

PRIMA MATERIA
volume 4

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*Speeding Through
the Night*

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Writings from the Hudson Valley, New York

Edited by Brent Robison



Prima Materia
Volume 4: Speeding Through the Night

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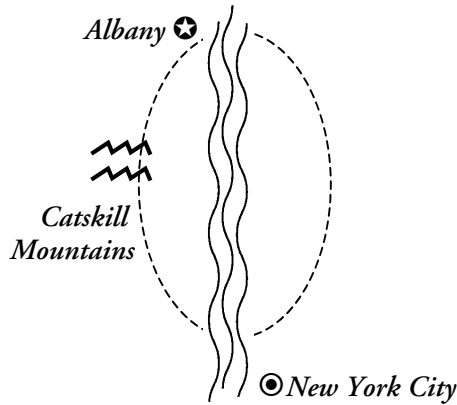
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The Hudson River Valley



In 1609, Henry Hudson sailed the Half Moon up the river that would one day bear his name. He called it the River of Mountains and wrote of its valley, “It is as pleasant a land as one can tread upon.” Washington Irving later made local folk tales famous with “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” and “Rip Van Winkle,” capturing a dark magic that most certainly hides in these hills. A surprising number of arts colonies and spiritual retreats have found refuge in these wooded valleys for over a century. Today, rumor has it that the region claims more “artists” per capita than any comparable area in the country. And UFOs as well.

With “The City,” the center of the world, just an easy jaunt downriver, and world-class culture swarming north to our doorstep, we can still enjoy the sight of a black bear eating berries in the backyard. There’s something in the air here, or the soil, or the water. There’s an energy in the Hudson Valley that has called creative spirits from all over the world. There’s serious talent here, working in secret in these woods and river towns. This book gives a sampling of the stories we have to tell.

To find the philosopher's stone:
"Pray, read, read, read, read again, labor, and discover."

—*Mutus Liber*

(Wordless Book)

1677

PRIMA MATERIA
v o l u m e 4

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Introduction

Speeding Through the Night

I'm drivin' a big lazy car rushin' up the highway in the dark
I got one hand steady on the wheel and one hand's tremblin' over my heart...
—Bruce Springsteen, "Valentine's Day"

Years ago, I drove at midnight with my headlights off through Arches National Park in Utah, along a ribbon of blacktop that glowed pale gray under a half moon, surrounded by a bizarre lunar landscape of spires and cliffs and boulders and dunes etched in monochrome, ink on charcoal, against the glitter of stars. I was fully alert, attuned to the wheel in my hands and the road under my tires, ready for the unknown that flew at me out of the darkness every instant. I felt alive.

Something of that experience is captured in this issue of *Prima Materia*.

Our fourth volume is, like its predecessors, a collection of very diverse works—fiction, poetry, and memoir pieces narrated by a remarkable chorus of unique voices. This is as it should be—a faithful, (thus unpredictable) representation of the creative forces at work in the Hudson Valley. As I assembled this one, the line of continuity became more clear to me than ever before: these books, even separated as they are by many months, are still all “of a piece.” In each, twenty-something fine writers from our local communities have crafted work with both mind and heart—work that explores complex matters of self and other, of love and death, of origin and destiny. Family, home, travel, landscape—all have recurring roles here, as in previous volumes. Again, these are stories grounded in the here and now, with occasional excursions to distant times and faraway places. There are traditional and experimental works here; lyrical and reportorial; allegorical and confessional; new voices and others you’ve read in these pages before.

In the quantum universe, all stories exist simultaneously. Too bad I can't present them that way—every selection front and center. With much struggle, I have given them a sequence, in which subtle relationships are at play, connections which I hope will enrich your reading experience.

Along the way, something else made itself know to me about this issue. There is more than a whisper here about children—children at risk. It seems to be a thread woven without my awareness into the selection process, fueled, I'm guessing, by the trip my wife and I took to India a year ago to pick up our adopted daughter from an orphanage. Her journey and ours, as well as yours and everybody's, through the scary nighttime of childhood into the different but perhaps equally frightening reality of adulthood, is one integral part of this book.

Another is the absolute necessity of love for our fellow travelers. In its own way, every piece of writing here delivers that message. That's what *Prima Materia* is all about.

The variety in this volume demands that no subtitle can apply in a literal way to every selection, but in my own convoluted thought, "Speeding Through the Night" describes an essential truth about being human, a truth that is shared by all of these fine pieces of writing. Each alone, we ride the runaway trains of our lives into the invisible future, eyes wide, hoping the meager headlamp doesn't fail. At the same time, all together like passengers on a bus, we hurtle on our little ball of a planet through endless black space. This volume's title was borrowed from the last line of the final selection in the book, Anne Richey's beautiful, bittersweet poem, "Trailways." It's my hope that even after the dark places (among the lighter ones) that you'll visit in the journey from cover to cover, the secret flame of those last few lines will leave a warm, lasting glow.

—Brent Robison
October 2005
Mt. Tremper, NY