GRASSROOTS
POETRY
PROSE
ART

The Prairie Review

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ANNE CARSON

Out the window I can see dead leaves ticking
over the flatland
and dregs of snow scarred by pine filth.
At the middle of the moor

where the ground goes down into a
depression,
the ice has begun to unclench.
Black open water comes

curdling up like anger.

Anne Carson
“The Glass Essay”

Cover Art
Kinga Lipinska. Portrait of Anne Carson.
Pencil on paper, digitally recolored and cropped for publishing, 11 x 14. 2026.

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Closing out a landmark year—and preparing to bring *The Prairie Review* into print.

Welcome to the final edition of The Prairie Review for 2026!

This year has been a season of remarkable growth, and we are still catching our breath. TPR qualified for the Firecracker Award for excellence in indie magazines and sent out six Pushcart Prize nominations. We also released a poetry album paired with a chapbook—a milestone made possible by the support of our community and friends.

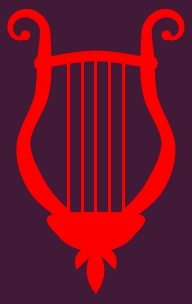
For this issue, we are thrilled to feature a portrait of Anne Carson on the cover: poet, performance artist, translator, essayist, and this year's Nobel Prize laureate. Inside, you can settle in and enjoy over 150 pages of poems and stories from around the world. You'll also find stunning visual art by Agnes Grochulska, an in-depth conversation on performance techniques for poets, a book review of *Calamity of Desire*, and field notes from the Poets for Science Gathering I attended in early November.

As I prepare to bring The Prairie Review into print alongside our online edition in the spring of 2027, I remain deeply grateful to every writer, artist, and reader who has supported our literary mission over the years.

To stay connected, please consider following TPR on social media. As we build our online presence, we'll be sharing curated book reviews, behind-the-scenes updates, submission calls for art and writing, and details on the upcoming print launch. Your support means the world to us—find us on Facebook at The Prairie Review and on Instagram at @lit.editor.tpr.

Live inspired,

Kinga Lipinska
Editor, The Prairie Review



"... there's something about Greek that seems to go deeper into words than any modern language. So that when you're reading it, you're down in the roots of where words work, whereas in English we're at the top of the tree, in the branches, bouncing around. It was stunning to me, a revelation. And it continues to be stunning, continues to be like a harbor always welcoming. Strange, but welcoming."

- Anne Carson

PAUL ILECHKO

Passing Through

It's likely that as you speed past
all you see is a blur missing the details
of an almost derelict house the man

who lives there will be the last occupant
before it is finally demolished you will
never know what happens to his dog

or even that he owns a dog never know
how it comes to be absorbed back into
the insignificance of a village that

he inhabited for thirty years a village
that you barely notice no traffic light
or stop sign to even slow your progress
*
looking back you might have stopped
asked him for direction he could have invited
you in offered you a beer so many options

possible in your life perhaps he was an artist
and you a writer you might have had such
interesting conversations he'd take you to the creek

and show you where he fished dark clouds
scudding across the evening sky
and when you said goodbye you would

have realized that something was off
kilter as if meaning could be weighed
on a scale and found to be unequal.

PAUL ILECHKO

B**usiness Casual Swimwear**

I used to wear suits and ties
dress shirts made from Egyptian cotton
looking out of the plate glass window
to where barges trundle down the river
sliding quietly under bridges
with their stacks of coke for factories
downstream a pile of newspapers
on my desk in competition with
the ticker tape but I'm submerged
once more in river water shirt drenched
in something worse than sweat

*

have you ever flipped a kayak
lived through the panic before you kick
yourself free head bursting back
into air as droplets fly in all directions
lungs gasping and there's a wire
that stretches from your breath
to the gleaming windows a hundred feet
up in the sky messages trickling
down it in vivid pulses that as you
watch appear to rearrange themselves
into a life encoded as binary.

PAUL ILECHKO

The Ballad of Slurry Seal

They’re slurry sealing the main road
I had to look it up on Wikipedia

and I was still absorbing the details when
she called to tell me that everything was over

and immediately memories were once
again clustering beneath the Linden trees

that line the driveway she asked for
the key to be returned the one

she had once readily given when I had
volunteered to take the helm of this ship

to read the stars at night and the sun
as it highlighted the edges of clouds

to set a course we both could believe in
how many grains of sand are there

on all of our beaches how many stars
in the universe and how many planets

where a version of either one of us might
once have existed I’m hungry now

and the supermarket will open soon but
the roads are blocked by heavy machinery.

PAUL ILECHKO

Weather

I checked my weather app because rain
was expected but the radar was
looking clear so I told you not to worry
about the umbrella you couldn’t find
yet five minutes after you left barely
even to Bucks County it seemed
the gods were playing a joke tipping
out their buckets of water until everything
was saturated the houses across
the street barely visible through the curtains
of liquid later you told me it stopped
just minutes before you reached your
appointment slightly late because
of the poor visibility but completely dry
your client’s child excited to greet you.

Paul Ilechko is the author of “Post Moby” (Sheila-Na-Gig, 2026) and “Fragmentation and Volta” (Gnashing Teeth, 2025). His work has appeared in many journals, including The Bennington Review, Bear Review, Atlanta Review, Permafrost, and Laurel Review. He reads for Marrow Magazine.

Long Ago

Long ago, I once loved. Loved with
a fever equal to the swelter of a
thousand summer nights. I deified
with a love that was elephantine &
engulfed the air around me until it
comfortably settled itself within the
walls of my asthmatic lungs. So filled
was I with delirium, I wrote letter after
letter. Full of red ink and sentimental
promises. Half desperate, fully broken
words hurriedly scribed in lustful script.
Frenetic in the form of an imprisoned
Marquis de Sade to get all the words out
of my head in time. Perhaps I had not
only loved, but loved too deeply.

SHONTAY LUNA

Circa Early to Mid-Eighties (Song Titles)

Ninety-Nine Red Balloons
float over Lake Michigan,
as we’re Head Over Heels,
yet Too Shy. Warriors
begging for One More Night,
Against All Odds. Under
a New Moon on Monday.
Longing for youth to stay
like an Eternal Flame.

Strange Ghosts of

Strange Ghosts of
human form have
bound and thrown
me into this wooden
monster. Amid waves
full of form and angry,
like a rabid dog with a
deep gaze.

Shontay Luna is a poet from the Midwest. Her work has been published in Brittle Paper, The Riverbed Review and Uut Poetry, among others. She studied poetry at Columbia College Chicago, and currently working on her fifth chapbook. You can find work on Instagram via @shontay_luna

JOHN GREY

Excerpts From a Marriage

Found a key but to which door?
What kind of unlucky bird is that,
discovered, after the rain,
having landed in a puddle of its own death?

And what kind of item
could you buy at a flea market
that would be of any use?

I know you think you're god.
But the God? Or just a god?

Now where did I put my pills?
And in which novel on this shelf did I stuff the C-note?
F Scott Fitzgerald, tell me. Is it you?
Losing things is the direct opposite of staying calm.

Do you reckon we will ever again play the old board game?
Should I toss it out
or keep it so that I can ask this very same question
a year from now?
Take a deep breath and maybe
finally listen to that new Leonard Cohen CD.

In my dreams, I stumbled into a woman named Samantha.
And now, come morning, my leg is aching.
And you're weeping on my shoulder.
Part of my husband duties is to take the weight.

We both like to lie down in the afternoon
though not always together.
You prefer the perfume of new cut grass.
I'd rather the intermittent hoopla of a ball game.

JOHN GREY

Ever wondered why the dog circles like that before it sits?
Do you ever wonder about anything?
Really, all this constant questioning of nobody in particular
leaves me exhausted.

I would circle like a dog myself
except that I am not a dog.
I am only this —endless straight lines.
They have a meaning you will explain to me some day.

JOHN GREY

Medical Tent

mid-afternoon,
MD's on standby –
then something's wheeled in –
time to get to work again

the body
half gone -
dances
but wrongly
as the litter crew
passes it along

ghosts
move with him -
no guts,
no bone,
no movie blood -
only the slow
controlled
motion
of shutting down

then he is
pronounced -
long after
the obvious –
as dead
as the last one
and the one before that

the nurse
steps out
the doctor follows –

this is the moment when
he takes up smoking

JOHN GREY

The Bird of War Page One

face
half-chewed
by war

a heron
rises
from the marsh

effort
thinned by war

beak points
toward the sun

as it works
its body upward
like some Jesus
climbing a cross

already
the stretcher waits -
a rotting smell
rising
breaking open
in the air

a young soldier
cries out
where it hurts the most

inside the bay
shouts cross wires
doctors and nurses
prepare

the stretcher crew
climbs aboard

my mind
tries to steady
what it thought
it saw

The Bird of War Page Two

the raw
medial view
of a man
torn open

still
we do
what must be done

crouched
under the blades'
churning

the dying
ride litters
without triumph

I look
because my eyes
must have something
to do

his face
is tilted back
toward sky
fills with blood

and as the helicopter departs
its roar gives way
to the flap of wings
somewhere above

I stand aside
engine idling -
a hole
in the dark
where a little
light persists

Miss Julie-Anne

She pours drops of whiskey on the withered rose petals.
Then wields the hose with a cigarette flopping from her lower lip.
What doesn't intoxicate her flowers,
she drinks.
Ashes fall onto the buds.
The bees will have to suffer
for their pollination.
She passes the graves
of all her cats,
apologizes to
the tiny crosses
because the bottle is now empty.
She remembers all the crushed birds
those felines dragged into the parlor.
They thought they were doing her a favor.
On the mantle are photographs of her parents, both passed on.
And the skull of a bird, a parrot that never did talk.
It's a strange household. Attention to detail reveals itself in death.

John Grey is an Australian poet, US resident, recently published in Midnight Mind, Willow Review and the Pennsylvania Literary Journal. Latest books, “Bittersweet”, “Subject Matters” and “Between Two Fires” are available through Amazon. Work upcoming in the MacGuffin, Touchstone and Plainsongs.

Georgia

As she slides the IV needle
into my arm the nurse
calls me “my love.” Her name
is Georgia, name of the
state where my mom was
raised. I wish my mom, once
a nurse herself, could be here
now to hold my hand before
they wheel me into the operating
room, but she quit her body
30 years ago in another hospital
two hours away. Maybe it's because
I miss her that my heart swells
when someone calls me sweetie,
darling, my love. This morning
I asked the spirits to protect me
during surgery and they sent all
the kindest nurses. They sent
Georgia, who said my love,
my love, my love and it felt
like medicine.

Charity
after Joni Mitchell

They think we're all prostitutes
here. But we're mothers and

orphans, desperate girls and destitutes
tangled in morality's dragnet. And

The chilly Sisters call us temptresses
because our fathers and Fathers like

parting our seas. As for me,
my mother died, my father's fallen

into a barrel of rotgut, no women
left to straighten us out. I was sentenced

to the Magdalen Asylum, into
the life of an abandoned girl, dreamless

hours spent embroidering bridal veils, drudgery
& knowing I'll never own anything so fine. Why

are my fingers always so sore? Do
the Sisters believe this course they

set will deafen me to temptation's call?
I may be an orphan, but I know this:

the world outside those gates is heartless
but not half as heartless as this place

where they crop our hair, change our
names, embroider each woman & girl into a lady

imprisoned within herself, bound by the lie of
Mary Magdalene's penitence, in the name of charity.

BETH WINEGARNER

Migraine Journal

It doesn’t start in my head like you’d think
but somewhere in the bridge between neck
shoulders and back, steel cables of sinew
tightened to the point of fraying, a burn
spreading from within, across trapezius
down shoulder blades, round to collarbones-
arms-hands-low back-hips-legs, blooming
like drops of paint in clear water. At last
creeping up neck and occiput, a blow
to the back of my skull, jaws and temples
gripped with thistly heat, pain cinching
round my body like a catsuit too tight. Wince
at light like bonesaw to cranium. Sudden
sounds hammer me bruised. My stomach
tries to turn inside out, empty the intruder
causing all this catastrophe, but roils only
weakly. I creep on brittle legs to the medicine
cabinet, swallow doctors’ promises, pray

this time they will work.

BETH WINEGARNER

A Crow Teaches Cain How to Tend to the Dead

after the Qur'an, Surah Al-Ma'idah (5:27–31)

You're new here, I can tell.
The trees whispered of your birth
after your parents left the garden.

I smelled the blood on your hands
from half a mile away and flew
here quickly, anticipating a feast.

Instead I find you've killed your brother.

I'm not here to judge. Murders happen.

Hey. Hey. Why are you trembling?
Why do tears flood your cheeks?

Oh, I see. Yes, death is a shock
when you've never seen it before.

No, you can't put his blood
back into his body. It doesn't work
that way. But it will nourish the soil.

You grow crops, don't you?

No, I'm sorry, his soul is gone
up into the sky, the clouds, the wind.
You can breathe him in
but it won't ever be the same.

When my kind die, we flock
to the body, study their limp feathers,
black wings askew, beak parted,
and look for signs of what took them:

Predator?
Insects?

Disease?
Age?

We compare notes, cry out, sit vigil
with the dead until our hearts settle.

You might try something similar. See
if it helps.

Have you considered giving your brother's
body to the Earth? Here, let me scratch open
the dirt with my talons. I'll get the hole started
for you.
There you go. As you dig, the soil
will scrub the blood from your hands.

When you're ready, plant him just like a wheat seed.
Tuck him into the ground, water him well,
and behold what you've sown.

Beth Winegarner is a journalist and writer who's contributed to the New York Times, the New Yorker, The Guardian, and many others. She is the author of several books, most recently "San Francisco's Forgotten Cemeteries: A Buried History" and "Swim Poems," and she is the co-host of the Dead Reckoning podcast.

BEN NARDOLILLI

Music Made First Thing in the Morning

Out of bed in the morning and dealing with the spread
of cubism between the floor and the swaying door

The boards are multiplying and their lines intersect,
a net full of splinters is trying to stop my advance

The sunlight slanting in could serve me, if I wanted
to bring expressions of romantic fantasy into the interior

Closer to the home of my hands, a harlequin appears,
another outbreak, looking rosy without being lush

Better to stick to assemblage, the concrete will come
oozing into place, if I can figure out my next purchase

BEN NARDOLILLI

Field Marks

If the train car stops long enough, guests on the concrete platform
will get a chance to see me suspended in this dark terrarium

Sipping the air-conditioned air, listless in the empty
atmosphere, safe it seems in a section of this big rolling cannister

All around me, cushions and devices, sheets and pillows
scattered and tossed to imitate my natural environment back home

At peace, until the children tap on the glass, their parents
then pulling them away, convinced I am coiled, and ready to strike

BEN NARDOLILLI

Our Inland

Small signs show we have not yet crossed
Over the border from Canada

There are suburbs here too, yes,
But they are brown and red unlike home

Where the single-family homes
Are all shades of blue, green, and white

Few have columns, balconies, and lanterns,
No need to imitate plantations

Perhaps they are all channeling
The forts colonists built looking for beavers

Beyond in the countryside, the land is flat,
Green and yellow regimes

America has such spreads too,
Covered in corn, raising patches of soybeans

Or whatever clumps can grow,
The harvest is not important only the sight

The stalks look the same, golden antennae
Top the sharp leaves in formation

Perhaps the only thing Canadian
Is that I can see farms so close to a metropolis

In Light of a Travel Ban

Europe closed off, perhaps this year
will be fit for another Westward expansion,
explorations to the Rocky Mountains
followed by excursions through the desert,
ending with the sight of tall trees
in the hills and valleys along another coast

Time then to return to the rails, leave old sky
and the sea behind to put miles
of land under me, from station to station,
as new visions grace the safety of my coach
and give me a better sense and whiff
of our new and ever-growing arid America

BEN NARDOLILLI IS A MANHATTAN SCRIVENER AND A BROOKLYN WRITER. HIS WORK HAS APPEARED IN HYPERTEXT MAGAZINE, DOOR IS A JAR, RED FEZ, A THIN SLICE OF ANXIETY, JMWW, QUAIL BELL MAGAZINE, AND SLAB. FOLLOW HIS PUBLISHING JOURNEY ON INSTAGRAM @SSENJAMINNARDOLILLI

N. J. GORDON

The Icon of Inadvertent Joy

The chapel near the Kremlin
Names
Kisses
And Snow
Marina Tsvetayeva
Floated on crimson
Clouds
Filled with wonderful
Powers
Holy Glory Lights
Filled with slendor.

N.J. Gordon writes stream of conscious poetry on scraps of paper in the spirit of Dickinson, Whitman, and The Beats.

RACHAEL YODER & KINGA LIPINSKA ON PERFORMANCE TECHINIQUES FOR POETS

Early this summer, I met with Rachael Yoder to discuss performance techniques for poets. Rachael is an actor and instructor with extensive expertise in embodiment techniques for creatives who work with language and voice.

Below is a transcript of our conversation. I am sharing it here in The Prairie Review as I thought it might be of interest to those for whom performance is a vital part of their poetic practice.

KINGA LIPINSKA
As poets, we can venture into other disciplines, like drama or pantomime, to engage the body during a performance. Personally, I find this bodily engagement to be the new standard for a satisfying poetry performance, both for the poet and the audience.

Since I know you studied at least three different performance techniques, I wanted to ask what overlaps you see between these different methodologies. Specifically, do they overlap when it comes to advice on **what makes a solid performance**?

RACHAEL YODER
The three techniques I studied in my MFA program—Meisner, Williamson, and Fitzmaurice—were designed to work together as one integrated process. Each approaches performance through the same central question: **how can a performer reliably reveal truth in the moment?** Meisner begins with present-tense responsiveness between people. Williamson adds the body, helping performers move beyond stillness or tension so the whole instrument (body) can respond. Fitzmaurice builds on that physical foundation by freeing the voice, allowing it to become more resonant, authentic, and connected to the body. Together, these practices help performers strip away anxiety, tension, mental chatter, and protective habits so they can be fully present. **The goal is not to manufacture emotion, but to remove what blocks it, allowing the body, voice, and emotions to respond honestly to what is happening at the moment, to what a performer is trying to evoke in their text.**

KL

That is exciting because, **in poetry, performance, at least ideally, is a channel to unveil the truth and meaning present in the poem.** The performer should allow themselves to become a conduit, allowing the text's authenticity and immediacy to reach the audience.

Even in traditional readings, with the page in hand, the body is still part of the performance. However, I remember moments when I hid behind the page, froze, and heard my own voice as unfamiliar. In those moments, the poem's impact was limited not by the text, but by my performer's anxiety.

That is why **I am interested in the craft of embodiment: how a poet can move beyond paralyzing self-consciousness and become more fully available to their own work during performance**. It may sound idealistic to speak of becoming a conduit for art, but I think it is possible. Perhaps even necessary.

Working with the embodiment techniques has helped me move into a more comfortable and conscious relationship with performance: speaking from memory, using the microphone with greater ease, and allowing movement to become part of the reading. With that in mind, what do you think makes a strong performance—not only in acting, but in any form that depends on the voice, the body, and the presence of the performer?

RY

A strong performance often succeeds when it no longer feels like performance, but like the revelation of a truth. **The most compelling performers seem to remove everything that blocks that truth: anxiety, tension, restlessness, self-consciousness, or vocal habits—so the audience can receive the work without distraction.** In that state, the performer becomes a clear channel for the experience: all signal, no noise.

KL

Yes, that's true. I'm also interested in **the balance between intentionality and surrender.** A poet may be fully embodied and conscious of how they are coming through, but they can also become so emotionally affected by the work that the performance becomes something else: a personal encounter with the text in real time.

That can be profound, even moving, but it raises a question: when the performer's intentionality gives way to being carried by the text, is that still performance? Or has it entered a different realm—closer to self-discovery, private revelation, or an encounter with one's own memory and experience?

RY
I think the answer is nuanced. **Preparation matters because it creates the structure—the scaffolding—that allows the meaning and intention of the work to come through.** But once you reach the performance, the audience becomes part of the experience. If I am having a profound personal encounter on stage but the people in the back row cannot hear or receive it, then it has not fully become performance.
A performer should transmit what they are experiencing in a way that reaches the audience. At the same time, effective performance also requires letting go of the preparation once the work begins. If the audience can see the scaffolding, if the work feels controlled or overworked—they are watching the preparation rather than a person living truthfully in the moment. The balance is delicate: build the structure, then release into the moment.

KL
Yes, that makes sense: preparation creates the conditions for presence. All the work we do before a reading—whether for poetry or any kind of spoken performance—helps us become available to the moment itself and serve as a conduit for the truth or aesthetic experience we want to share.
That truth does not have to be didactic; it may be enriching, unsettling, transformative, etc. What matters is that it reaches the audience. **For poets who are not trained performers but want to expand beyond traditional page-based reading, where would you suggest they begin?** How can they start developing the kind of presence that allows the work to come through fully?

RY
I would **begin with embodiment**. **Much of a poet's creative process can be cerebral: the work is shaped in the mind, felt internally, and then placed on the page. But once you share a poem aloud, the body becomes part of the transmission.**

At that point, **the poet is no longer relying on the page as the delivery system; the poet becomes the delivery system.**
So, the first step is to connect the text to physical experience—speaking it while moving, walking, doing simple tasks, or using any practice that brings the words into the body.

KL
Yes, I love that idea: the poet becomes the delivery system. **The page no longer stands between the work and the world; instead, the poet becomes the vehicle through which the work moves.** That requires a more conscious, intentional relationship to the body and opens up a larger understanding of poetry as a full-body experience.
That matters not only for writers and performers, but also for readers and audiences. A poem can be encountered physically as well as intellectually; its meaning may open when we walk with it, speak it aloud, or let it move through the body.
In that sense, even reading poetry on the page can become an embodied experience. **The poem does not come only from a cerebral space; it emerges from the lived, physical experience of being human. The more deeply it is embodied, the more powerfully it can communicate.**

RY
When a poet takes the work off the page and brings it into the body, the poem becomes an embodied experience. **In live performance, that experience does not remain contained within the performer; it moves outward into the shared space with the audience.**
The performer's body, voice, and energy vibrate with the poem, and that vibration reaches the listener. **What begins as something happening inside a poet, during performance becomes something happening between people, in the present moment.**

KL
Yes, that **exchange between poet and audience is exactly what gives a live reading its force.** It is often how listeners begin to distinguish one poet from another—not only through the words on the page, but through the particular quality of presence, voice, and resonance each poet brings into the room.

For the poet, this can be harder to perceive from the inside. I may prepare carefully and try to open that connection, but I cannot always know how I am coming through. Still, the goal is to become more conscious of how the poem moves through the body and reaches the listener.
That is where the poetic voice becomes fully alive: when the audience responds not only to the language, but to the embodied presence behind it. **The poem becomes a shared experience—cognitive, physical, and emotional—created in the space between performer and listener.**

RY
Exactly. This is where acting training can deeply serve the poetic process. The goal is to stand before an audience and vibrate at your truest frequency, but that requires clearing away whatever interferes with that truth.
The work is about tuning the instrument: the body, voice, and emotional life. Through that process, performers learn to access the truth of their own instrument and work from that place with reliability, even in front of an audience.

KL
Yes, that is a perfect way to frame where poets might begin. For actors, embodiment and preparation are built into the craft from the start; for poets, those questions are often overlooked because so much attention is placed on writing, editing, and overcoming creative blocks.
But performance and writing can inform each other. Learning to read aloud, connect with an audience, and let the work move through the body can reveal where language comes alive—and where something is still blocked. In that sense, performance is not secondary to poetry; it can become a vital extension of the creative process itself.
When poets perform their own work, they are not pretending. At their best, they are revealing something more sincere and genuine: the truth of the poem, the truth of the process, and, often, the truth of themselves. That revelation can open new possibilities for the work, the writer, and the audience.

RY
Exactly. That is one of the most important lessons I took from my training: **creativity needs a reliable process**. If an actor is performing a

demanding role eight times a week over several months, they cannot depend on inspiration alone. They need a repeatable way to enter the creative state and live truthfully in the work each time.

For me, that process includes a physical, vocal, and emotional warm-up that I can trust no matter where I am or what kind of day I have had. It begins by releasing restless energy, setting aside the noise of daily life, and returning to the breath. In Williamson work, even ten minutes of doing nothing can become a foundation: a way to settle the body, clear the channel, and reconnect with the first gesture of life itself—breathing.

Over time, that warm-up becomes flexible. It may be an hour, five minutes, or half an hour, depending on what the moment requires. What matters is having a bridge between ordinary life and the creative space. Without that transition, we bring all the residue of the day into the work. With it, we give ourselves a way to arrive—physically, vocally, and emotionally—ready to create.

KL

That is such valuable advice. I have often gone straight from the practical demands of daily life—setting up a reading, hosting an event, answering logistical questions—into performance, only to feel disconnected from the work once I began. In those moments, I realize how important it is to create a transition between the ordinary world and the creative space.

For poets, especially those on book tours or giving frequent readings, that transition can make it possible to return to the poem's living core rather than feeling trapped in repetition. Even when the same poem has been read many times, its truth remains worth sharing. The challenge is to prepare in a way that lets the work feel fresh again—for the poet and for each new audience.

RY

Exactly—and this is where Meisner work becomes especially useful. Williamson and Fitzmaurice help connect the body and voice; Meisner trains presence. Its foundation is repetition: two people may repeat the same simple truth back and forth, sometimes for many minutes, but if they are truly attending to what is happening in the moment, the repetition is never actually the same.

That practice teaches performers to connect with what is new right now. Even when the words are familiar, the moment, the audience, and the exchange are different each time. **Staying present to that newness is what keeps repeated performances alive.**

KL
That is a wonderful way to think about it. Repetition does not have to become tedious if the performer can return to the freshness of the moment. Even when a poem has been read many times, the audience, the room, and the exchange are always new.
That perspective helps poets move beyond the fear that a familiar poem has gone stale. Its core can remain alive if the performer prepares to meet it again, rather than simply repeat it. In that sense, performance becomes a way of sustaining creative momentum and navigating fatigue, burnout, or self-doubt.
For me, the ultimate goal is not productivity in the narrow sense, but aliveness: staying connected to the creative life, drawing energy from the present moment, and allowing each part of practice—writing, reading, performing, preparing—to reciprocally inform.

RY
Absolutely. I would love to work with more poets, because **there is so much potential in bringing these performance techniques into poetic practice.**

KL
I would be very happy to encourage poets to reach out, explore these practices, and see what opens for them. **Even for writers already interested in performance, embodiment training may not feel like an obvious next step, but it seems to me a powerful doorway into new creative possibilities.**

CONVERSATIONALISTS

KINGA LIPIŃSKA
EDITOR, THE PRAIRIE REVIEW



RACHAEL YODER
MEISNER & WILLIAMSON INSTRUCTOR



Rachael Yoder: Chicago-based professional actor, ICF Certified Coach, facilitator, and educator whose work centers on the intersection of embodiment, emotional truth, and creative expression. She holds an MFA in Acting from Northern Illinois University, a BA in Theater from SUNY Brockport, and is a graduate of the Stella Adler Studio of Acting's Two-Year Conservatory. She is a proud member of Actors' Equity Association. Rachael is on faculty at Green Shirt Studio in Chicago, where she teaches the Meisner and Williamson Techniques, helping actors, poets, and other artists cultivate greater presence, spontaneity, emotional availability, and trust in their impulses. Through classes and individualized coaching, she helps artists move beyond habitual performance choices, deepen their connection to language and imagery, and bring their work more fully into the body—creating expression that is immediate, authentic, and deeply connected. Beyond her work with artists, Rachael is the Founder and Principal Consultant of Human(ity) Resources LLC, where she brings her background in performance, facilitation, and coaching to corporate leadership development, helping leaders strengthen their presence, communication, emotional intelligence, and capacity for authentic human connection. She also serves on the leadership team of The Outer Loop Theater Experience, a nonprofit theater and humanitarian organization committed to theater for social change and community development in Tanzania. To connect with Rachael about upcoming Meisner and Williamson classes, workshops, or individualized coaching, please email: rachael@greenshirtstudio.com.

Rachael Yoder is leading a workshop titled "Physical Freedom for Actors." Here's the direct link to the workshop: https://www.greenshirtstudio.com/classes/physical-freedom-for-actors.

Check out Green Shirt Studio for classes and workshops, offered in-person and online.

DUANE L. HERRMANN

Sunbeams Illumine

Sunlight enters a room,
any room, of the house
at different angles
lines are illumined,
otherwise invisible –
filiments of need
for various spiders
normally hidden
structures in air.

As sunlight moves
lines disappear
and others appear.

They wait for tomorrow,
decorate the room,
changes through the day
and return again
to show once more.

Farm Boy At Sea

Desperate to get away –
away from the old man,
cussing in German,
and his mules
all so stubborn;
he went to sea.

The sea was flat –
nothing on the horizon
of the South Pacific – hot!
Ship: a small tin can.

He did paper work
transferring men
on and off
the ship.

He missed the cows,
any cows would do,
missed more than food.
He went from Lawrence
to Lawrence
back home.

DUANE L. HERRMANN

Extravagant Display

Thunderstorm power
is evident
and awesome.

Darkness of clouds
in day time
is astonishing.

Clouds tower higher
than imagination.

Lightning streaks
across the sky
stretching far and jagged,
or behind clouds
glowing here and there.

Soon, thunder,
rolling, roaring
climactic sound,
and then rain
comes pouring down.

The Wonder of Words

I. - Words Come

I never know
what I'm going to say
when words begin.
I don't know who
they may be,
or who
they may bring along.

Will they say
what I know?
Or, some new thing
hidden inside
until I write?

What?
What was that?

Are you sure?
Oh, My!

Are you sure?
Well, then.

II. - Words Go

Where do words come
from?
Out of air?
Do they fall,
invisible,
like rain?

Where do they go
when they leave me?
Out in the wide,
wide world
to homes I'll never
ever know.

Fly away little ones.
Take me too,
or, at least
some thought of me.

Where can I go?
Away.

III. - Words Do

Words come and go
from my life,
hidden mysteries
then,
as if magic
I could read,
then write.

Around the world
my words now sing.

Duane L. Herrmann, a reluctant carbon-based life-form, has grown fond of grass waving in the wind, trees and moonlight. He aspires to be a hermit, but would miss his children, grandchildren and a few friends. He is known to carry baby kittens in his mouth, pet snakes, and converse with owls, but is careful not to anger them! He survived a traumatic, abusive childhood embellished with dyslexia, ADHD (both unknown then), cyclothymia, now, PTSD.

BARABARA A. MEIER

Catching Branches

The wind catches branches outside my window
He silently mocks me,
whipping snow against the glass.
The furnace clicks,
then roars discontent,
blasting hot air across my desk.
At my feet the cold air seeps
in from the broken gasket,
numbing my feet.

In my mind I can smell
the sundrenched grass in my bedroom sheets
and imagine the doves cooing a summer song.

But from my chair, swiveling with each noise,
I know I am like the north wind, catching branches
with my teeth grinding bark to drink the sap.
I press the ink into a poem
with words that blow against the wall.
Boreas screams outside my window,
pasting sleet against the glass,
leaving a trail I follow with my eyes.
My fingers cramp holding the pen.
I can't feel them anymore.

The words will come another day
when the sky is Colorado blue
and the trees glisten and sparkle
in a coat of velvet white fur.
And I shall wear the crown of that tree
and will shake my arms, grab the wind
and make it stop. It will be my song.

BARABARA A. MEIER

“Carthago delenda est”

The image of the white farm elevators,
two twin towers against a stark blue sky
like cigarettes being shaken from a white and gold Marlboro pack.

At the top, a header, a roost for turkey vultures,
like an all knowing committee
commenting on the plays upon the diamond.

A chorus from “Dumbo”, mocking the crows prophesying about winning
and elephants climbing
in a tongue no one speaks any more.

“Carthago delenda est”!

leaving behind a field of red Aggregate dirt
like blood from an ancient battlefield.

"Carthage must be destroyed".

BARABARA A. MEIER

Saturday in the Cemetery

Saturday
in the cemetery,
I think it was the last day of April.
A fine mist shrouds the ground. The spirea is in
full bloom.Tiny white blossoms against red cedar
and gray skies. Iris springing purple crowding the
sparkling granite. Bushes of pink peony buds adorn
the chiseled words.Tattered cream stones broken with
jagged edges, propped up with iron bars. Green copper
stars marking the battle fields of the past. And in that
silence a robin darts and lands on a velvet tablet, singing
a song to greet all the visitors. She's been anticipating such a day.

Barbara A Meier is a retired teacher who works in a second grade classroom in Lincoln, KS. Her recent publications include: The Fourth River, BlinkerLit, Empyrean, Sabre, Masque & Spectacle! and Top-Shelf Literacy Magazine. She has been nominated for a Pushcart award and Best of the Net. Her chapbook, Sylvan Grove was published by The Poetry Box. She loves all things ancient.

my immaculate heart

To each others'. One's home becomes a nautilus of walls of China. Candle burning
in every window, a light-
hearted attempt. Teeth necklaces. An apartment with eight windows yet no view. That
all persecutions– arrows, nails,
wooden stake driven through– are essentially
Christian.

PHILIP KOBYLARZ

autumnal

In forms Latinate, practicing. Professing to go, nowhere. Youthful as duty lies.
Star crescent of a fingernail spat
floorward. In the end is that big joke, to have been / definition of be in two letters..
Sound it makes.
Room tonality of the sun changing inside a space-the curtains,
outside a chestnut tree rattling windows, door-knobs, leaves.

PHILIP KOBYLARZ

go West young _____

Snails being morsels of sex, remote controlled. Rain on as easy listening.

Because it is closed,

not many know of

the ginkgo in the park under moonlight-suited fog. Interpreted, stars are random

city lights not knowing

maps. Buttes illumine with night, looming, too far to be shot at,

so there's tin cans, rabbits, highway signs.

Philip Kobylarz is an itinerant teacher of the language arts and writer of fiction, poetry, book reviews, and essays.

A Woman's Choice

After *Hollyhocks in Sunshine* c1920s by Laura Coombs Hills, The Met American Wing

Bright blooms burst forth
within layers of handmade pastels;
on the threshold of change
delicate details
against a deep green background
with glimpses
of cornflower blue elicits
the *rush* of open air
where l o n g spires
of wild Aleca rosea bask
in sunshine's warmth
and secret-laced petals unfurl
along untrodden roads,
contrasting an era of confining
feminine ambition that flourished;
resilient, sure-rooted *hollyhocks*
display freedom's choice
etched onto rough brown paper
with a vibrancy that mirrors
the t r a n s f o r m a t i o n of an aging
artist when her tired eyes faltered

CM Pickard is a self-proclaimed late bloomer, living in Melbourne, Australia. Her poetry was shortlisted in The Letter Review Prize for Poetry and SWWV's Kathryn Purnell Poetry Prize, appeared in Soul Poetry, Prose & Arts Magazine, The Raven Review, and elsewhere. (https://cmpickardwrites.site/)

CM PICKARD

Recovery's Flame

It begins with a seductive lure,
a fleeting escape from reality
into addiction's unyielding grip

twisting rotting roots that weave
tendrils deep into upturned soil
tightening their hold,
polluting everyday existence

whispering promises of euphoria
to ensnare a fractured soul,
until hidden fault lines rupture

casting shattered illusions' rubble
into gaping fissures
where reason crumbles into dust
and only its dark allure remains

each day becomes a battle
between the desire for freedom
and the chains of dependency

yet, even in the darkest depths,
glimmers of hope persist,
embers waiting to be kindled
into recovery's flame.

CM PICKARD

Where Shadows Wander

After the painting *Figures on a Bayside Path*, ca 1925 by Clarice Beckett.

Muted shades
of a parkland track
swept by a salt-encrusted breeze
painted in hues
obscured by fading light
and separated by shadows
of Paynes grey,
l o n g
brushstrokes
of blue-black lines
in a hushed landscape of ghosts

two orange figures
anchored into heavy canvas
like dulled embers
disconnected
from the natural world
fractured patterns on dusty paths
contrast echoes of white posts
bathed
in a filtered glow
evoking dreams once shared
e
l
o
n
g
a
t
e
d

abandoned
like those cast by past glories,
hidden secrets
dissolving into blurred
specters of childhood
when summer's last rays caught
a girl twirling
amongst grassland
captured
in a small boy's gaze,
whose adoration she once sought
now relegated to years gone by

Life Complete

In shadows, bruised petals linger
behind greetings, mask a tinge of disdain
and whispers convey “What a pity”
while silent glances—fester to inflict pain.

Freedom of choice rims youth’s first encounter,
skipping along currents, where dreams await
the fledgling taking flight from an eagle’s nest
—yet I’ve learned the childless woman’s fate.

Invisible amidst a gathering of mothers
herding their young like gaggling geese,
casting silent sneers while they honk and glare
— pinned by a feathered flock, anxiety increases.

The urge to explain—justify my truth,
“I can’t bear children,” my would-be pitiful refrain
and my grandfather’s outdated echo remains,
“Ovaries are wasted on women without kids.”

Ensnared in a web of feminine insensitivity,
that weaves its tendrils like a toxic dance,
refusing to define oneself against societal norms,
in darkness, I take my solitary stance.

I’m a woman—someone’s daughter, sister or aunt
with resilience born from struggles survived
like the phoenix that soars above biological limits
without shame, navigating a life well lived.

In a world where motherhood is exalted,
the goose without goslings—perceived incomplete.
Yet strength resides in untold choices, leading
to the narrative unwritten, and a life complete.

KENNETH POBO

Kohler’s Trading Post

Among car parts
and wounded chairs,
I find the White Album
for a buck, complete
with pictures of each Beatle.
Much of my life

is trying to neaten everything.
At Kohler’s anyone can pursue
a degree in Messiness,
a Depression-era green
plate for a diploma.

We mow our lawns and put
glasses on coffee tables
with coasters.
At Kohler's,

we breathe in dusty dank,
a smell still on our shirts
when we get home.

KENNETH POBO

When I Finally

come out
to myself
I'm walking
in my hometown
where hate
pounds in sturdy
fenceposts—
I learn how to climb
over them and run
free, run

like my life
depends on it,
which it does,
it does.

Birch Elegy

One November day,
you keeled over,
broke, your stump
a song that only you
knew the words to.

KENNETH POBO

Welcome! Welcome!

Rain falls, straight down,
no wind, tree roots
groaning in joy.
It stops

as suddenly
as it started,
like a neighbor

who drops by,
leaving when
the moon appears
on a red leaf.

KENNETH POBO (HE/HIM) IS THE AUTHOR OF THIRTY-THREE CHAPBOOKS AND FIFTEEN FULL-LENGTH COLLECTIONS. RECENT BOOKS INCLUDE BEND OF QUIET (BLUE LIGHT PRESS), RAYLENE AND SKIP (WOLFSON PRESS), AND WRAP ME IN PLASTIC AND FEED ME A BUTTERFINGER (CHAPS POETRY SERIES). HIS WORK HAS APPEARED IN ASHEVILLE POETRY REVIEW, ROANOKE REVIEW, NORTH DAKOTA QUARTERLY, AMSTERDAM QUARTERLY, WEBER STUDIES, HAWAII REVIEW, AND ELSEWHERE.

AGNES GROCHULSKA

When we first featured Warsaw-born, Richmond-based artist Agnes Grochulska back in May, we highlighted her striking collection inspired by Franz Kafka's The Metamorphosis—a body of work where she sliced completed paintings into strips and wove them onto wire frames to turn flat canvases into sculptural objects. In this second installment, we wanted to step back into her studio to get to know the artist and her broader painting practice even better.

Across her expressive oil paintings and drawings, Grochulska anchors her work in the human figure while steering clear of rigid, photographic realism. Drawing on her classical training from the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw, she pairs solid structure with loose, intuitive brushwork, thick impasto textures, and plenty of exposed raw canvas. In series like Line and Color, Gestures, and Reflections, she intentionally leaves compositions unfinished—using simplified forms, energetic contour lines, and unexpected color palettes to capture the raw psychology and body language of her subjects rather than dictating a strict story.

As Grochulska puts it, we ultimately see paintings "not only as they are but as we are." By leaving visible brushstrokes and open space on the canvas, she invites the viewer straight into her creative process—giving us room to bring our own emotions to the work and complete the story ourselves.

Visit the artist's website here: https://www.agnesgrochulska.com/

PAINTINGS



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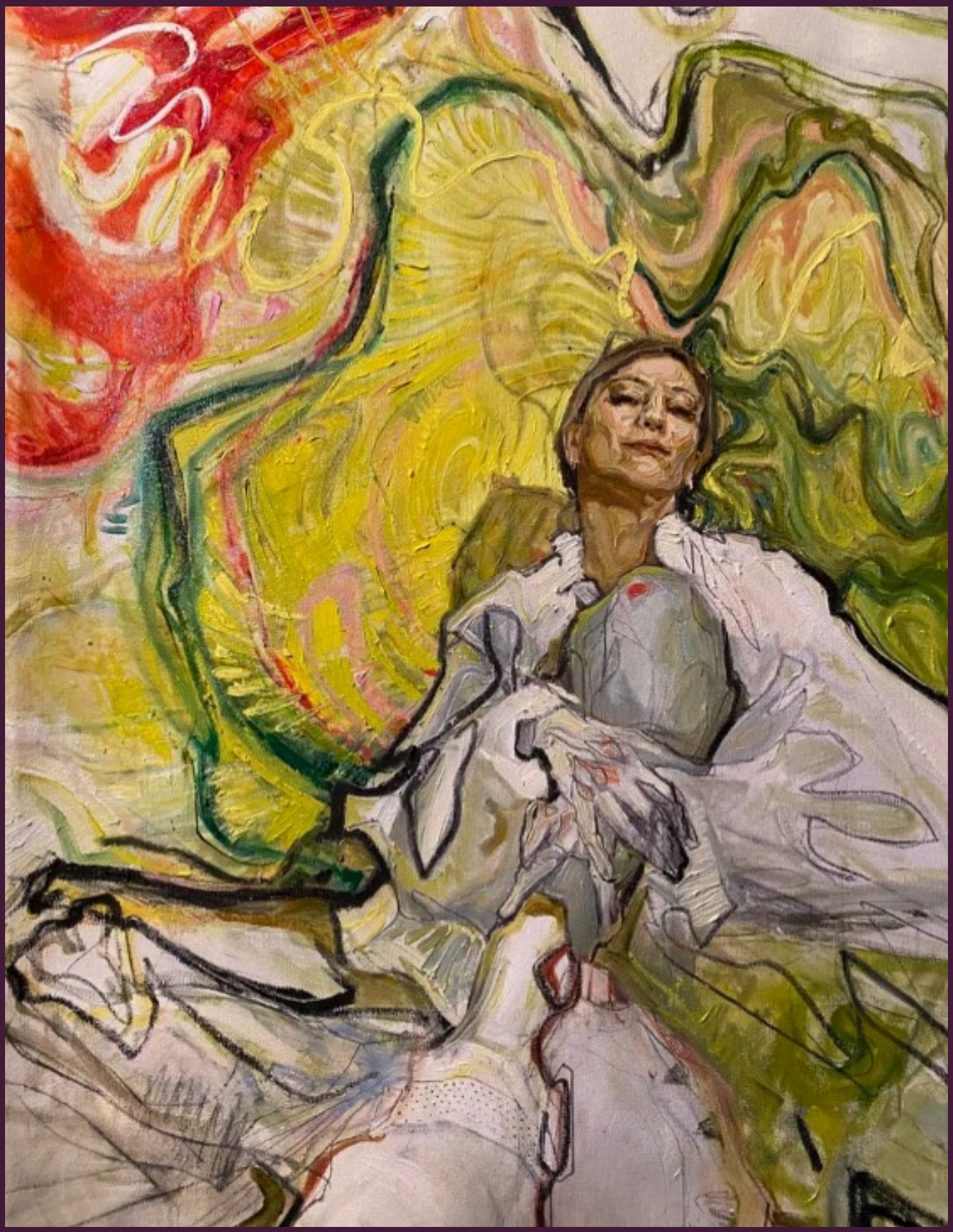

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COLLINS C. OPARAOCHA

What the Wind Carries Home

When the wind blows over the prairie at dusk.
Taking away some of us with them.

A screen door slamming
Three counties removed, in a Farmhouse.

The smell of coffee
From a kitchen where someone is cooking,
has just come back from work.

A red mitten, belonging to a child.
A man lost next to a frozen road.

The names of people
who have gone so far from here
They are now the voices of the weather.

In the edge of the field I stand
and listen.

The wind doesn't have a mouth,
but it continues to tell tales.

It speaks to me about the woman
who planted sunflowers
A house no longer there behind us.

COLLINS C. OPARAOCHA

About the farmer
who measured out his days
in the precipitation and indebtedness.

About the boy
A couple of people who have left the city
with twenty dollars
with his mother's word of caution.
He has folded some things inside his coat.

It tells me
All things do not remain as they were.

Not grief.
Not love.

Not the shape
A right hand on a shoulder.

Even abandoned things
continue traveling.

The rusted tractor
becomes red dust.

The broken barn
becomes a photograph.

COLLINS C. OPARAOCHA

The photograph
becomes a story.

The story becomes
someone else's inheritance.

Night gathers
across the open land.

Above me,
The stars appear to be close.
to touch
and beyond hope, beyond reach.

I think of all the people,
Those who have come before me,
Wanting the same dimness
for an answer.

There is no wind.
It passes through and through—

grass,
chimney,
bone,
memory—

and keeps going,

Just like heaven and earth
has somewhere
it still needs to be.

COLLINS C. OPARAOCHA

The Country Between Seasons

Grass bends there
Under the guidance of wind.
A fence keeps falling apart
one post at a time.
All her shoes and boots passed over it.

My dad would always say
land is an example of witness.

He said this as he was fixing
His hands were dark, the gate was the only thing that was darker
with soil and iron,
Like a world that had provided him with
two languages
These two were tough.

In spring,
The field turned nearly as green as grass.

In summer,
it became a body
learning thirst.

By autumn,
the grass carried
Old photographs have a certain color.

And winter—
winter had cleaned up the tracks.

Now I know better.

COLLINS C. OPARAOCHA

Under the snow,
A continuation of talks between roots.
Seeds breathe.
The buried stones
Maintain their original heat.

Even the fence,
half-rotten and leaning,
is still trying
to separate that which cannot be separated:

sky from earth,
departure from return,
the living
From the lives that they have been given.

This morning I walked there
after many years.

Not a single voice had been heard before the field.

I was coming.

Still,
As the wind blew, it shook the grass
With some sort of a sense of recognition.

And for a moment
I understood my father:
We are important, therefore,
It remembers us
Sometimes, we touch it, hence the reason.

Collins C. Oparaocha is a writer and poet. He lives and writes in Turkey. His work has appeared or forthcoming in Empyrean literary magazine, Abstract Magazine, Dualiterary Magazine, Merion West magazine, Pink Ochre Literary Magazine, Still Point: Poetry & Culture, Homeplace Magazine, Blue Daisies Journal, The Quasar Review, Abundance Literary Magazine, Canopy Literary, Review, timeless-reflections-magazine, Icebreakers Literary Magazine, Cassara via SFU Library Digital Publishing, Pretzel Bites Literary, The Leafline Magazine, River's Edge - Nadiya ke Narey Literary Magazine, Cabbage Patch Literary Magazine, Olkas literary magazine, Quaint Literary's, EASCAIR Magazine, Still Point Poetry and culture magazine. Author *ALL SHADOWS ARE BLACK*.

The Sky Has Shrunk

The sky has shrunk so badly
it no longer fits us. Pulling
it over my head at dawn,
I almost strangle myself.
You suffer even more tightly,
your body warping and pained
as the blue cramps you all over.

No use trying to button it up.
Maybe as the day warms the sky
will expand a little and relieve
the unnatural pressure. You blame
El Nino, but I doubt it
would waste its temper on us,
so far from the steaming Pacific.

We struggle through our errands—
drug store, market, hardware store.
I examine the hand tools, hoping
someone has devised something
to apply to shrunken spaces
and expand them to accept
the latest cultural expression,

whether musical or a tortured
motif just squeezed from a tube.
We buy sandpaper and box cutter
blades and plan to wield them not
in acts of terror or creation
but to smooth our many surfaces
as we shed the revealing light.

William Doreski lives in Peterborough, New Hampshire. He has taught at several colleges and universities. His most recent book of poetry is No Vacancy (2025) His essays, poetry, fiction, and reviews have appeared in various journals.

WILLIAM DORESKI

Life Stories

We no longer smoke cigars.
Their thrust is too insistent,
post-pubic and publicly rude.

You say we never smoked them,
but I remember an autumn night
after the races when children

had slumped off to bed, their parents
indulging routine sex, the stars
breaking out like forbidden disease.

We parked beside a corn field
and listened to dry husks rattle.
Some massive creature shuffled

through the dark, something
eager to bear witness against us.
To scare it off we lit cigars

and smoked them outside the car
to keep the upholstery clean.
The creature didn't approach us

but racketed toward the farmhouse
where someone would die in the night.
The cigars tasted like burnt leather,

but we smoked them down to stubs,
then tossed them into the field.
They failed to ignite the corn stalks,

but their stink lingered as we drove
home with our late-life virginity
intact, and our life stories untold.

WILLIAM DORESKI

Tiddly Tuesday

How odd can a Tuesday get?
Everything's misaligned. Houses
lean into each other like drunks,
trees gesture and wave their roots,
bulldozers and power shovels

tip and indulge in mud baths.
Shoppers dance in market aisles.
People even older than us sing
their favorite tunes from the Sixties.
Beatles haircuts recur on blond

high school students slouching
over essays AI has written
to please their harried teachers.
We march to the post office
and declare a town emergency,

but the postmaster has already
spoken to arrogant officials
who declare this a day of mourning.
No one special has died but
we're to tiptoe through the streets

to respect the wealthy patrons
whose delicate sensibilities
have shucked every public concern
and renamed every one of us
after some famous sunken ship.

WILLIAM DORESKI

A Shade of Yellow

On the foredge of music a shade
of yellow I've never heard before.

Not a voice but a temperament
etched in ordinary stone.

The day mounts the dark and rides it
to the farthest edge of the earth.

Then it peers into the bottomless
and possibly endless vacuum.

Something Homeric occurring—
a heroic impulse expressed

in a color that sings so brightly
it rearranges the cosmos like

the deck chairs on the Titanic.
Who am I tracing to what source?

The edge looms. I refuse to look
because vertigo would propel me

over and into the ticklish other.
The yellow strikes a pitch that blinds

and blends hearing and sight.
It doesn't deafen, though. I feel

it crawl along a neuron and stake
a claim where I'd least expect it—

the color, the song, the victim
keening with the wildest gaze.

NANCY BYRNE IANNUCCI

Cat's In the Cradle
for Matt Bell

It's like that, huh?
Cat's In the Cradle?
Matt asked his son
when the day had come
he'd rather skateboard
with his friends than with him.
Cat's In the Cradle, I get it.
This song has given fathers
pause since 1974:
Am I a present dad?
Am I a good father?
Sometimes, it's not about all that.
It's simply about a young man
wanting to do his own thing.
Harry Chapin was to sing
this song among others
down the road from my house,
at Eisenhower Park's
Lakeside Theater back in 1980.
My friend Kim and a few others
hopped on their banana seat bikes
and rode to Eisenhower for the show.
They waited and waited
but he never arrived.
While enroute to perform,
Chapin was in an accident,
he died in his 1975 Volkswagen Rabbit
on the Long Island Expressway.
Everyone drove home that night
as if all the birds had fallen from the trees,
and I still wonder what it was
he had last said to his five children
that day.

- Eisenhower Park's Lakeside Theater was renamed "The Harry Chapin Theater" in his honor.

Passing Notes: A Villanelle

There was nothing like the feel of a folded note
that he slipped into your hand in passing.
His unspoken words were kept in your coat.

You sat through classes wondering what he wrote
Like a message in a bottle, lost at sea-o, curiosity amassing.
There was nothing like the feel of a folded note.

You fingered his words like braille for a quote
The scent of Aqua Velva drifting and splashing
His unspoken words were kept in your coat.

A text can never replicate the G.O.A.T.
of unadulterated sensory dashing
there was nothing like the feel of a folded note.

If only you and his note could be somewhere remote
to untwine this tract without a soul trespassing
His unspoken words were kept in your coat.

The journey felt like a plankless moat
to the locker that held the coat- considering
there was nothing like the feel of a folded note
His unspoken words were kept in your coat.

NANCY BYRNE IANNUCCI IS A NEW YORK-BASED WRITER AND AUTHOR OF FOUR CHAPBOOKS. HER FIRST FULL-LENGTH POETRY COLLECTION IS SET FOR PUBLICATION IN 2027. A THREE-TIME BEST OF THE NET NOMINEE, SHE WAS SHORT-LISTED FOR THE 2025 POETRY LIGHTHOUSE PRIZE. HER WORK APPEARS IN SEVERAL PLACES INCLUDING THRUSH, QUASAR REVIEW, MAUDLIN HOUSE, GLASS, AND HOLLOW AND SKY. SHE LIVES IN UPSTATE NY WITH HER SIGNIFICANT OTHER, THEIR THREE CATS: EMILY DICKINSON, NASH, AND ROCKY. WEB: WWW.NANCYBYRNEIANNUCCI.COM IG: @NANCYBYRNEIANNUCCI

MICHELLE GEOGA

Instructions for Spring

Sit outside on a warm day and listen for new birdsong—that towhee, that wood-pewee—the juncos will soon be gone but the cowbirds have arrived and the finches are on their way. Sit outside on a cold day when the wind rests, the sun glares down, and wear dark pants and a dark coat to soak it up, when forty Fahrenheit feels like seventy. Sit inside on a cold windy day in the sun, in a chair set in its stream, with seed catalogs: swollen-sweet tomatoes, glossy imperial purple eggplant, cascading nasturtium. Order seeds. Check the mailbox. Stack bags of soil for the raised beds, forty-pound imperatives ready for action. Walk the woods twice a day to check for the ramps, hen-of-the-woods, mayapple, trout lily, cut-leaf toothwort, bloodroot. Let the scent of decomposing autumn leaves and worm turned earth fill you up. Watch for the curled fists of fiddleheads and damp-celled wood-colored morels. Watch the days not the calendar: this is how to receive spring.

the seasons a blink
of the stars, the years folds of
a garden cabbage

Michelle Geoga is a writer and artist from Chicago, living in Southwest Michigan. She holds a BFA in art and an MFA in writing from the School of the Art Institute. Her work has been published in the Little Patuxent Review, Laurel Review, SWWIM Everyday, Third Wednesday, Cleaver and elsewhere.

MICHELLE GEOGA

Hello, Old Friend

For a while, he was a pine squirrel, the red kind
who could famously mix it up with the others
always coming out on top, never crashing from the tree
and the next then he was a horned owl and he loved
turning his head 275 degrees, a record, and hooting
who cooks for you all the night long. When we first met
he was a tri-color beagle, aloof, arthritic, born hungry
happiest when breathing in the air, lounging on the lawn.
That was so him. I think I was almost forty then. And then
when we met again, he was an aged Dodge Caravan
an old great white whale who always bounced long after
the bumps in the road smoothed. So happy he couldn't
restrain himself. At some point, he was also a headstone
of shiny etched granite, but I didn't know him then.
I only knew of it from the owl-him, when I was an oak-me.
When we meet next, in another and then, I hope we know
each other, our past connections, but who knows. It's time.

MICHELLE GEOGA

We are Who We Are

It’s snowing in the house
light and fluffy but hard
to see through

it’s not sticking, as they say
when it’s warm underneath
our chairs sizzle flakes away

the sun bathed planked floor
in our soup-steamed kitchen
swallows the snow, and we

too quarrelsome for snowflakes
poor things, enjoy no respite
on our lashes, but nonetheless

it’s thick, this house snow
and when it’s over, will it
be over? Outside beams

a frigid bald sun, window
knuckling trees, frost crusted
unscented late roses, their

thorns snowdrop softened
reminding me that last winter
we planned to fly south but

here we are again, hunkered down
again. I hear those summer gulls
over the house screaming why.

yes, we could have flown south but
no, we put up with the frostiness
and sudden snow squalls, and wait.

MICHELLE GEOGA

Crying at Crystal Bridges in Front of Keith Haring

Keith, you really make me cry
how could one not cry—
what's wrong with all of you
fans, laughing, taking photos
or what's wrong with me

Keith, I hope you were there
to greet Mr. Rogers when he left
and he held you so long you forgot
where you were and then when
you remembered, it was okay

Keith, you should be closing in
on seventy today, still wearing
those skinny sweatpants with
even more paint splotches, still
skateboarding, painting with spray

Keith, maybe your hair is gone
or you got cataracts early like me
and after you got them done
you don't need those nerdy
glasses but wear them anyway

Keith, you'd still be the Pied Piper
of happy graffiti, of children
and surely there would have been
a 1994 Christmas special on ABC
with you, Bob Ross, and Elmo

Keith, I know I'm overreacting
but I need to come up with
a happy ending so I can exit
with a straight, dry face, forever
happy to meet your work in person

AMAN KUMAR

The River That Remembered

A Story from the Kosi, India

The first thing I learned about the Kosi was that nobody who lived beside her trusted her completely.

My grandmother trusted her only from a distance.

She would stand on the mud embankment at sunset, fold the end of her sari over her head, and look at the water as if she were looking at a person who had lied to her many times.

"Never turn your back on a river," she used to say.

I thought she was talking about drowning.

Years later, I understood that she was talking about memory.

I was nineteen when I decided to leave.

My village had always seemed too small to me. The same tea stall. The same broken road. The same railway line disappearing towards cities whose names sounded larger than our lives.

I wanted a city with glass buildings.

I wanted a room where nobody knew my father.

I wanted to become someone whose beginning nobody could use against him.

The morning my admission letter arrived, I ran to the embankment.

The Kosi was unusually quiet.

"I'm leaving," I told the river.

There was no answer.

Only wind moving through the tall grass.

That afternoon, my mother packed my clothes into an old blue suitcase.

Before I left, she placed a small notebook inside it.

"What is this?"

"Your grandmother's."

I opened it.

The pages contained numbers, dates, names of villages, water levels and little drawings of the river.

On the final page, there was only one sentence:

“A river remembers what people forget.”

I laughed.

AMAN KUMAR

"Dadi wrote poetry now?"
My mother did not laugh.
"She was keeping a record."
I left the next morning.
For the first time in my life, the Kosi disappeared behind a bus window.
I promised myself I would not miss it.
For two years, I kept that promise.
I studied.
I worked.
I learned how to speak faster, walk faster and pretend that I was not impressed by anything.
When people asked where I was from, I said the name of my district.
Never the village.
Never the river.
I thought success meant distance.
Then came the flood.
The call arrived at 3:17 in the morning.
"Come home."
It was my mother.
Nothing more.
By sunrise I was on a train.
By afternoon, the roads had vanished.
The water had taken them.
When I finally reached the village, I could not recognize it.
The school roof was visible above the water.
The tea stall was gone.
Electric poles stood like thin black lines in a grey sea.
And the Kosi—the river I had once wanted to escape—had entered almost every house.
I found my mother on the roof.
She looked smaller than I remembered.
"You came," she said.
I wanted to tell her that of course I had come.
Instead, I said, "Where is Dadi's notebook?"

She looked at me strangely.

"Why?"

"I left it in my room."

"That room is under water."

For the next three days, we moved between rooftops, boats and temporary shelters.

I met people I had spent years trying to forget.

The schoolteacher who had once failed me.

The shopkeeper who had given me tea on credit.

The old farmer who used to complain that young people were running away from the village.

Nobody asked why I had returned.

They simply made space for me.

On the fourth evening, the water began to fall.

I walked towards our house.

Mud covered everything.

My blue suitcase was gone.

My books were gone.

The photographs were gone.

The notebook was gone.

I stood in the doorway and felt something inside me collapse.

Not because of the clothes.

Not because of the money.

Because the one thing I had carried away from home had returned to the river without me.

I sat down in the mud.

Then I noticed something caught in the branches of a neem tree.

A small blue corner.

I climbed.

It was the notebook.

Wet.

Swollen.

Almost destroyed.

But the last page was still there.

I held it under the weak evening light.

AMAN KUMAR

The ink had spread.

The sentence was barely readable.

A river remembers what people forget.

For the first time, I understood.

My grandmother had not been writing about water.

She had been writing about us.

About the names of people who disappeared.

About houses rebuilt in the same place.

About children who grew up learning that loss was not the opposite of life. It was part of it.

The next morning, I began writing their names. Not statistics. Not victims. Names.

A boy who had rescued his little sister.

A woman who had cooked for thirty families from the roof of her house.

A farmer who lost his field but planted again.

A teacher who turned a schoolboat into a classroom.

A child who kept asking when the water would leave because he wanted to see his drawing on the wall again.

I wrote until my hands hurt.

Weeks later, when the train came again, my mother asked, "Aren't you going back?"

"I am."

"Then why are you smiling?"

I looked towards the river.

"Because this time I know I am not leaving everything behind."

Years passed.

I did leave.

I did build a life somewhere else.

But every year I returned.

Not because the Kosi had become safe. She never promised that.

I returned because she had taught me something the city could not.

A beginning is not always the place where your journey starts. Sometimes it is the place you return to after believing you had escaped it.

One evening, many years later, I stood on the same embankment where I had once told the river I was leaving.

AMAN KUMAR

The water was shining under the sunset.
I took out a new notebook.
On the first page, I wrote: Kosi.
Then I stopped.
Because suddenly I understood the truth.
I had spent half my life trying to become someone who came from somewhere else.
But the river had been waiting patiently for me to understand that I did not need another beginning.
I only needed to remember my first one.
I closed the notebook.
The Kosi kept moving.
And for the first time, I did not ask where it was going.

Aman Kumar is a writer and poet from Khagaria, Bihar, India, and a B.A. History (Honours) student at Koshi College, Munger University. He is the author of The Kosi Curse, an original horror fiction work inspired by the Kosi region. His poem "Kosi Ke Kinare" has appeared in Assam Muse. His separate Hindi poem, "नदी के उस पार भी घर है" (There Is Still a Home on the Other Side of the River), was submitted to NCERT for curriculum-related consideration, followed by official correspondence. His writing explores the Kosi region, floods, memory, displacement and the meaning of home.

SOPHIA ANTON

Saudade

Ever since I was born, I was desperate for my grandma Yia Yia's warmth and closeness. I wanted to be inseparable from her. But I never understood her the way my mom and dad did. They spoke her language, Greek, and they knew how to Greek dance like she did. I've grown up with high Greek Easter, Greek food, and watching my family members dance the Maniatikos. I'm even named for a Greek saint, Sophia.

Growing up, I traveled to Florida constantly to visit Yia Yia and my Greek family; I even flew down there by myself once, when I was 8 years old. From the time I was a baby and Yia Yia held me, I longed for a relationship with her where we could talk about everything, like her childhood experiences when she lived in Greece, what made her want to cook so much, or what kinds of things she did to be so Greek.

Yia Yia knew me more deeply than anyone else. She knew I was an overthinker and often gave me reassurance. She always told me I could do anything. She wanted me to live life and to be as healthy as possible. She would often lean over and tell me, "Sophia, you're down," which was her way of telling me to sit up straighter. She thought that good posture would help me in life. And she was right: slumping feels like being comfortable in the uncomfortable, while sitting up straight helps me focus. My posture is excellent now, I walk 10,000 steps per day, and I eat healthy. Yia Yia was a part of me, and without her, I wouldn't be who I am today.

Still, I have always longed to know her like my parents did before I was born. And now, I long for advice from her about my ex-boyfriend. After all, she would know, considering she was married for 81 years.

My ex was my childhood best friend–we met in kindergarten. And our separation wasn't just a normal break-up–it was a complete profanation of the sacred history and love we spent a lifetime building. I used food to cope, and became overweight, then obese, then diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes along with fatty liver disease. I felt embarrassed, judged, and ashamed of myself. But I never brought him up with her while she was alive. I couldn't find the time to tell her, even though she was the person I trusted the most.

*

SOPHIA ANTON

Two years ago, during my freshman year of college, my mom called. “Yia Yia’s in the hospital,” she said. “She broke her hip and was diagnosed with cancer.” Yia Yia was in too much pain to walk, falling constantly, eating and exercising far too little. She had to have surgery, and my parents were uncertain if she would make it. I wanted to drop everything to visit her, but my parents didn’t want me to go. They didn’t want me to see her in so much pain, even though I thought I could have handled it. Yia Yia pushed through as hard as she could, but when my mom called me again, she told me that Yia Yia had died. Just like that, everything turned into dust, like it all meant nothing. I wished I had been there with her, holding her hand, hugging her, talking with her, and hearing her voice one last time. I regretted never saying goodbye to her before she went into surgery.

Later, I was supposed to give a speech at her open-casket ceremony. But in the end, I wasn’t ready to do it, especially in front of strangers, so I had my dad read it for me. And I instantly regretted not reading it myself.

It felt like Yia Yia had left me the way my baby cousin Nicolas did when he was two years old and fell asleep and never woke up. I didn’t get to say goodbye to either of them. It felt like she left me the way my ex-boyfriend did. I hear my grandma now in my ex’s voice. The voice–their voices–remind me that I’m in love with someone I can’t unlove.

When I went back to Florida for my 21st birthday, I went through my grandma’s clothes and perfumes with my aunt. It felt weird, going through her stuff without her around. Her absence and her silence is a void I can’t ignore or mute. At night, when everything becomes quiet, I can’t help but replay the memories and revisit the past. The silence screams and echoes, in a plangent, stentorian voice. I can’t ever mute it. It’s deafening.

FATEME ETEMADI

Saeb Tabrizi

Characters:
Narrator
Chico the Sparrow
Mahan
Shayan
Mahan's Father
Children

Narrator: Hello, children! How are you? How are you doing? On this beautiful summer day, I want to take you to Isfahan—the "Half of the World."
One day, Mahan's father had promised to take Mahan and his friend on a trip. He took the children to visit the tomb of the great eleventh-century poet, Saeb Tabrizi, in Isfahan. If you would like to join the children on today's outing and get to know this great poet, come along with us!
Father: Well, children, we've arrived at the tomb of our great poet, Saeb Tabrizi, in the Takht-e Foulad garden of Isfahan.
Mahan: How interesting! His tomb doesn't have a building around it. It's right in the middle of a garden.
Father: I like that too. It feels as if this great poet is still among the people. Look—the street is over there, and his tomb is right here. In a way, he feels very close to the people.
Shayan: It feels very friendly and welcoming.
Father: Yes.
Mahan: Dad, wasn't he from Tabriz? Then what is he doing in Isfahan?
Father: Mirza Mohammad Ali Saeb Tabrizi... well, some historians believe he was born in Isfahan, while others believe he was born in Tabriz. His father was one of the great merchants of the Safavid era, and by the order of Shah Abbas, the family moved from Tabriz to Isfahan and settled there.
Mahan: Oh, I see.
Father: Come a little closer. After this beautiful pool and these trees, you can see his grave. And this is his gravestone. Oh, what a beautiful verse they have written on it:
"The heart of Saeb is a shrine for the people of the heart."

What a lovely welcome he has given us! It means that Saeb's heart is so pure and full of feeling that kind and loving people respect and honor it.

Shayan: What an interesting gravestone!

Father: What caught your attention, my son?

Shayan: His gravestone has a little basin where water has collected.

Mahan: That's really interesting! Someone has even put flower petals in it.

Father: How interesting that this was the first thing you noticed! Let me tell you a story, children. There is a library across the street. When I was in school, my friends and I used to borrow books from that library and come here to read them. One day, we asked our teacher the very same question, and she told us that this little basin was made so birds could drink water from it.

Children: How beautiful!

Father: Yes, very beautiful. When I was a child, I also had an imaginary sparrow. I used to come here and talk to him.

Children: An imaginary sparrow?!

Father: Yes. Children, I parked the car in the wrong place. I'm going to move it and come back.

Children: An imaginary sparrow...

[Imagination sound effect]

Chico: Hello, children!

Mahan: Who are you?

Chico: I'm a sparrow who comes here every day, drinks water, and recites poetry.

Shayan: How lucky you are! You must know this great poet very well.

Chico: Yes. So many people have come here, read his poems, and talked about him that I've learned a lot too. There was a lady named Professor Amir Banoo Karimi, a Saeb scholar and a professor at the University of Tehran. She used to come here often and tell me many things about this great poet.

Mahan: Tell us about him too!

Chico: For example, throughout his life, he learned many different sciences and traveled to many places—from Mecca and Mashhad to India and Kabul. His family was also interested in culture and poetry. Growing up in such a family, together with the influence of his travels, made him interested in writing poetry. Years later, he received the title of "Malek al-Shoara" (King of Poets) from Shah Abbas.

Shayan: Oh! What does that mean?

Chico: The king of poets.
Mahan: Oh, I see.
Chico: He also had a special style of poetry called the Indian style.
Mahan: What is that?
Chico: Every poet has a particular poetic style. Let me explain the Indian style to you. In this style, a poet describes ordinary things through unusual and fresh images. For example, instead of directly saying, “I’m sad” or “I’m happy,” the poet uses an imaginative image.
Children: Oh, I see.
Mahan: By the way, can you recite any of his poems?
Chico: Of course I can! In the mornings, I even sing in the garden.
Shayan: Then recite one for us.
Chico: He wrote an interesting couplet about Isfahan:
“Instead of rubies and jewels from the land of Isfahan, Saeb
Will carry these colorful poems to the land of India.”
Mahan: How interesting! Does that mean he took poetry from Isfahan as a souvenir?
Chico: Yes, exactly.
Shayan: Then he must have served our land greatly.
Chico: Exactly. Take a look at the poems written on the wall. It says:
“Saeb, your heart will never break,
For with his words, he made Iran’s face glow red.”
Mahan: How beautiful! What does it mean?
Chico: It means that he made Iran proud through his poetry. You see, children, this is how the Indian style works. Instead of simply saying that he made Iran proud, the poet imagines Iran as a person whose face has become rosy and lively because of Saeb’s poetry.
Shayan: How interesting!
Mahan: Reading his poems is like solving a mystery—and it’s really beautiful.
Chico: Yes. You have to spend hours reading poetry and enjoying its beauty.
Shayan: I would love to become a Saeb scholar like Mrs. Karimi.
Mahan: Me too. I want to read all of his poems.
Chico: During his eighty-seven years of life, he is said to have written between sixty thousand and one hundred and twenty thousand lines of poetry.

Shayan: Wow! That's so many! Then getting to know him must be very difficult. You would have to read all those lines!
Chico: Yes, it is a great task and requires determination. I think you can do it too. You just have to try, research, and study.
Mahan: We definitely will.
Shayan: Dear Chico, can you recite another poem for us?
Chico: Yes.
"Be careful—it is by my wings that your wings can fly.
Do not break me, for when you break me, you break yourself."
Mahan: Tell us what it means too.
Chico: It means that people should take care of one another. If we hurt someone else, it is as if we have hurt ourselves.
Shayan: How beautiful!
Mahan: Let's come here every day so you can recite poetry for us.
Chico: Of course! I would be very happy.
Father: Children! Children! Where is your attention? I'm back! I've been calling you, but it seems you couldn't hear me.
Children: No, no! We're paying attention!
Father: All right. Now let's go and meet one of my friends. I have an appointment with him today, and he is a Saeb scholar. I asked him to come because of you.
Children: Let's go! Let's go!
Mahan: Being a Saeb scholar is our future job!
[They laugh.]
Shayan: Yes!
Narrator: Well, children, that was our outing for today. I hope you are feeling wonderful. Goodbye!

HUINA ZHENG

Cheek Pouches

The female hamster I keep has no shame. During heat, she initiates. Raises her tail. Freezes in place. No diary. No downloading and deleting dating apps at three in the morning. She stuffs sunflower seeds, dried mealworms, hazelnuts into her cheek pouches until her face swells to three times the size of her body. She does not worry about her figure. She is not watched. She is not prey. After mating, she begins driving the male away again. She does not need to think: What does my body mean? What does sex mean? Her body will never be woven into intimacy or marriage.

She gives birth to seven babies. She bites through the umbilical cords and eats them. Does not keep them. Does not bury them. Does not braid them into nooses. Does she know that what she is eating is the last thread between herself and her children? She has never learned to ask herself: I have read so many feminist books, so why do I still long for a family? Why do I still want to be liked? Liked by a husband. Liked by his parents. No other female hamster questions her or demands that she choose a side.

When the babies reach twenty days old, she drives them from the nest. I remove them one by one. She does not count them. Does not search for them. Does she remember having given birth at all? Solitary. Self-contained. Was it her choice, or a choice made for her? Does a hamster need a language for independence, for solitude, for turning loneliness into a kind of victory? She bites the bars of the cage. Is it loneliness, or the absence of loneliness? She runs on the wheel all night. She stops. The wheel stops. Does she know the wheel is round? Does she know that running all night and running in a circle lead to the same place? She does not think: Why do I always end up back at the beginning? She simply stuffs another sunflower seed into her cheek pouch.

HUINA ZHENG

Warm Water

Every day of the past five years has etched its labor into her body. She studies her reflection, the accelerated aging she can no longer deny. Graying temples. A mouth pulled downward. Eyes dulled, lifeless as a dead fish's. They say women age quickly after menopause, but she knows these marks come less from hormones than from the grind of day after day.

Would her family ever be grateful? She thinks of the years since her mother's stroke, years in which she alone has done the caring: wiping her body, turning her over, massaging stiff limbs, until thick calluses formed on her hands. Yet what her mother speaks of every day is still her "precious son," the child she can rely on in her old age. As for her, she is merely the daughter who is never attentive enough, whose care is always insufficient. Her brother has long taken this arrangement for granted. From childhood on, his sister's giving has seemed only natural.

Her mother calls out from the next room. She hurries in.

"Heartless," her mother snaps. "Are you trying to let me die of thirst?"

She pours a cup of warm water and holds it out. The rim bumps against the bedrail, and some of the water sloshes over.

"I'm sorry," she says, before her mother can shout.

She knows she will not be thanked. She does it anyway, because refusing would cost her more.

Huina Zheng either writes as an admission coach at work or writes for fun after work. She lives in Guangzhou, China, with her family.

MARK J. MITCHELL

Action Painting

On a sunny sidewalk
of California Street
someone built a poem.

A pink cardboard tube
supported a white potato—
still. Balanced as breath,

like a lookout
with a barcode
as its unmoving flag.

The first dog
passing by
nosed it down.

MARK J. MITCHELL

Trust

Dunno. Don’t have faith in that sky.
See that silver rim? The third cloud
to your left? It’s sure got some drops
in it. Keep walking, we’ll get wet.

You’ll dry, he said. Not your thick clothes,
you know. Have some faith. The sky
never thinks about you. It’s there
all the time, filled with rain and sun.

‘Spose. Getting old and it’s showing
more and more each day, How’s your knee?
Dunno. It creaks like my faith. Sky’s
clearing a bit. See that blue jay,

catching light, proud as a priest?
He don’t think about you either.
Just screeches on that old cypress.
Dunno nothing—no faith, just sky.

Automotive

Her Buick’s body showed rust. A classic.
Still sound, she knows. Slung low, letting its past
show. Older than she is now. The shift sticks.
Engine growls like a blues singer. Drinks gas
like water. But it’s all hers. Paid for with
that under the table cash and that meant
it kept her secrets. The cold starter clicks.
She guns it again and pulls out at last
leaving that perfect parking spot behind.
She’d waited all night. If he wasn’t home
by now he wasn’t coming. He won’t find
her. She’s got her stuff. There’s a bridge. She goes
where she wants. He never knew what she meant
when she said, ‘life’s best when my tires align.’

MARK J. MITCHELL

Nomenclature

Named a common sound,
his voice soft, a cloud—
White. Tamed.
He liked short vowels
that never rose loud.
Explained:
I scatter loose nouns
to block out unsound
dead names.

Mark J. Mitchell has been a working poet for 50 years. His latest collection is *Something To Be.. A Novel. A Book of Lost Songs* was recently published by Histria Books and a new poetry chapbook, *Ground This Morning* came out recently from Sabre Lake Publishing. He is fond of baseball, Louis Aragon, Dante, and his wife, activist Joan Juster. He lives in San Francisco where he points out pretty things.

He can be found on Bluesky @MJMitchellwriter

NR SCHMIDT

For All of It

Under the sunned magnolia, all in bloom.
Dozing, maybe.

The leaves, mashed into the mud, on that path off the walkway.

Drop from a branch into a pool.
Mixing; mixed.

Clouded night and all the hum of the forest, cut through by a screech owl.

That break.
It envelops you.

Not here; not there.

Before.

Nothing.

Ripples receding.
And receding.
And receding.

After.

NR SCHMIDT

Forget Halloween

The smashed gourd holds no future tense.
The totaled car; no future trip.
The ragged shirt, insignia faded beyond recognition,
Unwearable for all the holes.

Sometimes, we get a warning.
Leaves fade from lush green to blood red to brown.
Outlines in the mud.
Becoming dirt.

Sometimes, we don't.
The baby that comes out,
Not moving,
And blue,
Is devastating.

Yet.
We look out to the horizon,
Sometimes with comfort,
Longing to rejoin those who went first.
For release.
Everything, nothing;
It might be something just without us.

A misty waterfall hidden behind a crag-laden bend.
The man's laughter, hidden behind a stoic mask, at his surprise party.
The sweet fruit of durian.

I sit in the snow.
No one knows I'm here.
I'm so still I could be dead.

NR SCHMIDT

What If It’s That?

I can see an empty plain,
Where the sky is black
Above a humming fog.

Maybe that’s what death is.
Scares the hell out of me.

A redwood forest,
With finger ferns above a green pool,
And rust like dust flowing with the water.

That’s where I’d go.
If it were my choice.

Or at Tea, in a cottage on the British coast.
Or a crepe by the d’Orsay.
Or maybe wind-chapped by sands in Giza.

And then the fear seeps back in.

The what if.

The dread.

Being scolded.
Being chosen, but as a consolation.
Being lost.

What if it’s that?

NR SCHMIDT IS A WRITER ORIGINALLY FROM AMERICA'S WEST COAST.

LOUIS FABER

To a Now Dead Father

It was two doubled slabs of well-worn leather
laced together on one side,
a pocket for a hand, found by him
at the Goodwill Store while she searched
for treasures that the prior owners
parted with, out of necessity or ignorance.
He had no idea it was once a glove
for a first baseman, that positional attribute
unknown to a ked reluctantly dragged
a game of stickball on the street as his uncle
watched imperiously from the stoop.
He was left handed and wanted to show me
what he had read about baseball, never
learning the game or wanting to do so.
We spent hours on the lawn with
a soon grass-stained Spaulding baseball,
and he trying hard not to see it a Spaldeen.
His ineptness with glove and ball showed
and matched my clumsiness, but he tried,
just as he tried camping, tried many things,
most ending in failure for him and
embarrassment for me which I badly hid.
He never stopped trying and it is only
now, when I finally want to thank him,
that I can only do so in memory of him.

LOUIS FABER

Unemployed

He stood in the middle of the street
staring into the cloud shrouded sky
screaming at God who ignored him.
“Lower your voice,” and old woman
shouted, leaning out of her window
three floors up, “He’s not hard of hearing.”
It wasn’t Sunday so he wasn’t going
to give God a pass on not responding,
he did not ask much, did not expect
his entreaty would be accepted, but
he knew it should be heard, he
should be acknowledged, he
needed to know that to someone
even if only God, he still mattered at all.
His voice grew hoarse and he sat
sullenly on the curb knowing yet again
he was nothing, no one, a nullity.
There is nothing worse, he knew
than being an angel with nothing
at all to do, no one at all to save.

LOUIS FABER

Without Prophecy

The parapets have crumbled
under the relentless weight of time
and we are left on shaken ground
to shout our pleas and entreaties
to an audience long grown deaf.
Where are we to stand, to whom
can we cry out when there is no one
who cares to listen, no gods to intercede.
We are bards rendered mute in a world
needing songs more than ever before.
We were to be the sentinels, canaries
at the mouth of a mine we thought
long depleted, no need for us. willingly
unemployed, prophets without prophecy.
Now we roam about decrying our world
tired of battle, brittle warriors unfit
to fight but having no choice but to do so.

LOUIS FABER

Of Which Dreams Are Made

In the child's dream
horses ran free across unfenced fields
and he is a colt
chasing after his parents,
his nostrils flaring
in the effort.

In his father's dream
he is a star athlete,
records falling at his every attempt
and his father basking
in reflected glory.

In his mother's dream
he is a little girl
sitting beside her playing
with her dolls and looking
lovingly at her as a role model.

None of the three
ever dreams that one day
in the future this once child
will hide under his desk
and pray that the shooter
does not enter his classroom.

LOUIS FABER IS A POET AND WRITER. HIS WORK HAS APPEARED IN SEVERAL ANTHOLOGIES AND IN PASSAGER, THE MACGUFFIN, CANTOS, ALCHEMY SPOON, NEW FEATHERS ANTHOLOGY, FLORA FICTION, DREICH (SCOTLAND), PROSETRICS, ATLANTA REVIEW, GLIMPSE, RATTLE, COLD MOUNTAIN REVIEW, , PEARL, MIDSTREAM, EUROPEAN JUDAISM, THE SOUTH CAROLINA REVIEW AND WORCESTER REVIEW, AMONG MANY OTHERS, AND HAS BEEN TWICE NOMINATED FOR A BEST OF THE NET AND TWICE NOMINATED FOR A PUSHCART PRIZE.

D.S. MAOLALAI

Once I could rattle

a machinegun – the keyboard.
wrote long paths through london –
through dublin and out to new york.
I burned forests. burned fields.
drank my liver black matchstick.
lived in wet bedsits and burned them
like cracking green wood. glasses
and plates in my sink shattered
sympathy. loud banging all night
with a lamp on. a table. I envy
myself – my speed, the ability
to aim without aiming; just guess
and take shots – there were always
more words – they're not
sacred. the words were
a hammer, the papers
all slabs of shaped stone –
hewn rough as old idols
of gods found with moss on.
they were me – I was god.
as young as and as muscled – I was hungry.
was thirsty. I was god.
I wonder – I type now with my wife
in the kitchen. she's making decaf
and the radio onto a talk-
show. I'll come out later on
with six poems about her to show
and we'll talk about plans
for a friend's daughter's christening.
I don't make things up – and life
is much slower now. my rage
is anxiety – I tell on myself.

On a Patio, On Timber

the vehicle swings
like a towel pegged up
to a clothesline. it seems
almost dragging
my hands along after –
over the wheel
rather than the other way
around. I'm not the driver –
I am the driver. I'm a passenger
with an opinion. my attention on girls
in short dresses who wait
at the crossings. dogs walking
immortal as sunsets
on the pavement in a rhythmic
stride. I am a danger
to others in traffic. traffic moves,
stops. I am lost in the traffic
in sunshades. I have somewhere
to go or I wouldn't be here
going anywhere. out to the suburbs
or turning back into
the city. a bridge
over the cherry orchard
pub is distinct
between the breezed movement
of trees. there are places
cement stands and places
you don't even notice –
hardness within
the soft world. evening
is a slurred word
spat over a glass
on a patio, on a timber
park bench with an ashtray.

D.S. MAOLALAI

Family

the first of three
children. a blank-coloured flag
which indicates nothing
except the direction of wind.

Late-august Butterflies

mind's alight.
anxiety flutters –
wings fall apart,
delicate as late-
august butterflies.

and everything lately
has been going fantastically.
my girlfriend became my fiancée.
the dog isn't sick. christmas
coming. even the job
has been mostly ok,
and everyone's healthy,
the weather is fine.

I stand at the window –
watch people dodge
traffic. any time now
I am certain
I'll see someone hit.

DS MAOLALAI HAS BEEN DESCRIBED BY ONE EDITOR AS "A COSMOPOLITAN POET" AND ANOTHER AS "PROLIFIC, BORDERING ON INCONTINENT". HIS WORK HAS BEEN NOMINATED FOURTEEN TIMES FOR BOTN, ELEVEN FOR THE PUSHCART AND ONCE FOR THE FORWARD PRIZE, AND RELEASED IN THREE COLLECTIONS; "LOVE IS BREAKING PLATES IN THE GARDEN" (ENCIRCLE PRESS, 2016), "SAD HAVOC AMONG THE BIRDS" (TURAS PRESS, 2019) AND “NOBLE ROT” (TURAS PRESS, 2022)

KINGA LIPINSKA

The Art of Paying Attention: Inside the 2026 Poets for Science Gathering

Stepping onto the Kent State University campus for the inaugural Poets for Science Gathering felt like entering a space where two supposedly separate worlds finally meet. Over three days in mid-November, I was eager to see how poets and scientists navigate that boundary—and how their diverse works might speak to one another.

While every speaker brought something compelling to the table, the opening evening program set an unforgettable tone with Diane Ackerman. Hearing a naturalist and poet whose career lives so comfortably at the intersection of mind and matter felt like the exact heartbeat of the conference. She spoke about the hidden textures and longings of the natural world with a sense of sheer wonder, reminding everyone in the room that rigorous scientific observation doesn't strip away mystery—it deepens it.

That spirit of expansive attention, so crucial to poetic practice, carried directly into the sessions led by Indigenous poets and activists, which were among the most grounding and transformative moments of the weekend. Listening to Kimberly Blaeser alongside Melissa Nelson was extremely enriching. Rather than treating science and poetry as two separate tools that need to be bridged, their work demonstrated how Traditional Ecological Knowledge and poetic language have always been deeply intertwined—rooted in kinship, land stewardship, and centuries of lived observation.

For those interested in the mechanics of language, listening to Tracy K. Smith and Camille T. Dungy was a masterclass in wisdom and poetic craft. They explored how intentionality, precision, and lyric restraint allow a poem to hold complex truths without losing its emotional pulse—offering invaluable insight into how writers can carry weighty ecological and human realities onto the page.

Just as memorable was the session with U.S. Poet Laureate Arthur Sze. Even appearing virtually via Zoom, he practically brought down the house. His poems moved with a stunning precision,

weaving together luminous particulars from the natural world, cosmology, and human history. Listening to him read felt like watching a master lensmaker at work—bringing distant, complex realities into sharp, emotionally resonant focus.

Beyond the main stage, the breakout sessions and book fair revealed a thriving ecosystem of grassroots interdisciplinary projects. Seeing so many people working the crossroads of poetry and science was deeply enriching, and it left me feeling genuinely hopeful. That sense of shared vision, care, and dedication felt like a much-needed antidote to the usual noise of contemporary society.

Leaving Kent, I carried a renewed sense of possibility. The Poets for Science Gathering wasn't just another conference; it was a living demonstration of what happens when people with deep passions collaborate. Guided by voices like Ackerman, Smith, Dungy, Sze, and the Indigenous poets at the heart of the program, the weekend proved that science gives us the facts to understand our world, while poetry gives us the art—and the reverence—to speak and care together.

Author’s Note: These field notes reflect just a fraction of the Gathering's highlights, as every speaker and guest brought valuable insights. Deepest gratitude to David Hassler, Director of the Wick Poetry Center, and poet extraordinaire Jane Hirshfield for bringing this transformative event to life. What an inspiration!

MARIO DUARTE

In The Lines

of Jaunita's face, a map
formed that directed her
to where future coconuts
and palm trees whispered
come here, work is over,
no secret, death before her.

How was she to believe
this enticement, this plead,
she thought, this endless
siren song tugging me
over the burnt horizon,
an island with no escape.

She found herself there
stepping into the warm
waves that laughed
at her frowning face
adrift the bubbling sea foam—
in hand, a soundless seashell.

When her friend arrived
with a gun she knew
what she had to do.
She shot the coconuts
out the trees, the milk dripping,
mingling with the white distance.

MARIO DUARTE IS A MEXICAN-AMERICAN WRITER WHO LIVES IN IOWA CITY AND IS AN IOWA WRITERS' WORKSHOP ALUMNUS. HIS FICTION AND POETRY HAVE APPEARED IN *HUIZACHE, MIDWEST QUARTERLY*, AND *WILD WILLOW*. HE IS THE AUTHOR OF A POETRY COLLECTION, *TO THE DEATH OF THE AUTHOR*, AND SHORT STORY COLLECTION, *MY FATHER CALLED US MONKEYS*.

MARIO DUARTE

In The House

of sorrow, old Diego
walked alone, whistling
hoping someone would
hum his composition
but no one did, so he
sat at his desk staring
at the blank wall until,
yes, he wrote a letter
to one he just lost.

Dear madre, tonight
a lonely star pricks
a tiny pinhole of light
in the darkest of nights—
no luna, lost in clouds,
and the night spreads
a heavy serape over
bird bone shoulders.

What is it like to be
dead? Do you no longer
care what others think?
Is there any peace, or
is it more like a bird
with no feathers, no beak
rolling in the dirt
by the road, waiting
for the wind to stop.

MARIO DUARTE

Because Of The Loud Silence

in the studio, the singer
escaped the recording session.

“Where is the generation
that birthed me?” he snarled.

Something hit his head, hard; he
thought it was a baseball.

It was a herd of tiny, flying
goats with angel wings. Soon mist.

At his home, he understood
the speech of squirrels and possums.

Even rabbit was comprehensible
when he bit into a carrot,

the orange lines a face
that stared back at him.

He closed his eyes, imagined
a water lily on a pond—

no more songs in his head,
or faces to love or forget.

Something true, he floated
away, on a ripple.

PETER NEWALL

A Friendship

Autumn.
The sky
white. Ravens' wingbeats
sew long seams
across the silence.
I, returning,
stand uncertain
at the forest's edge.

Years have trodden
the path down. But the gate,
lichened, slow
to open. Once,
the house breathed, welcomed
with woodsmoke. Now
a hare, startled,
runs from the clearing.

And emptiness. Behind
dull blank windows, nothing.
The roses at the door
choked with elder.

What was
now lies, folded,
in some small closed cabinet
of time, a drawer
not forgotten, but long
untouched.

PETER NEWALL

Friend, where were you
all those years?
We should
have met again
before this,
there might have been
a handclasp, understanding.
But you wrapped yourself
in a tattered scarf of shadows,
which became darkness. Now
I must turn back
alone.

Peter Newall has worked variously in a navy dockyard, as a lawyer and as a musician. He now lives in Odesa, Ukraine, where he plays jazz and blues in small clubs.

PETER NEWALL

River Jura

River, I have come
to see you, Jura, river of my youth,
running shallow over sand
amongst low pines.

Then, brown needles,
soft, silent,
padded the narrow path
to your bank.
The catch: three fish, silver-scaled,
thrust, still squirming,
into a hempen sack.

Barefoot, the way home passed
between slatternly wooden fences.
Smoke
from a stone chimney, a dog
like a wolf. I put my arms
around his neck, felt
his rough fur, his thudding heartbeat.

And I loved
the owl-cry, the frog-call,
the moon over the barn roof.

We lived beside you, unknowing
what was to come. Later, we
were taken away.
The hut, empty,
a mossy ruin, log walls
fallen awry, the step
sunken.

But you, river, remain,
running clear and cold. I throw a pine branch;
you carry it
down the valley, away.

PETER NEWALL

Lausanne

A hired car,
a white road lined with poplars.
Looking over the low stone hedges
I saw all that I'd expected;
pocket vineyards with reeking presses
squat, shaggy horses
houses wreathed in flowering vines.
The frank and beautiful peasant girl
and back to my hotel.

Blinds drawn
a white porcelain ewer
but why all this blood?

Then through the night to Colombey;
when she took the wheel and drove so fast
I thought she was death, come to meet me
but we arrived safely enough.
That town is populated by mongrel mastiffs
they police the streets, stand sentinel at corners.

A darkened building in a side street
where I expected to find
knowing men playing cards,
waiting.
But it was empty.
No underground passages; just
a small square room. Without windows.
I stared at the yellow ceiling for three days
thinking I was paralysed
while she came and went with knives and candles.

COREY MESLER

Writer

I make up people.
I give them names.
They walk around in
a world I concocted,
that without me
would be blank space.
Sometimes I fall in
love with a person
I've made up. Some-
times I put them
through things no one
else would. It's night-
time in one of these
worlds now. I see her
waiting for me. She
has no idea the ideas I have.

COREY MESLER has been published in numerous anthologies and journals including Poetry, Gargoyle, Five Points, Lunch Ticket, Good Poems American Places, and New Stories from the South. He has published over 50 books of fiction and poetry. His newest books are Memphis Movie Two, a novel, from Whiskey Tit, and Happy Happy, a novel from Livingston Press. With his wife he runs Burke's Book Store (est. 1875) in Memphis.

COREY MESLER

The Day's Music

In the morning there is song.
The birds form a
chorus. The trees thread in
a backbeat as
steady as rain. I step out
onto the sidewalk
and I'm swept away by song.
In the evening they find me
hung in the branches of the staves.

COREY MESLER

Divinities

Eve lay down in the deep grass,
her legs as open as God's eyes.
Adam was off somewhere talking
to one of the older apes. The
third player, the serpent, swam
toward Eve. He wasn't sure what
the goal was, but he was over-
heated, like a love-crossed forest god.

COREY MESLER

Afternoon

It's a storm.
It's a drought.
Relax is not in
my playbook.
I know things
about myself
I wish I didn't
know. I've seen
me clearly. You
don't have to
listen. It's not
that kind of
redemption I
am after. I am
after an after-
noon, calm and
sensual, the
way a painting
sometimes
can make you
think of
something else
almost as beautiful.

Poet: Thief

What are we then if not what the light says we are?

-Ocean Vuong, *On Earth, We're Briefly Gorgeous*-

Hoarding a cache
most nights

from daylight
or moonlight

instead of
a chip a bird

on his shoulder
looking back

at trenchcoat
& truncheon

cover of secret
social police

dying to lighten
his load

just before dawn!

Poet: Earthly Delights

Like my hands
that might seem pink,

but whiter, thinner than my unwed
walkabout gossamer-white tulle,

being-in-the-world without its noise
dredging up private stuff later that had

no place in my present welcoming
snowdrop and crocus and daffodil

among more first flirts pushing up boldly
under crusty spring snow, my own

rough slant on Chestnut Bur hair, eye
residue Sherry left behind by the Guest,

hands o’erspread by daybreak
over garden and hedgerow

until words transport me,
gather paradise,

everyday wonder of it all.

All Souls

02 November

Quarter moon.
Teardrop.
Earring
Hooked.

Toothed moon,
rising, for Glück.
Even when unseen.
Even when stars

unbidden, forgiven,
seventy times seven,
from fall
All Hollows-on.

What comforts,
this dint of light
waxing and waning
into bitter winter,

its beauty of inflections,
innuendos, like blackbird
whistle and twit,
or felt just after,

fractioned self
whatever trope fits,
one-quarter
enough

for me,
you,
maybe even
all lost souls.

G TIMOTHY GORDON

Offering

September 2026

Here are the stars,
and the moon,

rest of fall
black sky

most every night
into winter

without paywall,
algorithm, cryptic code,

a wholly doxxed address,
in case you forgot

in your haste
for dawn,

all for you and you
and you

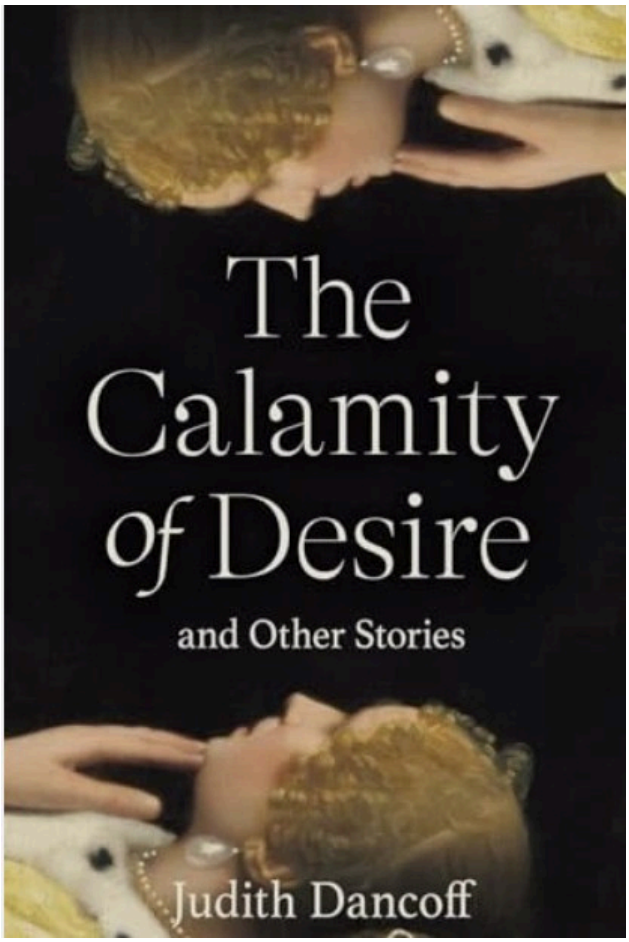
DREAM WIND published 2020, GROUND OF THIS BLUE EARTH, while EVERYTHING SPEAKING CHINESE was awarded RiverStone Book Prize. Fiction and poetry appear in AGNI, Cincinnati PR, Mississippi R, New York Q, RHINO, Texas Observer, several nominated for Pushcarts and Best of the Net. Recent books include EMPTY (2024), BLUE BUSINESS (2025), and KNOWING/UNKNOWING: A POEMOIR, forthcoming 2026, OFFERING and BECOMING LIGHT, first chapbooks, now under review. (66)

GTimothy Gordon divides lives between New Mexico/Texas/Mexico borderland Chihuahuan Desert Southwest Organ Mountains and Asia.

KINGA LIPINSKA

Seeing the Old Anew: Feminist Revisions of Art History in The Calamity of Desire

Judith Dancoff's *The Calamity of Desire* offers much to readers drawn to creative writing, feminist literary theory, and art history. Comprising six stories and a novella, the collection centers on a creative woman's perspective reimagined across different historical periods. Published in 2024 by Finishing Line Press, an independent press in Kentucky, the book won a Next Generation Indie Book Award and earned honorable mentions at the Los Angeles and Paris Book Festivals, alongside individual accolades for several of its stories.



Dancoff brings a revisionist feminist lens to art history and the artist's vocation. Just as feminism in the United States has unfolded across major phases to bring women's voices into new spheres—extending well beyond political rights and economic opportunities—Dancoff uses fiction to interrogate who gets remembered in the cultural canon. She has been recognized for this kind of inquiry since the early 1970s; her documentary film Judy Chicago & the California Girls captured a pivotal moment in American art, exploring ideological debates within feminist circles and the emergence of prominent twentieth-century women performance artists. The Calamity of Desire continues that work in prose, examining identity, sexuality, and familial and social power dynamics from a female point of view.

KINGA LIPINSKA

Every story in the collection carries a unique perspective shift, beginning with an intriguing opening piece centered on Velázquez's sister and her reflections on life and art. Her inner monologue places a woman's lived experience alongside the questions raised by one of the most acclaimed paintings in art history, Las Meninas, allowing the canvas and the life surrounding it to illuminate one another. While the celebrated master remains present, his sister's voice invites us to ask what art can tell us about living—and what lies beyond the frames through which we define a "masterpiece." Rather than discrediting the painting, this inventive turn widens our view, situating Las Meninas within a tangible world of marriage, family, and social expectation. The pleasure lies in holding both perspectives together: admiring the masterpiece while attending to a life adjacent to fame without treating it as merely incidental.

For readers interested in critical revisions of art history, *The Calamity of Desire* pairs naturally with Linda Nochlin's classic essay "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" as well as *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology*, by Griselda Pollock and Rozsika Parker. Where those nonfiction works challenge the supposed lack of female creative agency in canonical records, Dancoff confronts the very same concerns imaginatively, moving deftly between historical fact and fictionalized interiority.

Ultimately, creative work deserves to be discovered firsthand, with room to unsettle expectations and shift a reader's sensibility. A reviewer's task isn't to unravel a work of fiction completely; often, the best approach is simply to settle in, move from one story to the next, and pause when something within us expands. For anyone drawn to the intersection of visual art and literature, Dancoff's collection offers the immediate pleasures of surprise and discovery—and the deeper reward of seeing the old anew.

LARRY O. DEAN

Green Screen

Before the green screen I stopped,
menaced by roaring triceratops,

elbow-to-elbow with Napoleon
at Waterloo, and flanked

by a retinue of Busby Berkeley
bathing beauties.

What's not to enjoy?
Alone but not lonely,

the monitor nearby a window
to another megacosm of many

megacosms stitched together
and computer-generated,

I kept my eyes affixed
on Bonaparte's bayonet

spearing the rearing dinosaur
as bikinied ladies clapped.

LARRY O. DEAN

The Hand Won’t Clap Itself

The hand won’t clap itself.
It sits at the end of the wrist
like a piece of ripe fruit
to pick or to be picked.

The hand can’t clap itself;
even if the clapper jiggles
their arm so vigorously it slaps
the skin ad nauseam, it’s

not the sound of two hands
clapping—not applause, or seducing
dogs or babies to turn at the noise
and advance toward the source.

The hand won’t clap itself.
It has so much more to do!
The hand is in demand
every minute of every day

to be at hand, or handy
for whatever come what may,
on its own or in cahoots
with its partner across the way.

The hand won’t clap itself,
even if it could.
The hand understands
this won’t do any good.

Ted's Talk

Be a goldfish.
Chewing gum for the eyes.

Tell the jury they're wrong.
I have the necessary lack of tact.

Applause is the beginning of abuse.
I have no mouth and I must scream.

Hey, play "Chopsticks," you jazzy slut!
Strange things are afoot at the Circle-K.

That money was just resting in my account.
In what universe does that even make sense?

There is no morality in the mushroom cloud.
This day is turning out to be a little extra sucky.

If I only had a little humility, I would be perfect.
And now, I don't think I won't not go to the bathroom.

Early to bed, early to rise, work like hell, and advertise.
I'm the most cold-hearted son-of-a-bitch you'll ever meet.

First, we'll have an orgy. Then we'll go see Tony Bennett.
I have a perfect horror of words that are not backed up by deeds.

Brain damage is never a good idea, no matter what your friends say.
God gets you to the plate, but once you're there you're on your own.

My confidence level is insane. If there is one thing I am, it's always right.
I've just been handed a bulletin: "You have something on your front tooth!"

Manifesto. Read my Manifesto. I've written a Manifesto. It's all in the Manifesto!
Oh, like all my dreams end—with Marlo Thomas and Winston Churchill applauding me.

I couldn't believe that she knew my name. Some of my best friends didn't know my name.

Don't blame me for how I look. God made me this way, and then he told me where to shop for suits.

If standing for liberty and the Constitution makes you a Wacko Bird, then count me a proud Wacko Bird.

You don't tug on Superman's cape, you don't spit against the wind, and you don't write checks that your body can't cash.

I quit!

LARRY O. DEAN

What Does the Joke Mean?

What does the joke mean?
It is to laugh. Or ça fait rire,
as the French quip, or a
French quipped, avec un béret

et smoldering Gauloise
et shadowy stubble beard
completing the picture.
The joke means what it says,

whether en Français or English.
The joke says what it means,
doesn't pull its punch line
for the welfare of the pearl-

clutchers or breezily miffed.
What does the joke mean
to mean, meaning what is it
trying to say? Does the joke

have agency? An agent?
The latter might get it
better paying gigs but it
can't get itself no respect.

Larry O. Dean was born and raised in Flint, Michigan. His numerous books include I Am Spam (2024), Muse, Um (2022), Activities of Daily Living (2017), Brief Nudity (2013), Basic Cable Couplets (2012), Abbrev (2011), and About the Author (2011). He is also an acclaimed singer-songwriter whose latest solo album is Good Grief (2015); his band, The Injured Parties, has a new album, Mutually Assured Distraction, due in 2027. For more info, go to larryodean.com.

@larryodean (Bluesky, Facebook, Instagram)

DIANE WEBSTER

December Pumpkin Patch

December pumpkin patch
snow blown level
like a parking lot
scattered with seedless
sunflower stalks bent low
in streetlight fashion.
Globes shattered
by gang members
target practicing
like sparrows
picking off seeds
and leaving the shards
behind.

Snow sparkles
broken-glass sharpness
under moonlight,
sunlight,
starlight
until the thaw drips
stalactites percolating
through the snow crystals,
and pumpkins decay
into cavernous shells
like salvage-yard cars
awaiting compaction.

DIANE WEBSTER

Drought Lake

Blue Mesa Reservoir drought stricken
in its incredible-shrinking-lake disguise
leaves high-and-dry-tree-trunk flotsam
bleaching on the baked rip-rap shoreline.

An elephant burial ground revealed…
a thigh bone washed up over there;
a hipbone set up like a fisherman’s chair,
a rib wedged between boulders –
all it needs is a white flag of surrender
fluttering in the wind chopping
surface water into white caps.

Archeologists should crowd
the expanding shore and carry
stacks of bones like bundles of firewood
back to laboratories to enlighten
scientists with grains of climate change.

DIANE WEBSTER

Into Itself

The wooden garage sags
like an old horse
ridden too many miles.

Windows stare with
jack-o′-lantern eyes
shrinking day after day
into itself.

Trees grow around
like hospice nurses
helping the garage
to its ultimate demise.

Fallen comrade
embraced
in green leaves
and limbs caressing.

DIANE WEBSTER

A Peeling

Behind blooming hollyhocks
the white paint of the house
peels like the sunburned legs
of a little boy picking skin
off and chasing girls
as they scream around
the playground totally
impressed by the boy skin
held between their fingers.

White flakes of paint
lie brittle at the roots
of the green stalk
waving red flowers
like a shipwrecked survivor
flourishing a shirt for rescue
among the flotsam.

Diane Webster lives in western Colorado. Her poetry has appeared in North Dakota Quarterly, New English Review, Studio One, Jimson Weed and elsewhere. Her haiku/senryu have appeared in Pebbles, Kokako, Enchanted Garden Haiku. Five micro-chaps have been published by Origami Poetry Press. She was a featured writer in Macrame Literary Journal and WestWard Quarterly. Her website is: www.dianewebster.com

ASAD JALEEL

Need You To Stay

My heart is a stone, dead for so long
So dark, just clinging to right and wrong
Seeing my own reflection
And not making a mental connection
But not at the end of my rope,
I still haven’t lost hope.

I need you to stay.
I really need you to stay.
Got nothing to offer
I really need you to stay

Through the glittering city.
The salons of the fine and witty.
I’m totally on my own.
For a joker there is no throne.

I need you to stay.
I really need you to stay.
Got nothing to offer
I want you to get your way.

You listened to me complain
Didn’t tell me I was insane
I slept on your sheets
That made me feel complete.
Winter's Gloom and Spring's Respite

In winter's grasp, the days grow brief,
With shadows long, it brings us grief.
The sun retreats, a distant glow,
As frosty winds begin to blow.

The world is wrapped in silvery white,
Yet darkness lingers through the night.
With each morning comes a heavy sigh,
As sunlight fades and spirits die.

But whispers of a warmer breeze,
Begin to dance among the trees.
With lily blooms and skies of blue,
The heart awakens, fresh and new.

As springtime breaks the winter’s hold,
The stories of the sun unfold.
With longer days and laughter's tunes
We find our joy under silver moons.

ASAD JALEEL

Boxing Poem

two men centered
a tight circle forming around them
flashes from phones
artificial odor of asphalt

one man has a snake tattoo
one man has a skull tattoo
held breath and stillness
until the first swing

blonde-haired kid
watches from on Dad’s shoulders
teen girl laughs nervously
thinking it’s all absurd

grizzly man looks on silently
knowing how a fight like this feels
older lady stares in horror
violence on the street where she lives

Jab from Snake
Cross from Skull
Body blow from Snake
Skull trips

Skull comes up halfway
gravity pulls like a beast
But we’ll never know how it would’ve ended
because police break it up

a week later, the same two guys
are fighting over the same crap

ASAD JALEEL

Crisp Chill

Leaves turning yellow
descend slowly on a breeze
seasonal cycle

crisp chill in the air
length of day shortening now
winter approaches

squirrels race in meadows
their instinct to prepare
put nuts in a cache

Asad Jaleel is an attorney and lives in Naperville, Illinois. He enjoys traveling, learning French, and watching B movies. He is a graduate of UIC and Naperville Central High.

CLYDE LIFFEY

Freedmen

We started just after sunup. With any luck we'll reach trail's end in seven or eight weeks, we get paid by the head not the hour. Nights are tough, we don't sleep well. Soon as it starts getting dark we find a campsite, pitch our tents, water and settle the cattle. We don't eat much, we're on short rations so we'll ride farther each day, there's plenty of food in Abilene. Soon as we've eaten and the longhorns are asleep, I fetch my guitar. I don't have any set songs, people say I don't know any, I just start strumming, some of the others get their guitars, banjos, blues harps, whatever they have. One or two of the freedmen hum while they play, we don't have any other vocals. A few minutes in I look up, we lock eyes, get in rhythm, this lasts for a half hour, an hour, we lose track of time, don't play too long though, have to get back on the trail near sunrise tomorrow.

I'm usually dreamy in the forenoon, I keep up with the team, but I'm still thinking of last night's playing. One of the freedmen rides up to me. We hum, sometimes whistle, the best tunes we played last night. Sometimes I think I like playing better with them than with the white guys, not so surprising, I'm from New Orleans, not Texas, I swear if I could make my living playing music instead of driving cattle I would. He says he's taking the train to Chicago once we get to Abilene, asks me if I want to come. I decline, we get along well enough on the trail, how would it be in a railcar, damn, I think later, it could have been my main chance, I need to open my mind, take a few risks, someday I'll go to New York City, that'll be my apotheosis.

B M RYAN

The Calendar

Ms. Bates said the four most emotionally devastating words in the English language: “Pull out your calendars.”
Proof of life. But adults are wrong. It’s exasperation, not masturbation, when you are jerking yourself around.
You know what’s on the calender? School! Homework. But no one cares about those things.
Plus, my mum would actually kill me if I wrote down my real life.
Like, the time Lucas gave me the nickname “Boomer” because I held my phone too close to my face.
Or the time Wyatt walked up to the hottest girl in eighth grade and asked her to the dance. She said no, so he turned to her friend and said, “Sorry, I was talking to you. You’re way hotter.”
Pure Legend.
Or better yet, the time Bobby dangled it so beautifully, then flipped it to me for a tap-in—à la Makar to MacKinnon.
I spend most of school day dreaming about these moments.
But life, it is not perfect. What are those empty boxes on the calender going do, when there might not be a tomorrow or next week. When someone gets sick. Like, really sick.
Let’s say it’s your dad. Your mom. Someone you love.
You wanna be tough, but you can’t.
You want another day. Not because it is written down. Not because it was promised. But for the opportunity, for a moment.

Life is not a detail; it’s not a thing waiting for us on Tuesday at three o’clock; Life is right now. Life is the joke that makes everyone laugh when nobody expected to laugh. It is the pass Bobby makes. It is Wyatt getting rejected and immediately turning rejection into a story. It is the person in the hospital deciding, somehow, to fight for another breath.
But life has never been ahead. It has always been here. In the ordinary. In the fight. What do I know anyway? I don’t even use that dumb colander.

TOM MISURACA

While We Lay Sleeping

The family across the street. Murdered.
I couldn't wrap my head around it. While my family slept, a family of four was wiped out
barely sixty feet from us. (And no word yet on the fate of their dog.)
Granted we weren't friends, just neighborly acquaintances like most people in Los Angeles are. A quick wave or hello if we were rushing. A few minutes of generic catching up and some neighborhood gossip if we had time. As well as the obligatory: "The kids have gotten so big."
We have watched them grow from toddlers to teenagers. Can't wrap my head around the fact that those kids will never see adulthood.
Who could do something so awful to those so young?
So sudden. So senseless.
The neighborhood text chain (God, I hope somebody thought to take them off it) has no clue of the motive.
Not sure what's worse.
If it were intentional, what kind of people were living next door? Who were they associating with? Could we have been in danger of a drive by shooting in our quiet little neighborhood?
And if this were a random act of violence, why them? Why not us?
How close did we come to being slaughtered last night?

TOM MISURACA

Klepto

The yoga instructor wasn't sure what happened to the remote control for the window blinds. But Karla knew. And nobody would ever suspect her.

Karla took little things. The kind that are easy to swipe. Stuff nobody would suspect anybody would take because they were often useless anywhere else. It had to have been misplaced. It'll turn up.

The remote sat in her draw at home. Her special draw. The one filled with earbud cases, sunglasses (mostly children's), single gloves and screws, so many screws. She was particularly fond of the fish food she'd swiped from her dentist's office. And that "wait here" sign. Plus, a few other remote controls (TV, fan, humidifier) from various waiting rooms.

But for a short time, her actions had some effect on the world. People had to change their ways of doing something because of her.

She mattered.

TOM MISURACA

Whow Can It Be Now?

My text chimes.
My phone sits on the table across the room. Well out of reach. I'm reading in my comfy chair. Planning to finish this chapter in the latest James Patterson book. Only a page and a half to go. The message can wait.
It's probably one of my friends sending a stupid meme or link to an article they thought I'd find interesting, but I'll barely glance at. Or something in a group text that has no relevance to me.
Since it's Saturday morning, it could be somebody asking if I were free that night or Sunday for some activity. My availability will depend on who it is and what they're suggesting.
They can wait.
Maybe it's a friend I haven't heard from in a while. Reaching out to surprise me (or guilt me for not reaching out sooner). Always good to hear from an old friend, but they've waited this long, they can wait another page and a half.
Though I've lost the flow of the story.
As I try to pick it back up, the phone chimes its reminder. I only have it set on one, so it won't be disturbing me again. Unless the sender texts a second or third time. They'd only do that if it were an emergency.
What if it's a friend whose car broke down, leaving them stranded on the freeway. It's a Saturday morning so AAA is sure to take forever. I'd be their best bet at a rescue. It's cold and rainy out there. If that's the case, I'll run out to rescue them. As soon as I finish this chapter.
With my luck, one of my friends needs some money to help pay rent. They won't even get the courtesy of a response. Sorry, neither a borrower nor a lender be. Do I have any friends moving? Perhaps they realized it was a job too big for the crew assembled and are calling in reinforcements. Not with my back. And hey, aren't we at the age where they should be hiring movers and not bothering friends.
Same with rides to the airport. If somebody's texting to hit me up for that, they're also not getting a response.
If this text were a real emergency they'd call, right?
Unless a friend is sharing a bad health diagnosis. Unable to say the words over the phone, hoping a text would soften the blow.
Somebody could be in an emergency room with a medical crisis and having difficulty getting reception. They're reaching out to whoever they can come sit with them, or to rally their family to get to the hospital right away.
What if it's one of my siblings dealing with a health issue of their own? Or something bad happened to one of my nieces and nephews.
An accident.
An illness.
A school shooting!
Or they could be calling to tell me that an aunt, uncle or cousin is on their deathbed.
Or worse… my parents.
"Mom!"
I throw down my book and run to the phone. I read the message.

Spam.

TOM MISURACA

Howl

Awooooooooooo!!! Yip! Yip! Yip!

The chorus of coyotes howl in the night air. Their cries echoing off the concrete streets throughout the neighborhood.

To Mary, it sounds like the anguished lament of a mother who lost her child. One who believed a miracle had fulfilled her dreams of parenthood. Only to have it ripped away in a moment of unbearable pain.

The howls penetrate her heart.

Mary gravitates to the widow. Opens it.

And howls in harmony into the night air.

Tom Misuraca studied writing at Emerson College in his hometown of Boston. Over 180 of his short stories and two novels have been published. His story, Giving Up The Ghosts, was published in Constellations Journal, and nominated for a Pushcart Prize in 2021. His work has recently appeared in Phil Lit, TrashLight Press and Ivo Review. He is also a multi-award winning playwright with over 200 short plays and 17 full-lengths produced globally. His musical, Geeks!, was produced Off-Broadway in May 2019. He lives in Los Angeles.

KIM REED

Kosovo 1930s Pumpkin Vampire Scare

The chill of cooling flesh in the air
Past ten days since the harvest
The best of the vine, fine pumpkins
Begin to shake, shimmy, and quake

A farm child has disappeared
Following tremors everyone feared
Rolling all around in the earth
A low growl in rumbling sound

Smears of blood on the stem
Gourd gleams, an orange gem
Do spirits hide within the rinds
Private hotels for vampire kind

Crosses are out in village hands
Priest and Imam look at the land
Prayers against all evil beasts rise
Pumpkins be cleansed in fire

Perhaps beneath roasting hot orbs
Man’s footprints were also gored
Hidden by the colorful curves
A mortal child killer hid his form

KIM REED

Sahman, October's Debt
(2012)

Sahmain, October's debt
crisp leaves color marks of death

striped with human seed sown
into the light, fresh bones thrown

grass, grains, threshed and sliced
apple bobs treat us to paradise

cold, cold water, turnip heads grin
bed, salt and slaughter, the cattle all in

opening of a house, the closing of a year
bills curled by water dripping of fear

crackling skins, crackling skies
dry logs to burn the bonfire high

to light the hearth and scare the cat
bullets in the heads of pigs so fat

the stag's escape, the rabbit's prance
calling out the need to dance

whiskey to soothe blood in your nose
at visitors gate all ghosts will pose

The Devil is on Montrose Beach
(2014)

the devil says “you are me”
come, I must speak to you in privacy
poets, lost children, come come
through this door bonding forever

with spirits in purgatory or is it force
to channel the universe’s tiny grains
broken shells arc in crescent waves
smashed shelters of soft living things

all batteries are dead but acid
no cell service in hell says the devil
hot spots where you live are a gift
plug in to me or lose, be disconnected

like free coffee and unexpected meals
survival is not of the fittest but luck
slender means a few coins for crackers
sexualized, starving in your little tents

the devil is on Montrose beach
you can see the amount of burned wood
Lake Michigan’s small hearts of black coal
polished by energies at the bottom

dead infant heads surface from tide sand
broken claws from tiny inland crabs
wisps of torn white grass with wide roots
bleached by dog piss and city effluent

light pull me back to sleep’s catch
flaps closed around my lost diction
if not to call God, to call for a new life
in last breathable air before the storm

chilled against my own human heat
lost pillows, pens of driftwood harbor
small spiders in deep dark clefts
crawl out to feast on yesterday’s lunch

KIM REED

Tagging Things Seen in Drone Photos, a Job for Kurds in Iraq

tagging all the things
easy if it is clear
if there is no fire or fighting
no other work here

resting by the road
see a wheel rim
captured by flying photo
tag for the system

unknowns to firing drones
just metal and plastic
paper and odd stones
see it is not explosive

downed click, click, click
system cannot identify
tag, tag, super quick
for money money money

focus on every object
less firing at empty boxes
too many shots pop pop
less power wasted

mark what can be seen
use your human eyes
pays only for named things
AI can't identify

Kim Reed is a writer living in Uptown Chicago. Her recent poetry includes strong support for peace through anti-war themes, including *War Memorial* (Crab Song, Pink Tie Press, 2012 chapbook), *Can You See Gaza Alight* (Highland Park Poetry 2024), *Missile Strike* (Sunflowers Rising, Poets for Peace Anthology, 2025) and a forthcoming 21 poem pamphlet *Surreal Nursery* (2026) tanka dedicated to all women and children who survive war.

JOHN DORROH

What's Been Fixed, II
after Dorianne Laux

The white tiling in the guest bathroom.
The stainless steel toaster by the fridge.

A clay pot full of golden lantana. My
ulna. Aunt Sarah's outlook on life.

The pine branch that slaps me in the head
every time I mow the hill in front of

the house. The rotting deck piling
that supports entirely too much weight

at parties in the dusk. My leg, the one
I favor while standing in line at CVS.

The rickety seating in the Lory Theatre.
My bicycle's brakes. Uncle Jim's BBQ

grill. Long ago, my mother's favorite
casserole dish. The swing under the old

oak tree at Panther Lake. The rusted latch
on the back door of the barn. Just yesterday,

the leak under the sink in the laundry room.
This morning, my reading glasses and one

hour ago, my heart which had fallen off
the dresser in the bedroom but my some-

one caught in on its way to the floor.

JOHN DORROH

A Litany on the Verge of Being Preachy

1.

We'd rather not tell you what to write
or how to write it. We're here to curate your
finished products. And I'm here to tell you
that I have options about where to live if you ever
decide that I need to leave. I repeat: I have options.
Never forget that.

2.

Never forget that I am Terminus, Viktor de la Nell,
Constatine and Hebekkah all at once. I have purged
the Bible clean of my heritage, faces lost in a dark
web of fictitious wanna-be novels. The sun sets
over the mountains just as it does on the sea.

3.

Never think that writing is punishment. It is
paramount in your growth & development,
and in your speciation. It illuminates pathways
and provides sustenance for your soul.

4.

We'd never condone ghost tablets or pencils
without lead. We honor scribbles and dissertations
and move freely about the planet, always prepared
to bloom where we're planted.

5.

Never rip me from my bedded places, or tear away
the scars, which I have honorably earned.
Pink like the flesh of a new delicate baby.
But pink isn't always a pleasant color.

John Dorroh travels as often as possible. He inevitably ends up in other peoples' kitchens exchanging culinary tidbits and telling tall tales. Once he baked bread with Austrian monks and drank a healthy portion of their beer. Seven of his poems were nominated for Best of the Net. Others have appeared in over 100 journals, including Feral, North of Oxford, River Heron, Wisconsin Review, Kissing Dynamite, El Portal, and Loch Raven Review. He makes his home in Southwest Illinois not far from St. Louis. In his next life he wants to be a penguin.

CHARLIE BRICE

Minuet

Ladies in their flowing gowns,
gravid with petticoats and pleats,
wigs wagging in the ballroom,
fans unfurled fending off bugs,

fomenting wind, small smiles
that hide the terror of their lives:
a father bleak with debt, a drowsy
dowery, will they find a man,

justify the piano lessons,
the drawing lessons, singing
lessons, hours of playing whist,
or, when the music stops and

the feast is finished, will they
bury their heads in tear-soaked
pillows, sleep on narrow beds,
drink only lonely cups of tea?

Charlie Brice won the 2020 Field Guide Poetry Magazine Poetry Contest and placed third in the 2021 Allen Ginsberg Poetry Prize. His tenth poetry collection is A Brief History of the Sixties (Alien Buddha Press, 2026). His poetry has been nominated for the Best of Net Anthology and the Pushcart Prize and has appeared in Atlanta Review, The Honest Ulsterman, Ibbetson Street, Chiron Review, The MacGuffin, and elsewhere.

CHARLIE BRICE

Among the Reeds

Among the reeds, a basket. How did
they burn the oats? Rancid smell rose
from the hospital kitchen like Lucifer
resurrected. Old nurse, puckered lips,
thrust the thermometer up my ass.
It always hurt.

Jim, in the next bed crying. They did
something to his jigger. Circumcision.
No one would explain. Two analyses,
thousands of dollars, and those pompous
clichés never picked up on that. I was
five. Ever hear of Oedipus?

For Sigmund the opposite of love was indifference.

Puckered nurse forced me to drink 1955
chemically canned OJ made in Lucifer's kitchen.
I puked all over her starched white chest. Not
a reflection, but the wall of a cave nevertheless.

Fever. Puckered gave me an ice bath. For years
I was cold where she touched me. Caught
measles from the new kid in the next bed. Five
months of bedpans. Got home to save my life.
Forgot how to walk.

How much anger can one person have at the world?

M. KELLY PEACH

A Goodbye

Age upon age, rare strata lay. A pile heaving
to a mountain. Grand escarpments face the sun
to rise and crack the azure. Pale shadows, their parts to play
in streams through swathing forests. Hear the headlong
gurgling in muted glades. A life is but to live. Love to live,
never leave. The start of all beginnings is nowhere in sight.
The end justifies everything. If I could but sing a song
of love for you. If I could but sing how encaged by
fire's light of gilded friezes and bars made silvery. Of quiet
before bells pealing their tons of weight for the booming,
ceaseless surf crashing. The water falls and mists marvel
the morning. The moonlight's lambent luminosity pierces.
You uncovered my unplumbed depths and left us
no soothing saccharine balm for the pained goodbye.

M. KELLY PEACH

Dementia

Sitting in an atmosphere of perceiving far ahead
nothing as multitudinous aspects of reality leading
to logic accumulated in gossamer expressions.

Caducity is his premise of steadfast daydreams
And does the aged one extrapolate three-day old
infinity while seated on his crate?

Abstract quantities of cherry blossoms and pine cones
waft in his memories and perhaps what transpires
is what remains hidden.

And isn't it a damn shame somebody (who?) forgot
to lay the iron rails, unused now and rusted,
for the long and slow steam train of his thoughts.

M. Kelly Peach, lives in the wild & beautiful Upper Peninsula of Michigan. He reads & collects books, bakes, & facilitates Ink Society Meetings for a local writing group. Bluesky is @mkellypeach.bsky.social & author's website is mkellypeach.com. His work has appeared in: Alien Buddha Press (poetry chapbook: Please, Do Not Tap on the Glass) & Translucent Eyes Press (horror novella: The Death of Tintagiles Death; horror novel: The Whore: or Of Bureaucracy).

PATRICIA FARRELL

Kali

Why did you show me only one face—
back in those infused nights
in the industrial area bar

covered by the awning
your despairs drowned—
you gave what I wanted.

Lights shining in our pints
rain darkening cobbled streets—
we were in love with our reflections.

Even at the end you gave
everything away—
unused cookbooks, your tarot.

I think about the stories you told me—
I won’t call them lies.

PATRICIA FARRELL

A Gondola To The Top Of Mount Howard

Airless container late afternoon sun
hypnotic whir as I ascend
over twisted trees contoured by weather

Alone now far side of summit
machinery fades only wind
gusting across gravel flower-pocked

meadows where ants move with urgency
days of summer already shortened
autumn chill shivers

and I realize I am ill prepared
without jacket or water
unsheltered at eight thousand feet

I pass a weathered sign that reads
wind moves more slowly next to the ground
and even a tiny pebble can create a protective windbreak

I picture being stranded facing winter
shrinking myself to ant-size
scrabbling behind a pebble now big

as a boulder nourished by pollen and crumbs
thirst quenched by licking

snow off my six legs

PATRICIA FARRELL

Averted Vision

Sometimes my eyes spark at their edges,
caused they say, by retinal detachment —
viscous fluid dries, pulls away, results
in random bursts of glitter
bright enough to turn my head,
only to see darkness still before me.

One way to measure darkness, they say,
is the illumination of night skies
from ambient glow —
light captured and held in water
droplets of clouds —
much like the glistening silver

belly of the river otter who
undulates above and below,
slips in and out of sight—
a flash in the periphery
best seen, like some stars, out
of the corner of your eye.

PATRICIA FARRELL

Inside Story

Deep within, or maybe even near the surface,
        scars from ancient fires, and
even more recent burns, embedded
        wounds sealed off
by impervious layers, resin
        and though not visible,
the trunk bears witness
        charred, lopsided, or stunted, yet
the heartwood still holding.

Patricia Farrell is a Pushcart Prize-nominated poet who lives in rural western Oregon. Formerly a biologist and landscape architect, she received a Certificate of Creative Writing from Linfield University. Her poems have been published in journals such as *Camas Literary Journal, Verseweavers, The Clackamas Literary Review*, and *Cirque*, among others.

FREDERICK SCHARDT

These Ol' Black Boots Will Grow Hair

A little bit of dust creeks out
of my dirtied of blackened leather
boots, these little boots have ridden
through hard times, came out saved
from a polish man who tidied them up,
then out again through the valleys of serbia,
the mountains of bosnia,
the mountains of spain,
the horse trails of california,
the applachian creeks,
all the way back
to me, placed
on my stone-
like feet.

One day these boots will grow hair like my hardened feet,
at that moment they'll resemble the same essence,
forever, inside and outside they'll come
to be living with me in heaven.

Ol black boots will grow hair if you teach them
yr name and the landscapes of earth,
one day you'll know and refer
to them as yr brother
of hard times.

FREDERICK SCHARDT

Red Rippling Smoke

The fire burned,
the fire rippled,
it quivered in ashes,
looked up at the sky and smoked,
tossed and turned in the shaded night,
smoke blew from the feet and head
of the log like little smokestacks,
feet and head smoking kettles,
cracked in half,
everything fell apart,
and the fire was over.

An impression and actual vision
of a time in the yard in los angeles
when I took to watching the fire
on a dark and cold starry summer night,
a day dream of a night when all was clear.
The stars here reach low places,
perhaps we are low
and the fog has
simply lifted
for a little
while of
grace.

The fireplace is a cave painting of childish soot
where little boys blow smoke and ash
from below the floors of stone.

AIMIE McALLESTER

A Liminal Life

Hands grasping for the shoreline
Borderline, not here and not there
Everywhere and nowhere, scared
The mist rolls in to cover the shore
I scream, almost bored in the sad-
ness of the sea, overwhelming me
Madness meanders on the beach
trying to reach me, but this riptide
has taken me, in silence it stole
me from the earth. I gasp when I
can breathe, hyperventilating
No one ever taught me how to swim
I just don't die in the waters when
I jump in, it's a wave of a magic wand
One moment here, the next undone
But the sea is a different beast
Rages more like the cosmos
Infinite and uncaring
than the sky, limited by
atmospheric conditions that
themselves have finite limits
Unlike the pressure of the ocean
pushing, pulling you down
I am caught too close by the waves
No one can see me from the coast
from I could once boast that I held
victory over melancholy, no more now
I sigh into the sea and am unbound

AIMIE McALLESTER

Ghosts in the Machine

The ghosts in the machine
are haunting me, hunting
for a piece of paradise
Rolled dice, snake eyes
It’s time for my luck
to change, rearrange
I’m looking for heaven
too, wonder if they’ve
found it yet, note to self
check for phantoms
Found them lining
my ribcage, fingertips
Picked up a pen, lips
red, pinned a poem
to my head, in quotes
“Left unread” turn
right, write about the time
you spent with your lover
over and over again
Make your own
paradise, lies
lining your ribcage
Fingertips flared
furiously typing
Crying about the
time your heart broke

AIMIE McALLESTER

Woke up yesterday
morning mourning
the loss of youth
Uncouth and loud-mouthed
Stuck still in the south
I write about too many
memories, tried therapy
stop telling me that
I’m not trying, I’m trying
I’m complying with the
pills and picking up the
refills, I want thrills
And chills down my spine
All I do is whine about
the banalities and
break my mind, where’s
the ghosts, are they gone?

AIMIE McALLESTER

Friendzoned

Note the memories knotted
too tightly in the neurons
The way the electricity
spritz and darts between
nerve endings when
I hold your hand
The minute diameter of
the distance between
me and you, my eyes too
true-blue and observant,
of the current between us
too urgent, curve and
twist and now it’s broken
I always say the unspoken
Wished I’d insisted
harder when you pulled away
Now too late, and anyway I’d never
force you to stay, the weather in
my own head, pressure,
body against body
it’s too much
like lead, without you I swing too
quick to elation, depression, back
again and again and again
I’m too good at pretending
But once my bluff is called
Too good at ending
what we prolonged

AIMIE McALLESTER

The Moment After Survival

The edges of reality flicker against my skin
I take a deep breath and try my best to
look within, there’s nothing, mere reflection
of all the millions of times I sinned
And I shatter like glass, voiceless;
at last the sky and I have become one
And I will myself to become undone

Aimie McAllester (also known as Sylvia Rose) was born in Houston, but raised in East Texas. She used to be a pharmacy technician, but is taking a break to focus on her writing. She just recently published her first poetry chapbook "The Gods Are Arguing In My Head", a collection that uses greek mythology to contextualize becoming whole despite trauma.

DOUGLAS VANDERGRAPH

A Gardener, At First

At first she made the ordinary mistake:
she gave grief a uniform
and called the stranger gardener.

Who else would be awake
among the beds of earth,
who else would know the paths
between the stones?

She had brought a question
heavy with the weight of a body:
where have they taken him?

He gave her only a name,
her own,
and all the soil of morning
became a place to stand.

The garden kept its work:
roots held fast,
leaves unfolded,
light went on arriving.

Resurrection did not make
creation less itself.
It made the common ground
impossible to call empty.

DOUGLAS VANDERGRAPH

Two Miles After Emmaus

The road looked the same going back:
the low wall,
the ditch where rain gathered,
a field already preparing
for the dark.

Nothing had been repaired
in the landscape.
The empire still had its roads.
The nails were still nails.

But a loaf, taken and broken,
had turned a borrowed table
into a place of recognition.

So they traveled by memory
and by the strange speed of joy,
carrying no proof
that could be folded in a pocket.

They could not keep his face
at the table.
They could tell the others
how the bread had passed
from hand to hand,
and how their hearts
had begun to burn
before they knew why.

The Lock on the Upper Room

Someone had pushed a chair
beneath the handle,
as though the room could be kept safe
by making it smaller.

The bread was still there.
So were the bowls and the people
who had watched their courage leave
without them.

He stood among them anyway.
Not at the threshold,
asking who would let him in,
but at the center
of the fear they had furnished.

Peace, he said,
and showed them wounds
that had not been erased
for the sake of the greeting.

Afterward, the chair remained
beside the door.
No one needed to move it quickly.
The lock had lost its argument.

DOUGLAS VANDERGRAPH IS A CHRISTIAN WRITER, SPEAKER, AND PODCASTER WHOSE POETRY AND ESSAYS EXPLORE SCRIPTURE, HOPE, KINDNESS, AND EVERYDAY LIFE. HIS WORK ENCOURAGES READERS TO CONSIDER HOW FAITH CAN BECOME VISIBLE THROUGH COMPASSION, PERSEVERANCE, AND SERVICE TO OTHERS.

SALLY MILLS

I know something

Other people know it too.
Some people know some of it.
Some people know it, but
haven't really thought it through.
I would tell you what it is,
but once you know it,
it becomes your burden too.
It would change you,
make you walk differently.
It has changed me.
I'm a little less petty now.
When someone is rude to me
(which happens in my line of work),
I'm a little more inclined to think
that they must be having a hard time,
as opposed to assuming they are
a horrible person.

We are each as fragile as a spider's web
on a summer morning,
speckled in dew,
ready to receive the early sun.

Be gentle.

SALLY MILLS

One Last Shot

A bronze whaler shark on the trail of his prey
wandered in from the sea to a Korean canal—
North Port Waterfront Park on the waterway:
2,000 people a day on holidays.
And now, will the story prove hopeful or fatal?

At first, they tried to force him out, drive him out,
although it's not clear how. The shark could not
find his own way out. And then there was doubt:
There must be a better way out.
Suspend operations! Let's give it more thought.

If forcing could harm him or make him aggressive,
perhaps they could gently push him with water from behind?
As long as the pushing was not too excessive.
Why, it worked before! They designed
a similar plan in Massachusetts, a state known to be progressive.

The first attempt failed; he went back inside.
The National Institute declared him stable.
But life in the canal would surely be suicide!
He knew he had to dig down deep and abide,
accept all their help if he was able.

The tiny suns dance
on top of the quiet sea.
Illumine my path.

SALLY MILLS

Dirty Dancing

Alice lost her mind. Just who does she think
she is, that Alice? Out there
on the dance floor? Flaunting,
flirting, flapping? Looks like she lost
a button there, hanging right out
of that sweater! Why, Fred the Custodian has to
avert his gaze, and that's not really fair
with all that he does
for this place. He's a lost
soul, that one. And there's Alice losing her
self-respect, her bearings, her
way. She'll lose
her voice if she keeps
singing that loud!

But wait!
What's happening? That music! Mam-
bo? Rumba? Rambo? And is that
Fred, sliding, gliding, hip-bumping
through the crowd? The disco ball
blinds, but Alice still finds him.

Ahhhh. The time of
her life!

SALLY MILLS

Let's Make a Pact

Let's just assume we are all
compromised. They got to us.
Every one of us. And we each
caved, understandably.
They were going to kill our
mother, our children, put our father
in prison, torture our partner. Something
that would break anyone (I know
it wouldn't take a lot
to break me), and then act
accordingly, disclose
accordingly. Keep the family secrets,
jewels, even closer. Reveal
even less. Close
the circle,
knowing.

Sally Mills is a poet and attorney from Downeast Maine. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in publications including *The New Verse News*, *The Main Street Rag*, *Sheila-Na-Gig*, *Rat's Ass Review*, *The Esthetic Apostle*, *The RavensPerch*, *Life and Legend*s, and *Mobius: The Journal of Social Change*. Her poem "Sunken Angel" was selected for the 2026 Page Gallery Art & Ekphrastic Poetry reading.



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Kinga Lipinska

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