

GRASSROOTS
POETRY
PROSE
ART

The Prairie Review

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CLARA WESTHOFF RILKE



Cover Art

Kinga Lipinska. Portrait of Clara Westhoff Rilke. Ink and pencil on watercolor paper, 11 x 14. 2026.

The Prairie Review

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EDITOR'S LETTER

Welcome to the latest issue of The Prairie Review!

I am thrilled that this Review has become a kind of special cartographer, drawing a unique poetic map that connects creatives and readers from the United States, Australia, Brazil, Iran, India, and beyond. We appreciate all the contributors who generously share their art with our growing community.

Please take your time to enjoy all the works published here. I want to highlight David Booth's great creative nonfiction piece, and I encourage you to explore the stunning visual art portfolio of our featured painter, Camille Silverman.

The Prairie Review continues as a digital magazine; however, hard copies are being seriously considered as we form ties with independent bookstores across the American Midwest region. We frequently receive requests for printed copies from our readers as well. I will be able to make an announcement the final decision on this matter later this year.

Live inspired,
Kinga Lipinska



And everyone I have known suddenly vanished
The storm lasted longer than necessary.

Faleeha Hassan

FALEEHA HASSAN

Let's Call It a Tree

Translated by Dikra Ridha

What I am drawing now is not a shadow
The cloud surrounded my last, saved days
And everyone I have known suddenly vanished
The storm lasted longer than necessary.

Yesterday I spoke to my mother
I stretched my hand at night
and removed from her the curtains of sleep
- 'The seeds of pomegranates have split.'

She replied: 'One will remain. It will not end up in a cockerel's beak,
plenty will grow from it.'

- 'I am scared, ' I told her.

Surprised, she said:

- 'Are poets scared?'

- 'I'm sad, I told her.

- 'These are habits of poets.'

- 'I fear even for the wall of the sky.'

- 'We built the sky with a word, just like they demolish it with a word;
you are my word.'

This is what my mother said.

FALEEHA HASSAN

As the others rest, sullen under the shade of their wishes
I seek the tree that still has not awakened from its sleep
The one that left us such a thin shadow.
It does not give us safety from the heat of our sins.

And now I
Spin the snow into a mask,
And prepare myself for what's to come, which is still far
And name myself, happiness.

Faleeha Hassan is a Pulitzer Prize and Pushcart Prize nominee. Member of IWA and Who's Who in America, Cultural Ambassador of Iraq, USA, winner of the Women's Excellence Award, winner of the Grand Jury Award of the SAHITTO, one of the Excellence selection committees, winner of the Women's Arts Award. SAHITTO AWARD JUDGING PANEL. And the winner of the HerStory Award from the Women's Federation for World Peace, NEW Jersey. d.fh88@yahoo.com

<https://www.faleehahassan.com/>

FALEEHA HASSAN

Not Maryam

Translated by Dikra Ridha

Father, I am not Maryam.
Not Maryam.
Despite that
The one you see
Utter between you,
I am not his mother
And he was not born from me
Yet the one called Jesus
belongs to me.

...

I am not Maryam, father
Not Maryam.
I buy my bread with my own tears
Every time
You don't feed me.
Your sky is grapes
And I have not a prophet's uncle
And my mother didn't sell me
For the Qibla* of her prayers.
Why then do I see the deaf
And blind
Fight me at my doorstep?

...

Not Maryam, father.
I am not Maryam.
I was not a sister to Harun *

FALEEHA HASSAN

My hands are my witnesses
They tire of shaking
the root of your palms
And I did not dream
of flour falling into my hands
The drink I brought
Is tasteful only to me.
What's with these horses
Bleeding and whining
At my sight?

...

I am not Maryam, Father.
I am not her.
Your women seek
me for the onset of labour.
And this face
Its features moulded
by the palm of the wind
is ruined by exile.
For the first dawn
I do not rise to deceit,
I am not hanged -
and have no fear.
I am not Maryam, father
I am not Maryam.
But I present myself
As a temple
Lest you claim
That I am Maryam.

* Qibla: the direction that a Muslim faces when performing their daily prayers.

* Harun: (Harun Al Rashid 766-809) His date of birth is debatable. The Thousand and One Nights tales were based on him and his imagination.

What If?

Translated by William M. Hutchins

What if Columbus hadn't discovered America?

I would be playing hide-and-seek with my daughters.

This afternoon, we would gather around a tray with cardamom-scented tea

And pastries as my brother,

Certainly, we expect him,

Taps lightly on the door and asks, "Is anyone home?"

We would laugh repeatedly at the jokes my students told at school,

While incense perfumes the room.

If Columbus had not discovered America,

I wouldn't keep the windows of my apartment closed,

To prevent fumes of opium from the neighbor lady's pipe from polluting it.

If he had not discovered it,

I would enjoy the scent of bread baking every morning

And not be obliged to trek through the woods to Walmart

To buy a loaf of bread and some cheese, after

Asking my young son, "Accompany me? Will you?"

He says: "I'm afraid to walk through the forest."

So, I trudge there alone.

If Columbus had not discovered America,

I would not take two trains and a bus to reach my university

and return the same way.

I would merely board a minibus

That takes me wherever I want.

If Columbus had not discovered America,

I would have slumbered all night long, lulled by

the breathing of my children;

FALEEHA HASSAN

I would not have suffered from the insomnia that afflicts me here.
If he had not discovered it,
I would receive my poetry collection a month after it is published,
Rather than waiting an entire year for three copies to arrive in the mail.
If he had not discovered it,
I wouldn't have spent three days sheltering from Hurricane Sandy
As it tried to rip the roof off my apartment,
using all the energy it collected from the waves and the wind,
While I held the shingles down with my prayers.
And. . . .
My God, when may I rest?
For twenty years, I've struggled on many fronts,
But no victories in sight, not yet.

.....

I've mourned with the dove,
Dogs have chased me,
I've expressed a teardrop
And wrapped myself in poems against fear and cold weather.
I've suspended my days from hooks of patience
That surely will collapse.
I've soaked in the raindrops of renunciation,
Repeatedly swallowed the cup of betrayal,
And . . .
There's no time for a warrior to relax!

FALEEHA HASSAN

The Futility of Protesting Near Bustling Cemeteries

Translated by William M. Hutchins

For the Most Important Person in My Life, My Son Ahmad

Preamble

Take my spirit for your shirt

And use my heart's arteries for shoelaces.

The Poem

My spirit patched with raw dreams,

My soft body blemished by war's scars,

My heart was crushed and crunched like

Leaves underfoot—

These are the sole signs of my existence

In a room that awaits a hurricane

That dreams of unleashing its gales.

My son,

Let me say tonight,

Objectively,

That I can't do anything more.

What happens,

Happens all the time.

What doesn't happen,

Never happens,

But we always paint a comely face

On life's hideous visage.

LYNN FITZGERALD

Without a Kiss

We cannot imagine defiance
yet rage is present and spills
across our nightstands
settles like a thin film in the corners
of our bedrooms. We do not know how
to break a rule; yet we begin to think about this
and know that if we dare, silence will follow
course through the house,
blow open doors
smash glasses
which we will soon sweep up
because we must make it right.
According to Scripture, to suffer
translates to the attainment of knowledge.
This, we have read, although no one asks what we know
presumed as it is that we are good
in our classes, listen to the point of boredom
balloons of tedium float past our eyes.
If nothing else, we have built our worlds
on books and a cup of tea with our mothers
----we are keen to learn society's rules--
although morality seems equivocal, we reflect
as we attend Sunday Mass.
We look too modest next to ladies
wearing wide brimmed hats, a brim that could hide a face
and white gloves that scream Madonna,
proper ladies?
To one another, sotto voce, we imagine
their dalliances.
We have read Lady Chatterley's Lover
with a flashlight while our sisters fall asleep.

Yet, we reserve our curiosity
remain self-possessed as we go about the day.
We've been cautioned to not sass or fret
and we comply because the consequence will be more silence
or worse, no good night kiss after prayers
and we could very well languish from guilt or despair
without this kiss
what we know of love is in this kiss
all we want is to be forgiven any trespass,
how else could we come to know the meaning of love.
all we want is to be forgiven any trespass,
how else could we come to know the meaning of love.

LYNN FITZGERALD

The Shape of Feeling

we don't know the shape of feeling
but we know what molds it from without
who hasn't sat in a theatre
as the curtain rises
witnessed the start and strut of the actors
across a stage, surrounded by black
the velvet of the drape
the faces of pure appearance.
I wait. I might rather see a puppet on a horse
some costume of a make-believe world,
no artful representation
instead, the distillation of a creator.
I could sit and watch a story unfold
or leave and walk away
into a different measure of darkness
a dark no one could conjure
sleep, the dream forgotten
until dawn's rhythm
feeling my way.

LYNN FITZGERALD

Reading

If only I could have you the way
I have books

I would turn your pages
stopping briefly to admire the frontispiece

then leaf through you to touch
the hand stitches sewn inside

careful not to disturb the delicate binding,
the threading together of an author's thoughts.

As a filmmaker might observe an image,
unreel the spool, I would pause to notice

the lettering, the white space
and my eyes would travel down

that I might fancy the script, admire
the parchment, the kerning of letters

I would brush each page of you
with my fingertips

I might even find a folio of interest and stop, placing my index finger over your lips

each written page an elixir
to slake my unquenchable thirst

LYNN FITZGERALD

How marvelous every sheet to read,
to muse or mull, to thumb through

with my right hand while clutching
the quire with my left, each page a delight

until I clasp the final leaf, I would hesitate
and ask, did you like it?

The flutter, the ruffle, the leafing through those pages with my fingers.

MICHAEL MAZOCK



She Beyond the Shell

Adonis wanders along secluded shore
startled by an apparition
yet material—
the goddess's garment
caught on a branch
of an unseen tree
left here to hang
flapping fluently in the breeze

shorn she slips
into scallop shell—

her shell he cannot see
only his own

he lifts his to his ear
waves whisper weeping
gentle breeze bears
a scent's ascent
evoking her embrace

before she'd shed her shell

MICHAEL MAZOCK



Three Score and Ten

Who arrives along life's journey?

Cartographer

Companions

Gatekeeper

nearby

Elkhart in Diana—*mihšiiwiateehi*

heart's maiden Roe

Max howls at the Moon

cards spread—

patterns live

turning 70 on Bastille

midway through life's journey

does not stay still

MICHAEL MAZOCK

what is the midpoint of a life
that has not yet found its endpoint?

not to reach beyond the end
but to linger at limits
with my guide—
my teleological soul

faithful companion Max
celebrates birthdays
cake candles singing
leaping on laps

I see through his eyes
mirror posture
mirror gestures

our tails wag—
mine unseen

singing the birthday song
stuffed crocodile—Sobek
uplifts Max into levitation
July 14 witnesses the miracle

cake and courses spread
patterns return

Time arrives
moments march
processing through
drawn forward
toward inevitability

MICHAEL MAZOCK

not by fate or accident
but by meaning's order

this birthday hums its song
its notes vibrating
along a cord
that binds sun and stars and soul
each note a self-contained chord
each chord composing an unfinished symphony
improvised across a lifetime

everything changes
not as revolution's eruption
but as tectonic shift
through slow evolution
from charted constellations
toward unmapped consciousness

Elk Roe Moon
High Priestess
Goddess

inside
outside
veil

patterns found
when unforced—
simply opening

KIM REED

The Oldest Seed, in free verse septets

The oldest found seed to germinate and become a living plant
Lay quietly in King Harod's palace at Masada
For 2000 years without water or weight or mold or rust
No footprint or animal forager, no bee or fresh earth to comfort
Crush or devour, the date palm kernel avoided all consumption
All corruption, in stillness and integrity, a promise, a gift
Survival, patient waiting for a moment of discovery, planting

Witness to the destruction of the Jews resisting the Romans
Even as the last lamp burning for the Judeans sputtered
Many fled in diaspora across the desert, the Dead Sea
The world, a seed remained with a fertile kernel to nourish
Two millennial ages passing above the silent battlements
When a young hand, gentle in excavation, found intact
Potential, the question of how to water and ignite life again

Though palaces and forts may fall and burn, a seed remained
That could nourish the future from clusters of cream flowers
Thrusting a shoot that became a root to the ancient world
There to be found in the waterless dust of tourist tracks in time
As a future only opens in a prayer between generations
Sharing water, sharing bread, sharing wine and charoset
Beside a date palm, under stars that guide us to peace

KIM REED

Letter to Rosanna

Translated by Kim Reed

An aria my open bright pearl
in its shell like a tear

Rosanna, I come from another land

where the sun strikes to death in its heat
a perfect summer rages in the fields
merry grass sings like a blond beer girlfriend
the fragrant hay is as sacred as a god.

Rosanna, do you want to come to my land?
I'm the only one here crying and complaining
the earth Gaia takes me away from herself
on the border painted with tears
I call you, I call you, I call you.

and in my eyes, slowly it dies
my perfect summer, the summer of fire
on my parched lips still full of thirst
songs die like virgins struck in the side

a huge silence with a white belly
surrounds me and tempts me
but I don't want to see tranquility!
send it away, I am a mad woman.

the sun killed his mother and father
now he wants to drink my summer blood

Rosanna, the long day
is about to die in my hand...

KIM REED

Secret Rossana

Translated by Kim Reed

I've seen in your eyes
a strange memory,
(And in the evening it would come up to you
like a snake on its hips)
memory of things left behind
just, still in pain
not yet, don't forget.

I passed my hand
on the Eyes of your memories,
on your forehead, on your mouth
on your white breasts.

In the evening I heard it
weave like a bell,
then like lightning in clear water
I heard your scream
sideways on my kidneys.

But I didn't fall to the ground
a white goat

Interior vertigo
complete fun took me away.

Serene after our tornado.
in the evening I fell on the lawn
under fog.

Note: Nella Nobili is remembered as a lesbian, poet, worker and antifascist. Nella was born in 1926 in Bologna, Italy. As a teenager she lived in France. As an adult who survived World War II, she returned to Bologna where she associated with anti-fascist and communist artists in the city's café and studio arts circles. In Rome, she felt she was not taken seriously. She returned to France in 1953 and continued to write throughout the 1960s and 70s. Nella was criticized and dismissed by Simone DeBeauvoir as clumsy and immature, rejected by the leading feminist writer in France. Poor, a lesbian with no university affiliation who dressed like a farm or factory worker, Nella worked and suffered from depression. Nobili committed suicide in 1985. In English speaking countries she was not considered publishable during decades where "commie dyke" was enough insult to silence history. Her poems in French and Italian have no published English translations until today.

Translated poems from a published collection, Nobili, Nella (2018). *Ho camminato nel mondo con l'anima aperta* (in Italian). RCS MEDIAGROUP. Available on Amazon Kindle and Audio. As an act of poetry, the two poems translated into English may differ from the original phrase to achieve the passion of the poem.

KIM REED

The Corn Goddess

The corn goddess begins gifting the seed
In mud and pain, woman toils in the soil
Nurturing the people for the future
They deny her, accusing her of witchcraft
Driving her away or back into the earth
Where she continues her secret presence
Helping our kind remember how to behave
Not to grind the seed corn, not just to kill
For hunger, but to plant and love in season
Three sisters, corn, beans, and squash

CHRIS FOSTER

Ink to Pen

Ink is to pen like
lose is to win,
Like 9 is to 10
One step from becoming. One breath
from within.

Ink to pen is what
Holy is to sin,
Like break is to bend—
For nothing is strengthened
Until it can mend.

Ink is to pen is
What silence is to song,
Like night is to dawn—
The waiting before
The world carries on.

Ink to pen is what
Like roots are to rain—
The deeper they're buried,
The richer the grain.

Ink is to pen is
What truth is to scars,
Like oceans to shore—
Each leaves its own mark,
Yet returns wanting more.

CHRIS FOSTER

Ink is to pen
Like hand is to glove
Like hate is to love.

Ink is to pen is
What questions are to faith,
Like stars are to sky—
Not there for the answers,
But teaching us
why.

Ink to pen is what
The soul is to skin,
The unseen made known.
A story is never
The words alone—

For ink is to pen
As the heart is to life:
That outlives the writer,
And survives every strife.

ROGER CAHAK

Bittersweet Harmony

I seem to have fallen in love
with a young man whose predilection defies convention.
I am not his one and only
and yet,
I am beloved in his heart.

Our communion makes my heart sing.
My eyes well with tears of joy
as butterflies dance in my stomach.
My body tingles from his touch.

I cherish each moment
that I gaze into his soulful brown eyes,
feel his soft lips on mine,
and nestle into his inviting arms.

We have come to know the other fully,
strengthened by our candor,
buoyed by our resilience,
and accepting of our shadows.

Despite difference of generation,
culture, and circumstance,
we are kindred in thought,
heart, and spirit
and I relish the beautiful contradictions
that punctuate our unfolding story.

And yet –

ROGER CAHAK

He shares his daily life with another.
Mine is not the face he sees when he awakens,
and he is but a vision
when I close my eyes to slumber.

Our time together is pure bliss,
and then – poof – he's gone:
back with his nesting partner
and I am alone.

Have I no self-respect?

Did I wantonly compromise my values
to experience connection,
validation, pleasure?

Or have I simply outgrown
ideological malarkey?

Maybe both contentions are true.

I feel threatened by others
I fear are more worthy of his attention,
yet I know that sex is not love
and cannot supplant its primacy.

I tell myself I am not an alternative or afterthought,
that my presence is intentional,
that I am an integral piece
in a complex puzzle.

ROGER CAHAK

He is often in my thoughts
and lives verdantly in my heart
as I painstakingly learn to shift from default to design
and surrender to the gift
that is our bittersweet harmony.

Can it be that our story
is not defined by exclusivity,
but by the unison of our heartbeats?

I reason that jealousy
is not to be feared
but cradled tenderly,
its undulation natural and expectant.

Loving another longer or differently
doesn't mean loving me less.

I wonder if my declarations
are right and true
or if I'm just rationalizing,
waxing Pollyanna,
ignoring the tempest within.

Uncertainty and ambiguity
are ubiquitous ogres
in the tapestry of life.
Some questions
must remain unanswered.

ROGER CAHAK

So convention be damned.

Despite my fear of heartbreak,
I have chosen to embrace
a Byzantine love
that champions abundance
and bridles scarcity.

It is a love
that grounds me in the here and now
instead of some aspirational version of nirvana.

You see,
today is the blessing,
tomorrow but a dream.

KAREN KROTZER

Mountain Passage

A mass exodus of
Refugees seek safety in
Numbers, leave former lives
Behind. Whatever their reasons,
Whether war, poverty, famine,
Or persecution, they risk
Everything, and bring nothing
But determination, the will
To survive, in search
Of a better life.

Troops of soldiers steadily
March onward through the
Gap despite harsh weather
And dwindling supplies. Whether
Protecting their homeland, or
Invading their neighbors, they
Forge ahead to triumph
Over their enemy on
The other side with
The element of surprise.

A hoard of people,
Including laborers and guides,
Climb to the summit.
Whatever their reasons, whether
Adventurers who seek thrills,
Scientists in search of
Discoveries, or treasure hunters
Who desire riches, they
Lead others, motivated by
The hope of fame.

KAREN KROTZER

Faithful pilgrims slowly ascend
To reach the shrine.
They eagerly await their
Moment to pray, whether
For a miracle, for
Comfort and peace, or
To dedicate life and
Soul to their religion.
Their fervor and devotion
Is palpable to others.

Through story and song,
Mountains are revered by
Many cultures across the
World for their mystique.
All who make the
Arduous trek through the
Mountain passage, for whatever
Reason and despite any hardships,
Are ultimately in search
Of a life-changing answer.

KAREN KROTZER

Biting Off More Than Can Be Chewed

(Architects of Our Own Demise)

If we as humans
Are superiorly more intelligent
Than other animal species,
Then why can we not recognize
The error of our ways?

Our savior-like complex
Compels us to believe
We can create solutions
To problems which we
Never even fully comprehend.

As masters of logical
Thought, we should foresee
Long-term consequences of
Choices and decisions which
Lead to our demise.

How can we continue
To ignore carelessness, support
Greed, and dismiss warnings
Solely for the sake
Of short-term progress?

Because hindsight is 20/20,
Let historical references of
Past follies and failures
Teach us how to
Save us from ourselves.

We cannot remain blind
To what is occurring
All across our planet;
We are already witnessing
Changes that impact us.

Despite so many ideological
Differences, will humanity ever
Come to an accord to
Cease biting off more
Than can be chewed?

KAREN KROTZER

On the Hunt for Love

Set your marks!

Aim!

Fire!

Cupid's arrow

Flies straight ahead

To meet the heart.

What a deadly hit!

The victim falls;

The hunter strikes

The rich, red oil

That oozes from

The joints and skin

Where the thorns

From the bed

Of white roses

Pierce it. Slowly,

Drop by drop,

It stains the many

Innocent ones below

Trembling with fear

From the cruelty of

Such a lustful hunter.

What an outrage

Is this life,

Is this love!

KAREN KROTZER

The Wonder of Woman

Oh, woman of wonder!
Your countless curves
Contrast the strength
Of your determined gaze.
Your delicate features
Soften the warrior headdress
That frames your face.

You set aside
The safety of lenses,
Facing all demands head-on
With sweat on brow
And tear on cheek,
Secretly succumbing to
A momentary sadness.

Always the planner
And deep in thought,
Creativity bubbles; ideas
Carefully become knit together.
As you meditate,
A blue of calm,
Not sadness, envelopes you.

You are beauty embodied
Despite the drooping of feathers
And the blood-letting
While turning the page
For the next meal
On the calendar
Of your family story.

KAREN KROTZER

You plow through exhaustion.
Toiling tirelessly at
Your task at hand,
You stare stoically
At the blood stains
Forming on freshly folded linens.
The chips will fall as they may!

You breathe deeply a
Single sigh of remorse.
You quietly question whether
You are paralyzed with
Fear of societal norms,
Or simply a martyr
In your own mind.

A former elementary school teacher, **Karen Krotzer** lives in Manassas, VA. She grew up in Lancaster, PA, began writing poems in the fourth grade, and knew she wanted to be a writer by middle school. She has been published by Great Lakes Poetry Press, the Tom Bird Institute, Hutton Publications (nominated a poem for the Pushcart Prize), several publications through Local Gems Press, The RavensPerch, Retrograde Review, The Miserere Review, Grande Dame Literary & Art Journal, in the Common Language Project: Time anthology, internationally in Poets of the Parthenon by the Creative Writing Academy of Greece, and pending in Top-Shelf Literary Magazine.

**DEBRA
RODRIGUEZ**



"He Said He Loved Me."
Acrylic on canvas, 14"x11"



"The Water Is Perfect"
Acrylic on canvas, 20"x20"

CAROLYN ADAMS

Rain at My Window

Winter-dead in the spring,
witch-pains
pin me to the bed.

Outside, torrid green simmers,
constant rain.
Mountain fills window,
earth, rich and dark,
veined with rivers.

Near dawn, light shifts.
From columns of water,
a dead thing speaks,
a contagion.
If I deny that presence,
the mirror may crack.
Or maybe I won't remember
my debt to the weather.

CAROLYN ADAMS

Woman

(Erasure poem culled from Mary Baker Eddy's Pulpit and Press)

All praise to the winds,
the leaves, the
woe. Urging
this miracle toward
consummation,
prayers distill
the finest flowers
of history.
Brothers could break
the altar, its fires,
our hope.

But woman came from the clouds.

CAROLYN ADAMS

Crow Hours

Crows flower a tree
in fog-washed hours
before something worse
happens.

There's a Man I Can't Get Rid Of

He reeks my hair, my skin.
His barbed memory stings
where it touches me.

BUNNY GOODJOHN

Lemon + Lemon + Lemon

How this day sails on my need to catch a fall of Ginko leaves
with neither pad nor pen. I chant "*green tea in a lemon*

cup" - and a reel of lemons spin. Six years old and desperate
for the gifts sickness brings—mother to myself, hot honey and lemon.

My father on pay day rejecting my clamor for sweetness
(glass jars of Penny Chews, Fruit Salads) in favor of lemon

drops in a paper bag. His crouching—eye-to-eye—to feed me,
sugar dusting his fingers, my lips; I suck, crave that lemon

shock. Twelve in a yellow dress, my coins feed the campsite's one-armed
bandit (my muttered heathen plea: *Lemon + Lemon + Lemon*),

my fledgling addiction trembling like a prayer flag, small and bright.
Each reel's spin delivers a fruit . . . a *Lemon and a Lemon*

and Cherry blossom all down the Mall, our marriage not yet cracked
open: beers at *L'Enfant*, the sodden labels, wheat and lemon.

A gurney's clatter down a corridor, my poisoned ovaries,
the nurse's afterthought: a warm blanket, cellular, lemon.

In dreams my hands hold mandarins, tangerines, sweet satsumas.
How, blind-eyed, I bend to viciousness, the quartered flesh of lemons.

All moments decay, some quicker than others. Old days molder
like cut-price oranges in a bowl. Memories, like lemons,

need salt, need a strong jar at the back of the larder. How else
might we survive our long winters without the tang of lemons?

BUNNY GOODJOHN

Three Sisters Archipelago

I am not convinced
 we were ever taken in
 by the blood

over water argument
 that we shared anything
 beyond a flood

of our mother's amniotic fluid
 and a faint sense
 of obligation we three

an archipelago of warring islands
 our shores lapped
 by the same chaotic sea

unable to say what we need
 we endlessly snipe
 from our bunkered sidelines

seven decades
 spent scheming
 spent setting mines

we lob versions of truth like grenades
 until tragedy has us beaching
 our dinghies on each other's sand

this one's bankruptcy
 my botched suicide
 her husband with his heavy hands

each armistice ticking like a bomb
 under the debris of old transgressions
 we blow and row furious to our anchored ships

to our cabins where we slam the doors
 hurl our dramatic selves onto beds
 adolescent rage still stinging on our thinning lips

BUNNY GOODJOHN

Glimpses

My mother is barefoot, painting roses
along the rusted edge of a water butt,
the hem of her nightgown heavy with dew.

She's been dead nine months now
unless we two are in those times
that unfold slow before remembering.

In that curved space, she is in her kitchen
microwaving a plastic tray of salmon
and broccoli: she is strolling down the garden,
the radio tinny from the windowsill;
she is confiding in the greenhouse.

And then she's dead again.
A shock, a void.
She's in a casket
in a nightgown my sister bought,
new lace pricking at her throat.

Until she is my mother sipping Baileys
from her one remaining stem glass.
She is unwrapping a toffee.

She's ashes, bagged
in the undertaker's closet
awaiting interment with my father.

She's dead more often now.
She is my dead mother
until in one reckless moment,
she isn't.

BUNNY GOODJOHN

The Morning After Renee Good is Murdered by an Ice Agent

Early a.m. and the Roomba tells me
it is full and searching for home.
It struggles to mount the hallway rug
on its way to dock, to empty its dirt,
to continue its eternal cleaning.
My feed is full of Minneapolis
and its mayor, of a man in a mask
killing a woman & of neighborhood
cats caught on Ring cameras.
A slow stream of random posts
for protein powders and how
a deep squat can save your life
& reels of good people on the street
demanding something be done.
A post of the bloody headrest.
What could wipe clean a stain like that?
A neighbor seeks a massage therapist,
the release of the Epstein files & then
a news clip of the President,
his filthy tight mouth tonguing
more lies above a post on Orwell
who told us all this was coming our way.

BUNNY GOODJOHN

A new widow sobs greyscale on the snow,
the black dog silent in the road.
A woman is suing her landlord
over spider bites & a man I don't know
tells me the chick should have been home
with her kids, not obstructing the law,
& Lola, a shelter dog dressed
in yellow AI feathers, is transformed
into showgirl fleeing euthanasia.
Roomba empties her dirt, tells me
she is calibrating, recharging.
Kristi Noem in that Stetson tells me
the poet was a domestic terrorist.
The Roomba heads out, empty now,
recharged, its casters spinning
on the hallway rug, a map
of the house's endless dirt
unfurling in its memory.

Bunny Goodjohn is published in both poetry and fiction. Her poetry has appeared most recently at One Art Poetry, Rust and Moth, Mom Egg Review and Sheila-Na-Gig. Her collection Bone Song (Briery Creek Press) came out in 2015. Goodjohn has also published two novels: Sticklebacks and Snow Globes (Permanent Press) 2007 and The Beginning Things (Underground Voices) 2015.

<http://www.bunnygoodjohn.com>

ALISON KATON

Farewell, My Brother

In Memoriam Kent S. Katon

You taught me:

To explore music outside pop banalities
discovering dazzling melodies emanating from remote hertzian waves;
To prepare bread from flour and salt in our hands
Worth all the “live long day” effort;
To live harmoniously in the universe
Decades before didactic advertising slogans.

You and I fought:

The poison of our family misdeeds,
Greed and betrayal seeped into our bones.
Subtle vicious revenge
Only Celtic blood knows how to exact.

You abandoned us:

As we listened to King Lear’s rages in the dewy dusk,
I sensed our clan’s eternal restlessness
In your tapping feet and jerking hands.
Escaping unbearable burden of Midwest expectations -

You heeded:

The West’s siren call,
Wandering across the Plains
Following Northern Lights,
Meandering along TexMex border.

You discovered her:

In pure mountain air of a small university town in the Rockies,
Finding love with a woman escaping turmoil of Salvadorean violence,
She created a home we were incapable of providing.
Your radical politics mellowing to
Amused cynicism with rebel spirit ember glowing.

You and I made peace:

Twilight of your life brought silent space for communion,
Our fractures too deep to truly heal,
A wary truce achieved.
Farewell, my brother,
Our reunion is but a waking dream away.

ALISON KATON

Price of a Soul

Once, a lifetime ago,
She lay in bed listening:
Cicadas trumpeting their invasion of
Cornfields stretching endlessly across vast flat land,
Amber shell casings littering backyard come morn.
And she dreamed of escape.

Enthralling East Coast metropolis,
Blue grey dawn rising above the Avenue,
Arms encircled, heads whisper close,
She fell in love -
He made her laugh.

He promised her wonderful:
Rambling under elm tree canopies
in Park's midnight perfume,
Opal rays flit across their bodies,
Thrilling violation of archaic mores.

Conviction their spirits united,
Reborn a soaring goddess - - -
Until happening upon his coupling
Nymph secretary on her desk,
Hoax revealed, blackness engulfing.

Dawn arose unconquered
Abandoning Gotham's sand-shift realities,
Virgin eyes burnt to ashes,
She returned to Midwest Dictates
Mastering how to bend, break, exploit.

She now reigns in corner office:
Views across aqua pasture white boats grazing,
Requisite awards flank onyx marble credenza.
Global corporations seek her advice,
She manipulates justice and humans alike.

Millions annually possessing
Househusband, son, daughter, canine companion.
She feigns homespun self-deprecation,
Real humility long extinct
Never to return.

Mistress of all her world,
Her soul united to the Dark Prince.
Can she redeem it?
Does she even care?

MATT NADBRZUCH

Thanks for Nothing

Are you there, God?
It's me, Matt
I wish I could be one of the cool atheist kids on Reddit
Tipping their fedora at all the passerby
But I'm not and I never will be
So I guess I'm stuck with you
You never promised me anything so maybe I have no reason to be upset
But damn, you did me dirty
Struck down by an errant tick and its poisons
Before I even reached the starting line
What did I do to deserve all this?
Up to that point, only what I was 'supposed to'
Behaving and doing homework
What a waste of fucking time
My only detention was from holding a snowball
I didn't even get the joy of throwing it
I should've been an asshole
They get everything
Imagine being sick
Then imagine being sick with conditions that don't officially exist
I was cast out to the medical badlands
Forced to confer with MAGA Karens who don't believe in vaccines
How embarrassing
Father, why have you forsaken me?
I think you stole that from System of a Down
(Sneaky God)
25 years of illness and life hasn't killed me yet
Though sometimes I wish it would
If you really cared you'd help me out with that
But all life is sacred right?
Kind of self-righteous of you
So where does that leave us?
I don't like you and you apparently don't like me very much
Should we still give this a shot or go our separate ways?
Maybe we should give it some thought
After all, you've got eternity and I've still got 40 fucking years of this
Until we decide, I guess I'll talk to you later
Though I'm not sure if you're still listening

MATT NADBRZUCH

Senior Year

2001

Living in Rogers Park

Down the street from The Armadillo's Pillow

(They sell books, you know)

Attending Jones College Prep

(Near north side represent!)

So very tired of school

Ready for a new chapter new people

New start begins with the turn of a car key

Driving for the first time ever

Driving here there and everywhere

South side

North side

Springfield

You name it

Evening outings with friends to the theater

Cool wind brushing against my face

Lord of the Rings at midnight?

Evil Dead 2 at the glamorous Music Box?

Count me in!

Studying hard

Getting ready for college

It's so close I can taste it

What's this?

Weird things are happening

Blacking out

Falling down

Trouble sleeping

But why?

Brain not working right

Hard to think

Can't control it

Mustn't tell anyone

Ignore it

Must study and nothing else

Surely this is nothing

It's not the beginning of the end of my life or anything...

MATT NADBRZUCH

Remnants of a Life Once Lost

Here lie the remnants of a life once lost

Remnant may bring up images of something rotten and decayed

Here this is not the case however

Instead, we have a multitude of lovingly-crafted books for a child with his whole life ahead of him

Purchased by a mother for her son to engage in his favorite activity in mid-80s
Warsaw, Poland

A comic strip of a talking chimp and his friends traversing the world and having
zany adventures wherever they go

A beautifully-illustrated adaptation of The Arabian Nights

A story about a young boy who awakens at midnight (the witching hour) and is
scared of everything around him

Until he's welcomed into the safe arms of his parents

Heavy material for a four year old

But it may have ignited my lifelong love for the spooky and supernatural

These were seedlings that represented a life that was snuffed out before it could
reach fruition

(I have these wonderful books, yet I've been told that life behind the Iron Curtain
was a hellscape of infinite suffering. Go figure!)

Would life have been better if we didn't make it to the States?

Not necessarily, but it couldn't have been much worse

What happened, you may ask?

Well, a life-ruining tick bite in high school, toxic infections for 25 years, toxic family,
toxic living situations

Why, there was enough toxicity to make System of a Down blush!

Let's not forget the toxic relationships

You haven't lived until you've been screamed at by an absurd maniac

Then had sex with that same maniac

(Actually, I don't recommend this at all...just date nice people)

MATT NADBRZUCH

I travelled the United Nations looking for love
Mexico, France, Peru, The Philippines
Counting notches on the bedpost was fun at the time but it means nothing if you
end up where you started
What if I stayed in Poland and married a nice Polish girl and had some nice Polish
kids?
Sure, I would've had to go to church a few times a year and pretend to be Catholic
But I could've continued my Satanic rituals in the comfort of my own home
As is my right
Hey, at least I would've belonged somewhere for once
(Just kidding about the Satan stuff...maybe?)
Man, if I had stayed in Warsaw I could've been on my way to running that town
My mother had just received her Master's and was on her way to being a big
shot at the university
I probably would have attended the best of schools
I completed preschool there and word is, I greatly enjoyed the experience
I have the photos to prove it
They might be the first thing I grab if my house was on fire
Second would be my comic book collection
What would I do with a worthless copy of X-Men #37?
Absolutely nothing
But it reminds me of a time when life still held hope
And who knows, maybe I would've left Poland anyway
Perhaps it wouldn't have been big enough for my ambitions
But at least it would have been of my own accord

Maybe this is a pathetic wish
In fact, I'm a bit ashamed to share it
But I wish I never got on that plane in...what was it...1988?
Although it was necessary at the time
Maybe I'll wake up to find the last 38 years have just been a long, bad, American
dream

MATT NADBRZUCH

I Can't Stop Smoking You

I prefer you over any human being save for my mother
Although on some days, even that is debatable

You bring me so much pleasure
Does that mean I love you?
It depends
Can a slave love its master?
In my case: yes

I would choose an evening with you over being with a woman
I was introduced to you by a woman in fact
I wish I never met either of you
Twin toxicities poisoning my life
But the past is past and what's done is done

I always wanted some remorse from your end
But I know you're not capable of it
So maybe this poem is a waste of time
Just ramblings into the ether
But perhaps it will help me forgive you
And maybe that's enough

I know it's possible to quit you
But it seems harder than climbing Everest
So it seems I'm stuck with you
As you force your toxic joy into me

Matthew Nadbrzuch was born in Warsaw, Poland and currently resides in the Chicagoland area. He received a degree in Creative Writing from the University of Illinois at Chicago and has been involved in a variety of creative endeavors. These include short films, sketch and stand-up comedy, and poetry. He can be reached on Instagram at @matthew.nadbrzuch

SHERRIE SHAO

My poem (Feb.15, 2026)

My poem is
Not for you
Neither for the cheering that collects
Bird chirping in a quiet winter day
Or for angers that make
Yelling a righteous tool to fight

My poem is
Fragile
Like the flower pedals in shapes and colors
Singing their eulogy and elegy in short days

My poem is
A closure
We will never reach
A thunderous cry in midnight
Endless tears a heart can ever
Hold and pour

My poem is
Not a mediator
Not a path to peace
My poem is
A fightback
For answers never received
For lies never punished
My poem is
A broken crystal bowl
Its shards ready to pierce

My poem is
All I have

SHERRIE SHAO

Unmooring (Feb.11, 2026)

Faces of liars
Men and women in my life
All pile up
Overlapping their downcast eyes
They know more truth than I do

Of all the music and songs and poems and paintings
I hear read see
They know a different version
They always know better

They claim, always
Their hearts are wounded
They have more tears
at midnight
They sweat more
They endure more
• I no longer know the truth
They always know better

I can only hold
A mirror
Reflects light even at midnight
With sharp eyes seeking
Conscience
• nowhere to hide

Their lances pierce through my mirror
They jolly dance day and night
Rock and rolling songs, busy fabricating a safer net
Their hedonic gaiety
Silences me
They always know more truth
They are only calculating
What they have missed
They are the judges of
A world
I do not understand

SHERRIE SHAO

Capital City (6/4/2026)

This city is ugly
Even with all the roses planted along
Irrigated roads, rainbow edges
Fancy cars, rainbow dust
Each bears the best
Industrially

People, once carefree
Now stressed, wary of jokes
Juvenile faces
Compete for youthfulness
Smiles,
Load with intentions
Lost their innocence

I saw a one-day-old baby
With a weight unbearably light

Masks rejecting sunlight
Buildings deflecting moonlight
Lovers adrift in neon light
Their stories nowhere to be found

Poetry has long fled
Its exultant days
Some thirty-seven years ago

I'm exhausted,
Parsing truth from myth,
Reflecting on the decision to leave
Long, long time ago,
With the thought
Of never return

Home

* "Thirty-seven years ago", June 4, 1989 was when the Tiananmen Square massacre took place. It remains a forbidden topic in China. Most younger generations are unaware of it because of strict censorship and tight restrictions on information.

SHERRIE SHAO

Infinite Silence (July 18, 2026)

I wonder if you feel it
In your immobile limbs
In your indistinct gaze
In your inaccessible hearing
Can you see I'm here
Trying to feel you
Out of years
Out of miles
Out of silky skins we share

Can love transcend
Can love sustain
When noise clamors, so huge
When we forget silence exists
When expressing means nothing
When night and day mixes

Just you and me
With infinite silence
With nothing under control

CECIL SAYRE

How to Make a Fist

At birth, I taught my son how to make a fist
Because I never knew what to do with my hands

They were strange birds fluttering, struggling
On the ends of my skinny wrists

Bobbing into the air for freedom as I spoke
I hid them in my pants pockets

To my father's mocking shame
Of playing pocket pool

He taught me how to make a fist
How not to curl the thumb into the palm

He said that would break my thumb
When fighting another man

I just kept my fists in my pockets
And waited forever to see him throw a punch

All I ever saw him hold was my mother's hands
A gentleness he never showed or taught to me

Now as he dies, his hands jump and twist and bob in the air
And collide with mine, entangling fingers and thumbs,

As I fight to hold them, to calm him, to give him rest
But he resists, and tells me *No, no, no.*

CECIL SAYRE

After the Soldiers Leave

After the soldiers leave,
she digs, with her fingers, for her husband,
for the words in his pockets, and soon,
because only love digs a deep grave,
she is brushing the fabric of his shirt.

After the soldiers leave,
she struggles with his body, straddling him,
her feet caught in the narrow spaces
she's dug around his hips,
her bare toes curled under his weight.

After the soldiers leave,
she pulls from his dirt-filled pockets
the folded, blood-stained papers,
delicately easing them apart, opening them
as carefully as the first time he tried holding her hands.

After the soldiers leave,
she spreads her husband's poems on the ground
beside the mounds, like wrinkled, white sheets,
and sweeps aside the moist earth
so the sun can lie in their worn creases.

CECIL SAYRE

Carrying the Weight

He held the world on his shoulders
upside down, standing on his head, trying
to impress the smiling woman beside him
in photograph after photograph
black and white proof
of his strength and love

They were young then
and the world was light
the nothingness of a dream
such as love could make of troubles
He could bounce the world into the air
with one hand, holding her with the other

We, their children, were never
witnesses to this miraculous act
coming into existence one by one
only later when he carried something
more important on his shoulders
his feet ever firmer on the ground

CECIL SAYRE

Acts

My hand has rested many times on the good book,
and other times my hand has rested on the good book,
many nights I've lost turning its pages,
thinking on the meanings of its words.

That thinking leaves me lost the way I have become lost
moving behind a mule, turning the hard earth,
while my mind turns in circles,
half the field plowed before I know it.

Such thoughts have left me believing
certain people do mean to commit acts
against others in this world,
but for the rest of us, things just happen.

Your mother taught me to read, same as she's teaching you,
and some days I wish she hadn't taught me. Maybe
there is too much to know, maybe more than we need to know,
more than the farming my father taught me and my brother,

like, is a sin still a sin if it's not written in a book?
Is it enough in your heart to know a sin, a wrong
like a fist squeezing your chest threatening to burst you
like Old Tom Jenkins can do a Red Delicious?

Or is it only in writing we learn the full evil of Man,
only learn then how wrong our deeds?
not the wrong, son, of taking an extra stick of candy
or hiding an extra card in your hand,

though both are wrong and you shouldn't do,
the doing of either rooted in the ruthlessness of desire.
No, I'm talking about not doing right
when you know you can, know you should,

CECIL SAYRE

maybe something as simple as putting your hand on a man's shoulder
and stopping him from walking too far,
or maybe rescuing him from the deep end of the swimming hole
where a whirlpool has sucked him under.

It's wrong not to help, we are each other's brother,
but is it so wrong it's a sin?
What good in saving one man, even your brother,
when two might surely die?

Why not let one man pass and let the other continue
in the dead man's steps? What harm to the world then?
Because I have seen a man pulled under,
seen him struggle against the whirling water,

his hands grasping for a tree root, something to pull himself free,
his bride-to-be standing on the banks, screaming.
I have known the fear that refuses to let one help
lest harm come to them too,

slipped on the wet rocks, felt the rushing water push me back,
known the moment when one finally acts
with no good coming from it at all, just a body
to hold under the arms, drag onto the muddy grass, leave at her feet.

The Bible teaches us many things, some hard to believe,
some so true we can't help but believe them.
Certain people do commit wrongs against others,
Cain truly may have slain Abel,

but I believe Eve and the apple and the lost
of Eden were things that just happened.
And I believe both are still at work in this world,
people planning and committing wrongs against each other

while the rest of us are swept along in an unstoppable river,
thick as blood.

After Tuolumne Meadows

A Painting

The orange at the horizon is just sunset. What looks like smoke drifting beyond the tree line isn't smoke but long, flat clouds purpling, making soft incursions into a sky of late blues and tuft-white cumuli coming apart in the raking light of end of day. Tules and sedges and rushes grow in a meadow, in a marsh. Lining the far edge of the meadow made marsh from snowpack, some gnarled and some crooked, and some denuded and some leafy, and bent into stands one windy day, these western trees, juniper maybe, lodgepole pine, resist personification as custodians with no traffic in from, say, Los Angeles. The meadow is empty. No sheep grazing. No Miwok slipping in and out of bow range of deer grazing, and nowhere and everywhere their seed-gathering families. And nowhere and everywhere, the painter's process from start to finish.⁽¹⁾ He sketches the Lyell Fork before returning to his Berkeley studio to carve the features of the landscape into the faces of wooden blocks like stamps for pressing sky and meadow onto paper one color, one abstracted detail, at a time. And nowhere and everywhere, the artist's internment at the Tanforan Assembly Center at San Bruno and his transfer to the Topaz War Relocation Center in the Utah desert, where he founds an art school dedicated to the artistic witness of imprisonment. And the nowhere-ness and everywhere-ness of drought. And nowhere and everywhere, the Rim Fire filling the meadow with smoke. The orange at the horizon in "Evening Glow at Lyell Fork, Tuolumne Meadows" (1930) is just sunset.

1. The artist Chiura Obata (1885–1975), whose adopted name "Chiura" means "Thousand Bays," is born in Japan and at eighteen immigrates to California to settle in San Francisco. Working as an illustrator for the city's Japanese newspapers *The New World* and *Japanese American*, he makes on-site sketches of the aftermath of the San Francisco earthquake. In 1927, he spends two months in Yosemite National Park with one Professor Ryder from UC Berkeley and in that time creates more than one hundred sketches and ink paintings of the natural world. This begins his lifelong commitment to the California landscape and the project he calls "Great Nature."

DAVID BOOTH

Symphony

Oceans undulate. They modulate as the music made imitating them. They are not them. Music makes of the sea not so much vast selves without edges as listeners and watchers, small in the face of it, losing their own edges.

Perpetual water between long shores,
perpetual swell and collapse,
water runs underground between sight and song
silence tunnels toward pure, pure acts.

Become Ocean is the name of a symphony by John Luther Adams (b. 1953).² No talking while listening if “we” is going to become “I” dissolving. But we talk now, as we make our ways to our seats.

Trip down the mountain
to the point of separation,
a long romp through a stand of willows
between divergent streams.
We’ve never been anywhere
but beside this water,
sea spume and sun traps,
animal ocean,
minimal sea.

2. *Become Ocean* (2013) takes its name from the final line of John Cage’s mesostic poem “Many Happy Returns,” written for the composer Lou Harrison, Adams’ mentor. Cage compares Harrison’s music to “a river in delta”—“Listening to it, we become ocean.” Adams describes the symphony as an expansion of his earlier orchestral work *Dark Waves* (2007), built on the same oceanic sound world and extended into a much larger time frame.

DAVID BOOTH

No proscenium separates us from the stage now filling. Flutes enter, and oboes. See here too the clarinetists and bassoons, and the bowtied marimba, followed by a pair of harpists, vibraphone player, crotales. Woodwinds and percussion are setting up at a distance from them, as if upon an opposing shore. Their horns have their own percussion, their constellation its own marimba and vibraphone and harpists. Strings spread between them as if festooned over bass drums, tam-tam, a cymbal of some kind, timpani, celesta. Piano transcends furniture with a man at it, running his fingers up and down the keys. Double basses turn toward our ocean's floor. Each ensemble forms its own part of the whole, each with its own conductor and book of phrases and palette of sound colors. The sameness of the sun set in different positions in the sky, one for each gathering of players, shines low and high and darkly on ocean as palindrome swirling everyone's idiosyncrasies into the oceanic, here jarring and there melodic and here the eventide. With everyone in place, the music begins imperceptibly.

Wakedness elongates a sprawling body,
singular moments in flux
as body without form,
fluid beside fluid encased in space,
elemental cages into which light goes quickly.

The Seattle Symphony performs the premiere of *Become Ocean* under the direction of the French conductor Ludovic Morlot (b. 1973). Like in a sitting meditation but with his back to us and all of us all but forgotten, he instructs us to hold the image of an object, the moon or a tree—only here is the ocean—and occasionally becoming it, take in its lengths and depths, enumerable movements.

DAVID BOOTH

Our silence, spacious composite sound,
composers en masse of the ensemble.

Incidental to the music yet present, ocean acidification from carbon absorption dissolves oyster larvae before their shells can form. It can't become itself in what won't allow it, in music about becoming water. Hatchery owners suspect bacteria—*Vibrio tubiashii*—but shellfish die in its absence. Of their collapse, no photograph captures its expression, no recording preserves its voice.

It disappears into acidified water as anonymously as a life. Absent the eyes of a donkey, it garners less sympathy from its eaters than stones from stone collectors. To save their lives, animals with eyes look back. We urge them to acknowledge our presence.

Memorial to the Planet

The peripatetic poet does not amble through the website like a meadow. Online animals aren't here to perform for him but remain everywhere in view, and nowhere. He sees them from his seat in photographs and reads about them as if in their obituaries, while listening to recordings of their voices, footfall, wing flap. The imagination strains for textures, for odors. Like memories of wild animals reconstructed from countless animal encounters, true kinesis—trajectories, itineraries, settling hibernations—fades across imagined biomes, like the men and women here in their hometowns, and there fading behind their names, engraved in the marble wall on the Mall in Washington.³ The poet's home is far away. He's staying on a farm

3. Maya Lin (b. 1959) designed the Vietnam Veterans Memorial (1982) as a wall inscribed with the names of 58,272 Americans killed or missing in the Vietnam War. Polished black granite reflects the viewer's face amid the names of the dead. Her final memorial "What is Missing?" (2009–ongoing) is an interactive website documenting endangered and extinct species through photographs, sound recordings, and ecological data. Visitors are invited to contribute their own observations of what they notice disappearing. Unlike the veterans' memorial, fixed and complete, "What is Missing?" is a living platform no longer maintained by its maker but still receiving its dead.

DAVID BOOTH

outside Buttonwillow, where the rancher Henry Miller⁴ once sheltered the last tule elk from extinction. At dusk he unpacks his camera and visits livestock, pygmy goat, donkey, black cow, in their enclosures. Closeups capture ears twitching, curious brow, muzzle. Closeups test his hypothesis. The more one isolates the eyes, the more like looking at each other through slits and hatches, the more emotional, whether emotion runs warm or by degrees confrontational.

The donkey in old halter
looks past me
through large glistening eyes,

my own autistic gaze,
the familiar distress
of being pulled
by the neck.

Tonight, after a long call with his wife, after telling her from too far away that poets don't amble through websites, he falls asleep thinking of the donkey. Where it's corralled, lethargic, the tule elk has gone missing. Searching the Lin memorial is like scanning with his finger for the name of one of his father's childhood friends, a casualty of war, whose name he can't remember. Its photograph is missing from the site, and its body. You would think they must all be dead now. But the tule elk hiding in the marsh survives by concealment, invisible in the tules, antlers ramate like flora. Hunters passing by without detecting them give their numbers room to grow. They are transplanted into new centuries and new landscapes, arriving at Tomales Point in the Point Reyes National Seashore, to roam. Liberation is strange unwitnessed.

4. Henry Miller (1827 – 1916) is a German-American rancher known as the "Cattle King of California" for vast landholdings and his business acumen. In 1875, with as few as ten tule elk living, he forbids his employees from killing them, marking a turning point, what scales as a tiny gesture, in their collective ability to survive. Today there are thought to be nearly 6,000 tule elk throughout California.

DAVID BOOTH

God's Grandeur

Elms and beeches in ancient woodland, Y Graig, rock roses in open grassland, Hebridean sheep, autumnal gentian, occasional orchid, remembered child, limestone crag, greater spotted, tawny owl, purple hairstreak, I'm trying to imagine a sloping patch of land where the poet can sit, his seat, his sitting on the ground in his boots and britches, in a valley south of Tremeirchion in Wales, near Saint Beuno's College, to write his poem. Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889) sees trees come down with smokestacks rising and everyone gone into factory work while the racket of human builders rustles the beaver out of its lodge, chases the otter from its holt. Written in 1877, long after beavers are thought gone forever, and while industrial England is carving up the landscapes the poet celebrates ecstatically, "God's Grandeur" is a carbon-footprint poem, perhaps the first Anthropocene poem written in English. It opens with an octave describing life on earth as degrading commerce—"all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil"—before recovering, in the sestet that follows, the lost sense of the Holy Ghost as Brooder over Charred Earth. The opening line wants nature always to rejuvenate us by rejuvenating itself.

For all this, nature is never spent...

That it is spent is a commonly held belief fast growing and giving rise to couples asking: *Should we bring a child into this world?* I remember as a child building a Desalinization Box under the guidance of the kindest hothead imaginable, Mr. Delugo. I remember as a child with yet another school project looming writing a letter to the Chamber of Commerce in Juneau, Alaska, to ask what children are like there and also the weather. I remember from just last year some boys' schematic for digging infinite bays for the Pacific Ocean to flow deep into California's interior and out across America as a way of lowering sea levels. Just last night my neighbor and biking buddy Ed was showing Emily Hawkins's 2024 picture

DAVID BOOTH

book *Rewild the World at Bedtime: Hopeful Stories from Mother Nature* to his daughter Emma, when the girl's mother Nancy came through the door jetlagged from her business trip to Hsinchu.⁵ At last the three of them are together. Mom takes the lead reading and holding up pictures. Emma asks as if for the first time, "What's rewilding anyway?" and her mother paraphrases,

To bring what's wild back
to where it once thrived,
lend a helping hand here
and there, let it heal itself.

What rewilding proposes many Indigenous communities never stopped practicing. The book tells stories about rewilders bringing water buffalo back to the Carpathian Mountains in Ukraine, and getting out of the way of pods of humpback whales repopulating Humpback Highway in the waters off the Sapphire Coast, Australia. Rewilded are habitats for elephants in Mozambique, pandas in China, bees in Norway, and forests as homebound organisms in Costa Rica. The illustrator Ella Beech paints (watercolor and ink) the colors of sun on alluvium, of sky and cloud cover, the bustle of wildflowers, the blue of seafloor, the white of snowy Yellowstone, the gray-green of frozen time and biome, and through all of it the animals move, pause, and hold still just long enough for the child looking to realize she has been watching. Where Beech places her human watchers small inside the landscape—girls and boys watching hippos and horses and water lilies from bluffs and fence tops and stream's edge, and the wilders themselves tending to some like the sea turtle—Hopkins sits on his stony slope above Tremeirchion litigating what is metal and what is green in his

⁵ Home of the Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC) and Taiwan's semiconductor industry.

DAVID BOOTH

for otherworldly interference.⁶ I go back through my Tuolumne series, and back to the end again, typing out part of a poem seeming to fit:

Before you go further,
let me tell you what a poem brings,
first, you must know the secret, there is no poem
to speak of, it is a way to attain a life without boundaries,
yes, it is that easy...⁷

—Juan Felipe Herrera

6. Davis Ranches in Colusa County, roughly 250 miles north and slightly east of San Francisco, has practiced rewilding on its rice fields for years. After the harvest, fields are re-flooded to restore seasonal wetland habitat beneath the Pacific Flyway, the great migratory bird corridor ranging from Alaska to Patagonia, and attracting hundreds of species of waterfowl and shorebirds. Indigenous hedgerows of native plants border the fields, providing habitat corridors, pollinator support, and erosion control in practices that recover what Indigenous communities of the Central Valley maintained long before drainage and levee systems severed the land from its water. Whether to bring a child into this world is the question. At Davis Ranches and ten thousand places like it, mothers and fathers, poets and scientists, farmers and children reading at bedtime are finding their own answers. Call them The Rewilders.

7. From Juan Felipe Herrera's poem "Let Me Tell You What a Poem Brings," appearing in his *Half of the World in Light: New and Selected Poems*, published by University of Arizona Press in 2008

Process Statement

Seeing with my eyes closed

My paintings are often unstable or uncertain and this is by design. I have found color through meditation (eyes closed) and I have tried to capture its most malleable and ever-changing qualities. This has led to recordings of color combos observed during sits where I see the moving in and out of unnamable luminous color blossoms.

I started getting a new sensitivity to how palettes were operating but didn't really apply it to my own work until much later. The first time was when an intern at Riverside Arts Center used shiny pedestal paint to patch nail holes on the matte white exhibition walls by accident. The white on white started interacting with an exhibiting artist's black on white floating paper installation and it was just so exciting to see the phenomenon it created. The wall was just as activated as the black and white drawings.

Back at the studio I was noticing how some parts of my paintings had glare from one angle to the next depending on where I was standing. This often bothered me in the past but now because of my meditation practice I could see how I could harness this and have colors move in and out as one moves about the painting.

Pure color can operate in the same way. Color combinations can be indistinguishable and meld together depending on where the viewer is standing. Similar to sculpture, the work can change as one walks around the two dimensional work. This so continually surprising and satisfying.

Camille Silverman resides in the northwest side of Chicago and for the past six years has painted and constructed large scale installations at her studio in Garfield Park. Just blocks away from the ever inspiring Garfield Park Conservatory.

She attended CSU Pueblo in Colorado for her BA and received her MFA from Cranbrook Art Academy outside of Detroit, MI. Her work has been published in New American Painting, Studio Visit Magazine and the Museum of Americana.

Currently her self portrait work can be seen at the Venice Biennial in The Minds Eye group exhibit curated and created by artist Anne Harris, as well online archives at camillesilverman.com and SeaChiprojects.com

CAMILLE SILVRMAN



Dan, Acrylic on Canvas, 20 x 15.

CAMILLE SILVRMAN



Garden Head, Acrylic on Canvas, 48 x 36

CAMILLE SILVRMAN



Window, Acrylic on Canvas, 48 x 36

CAMILLE SILVRMAN

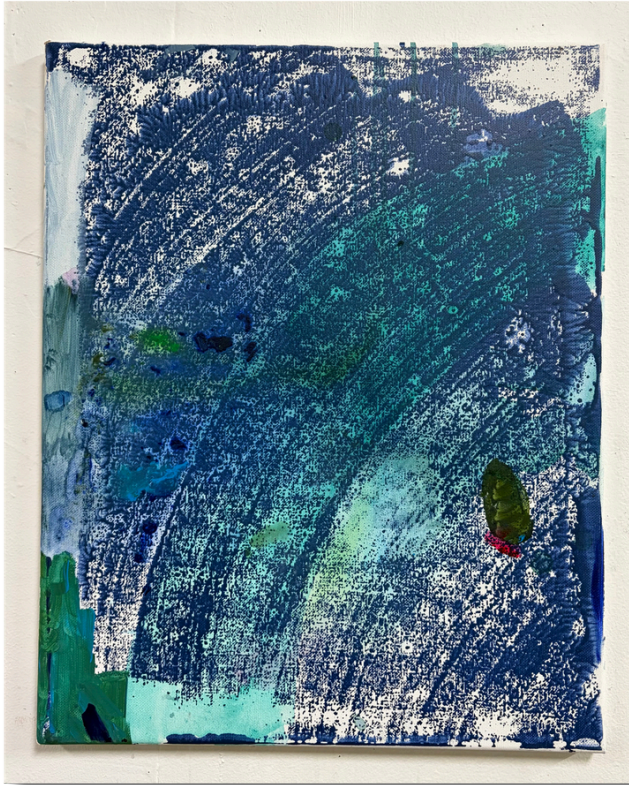


Morning Drama. Acrylic on Canvas, 30 x 48



Tier, Acrylic on Canvas, 30 x 48

CAMILLE SILVRMAN



Seeing With Ones Eyes Closed.
Acrylic, and spray paint on canvas,
30 x 48 x 1.5

Seeing With Ones Eyes Closed.
Acrylic, and spray paint on canvas,
30 x 48 x 1.5



CAMILLE SILVRMAN



Odom Wave. Acrylic, spray paint on canvas, 10 x 10 x 0.5

CAMILLE SILVRMAN



Bad Days. Acrylic on Canvas, 40 x 30

BLANCHE KABENGELE

Deep in the Blues

I'm certain there are many strange places one might find themselves waking up in, like a 5th avenue restaurant to find the only credit card you have is declined— aw what shame. Or beneath what you thought was a blanket, but this blanket has burly hands attached to a name you don't know, left to wonder how either, one of you got there; or waking up, under water, where the rules are different than the alternate, here a wet film covers everything, everything whether it floats, or knows how to swim or happy or unhappy about this newfound space.

BLANCHE KABENGELE

Change

Is Ahab, Ahab? Is it I, God, or who, that lifts this arm?
Moby Dick, Herman Melville

can be as a pill swallowed,
without water.
a straight line creased,
on linen's arrogance.
make the average forget
what a thimble is for.

perhaps

for Zhuangzi

last night I dreamt a dream
I wished when I awoke,
I would remember.

what was this anonymously
directed escapade, where folks flew
and pirouetted on the tips of their toes.

perhaps, I wasn't even asleep.

JAN WIEZOREK

Deer-Heart

When I see you lunge and cross
just twenty arms from me, you look
straight ahead, your eyes guessing
where to squeeze through next,
past the stubborn chicken wire

and over variegated hostas; and I imagine
you as the first artists see your relatives,
chalking or burnt into charcoal or incised,
likely painted or blown as brown-tan surfaces,
texture of simple artistry, hand over hide

of surprise; and finally I say out loud:
Oh, we are so lucky to have each other.
Though you take no notice, I see careful tops
of the hostas are bitten, gone, and I am still
searching over the greens for wild raspberries.

JAN WIEZOREK

Around Fishtown

We plan the day here like a rod
that does nothing in this wind.
But in the mind's back shed,
I think of going to the art museum
in town by the bay. You are ready
to chum it all in for my last-
minute whim. But that is far
from what we said we'd do:

docking ourselves here with two
spoons full of chowder and chewing
artisan sandwiches. You always
give me the larger half. Some boys
nearby nearly catch a fish. Little else
on our minds but Fishtown for weeks.
Now that it is upon us, I nearly blow it.
Arm hair stiffens in chastising winds.

JAN WIEZOREK

Shoreline

As if something more is coming, I walk half-undone,
not limited. A largesse facing west, submitting

to the last claw of me that believes in waves
of unknown reaching and reclaiming.

Who digs and scurries, allowing seed to roll
among these fingers that drop to stone.

It speaks to the dead in their covered selves,
reduced to lake currents and sand at the balls

of all their shiny, calcium feet—and mine, too,
caressed, de-callused, loosened, lovelier than a heel.

JAN WIEZOREK

Walking Home Through Grasses

The new, sedge grasses keep my mind
wandering with no other force moving me.
Caught in a wetland whisper inside
these singular lines. I am worker, worrier,
longing to pull, free, turn, toss, spurn,
engage. Listening for buzzing and dripping
sweetness. That's you calling me back
home. What I've pulled of grasses—

and put in my mouth—stripped against
my biters—has entered me like chickpeas:
inherently my kin, lining gut with green
and sage. The closer I get to plantain leaf,
the more informed I am for no special green-
grass reason: to twist and strangle at length
all misunderstandings hidden here. Slowly,
your lips purse into a parsley peace-pucker.

Jan Wiezorek (he/him) writes from Harbor Country of rural Michigan. He authored the poetry chapbooks *Forests of Woundedness* (Seven Kitchens Press, 2026) and *Prayer's Prairie* (Michigan Writers Cooperative Press, 2025). His poetry is forthcoming in *The MacGuffin*, *The Comstock Review*, and *Dunes Review*. Wiezorek is an awardee of the Poetry Society of Michigan and a two-time Pushcart Prize nominee. Visit him at janwiezorek.substack.com.

ANN GROGAN

More Love

No man of war can love music,
no enslaved woman, too,
though names be writ upon a score
pretending that they do.

No man of hate who loves the game,
and the patriarchal paradigm,
can make music though he claims it true
when he just wastes our time,

as does the woman who lost her mind
and puts asunder the truth she knows,
falling silent in impure desire
for perceived riches vile men bestow.

No warring men can justify
hateful acts that know no bounds,
reenacting what their fathers did
in the old one-up/one-down.

No decent man believes in his heart,
that some do not belong
to the human race, no less the case
for women who know that's wrong.

Though warring demons of vilest nature
can cause us mortal wounds,
they also leave music in disarray
and kill the pure pleasure of love.

For to love music requires that we love,
even making mistakes we regret,
and then we remember what we know,
that love more love begets.

ANN GROGAN

The Basic Truth

There's no sound without motion
or lovers without heart,
no sight without eyes,
no end without start,

no road without pebbles,
the same with a bridge,
no mountains without rocks
or cliffs without edge,

no stars without blasts
like the royal Big Bang,
no fire engine allowed
without a loud clang,

no sight without photons
our eyes can receive,
no coffee without beans
or deep love without grief,

no music without genius
or scores without notes,
no bliss without babes
on whom grandmoms can dote,

no apples without seeds
or crops sans sunshine,
no chickens without eggs—
or the opposite, we find?

No matter the causes,
it's basically true:
most wondrous of all,
there's no me without you.

ANN GROGAN

Life's Proper Place

A life without passion lived—how sad!
I'm glad I chose otherwise: to feel deeply
and wide, and then besides to play the hand
that I was dealt and share just what I felt,

to dare to do exactly what I chose
because otherwise I'd live a lie,
belying what I really believed,
deceiving, not to pursue my truth.

Expressing desire, admiring the best
of those who just like me
reach within then share without
and in kindness do repose,

then like the rose their fragrant souls
do share their deepest grace,
and float around life's stumbling blocks
to take life's proper place.

Ann Grogan is a joyful octogenarian, pianophile, and retired lawyer living in San Francisco, CA. Her writing promotes the unequivocal permission to pursue one's passions at any age. Her poems have appeared in *The Prairie Review*, *Querencia*, *Amethyst Review*, *Whims of the Wilderness*, *Rue Scribe*, *Bloomin' Onion*, *New Verse News*, and *Writers Resist*, among others. She was named a semifinalist for The Writing Salon's 2025 Jane Underwood Poetry Prize and for Leftie Blondie's chapbook competition. Her poem "Used Envelopes" was nominated by *Bloomin' Onion* for Best of the Net Anthology 2026 (published by Sundress Press). Find her at rhapsodydmb.com.

WESTLEY HEINE

The Old Man at the End of the Bar

In the neighborhood there's only one bar quiet enough to talk. The place has no name, only the twitching neon sign, the Old Style denomination. The first time I was there my wife and I were meeting up with her friends from work. I didn't want to go but it's a husband's duty. The place was busy for a Thursday night. There were only two seats left at the bar between her pack of coworkers and an old guy perched on the very last stool. He was half in the shadows hunched over his beer. Squeezing in next to him talking to himself or rather staring into his bottle telling it a story. I tried not to make eye contact.

The bartender came and went. He never seemed to charge the old man. My wife and the other ladies were busy with inside jokes from her job. I started to feel a kinship with the old guy sitting next to me who no one wanted to talk to. Between cleaning my glasses I snuck glances at him. His face was alco-glow red. He had skin tags under his eyes. His beard was trimmed but one side was longer than the other. His hair was sweaty. His face held a resting smirk.

When sneaking a glance we made eye contact. His pupil twinkled. It was a fisherman who got a bite. It was enough for him to raise his chin a few degrees out of the bullhorn of his bottle. He continued his monologue not at me but to the space just in front of me. Continuing to stare straight ahead he knew I was listening though I pretended I wasn't.

The jukebox played the usual upbeat top forty songs from each decade marred by fashion victims and ringing bells in our memories. Disinterested in everything else I began listening to the old guy. My right ear grew heavy with his rambling.

That night in bed my wife and I read under the lamps perching on our matching nightstands. My book wasn't particularly interesting. Still a little buzzed, my mind wandered thinking of something the barfly said. Laughing to myself my wife asked what was funny and I said it was nothing.

A few days later I returned to the bar. The old guy was in the same spot. Sitting a stool away from him when my imported bottle came I raised it in a small greeting. He swiveled slightly on his stool and began talking.

Soon I was going to the bar every day after work. The old man and I would have the same routine. He'd talk and I'd listen. He was old. I was young. It was his turn. My wife accused me of becoming an alcoholic.

WESTLEY HEINE

This went on for months. Months turned into years. Sometimes he repeated himself but since he knew I was eavesdropping he tried to tell something new. Some of his yarns stretched the truth like a black hole, and some were so odd that no one could have pulled them from out of the blue.

Life went on. I got divorced. I got a different job. My dog died. The only constant was the old guy, and the flickering Old Style sign.

One winter night I walked into the bar and the old man wasn't in his usual spot. Nursing a beer I waited. Then I went home. The next day it was the same thing. Like an old joke, the third time I asked the bartender about the old guy. He said he didn't know.

Some college kids came in and were making a lot of noise. To make room for them I slide down to the end of the bar. A preppy kid asked if the seat next to me was taken. He asked if I was waiting for someone. I said I was waiting for someone in a way, but to take the seat anyway. Being friendly he asked who I was waiting for. I told him. His brow ruffled. He said that the old guy must have had some good stories. I said that I thought so. As the kid waited for his complicated drink to be made I began to tell him one of the old mans' stories. Then I told one of my own. No one said anything about how one story was from an older generation, and another from a newer time. No one said anything. When I finished I looked up and the kid was gone. Every night I kept the seat warm hoping to see my old friend, but he never returned. The next best thing was to keep telling the stories.

WESTLEY HEINE

Laying Low in Mexico

We had just crossed the border. Jerman and I left a trail of unpaid pumps. He had warrants and I was out on bail on a possession charge I was never going to beat. Paranoia consumed us the last three days. Every approaching car was a cop. Before the border in a rush to disguise myself I had combed toothpaste into my beard and hair. The effect was that I looked twenty years older.

"You smell minty fresh brother man," Jerman said.

"Can't say the same for you."

Turns out entering Mexico is easy. They just wave you through. The line to get into the States across the median was exodus.

"No more running out on gas stations yo. Let's make a clean break in Me-he-co."

"Just let me know what people are saying to me."

"Will do, brother man."

Jerman was born in Mexico. He went under the fence when he was five. He spoke broken Spanish and broken English. His mind was free of both languages. He was crazy, but he was the only one I trusted.

"Don't worry about pinching pennies now. Twenty dollars is like two hundred homie. We're going to have a time."

We drove all night. Somewhere in the dark a weight fell off. We no longer looked over our shoulders. Maybe south of the border a guy could start his life over.

Through mountains and desert the land changed. In the dawn brown plateaus guarded jungle riverbeds lush and green.

All roads lead to Mexico City. With his finger Jerman traced the lines in the map down south, south, south.

North of Tula we came to a valley fogged with dust. Rusty trains crossed a brown river. A meat packing plant steamed in the distance.

Pulling into a truck stop Jerman said, "I know this town. The strip clubs in Mexico are not just a tease like in the States. You can get laid."

"Damn, I still have toothpaste in my hair."

At the far end of the lot, shaded in palm fronds, the club was a long one-story building with no windows and a simple neon sign glowing above the awning.

Inside was red enough to develop pictures. There was only one woman inside sitting alone at a long table. The place was empty, but the music thundered on. Greeted by two hard cases behind the bar we were escorted to the lone woman. Crimson bulbs flattened age lines and negated skin tone. No one was old or young. No one was brown or white

WESTLEY HEINE

Everyone was red.

Jerman started talking to her. He didn't bother to translate for me.

Gin and tonics arrived including one for the lady. There was no mention of money. The stone-faced waiter went back behind the bar and stared at us.

When the lady got up and headed to the back I asked Jerman, "So what's going on?"

"Not much. She keeps talking about her kids."

"Jesus. Is she going in the backroom to wait for you?"

"No, the bathroom. She says she doesn't like to drink much."

"Oh."

"And there's no backroom."

"There's no dancing either."

"Things are a little different here. If you want the lady you have to pay for her, take her to a motel, and pay for the room."

"They shake you down at every toll booth."

A second girl entered. It seemed that the doorman ran out and woke her up.

She turned her attention to me as Jerman's date returned from the john.

More drinks arrived.

My new friend was heavy in a pleasing way, juicy lips and wet eyes sharpened by thick lines of makeup. Despite the dim red glow I watched pancake flakes leave her cheeks joining the toothpaste snowing from my beard onto the table. She worked me the best she could despite the language barrier. She acted perky and gestured too fast to make sure her cleavage bounced. She was a soft bubbly lizard woman. Unlike Jerman's morose maiden my date grinned and downed the drinks as fast as they came.

As soon as she realized I couldn't speak Spanish, in order to flirt my lizard made faces at me. She crossed her eyes and puckered her big lips like a fish. Then she demonstrated what English she knew. Looking me in the eyes she said, "Fuck me, fuck me." I couldn't help but laugh. Following my lead she laughed too.

More drinks arrived.

The gin was swimming in my head. I started to relax. I forgot about the hard cases. I forgot about the toothpaste in my hair. I forgot about how dreary the scene was. Hell, I can't save the world. I started to think about what those full lips could do to me. Maybe we could get a room? Maybe we were in the land of leisure? Maybe Mexico was easy about love and lust?

Then the waiter leaned in and said something to Jerman.

Jerman stopped smiling. When the waiter left he turned to me, "So this whole time we've been on the clock. The drinks for the ladies aren't on the house. We've been paying for their drinks too."

"How much is the bill?"

WESTLEY HEINE

Like two hundred and some change.”

“What do we do?”

Jerman walked up to the bar and talked at length to the Sphinx faced gents.

When he came back he said, “Ok, one of the dudes are going to escort me to the car where I have the rest of my cash. How much do you have on you?”

“A couple bucks.” I forked it over.

“You’ll have to stay here as collateral.”

“You mean a hostage.”

“I don’t know man. They say they want to make sure I come back.”

“Shit. What the hell else are we going to do?”

Jerman and one of the hard cases went out the door leaving me sucking on ice from my drained gin and tonic. My lizard girl who a moment ago had all her energy focused on me moved to the next table. She was five feet away and facing me, but didn’t make eye contact. She stared through me as if she were unplugged.

Time slowed down. All the songs sounded the same. Under the red lights everything came into painful focus as a photo developing slowly.

The bartender watched me unblinking as I got up and strolled to the bathroom. There I washed the toothpaste out of my beard and hair.

Finally, Jerman came in the door. He paid the man behind the bar and motioned to me.

We skedaddled through the parking lot.

“I talked them down on the bill some. But they said not to come back.”

Back in the car we started laughing. “They thought you were a rich old white guy with all that white shit in your hair!”

We weaved down the road spring-diving speed bumps.

Westley Heine is the author of *Busking Blues: Recollections of a Street Musician and Squatter* (Roadside Press 2022), a short story collection *12 Chicago Cabbies* (Newington Blue Press 2021), a poetry collection *Street Corner Spirits* (Roadside Press 2023), a novella *Picture Book* (Page Telegram Press 2024), and a collection of short stories and poems *Cloud Watching in the Inferno* (Roadside Press 2025). Most recently Roadside Press has acquired his new novel *The Boys in Black* (2026).

Heine was a 2025 poetry judge for the Society of Midland Authors, is Pushcart Prize nominated, twice the featured performer at the original poetry slam at The Green Mill in Chicago, featured at Underground Lit Fest in Toledo and Beyond Baroque in LA, and was the poet chosen to represent Illinois at the Route 66 Poetry & Arts Festival 2025.

MARK YOUNG

The Perspicacity of Mirrors

Is said cameras can sometimes steal
the soul of the subject away. Not

quite like that; but reflections may
linger in mirrors after a person has

passed by them. Much magic attached —
windows to the soul, portals to another

world; the list goes on. So move away
from that, & think on how reflecting

surfaces suddenly catch the eye, &
with luck, you see how others see you.

MARK YOUNG

Trois nus dans un intérieur

(after the painting by René Magritte)

A girl's night in, or so
it seems. There's a movie
about that, but not about
life in a cubist setting. A
phrase from the movie —
"together we make up the
perfect woman" — seems
at first look to have little
relevance here, & yet the
setting has perfection in-
corporated in it. Light &
shadow within the room.
A table on which cups are
set. A bowl of fruit. Com-
fortable with their own &
the other's bodies. An an-
gularity to them that does
not seem to pierce the in-
timacy that fills the room.

MARK YOUNG

Catalonian Fireboxes

"Hell's Mouth" in one such. A
rarity. An angry eye on either
side. The work of an artist,
not just an artisan. In Bar-
celona. Also in Barcelona
resistance to Franco, the last
year of the Civil War, now
many years ago, but later than

the firebox. A war I had rom-
antic feelings for, would like
to have fought in, until I read
George Orwell's *Homage to Cat-
alonia* & all attraction vanished.
Fire out. Ashes in the mouth.

MARK YOUNG

lemon	domicile	chenille	bend sinister	derringer	madrigal	catapult	fugue
sycophant	tsunami	stance	drouth	cirrus cloud	火	contrast	overflow
visceral	harmony	erratic	<i>où sont les neiges d'antan?</i>		fable	Harry Bosch	tribute band
	elastic	p o e m	character actor	flense	diagnosis	redacted	XX
behemoth	carseat	armadillo		KPop Demon Hunters	Allahu Akbar	juniper	praxis
turned turtle	proclaim	)(	enjamb- ment	lens cleanser	domicile	dementia	isthmus
prime thyme	abrogate	suspense	relative		Bo Diddley	nematode	allspice
corroded	TikTok challenge	emetic	vaulted	tactile	poseur	carry-on or carrion?	essence

Mark Young was born in Aotearoa / New Zealand but now lives in a small town in North Queensland in Australia. He has been publishing poetry for over sixty-five years, & is the author of around eighty books, primarily text poetry but also including speculative fiction, vispo, non-fiction, art history, & an artist's book. His most recent books of poetry are *synecdoche*, out from Sandy Press in mid-April, & *Curtains*, from Neo-Mimeo Edition in June. A collection of visual pieces, *In the Key of G*, will be published later this year.

LIN BRUMMELS

Chimney Sweep

The night's chill
reminds me of this yearly ritual,
singing its rhythmic song.
Wait for a windless day,
open the chimney's bottom latch,
haul out the eight-foot ladder,
hold it steady as tall son climbs,
first onto lower roof, then
toss him the chimney brush.
Next, he ascends short roof ladder
to highest part of the two-story house
where chimney resides.

Son climbs lefthanded,
brush in his non-dominant one,
then stands up there outlined
against an autumn blue sky.
You pray he is steady
as he lifts the chimney cap,
drops, the rope, then brush,
and when you see rope dangle
out the bottom, tug once.
Brush swooshes to the bottom,
soot rains onto the concrete below.

LIN BRUMMELS

Toss the brush back up to him,
repeat. He replaces the cap,
begins his descent, retracing
steps he repeats annually.
You must hold that ladder steady,
the climb down often more
precarious than going up.
His feet must make contact
with the ladder's top step.
One misstep and he would
fall nine feet to the ground.

We both sigh relief when
he descends safely again.
You replace the chimney latch,
go inside and light
first fire of the fall season.
Next year, get a taller ladder.

LIN BRUMMELS

Oh My

Oh, my my, oh my my

You can boogie, you can slide

Ringo Starr, *Oh My My*

Ragweed, wild cucumber,
pig weed, purslane, crab grass,
and too many tree seedlings,
grow where they are not
wanted. If only they could
sing and dance, oh my, oh my.
I waltz through the rows,
pull a baby ash tree under
a beet, firmly grasp purslane
filling in space under
potatoes, toss it over fence
before it goes to seed.

Volunteer dill shade
tiny carrots, and crabby
grass is growing between
tomatoes, I boogie left
to thin them, maneuver
right to toss, oh my, oh my.
Green beans need water,
I sashay around to check-
already mulched, no weeds
to interfere. They dance

LIN BRUMMELS

with each other, oh my,
their flowers flourish.

Creeping Charlie slithers
around garden's borders,
sends tendrils into bare soil,
stealing cantaloup's territory,
like a twirling menace,
it grows inches every day.
I dream of a dance partner
that helps keep the garden
neat and weed free. Lacking
that, I will twirl and swing,
two-step and limbo low,
pull weeds nice and slow.

Passage of Time

I sought a magic place like Avalon
before I knew about Arthur's land of renewal
and prior to learning about Morgana's role
in rotting apples year-round.

I feel like a Morgana, ruled by the underworld,
surfacing periodically
to grow and pick more apples.
I seek peace as I dance under a full moon

for a fruitful harvest, sans rose-colored glasses
seeing long ago glories, not wounded people.
Animals are safe with me; deer pass unharmed
in front of my car, squirrels scurry unmolested

across my path, crows tip their wings to me
as they glide across fields hunting mice,
self-centered vultures roosting on cell towers
can circle uncontested in search of carrion.

I've had my nose to the grindstone for years,
believing if I worked harder,
life would be better, without result.
Windows in my house are tougher to open

each year, like my dwindling choices. Time to
throw caution into a steaming cauldron,
get a new puppy to breathe life into my stodgy
being, move bones and brain about to ossify,

participate in a protest movement,
carry signs that declare my ethical stance,
dump boiling oil on the passage of time,
stop the tides of age with wild song and dance.

LIN BRUMMELS

Fire Dream

In this nightmare
I gradually became aware
of the crackle, building rapidly
to a roar, frantic, desperate
mewing, scratching
from trapped barn cats.
Smoke slithered beneath
the tack room door,
through a slit formed
as the rough concrete floor
dipped to the west.
Tendrils swirled
around me as I ran full tilt
toward the plaintive cries,
grabbed the handle, yanked
open the still-intact red door.
In-rush of chilly air gave new life
to angry fire gods demanding
payment for past sins.
Still alert toms, mommas, kittens
rushed to the opening.
I grabbed a yellow tabby overcome
by smoke, tossed him outside,
went back for a calico mesmerized
by the flames, found a young grey
that ran back, grabbed him
and satisfied the room was empty,
slammed shut the door, stumbled
away from the burning barn.
Wake from deep sleep, coughing,
smoke scent in my nostrils
from northern wildfires.

RUSS GERNEY

Somewhere in Kentucky

Saw a barn
Rising out of gently waving weeds.
Boards weathered to a flat blackish gray
Tin roof rusted a burnt orange.

There was a house nearby
Ancient brick, peeling white windowsills
A chimney that no longer smoked
Glassless windows
From which no eyes peered.

Behind the house
A harrow rusted, broken
Silent in the untilled fields.

No cornstalks rustling in the gentle breeze
Only the August heat baking the land
Parched, yearning for rain
And Demeter's nurturing touch.

Purring orange cat
Shaking hand stroking soft fur
Man home from battle.

RUSS GERNEY

The Cardinal and the Cat

The bold red cardinal
Perched on the green limb
Of the young spruce
Calling, waiting.

The silent black cat
Crouched on the brown earth
Beneath the branch
Watching, patiently.

RUSS GERNEY

Victim Statement

Why won't you believe me?

Is it because I was

A girl

A boy

A child

Powerless to stop them?

Is it because they are

Rich

Powerful

White

Men?

Why are Epstein documents

Blackened with redactions

Names removed to protect the guilty

Louder than my voice,

More powerful than my tears?

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LAURA LEE

***Shame, like the swamp:
green death, wet death nothing
delicate grows.***

Or so I wrote, but there were also delights growing up near a swamp. I said I grew up on metaphor lane: swamp, wrong side of the tracks, dead end street. Flooding. Four Corners of shame. The poor kids with loud families, furniture on the lawn, broken brown bottles on gravel driveways. The air often smelled slightly pungent green.

Yet we faced west and witnessed amazing sunsets, fuchsia a common color. I grew up thinking white butterflies were everywhere and fireflies would always light up my hair. I grew up knowing the sound of June Bugs close to my ears.

I grew up standing on a rickety picnic table, facing west, dreaming.

Things disappeared into the swamp. Things flew out of the swamp. Green mists. Scurrying critters. Pheasants. Witches with long black hair, full of sparks.

Sometimes, the witchy woman would make an appearance. Sometimes the gray faces in the swamp would rise, rise... as we tried to cross the downed trees. The boys crossed over from prairie to swamp, but I—I observed more often.

Oh, the trees! Swamps are not known for trees, but a stand of wide tall elms grew and then fell there. And when they fell, they became bridges into the swamp, four children wide.

Bridges to imagination.

***Green life, wet life
strong, bitter sharp:
how wild we children grew.***

LAURA LEE

Nothing
delicate
survives

Green steam mud
always slick
no sure-footedness here.

Children come and go.
Some come to play.
some come to escape.

All find
soil
not quite safe.

Sneezeweed, milkweed,
Joe Pye weed
marsh blazing star
false dragonhead
all hold on.

Wildflowers:
short squat stems
strong roots keep
purple, yellow, brown
earthbound.

the
swamp.

Laura Lee is a Chicago area writer, poet, and teacher. Her poetry, fiction, and prose have been published in the UK, USA, and Greece, online and in print. She is a literacy advocate and delighted with words.

The Purpose of Dancing

Does your mother recall the waltz,
the stepped-off geometry of ballrooms
as mine does? None of us were present

when our parents learned to dance.
So did your mama know the pony, the swim,
funky chicken or electric slide?

Did she bump her way through the disco era?
Twerk or vogue? Was she a deadhead,
twirl dancing to twin drummers,

willing the gospel of shuffle to spin
into the realm that shimmers before us
when the body forgets it exists.

Each body writes unshared history
in a silence the young, caught up
in the betrayals of flesh and some

who should know better, can't see
in others. The thorned vines and fallen
limbs that are always there.

AL MAGINNES

My daughter and her friends dance in clubs
where the music is nothing
I recognize, the negotiations probably

what they have always been,
and they dissolve on dance floors lit
like spaceships until they leave

awkward and aging parents who remember
public dancing as a ritual
left behind these days though

they might still turn once around
the kitchen in pretend waltz to a song
they're glad to hear playing again.

A Theory of Lightning

The new theory says
he was named Lightning
not for the speed of his fingers
striking the guitar—he rarely
seemed to hurry though
he could play quick as anyone—
but because when he was struck,
nothing stopped him. So when
Blind Lemon Jefferson sang
on the street, little Sam
Hopkins jumped in and played
right beside him. Jefferson heard
something he liked and let
the boy play behind him
when he sang in churches.
For months I've been trying
to nail a few of the licks
Lightning threw off without
a glance or second thought, licks
he played so often
they must have been natural
as blinking for him. When
I listen through the near
endless series of records
he made for any label
that would pay him,
his voice twists through
the thorny runs of notes

AL MAGINNES

familiar and changed. I listen
the way I once read
the poets I dreamed of joining
and before them, the guys
who said they didn't give a shit
and meant it. It's hard to say
if Lightning gave a shit
or not. He was Po Lightning,
the city cat who knew
country ways, who could
lead a rock band through
the changes or play alone,
the way I love him best.

The secret is never to let
anyone think you have
those uneasy encounters
with your own being,
even if singing about them
is what keeps you alive.

Some pull this trick more easily
than others. Second guesses
fall naturally as summer sweat.

The third and fourth guess will
trip you up because time has moved,
Lightning has slipped up the neck
into tricky territory,
it's possible he's changed keys,
and this run of notes
is hidden under the running
current of the thumb

AL MAGINNES

counting perfect time between
the E string and the D.
“If I had a listened to my second mind,”
Lightning sings. Too often
I’ve stopped listening for
my second mind, the one
that pauses, that holds off
the flash, the fire. The lightning.
Searching a word or a run of notes
that cuts so deep and true
you stay up all night, trying
to trace its source. The way
it drops from the sky and scorches
so you never see the same way
again. The way that, after storms pass,
we walk outside and breathe
the washed-clean air
full of songs that come so quick
the second mind never has
a chance to speak.

A Work Story

for Michael Gills

I heard this story so long ago
I only remember who told it.
He was a new hire on a job
and was told to walk a steel beam
forty feet in the air, a task
that requires you to forget
you are forth feet in the air.
Another guy, like him a new hire,
walked behind him and when
they'd reached safe footing
on the roof they were building,
he lifted his shirt and said,
"When I was four, my father
set me on fire." The mess of scar
left behind melted all questions
of motive, the why of how
such things happen. Like most
who believe we have free will
and that our words have power,
I've heard men and women declare
independence from bosses, schools,
creeds. But this was declaration,
held in ruined flesh, said that
one man cared so little for
this world, he would destroy
a being whose life he had made.
But motive matters little
to mangled flesh. Enough

AL MAGINNES

to exist and live in the story
it has made. We all have them.
Visible or not. At a job interview
once, I was asked to read
a few poems, sort of a tryout
for those who might be
my colleagues. After my reading,
I was asked why so many
lines mentioning tattoos, scars,
blood. I was never able to tell
what an audience wants,
so I didn't say we all have
scars, we all have blood,
and most of us have considered
a tattoo at least once. Now,
a few tattoos and scars later, including
I know why I didn't get that job.
We are all marked but how many
raise their shirts to show
their wound to a stranger and testify
that the world betrayed them
when they were too young to know
anything except that they would not
trust any being ever again.

AL MAGINNES

The Boy Who Doesn't Talk

Soon they will come
to look for him,
the boy who fled
the fireworks
and noise, who ran
to empty his ears,
until the one noise
was his breath, until
the moon made
the sky's one light,
and night is once again
big enough to hide
any fires.

Al Maginnes' 15th poetry collection, *Second Line*, was just published by Redhawk Publications. His next book *What There Is* will be the initial offering from Seed Bed Press. New poems appear or are forthcoming in *Lake Effect*, *Rattle*, *National Poetry Review*, *Glassworks*, and several others. He is retired from teaching and lives in Raleigh, NC.

AL MAGINNES

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DEVIN CAIN

Allswell

You find in each word all manner of things
knowing they all must be well attended
through the multitudes of every meaning
letters running an invisible course
across each page we've turned into some new
story we tell ourselves about ourselves
which with each telling changes a little
by little until it becomes something
unrecognizable to these same eyes
a distorted image of what we thought
we were yet feel the comfort in the flux
we didn't create but must respond to.

DEVIN CAIN

Gracious Be

Having been served, must I be of service?
To whom, we all ask, does such debt accrue?
No one speaks. The answer make us nervous,
knowing we must in humility do
the tasks first that we find so revolting:
washing feet, cleaning bed pans, touching those
from whom we can't help but turn, devoting
our dignity as shared. It's what we chose;
not through high mindedness but by making
oneself so small as to escape notice
by any but the most attuned, breaking
off suitable pieces. So now know this:
what goes around loses out, too dizzy
to fix vision on the world's so busy.

DEVIN CAIN

Desuetude

You speak of me in languages I have
yet to know or have all else forgotten
for your yearly churn always seems to calve
some new dialect quickly besotten
just as quickly lost to lack of usage
twist my tongue as you might I won't recall
even you must efforts make to salvage
just a few words here not there casts a pall
thick as new smoke and caught in our windpipes
no longer capable of the right sound
only wheezing and only then mere gripes
about the poor inflection run aground
no wonder you say this is all slippage
we'll need find another phrase to pillage.

DEVIN CAIN

Straight through

Belief narrowly circumscribed as this
holds its place through some awful gravity
that makes of life an orderly caucus
finds escape in the smallest cavity
slips right through a spineless octopus grips
so tightly the soul to keep in places
hidden from the common eye fools the lips
that know not the words that fill the spaces
where doubt an eel can slide so calmly through
blocked but by incantation's heavy tones
if deaf to plenty pleas to look anew
to ask the questions that stick in the bones
only to find all that's there is marrow
turns on itself a cancerous arrow.

JUSTIN EVANS

Disclaimer

This may not be the poem you asked for.

This poem has no warranty, no guarantee of satisfaction.

All sales are final.

Buyer's remorse may be real, but it will not be honored.

Measure your doors before you purchase this poem.

Make sure you have enough space in your home.

Do not let the neighbor's dog near this poem.

Children should be kept at a safe distance.

This poem is not a conversation starter for cocktail parties.

This poem is autonomous.

This poem will grow roots and spread.

This poem has the potential to keep you up nights.

Confront this poem at your own risk.

All accessories sold separately.

JUSTIN EVANS

Red Rock Thaumaturgy

last waters of our season
slip unnoticed into deep crevices

ancestors gathered around
for centuries worth of safe passage

beneath painted rocks
grooved sandstone ledgers

describing millennia of history
our stories need telling

spells for ceremonies
magic we needed to learn

JUSTIN EVANS

The Swim

I am tired of the litany
of months

—Linda Pastan

Call it whatever you like
but the winter blues are upon us
and I suspect you know as much
as I do. Are you prepared?

I looked out my window
today before I left the house
clouds strewn across the sky
like spilled coffee. I wondered

if I could make it
another day like this, like
the last, like what this entire
month has been. Not a loss

but not anything close
to the kind of victory I'd need
to fight off these blues, this
emptiness and mild dread

filled ache in my lungs
the way they feel when you
are swimming beneath
the surface and want to breath.

Need comes later. When you
can do nothing else, need is
always tucked into your wet cap
telling you it's not so deep.

JUSTIN EVANS

Marginalia

Whenever I listen to John Coltrane's *My Favorite Things*
I can't help but think about William Blake
furiously illustrating Milton's *Paradise Lost*, screaming
into the darkness at a dead man and his piety;
how at 7:30 or so, Coltrane just goes off the rails
not even worrying if anyone who buys his record
will be able to follow along. It's just about
the most incredible thing I have ever listened to
and I have to admit there are times when I am listening
I don't want to find my way back. I'd just rather
turn off the lights and wait until morning and for
my eyes to eventually adjust to the darkness—
I just lay there with a pen in my hand, scribbling
whatever I might discover, line by lonely line.

Justin Evans lives in rural Nevada with his wife and sons. Justin's most recent books are *Cenotaph* (2024) and *A Walled Pleasance* (2025). His poems have recently appeared in or are forthcoming in *Midwest Quarterly*, *The Meadow*, *Fugue*, and *Sugar House Review*. Justin has twice been awarded an Individual Artist Grant from the Nevada Arts Council.





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