

Beauty and Precarity: More LGBTQ+ Voices from North Carolina

by Dwight Tanner, Guest Feature Editor

One of the many pleasures of serving as the guest feature editor for *NCLR*'s 2025 issues on NC LGBTQ+ writers has been the opportunity to reacquaint myself with the many established authors in this category while also coming to discover and appreciate countless more. The collection of creative writings, artwork, and book reviews in this, the Spring 2025 digital issue, provides a great opportunity to do just that.

The special feature begins with "There's Another Moment After This One," the first of two new short stories by Jim Grimsley, with the second story to exclusively appear in the upcoming Summer 2025 print issue. This enigmatic story unfolds from the first-person perspective of an unnamed narrator standing on an oceanside sandbar. Grimsley's masterful use of language vividly depicts the beauty of the scene alongside a mounting sense of the precariousness of our times. The story is accompanied by a similarly evocative painting by the issue's cover artist, Willie Little, who uses oil, rust, and oxidation to capture both beauty and decay.

Next, Amber Flora Thomas's poem "Figure in a Landscape" comparably renders the beauty in disquiet and the disquiet in beauty. The poem repeatedly highlights what we can and can't see. It is complemented by a mixed media collage by multidisciplinary artist Karena "Kidd" Graves.

Read several book reviews in this section. First, Catherine Carter's in-depth review of Jessica Jacobs's latest collection, *unalone: Poems in Conversation with the Book of Genesis*, analyzes how Jacobs's poems explore and reconsider themes

from Genesis using the Hebrew tradition of *mi-drash*, effectively creating a conversation through myriad voices and ideas. Looking forward, the special feature in the upcoming print edition will include a conversation between Carter, who is also a poet, and Jacobs, which further examines what is said, what is left unsaid, and the host of biblical exegesis and commentary that affect how we might understand the poems in *unalone*.

Onyx Bradley, another poet, begins their review of Eric Tran's poetry collection *Mouth, Sugar, and Smoke* by pointing out the unique ways that death and specific types of grief "hang over LGBTQ+ individuals' lives." Bradley argues that Tran provides unique insight into these otherwise common tropes of loss not only as a queer Vietnamese American poet, but also through his unique life experiences studying at the UNC School of Medicine and working as a psychiatrist, all of which mediate the poems and themes in this collection.

Next, Robert M. West begins his review of Jeffery Beam's *Verdant* by positioning Beam as a unique poet-singer, which he clarifies as meaning the poet "as ecstatic." In that tradition, *Verdant*, at its core, presents twenty-six untitled poems written over thirteen years as part of Beam's process to help "him think and feel his way through" the end of a romantic relationship. West notes that the poems are surrounded by different types of paratext – such as literary epigraphs and essays and notes by Beam – that directly affect the reader's experience and responses to the poems

while also foregrounding "the achievement of deep anguish's transformation into art."

This idea of telling one's story as a means of releasing emotions and trauma also ripples throughout Stephanie Clare Smith's gripping memoir, *Everywhere the Undrowned: A Memoir of Survival and Imagination*, reviewed here by Jennifer McGaha. The story of Smith's abandonment and abuse as a teenager (by many of the adults who should have been protecting her) is largely told in vignettes and snippets. Despite the challenges of the traumatic events the book depicts, McGaha's review highlights both the beauty of Smith's lyricism and the powerful – and hopeful – reclamation of her own story and healing process.

As the editorial staff at *NCLR* work toward finalizing the upcoming 2025 print issue, due out this summer, don't forget to subscribe to receive it. The print issue promises to both introduce us to and reacquaint us with a wide range of incredible LGBTQ+ voices from North Carolina. In addition to exciting content already mentioned, the print issue will include interviews with poet Gabrielle Calvocoressi novelist De'Shawn and Charles Winslow. Featured scholarly and creative essays will explore writers such as Randall Kenan, Carter Sickels, and Carl Wittman. And there's more.

Looking further to the future, I'd also like to remind everyone of next year's upcoming *NCLR* special feature on North Carolina Veteran and Active Military Authors, which will be guest edited by Anna Froula, with submissions due by August 31, 2025. ■

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