Writings from The Poetry Workshop at The Champaign County Jail

Including works by Nate Collins, Martines Gill, Jonathan Gilmore, Ron Good, Makaiah Grant, Phillip James, DeAndre Lewis, Robert “Chicago” McCollum, Thomas L. McDonald, Richard McNally, J.B.R., Michael Shaw, William T. Smith Jr., Jason Walker, and Seth Weaver

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The Clock
By Jason Walker

A circle of such significance
Sixty marks of mental anguish
The short arm vaguely stating where the sun sits in the sky
While the long arm moves with unbelievable regularity
Followed by my anxious eyes
The red arm flies over both nonstop
The burning sun of this inside world
Beige, white, black, red, and full of numbers

In The City
Jonathan Gilmore

My mind rolls, hold on tight
People come and go, strangers, some lonely passersby
Wobbling in tune to some secret logic
as the Cadillacs and Taxis cruise by
See the electric lights, hear the church bells sing
The skyline screams with broken dreams
Yet the vibrant hum of the street makes the world
Go ‘round in this infinite place in time

Cries of Life
DeAndre Lewis

It’s sad to say and even worse to see
Black on black crimes even within families
We’ve fallen so far that funerals are the only place you’ll catch us
giving hugs coming from real love
Sure, our ambition is to survive
through the good and bad times
But I wonder, when will this pain die?

Devil Talks
By Robert “Chicago” McCollum

It’s as if he seen my ability to get doe radiate off me
as he drove by in his cheap but expensive car
He said MOE I kno you like shinin’
cause I see that spark in ya right eye
Cum Fuck witcha boy –N- you could be making stacks right now!
You kno where my spot at right?
meet me their at 4:30 NAW make it 5
I remember it like it was yesterday
when I walked through dat door
-N- seen dem 2 38s in his shoulder holster
-N- in his waist ban was dat PHAT AZZ 4-five
He said be4 I get started po’ yo self a drink
an roll a few blunts of dis Strawberry -N- Kiwi lime
As I inhaled the weed smoke he stared in my eyes 4 a second
be4 he said, I kno you young MOE
therefore Ima educate you on Hustle -N- Grind
First Ima teach you how ta turn soft ta hard, but most importantly
Ima teach you how ta distribute yo products through yo sell line
Now look, you can do whatever da FUCK u gonna do
wit yo money. But Remember Dat 60 % of that shit is mine
-N- da first time a piece of my cash get messed up
that’s ah slice ta yá left wrist
but the second time it happens Ima EAT’CHA FACE
wit billy the 38 -N- kid that 4-fifth
Relativity
By J.B.R.

Your mind
To turn around
Replace
To make different
Coins/currency
Clothing
Adjust
Alter
Adapt
Switch
Vary
Revise
Transform
Modify

—change

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A Peek at My Past Afflictions
By Seth Weaver

Wake up on the floor at a quarter past four
with the dog licking puke from my toes
Grab myself a beer do a line off the mirror
and watch the blood trickle down my nose

Addiction

Three friends, sixty plus beers, and a bottle of booze
Without a care in the world, with nothing to lose
Drink and drink throughout the night
until morning when there was no more
Impatiently waiting until we could re-cop at the store

Addiction

The adrenaline pulsing through my veins
with the fury of a white rapid river
The transformation of a pseudo-civilized being
into a blood thirsty feral beast out on the prowl
searching, seeking for a kill under the waxing of the moon
Like the flick of a switch, Jekyll to Hyde. The blood-lustful thirst
slightly quelled by the promise of bloody violence
and the sweet masochistic pleasure found in pain

Addiction

Thoughts of her penetrate my brain
as desire consumes my essence, searing my very soul
My only concern is to satisfy and please this new found goddess
If she would only ask for the world
I would succeed where so many else have tried and failed
or breathe my very last breath trying

Addiction
Energy of the Night
By Nate Collins

Late nights, being the life of the party
Pop a pill, snort a line, ravage my body
Eventually my brain is confused
About who demands the abuse
Could it be my mind gone to the limit?
Or maybe it's my heart telling me to let go?
Whatever it is I feel that I'm stuck
To this habit of swagger
All to be the energy of the night
One deranged college kid on the move

She is amazing in all aspects of life
Her beauty has me thinking why
She saved this deranged frat boy on the edge
Now its late nights with her instead
She transcended the energy of the night
And turned it into the last 3 years of my life
One day marriage calls
Love
That's my new addiction

Gambling
By Michael Shaw

The thrill of winning a big pot
The fantasy of a better way of life
My mind starts racing
As I begin to dream big

Roll those dice
Draw for high card
Pull the one armed bandit
Watch the metal ball bound
   on the spinning wheel
Stay, hit, or fold?
Scratch off another ticket
Check those six numbers
Which horse today?

Please God, help me win
   I will help my church
I will help my family
   I will be a better person

I wake up penniless with
   a sick feeling inside
You lose more than you win
   but play over and over again

What do I do now?
Secret
Jonathan Gilmore

My thoughts twirl toward her
I wish I had a rose
I’m running up escalators from pit to pit
In the company of a mesmerizing lady
Are you receiving guests?

Oh your neck—a lily of immaculate whiteness
Let’s talk about all that is good and beautiful
This happened in a lost century
I dream of her, where does that place desire?

Breathless gazing into your eyes
Eyes that hypnotize, eyes filled with oceans of beauty
The air has states, not places
I’m on the outer earth watching the sky above darken to blue matter
But I’m not waiting in vain here in the atmosphere
There’s a friendly warmth
Wonderful, phenomenal, fantasia, silk
Your hair that is

I should share this secret, but I don’t
And in the eyes of all that is grand
It’s not the way it’s supposed to be
So I sigh, but then smile thinking of
Ambrosia pressed light on her lips
Like an unconsumed wafer

Nothing makes me smile like you
So I’m grateful just to be grateful

Change
By Jason Walker

Change: to make or become different: to alter: to replace
Change…is it necessary?
But change what? Change who?
Is it just me who needs to change?

For no matter how poetic I may be
or how well I can elucidate my faults
these are the characteristics that make me uniquely wonderful

Yet the system is unreservedly enthusiastic
about dipping into the psychoactive pharmacopoeia
to ladle up a fruit punch of behavioral modification drugs
which impose a short-term placidity, yet ultimately leave me
with more short circuiting synapses than before

As a result, I, like countless others,
am left with an at times unbearable mind
swollen with unspent rain, a side effect of being
a mere combatant in this sad war between self improvement
and a crooked system fueled by merciless imprisonment

In fighting this war I’ve been left with a paucity of ambition,
yet spiritually I’m strong willed, confident, and driven

A Diction
by Seth Weaver

enunciation
or words regarding clearness
that is a diction
Change
By William T. Smith, Jr.

Denim rhythms in my head
Rough like the texture of cloth
I was bred
Colorfast, burning umber
Crimson red
Materially torn asunder
Wanton scorn stop and wonder
Attempt to unravel threads tangled
Hopes and dreams once to hold
Sit discarded, bent in folds
Surreptitiously mangled
Emphatically enough
Writing on a wall of solitude
Another surface rough
Combining sentences
Measured and tapered
For a million and one
Orange jumpsuits
Twelve tailors and seamstresses
Interweaving irregular threads
Into a concrete fabric
Without thought
Nor reason nor rhyme
To the biased consequences
Placed on us by inspector 245
Then think—there are 244
Other adjudicators times 50
All doing the same thing
Saying:
"these" go on the rejected pile
No living!
No lives!

Only shells of existence
Like tattered garments
Somebody used to wear
Maybe even I
Wishing to be reborn into
An indestructible fabric
That don't fade
Don't tear
Don't give
Fit to form smooth
Seamless, flowing, carefree
Like the finest gabardine

The Crow
By Jonathan Gilmore

Like the crow
A scavenger
I am feathered from head to toe
Fly, fly, flight
The clouds tumble beneath me
As the sky expands
I surrender to the air

My Secret
By Makaiah Grant

Secret garden like secret lovers oh so passionate
Or maybe it's the classified confidential secret
Locked away and sealed without a key
For better or for worse, who's to say anything?
The Touch of an Angel
By Jonathan Gilmore

To touch is to feel
Your perfume is ecstasy
Your hair is radiant
Those beautiful hands hold the weight of the world
And your mind! Your intellect burns

So who am I?
One not so worthy of this Angel?
Breathe my soul as it shivers up your spine
To the crest of your neck as I offer a soft kiss
Friends and lovers we lay down
I mean no harm, want no wrong
Long only for beauty unleashed

Be not afraid!
Because to touch is to feel
To be dead is to die no more
So I tell you the time has come
For us to feel alive again

Pain, Then Came Change
By Phillip James

The things I thought were harmless
at my sweet young age
have become the third line of my book
I'm scared to go on
I thought my life was over
That I was nearing the end
My eyes got heavy and full of tears
As I dropped down to my knees
Regretting that I was ever born
If I had a second chance
I would change the path I have taken

If I had three wishes I would give one
to someone who has a broken heart like me
And then I would make my dreams a reality

So many times I have taken this road of pain
and no matter how hard I try it all ends up the same
I want a life with no more fears
I want a life with no more tears

I pray every night that God will see
Just who this lost soul is pleading to be
For despite my years of committing crimes
I know God can forgive with a little bit of time
Despite the years Satan brought nothing but strife
Oh God please help me build an acceptable of life

Stereotypes
by Jason Walker

criticized by men
suits sitting without regret
we all meet our maker
The Afflictions of Addiction
By Thomas L. McDonald

What it's like to be addicted:
One could say I'm afflicted
Just the average dope-fiend
Nothing about my life is serene
Another alcohol abuser
Looked at by the world as a loser
I used to live and lived to use
My whole life controlled by booze
My addictions have cost me a lot of time
in jails, institutions, or death
I ended up like all the rest:
A.A., N.A., the twelve steps
Kind of like a workout with so many reps
Seems that they're all the same
Everyone calls me by my first name
Will it ever stop? I don't know
but I sure as hell hope so

A Letter to My Addiction
By Makaiah Grant

I know we've have had some ups and downs
I used to love you so much!
At one time you were my favorite in the world
You used to make me feel so special

But I'm on to you now
For I have wizened up
Why should I love you when you want me dead?
You are the reason I've missed out on so much in life
Now I despise you in every way!

Keep It, It's Yours
By Nate Collins

Ashley, hey can you hear me?
I am running late, sorry, I am on my way
Got something I need to ask you
Remember the first time we me?
Your eyes pulled my heart from my chest:
That day I learned what love really meant
I owe you an apology, for I acted a fool
My intentions were to stay on top of that barstool
Nevertheless you helped me up and
Whispered "Nate, keep your mouth shut!"
Or how the little things made me so pissed
You cured me with an amazing kiss
Sorry it took so long to notice
Thank you for helping me get focused
I owe you a lot no doubt
Remember that thing from my chest you pulled out?
Keep it, it's yours.
For today and many more
I love you!
Hope
By Ron Good

Hope. Ha! Ha! Ha!
What a word
Hope turns to heartaches and failure
Hope, Ha what a joke
As a child we are Full of Hope
What a deceitful word Hope
Most of the time it's better to be drunk or full of dope

Ha! Ha! Ha! Hope
As a child we stay outside or in our room
We hope, hope that our father hasn't woke up mad
and won't lose his mind soon
If this happens we can only hope for a short verbal beating
or a less painful slap
We are full of hope that mom will come home soon
OH NO! Dad started drinking at noon and now it's four
He's swaggering and staggering

Hope, what a great concept
We no longer have to hope, look boys, here comes Mom
As we ran to meet her at the door of her car
It's alright now boys we won't have to run far
Hope yeah, isn't that great!
Look brothers there's our mom, so we all can relax
She just walked in the back gate

Now that we're grown and are one with God
We pray and hope all the violence and hatred will stop
We hope for love, respect, and peace

A Sinner's Prayer
By Martines Gill

Heavenly father please hear me tonight
I need guidance to live my life right
Sometimes the pressure is so hard to bear
I often wonder if anyone cares
How can I wake up and face a new day
knowing I have to live my life this way?

Lord forgive all my sins
I want to change but where do I begin?
Give me the strength to resist the wild life I desire
Help me escape the nightly gunfire
And Lord bless my mother who cries every night
worrying I'll be killed in another gang fight

Heavenly father please answer my prayers
Please let me know if you're listening up there
When will it end? What was it all for?
Was it to prove yeah, I'm down, I'm hardcore?
I wonder how will I die,
by a bullet wound or a knife in my side?

Heavenly father please hear me tonight
give me the courage and the strength to live my life right
show me the way lord, show me the light
Help give my heart peace so I don't have to fight

And thank you for forgiveness lord
Thank you for being there
But most of all thank you
for listening to a sinner's prayer.
**Observation**  
By William T. Smith, Jr.

You look  
I look  
With looks beyond seeing  
With visual hints beyond trivial meaning  
Inquisitive glints  
Look forward  
Look past  
Looking  
Searching  
Lingering looks  
Last long after that  
Memorable split second merging  
When it seemed we were locked  
In a mutual gaze of infinity  
And I could detect the birth of stars  
In your eyes  
Of galaxies formed  
Of an alignment born  
Of edges far  
Far out there  
Where no man has ever  
Dared to travel  
Where no man has ever  
Cared to look

**Whos’it**  
By Richard McNally

To think you go unseen is to deceive yourself  
In this psychic game of cat and mouse you are both  
Always playing many roles, careful now you’ll forget  
Who you are, ah, but that’s what you expect of me  
True, you are the “voices,” and can only be seen in my head  
So there’s room enough for endless rounds of the game  
I know you’re real, yet dare not speak a word  
Of the incessant babble and static exchanging  
My voice, your voice, whos’it going to be?  
Comfort comes when I realize  
We can share this space a while longer

**Practicing Principles**  
By Phillip James

1. Stop doing drugs, so you can stay in school  
   Acknowledge life as your teacher  
   And learn these rules  
2. Don’t sleep all day and miss out on life  
   Don’t grow dumb in understanding  
   how to walk upright  
3. And don’t hate your brother  
   because of his freedom to speak  
   Control your attitude and let him preach  
4. Don’t lie, don’t steal, don’t boast with pride  
   about your life of sin, as if you love to ride  
5. Don’t read this poem and believe you’re cool  
   to break the law and think the judge is a fool  
6. Because the law forbids us to fight and kill  
   The reason the Bible was created  
   is to guide your will  
7. Now practice these principles and live in peace  
   Don’t forget I’m wisdom  
   And my ways you shall keep
This is a quarterly publication, made possible by the love and sweat of our volunteers and the hard work of imprisoned men, writers who have sought empowerment and solace in the strength of Captured Words / Free Thoughts.

If you are imprisoned and would like to contribute to the next issue, or if you are free and would like to lend your assistance, or if you are wealthy and care to make a donation to our humble magazine, then please contact:

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If you would like to join the movement fighting for a sane criminal justice system, then please contact:

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