

# Poetry South

2021



# Poetry South

Issue 13 2021

 The W logo consists of a large, stylized letter 'W' with a small 'The' above it and a small 'TM' below it.

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# Poetry South

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## CONTENTS

George Freek	6	Written at Blue Lake
Bill Griffin	7	Imagined
Claude Wilkinson	8	An Evening in Annus Mirabilis
	10	Cock Robin, in Memoriam
Ilma Qureshi	11	woven in silken sky
Sjohnna McCray	12	The Midnight Train
	13	Homegoing
Ellen June Wright	14	Today, I Heard Obama Sing Amazing Grace Again
	15	Michael Brown
Jessica Mehta	16	FoundNations
Katherine Hoerth	17	What Cassandra Knew
Chrissy Martin	18	I tend my grief like any good garden
Carter Vance	19	Colossus of Spring
Jackie Chicalese	20	Elegy in Reverse
	21	Creation Myth
Will Simescu	22	Bathing in the Supermoon, Joshua Tree 2019
Richard Schiffman	23	Rio Grande Gorge
Timothy Geiger	24	Take Flight
	25	Grackle, Grackle
Richard Band	26	The grass is buggy and alive
Nick Maurer	27	Goodbye Everybody
Hannah Whiteman	28	Spins & Substitutions
Andrea Moorhead	31	The Intensity of Dream
	31	Cantilevers
Ted Haddin	32	Honey in the Church
	33	Rising to a Head
	34	Paratrooper, W W II
	35	Amanita Muscaria
Jack Giaour	36	in peabody there is a lot
	37	PTSD II
Nick Soluri	38	Going Out There
Laura Sweeney	39	How to Know You're Doing Fine
Brian Clifton	40	Orpheus in the Surgical Theatre
David Holper	42	Master Class in Disaster
Jeff Tigchelaar	43	Give Me Some Covers
lucas ray hall	44	a poem in which i lie about how much i worry
Emily Murman	45	farewell, orpheus (later!)

Theodore Worozbyt	46	The Desk
	46	September
Elena Adames Camaño	47	Pa'lante
Cindy Yarberry	48	Limbo
	49	An Exercise from Two Pages of the Dictionary
Simon Perchik	50	[It's the rope you carry from a cemetery]
	50	[You pull each clothespin closer]
Jianqing Zheng	51	Soulful Dancer
	51	Escape
Brent Ameneyro	52	I'll Never Be
Amelia L. Williams	53	Songs of the Red Velvet Ant
Savannah Slone	54	the Overwhelm
Larry Blazek	55	A Bone White Object
Kelley Jean White	56	Death might just be a gentle wind
	57	even jays can be a role model
Adam Day	58	Logic of Negation
	59	To Move with Open Hands
Frances Koziar	60	Between the Lines of History
Debra Kaufman	62	Forgotten
Kerry Dexter	63	Antietam
Miriam Moore-Keish	64	Katherine and I Found a Gravestone in the Woods
Marcus Myers	66	Personal Essay
	68	When Honest
Laura Ruby	70	Giving What She Got
Kory Wells	71	Hierarchy of Need
Nicholas Gruber	72	first love
Joe Bisicchia	73	Madonna of the Pomegranate
Melissa Huckabay	74	Pink Evening Primrose, or Buttercup as My Mom Called It
Shana Campbell Jones	75	Longleaf Pine Illumination
Kirstin Ruth Bratt	76	Rabat
	76	Outline
Samantha Malay	77	Compass
	77	Interval
Weston Cutter	78	Spring's Proportion
	79	Slipping Into Something A Little Less Comfortable
Erin Pesut	80	riding hood
	80	one way the body speaks to you

Douglas Cole	81	Lonesome Driver
	81	A Stone Tells How It Is
Michael Brosnan	82	Ghost Light
Daisy Bassen	84	motherboard
M.P. Carver	85	Market Strategies
	85	Formication
Allisa Cherry	86	The 13th Article of Faith
Jeremy Griffin	87	A Better Word for Suffering
Peter Grandbois	88	Let's begin with what we cannot hear—
	89	What remains hidden
Heikki Huotari	90	Be The Biggest Liar On The Block
A. R. Rogers	91	Souvenirs
Samantha Samakande	92	Talking Small
Brian Lutz	94	Leaving the Library Like Doing Laundry
	95	Sign/Language
Tufik Shayeb	96	My Opinion
	98	Anarchist Donkey
Sam Campbell	100	Rural Legend No. 2: Skinned Tom
Marcia L. Hurlow	101	Lucky
Clare Banks	102	A Cliff Over Foster Falls
	103	Lake Swim
Catherine Carter	104	What magic is
	105	The color of aquamarine: a spell for blessing
Contributors	106	

George Freek

WRITTEN AT BLUE LAKE

*After Lu Yu*

Tonight there is no moon.  
There is only my memory of it.  
And so my memory of the moon  
becomes the moon.  
There are shadows at the door.  
They speak to themselves  
of themselves, as darkness  
slithers across the floor.  
A great nothingness rules here,  
but nature makes less of  
us than we make of it.  
Time is a horse that gallops  
riderless in the night.  
Crows watch me, watching  
them, then they take flight,  
and blacken the remaining light.

Bill Griffin

IMAGINED

After rain, thunder  
troubles someone  
farther east; now robin,  
vireo, cardinal compete: who  
can restore the evening?  
Hectic the blowing sheets,  
gutters streaming; now  
leaves perfect  
in their stillness, the three  
would call  
earth back to its business.

Better, friend, to rest  
from fearfulness  
& lightning, better even  
to rest  
from naming birds;  
especially rest  
from supposing all singers,  
insects, rising damp,  
slow earth turning, storm  
that harrows new fields,  
rest  
from imagining that any  
have desire  
that can be  
imagined.

Claude Wilkinson

AN EVENING IN ANNUS MIRABILIS

So startled and pleased in the abundance  
of bluebirds I'd seen this spring, especially  
passing the rubbish heap on a hushed road  
I love to drive just before dusk, that I refused  
even to consider any toxic reason  
for their brilliantly turquoise wings.

Perhaps a singular, gold-bleached thrush  
is only a trick of afternoon light, but not  
the largish, floppy umber rabbit  
zigging past a stagnant pool impastoed  
by algae, dazzled with tornadic gnats.

Each iridescent moment scanned  
in strokes of damselflies, the fantasia  
of tweeting hidden among elms  
by this time approaches white noise.

A little later here and a familiar whitetail  
would be out, both coon and possum would be  
creeping through their twilight haunts,  
and likely as not, the beige blade of an owl  
slicing into the iniquity of night.

Maybe for one somewhere in Holland,  
it's the yellow therapy of sunflowers  
under a low, cumulus ceiling  
like that of a Dutch master's sky.

But for now, beside such beauty as this,  
piled with refuse of people's lives,  
the landfill reminds me of Chaucer's Troilus  
when he says sweetness couldn't be known  
without knowing also about the bitter.

No wonder I marvel from craters  
up mounds rising toward fearless clouds  
drifting for what I imagine as empyrean places  
of rest far beyond our current pestilence

and we who are pawns in the Olympian  
game of asses and elephants.

In this brief peace, I can still give thanks  
for the mild longing of doves, and for  
the season's many fireflies—more than I've seen  
since I was a child when they hung like berries

almost asking to be plucked from thick  
Mississippi air, to sacrifice their lights  
for us to streak our cherubic faces  
in fluorescent glory as if come  
with bright revelation for earth.

Claude Wilkinson

COCK ROBIN, IN MEMORIAM

February had been hard.  
Even the doe who once  
had three sweetly dotted children  
was now down to  
two winter-grizzled fawns.  
And I had waited, and waited,  
and waited on God.  
On the morning  
of the third day  
of metallic ice and freezing pipes,  
I found him  
under my front window  
in the one corner  
without snow—  
a dry vestry, if you will—  
crumpled and colored  
like an autumn leaf  
till a few reddish breast  
feathers fluttered by a breeze,  
when his bill and crown  
and tarsi were found,  
and then the blind  
but still bright eye,  
though with no closure  
of a tiny arrow  
to suggest fowl play,  
no resplendent shroud,  
or cooing lamentations,  
or lovely tolling bell,  
or anything else soothing  
from the nursery rhyme,  
only his chalky outline  
of transfiguration.

Ilma Qureshi

WOVEN IN SILKEN SKY

when a koel, or shall we say, a cuckoo,  
lets out a song  
the day folds, decidedly,  
like a teenager  
rolling up sleeves  
in the heat of July

then, glistening like a water crystal  
a sharp clarity descends on me;  
the world will go on  
in its infinite, shimmery beauty  
after i am gone  
can I trust such a world?

what then, shall my gait be?  
shall i wear my trousers rolled?  
shall i stop  
to look at the ant  
that carries a sack thicker than frail legs  
or the bird  
that goes home with empty-pockets  
and yet glides with a certain flair,  
shining; like a crescent  
woven in the silken sky

Sjohnna McCray

## THE MIDNIGHT TRAIN

The midnight train is late. It's cold and the stars  
shield their eyes from those on the platform.

No headlights beam, only uncertainty  
and the folded arms of time misspent

on being still, sitting with a backpack  
in your lap, closing legs, withering to

make room for someone else—to sit down and breathe,  
to share this waiting, alone but not

alone. Forget the city's sly promises.  
Stop wasting time: appetites starved with diets.

Admit things you love: spaghetti carbonara,  
his hair too long, irises in a field—

all the untethered color. The surprise  
of still seeing and craving. Desire.

Admit imbalance: bearded arms that aren't his,  
eating sopas—crisp on the bottom

and prepared with so much chili it makes you  
vomit, praying the train is late so you can

go home and sit in the beige recliner, watch  
him take your vitals, blood pressure

and heartrate, your life an eclipse on his own.  
You are always Orpheus looking back

as the train approaches, singing down the tracks.

## HOMEGOING

Dirt dashes against the coffin's lid like rain  
slowed by a Japanese maple—kaleidoscope  
of red leaves, twigs like arteries and veins.  
While quiet would be welcome, it's hard to imagine  
losing control, water falling off the tip  
of a branch midair—It's presumptuous  
to assume heaven lies beyond the Milky Way,  
the soul sluicing through the stars  
like an x-ray—noting the black holes  
and supernova explosions heating  
gas into threads and galactic plumes of orange,  
blue and purple. However, I refute  
the universe's combustible heart and dream  
earthbound dreams. Every Sunday, I'll wait  
in the garden to stare up at him because  
it's watering day and I want nothing  
but to stand at attention like foxglove,  
a field of it, hundreds of arms in bloom,  
bell-shaped and draped, palettes of pink,  
leaning toward the sun and craving his shadow.

Ellen June Wright

TODAY, I HEARD OBAMA SING AMAZING GRACE AGAIN

as though it came across ocean waters.  
The ex-slaver's hymn, floats on currents,  
rolls foam-white waves,  
his repentance for all those crimes.  
Men and women stacked like corpses  
in excrement and disease for months .  
I hear voices chanting dirges  
from the deep, marking spots where charnel  
depths hold soulless remains.  
I shouldn't think of these things.  
The young poet says this topic is dryer than  
a breast after wormwood, but I keep returning  
to it—a gleaner of remnants overlooked.  
Every bone precious. The screams  
they voice ring in ears inclined to hear.  
Why write about the dead buried  
fathoms deep except my body feels  
the thrall of those left behind, doomed  
ancestors who sank beneath the waves.

## MICHAEL BROWN

Every cell in me knows it's barbaric to leave a brother uncovered.  
I still see Michael Brown's body lying in the street.

I still dream about Antigone scooping handfuls of dirt over him.  
Even the ancients knew we are not carrion.

The least among us is too noble.  
What is life if we can't honor our fallen dead.

Cover him. Place a coin in his mouth.  
Usher him towards the abyss called the Underworld.

Usher towards Achilles and other heroes he might have become.  
Crows circle overhead like ancestors dancing.

I still see Michael Brown's body lying in the street for hours  
like a carcass, like something those birds will soon devour.

Jessica Mehta

FOUNDNATIONS

We were children<sup>1</sup>  
sown as seeds,—no babies  
gone to ghost. You

interred us not  
in unmarked graves,  
buried sins and shames  
ill-covered. Readily

and rather,

we took to root  
in cherished gardens.

Unearth us,  
cap to cradle, these bones  
ne'er forgotten, tended  
tender now  
by unisi hands. We are not

your foundations, stem  
walls and slabs for slaughter, —  
brick by brick, we  
are Nations found, called  
home to ever-blossom.

<sup>1</sup> “We were children” was written in red paint on the doors of St. Paul’s Co-Cathedral in Saskatoon on June 24, 2021 in response to the announcement from Cowessess First Nation that 751 unmarked graves were found near the former Marieval Residential School.

Katherine Hoerth

WHAT CASSANDRA KNEW

She grasped her auburn locks of hair and screamed.  
Centuries ago, the world ignored  
her prophecies. No one believed that Troy  
could turn into a world of ash and bone.  
Was it because the lips that carved those words  
were supple? Because her voice reminded them  
of the lilting of a thrush's song,  
rising at the end of every sentence?  
Did she squeak? Or screech? Sound shrill?  
Did everything she say seem like a question,  
not an answer, warning, or the truth?  
Maybe she uttered "like" too many times.  
But every word flung from her tongue came true.  
She watched the ramparts burn, her kingdom fall.  
What good is prophecy when you're a woman?

Cassandra, I can feel the flames today  
as flare stacks fill the sky like blazing stars.  
Cassandra, no one's listening again.  
Cassandra, climates change, but man does not.  
Cassandra, I am pulling out my hair.

Chrissy Martin

I TEND MY GRIEF LIKE ANY GOOD GARDEN

on my knees in the dirt where the tulip centers are so black, I swear they're all spiders. The cucumbers are fat and wilted, starlings ganging up on the peppers and wooden stakes.

Someone needs to tell the worms to stop blessing this ground fertile—stop eating and burrowing, stop keeping this grief alive.

I am trying to call in the crows, scoop the bulbs, salt the roots. Mourning dirt under my nails in stripes and between my toes.

The rabbits eat the rosemary and basil and maybe if I am lucky, they'll eat pinholes in my grief. Digest and disperse this more evenly. A fertile gift to another garden

There is too much here for one body, we must sprinkle it around. Sprinkle this body around. It is too much.

Carter Vance

COLOSSUS OF SPRING

I took hope in baskets,  
came across river brook bends  
that felt around ice flows  
for a hint of ground,  
cloaked as they were in  
pale shroud.

I walk it up past train  
track marks and police tape,  
caution yellow the wounds we  
took as given until they  
burst out in red blood.

I mix it with sugar,  
make honey water blossom  
for afternoon tea between  
the two of us shared.

I give it to the sky,  
set it on windowsills  
to drift in coughing breeze.

I watch its bundle spin sticks  
across horizons.

I return to rooming time.

Jackie Chicalese

ELEGY IN REVERSE

*after Matt Rasmussen*

Chrysanthemums bleached  
like mandibles collapse  
themselves into buds.

We carry the bodies back  
from the funeral grounds,  
reattach peduncles to spines,

flatten soil with our knees.  
At home, my mother sews  
obituary back into newspaper,

the words dropping from her  
eyes like ash. In the viewing  
room, my father resurrects,

his rising soft as dawn  
chorus. Morning makes him  
beautiful when he returns

to us & he opens his arms,  
reaching for me smelling  
of fruit, leaves molted

into yellow sunlight.  
I catch this reaching  
inside my lungs like spring.

## CREATION MYTH

On the night you died, the clouds became basins  
of ache. Over four hours, ten inches of snow made glacier  
our sidewalks & roads, collapsed tree branches & powerlines.

Nonna stayed awake all night with you, the candles she lit  
to keep warm blurring into ghosts, your lungs blossoming  
moonflowers against the slow spread of a sickly flame.

At home, my brothers & I slept while our parents stared into the dark  
silence of the phone receiver. We wouldn't know until morning. No—  
I am revising this—that night, we were all together:

Nonna gathered us on the lawn & the moment you died,  
snow began lifting off the ground, thousands of crystals  
floating upward & outward, catching in our lashes

& silvering the sky. We stood in the light as it pulled  
the snow into a web of stars & with our hands open,  
we passed to one another this new weightlessness.

Will Simescu

BATHING IN THE SUPERMOON, JOSHUA TREE 2019

In the Pleistocene, enormous ground sloths  
feasted on Joshua Tree fruit,  
sipped ancient water from a receding shore.  
Now the sky glows with tributaries  
of Los Angeles light pollution.

I lay my head on sand-colored gneiss  
and dream of my father.  
How as a child I clung  
from his bicep in the front yard.  
“I want to end this progression,”  
he said at last.

If only I were never cut from the sky.  
If only I were a faint breeze among the blossoms  
of a great wildflower bloom.

Aircraft inch west in the night  
from point A to B, toward the illusion  
of closure. The Joshua Tree  
stretches arms high, beckoning.

Richard Schiffman

RIO GRANDE GORGE

The earth puckered its lips  
and the high Sierra has poured  
its snowmelt heart there ever since.

The earth puckered its lips  
and the river can't stop babbling  
sea chanties to the desert.

The earth puckered its lips  
and everything tumbled in—  
dragonflies, the moon, the frigidly winking stars.

The earth puckered its lips  
and the tourists snapped their selfies  
as they teetered on that igneous brink.

The earth puckered its lips,  
the hikers hiked, the rafters rafted,  
the swimmers swam, the jumpers jumped.

And yes, a few stood transfixed,  
gazing at the frothing Rio, merging  
in the distant hiss, recalling

how that liquid bliss, murmured  
on and on six million summers.  
poetry slicing through Earth's heart of stone.

Timothy Geiger

TAKE FLIGHT

*for Jane*

Swarming the silver maple's branches  
in loose murmurations of gold pocked rust,  
a constellation of starlings chatters  
their explanations of divinity  
to the wind.

    To demonstrate they ascend  
to form a consensus mid-air,  
an adulation in no shape other than a cloud,  
a blurry mist twisting like salvation  
over the memory of green Tennessee hills.

You've been here so long  
your name is etched on the stoop,  
a house number unrecognizable in faded paint,  
your tired heart has finally forgotten  
how to speak its pulse.

    The past  
is the dry field you bless each morning with seed,  
adrift you sit and watch the starlings—  
their incomprehensible psalms of the body  
transfigure into the body they become.

## GRACKLE, GRACKLE

Precursor to summer wind,  
chattering palettes  
and trembling quarrels,  
or on twigs, comatose  
as slow cooked beans.

I have always wanted  
to admire their plucky flight,  
call it “resplendent in apogee,”

but my head begs dust  
to stay dust, my head  
wants kinder equations  
than their collective  
designation as “plagues”—

most times I see them  
as oily grubbers  
picking lint from seed.

God over grackles, tiny subset  
that watches over all wings,  
make Spring behind  
their tail feathers, sun always  
in their stuttered wake.

Richard Band

THE GRASS IS BUGGY AND ALIVE

this backyard morning cool in May  
in my camp chair reading a detective yarn  
I do not know the names of birds  
indifferent to me as well  
that red one I think absurdly bright  
the breeze nips but it comes and goes  
the underside of the eaves has mold  
a mower drones three houses down  
the flower beds await a border wall the stones  
in a pile my work laid out for me  
the wind chimes our daughter gave my wife  
make no music now the wind is low  
or maybe that's a blower up the street  
I do not know the names of neighbors that far off  
warring against growing things or failing that  
we pen them into plots that we contrive  
the bird bath is dry should I bring water  
or wait for summer rains  
the gumshoe as I read is tracking DNA  
I remember mailing off my spit  
it means I can never contemplate a crime  
even the gnats fly blinded by predictive genes  
all creatures are in a database somewhere  
the planet has been digitized  
it's just another thing that doesn't move my mind  
or stand me up I close my eyes a while the book  
falls off my lap I wonder who the killer is  
the piled skies own a display of cloud that will never  
be lovelier nor ever again the same

Nick Maurer

GOODBYE EVERYBODY

*after Hart Crane*

I cannot mask the sorrow.  
Eyes like pricked buckets

hurricane down the wildlife  
of words I cry.

The jaw of gone,  
an alien refund.

He leaves, the wind stammers.  
Clearly the world, empty and blood.

This carnival  
of shade,

this bridge of  
inverse. He left. This

garden of so long ago,  
almost as violent and numb

as a cartoon animal,  
this original song.

Hannah Whiteman

SPINS & SUBSTITUTIONS

I.

Under sky-piercing  
loblollies I chew greasegrass and  
the word steal:  
the way kudzu steals sun—chokes  
out sharp toothed flowers with dark  
—and I steal your stories  
for my own,  
like the one you told  
about your step-brother, each detail  
intentional, precise: how his father stole  
him, locked him in a dim red room.  
And, though now returned home,  
he lives terrified of closed doors.

Over wine with my friends  
on the Saturday evenings you work late,  
they ask about the brother  
you won't speak of  
and I recount the details (adding  
a few of my own—white afghans,  
police chases, reporters with cigarettes,  
station house coffee, wooden-benched  
court rooms and you,  
picking nervously at a red tie)  
that spark debates on what it means  
to survive. And he, at only five years old:  
will he do more? . . .  
but the bald, aged sun  
admonishes too much—  
insists I stop telling.

## II.

Your work tells a story all its own:  
monochrome canvases, red on red  
on red, an homage (you once said) to Reinhardt—  
an image you use and use again.

The found objects—mostly newsprint—  
to weave in and out of the acrylic  
take you days, weeks, to sort and select.

I trip over headlines—  
everyday horrors—your mediums—clipped, piled  
on the couch, the coffee table, littering  
the white afghan in the den. Often,  
you arrive home after midnight and still  
you begin, so late, with the red:  
wrathful streaks drip with intent  
on a bare garage floor.

With words I recreate  
your basketball shorts  
your paint spattered hands,  
weave headlines with red paint cans.  
An afternoon of writing  
and my speaker stands, sorts through newsprint,  
and at night, paces a bare room, sleepless.

A slash of pigment across canvas  
with a sharp *not me* (you always see yourself);  
I raze my work into a thinner sketch,  
clean of you again but for  
purposeful pops of vermilion.

### III.

Our stories are written  
in August afternoons' thunder and wax green—  
a sharpness that needs sweetening.

But I have always been good  
at amending, like when you bought flax seed  
instead of oat flour. I did what I could:

added seeds to egg whites, a touch  
of cinnamon, of nutmeg, a quarter cup  
of dried apricots—a prying sweetness  
like prying turtles or saints or cake out  
of formless clouds—a touch of vanilla. . .

I beat, beat, beat  
the wet and dry ingredients,  
beat away the smells of gesso and acetone,  
beat away your mother's ringtone,  
beat away the *swish* of your shorts as you shifted  
in the doorway, watching.

Finally beaten,  
dough slumped into the glass bowl,  
as you slumped into the pine-shaded backyard.

When I tell this story,  
I will recount an ending:  
two fingers across a wooden spoon too wet;  
I will substitute your "something is missing"  
for a kiss in the retelling.

Andrea Moorhead

## THE INTENSITY OF DREAM

A mammoth explosion down by the river, it's the ice again crashing against itself splitting and sliding, hung up on the light trapped in the water, scraping the bottom of the clouds, you can't go down there, there's no firm ground, the ice will crush you, swallow up the space you inhabit, occupy, wish to dream in, can't you see the explosion will repeat, the river will surge forward, up and over the immensity you long to contemplate slowly, not heeding the warnings that all space has been obliterated in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, in the very rhythm you hope to simulate?

## CANTILEVERS

High pressure over the mountains, needles in my mouth now, flowers walking around, sowing flames and ash, the same air yesterday, high pressure and the sun spins over us, needles in my mouth, the pines sway at the slightest sound, flowers sowing flames and ash, you can't walk here with me, don't you see the mountains? The crust is cracking and spitting, the ground is green snow and purple iris, there are no more bells ringing across twilight, across the supposition that high pressure brings relief from storms.

Ted Haddin

## HONEY IN THE CHURCH

*For Rev. John Burrus*

They say it came from four hives  
conserving the lives of bees  
in woods behind the church  
some in a small jar  
for each person  
and here drop by drop  
between strawberries and blueberries,  
down into oats warming to welcome  
the burdens of bees. From fall's soft  
breeze they swing back from gardens  
around, and weed-flowers along the track,  
their pollen pulled to the hive's retreat.  
I feel the humming of bees, honey and bowl,  
and I think of their returning to a source  
older than either, which they share  
with us today as we come together  
in this one little jar that says  
the source is here, where we are.

## RISING TO A HEAD

It was exploring all those earlier avenues,  
I came to a fullness I couldn't resist,  
how looking over the burgeoning grass  
and following out the flights of crows,  
I came to a fullness of what has passed,  
and blessings of what was flowing now.  
I saw a field of corn, and cabbages large  
for picking, and blood-red tomatoes  
dark in their green recesses. And I  
thought of the blessing I was feeling.  
So full now with old age reckoning,  
I couldn't believe the surprise that  
followed my eyes as they went down  
rows and standing stalks, and to the  
river's edge where, like the years,  
everything was going by.

Ted Haddin

PARATROOPER, W W II

Jack Vogel drinks bread and milk  
in a glass late at night. He chooses  
the heel, the toughest part of the bread.  
He liked to climb high for a dive.  
He trained till he was hard as nails,  
with men not afraid of jumping off.  
He was so strong he could crush  
Brazil nuts easily in both hands.  
In German his name means bird.  
At night high over Belgium,  
in sudden winds he jumped  
into German hellfire in the Battle  
of the Bulge and lived to tell,  
when thousands could drop down  
and only a few survive.

They fixed him, they said,  
but they couldn't take out  
the shrapnel, too many pieces,  
he'd have one game leg. Accept  
pain when he walked. But late  
at night, in a lonely room,  
he pours from the bottle, stirs  
the milk, and dips pieces of bread  
out, one by one, with a spoon.

## AMANITA MUSCARIA

Looks like an exploding  
atomic bomb, the veil  
coming up full of white  
warts, the stem solidly  
producing the overhead  
mushroom, parallel of  
the scientific achievement  
reproduced in nature.

It curls over as it rises,  
orange, yellow, red or  
brown, the prize for just  
looking, or the photograph  
to capture the natural  
explosion, safe for all  
who'll leave it alone  
to itself for another  
year. No tsunami, no  
radiation to poison the air.

Jack Giaour

IN PEABODY THERE IS A LOT

of history nobody knows about if you're not  
from massachusetts you don't even know where  
peabody is i lived in peabody  
my roots are not in peabody though my family  
roots i mean i learned how to swim there and  
i learned how to ice skate there in  
the brown bruins hat that was too big for me  
because it was really my dad's  
but i bet you didn't know any of that  
you can't even find peabody on the map  
if you look you'll just see a black dot  
but it's a lot more than that i learned  
about bullies there i was beaten up for  
the first time there i learned how to lie to my parents there  
but i bet you didn't know that either

## PTSD II

*Our military must be focused on decisive and  
overwhelming... victory and cannot be burdened  
with the tremendous medical costs and disruption  
that transgender in the military would entail.*

- Donald Trump

i only dream of flames now                      i only whisper thank you  
to the smoky shadow of a sleeping friend's spine      i never speak out  
just in case my voice catches fire  
i found myself crying in the ashen husk of a tank  
and i shot him      a dead friend found me in a mosque and gave me his spine  
i was a soldier in a dream once      i was a killer in a machine once  
i got discharged and they told  
me about service and they told me about costs and they told me all  
about men  
raping and killing and loving and knowing that free will is not about victory  
and it never was      i saw bodies stacked against a fence once  
we aren't soldiers      they aren't soldiers  
we are all men with broken bodies and medical costs and dreams  
i am a man                      that is my war crime  
we burned the bodies                                              i dream of flames

Nick Soluri

GOING OUT THERE

*for Barbara Jean*

Tell me the world won't end  
before I can finish picking  
the weeds from the front lawn  
in this dead heat of July.

The riverbed is flush with low altitude,  
buying back each frog, each waterlily  
for the price of two packs of smokes  
and a couple days rain.

Tell me it'll all be okay  
when it finally happens.  
Your doorknobs will shine  
like honey even when it gets dark.

Plucking something from the ground,  
let's call that remembering. The mallards  
gawk in the sky. Look at them,  
they never notice us

down here, sweating into our shirts.  
When you ask *are you thirsty?*  
I'll say yes and I'll mean it.  
If I begin to cry into myself

will you keep me from going  
out there into the field to listen  
to the tobacco leaves sing?  
I know it will all be too beautiful

and more than I can handle.  
Tell me how much beauty is worth,  
there's too much of it around me.  
Watching it all fall down is poison.

Laura Sweeney

## HOW TO KNOW YOU'RE DOING FINE

If you've made it more than one year in this in-between place  
and can allow yourself a bubble bath and hibiscus tea.

If you still give him credit for naming your dog  
after a Norwegian goddess.

If you remember how he introduced you to the graphic novel genre  
and you still buy the Neil Gaimon book on Norse Mythology.

If you didn't marry your rebounds,  
the mechanic or the Russian.

If you still have the poster of the residency the one with the cornfield  
as backdrop where he called you a corn-fed woman.

If you recall your fondling in the corn fields fondly  
though the farmer didn't take kindly to such antics.

If you've spent time with the goats on an art farm  
in the backwoods of Tennessee.

If your blood pressure is slowly reviving  
as the magnolias will later this spring.

If you've embraced this opening, like the butterfly graphic  
one of your students designed as your logo

*you are entering your life.*

Brian Clifton

ORPHEUS IN THE SURGICAL THEATRE

When I think of my brain,  
I see the neat lines  
of a surgeon's instruments  
on a sterile cloth under a spotlight.

We tell ourselves myths:  
Eradication in every margin,  
Orpheus and his unplucked lyre.

\*

As with myth, the tenuous correspondence  
between what was written and what remained  
blank. Once upon a time, I believed I named  
my own destruction. And then my oncologist  
set my date as though it were casual.  
In the margin, that date grew until outlived.

\*

We tell ourselves myths,  
stories known only in memory—  
how the lyre hummed in Orpheus' hand,  
how my body, too, hummed when hardwired  
to a blackout. Even now, these myths do not hold.



David Holper

MASTER CLASS IN DISASTER

Pour water on the hot spots. Let the ashes settle.  
Let the wounds heal, if they will heal. Understand

what refuses to be understood. Go to the boulder  
in the field and ask again, why him? Stare into

windows and think of ice, salt, topaz: of her ruckled face  
there, under the morphine, as she was dying, the lines

ploughed deep into her flesh, the nurses frowning in their hazmat suits,  
the monitor flatlining. Gather with a few friends at that Italian restaurant

in Daytona Beach. Star says, where were you that day? So imagine us all  
spilling the beans: our mundane survivors' tales. Only after we finish,

Star tells us about her nephew, his first day working at Amex in NYC.  
He had those first day ticker tape skitters. When others arose to go

stand at the window, staring, he stayed glued to his computer, typing  
diligently away. Only after the cop came into the room and shouted

to evacuate did he look up. He raced with the crowd  
to the elevator, jammed in with all the sheep, terrified,

dialing cell phones, trying desperately to reach someone going to voicemail.  
He couldn't think who he should call. When he got to the front door,

the fireman bellowed at them, *whatever you do, for God's sake, don't look back!*  
Like Lot's wife, he couldn't stop himself. He remembered it in slo-mo:

the body tumbling, the man's tie flapping. He turned away  
before the body stopped on the concrete. After that,

none of us could find a word to say. Ice, salt, topaz: numbers mean  
nothing. It is the vacuum after the body is lowered, after the ashes

are cast upon the waters. Don't bother trying to explain.  
Until you have stood in that absence and felt love

shattered beyond repair,  
there are no words to explain.

Jeff Tigchelaar

## GIVE ME SOME COVERS

Who when someone requests a bit of comfort  
would give them sackcloth and burlap

Who when a woman asks for a glass of water  
hands her a chunk of coal

To reiterate

I will dream again as soon as I get some sleep

I'm pretty sure I'll dream again of karaoke-ing

though first I'll need some sheets

I dreamed last night of Doris Day

She stood in a pulpit and said epiphanies

are recognizing a Christ in your midst

and I dreamed I'll admit of Goldie Hawn

She danced and the traffic slowed down

Willie Nelson sings "Blue Skies" but man  
Doris Day did it first

Could I get those covers now dear

As soon as I get some blankets I'll dream again I swear

A long way to morning and you with your tugging  
and still no comfort in sight

If Goldie stopped her car to dance in the road  
don't tell me you wouldn't dance along

Lord I'd never let her go it alone

Please God send Goldie to our town

lucas ray hall

A POEM IN WHICH I LIE ABOUT HOW MUCH I WORRY

i really only worry  
about malaria

when we are out  
at the end

of the dock,  
at that small lake

behind the woods  
& the waves are hitting

the wooden supports  
exactly right & I turn

to look at you  
& a mosquito lands

on your forearm  
& you swat at it

& miss

& miss

& miss

& the mosquito

wobbles away,  
within sight, just over

the water &  
its tepid breathing.

Emily Murman

FAREWELL, ORPHEUS (LATER!)

this moony day / here you are  
camel-lashed on the driveway  
light on the length of your arm  
I trace your shadow with my shoe

o! orpheus, can I call your name  
till you're sick of me / a nude in  
a painting you can't remember  
made from tiny flowers, ho hum

a few steps over / & our dust  
would have glowed / maybe  
there's a fifty percent chance  
of you ignoring me or stumbling

I watch your walking shoulder  
till the high note's breathless—  
all I do is bitch & what I mean is  
I want to be wanted

running like a plover / my mouth  
rambles leaving no room for rest  
& you mean no harm but some  
days looking back outweighs it all

Theodore Worozbyt

THE DESK

No one else knows one leg is broken  
here at the bottom of this new house.

I can repair it, and it will be  
as though the anole under the kitchen

clocks in a carton I opened today  
will have looked more than once

at me; and then at something else  
with his small, discerning eye.

SEPTEMBER

Shrunken in their thick green skins  
unripe pecans fall and stain  
our concrete brown

and bruise still bared summer feet,  
the sound they make  
on the deck

like dull knocks at a window  
left mistakenly unlocked  
while leaves shook

in the cool wind,  
knocks by no one.

Elena Adames Camaño

*PA'LANTE*

The mechanics are the same.  
You can turn a music box into a metronome.  
You strip some parts out and  
you introduce new pieces in,  
but there are the same  
gears  
clicking together,  
pushing and grinding,  
making marvels from honed and shaped  
metal.

The mechanics are the same,  
even if it looks different to the casual observer  
who hasn't touched the inside,  
who hasn't cracked open the diamond etched façade,  
who hasn't gotten intimate with the mainspring and escapement,  
who hasn't replaced an oscillator to preserve  
functionality, who doesn't know this same gear train once fit together  
into a clock,  
who hasn't seen the complex  
become simpler.

The mechanics are the same  
as you shed away  
the excess,  
the worn,  
the pieces that just aren't necessary anymore.

Cindy Yarberry

LIMBO

These days I live in a place  
between my parents' dying friends  
and my children's crooked cartwheels.

I wish I could go back  
to the blues and greens of marbles,  
to sandcastles sagging in the tide,  
to chilly angels carved in snow.

Instead I move slowly, inexorably,  
toward fragility of bone and spirit,  
toward missing more of what is said,  
toward hospital beds where you can't remember  
which side lets down.

In one of those hospital beds lies my father's old friend Leonard,  
curled up now into a fetal ball  
finally at the end of his suffering  
occasionally calling my father's name in moments of lucidity.

Come with me to the nursing home  
my father says  
but I cannot  
caught in my carefully crafted world of in between.

## AN EXERCISE FROM TWO PAGES OF THE DICTIONARY

Again at cross-purposes,  
we settle into an uneasy truce  
you working your crossword puzzle,  
me crocheting another useless rug.

You're never cruel, or crude, just not there.  
The crow's feet at the corner of your eyes  
remind me how long we've been at this,  
how crowded our minds are with dreams  
of distant days forged and fought  
in love's intense crucible.

Across the room, I know you see me crumbling.  
You don your crucifix  
and refuse me, once again.

## Simon Perchik

\*

It's the rope you carry from a cemetery  
with the dead holding on as if the knot  
would keep its shadow in place

let no one lift it from the ground  
to blacken their teeth not to forget  
why night became a night

covered the Earth and for the first time  
as the word given it by the dying  
who need certainty, who lose their way

when separated from each other, want  
something to hold that is not a stone  
would never let go their hand.

\*

You pull each clothespin closer  
letting them hear the sadness  
that comes over the wash

when its water drifts through you  
to dry her blouse before your eyes  
—every night now it soaks

in the darkness that once had a face  
would smell as her breasts  
the way empty shells from the sea

still wait to be carried back  
—you listen for arms spreading out  
as sleeves to start without her

are already gathering stars  
side by side to begin the morning  
that lost its will to come.

Jianqing Zheng

## SOULFUL DANCER

*after William Ferris's Unidentified Street Actress*

She's expressing herself, her shoulders bouncing, chest jilting, eyes beaming with sunshine. Jerking and stomping, popping and locking, wiggling and backsliding, she casts her smile to a streetful of whistles and clapping hands.

county fair  
a butterfly flutters  
head to head

## ESCAPE

*after Dorothea Lange's Homeless Family,\*  
Atoka County, Oklahoma, 16 June 1938

They plod along from place to place looking for the meager chance of survival, but the unpaved road goes so long and so rutty across the vast barren flatland as if there's nothing but the sundown in the distance.

homeless  
sharing the night  
with stars

Brent Ameneyro

## I'LL NEVER BE

dancing with another child  
for the first time

at some wedding in Mexico again  
scared of stepping on her toes

praying the next song  
isn't slow

blue chrysanthemum dress  
hair a color I'd only seen in a telescope

darkness  
between flashing lights  
a darkness that lasted decades  
darker than a black charm lily  
quick flash  
on the scuffed wood dance floor  
and back to dark

dad put his hand on my back  
mom clapped

I stared at the DJ's emerald tree boa lights  
for the rest of the night

Amelia L. Williams

## SONGS OF THE RED VELVET ANT

*The red velvet ant is a species of parasitoid wasp native to the eastern United States. The wingless females can deliver a painful sting, earning the nickname “cow killer.”*

### i) Soliloquy

O honey bees, true ants, and paper wasps—  
my social cousins who know the nectar dance,  
lay trails of scent for comrades, construct  
elegant paper houses, how I envied  
your winged chance to savor pollen, touse  
blossoms, touch antennae – to belong.  
When my mate carried me up in nuptial flight  
it wasn't my dreamed-of bliss, no honeyed song.

Now I strut along in my red velvet dress,  
drawn like daggers to the mouth of a nest  
in my finery. Emitting foul perfume,  
stridulating at the least threat, I can't help but  
lay my eggs in the ground bees' open brood cells;  
my children are destined to eat theirs one by one.

### ii) Cow Killer, My Eye

I'm shy in truth, but you in your sandaled feet,  
naked toes, step aside fast to notice me  
strutting down the dusty path. Floozy,  
you're thinking, sashaying around in that red  
velvet dress. Yeah your friend gave you shit  
for anthropomorphizing me. But sugar—

I'm imagining you too. Some nights  
in a dream of flight we explore the heart  
of a foxglove together, sip and suck,  
slip pollen from anther in a speckled cup.  
Awake, both back in our armor, no signals  
to send. I've wrapped you in my story.  
Implacable, you enter the nest of the other  
to lay your eggs. Do we belong together?



Larry Blazek

A BONE WHITE OBJECT

lies surrounded by a verdant chaos  
perhaps it is the last remnant of  
a forgotten highway that once  
led to a mysterious lost city  
perhaps it is a remote airstrip  
that is the only lifeline to  
civilization for a handful  
of people that inhabit  
a trackless wilderness  
perhaps it is a white  
painted pine board resting  
in a neglected, shaggy lawn  
in the center rests  
an indeterminate object  
perhaps it is a rickety  
ancient aircraft warming up  
an engine long overdue for a rebuild  
to try for just one more flight  
perhaps it is a great black bird  
that signifies an evil omen  
perhaps it is the last  
member of an endangered species  
hereto unknown to science  
perhaps it is a common insect

Kelley Jean White

DEATH MIGHT JUST BE A GENTLE WIND

lifting us into the trees. We'd be mockingbirds.  
We'd be skylarks. We'd be the songs  
that no one but the forest hears. The scent  
of pine, the sticky pitch, the swoosh  
of evening stars; the taste of raspberries  
washed by cool water, the thick butter  
of sunlight drifting across forgotten skin.  
Would I remember Justine? Or Robert?  
Or a little New Hampshire village? No.  
Death must be ice, tearing limbs, stripping  
tender branches from new saplings, shredding  
bark. And the mornings after death?  
Oh, I knelt at your bedside too late. I sat  
reading in a corner chair and thought counting  
your breaths was enough. Sublingual morphine.  
I overruled your late refusal of pain meds.  
Did you think pain would keep you alive?  
No, you were welcoming death. You thought  
pain would bring it to your bedside. Perhaps  
it did. We placed death on your tongue  
like the unholy communion of Anger and  
Forgetting. And you tasted fish and stale wine.  
I was the goldilocks testing the porridge  
for heat. Will a morning come when a beloved  
finds me with a spoon in my lap, egg dried  
on my tongue and choking my throat? I shall  
die alone. As you did. I snuck solid through  
a melting glass wall into sleep. At home.  
I keep answering that phone call. Keep pulling  
the brush through my hair, braiding, binding,  
and the car carrying me those few minutes  
late to your going. Pax. The curtains swaying  
in a forgiving breeze. The screen sang. Yes,  
Ivy, I'd left the window open. Yes, death,  
you took that spirit in your gentle wind  
to the hawk hungry trees.

## EVEN JAYS CAN BE A ROLE MODEL

curious, noisy, intelligent  
and yes, aggressive, territorial,  
vocal; able to imitate the cries  
of hawks and other birds,  
to communicate with body language  
and sounds, a diverse vocabulary  
of vocalizations; they feed  
on fruits, nuts, seeds, insects, mice,  
frogs and sometimes rob  
nests for young birds and eggs;  
they are willing to chase off humans  
and will mob larger birds such as  
crows, owls or even eagles;  
they are loyal to their mates, somewhat  
migratory: raucous, harsh, yes,  
they drive the other birds from  
suburban bird feeders, but are  
handsome in their cerulean miters;  
their lives tend to be short  
(seven or eight years in the wild,)  
but one captive female lived  
26 years and three months  
difficult for a social animal.

Adam Day

LOGIC OF NEGATION

Woman with a fold-up  
grocery cart; handles

of plastic bags like stray  
hairs, packed under

an oil-stained blue  
sleeping bag, baby

lying on top. Woman  
pushes the cart out

and back, out and back,  
where the asphalt sags,

squinting into the sun,  
out and back, out and back

into a future  
which never arrives,

legs disappearing in fog.

## TO MOVE WITH OPEN HANDS

Little girl climbs  
pregnant out of swamp

water lapping  
broken steps, distractedly

running a forefinger  
along the rim

of her uneven  
bottom teeth, trying

to see from inside  
her own face.

Frances Koziar

BETWEEN THE LINES OF HISTORY

stories wander without a name, whisper  
in echoing caves dripping  
phantom tears; they ripple  
the darkness too softly to be heard over those  
given words.

History describes the siege of the Aztec capital,  
of hundreds of thousands strong marching  
on the largest city anyone  
knew. History

murmurs of hair torn in grief,  
blood rushing down the streets like water, flowing  
around and beneath bodies  
lying like river stones, tells us  
of a ruined world of turquoise  
and gold, shattered  
like glass hitting the cobblestones.

History speaks, too, of king Cuauhtemoc, the last  
ruler of that metropolis, explains  
that he fought side by side with Temilotzin,  
his captain, writes that they stood together on that precipice  
in their moment of surrender  
like eagles screaming into the void, but—

Years later, when Cuauhtemoc  
was killed on a rumour  
—again, worth telling—  
of an uprising, cut down in flowers and tears  
and quetzal feathers, Cortés noted  
(in passing)  
that Temilotzin found no more reason  
to live.

Temilotzin swam into the sun, he said, straining  
for the only reprieve he could reach from his losses, the only  
escape that wasn't barricaded like the door  
to the world he had known, seeking only

to leave the dungeons of his grief,  
and a city and a friend that had fallen together  
like the sun at the ending  
of the world.

Cortés writes  
that a friend called to Temilotzin  
from a boat, warned him of the sharp teeth  
of the water, hoped  
he would reach out for the shore like a lost child reaching  
for their parent's hand  
as crocodiles sifted along the surface like lily pads, but he  
ignored them.

Temilotzin swam away  
from that ever-burning hearth  
of Hope and Possibility, swam away  
from his future and his obligations, shifted  
like the ether of the in-between as he turned instead  
toward Cuauhtemoc, toward the Mictlan of the dead,  
heading away—ever away—from the world  
he longer wanted to know.

Between the lines of history, stories wander  
without a name, of lovers and lies  
and secrets painted in red and black, hidden  
in plain sight but hidden  
nonetheless, for thus could the story fit  
just so.

Debra Kaufman

FORGOTTEN

Who sent my sister and me away,  
into the wind swirling our skirts, and why  
was it our uncle who found us uptown

and told us our grandfather died  
from a stroke, whatever that meant,  
and drove us back in his humming car

to our grandmother's house, where  
we lived then, with its dark hush,  
cigarette smoke, cousins crowding the kitchen,

why was our mother busy brewing coffee,  
why didn't our father take us aside  
to explain how his father could be truly

forever dead when just last week  
he'd spoon-fed him ice cream?  
Everyone all muddled together,

no one minded how much cake we ate,  
no one warned us what would happen next.

Kerry Dexter

ANTIETAM

This night, candles flicker, lights burn low  
In silence, we see starlight  
and remember, many years ago  
how zeal, wrath, and rebellion met, this ground to fight

Across these fields, so silent now  
Hand to hand, blood to blood until the night  
this night, candles flicker, lights burn low  
in silence, we see starlight

Brother to brother, friend turned foe  
Zeal of war distorting sight  
Antietam Creek, Bloody Lane, all silent now  
as spirits walk these fields of night

This night, candles flicker, lights burn low  
In silence, we see starlight

*Aside: At Antietam Creek, near Sharpsburg in Maryland, thousands of people were killed, wounded, or went missing during one day's conflict in 1862. Each year in December, volunteers set out candles across the landscape where the battle was fought in the exact number of those gone.*

Miriam Moore-Keish

KATHERINE AND I FOUND A GRAVESTONE IN THE WOODS

Katherine and I found a gravestone  
in the woods behind our elementary school,  
past the field where we played at recess,

before the school built a playground  
where a classmate was raped one Halloween  
on the heat-cracked basketball court  
years after we changed schools—

we found a gravestone in the woods.

We left boys against girls tag,  
kids practicing prison on each other,  
*cops and robbers* in rehearsal before  
they ended up performing it on the streets.

We walked in the creek though the forest,  
a capillary in the circulatory system  
leading to the Chattahoochee, beating  
with the heat of Sherman's army that  
marched here over a century before us.

We didn't know the creek was full of  
sewage but we were eight  
and we knew everything.

We even knew the gravestone was a brick.

But we thought our world was too full of life,  
the land under our feet too strong,  
so we chose to believe it was a grave, dead.

Back in the air-conditioned classroom,  
learning about our seven times tables and  
the Creek the teacher said were here before us,  
between new words like "wattle" and "daub,"  
Katherine and I whispered to the other kids,  
*we found a gravestone in the woods,*

our hands under the table grasping pine needles—  
souvenirs from the trees,  
from the world we knew so much about—  
braiding them, making them strong.

Marcus Myers

PERSONAL ESSAY

As if any body  
but mine cared  
the mourning doves in tone come

closer to what we call *sky*  
or *blue* They sing above  
the utilities

of language  
and the rest  
I cannot say

when seated  
with a century of houses  
in a chair

made of trees  
and somebody else's labor  
So that my graying body

might relax and dream  
in liminal skin I didn't choose  
before a garden

I didn't plant  
but have tended  
with bees in order

to open these words  
as blooms as a singular try  
at songs Whose songs

are these their leafy tongues  
unfurling ecstatic All I have  
these attendant failures

I can really own them  
now I will  
disattend to blue

thoughts like bones  
of birds returned to soil    keep  
my hollow voice down

where roots  
remember  
without ear or sound

Marcus Myers

WHEN HONEST

*[A letter to my daughter]*

When I read about the pending doom  
our species has invented for you,  
for our bodies, dear daughter,  
I have the cretin & intolerable thought: Marry  
a survivalist. No, better yet, join  
a polygamist band of survivalists  
(whose grit & skills,  
an ancient love language  
older than shame)  
will keep you alive.  
When scrolling rotten tundra  
and sea levels rising  
and calling back our plastic islands,  
when I hear the air conditioners'  
disgraceful thrumming,  
as I read and think on paper  
from trees we never see,  
when I picture the incinerated cities,  
the toxic brown air of  
the coming desertification,  
the choking lines of panic  
the oxygen, the water  
and fuel shortages create,  
the fixed & migrating crises, the atrocities,  
I have the recurring image  
of the raisin-dry brains  
of all this reading and thinking.  
When honest, I'm ashamed  
of how I've believed  
we must live within this sanctum of words  
& pictures  
to live the semblance of a life worth living.  
And that's when I wish I could teach you—  
no, train you—  
how to survive. I guess  
I can teach you what literature  
& art teaches: how to lose.  
And yet this is old-school cynical.

I can't really teach you this. And  
I guess I don't know how  
to put down our words  
while mourning to imagine  
the new truth as another beauty, new  
with more of the old shame.

Laura Ruby

## GIVING WHAT SHE GOT

*“The horizontal slit of an octopus’s eye is a door that judges us.”*  
—World of Wonders, *Aimee Nezhukumatahil*

The slit of your mother’s eye is a cracked door that slams shut. She has eight arms to haul you from the coral cave

of the dressing room, fillet your fish-white belly and rippled thighs, eight arms to tow you under the vicious kitchen light

to check your face for hooks, propeller scars. She used to think you’d be a beautiful girl, she always says, like her mother said

before her. *I used to think you’d be beautiful. But this, here, and this—such a shame.* The damage is forever, she believes,

and you believe it, too, even when you don’t. *What damage?* you ask, *Where?* and she won’t answer, because who answers

the obvious? Her beak, though tucked away, is strong enough to shatter houses, scrape out the soft meat inside. She is soft

meat, too, boneless in the water. It doesn’t matter. Or does it? She is only giving what she got. You are boneless in her arms.

The suckers tear at you, leaving open mouths of flesh that dread the sting of salt. When it comes, it tastes like love, and not.

Kory Wells

HIERARCHY OF NEED

I was thirty and changing my name  
to milkmaid  
dairy bar Bessie Guernsey  
I was a factory a barn practically  
a regional supply depot  
built stacked stocked  
the more the baby nursed  
the more I produced  
I was constantly  
producing  
and starving and awkward  
with the baby so slippery and breakable  
I held her with both hands  
while I fed her  
knee to knee my husband sat with me  
knifing and forking a steak  
to my mouth bite by bite  
and I ate it  
like a child  
no thought of the cow

Nicholas Gruber

FIRST LOVE

he finds *apple*, but yesterday she let him  
taste *plum* first & he loves her so. she is  
absolutely beaming, having just named  
*peach*, which they—instant- & *wordless-*  
*ly* agreed was perfect. men are soft fruit  
in the garden; easily bruised, they purr  
or exciting things burst off their tongues:  
*juicy. tart. salivate.* she takes a big bite,  
hands him the bright globe. their eyes meet.  
their eyes don't go wide or anything, but  
it's clear they both like apple. sunny pulp  
laughs down the chin

of that brief paradise.

Joe Bisicchia

## MADONNA OF THE POMEGRANATE

Forever appears as a painted portrait outside my jalousie far from Italy, this side of the Mississippi, as a framed backyard dead tree. And Sandro Botticelli, I think of you, and of your depicted seeds of pomegranate variety.

I wonder if you ever tired of painting the popes. Or became invigorated even more by it. I wonder if you ever wondered too of forever and of mortality. I wonder if forever outlasts even our names engraved in granite, or in your case layered in a line of permanent oil.

Nothing is permanent. Even sadness and torment. Distant cemetery twists for me, this canvas beyond the dead tree, grass to new grass. And I know from here what I see. Somehow, the meaning for me is underneath your imagery. Of all the holiness of heaven and earth, my vision settles on the pomegranate; this you painted upon the Child's hand. Therein the seeds, now here too for me.

Yes, even for me. There shall be mortality. But, yes, I see that very baby outside my very own jalousie. The Virgin, the angels, and forever too. The portrait fills my mortal room in the oils I am currently embodying as if beyond a moment in time, but immortal, thank God, even if thin as glass, but made to last wide beyond any art. I am uplifted in my belief, even here aside a window looking at a dead tree and a distant cemetery, and seeds, this side of the Mississippi with so much ongoing greenery.

Melissa Huckabay

PINK EVENING PRIMROSE, OR BUTTERCUP AS MY MOM  
CALLED IT

Sometimes called the pink lady, twirling her skirts, “showy,”  
morning canary dust that leaves sprinkles on your collar and  
pollen-dots on your curious nose as you inhale and sneeze,

as you and your sisters run through the backcountry,  
dirt smeared on your hands and face, leaving the house  
while the sun is high, coming back when it sinks in the grass,

your bare feet on the concrete porch, cold, just as the primrose  
opens its pollen-eyes to the twilight’s jazzy, steady hums,  
flirt-petals springing wide like a girl’s gangly arms,

the days will soon shorten, the evening buttercup grows,  
spreading like tangled hair on the ground, digging fingers  
into earth, showy blooms that know their place.

Shana Campbell Jones

LONGLEAF PINE ILLUMINATION

Here, in the South, fire should blaze the landscape,  
Open up the tangled understory,  
Threaded thick with ceaseless brush.

So say the sunburnt and wiry rangers,  
Who stand, hip-cocked and masculine,  
Squinting with a surety I wish I could see.

So say the pale and careful historians  
Who recount virgin forest limitless  
Cut down, planked, and vanquished.

Tempting lightning, drawing flares,  
What tree creates sunshine instead of shade,  
Grows a grassy common, its own wide garden?

Prometheus, surely you would weep  
To steal fire as artfully as these trees,  
Reaching into storms, catching roaring sparks.

Perhaps your punishment would have been less  
If you had set yourself aflame instead,  
And formed a different, generous people.

Then the pineland could have been born again  
As itself but in an altered way -- new  
Yet constant, evergreen: lit from within.

Kirstin Ruth Bratt

## RABAT

Unfinished columns hold the sky  
Imagine yourself veiled and flowing  
Serenity descends like a lopsided heron  
Forget for a moment, you hectic, fretful tourist  
Stop for a moment without past and future  
Leave your identity and relations  
Watch a tugboat hew the surface of the sea

## OUTLINE

*Inspired by the 495th ghazal of Hafiz*

- A. You want to plant flowers
- B. The government is laughing at you
- C. The grocery store is too crowded
- D. The candles are dying
- E. You want
  - 1. Someone to witness your pain
  - 2. Someone to drink from your mouth
  - 3. Someone to admire your flowers
  - 4. Someone close when you want her
  - 5. Someone far when you want to
    - a. Understand your own heights
    - b. See yellow flowers when they are blue
  - c. Find things you want like
    - i. Good will
    - ii. Lucky coins
    - iii. A rooster in the arms of a king

Samantha Malay

COMPASS

on the night path  
tree trunks are dark torsos  
twigs snag sleeve flannel  
and unlace boots  
lantern-glow limns cabin voices  
and wood smoke  
is diminished by rain

INTERVAL

between mountain shoulders  
in a field of dry grass  
where a pile of stones remembers the plow  
and dishwater pearls on garden dust  
wave to me from a bend in the road  
and a chain of unadorned days

Weston Cutter

SPRING'S PROPORTION

Beneath the hat of January's fog  
behind the thin sweater of winter's end  
before spring's grand inhale+prior to  
each crocus clarinetting the new trail  
(purple confetti lining a parade's  
chaotic route)—at root in everything  
is one cup. Small. Tipped over. +yr lone task  
so simple it's the river's agenda:

to flow as path demands until the cup  
inside yr longing's been set right again.  
There's nothing more. And *fill it* isn't why.  
Your empty hands were made for their *almost*,  
their *ready for*. The world comes blossoming  
in proof+poverty. Behold enough.



Erin Pesut

RIDING HOOD

Like castles, fairytales can be shorthanded. Girls, unlike bottles, do not need to be broken. What goes out may not come back even when there's bread involved. Nothing is a given. Even if the bread is warm. Even if the starter has a name. Foxes carry squirrels in their mouth even if there's no photographic evidence. But what you mean is *wolf*. The girl is out there alone in the woods. Girls are older than electricity. No AA batteries, no flashlights. They simply do not exist. Girls with bread and woods with wolves. A scream is one of the oldest things on earth.

ONE WAY THE BODY SPEAKS TO YOU

a massage therapist told me once my chest was as tight as a box  
maybe it's loneliness, she said, maybe trauma. She was folding  
her white towels when I asked, Is there anything I can do?  
She told me, The body will know how to let it out.  
I tipped her and left and she found me in my car,  
engine running, *Oh*, she said, *and you can sing*.

on the drive home I scanned the splintered woods  
for any signs of life: a deer? a reddish fox?  
a coyote? maybe a hare? what about a footprint?  
I couldn't find a thing. I imagined my trauma  
a pacing faceless tiger jailed behind my ribs and  
I opened my mouth right there in the car  
to see if anything would come out  
crows flew out like cut-outs

against the wintered sky

Douglas Cole

### LONESOME DRIVER

I feel like I'm driving forever—at every road stop  
whole lifetimes slam up against the back of my head—  
even you float by in a doppler wave  
bending into a siren wail in the dark—  
and around midnight just when I find a station  
I like on the motel TV, a hard knock comes at the door  
and a child standing there with a pamphlet asking  
where will you be at the end of the world.

### A STONE TELLS HOW IT IS

At the end of this road with white rocks on the hillside  
spelling out “Emory,” you find a screen in an empty field  
with rows of folding chairs and not one viewer you can find,  
so you sit dead center and watch celebrities in reenactments of  
someone's life, not yours, and it passes at incredible speed,  
but you get every detail, every nuance, and though you sit behind  
a blank expression, I see those hints of amusement—  
you've been sucked in! It's not a life you'd want or willingly live,  
but given the options and with night now coming on,  
you rise so the projection splashes across your face,  
and you occupy every move as if no one were watching.

Michael Brosnan

GHOST LIGHT

The word works its way in again,  
like stink bugs, like dust and memories of youth.

On the phone, I find myself telling you  
I'm *very* happy with life —

how it has turned out for me and all.  
It's not true. I'm happy at times,

but not *very* happy, not even close these days.  
Yet I say it anyway. And

I'm *very* happy for you, too. I say: the house, the family,  
the work weighted by the heavy cloak of hunger,

the garage crowded with stuff that wants to be of use.  
It's all... well, you know, mostly nice.

You say nothing at first, and I imagine  
you're thinking about the stars again — how

so many of the stars we see at night are long dead.  
You talk about dead stars all the time — how

you and me and all the beautiful people  
who came before and loved and suffered and died

have been studying ghost light.  
*It's ghost light, my friend. Just ghost light.*

But tonight you don't speak of stars.  
Instead, you tells me of helplessness — watching

the human world spin in the wrong direction.  
So suddenly. Dumbfoundingly.

I try shifting the conversation to sports  
and more harmless things. And then I remember

that I'm holding a piece of plastic in my hand,  
black and smooth and stuffed with

wires and digital chips and rare minerals,  
humming with electric current and the reconstructed,

disembodied voice of a good but distant friend,  
and the night is closing down. Again.

I look out the window into the absence of daylight.  
It's *very* strange. These stars of yours

they are still gone, yet their light fights on  
to mark all emptiness — as if

all emptiness  
is the mark of all beauty.

Daisy Bassen

MOTHERBOARD

what if I wrote in the future  
and nothing had happened yet,  
not the daffodils blooming,  
not the laundry dried, smelling  
of lavender, lavender stems  
crumbling like ash, like a poor  
defense; what if I were always  
ahead of where I am, a long jump,  
a league beyond myself, tethered  
to mistakes like every busy placenta,  
the liverish chimera we're beholden to,  
all of us who were born shell-less;  
what if marionettes compelled us  
because they are what we are  
but more violent, more aware of strings,  
silk and hemp, of hands ready to withdraw  
and pick up the cup of coffee, tea,  
something hot that's been waiting  
for a break, shoulders shrugged,  
it is what it is, but it isn't, is it?  
what if time were very polite  
and said *oh, excuse me*, before it ruined  
everything, the daffodils' yellow ecstasy,  
mending, repairs, restoration, reparation,  
my hopes and yours, any explanation  
for the weakless universe?

M.P. Carver

## MARKET STRATEGIES

In this story there is the grasshopper and the ant.

The grasshopper doesn't work, but he's cooking a scheme to become his own bank through strategic investment in whole-life insurance, which he will fund by playing the middleman, hiring out that ant, who is naïve enough to toil away for even minimum wage.

That ant, as you may know, spends night after night in therapy, discussing her compulsive swallowing of stars, growing luminous.

## FORMICATION

I run my fingers through your syntax, watch them staining,  
and your spleen's still wearing that funny beret.

I misheard miracles in your skin and my  
tympanic membrane is all regret.

Your poetry's bad, but  
you have a nice  
triangular shape,  
blessed of hips.

There's a word for the tingling feeling amongst  
and between ions of the macro scopes,  
but let's not repeat it here.

Allisa Cherry

THE 13TH ARTICLE OF FAITH

The bishop said *think on these things*  
but we didn't know if he meant chastity  
or virtue, benevolence or faith –  
all nouns that might be used  
by a cosmetic company for different shades  
of lip gloss. We thought,  
*Imagine only ever kissing one mouth again*

*for the rest of your life.* He said  
*follow the admonition of Paul*  
and we heard Bono singing *Forty*,  
the Edge's voice entering  
high up in the octave.  
We wanted  
each subsequent year  
to be a new mouth  
opening before us,

filled with longing and praise.  
The unfashionable tie  
at his throat made us think of a tether,  
how he'd lashed himself  
to his woman like a raft  
on a swollen river. His eyes  
did not brighten before  
the shine on our mouths.  
He was steadfast. He belonged  
in the company of ranchers.  
He had one desire.  
He meant to drive us  
like cattle toward God.

Jeremy Griffin

A BETTER WORD FOR SUFFERING

*How severe is your pain?* the woman in the waiting room asks her husband, reading from a clipboard. *How far down your leg does it radiate?* She's plump and sweetly-dimpled in that prim southern way that announces itself in slanted vowels and a souring of the mouth at *goddamn*, while he looks on with the dry resignation of a prisoner who knows that he will never again slip out of a lover's bed in the morning's dark infancy to drive home along palmetto-lined avenues named after flowers that seem to exist everywhere but here, *jacaranda* and *poppy*, *amaryllis*. What if everything is a preamble to hurt? What if I never split my knee open on a Matchbox car when I was four, the skin never returning to itself after so many stitches and time—would I still know what it means to ache? *How long have you been in pain?* If it can bleed, it will. The man coughs into a sunspotted fist while his wife continues to inventory the many failures of his body, tissue-thin voice floating atop the room's sludgy silence, a eulogy for the future, and I'm still waiting for the next disaster to show me how many ways there are to heal.

Peter Grandbois

LET'S BEGIN WITH WHAT WE CANNOT HEAR—

The sleeper's dream wrapped in stone

The whisper of web the spider floats upon

Long-fingered sunlight  
across the rain-soaked street

Swollen red leaves the moment  
you speak

The light at the center of the twig  
your dog carries  
in its mouth

The ceremony of darkness in the box  
of your cardboard childhood

The warm baritone of the lone pine  
singing at the field's edge  
at dusk

The forgotten  
road

The buzz and clamor of growing  
old

## WHAT REMAINS HIDDEN

Begin with the night  
is not completely  
or choose the morning  
about your puzzle  
It doesn't matter  
from your wind-blown  
this brief dialogue  
You become one thing  
trying to keep hidden,  
swept into unknown,  
is take into  
accept that all things

and the fact that flesh  
star-grown  
that lies to you  
of unstated need.  
which story you pluck  
pain  
it's all been paid for—  
between blood and bone.  
and then another,  
to keep from being  
when all you need do  
your body all things,  
move toward moan.

Heikki Huotari

BE THE BIGGEST LIAR ON THE BLOCK

The crow picks up and drops the small dark object as the streetlight sizzles off and then back on. Oh connoisseur of status quo, oh reliquary of convention, profound be thy pleasure. Denigrate infinitesimally but assign your chosen units to the rate of change, hair's breadths per nanosecond for example. Many are the UFOs that would expose stochastic matrices to gamma rays if not lie down with dogs, if not ascend with fleas, be geosynchronous if not queen for a day, so call immediately: polygraph examiners are standing by.

A. R. Rogers

SOUVENIRS

After walking the perimeter of an exposed belly  
of green water I return home with sinewy

bones that bloom and fall in my palms:  
a bone used to be in a body used to hold it

together until it became a tool until I set it  
to soak in a solution and made the bone

a thing to behold and safe to handle while  
I bitterly consider the possibility of god

Samantha Samakande

TALKING SMALL

*Now is not the time*

I instruct my tongue  
almost out loud  
because I can feel it  
living a separate life  
on the roof of my mouth.  
I taste the seconds as they go,  
irritate you with my silence.

It always starts this way,  
with us scuffing up  
the same wounds,  
with us talking small  
about things that are not small.  
You have had enough  
of me, so you shuffle away  
to the very ledge  
of the bed and we just hurt  
and breathe in the dark.

For a small minute,  
you are only meat,  
and I am only meat,  
in between us,  
the indentations our bodies  
have inscribed into the mattress  
on nights better than this.

All this squinting  
at the black slab  
I know is your back  
starts to make me hungry.  
I feel that naked  
ache, that miserable animal  
in my gut I know is love.  
I feel extinguished—  
a matchstick snuffed out  
by its neck as if this thing  
of ours is hollowing. How it shakes

us loose of ourselves, makes us  
insufficient, how it slices  
us wide, leaves us  
ajar

Brian Lutz

LEAVING THE LIBRARY LIKE DOING LAUNDRY

And, as I was leaving the library  
and thinking nothing about her,

(did not know how, really, to think  
about someone so far from my everyday

navigations and expectations) she  
squatted before the simple statue,

as if she too were a statue, and focused  
through the triple lens of eye, eyeglass,

and camera. When I passed her in some  
small way she gave me a look that was

like the look Eve must have given  
when finally the cider slid into the jug

of her gut and she was caught. A look  
that said she was embarrassed to be caught

photographing the simple cement boy  
sitting on a stack of cement books,

an open book on his lap. She was charmed  
by the easy statue so obviously organized

before the library, but for all of my love  
for her, then, that moment, I couldn't see

what she saw, and she could see I couldn't  
see it, and it was like that moment when,

doing the laundry, you click the dryer on  
and the houselights quickly dim.

## SIGN/LANGUAGE

The bridge is no more than the bent back  
of a tall man, a raised eyebrow, one half

of a cupped hand cupping its reflection.  
The water below is not blue, is not newly

spit from spring or loudly proud in its rage;  
it washes in in whispers. The loudest sound

is the bird slapping with a sudden blow  
against the becalmed tide. Nothing needs

to be said. The fog ascends. Somewhere  
in all of Galway a single horn sounds a harbor

hum just under the ken of human hearing. The sun  
runs over the cock-crowed homes crowded

on the banks of the bay. Nothing needs  
to be said. Sounds are drowsy. We speak

the language of our hands. It is morning  
for the first time. We say what needs to be said.

Tufik Shayeb

MY OPINION

is not as humble  
as you

might expect

it wears a three-piece suit  
with a bullet-proof vest

to avoid being shot down

it is a rabid beast,  
confused by your help

or, sometimes,

it is a venomous snake  
coiling near your ideas

regardless of the species,

it is a vast ocean  
that sees itself in the sky

and believes it is alone

my opinion is old,  
but sturdy as Roman arches

it holds up civilizations

on the vague promise  
of an evergreen influence,

the myth of all beginnings

it is a ghost  
haunting the seat of power,

the spirit in a dead cocktail

my opinion falls  
only as drizzle from above

covering the whole world

and drowning anyone  
too anchored or too free

it does not discriminate

my opinion blossoms,  
each morning, as a flower

and withers to potpourri

my opinion is a gift  
given with no gift receipt

a token of no real value

Tufik Shayeb

ANARCHIST DONKEY

bray, bray like a donkey  
bray like you mean it

for exhalation and release  
bray for a life filled with noise

bray like a teacher  
pissed off at his student,

as if each snarl and belt  
brought you closer to truth

you are a diminutive horse,  
ridiculous in stature,

and you are too beautiful to die  
with your tiny legs tied down

so bray with naked thighs,  
with hooves always pumping

*yeehaw*, bray like a redneck  
with a brand-new pickup truck

bray like a motorbike,  
frighten the stingy neighbors

tell your boss he is a square  
then ride circles into the distance

bray like a man, bray like a woman  
bray for love, bray for peace

scrape friendship off the street  
and properly greet your shadows

teach them how to bray at night  
and call it a corral or a farm

bray on the sidewalks and streets,  
until they call you insane

chase the humorless sparrows  
screaming *I'm a flamingo!*

bray at the still carousel statues  
and tell them you are a cousin

bray for justice, bray for honor  
you are too beautiful for crime

bray for science, for NASA  
you are a space-worthy hawk

bray with your voice  
like the sound of a rocket booster,

like a tree caught in the storm  
and when they stop to look,

tell them you are no camel  
bray in their uncertain faces

then tell them you are donkey  
and that this is your song

Sam Campbell

RURAL LEGEND NO. 2: SKINNED TOM

*A Golden Shovel After "In a Station at the Metro"*

Does your husband know the  
freckle beneath your earlobe, the apparition  
of my face when you look at him? Of  
all my women I bring to Lover's Lane, these  
moments with you are most precious. Our faces  
fogged behind window-glass, he peers in  
rips you from the car, from me, from life. The  
ropes cut into my wrists. He pulls me through the crowd  
of trees and my skin petals  
off my frame until my tree is bare. On  
the ground, my life wintered. A  
spirit that once was her touched my wet  
bare muscles before withering black  
and gone. I sling my skin-coat over a nearby bough.

Marcia L. Hurlow

LUCKY

Lucky will stand in front of me and stare,  
his half-pit half-black lab nose on my book.  
If I guess what he wants—canned food, downstairs,  
a cuddle—he licks his lips. If I guess

he craves a chewie or to play outside,  
he adds a sideways stutter dance, surprised  
and pushed off balance by wild good fortune.  
And why not? Such luck just never happens

enough. It may never happen again:  
The love of your life or an unsought win,  
the taste that widens your smile may ripple  
your heart for years. So today I scratch him

behind his ears, pick up his red frisbee.  
We head outdoors, perfectly lucky.

Clare Banks

A CLIFF OVER FOSTER FALLS

He whines and pants, too scared to take a step,  
knowing what he's done, how he's misjudged the width  
of the ledge, its brittle stone, and the weight of his  
body. He's been off his leash and cantering,  
searching the undergrowth, nose in the leaves,  
then back to us like a game, like he's herding us  
or we're his quarry moving across the plateau.  
It's late fall and the azaleas and laurel  
have long since bloomed, where they wait along  
the trails green-leaved and anonymous. Hemlocks  
line the gorge, some growing out from the edge  
like divers ready to jump into the pool  
sixty feet below. The trail is littered with their short  
needles and miniature cones. If you were looking down  
from the top of a tree, you would see him running,  
you would notice his dog smile, his jaw gaping,  
then, his confusion at the edge, suddenly looking  
into deep water, a hole in the mountain,  
a cave pried open, its lid thrown. He stands struggling  
to leap back, you can see it in his hind legs,  
how they think to jump higher, then, lose faith  
and stall out. I'm sure he'll fall. As Carrie  
picks her way lower along the cliff, hanging  
onto steady trees, she reaches for his collar,  
to bring him back to us, and in this moment,  
I picture them sliding, the scrape of loose earth  
and skree in our ears, their drop into the falls,  
swallowed into that cold, complete darkness.  
And I see it: we're searching the cave's water  
for them, we reach, lost, blind in blind water.

## LAKE SWIM

We walk through sand pocked with cigarettes  
to the beach where thin waves lap

and grasshoppers in the reeds shock the air  
with their constant static. My sisters lie

on their towels gleaming in baby oil, smoking  
and drinking Cokes, a *Damn the Torpedoes*

cassette blaring from their boombox.  
The lake floor feels slick, algae and mud squeeze

between my toes drawing clouds. I swim  
along the humming surface with the dog

to the cool waters of the lake's center  
where the crack of dragonflies land and lurch away.

The smell of dry earth, dry grasses blowing in  
from the fields beyond. My sisters call out

*Don't go too far.* I can see my legs treading  
water past the bulrushes and minnows.

*Watch out for the dead horse.* A body I picture  
lying below me, its brown mane spread

against the lake bottom, each strand playing  
in the murky green light of the current.

Catherine Carter

WHAT MAGIC IS

—“*I opened a door.*”  
Rahul Dubey

Not the knife in the throat  
of cat or goat: that’s making  
something else sacrifice  
what you have to give  
yourself. Not the iron-  
racked will behind LaLaurie’s  
attic room. Not praying,  
while waving a wand, “let someone  
burn, but not me, not me.”  
Magic’s not safety  
where there’s none, it’s not  
what gets called magic.

Nor, either, the transfiguration  
of cabbage through  
fermentation, meat  
through heat, Maillard  
reaction, light  
through photosynthesis,  
because that’s something  
else, that’s miracle. Magic’s  
the human thing,  
the one right word, deed, touch,  
at the one right time.

The power of the words  
*God bless, or I was  
wrong.* Of Black Elk’s  
rain cloud. Of  
one man opening  
a door to one small  
apartment to admit  
seventy weeping people  
fleeing faceless shields.  
Of pouring water and milk  
over their burning eyes.

## THE COLOR OF AQUAMARINE: A SPELL FOR BLESSING

Pale beryl cousin of emerald, whose name means *seawater*. Color of light through suspended solution of salt, milt, urine, single-celled cyan algae, fringed baleen, elastic frayed from someone's bikini; of salt-crusted pearls' gritty sheen lodged in oysters' soft whole-body labia or in puckered octopus suckers; of seafloor ley lines throbbing with the underpinning pulse of lava and radiating jade haloes of energy for those who can see with the slotted eyes of the squid, sharks' ampullae of Lorenzini, the lateral lines of traveling toadfish, or gannets' plunging flanges. Color of turquoise, if turquoise could be thin and clear. Color of seawater, that solution of absolutely everything: color I choose to spin out from the frontal lobes into which I have called it with memory— out in words and the stir of fingertips, through the electromagnetic caul of this body, to wrap it around you as a shieldwall against malice and harm: electrical, unseen, blue-green, aquamarine.

## CONTRIBUTORS

**ELENA ADAMES CAMAÑO** is Panamanian-American, and is a second generation immigrant living in Miami, FL. She has been greatly influenced by her time living in various states across the US, including Alabama and Massachusetts.

**BRENT AMENEYRO**'s poetry has been featured in songs, publications such as the *San Diego Poetry Annual* and Seven Circle Press, as well as in an art installation. He has served as the managing poetry editor for the *American River Review* and as managing submissions editor for *Poetry International*. He was the recipient of the 2019 Sarah B. Marsh Rebelo Excellence in Poetry Scholarship, 2020 San Miguel Poetry Week Fellowship, 2020 Master's Research Scholarship, and the 2021 SRS Research Award for Diversity, Inclusion and Social Justice.

**RICHARD BAND** is a retired librarian from Lancaster, South Carolina. His work has appeared in *South Carolina Review*, *Kakalak*, *Charlotte Writers Club Annual Awards Anthology*, *Furman Magazine* and *Light Quarterly*.

**CLARE BANKS** is associate editor for *Smartish Pace*. A recipient of a Maryland State Arts Council Individual Artist Award, her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Boulevard*, *Mississippi Review*, and *Greensboro Review*, among others. She has an MFA in poetry from the University of Maryland and lives in Baltimore City.

**DAISY BASSEN** is a poet and practicing physician who graduated from Princeton University's Creative Writing Program and completed her medical training at The University of Rochester and Brown. Her work has been published in *Oberon*, *McSweeney's*, and [PANK] among other journals. She was the winner of the So to Speak 2019 Poetry Contest, the 2019 ILDS White Mice Contest and the 2020 Beullah Rose Poetry Prize. She was doubly nominated for the 2019 Best of the Net Anthology and for a 2019 and 2020 Pushcart Prize. Born in New York, she lives in Rhode Island with her family.

**JOE BISICCHIA** writes of our shared dynamic. An Honorable Mention recipient for the Fernando Rielo XXXII World Prize for Mystical Poetry, his works have appeared in numerous publications. His website is [JoeBisicchia.com](http://JoeBisicchia.com).

**LARRY BLAZEK** lives on a small farm, where he writes poetry and short stories. He plays guitar, tinkers with mechanical devices, has built his own vehicles, and grows some of his own food organically. He has been published in the *Lucklow*, *Damfino*, *Puff Puff*, *Panopolyzine*, *Indicia*, and *Radvocate*, among others.

**KIRSTIN RUTH BRATT** is a professor, mother, writer who is fascinated with live theater and music. She can often be seen walking near the Mississippi River in Minneapolis or holding yoga poses in a hot studio.

**MICHAEL BROSNAN** lives in Exeter, New Hampshire. His most recent poetry book is *The Sovereignty of the Accidental*. His poems have appeared in numerous journals in the U.S. and elsewhere. He's also the author of *Against the Current*, a book on inner-city education, and serves as the senior editor for the website Teaching While White.

**SAM CAMPBELL** is a writer and teacher from Tennessee. She earned her English M.A. from East Tennessee State University, where she was the Editor-in-Chief of *The Mockingbird*. She serves *Arkansas International* as Social Media Editor and holds editorial positions at *Orison* and *The Great Lakes Review*. She is the fiction editor and co-founder of *Black Moon*. Her work appears in *October Hill*, *Tennessee's Emerging Poets Anthology*, and *Another Chicago Magazine*, among others. Her awards include the 2019 James Still Prize for Short Fiction and 2019 Jesse Stuart Prize for Young Adult Writing.

**CATHERINE CARTER** lives with her husband in Cullowhee, near Western Carolina University, where she is a professor in the English Education program and interim managing editor of *Cider Press Review*. Her most recent full-length collection is *Larvae of the Nearest Stars*. Her work has also appeared in *Best American Poetry 2009*, *Orion*, *Poetry*, *North Carolina Literary Review*, *Asheville Poetry Review*, and *Ploughshares*, among others. On a good day, she can re-queen a hive of honeybees and roll a whitewater kayak. On less good days, she collects stings, rockburn, and multiple contusions.

**M.P. CARVER** is a poet and visual artist. She is an editor at *YesNo Press*, miCrO-Founder of the journal *Molecule*: a tiny lit mag, former Poetry Editor of *Soundings East*, and Director of the 2021 Massachusetts Poetry Festival. Her work has been published in *The Lily Poetry Review*, *Jubilat*, and *50Haikus*, among others. Her chapbook, *Selachimorpha*, was published by Incessant Pipe in 2015. She lives in Salem, MA and teaches creative and digital writing at Salem State University.

**ALLISA CHERRY** was born and raised in the rural southwest of the United States. She has since relocated to Portland, OR where she works as a writing tutor and small-scale urban farmer and has recently completed an MFA in poetry at Pacific University. Her work has received Pushcart Prize nominations from *San Pedro River Review* and *High Desert Journal*, and is forthcoming at *SWWIM* and in *Tar River Poetry*.

**JACKIE CHICALESE** is currently an MFA candidate studying at the University of Arkansas. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Italian Americana* and *Salt Hill Journal*.

**BRIAN CLIFTON** is the author of the chapbooks *MOT* and *Agape*. They have work in: *Pleiades*, *Guernica*, *Cincinnati Review*, *Salt Hill*, *Colorado Review*, *The Journal*, *Beloit Poetry Journal*, and other magazines. They are an avid record collector and curator of curiosities.

**DOUGLAS COLE** has published six collections of poetry, a novella and has published a novel, *The White Field*, in September. His work has appeared in several anthologies as well as *The Chicago Quarterly Review*, *The Galway Review*, *Bitter Oleander*, *Louisiana Literature* and *Slipstream*. He has been nominated twice for a Pushcart and Best of the Net and received the Leslie Hunt Memorial Prize in Poetry. He lives and teaches in Seattle. His website is [douglastcole.com](http://douglastcole.com).

**WESTON CUTTER** is from the midwest, his latest chapbook is *Careful*, and he's had recent-ish work in the *Gettysburg Review* and the *Southern Review*.

**ADAM DAY** lives in a neighborhood adjacent to that of the late Breonna Taylor in Louisville, KY, and these poems are concerned with the intersection of social justice and Buddhism. He is the author of *Left-Handed Wolf*, and of *Model of a City in Civil War*, and the recipient of a Poetry Society of America Chapbook Fellowship for *Badger, Apocrypha*, and of a PEN Award. He is also the editor of the forthcoming anthology, *Divine Orphans of the Poetic Project*, and his work has appeared in the *APR*, *Boston Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Volt*, *Kenyon Review*, *Iowa Review*, and elsewhere.

**KERRY DEXTER** is a writer and photographer. Her nonfiction has appeared in *National Geographic Traveler*, *Perceptive Travel*, *Strings*, *Ireland and the Americas*, *Wandering Educators*, and other print and electronic media. She has contributed to works published by Harvard University Press, Oxford University Press, and the University of Virginia. Most recently, her poetry has appeared *Revival*, *Crannog*, *The Stony Thursday Book*, and *Poetry Scotland*, and been read for broadcast on *Travels with Rick Steves* and *Shannon Heaton's Irish Music Stories*. Twitter @kerrydexter; [musicroad.blogspot.com](http://musicroad.blogspot.com)

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**TIMOTHY GEIGER** has published three poetry collections, *Weatherbox*, (winner of the 2019 Vern Rutsala Prize), *Blue Light Factory*, and *The Curse of Pheromones*. He is a professor of English at The University of Toledo, where he teaches Creative Writing and Book Arts

**JACK GIAOUR** pays his rent as a freelance ghostwriter. He completed his MFA in Creative Writing at Chapman University in 2016. His poems have appeared in *Mantis*, *Cardinal Sins*, and *[PANK]*, among other journals.

**PETER GRANDBOIS** is the author of eleven books, the most recent of which is the poetry collection *The Three-Legged World*, published as *Triptych* with books by James McCorkle and Robert Miltner. His work has appeared in over one hundred journals, including *The Kenyon Review*, *The Gettysburg Review*, and *Prairie Schooner*. His plays have been performed in St. Louis, Columbus, Los Angeles, and New York. He is poetry editor at *Boulevard* and teaches at Denison University in Ohio. You can find him at [petergrandbois.com](http://petergrandbois.com).

**BILL GRIFFIN** is a family physician (retired) in rural North Carolina. Poetry may not have saved his patients but poetry has certainly saved him. Bill's poems have appeared widely including *Tar River Poetry*, *Southern Poetry Review*, and *NCLiterary Review*. His latest collection is *Riverstory: Treestory*. Share his compilation of poets and their poetry, essays, and photography at [GriffinPoetry.com](http://GriffinPoetry.com).

**JEREMY GRIFFIN** is the author of the short fiction collections *A Last Resort for Desperate People* and *Oceanography*, winner of the 2018 Orison Books Fiction Prize. His work has appeared in such journals as the *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *the Bellevue Literary Review*, *the Greensboro Review*, *the*

*Indiana Review*, and *Shenandoah*, among others. He has received support from the South Carolina Arts Commission, and teaches at Coastal Carolina University, where he serves as faculty fiction editor of *Waccamaw: A Journal of Contemporary Literature*.

**NICHOLAS GRUBER** is a candidate in the MFA International program at UNLV. His writing has appeared in *The American Journal of Poetry* and *Furrow Magazine*. Also a First Year Writing Instructor, he's stacking paper.

**TED HADDIN** is Professor Emeritus from University of Alabama in Birmingham and is the author of two collections of poetry, *The River and the Road* and *In the Garden*. He continues to play violin and write and review poetry.

**LUKAS RAY HALL** holds an MFA from Pacific University. They are the author of *loudest when startled*. Their poems have appeared in *The Florida Review*, *Moon City Review*, *Atlanta Review*, and *Raleigh Review*, among others. They live in St. Paul, Minnesota.

**KATHERINE HOERTH** is the author of five poetry collections, including the forthcoming *Flare Stacks in Full Bloom*. In 2015, she won the Texas Institute of Letters Helen C. Smith Award. Her work has been published in numerous literary magazines including *Poetry South*, *Valparaiso Review*, and *Southwestern American Literature*. She is an assistant professor at Lamar University and editor of Lamar University Literary Press.

**DAVID HOLPER** has done a little bit of everything: taxi driver, fisherman, dishwasher, bus driver, soldier, house painter, bike mechanic, bike courier, and teacher. He has published a number of stories and poems, including two collections of poetry, *The Bridge* and *64 Questions*. His poems have appeared in numerous literary journals and anthologies, and he has recently won several poetry competitions, in spite of his contention that he never wins anything. He teaches English at College of the Redwoods and lives in Eureka, California, where his is the city's first Poet Laureate.

**MELISSA HUCKABAY** is a poet and multi-genre writer whose work has appeared in *Defunkt Magazine*, *The Remembered Arts Journal*, and *The Inkling*. Her short fiction won the 2019 Spider's Web Flash Fiction Prize from Spider Road Press, and her short plays have been produced at several stages in Houston, Texas. A former high school teacher and journalist, Melissa is an MFA candidate in poetry at Texas State University.

In a past century **HEIKKI HUOTARI** attended a one-room school and spent summers on a forest-fire lookout tower. He's a retired math professor and has published poems in numerous literary journals, including *Spillway*, *the American Journal of Poetry* and *Willow Springs*. His fourth collection, *Deja Vu Goes Both Ways*, won the Star 82 Press Book Award.

**MARCIA L. HURLOW**'s first full-length poetry collection, *Anomie*, won the Edges Prize. She also has five chapbooks. Her poems have appeared in *Poetry*, *Chicago Review*, *River Styx*, *Nimrod*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Stand*, *Cold Mountain*, *Zone 3* and *The Journal*, among others. She has twice received the Kentucky Art Council's Al Smith Fellowship for Poetry and is co-editor of *Kansas City Voices*.

**SHANA CAMPBELL JONES** is an environmental lawyer at the University of Georgia where she focuses on coastal issues, sea-level rise adaptation, and oyster aquaculture policy. She grew up in the Florida Panhandle. Her essay, “Letter from a Floodplain,” appeared in *Orion*. Her essay, “Family Portraits, With Dogs,” appeared in *The Barely South Review*. It was selected as a notable essay by *Best American Essays* in 2014. In 2021, she completed an Orion Poetry workshop led by Geoffrey Davis.

**DEBRA KAUFMAN** is the author of the poetry collections *God Shattered*, *Delicate Thefts*, *The Next Moment*, and *A Certain Light*, as well as three chapbooks, many monologues and short plays, and four full-length plays. Her most recent poems appeared or are forthcoming in *Poetry East*, *North Carolina Literary Review*, *Tar River Poetry*, and *The Phare*. She produced *Illuminated Dresses*, a series of monologues by women, in 2019, in Raleigh, North Carolina. [Debrakaufman.info](http://Debrakaufman.info)

**FRANCES KOZIAR** has writing published in over 40 literary magazines, and is seeking an agent for a diverse NA fantasy novel. One of her poems shortlisted for the 2019 Molotov Cocktail Shadow Award Contest, and her poetry has appeared in *Acta Victoriana*, *Snapdragon*, and *Thin Air Magazine*. She is a young (disabled) retiree and a social justice advocate, and she lives in Kingston, Ontario, Canada. Author website: [franceskozyar.wixsite.com/author](http://franceskozyar.wixsite.com/author)

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**SAMANTHA MALAY**'s work recently appeared in *Ponder Review*, *In Parentheses*, and *TINGE Magazine*, and will soon be published by *Kind Writers*, *SHARK REEF*, and *Five South*. She was born in Berlin, Germany, and grew up in rural northeastern Washington State. A graduate of Seattle University's sociology program, she is a theatrical wardrobe technician by trade and a mixed-media artist. Her published poetry can be found at [thistleandhasp.wordpress.com](http://thistleandhasp.wordpress.com).

**CHRISSY MARTIN** is a Ph.D. candidate at Oklahoma State University and has an MFA in Poetry from Columbia College Chicago. She is the Poetry Editor for *Arcturus* and an editorial assistant for *Cimarron Review*. Her work has appeared in *Harpur Palate*, *Tinderbox Poetry Journal*, *Crab Creek Review*, and *Carve Magazine*. Find her at [chrissymartinpoetry.com](http://chrissymartinpoetry.com).

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**JESSICA MEHTA** is an indigenous woman and citizen of the Cherokee Nation. Much of her work reflects place, space, ancestry, and lineage. Recent accomplishments include the 2020 Birdy Prize by Meadowlark Books, a 2020 gold award for her poetry collection *Savagery*, and her solo exhibition “emBODY poetry” at Open Signal New Media in Portland, Oregon. See [jessicamehta.com](http://jessicamehta.com) for links to books, a documentary on her life and work by Osiyo Television.

Originally from Atlanta, **MIRIAM MOORE-KEISH** received her undergraduate degree in English from Macalester College and her Master’s in children’s literature from the University of Cambridge. Recent publications include *Chanter Literary Magazine*, *The Southwest Journal*, *Penultimate Peanut Magazine*, *Collision Literary Magazine*, *The Underground Journal*, *The Blue Route*, *The White Wall Review*, *The Yale Perch Literary Magazine*, *The Academy of American Poets*, *The Hoxie Gorge Review*, and *The Dead Mule School of Southern Literature*, as well as her chapbook, *Cherokee Rose*.

**ANDREA MOORHEAD** is editor of *Osiris* and translator of contemporary Francophone poetry. Poems and translations have appeared in journals such as *Abraxas*, *Indefinite Space*, *The Bitter Oleander*, *Poetry Salzburg Review*, and *Stride Magazine*. Poetry collections include *The Carver’s Dream* and *A l’ombre de ta voix*. Translations include *Dark Menagerie* and *The Red Bird*. Moorhead’s French work is featured in *Phoenix 23*; her English work, in the Autumn 2018 issue of *The Bitter Oleander*. In 2018, she was awarded the Prix International de Poésie Antonio Viccaro.

**EMILY MURMAN** is a poet & educator from Chicago. She holds an MFA in poetry from National University. Her debut chapbook, *Shrivel and Bloom*, is forthcoming in 2021, as is her chapbook *I want your emergency*. She can be found on Twitter @emilymurman.

**MARCUS MYERS** lives in Kansas City, Missouri, where he teaches and serves as a co-founding and managing editor of *Bear Review*. A semifinalist in the 2019 92nd Street Y Discovery Contest, his poems have appeared in or are forthcoming from *The Common*, *The Cortland Review*, *Hunger Mountain*, *The Laurel Review*, *Mid-American Review*, *The National Poetry Review*, *Rhino*, *Salt Hill*, *Sink Review*, *Tar River Poetry* and elsewhere.

**SIMON PERCHIK** is an attorney whose poetry has appeared in *Poetry South*, *Partisan Review*, *The Nation*, *The New Yorker* and elsewhere.

**ERIN PESUT** received her MFA in fiction from Columbia University. Her writing has appeared on Vermont Public Radio and in *Legacy Magazine*, *TAILOR Magazine*, *The Peel*, *Owl & Spade*, and *Classifieds: An Anthology of Prose Poems*. Her short stories have been shortlisted for *The Masters Review Anthology X* and the *Southern Writers Symposium* and her essays have been recent finalists and semi-finalists in writing competitions through *CRAFT* and *Boulevard Magazine*.

**ILMA QURESHI** is currently pursuing a doctorate in Persian poetics, Sufism, and Comparative Literature at the University of Virginia. Hailing from Multan, a small town decked in the south of Pakistan, Qureshi grew up with

a host of languages and writes in Persian, Urdu, and English. Previous work has been published in literary journals such as *Tafheem*, *Tareekh-e-Adab-e-Urdu*, *Active Muse*, *The Ice Colony*, *Rigorous Magazine*, *The Global Review*, and *Audio Times*.

**A.R. ROGERS'** writing has been published or is forthcoming in *Permafrost*, *The West Review*, *Texas Poetry Calendar*, *Red River Review*, and *Southwestern American Literature*. A recent graduate of Texas State University's MFA program, she now lives and teaches in Austin, Texas with her dog, Yakona.

**LAURA RUBY** is primarily a novelist with eleven books published, including *Bone Gap* and *Thirteen Doorways*, *Wolves Behind Them All*, both National Book Award Finalists. Her fiction has appeared in *The Florida Review*, *Pleiades*, and the *Beloit Fiction Journal*, among others, and she has a poem in *Clockhouse* and another forthcoming in *Poetry Online*. Currently, she teaches writing at Hamline University and is an MFA candidate in poetry at Queens University.

**SAMANTHA SAMAKANDE** is a Zimbabwean poet currently based out of Bloomfield, NJ where she resides with her husband. She is a graduate of Allegheny College and is a junior editor for *F(r)iction*. It is her lived experience as an immigrant that made her a poet, an observer, and a daughter of many tongues and in-betweens. Her work has appeared in *Pif Magazine*, *Hobart*, and *Gordon Square Review*. In 2020, she was the second-place winner of Frontier Poetry's Award for New Poets.

**RICHARD SCHIFFMAN** is an environmental journalist, poet and author of two biographies. His poems have been published in *Alaska Quarterly*, *New Ohio Review*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *New York Times*, *Writer's Almanac*, *This American Life in Poetry*, *Verse Daily* and other publications. His first poetry collection *What the Dust Doesn't Know* was published in 2017 by Salmon Poetry.

**TUFIK SHAYEB'S** poetry has appeared in numerous publications, including *Potomac Review*, *Sheepshead Review*, *The Menteur*, *Lost Lake Folk Opera*, *Madcap Review*, *Heyday Magazine*, *Blinders Journal*, *Muzzle Magazine*, *Restless Anthology*, *The November 3rd Club*, and others. To date, Shayeb has published three chapbooks and one full-length collection titled, *I'll Love You to Smithereens*. Currently, Shayeb resides in Phoenix, Arizona.

**WILL SIMESCU** grew up in Northern Michigan and spent six years as a Russian language analyst in the U.S. Air Force. He currently lives in Colorado and studies Restoration Ecology at Colorado State University. He was a finalist for the *Ember Chasm Review* 2020 Summer Poetry Contest and a semi-finalist for *Nimrod International's* 2020 Francine Ringold Awards for New Writers. His poems have also appeared in the *Louisville Review*, *Slippery Elm*, and *Plainsongs Magazine*.

**SAVANNAH SLONE** is a queer, bipolar, and disabled writer, editor, and English professor who currently dwells in the Pacific Northwest. Her work has appeared in *Split Lip Magazine*, *Paper Darts*, *The Indianapolis Review*, *Glass: A Poetry Journal*, *Crab Creek Review*, *FIVE:2:ONE*, *Pidgeonholes*, *decomp magazinE*, *Crab Fat Magazine*, *Pithead Chapel*, *Hobart Pulp*, and

elsewhere. She is the Editor-in-Chief of *Homology Lit*, as well as the author of *An Exhalation of Dead Things*, *Hearing the Underwater*, and *This Body is My Own*. She enjoys reading, knitting, hiking, and discussing intersectional feminism. You can read more at [savannahslonewriter.com](http://savannahslonewriter.com).

**NICK SOLURI** is a poet and playwright from North Carolina by way of New York City. His poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *Hobart*, *Misfit Magazine*, *Drunk Monkeys*, *As It Ought To Be Magazine*, *Albany Poets*, and in the anthology *Without A Doubt: Poems Illuminating Faith*. He's an MFA candidate at Sarah Lawrence College, and tweets @nerkcelery

**LAURA SWEENEY** facilitates Writers for Life in central Iowa. She represented the Iowa Arts Council at the First International Teaching Artist's Conference in Oslo, Norway. Her poems and prose appear in fifty plus journals in the States, Canada, Britain, and China. Her recent awards include a residency at Sundress Publication's Firefly Farms, a scholarship to the Sewanee Writer's Conference, and participation in the Kaz Creative Nonfiction Conference and *St. Petersburg Review's* Summer Literary Seminar. She is a PhD candidate, English Studies/Creative Writing, at Illinois State University.

**JEFF TIGCHELAAR's** poems appear in *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *New Ohio Review*, *Pleiades*, *Tar River Poetry*, *Atlanta Review*, *Best New Poets*, *Hunger Mountain*, *Rattle*, and *Rhino*, as well as on *Verse Daily*. Awards include a fellowship from the Ohio Arts Council, a Langston Hughes Creative Writing Award, and the Kansas Authors Club 2016 Nelson Poetry Book Award for his first collection, *Certain Streets at an Uncertain Hour*.

**CARTER VANCE** is a writer and poet originally from Cobourg, Ontario, currently resident in Halifax, Nova Scotia. His work has appeared in such publications as *The Smart Set*, *Contemporary Verse 2* and *A Midwestern Review*, amongst others. He was previously a Harrison Middleton University Ideas Fellow. His latest collection of poems, *Places to Be*, is available from Moonstone Arts Press.

**KORY WELLS** is the author of *Sugar Fix*, poetry from Terrapin Books. Her writing has been featured on *The Slowdown* podcast and appears in *The Strategic Poet*, *The Southern Poetry Anthology*, *James Dickey Review*, *Ruminate*, and elsewhere. A former software developer who now nurtures connection and community through the arts and advocacy, Kory mentors poets through the low residency program MTSU Write and has served as the poet laureate of Murfreesboro, Tennessee. [korywells.com](http://korywells.com)

Pediatrician **KELLEY WHITE** has worked in inner city Philadelphia and rural New Hampshire. Her poems have appeared in *Exquisite Corpse*, *Rattle* and *JAMA*. Her recent books are *Toxic Environment* and *Two Birds in Flame*. She received a 2008 Pennsylvania Council on the Arts grant.

**HANNAH WHITEMAN** received her MFA from the University of Florida. Her work can be found in *The Baltimore Review* and *North Dakota Quarterly*.

**CLAUDE WILKINSON** is a critic, essayist, painter, and poet. His most recent poetry collections are *Marvelous Light* and *World without End*.

**AMELIA L. WILLIAMS**, PhD, is a poet, eco-artist, and medical writer in Nelson County, Virginia. Sales of her chapbook *Walking Wildwood Trail: Poems and Photographs*, benefit regional #NoPipelines causes. She coordinated The Ties That Bind, A #NoPipelines Collaborative Community Art and Story Project of over 250 fabric braids made by citizens to protest proposed fracked-gas pipelines in Virginia. She received a Pushcart nomination for “Walking the Celtic Ridgeway.” Her poems have appeared in *TAB*, *Streetlight Magazine*, *The Healing Muse*, *The Hollins Critic*, *ANMLY*, *Rabbit: a journal for nonfiction poetry*, *Nimrod International Journal*, *K'in* and elsewhere.

**THEODORE WOROZBYT** is the recipient of grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Alabama and Georgia Arts Councils. His books are *The Dauber Wings*, *Letters of Transit*, and *Smaller Than Death*. He teaches at Georgia State University.

**ELLEN JUNE WRIGHT** was born in England of West Indian parents. She has consulted on guides for three PBS poetry series. She was a finalist in the *Gulf Stream* 2020 summer poetry contest and is a founding member of Poets of Color virtual poetry workshop.

An NC native, **CINDY YARBERRY** is a retired educator with a Master’s degree in English from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She worked in adult literacy, slogged through teaching high school, and taught in various community colleges. She currently lives in Montana, where she loves the big open skies. Her work has been published in *The Sun* and *Streetlight Magazine*.

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