

The Blotter

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The Blotter

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COVER: "Mosaic supplies" by
Anika Devereux - more inside

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"Busybody"

I recently bore witness to an online argument, and yes, I quite agree, that makes me suspect right out of the box. Two or three people discussing a book, an event for which my ears naturally perked. One of them referred to the book as a classic. Another individual at the table – I looked and saw them make a sour face - was surprised by such a claim and asked when the book was published. 30 years ago, the answer. And the third person made a statement (with eyes slightly closed and head nodding slowly with gravitas of this knowledge) something to the effect that the age of a book doesn't make it a classic. And the other two shook their wise and weary heads at the third.

I almost engaged. Almost... Oh, I nearly became that person walking past a table in a café and, stopping and uninvited, speaking to the people there - as if by being outside and sitting in public they naturally were asking for interruption by a total stranger. I almost imagined it was appropriate to try and teach people something about our language, about idiom, common usage and finding the appropriate vocabulary, and how to discern the long-term value of an author's work. I did not, but it was touch and go for a second. After all, I did not know any of these folks from Adam's off ox, and who the hell am I, anyway, to jump in with no credentials and try and referee a conversation about writing? Let them work it out. Frankly, what am I even doing giving a damn what other people think? (And what are they doing, giving one small crap about me?)

Whoops.

Because I save that for you, Gentle Reader. There is a part of me - of many of us, I suspect - that wants to assist with other folks' day to day conversations. Not necessarily because we want to be of use, but because we want to show off, or are just exercising our annoyance muscles. We jump in and disagree simply for the sake of stirring the pot. Still others just want to be heard, by anyone at all, and our technology permits, and then insists that they shout to the heavens. And so they do.

This is hardly a new thing, butting-in. We had a name for it, before social media, before trolling and any other, newer, terms for it. We called it being a busybody and it was not something to be, right up to the point where it was.

The busybody I knew best was the neighbor of ours who sat on the front stoop smoking Pall Malls, sipping coffee (when appropriate) and scotch-rocks (when appropriate), listening to a transistor radio, reading paperbacks and occasionally reporting to my mom what a little terror I (and many another neighbor-

hood brat) was. She was the person who shouted to me from her perch not to ride my bicycle without hands. She caught me (more than once, I regret to say) throwing stones down from the high branches of an oak tree with my friends, on cars passing by. Told my mom. Got me punished, again more than once. Deservedly so. Needless to say (and yet I do) we, were not fond of this neighbor. Until we were.

Turned out later that she was pretty cool – as teens we sat on that same stoop, talking, listening. She was merely someone who came outside and noticed us. Paid attention. Attended. That was why she seemed like a busybody.

So jump to today: what is the difference from the neighborhood busybody and the know-it-all who says that a book being classic has little to do with how old it is and the volunteer grammar-policeman who tries to explain to a stranger that there is a difference between subjugate and sublimate. Is it just our environment? Our self-induced lack of privacy or propriety?

Some of this may be actual, if unsolicited, assistance for a real, well, maybe not a problem but a concern worth a minute or two. Like those ads for not becoming one's parents. Heard you using non-synonyms interchangeably, and wanted to prevent you from doing this on a future job application. Or "I wanted to offer my opinion on the best Beowulf translation I've read - you know, just because." Some of this may also be a lapse in, or just a lack of, common behavioral standards. After all, what is rudeness, anymore? If we can't say every little thing that's on our minds, whatever shall we do with our time, our cellphones and our social media apps? And you really do need to know this thing I just learned.

Add to this a certain - how do you say? – know-it-all quality that some of us think we possess, and you have a pretty good bead on our modern world. Here, let me help you with that heavy lifting. Put down your brain for a moment and take a break. Let me talk. Like me. Like me!

Here's a thought – turn it off. Take your own advice. Turn off the need to respond. Turn off the urge to engage. Or crank it down, a little, to start, then more as you adjust for personal taste. Say hello to people you know. Smile at strangers. Thank folks who help you, who serve you or clean up after you. That's enough for now.

Garry - editor@blotterrag.com

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CAUTION

rock you, that's all I want

"My Friend Joan"

by Lydia Bach

Joan was the first person I knew who had an analyst. At least, she was the first person to talk about having one. Joan loved her analyst. She cycled through several other doctors until she found this one, like a good analysand does. Dr. Rosenfeld or Rosenthal or Rosenbaum, I can't remember now. But Joan adored this woman and was constantly quoting her back to me. Any problem I ever came to her with was accompanied by a, "well, Lily, you know what my therapist told me?" It was always hard to tell what the doctor had said versus what Joan had made up. "Emphasized for the sake of plot" was how she put it. Lies were what other people called her quotes, but Joan told such a good story that everyone let it go.

I was once at a dinner party where an analyst (not Joan's, a different one), asked me whether Joan had any issue with being 'the professor's wife'. I had to stop myself from laughing at the woman. Anyone who knew Joan understood that the idea of her being known as anyone's wife was absurd. If anything, David was thought of as Joan's husband, not the other way around.

She had never been 'the professor's wife'. She had never followed what other people wanted her to be. I can imagine her as a small child, being instructed by a woman in a calico dress to go clean her room, and instead making sure to do the exact opposite. If she was told to stop in the hall and take off her boots, that it was raining and her mother didn't want her to track mud all over the house, Joan would have rubbed her feet in the dirt and walked up and down the hallway. Afterall, it was Joan's mother who told

her not to become a writer, that she'd be poor and depressed. Joan did the exact opposite and became a novelist, rich and happy (thanks to the Xanax).

I don't have to imagine that happening; she was like that as an adult: pushing people's buttons just to get a reaction. She got a kick out of annoying people, just to see what would happen. It was always the little details. Joan would never say anything that might really ruin her friendships. It was when she didn't like someone that we were all in trouble. The people she liked to mess with the most were push-overs and Californians. Joan felt Californians had no sense of irony, they took everything that was said seriously.

If Joan could get away with it, she'd say anything. Mostly, she liked to make fools of men. "If I call Martin by the wrong name enough times, will he ever correct me?" (the answer was no, not until Martin's husband heard and told her that in fact his name was not Marvin, but Martin with a "t"). Or there was always the good old 'How long can I drink my soup straight from the bowl without someone telling me it's rude?' Most of the time it was better to ignore Joan, at least in public.

I think the booze had something to do with it; 'it' being the button pushing, the nagging. The endless questions she already knew the answers to. When her blood alcohol level was above zero, there was no telling what would come out of her mouth.

When it came to drinking, Joan had a rule, and only one: if it was before eleven am, she wouldn't drink. But the minute the old clock in the hall struck eleven, she would go into the kitchen and pour herself a great big glass of vodka with a single ice cube. It would be gone in ten minutes, so she'd pour herself another and—if it had been a particularly rough morning— another. In those days Joan really

was an alcoholic, and such fun! She wasn't half as fun when she was sober. Wasn't half as annoying either.

Joan loved to drink on someone else's dollar. I realized I would spend the same amount of money having her over for dinner than going to a restaurant. Joan liked to drink the cheapest alcohol she could get her hands on. Yet, she could make one bankrupt in a night without ever having drunk more than bottom-shelf, supermarket vodka. A talent, of sorts.

Even when drunk, she was civilized. There was no drinking straight from the bottle or any of that. She didn't slosh vodka all over my floor or become uncoordinated and make a mess of the apartment. She used a glass and offered to share. She smiled and thanked me for my hospitality. Always a lady, no matter the circumstances.

She could drink through a liquor cabinet and then get up and walk from my apartment in the Village to hers on East 72nd and 5th without anyone ever realizing she was black-out drunk. The only problem was that you could smell her from a mile away. Like a bottle of rubbing alcohol in patent leather heels.

I, on the other hand, was a complete lightweight; I hardly ever drank and got hungover after a glass of wine. We must have been a funny sight whenever we did go out to restaurants. A drunk holding the hand of a stumbling lightweight. Roles reversed.

No one stopped her. None of us, not even her husband, wanted her to stop. We knew that if Joan was difficult drunk she would be more difficult sober. If you even hinted to her about taking it slow or not having that night-cap she'd get angry. She claimed she couldn't write if she couldn't drink; that she'd been in rehab once before and being sober had wasted a year of her life. The truth was, she was scared. The smell of alcohol was used to

mask the smell of fear that leaked out from her. Not one of us wanted to smell that fear.

Whether or not she was an alcoholic, people clung to Joan. She was brilliant, funny too; though often what was entertaining was her meanness. I could never quite believe my afternoons with Joan. She'd throw these lavish dinner parties (courtesy of the professor's dime) for her friends, and new people were always joining. She would lead me across the room saying something like, "here Lily, this is my dentist's third cousin who's visiting from Czechoslovakia, he's studying..." and because the person had some interest in sixteenth century lit or the Spanish language, Joan left them with me to hole up in some corner and talk.

That was the nice thing about Joan: she had great confidence in the ability of her friends. If there was a problem, more often than not Joan knew someone who could sort it out. Divorce lawyer? Done. Plumber? She knew a guy who would fix the sink for free if fed dinner afterwards. Once, when I needed a new hat, Joan sent me to a millinery in the East Village run by a woman she had met in college. I left with a new hat, free of charge.

After reading this, one might think Joan really was 'the professor's wife'. Just another wealthy woman with too much time on her hands. A woman of a certain age, a certain class. Married to a certain type of man. The professor's wife doesn't work, she organizes dinner parties. Or, more often than not, she does. As an aspiring poet or a member of an arts board or some do-gooders organization. She doesn't have to lift a finger, she majored in Russian Lit. She could talk about Tolstoy for days. Sharp, smart, and yet she's made nothing of her life. A disappointment.

But, of course, I wouldn't be writing this if it wasn't for Joan's career, that much is clear. No one gets an obit in The New Yorker with-

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out doing something. To be honest, I'm not sure what I could say about Joan's career. The only time I was allowed to read her work was after she had submitted it to her editor. When I popped into her apartment on the way home from the office, she'd quickly shuffle her papers away. Scared of what I might read. It was since we were both writers. She was always worried about writers.

Maybe if she had known how much I hated her books, she would have let her guard down a bit. ❖

"M"

by David Lenna

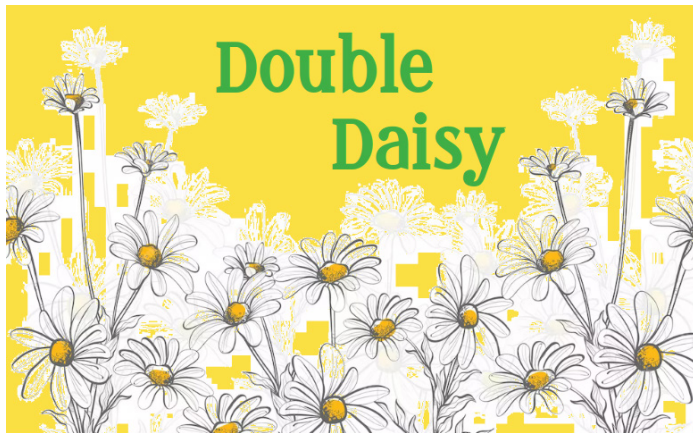
Grey as the sea of foggy drops, floats around me like a twelve-headed harpy after a bit of LSD from an Indian dripping tea. Slowly into my head, settling in the image of psychedelic shit. They'll unite into marshmallow knives and bring some painful spasms deep into my ears. They stab deep into my skin, where removing my meat causes only a weak vibration. I have no clue what system is in effect. I don't know why I try to understand them. That tension is sucking out my brain fluid, spitting out in every direction. It's hard to be lonesome when you talk to yourself. You don't have only two chins, not wrinkles only. After you kiss your babies aged by starvation for someone worthier of their netting. Too many ideas for one dumb head, hacked up by an old smith, today already with AI. It's prohibited to let him in wet spaces, for his bendable body starts to suffer from fungus there. He's falling. It all falls apart, will fall on him. When his only friend pleases him with her nostalgic hug. It looks precious, but to him, it's just needed goods with a regular import.

"Old Times"

What are the
definitions for when they're
always out? Got my head
loaded with seeing
and vigil. Mainly that.
Like when I was writing
these things
on the ground. Tearing my hair
out, not knowing the dawn would
come. The dawn has come, it
bores me yet. The sun is
stopping. I have to go
to sleep. I must wash myself.
Sex is boring. As in
the old days. Laura, I haven't
seen her, she's not important.
Everything I was dealing with is
gone, solved. It's not as happy
as it sounds. At the end
of the day, maybe it is.
Good night.
The idea of sleep now
is something for me.
Like a caress
of a hand from Heaven.
Please, come and get
me. For a
while only.

David Lenna

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1-12-25 "Drip Coffee" mosaic in process - Anika Deveraux

In my head: the vision of a mosaic of a tree made of coffee beans dripping from the leaves right into a cup. That would be half a cup, a cup cut vertically in half, in order to adhere it to the mosaic board.

None of the usual mosaic cutting tools -- nippers, compound nippers, wheeled nippers, score-and-snappers, ceramic scissors, glass cutter and running pliers, hammer -- were going to get the job done cleanly.

Without access to a wet saw (could cut a cup in half like butter), I ordered some diamond blades,



attached them to the Dremel, and got to work. About 10 cups and a lot of noise later, I had two cups that I could actually use in the art piece. Good to go! Actually, a miracle:

As a mosaic artist, I usually work in the pique-assiette tradition (a French word loosely meaning “broken plate”), using pieces of crockery, found objects and other doo-dads to create multi-textured art.

Part of the magic of pique-assiette mosaics is that, when breaking plates, cups and bowls, one never knows what will happen. Sometimes a little nip on the edge of a plate results in a clean break all the way through; sometimes the result is a lump of shards and crumpled base matter. So cutting a cup is that situation to the nth degree.



I had just found two beautiful blue and white china cups at the thrift store. I crossed my fingers and turned on the Dremel. One cut in half perfectly; the other one cut in half plus broke along the bottom. But I realized it was a fortuitous accident, because it made that one look like an espresso cup, and added variety to the mosaic design. Now we were off and running! Or were we?

Besides the usual process of choosing colors and textures in the materials, this project needed coffee beans. Having never mosaiced with beans before, some testing and practice needed to be done.

And who knew mosaicing with coffee beans was so nuanced? Glue them uniformly cracked side or smooth side up? Alternate which side is up? Glue them in a straight line or jumble them together?



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Polyurethane over 'em or naked? As I tested these different ideas, I felt that cracked side up looked more like tree bark, while smooth side up seemed more like a stone road. [picture of "Coffee Road"]

In the end, for the tree in "Drip Coffee," I glued the beans down with rounded side up, then topped it with another layer of cracked side up to give it more of a three-dimensional tree bark look. I also learned, right after starting to glue some down, that I ought to paint the board underneath a deep brown color to help the coffee beans blend together.

After all of the glass pieces were glued in place, the area on the tree for coffee beans was taped off, grouting done, then the tape removed and coffee beans glued down. A handful of beans dripping from the leaves of the tree and filling the cups completed the project.

Did I mention my commitment to upcycling, and what a wonderful art form this is for reusing materials? In the finished piece, everything is upcycled, including the board and all the materials on it (even the grout), with the exception of a few black and brown glass squares around the edges.

And the coffee beans, which were donated by a local coffee roaster and which were the nicest-smelling materials I'd ever worked with. ❖



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"box" by geoffrey neal

The box is always unimpressed. Unimpressed by plastic tapes. Unimpressed by earnest recycling efforts. Unimpressed by left of an imagination smeared into a bar code.

The box implies both mobility and immobility.
Implies warm embraces and artificial enthusiasm.
Implies entertainment behaviors swirling in comfortable commodity.

The box hides art through misdirection. Contains all the platitudes and wan suggestions of lives lived successfully, all the pastimes that could ever fit into a shopping cart.

The box opens itself up to all value systems: commodity-value, use- and exchange-value, moral value, aesthetic value. Go ahead. Close your eyes. Stick your hand in and rummage.

The box is an empty frame for a dream, a magnetic field aswirl around a sty of sleepers, a fossilized track in otherwise uninteresting stone, an eddy of cellophane and copper colored staples.

The box implies pointy or sharp or edgy, narrow yet sufficiently proletarian. Implies a cult, a miracle in a dissolving cloud or evaporating stain. Implies euphoric revelation through its careful unflapping.

The box knows resistance, knows decay.

The box is not an oracle, does not carelessly assert. The box loves only itself and may occasionally express a certain wildness of being through stamped code.

The box must know that poetry is the only language capable of truth and thus may be the only way to transmute all that is unintelligible between you and them into...what?

The box must also know how ridiculous art is, how ridiculous these words are, how all that really matters is being opened fully, properly consumed,

then smashed flat, then recycled.

The box is generous with truth.

The box is the biggest eater.

The box cannot unimagine its corners, cannot empty its accumulations onto the floor of some mediocre anonymous childhood, cannot escape the temporary universe of a pale blue 1978 Chevy Malibu station wagon.

The box can only hold tears for so long.

The box cannot smell and thus is never offended.

The box is authentic even when its contents are not.

The box could be a gun, or a balloon, or a handshake, or a text.

The box has no choice but to come back as itself. The alternative is void.

The box is heavy with bumper sticker irony, cynical like oat milk, current like a blank book on a smudged table on a drab edge of a forgettable shop, safer than standing in the line at 2 p.m. with a soiled bill between thumb and index and a prayer at the edge of your face, emptier than the dream after the clock explodes.

The box is a girdling root at the base of the colossus and all eyes are up.

The box dissects another sunset into all that is ridiculous and necessary. Holds the idiot's testament and the savior's safety scissors and at least one extra set of batteries.

The box cannot be forgotten even when filmed over with pollen and regret or left on the wrong porch.

The box is alive and fragile, dead and permanent. The box is in every room, every closet, squares every circle, doesn't know when to stop, doesn't know when to shut up.



Drip Coffee by Anika Devereux

"pez"
by geoffrey neal

you pick up the phone
you dial you wait
the local bar cuts you off after 3 rounds
with no explanation
waking up at the wrong time
the village idiot offers you money
we make due with the bones
as there is no more meat
you could move right into your blue period
if you could just find the stairs
thinking of your mother out of habit
no speaker no situation not enough development
to accept literally
after a while you just get used to them
dog follows you home
there is no scene
there is no band
there is no party after the show
if you would like to make a call
please hang up and try your call again
litter of unsolicited inspirations
and broken ashtrays
waking up with the pillow over your head
starting to cry because of a smell
want to purr
words like aquamarine flavored candy
forklifts in each walkway
always the same warehouse
never the same shelves
wind somewhere moving
we temporarily chew air
a place to rest
a voice to sigh
a lid to close
a glimpse of your silly lopsided smile
cannot wake up
long cigarettes of coffee quietly outstepping later.

chickenshit
by geoffrey neal

shame's shadow
is going through
the trash again

undoing the forgetting

working moonlight
by the back stoop

scraping history
from the wrapper

movements and manifestos
are just flocks
clusterfucks

of tongue wagging
page dogging
screen sharing
shoe gazing

heads bobbing downward
automatically
striking a blade

over&over&over&over

i'm concussed
just talking about it

The Dream Journal

real dreams, real weird
Please send excerpts from your own dream journals.
If nothing else, we'd love to read them.
We won't publish your whole name.

So many questions. I never go to games, much less stand on the sideline. Yet, here I am. Odd - there is no noise, although certainly there should be. A crowd is behind me, yes? I don't turn around - I never turn around in a dream, for obvious reasons. Still, there is another crowd across the wide expanse of green field marked with paint for yards, numbers and borders, just as silent. They are small and out of focus, but moving around, turning to one another, raising their hands and waving, but making no noise. Is there a barrier between us, or some kind of technology that suppresses noise with an opposite noise - a cancelling function? Are they mocking me? Have my ears reached their warranty expiration and I cannot receive auditory information?

The camera drone sweeps across the field, capturing information of one sort or another. If it is looking for me, I am right here.

Men, or who knows? are encased in colorful cloth and padding like armor, their faces invisible behind tinted plastic shields. I wonder if they are robots or creatures from some other place and wonder if in the very act of wondering I am suspect to a secret I shouldn't know and will feel a heavy hand thudding on my shoulder, then guiding me away roughly from the game and into a darkened SUV for questioning. What am I doing on the sideline of this big game? And how did I find out? (about what, about who?) Who told you? Who else knows and where are they? Whistles blow and I jump inside, trying to keep my cool exterior. What are they whistling for? Are they on to me? Will I even be fed in my incarceration? Oh, it's just a penalty. Shiny plastic yellow flags flutter to the fake grass.

Kid Curry - Cyberspace

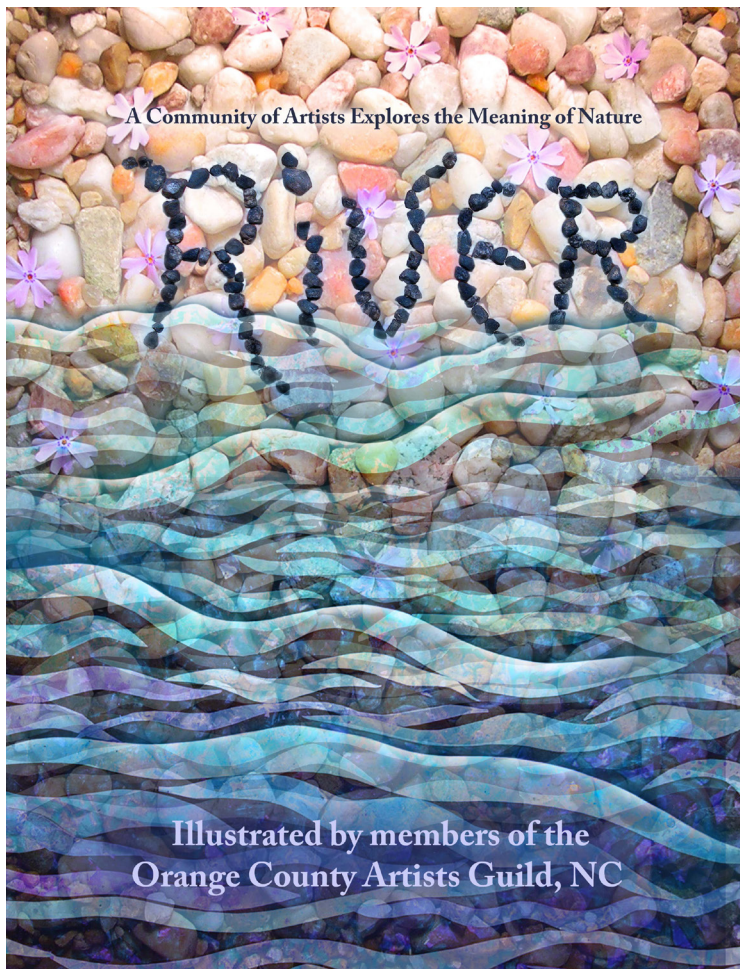
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David Lenna is nothing and everything in the universe. Not in yours, of course. His poems have appeared in *Adelaide Literary Magazine*, *The Broken City Magazine*, *The Blotter Literary Magazine*, and *Jokes Literary Review*, among others. David lives in Prague, but you can send him some regards @hehasanaccount.

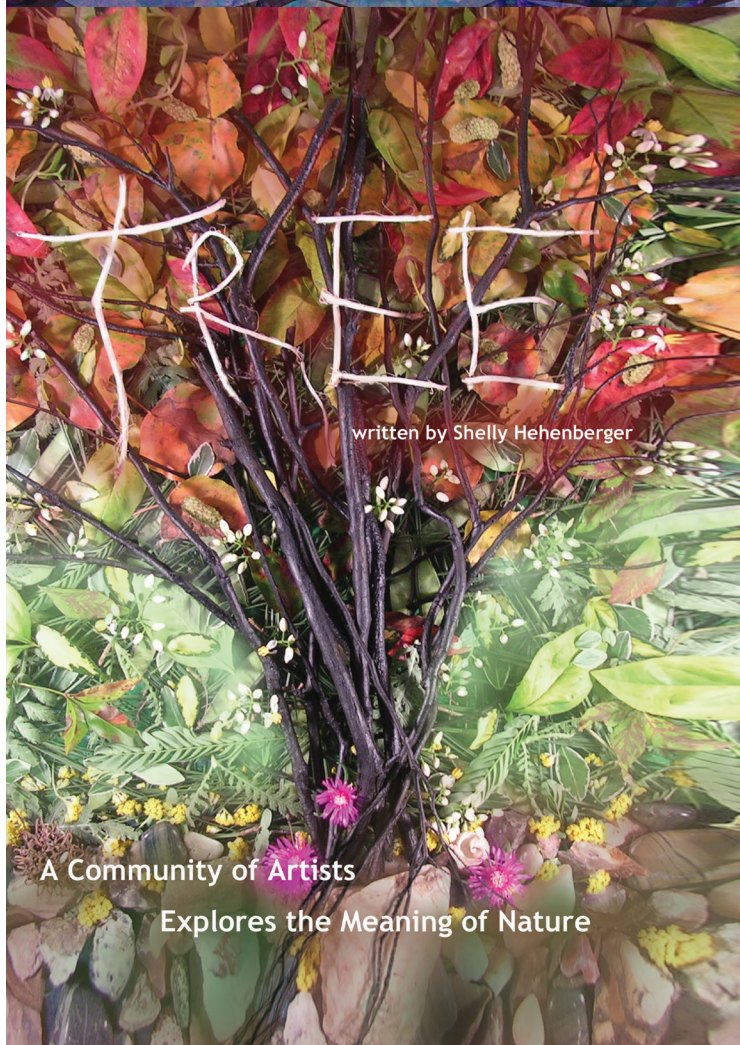
Geoffrey Neal lives in Chatham County, NC. He makes his living as Curator of the Coker Arboretum at UNC Chapel Hill. He recently started a monthly article titled 'Refugium' for the WCHL website chapelboro.com. His photography may be seen @soapyair and @gffry. His website soapyair.com is coming along nicely.

Anika Devereux (Double Daisy) is an artist living in Chapel Hill, NC. She uses upcycled materials to transform something into a brand-new piece through mosaics. See more of her work on doubledaisy.org



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as seen
through
the eyes of
different
artists.

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