don't think we lie to ourselves intentionally but we have to get through difficult times and so we often rationalize in ways that don't completely take into account what is going on. Also, writing about the past is like looking at an amoeba under a microscope: it's still alive and it keeps on shifting, changing shape as you recall it.

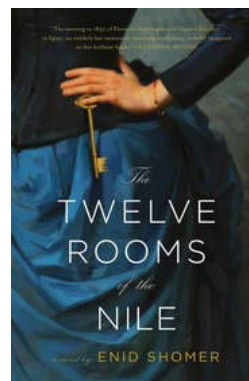
Enid Shomer books referenced in the interview:



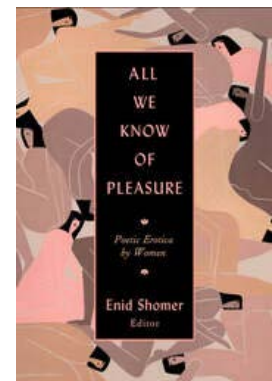
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At Matheson Hammock Beach

In late summer the sea is like a bathtub,
a visitor complains. But I love to sit rib-
high in that warmth, so still the little fish rub

against me. Nearby, land crabs in the scrub
clatter over mangrove roots in their olive drab
while in a glassy tide pool ghost crabs

pop up like jumping beans from thumb-
sized holes. At first, absorbed
in the sand, sky, and sea, I ignore the tabs

of soda cans, a Fritos bag. My job
is praise—for the whitecaps, those endless iambs
that pummel the shore, depositing dribs and drabs

of sea wrack. For the sunlight that strobes
off the waves like mirrored disco globes
rolling in on the tide. For the ibises jabbing

living silver from the spume.

Now the tide ebbs
in the violet dusk, ridging the sand to slubbed
silk. It's time to collect the trash I'm no longer able

to ignore. As a child, at dusk I'd inscribe
my name in the sand to say goodnight, goodbye
to the beach, leaving sweet proof the tides would swab

it clean again by morning. But this rubbish
that accumulates each day will spread, glib
as ink, into estuaries and bays, mobbing

even atolls in the Pacific. Wherever the globe
is blue a fringe of oily rubble grabs
hold.

Bald

Cue ball, egg, the handles of tools:
everything wants to be smooth,
then smoother—the newel post worn to satin

by generations rushing up and down
stairs scooped out, thinned
like the bowls of spoons. Even languages

slicken. Without the Barbarian hordes,
and given another millennium,
Latin, with its prickly cases

and moods, would have simplified,
like Chinese, till every word
was good for any part of speech:

I own a dog, I dog the dog,
I have dog breath,
I walk dogly. . .

O the beauties of use—the slow-cooked
patina on ivory pistol grips,
the rounded corners of leather books.

And splendor of splendors,
evolution, that plucked the vulture's
head for dipping in guts unhindered

by plumes. I think of my own lost
hair like that—not as the cost
of killing deadly cells, but a sleek

mutation. Bald beneath my Yankee
blue, I tip my cap to nature's
thrift, to cure.

Pausing on a Hillside in Anatolia

I've learned to pause from time to time
 in this landscape riddled with antiquity
 where the hills have swallowed whole cities
 and telltale ruins poke from every slope.
 Exposed stones like rows
 of erupting teeth mean walls
 or roads; columns—whether stubs
 or towering trunks—mark temples
 to Artemis.

So when the sound begins

in the distance, so faint at first I mistake it
 for leaves spooling in the breeze, I stop
 and wait, I feel it shiver the hair
 on my arms. It grows louder, from the jingle
 of coins in an army of pockets to nuggets
 of ore riding the rim of a prospector's pan,
 shells churning in surf,
 the furious tinkling of icicles
 in a storm.

I used to pause like this,

feeling *called*, when the college carillon
 tolled at dusk, hurrying me
 to my room. Not when it dragged and shuffled
 through popular tunes, but the classic dirges,
 pedaled sostenuto. How
 perfectly those giant chimes
 heralded the night, spreading
 a pall on the air where I heard what I often
 felt in my heart—

how wide is the gulf

between speech and silence, how sad our thoughts,
 forever caught between. Now
 a goatherd appears with his goats, a patchwork
 of grays and browns that billows down
 the knoll, the bells on their necks resounding,
 bronze and brass, copper and tin
 clappers and cups, large as apples
 for rams, thimble-sized for kids,
 each with its own timbre and pitch.

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Later, at the covered bazaar
 in Istanbul, at the weekly market
 in Tiré, I will try to buy the music,
 hefting and sorting bells by shape
 and size, but nothing will match these starbursts
 of sound, the echoing of this mountainsized
 marimba, glitter spilling
 from a vial, rain plinking into hollow
 clay jars.

The herd advances,

leapfrogging toward an ancient stone
 trough where they lower their heads to drink,
 damping the bells. When they raise them again,
 the accidental music resumes—
 a xylophone pelted by hail. It covers
 me completely, a blanket woven
 of thrums and spangles, glissando trills,
 the tinsel of tambourines and finger
 cymbals.

Sometimes when I sang

in choir, I felt the bones of my skull
 buzzing, music passing through them
 like drone strings, my own voice
 inaudible in the rainbow of sound
 we hung from the rafters. I had to hold hands
 with the girl beside me for the highest
 soprano riffs, I was so dizzy
 with the bliss of blending in.

Slaked, the caravan

retreats, dragging the sound behind it
 like a ninetails of soda cans
 and flatware lashed to a newlywed's bumper.
 Then, like a siren dopplered by distance,
 the pitch drops and fades. I step
 forward, straining through the new
 silence for any whisper, but even
 their hooves fall like felt on the stone
 outcrops.

Years ago, I read

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The Lives of the Romantic Poets
and recall now their favorite toy
and metaphor for the poet: the Aeolian
harp, a kind of fretless guitar
placed in a window where gusting breezes
strummed a pensive music that came
from nature, not art. Anyone,
said Shelley, could coax the world to sing,
as today the goats did,
 exchanging

their breath and movement for that celestial
glockenspiel, an alchemy
profound as turning lead to gold.
Far away, the goats run
still, taking their music wherever
they go. Shelley believed the poet
is like the wind harp, and life
the wind that plucks his harmonies,
his poems.

 Well I have lived in a punishing wind

for years now, but how many bells
could I summon? Never enough for the century's
slaughter. Not even enough to forge
the iron of my own losses into a sounding
shape. After the goats sang
to me in my language, I asked myself how
I could live without that sound, though later
it faded. Later, I could not even
remember their music
 without this poem.

Rara Omnia

If there's life after death, it isn't the body
I'd want, which after all is a rather shoddy
container. I'd want to come back as pure voice.

I'd want to tell of this beach before the turtles
confused the porch lights for moons as they hurtled
ashore to lay their eggs. I wouldn't point

an accusing finger. I just want the record
straight, to tell how black skimmers in sinuous hordes
turned in the sky like pages of print; how they strained

the sea, their lower mandibles seining for fish.
That the snowy plovers took flight in waves of applause,
their wings beating so fast they seemed to pause,

strobe-lit. I'd tell how the sea relents
in early spring, exposing the muck where creatures spend
themselves in extravagant numbers—fighting conchs

hopping like slow rabbits in search of a mate
on their singular black feet; Atlantic cockles in spate,
their speckled mantles like pink tongues on which

they twirl and fall through the inch-deep surf
in a ritual dance. And skates dragging a scarf
through the shallows as their wingtips

and eye ridges froth the water to tulle.
And horse conchs, with their glossy orange lips
cartwheeling over the sand bar, heroic

as salmon swimming upstream. Then the water stood
still—limpid, glassed out, afloat with ripe
coconuts and mangrove pods, those brown-tipped

exclamations, each an infant tree that accretes
an island if given a toehold. For weeks
the tides lay like a blanket over the freshly laid

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eggs—the leathery leis of the lightning whelk,
the castanets of conchs with dozens of baby
gastropods inside each disk of salty milk.

At the end of a month, the water peeled back
like bells ringing, and everywhere the egg sacs
burst, and tiny offspring poured forth.

This was before the beach became a catcher’s mitt
for trash, before the oil spills and red tides,
before the hard corals blanched and died,

before the fire sponges rotted in their red glory.
If I could come back I’d tell this story and the stories
found only in record books: the tarpon reaching

twelve feet, the groupers big as cars,
cone shells grown heavy as bricks on their packs
of poison harpoons. And everywhere the fish, scarce

now—mackerel, trout, pompano, drum—so
plentiful once they fed us for millennia.
I’d send my voice like a whale song into the deep

threading it through turtle grass and sea wrack
singing to the soft corals and sea hares, the polychete
worms and squid, *Come back if you can, come back.*

FISHING SEAHORSE REEF

Our lures trail
in the prop-wash,
skipping to mimic
live bait. Minutes ago
I watched you
cut up the dead shrimp
that smell like sex.
Now we stand, long
filmy shapes jigsawed
by the waves, and wait
for the rods to arc
heavy with kingfish.
We bring the limit
of eight on board,
their teeth gnashing
against the lures.
And I think how tender
all animal urgency is—
these fish thrashing
to throw the hook,
or a man flinging himself
into the future
each time he enters
a woman. This
is what I picture
all afternoon: you
inside me, your body a stem
bent under the weight
of its flowering,
as beautiful as that;
how carefully
you would lower yourself,
like something with wings,
a separate order
of fallen thing
from these angels with fins
who know only once
the difference
between water and air.

GLOBAL APHASIA

It's like a two-way street, the hospital speech
therapist explains, drawing lanes with arrows

and curves. Information swerves in through the ears;
replies arrive in the mouth. The brain is the driver.

"Okay okay okay," Mother answers without delay
when asked about the food, her health, this task.

This "automatic response," a kind of static, relieves
the silence she emotes like a high frequency note

of distress. "Brush your . . . ?" "Suitcase," she rushes to fill
in the blank, shaking her head as you would to free the ink

in a ballpoint pen. "Tie your . . . ?" Mother's eyes roll.
"Suitcase?" she pleads. At the root of "perseveration," the name

for this odd repeating of words, is the word "persevere,"
that hopeful bird which sits on my chest with its head

snaked under a wing and its talons digging in as she shakes
more and more suitcases loose from her mind. One shines

on her finger, one barks like a dog. O singer with your one-word
song, you knew I was there but not for how long, so all

day you conjured up luggage, all afternoon you lured my bags
from the thicket of thought and picked at the locks of my visit.

Gowned Waiting

is the name of the room where we sit, clutching
rouge-pink robes with flimsy ties. One flips

through fashion mags. Her cubicle door ajar,
another rehearses a script, while two friends,

scheduled together, compare injustices
at work. I'm writing this in my journal, trying

for calm against the terror at hand, this visit
a truce with disease I negotiate twice

a year. A woman enters speaking broken
English, weeping. We understand—tears

are the native idiom here in Gowned Waiting.
Minutes ago, she was swept aboard

the diagnosis express, where everything blurs
like a landscape rushing past, though at the moment

her train creeps so slowly that seconds
freeze, refusing to pass, trapping her

in the instant of discovery, the words
that struck like fangs—*malignant, invasive* . . .

bad. The brochure they gave her—support
groups and hotlines, survivors beribboned in pink—

lists on her lap like a shipwrecked paper boat.
She wants to run the day backwards,

as I did last year. To walk back
out through the clinic door to the subway stop,

to my block, to pause in reverse for the breakfast I grabbed
on the run until I'm standing wreathed with steam

in the morning shower, completely clean.

CADILLAC

Imagine my squat, blue-eyed Russian
grandfather, a stogie in his fist, a Stetson

on his head, a silk suit precisely vented,
ordered from a rabbi with a sideline and friends

in Hong Kong. Imagine his voyage here alone
at thirteen, the sea like a pasture of fescue combed

by the wind and him hiding most of the time in that carousel
of piss and vomit. Imagine the babies crying, the charred smell

of food cooked in steerage, the dark knots
of men smoking and gambling. Did they hate

Jews, too? Imagine him on Ellis Island with his wild Slavic face
and the space between his shoulders that always

itched, puffing out his chest for the doctors.
One deep breath puts his name on the roster

Americanized—the ik chopped off of Magazinik
to make Magazine, a word he understands means a quick

book. He has no notion yet of luxury or charity, of leather
sofas or engraved plaques or dinners in honor

of. These will come after ice cream vending
and carpentry thin his voice and thicken his hands,

after he loses every cent in the Depression, and begins
his big ventures—Fort Stevens, Brandywine,

1000 Connecticut Avenue, that soaring granite address
that was like the White House for us,

(Continued on the next page)

a sparkling tower where he sat like a prince
 thirty levels above the polished marble dance

floor of the lobby. O once more let him watch the phony
 wrestlers on TV, his shoulders lurching with each throw.

I want to see him sop pleasure again from a bowl
 with a heel of bread, dipping and slurping, his whole

face slick with broth and steam. And the deck
 of nudie cards he kept hidden in the top right desk

drawer, redheads with tits like roses. And the slow
 way he rolled his "I"s across his tongue, as if savoring fish roe.

I remember how short he was behind the wheel of his prize—
 they called them Jew canoes in those days—

how joyfully he packed us in on Sundays, plowing down the road,
 letting the big car drift across the center line, like a parade.



Photo by Levent Tuncer

ABOUT ENID SHOMER

Enid Shomer is the author of nine books of poetry and prose, most recently *Shoreless: Poems*, winner of the **Lexi Rudnitsky Editors' Choice Award** from Persea Books, and the widely acclaimed historical novel *The Twelve Rooms of the Nile* (Simon & Schuster). Her poems and stories have appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Atlantic*, and numerous literary journals, including *New Criterion*, *The Paris Review*, *Virginia Quarterly Review*, and *Poetry*. Her awards include the **Word Works' Washington Prize**, the **Celia B. Wagner Award** from the Poetry Society of America, *Poetry* magazine's **Eunice Tietjens Award**, two fellowships from the NEA, and the **Lifetime Achievement Award in Writing** from the Florida Humanities Council. Her first short story collection, *Imaginary Men* received the **Iowa Fiction Prize** and the *Southern Review/LSU Prize*. Her second collection, *Tourist Season* won the **Florida Book Awards' Gold Medal**. Shomer has served as distinguished visiting writer at various universities, as well as teaching at Florida State University, the Ohio State University, and

the University of Arkansas, where she was Poetry Series Editor for the University of Arkansas Press from 2002 to 2017. She also edited the anthology, *ALL WE KNOW OF PLEASURE: Poetic Erotica by Women* (John Blair/Carolina Wren). Shomer lives in Tampa, Florida, with her husband, the painter Levent Tuncer. She is currently working on a memoir.



Photo by Gerald Clark

ABOUT SHUTTA CRUM

Shutta Crum is an award-winning poet and children's book writer and an off-requested speaker and presenter at writing conferences, libraries and schools. She is the author of a well-reviewed chapbook, *When You Get Here*, which won a gold **Royal Palm Literary Award** (Kelsay Books). Her latest chapbook is *The Way To The River* (Kelsay Books). In addition, more than 100 of her poems have appeared in numerous small press publications and literary journals since the 1970s. These include *Driftwood*, *Stoneboat Literary*, *Typehouse*, *Blue Mountain Review*, *Orchards Poetry Journal*, *Better Than Starbucks*, *Nostos*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *Artascent*, *Beyond Words*, *3rd Wednesday Magazine*, *Plainsongs*, *Acumen*, and *Forthcoming In Mom Egg Review* and *Calyx*.

She is also the author of thirteen picture books and three novels for young readers published by Alfred A. Knopf, Clarion/Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, Albert Whitman, and Fitzhenry & Whiteside. Two more picture books are currently under contract. In 2005 she was invited to read at the White House, and in 2010 toured Japan presenting to the students of the Department of Defense schools. Finally, she edits *The Wordsmith's Playground*, a monthly newsletter about writing that can be subscribed to at her site www.shutta.com.

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