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PENSIVE

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Pensive publishes work that deepens the inward life; expresses a range of religious/spiritual/humanist experiences and perspectives; envisions a more just, peaceful, and sustainable world; advances dialogue across difference; and challenges structural oppression in all its forms.

*Pensive: A Global Journal
of Spirituality & the Arts*

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Center for Spirituality, Dialogue, and Service

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Margo Fuchs Knill

The good news is...

How have I been not happy enough
Let me ask the other way around:
have I ever been happy enough?
Have I praised enough health
the pain free times
the lightness of humor
the dance with being
for its own sake?
Have I said enough times
thank you, thank you
my beloved life
that you hold on to me
day for day?

Can you forgive me
can I forgive myself
to be forgetful
about my good intentions.

How can I go on, knowing
it will never be enough
and nevertheless -
I do have faith into mercy
that the not enough
can be good enough.

Aren't we 'on the way'
on this stony, crazy, beautiful path -
approaching, always approaching the next?

What would a loving hand say to you
What if, after years of trial
after years of loss
after sleepless nights in despair
after having lost the sense for intimacy,
this sense which has you smile
at the world for no reason –
what if after all these years of trial
to be in company with hope and new friends
you suddenly, one early morning
look out the window and say:
hey, passing clouds up there
can I have a ride and turn wild?

The good news is ...
that I can do it and do it again,
the crash into despair at night
and getting up unharmed,
the race with doubt and
giving her no chance to win,
the stumbling over my own boring words
and turning them into a dinner for two,
the good news is that life is never boring,
and gives me a chance to be the same.

Marge Piercy

One more experience

A train heading into a long
dark tunnel, we are bound
into winter. In normal years,
I dread the regress into cold,

The sun setting by 3:30,
endless night erasing all.
But this year, just to
breathe again freely

to wake, to live each
moment I sense how
fleeting, but here to be
relished as now I can

and must. Joy—elusive
as a dayflower, opening
one morning, gone by
night. I try to grasp it.

The sunset at 3:30, cold
pressing against windows
I mind less than ever,
just because I'm alive.

Alexis Musaelyan-Blackmon

to be

in the stillness,
a voice whispers,
“seek, and find your truth.”
yet, the more we seek,
the more lost we become.
a river tells me,
“to know is to flow with what is.”
not seeking, not grasping,
but being — fully, deeply.
“the river reaches the sea,
not by striving but by simply being,” it murmurs.
in its flow, a lesson:
we are not the seekers
but we are the river itself.
our essence is not in the search,
but in the surrender to the current.
not in finding,
but in becoming.
dear soul,
let go and become the flow.
in the release,
find that you are already home.

Angela Townsend

Live it Up

“I am not a ‘live it up’ person.”

My cautious colleague confessed. The context was my own words, reflecting a bawdy neon sign I hadn’t seen.

“Live it up with us!”

I had written these words on the invitation to a donor event. I had no idea I had written this. If I were in my right mind, I would never have written this.

“Live it up with us!”

Katherine was right. This was an uncharacteristic command for our earnest organization. We rescue cats, not dogs or wildebeests. Cat people are introverts.

We commune over coffee secrets and silken silences, intense to a fault and allergic to extravaganza. Carnival overwhelms our green-gold eyes, but we listen all the way to the elements. Empathy pleases us at the subatomic level. We do not often feel at home in the whirl. We squirrel away evenings for fleece and peace.

We are not “live it up” people.

But there were my own words, in blue and orange, about to hit two hundred inboxes.

“Live it up with us!”

Katherine knew that I, of all cats, was not a “live it up” person. I skipped game nights and crammed my social capital into the wallet of workdays. I was a chaplain, not a Solid Gold dancer; a poet, not a puppy. I loved ferociously, then disappeared entirely.

A certain donor once described me as a “live wire.” I knew what he meant. When I must be in the world, my caffeination comes. My blood glucose may be 400, and my fear may be nuclear, but in the fray, I am electric. The bubbles take over and lift me to the top of the flute, and the happy hypomanic girl pipes her tune.

It’s genuine and bafflingly enjoyable. I love people. I love the zest crest. I love raising the sum total of tenderness in the world. I love being reduced and expanded to my constituent elements, exuberanting in all directions.

The world is a mystery and a Magnificat, and I am your hostess.

And when it ends, I am spent. And nobody knows.

Nobody knows, except the ones who know that I am not really a “live it up” person.

Maybe.

If my pyrotechnics have a life partner, they are an odd couple. But there’s no denying this is an epic love. The fleece-lined spouse of my glittery gush is the written word.

Come the weekend, she dons her eyelet apron. It is time to roll meatballs and pipe frosting on cupcakes. She shoos cats from the kitchen. She hums Rosemary Clooney songs and wears no makeup. She remakes the world.

The ingredients await me patiently. Just knowing I have time to write electrifies my hours. I am jealous for these windows, flinging them open and singing bravery across the prairie. I look forward to this all week. I look myself in the eyes, and I like the wiry weird wildcat I see.

I write my way out of jams and into orchards. I write my way deeper into the world that I love too much.

And when it ends, I am spent. And nobody knows.

Nobody knows, although I try to express it. But happy puppies lament hermit weekends. Social butterflies worry about glow worms who burrow under words. “Live it up” people could never live it down if they lived like me.

Maybe.

Or maybe there are as many outlets as there are live wires.

“Live it up with us!” Katherine’s confession drove me back to the moment I wrote that inscrutable line. At last, I remembered: it came, not from me, but from Pappy.

Pappy, my stepfather, is a man cooler than Lenny Kravitz and warmer than mashed potatoes. He is as fully kin as anyone whose double-helix ever danced with mine.

When I was nineteen, I won a Dannon Yogurt T-shirt in a raffle, offering it to him as a furtive gift early in our friendship. Pappy wore it until it fell apart.

When I mentioned that my train rides from college were populated with unsavory characters, he arrived at the station smiling, his wiry hair teased into an enormous cinnamon cloud. The unsavory characters never leered at me again.

He sends me “My daughter is my blessing” birthday cards that make me weep. He sees me and knows me all the way to my smudges.

When I tried to tell Pappy how I feel when I write, the words came out all childlike and bumbled.

But Pappy, with advanced degrees in Alive, understood.

And Pappy whooped: “Live it up!”

And I learned that I am a “live it up” person.

And I learned that’s the only kind of person.

And I want all the people to know.

Nobody knows. We think bolder bodies are living it up, while we’re just boiling down our days. We are “just” working or writing, petting cats or rolling meatballs. We are quiet in the orchard, while gymnasts scream with streamers.

But our wires sizzle in secret.

Our eyes turn green and gold.

We have our something, and bless the brave ones who give it everything.

Our cups overflow with chamomile or champagne. When it happens, we know. There are as many ways to live it up as there are lives. I have it on good authority that each of us gets at least nine.

Sakes alive. I am a “live it up” person.

So are Katherine, and Pappy, and all the kittens and caterpillars. We are exquisite. We make our world, and sometimes our hair, enormous.

Come live it up with us.

Elizabeth Rae Bullmer

Once a Potion Maker Always an Alchemist

When I was just seven, I plucked purple lilacs,
flaming forsythia flowers; gathered precious pink

petals fallen from Mother's rhododendron
mixed with smashed tangerine berries from

the skinny, long-necked mountain ash.
Pounded and submerged my tinctures

in a collection of empty perfume bottles, to rot
in the upstairs bathroom. At puberty I sought Beauty,

like alchemists seek gold. Applied cream
to dissolve hair; bleached the hair I kept,

which turned the bright bronze of sweet potato
flesh. Carved mourning glyphs into my arms,

inked runes down my spine—a chiseled standing stone
of sacred symbols. Twisted a tack into my nostril until

the metal prong pierced cartilage. Scraped
nineteen years of dried dung from my skin.

Fastened my earlobes with safety pins and
shaved my head to grieve, first for myself and then

for my father. Now, having birthed two children
and eaten others, I leave my body alone. Seek the recipe

for immortality. Holy Grail—vessel of evolution,
expansion, conversion, rebirth. Ferment parsley

and dandelion wine, blueberry mead with sage.
Lemon balm and passionflower seep into ice-

clear vodka. Pomegranate kombucha bubbles
beside nettle and oat straw infusions.

How many herbs to make me whole again? The child
living under the staircase of my spine wonders.

How many potions before I sprout wings?

Claire Russell

The Same Shape

Being too sincere
is bland. Unless you are sincere
about what matters.
I tried to write poetry
but my words curdled,
When we are too careful
we speak in riddles:
A gash, a map,
a country that is not a country.
Men swing golf clubs at
Four blonde horses, spurring on
The holy flames. The eyes that burn.
Must cover your cries with emojis
if you want to livestream the apocalypse.
We have had enough of suffering. We are ready
for a coffee break. Men swaddle their
babies for the grave. A face is not
a face is not
a muzzle. Is that not a human sound she makes
when bound for burial in the long white shroud?
We call them lucky. Wishing on the
white star. Soldiers, why are you laughing?
Strike up for the dance—you say—they see
Your straight white milk teeth, your bluelined starlight.

You want to see the woman's hair, unveiled,
want to see her ribs without their clothes,
white boned, like your teeth, you
cleave the earth into
A gash
A cuntry.
(We misspell our words) when we're afraid,
we lie about
the things that matter. We gut
ourselves and smile complaints
about the weather.

E.B. Lockman

Oil on Canvas

When I realised, it wasn't some
massive revelation; more like a breadcrumb
or ten scattered around my life. I

was a good kid - Christian, or just about.
Called a tomboy by my parents, I never had any doubt
that that was all I'd be: some chubby-thigh

mildly average girl; never popular, just
in the background somewhere, like dust.
I thought I was interested in a boy nearby

my house, although looking back it's more that
he was nice to me and didn't treat me like a feral cat,
which I seemed to be in the eye

of anyone else who talked to me.
So when I browsed online, naïve and carefree,
and found out that there was a girl that turned to a guy...

...the breadcrumbs made sense. I wasn't a tomboy -
I was *an actual boy*, a feminine decoy.
And from there, I waved goodbye

to being society's version of "normal," to being cis.
I didn't know it at the time, but later it'd be bliss
to be out and open instead of shy.

Later I'd find they call it "euphoria",
but to me it was more like a dream, a phantasmagoria,
seeing all the paths laid ahead of me like a blue sky.

These days, the eu- and dys- phorias are equally ever-present -
in my clothes, my name, the well-meant
compliments that sometimes people imply -

but I'll never forget that moment when everything
changed for the better. Now, when life's sting
rears its ugly head, I can definitively certify

that I'm going to be okay.

Stefan Balan

Mateo

Through the unhurried night, in flip flops and shorts,
he walks back to his village.

He knows where he is by the smells: the pachote, the pink
shower tree, the hedge of dracenas, the swaths of grass and dirt, nameless
and unique like fingerprints.
The too pretty stars with their Latin names are of no use.

Behind the ear, the cigarette is for later, but not too late.
By 15 he already had his knife fight, lost a couple of teeth,
and has tattoos to trumpet loves, all forfeited.
By 20 he will spend time in jail and by 30 he will lose his father and, unknowing,
will become one.
By 40 he will travel enough to make money, to squander it, to learn where home is,
to return.
By 60, his health, luck, and mother's inheritance, like his hair, will recede,
enlarging a place filled with tulip trees and boredom that he will not resent.

Now he shuffles along, unseen, a basketball in equipoise between elbow and hip.
From time to time, the clicking of dart frogs, the screeching of a kinkajou,
the howling of a monkey.

By the time he arrives, he will knife a coati.
By the time he arrives, he will smell and let go of the red ginger.
By the time he arrives, nobody will be waiting for him.

Maniacally, the crickets keep stitching the night, which nothing can fasten.

Levi Morrow

I Made You Reader

I made you Reader
In my image when
I wrote myself
Upon your eye

'Read the text and interpret'
I blessed you
'Be distressed and
Multiply the meanings
Of my body'

The architecture of my letters
Resonates with force of scripture
Read me speak me and complete me
Love me through my nomenclature

Memorize the way I roll
Before your eyes
Along your tongue
My body lies
Across—the lines
Across—the rungs
A ladder—climb

Into my names
Up my lines the
Contours of my form

Chris Reisig

In the apartment of Orpheus and Euydice

the over-the-counter narcan goes unused
and she thanks god they've made it so far, never knows if they'll make it
this much longer she knows it's Sunday 'cause she checks her phone and left their home
one winter-dark afternoon at 5 pm and thought the world had ended until she realized
it was really morning and the stillness made sense,
she tells him and he puts it in a song, happening to him,
and love this big is sometimes enough to reverse yourself back into unloved
invisibility
in the mirror her skin is drier than it is pale
and under her eyes she can't even decide what color to call it
not purple, really
but just sleepless grey. once she tries to
count how many days it's been since she kissed her husband and doesn't
know what that might mean
he can't sleep unless he's holding her
she scrolls her phone to find a cheaper tattoo parlor as he snores with his hand held to
her skin by the waistband of underwear she doesn't remember changing
things were going to get better
they were going to, she
loves him and she cannot do the dishes
one day he gets a burst of energy and throws all the unwashed plates away
on the way to the stairs one breaks
the bag shreds and she
wears shoes for a week instead of sweeping
he tells her he's sorry and she's forgiven him without remembering to ask "for what"
her mother calls but it takes so much effort to pick up
does she have friends still in the city?
how long has it been now since she was sixteen and felt so full of promise

she's too afraid to leave and so she
never gets her last prescription
sits shivering in
bed without them
withdrawal feels like an angel. a message
and then everything gets darker again
Orpheus comes home asking how long she's been crying
she hasn't been counting
she can't stop

David Ebenbach

At the End of the Universe

At the end of the universe, the two of us had the same conversation we always had.

“It’s hard,” you said, your eyes doing what people used to call shining.

“It is,” I said.

Above us the sky was very dark and thin. Below us the ground was dry and dusty. Neither of us knew why the two of us were still here, when everyone and just about everything else was gone, but sometimes in this universe unexplained things happened. Usually, in fact. We did know that.

“Should we sit down?” you asked, and we both looked around for somewhere in the dust where we wanted to sit and didn’t find what we were looking for. There weren’t even any large rocks left.

“I’m okay standing,” I said.

“Sure,” you said, and we kept standing.

The air was cold but still around us. Breezes were no longer a part of the human experience, and hadn’t been for a long time. Sometimes we forgot the word *wind* altogether. And then it would come back to us abruptly: *wind!*

“Should we eat something?” you asked, and we both looked around for something in the dust that we wanted to eat and didn’t find what we were looking for.

“I’m going to hold off,” I said.

“Sure,” you said.

I looked down. Sometimes I wiggled my toes in the dust just because I could.

But now they weren't wiggling. They were just sitting in the gray.

"When do you think it's going to happen?" I asked.

You were looking up at the sky. "Soon, I'd think," you said.

This was undoubtedly true; the nature of the universe at that time was that the end was always soon.

I didn't sigh. What was the point of sighing about it? But I looked back up and asked, just because I couldn't help it, "How do you think it will go?"

You knew what I meant; this was the conversation we always had. I meant, would it be all at once, or would it be sequentially, so that one of us—maybe by chance standing a little closer to the center of the end, if the end had a center—would go before the other did. We both felt that it made all the difference, whether the universe ended all at once or sequentially. Even if our last moments were separated by a fraction of time imperceptible to human consciousness, we felt that that separation still made all the difference.

You looked off at the very distant horizon, which wasn't very different from not looking off at the horizon. "I don't know," you said, rubbing at your dusty chin. And then, after an amount of time fully perceptible to human consciousness, you asked, "What if it's a doorway? Like, to some other thing?" I nodded a few times. "I think that would be nice," I said. I looked at your face that was turned slightly away to the horizon, and then watched it come back. I nodded a few more times.

"Do you think it could be?" you asked. "A door?"

I said, "I think it would be very nice if it was."

You were back to looking at the horizon; your face did what people used to call smiling.

We didn't talk for a little while after that. Though you couldn't necessarily tell by looking at it, the universe meanwhile progressed somewhat further toward its end.

Finally, I asked, "Would you like to stand closer together?"

You agreed. "Sure," you said. And we stood right next to each other, almost touching.

The air on the far sides of our bodies was still cold, of course.

Abruptly: *Wind!* I remembered. *Wind!* you remembered.

We came closer. We stood as close as possible to one another. And I knew just what you were hoping in that moment: when the universe ended, maybe it would think we were just one thing. Just one remaining thing.



Sjafril
Bulang

Naomi Pattison-Williams

Holy Ground

These days are spent hidden, my love,
from a world kept afloat by noteworthy people
doing noteworthy things. Accustomed, now
to the silence that passes over and through me
in small talk about *how work is going*, and
to the swept crumbs that disappear
into oblivion after every meal.

Late-afternoon shadows soften
the tall east wall as you and I read
the caterpillar book you've memorised,
curled into each other as this Tuesday
yields to dusk.

Some days, I'll admit, I feel suspended
in this space crowded with endings
and mysterious, hazy beginnings, and I cling
to memories of who I was—though
I know they won't hold.

On these days, I have to remember to touch
the earth. The clutch of warm eggs
buried in the straw and the crisp sweep of your hair
beneath my palm. Porridge-crusteds spoons
from morning doused in warm water and
the kettle's insistent whistle as garlic flecks
shimmer to gold in oil, fragrance blooming.
The radiant delight as you shout your welcome
to the returning geese and the overflowing
compost pail, ripe with life.

And just beyond the kitchen window—
wintered branches shot through
with sunset's last gleam:
suddenly, inexorably, aflame.

Daniel Rabinovitz

A Village of Masks

There was a little boy named Paneem

In his village, everyone wore a mask and a cloak, with their names printed on their masks to tell each other apart.

The village elders would say that hiding how you looked was important because if everyone looks the same, then you have to judge people by their actions.

When Paneem went to play, people made fun of him for his voice. They'd say "Paneem, you sound so silly!" And Paneem would get mad. So he went in secret, and he learned to sing.

When he went out to play again, people would say "Paneem! You sound so silly." And then he dug his feet into the ground and started to sing. And the people said "How can someone who sounds so silly sound so beautiful?" And Paneem was a little happy, because they called him beautiful. But he was angry, because learning to sing just made people notice his speaking voice even more!

So Paneem decided to never talk. No one would ever hear him again. And he went in secret and rubbed his name off his mask, so that no one would know who wasn't talking.

Paneem went out to play by himself again. And no one in his village knew who he was. He wouldn't talk. He had no name. And so the people were scared, because there was a stranger in their village. So they brought Paneem to the elders, saying "look at this stranger! We don't know who he is, and he's scaring us!"

And so the elders asked Paneem: Why do you not speak? And Paneem did not speak. The elders asked him: "Why did you erase your name?" And Paneem did not speak. But Paneem began to cry.

The elders spoke in hushed tones, whispering. And then they asked: "Who hurt you so, that you will not speak but only cry?" And Paneem did not speak. But he pulled down his mask, and let his tears fall to the ground.

The village elders were outraged. They said: "Who are you to take off your mask!" And Paneem dropped his cloak. The elders were outraged again, saying "Who are you to take off your cloak?" And Paneem began to sing a melody with no words.

The melody was beautiful, sorrowful.

And the elders asked again, unknowing what to think: "Who is this boy, to break our customs but know such sorrow?" And Paneem put on his cloak. And the elders were still unsure, saying "Who is this boy, to show his face but know such sorrow?" And Paneem put on his mask. And the elders were still unsure, saying "Who is this boy to cry and not tell us his name?"

And so Paneem picked up a stone off the ground, and carved back onto his mask: "Paneem."



A village
of
masks

Sarah Harley

The Paper Flowers

My father knew to pick flowers with a single layer of petals, best for placing between two sheets of paper, then pressing inside the pages of a book. He chose heavy books with thick covers, stacked in a pile, smallest at the top. The books were his treasures, soft pages and worn corners.

In the darkness, the flowers slowly dried out, stretching their petals across the flat dry surface of the paper. Their colors faded, diminished in hue and luster. They were no longer alive.

My father scouted for the flowers in nearby woods and fields, often in the rain. He walked absentmindedly, hands inside the pockets of an old brown corduroy coat, with only the thoughts of my mother to accompany him. The thoughts came and went like the ticking of a clock.

At home, my mother's cancer was progressing. It was a subject no one talked about. I was left to discern the meaning of sights and sounds. A bottle of blue pills. Shattered glass. Loud and slurred voices shouting through the walls.

When I was younger, I ran alongside my father. Bright yellow rain boots, my small hand inside his. Sometimes. Then not. I had a longing to learn the names of everything around me. My father knew them all. Nightingale, willow, wood dove,

harebell. Each word was more magical than the last. I was too young to put them into an order, to create a taxonomy to organize them in my child mind.

As he taught me the names, my father picked a yellow primrose, red-orange hawthorne, often the young white flowers of the wild blackberry bushes that flowered before the fruit. I stood on tiptoes and held the wild growth of the brambles, cold raindrops knocked from the leaves.

“Watch out for the thorns,” he said.

When he picked them, the flowers gave up themselves.

On the walks, he was absorbed in only the present moment, no need to think, thoughts coming on their own then quietly falling away. Time and consciousness both faded. He was transported to a different realm, merging with the hum of life around him. Even though he was physically present, he wasn't fully there.

My father taught me how to be far away and still appear present. My mother imparted the same lesson. She was always elsewhere or nowhere. Green eyes resting in a place just beyond the present moment.

When I turned 9, I started to take my own walks, through the wet fields and deep woods at the end of the town. My mind raced; I felt afraid. But the fear lifted a weight, leaving a lightness in its place. My thoughts fell into a soft nothingness.

Along with the names of the flowers, my father taught me how to walk away my emotions, instead of having to feel them, the things without names. I buried them under the damp fallen leaves with each footstep.

Sometimes light shone through the forest.

Everything big is made up of a collection of the small. In the smallness of the flowers, my father brought a part of the forest home with him. He hoped to diminish the emptiness my mother left behind after she died.

During my mother's illness, my father had to let go of everything. In her dark bedroom at the far end of the house, she grew smaller. Her green eyes lost their sparkle, cancer ravaged her body. By the summer, she was gone. I was 13.

I didn't know about my father's practice of picking and pressing the flowers. I learned of it by accident, after he died.

One year, he was gone in the dead of winter. A widow-maker heart attack on the drive to work. I was 21. As a distraction from my feelings, I fought with my sisters for possession of many of his books, believing they contained my father's knowledge.

Years later, when I opened one of his books, a small crumpled flower fell out. I gently picked it up, papery and almost translucent. I knew it was a yellow freesia, my mother's favorite flower.

Had my father pressed it before or after she died? I thought about the flowers we took to her grave, every Sunday in the year that followed her death. We trudged through the quiet town, then across wet green fields to a hilltop churchyard.

At the graveside, I prepared the flowers, cutting the stems at an angle and trimming away the leaves. My father turned away, his eyes fixed on the woods in the distance.

A small square of green granite marked my mother's grave. The names that belonged to her jumped out in vivid black letters. I stared at the two dates, written as years, separated by a dash. My mother's short life from birth to death was summed up in one short line.

*

My father gave my sister and me a flower press for Christmas the year after my mother died. It was a small wooden frame with four metal screws at each corner to tighten the pages inside. Looking back, I think he wanted us to compress other things but mostly the loss of our mother, the possible messiness of our grief. It was best to tuck the grief away in a dark hidden place.

I made a number of mistakes in my first attempts to press a flower. I didn't know the rule of choosing flowers with a single layer of petals. In my ignorance, I chose flowers with many petals, in complex layers: roses, peony buds, lilies. The thickness of the petals resulted in uneven drying which led to a distorted appearance. Other flowers were too delicate and fragile, crushed and completely damaged during the pressing process.

I thought it was strange that my father gave both his daughters the same gift. My sister's flower press was about two inches larger than mine. At 15, she was two years older than me, so it made sense for her press to be able to hold more flowers than mine.

I also wondered why he gave us such an old-fashioned gift. Flower pressing had gained popularity during the Victorian era, a time characterized by a fascination with nature and a passion for collecting, where pressed and preserved plants and flowers were systematically named and cataloged.

My father never named the flowers or documented where and when he picked them. They were just mementoes of a time when he stopped for a moment and rose toward a flower, that which was beautiful and life-giving.

As it turned out, it was easy for him to fall in love with a flower.

He was faithful to the flower, carrying it home, tucked carefully in the inside pocket of his corduroy coat. Once pressed, the flower would be with him forever.

In return, the flower was faithful to my father.

He inhabited a liminal space, between thinking about the prettiest flower and not being able to see it yet. Then there it was! Hidden in the manifold nature of the woods, in all shades and hues of green, his eyes landed on a single colour: yellow, purple, and sometimes white. He saw the subtle luminosity come over the flower when he took its life.

*

In the year that followed my mother's death, the flowers kept time. They marked the fleeting moments of enchantment my father experienced when he found them.

In my mind, I started an almanac of grief for my mother, that would take me over thirty years to put to paper.

In January, there were snowdrops, the first flowers of the year, bright green shoots pushing through cold soil. My father must have asked himself whether or not he could press a snowdrop. Perhaps they were too small in size and number. My mother's voice would have reminded him it was unlucky to bring them into the house. A sparse cluster grew next to the stone steps at the bottom of the garden. Winter had meaning for them as they pushed into the cold light of their new world.

Winter aconite appeared in February, almost the smallest flower in the garden, the first true blossoms of the year, cup shaped flowers made up of bright yellow petals. They were too fragile to press.

The other flowers remained asleep.

In March, the wild daffodils appeared, the brightest yellow of the year, followed by the tall rise of the allium in April. The forest was filled with the scent of wild garlic. The ground turned into a sea of bluebells; the spring light caught the shadows of the allium's large round spheres holding clusters of white stars. Blue forget-me-nots nestled close to the ground.

With each flower, my father collected small moments to remember. Once home, the flowers abided with him.

May, June, and July brought the fragrant flowers: lilies of the valley, foxgloves, and honeysuckle, winding its way around a wooden trellis in the garden. I loved to learn the names of the flowers, a magical kingdom of life. My sister and I picked them and drank nectar as if we were flower fairies.

My father gave my sister the large book of the flower fairies because she so closely resembled the fuchsia fairy, dancing on her tiptoes in a red and purple dress made from petals. I felt jealous and wished I could look like a fairy too.

The nightshades appeared in August and September, dark and ominous, growing in the understory where they received filtered sunlight. As the days grew shorter, the flowers took on magical names: betony, woundwort, witch hazel with its spidery blooms. Before she died, my mother warned of their properties, the spells they withheld. These were the ancient woodland flowers, returning year and year, pushing up their bright green shoots in last year's fallen leaves. The flowers had stories to tell.

In the later months of the year, the flowers grew smaller, winding their stems around the dark green ivy leaves. Red and white campions and pink dogwood bloomed in the early light of days that grew shorter.

Last were the violets, dark and abiding and fragrant, growing in silence in a low mist. They died of fright when my father's shadow bent down to pick them.

My father secretly yearned for the flowers, to enfold himself against them without crushing them.

*

As he walked through the woods, my father felt a sense of homesickness for a place he had not yet left. Even so, it was leaving without him in some way.

Small yellow paper flower, fallen from a book. As I looked at it, crumpled in the palm of my hand, I caught a glimpse of my father's love for my mother. Like the flowers, his love for her was fleeting, there one moment and then gone the next. But a small part of it was tucked away, hidden within the darkness of a book's pages.

I lay the small flower down on the flat surface of the paper, covering with the other as if I was putting it to sleep. I gently closed the book and put it back on the shelf.

Kimberly Ann Priest

Unthaw

Mornings weren't mornings unless
my mother was awake much too early praying and digging
in the freezer for meat, dinner already
in the making in her mind, the frozen packages
clanking together and against the freezer's side. Her humming
swam up through the heat vents and into my room
where I lay half-asleep at 4 AM listening
to her warm alien voice. Back then, I too was a warm alien
having no other way to name myself than *freak*
in stark contrast to my mother's insistence that all her children
were unique, *the apple*, she would tell us, *of God's eye*.
These are the words she spoke to me stroking my hair
while I cried nearly every evening of my youth,
having no language to explain difference, *my* difference.
She would hum a tune, stroking my hair and insisting
God is love. And I believed her. God is love,
a presence I could conjure in the absence of human
connection, warm and reassuring like my mother. We didn't
use words like *Asperger's* or *autism* then, my mother
and I huddled together on the couch
where her lofty form hovered my little form as her mind
darted between affection for her child and the whole chicken
roasting with carrots and potatoes in the old oven
in our kitchen that still bore the marks
of its previous owners: 1960s faux brick walls.
It's hard to believe that, in the 60s (a mere decade before my birth)
my mother could have been deemed
'a refrigerator mother' had my disability been discovered
by the finest medical doctors of her time.

Every morning of my childhood,
after too many tears and prayers and waking to the sounds
of my mother in the kitchen, our home's front door
closed behind her when she left early
for work, I'd come downstairs, pour myself a bowl
of cereal, feel her presence in the absence
of connection, see the frozen chicken in a pot atop the cold
stove where my mother, humming, had left it,
as she'd say, smartly, to "unthaw."

Thomas Rions-Maehren

PLAYTIME

- for Ryan

when you are born of music,
drumsticks in your hands, the world
is your instrument. each solo,
a cacophony on the coffee table,

a romp on the lamp base, a pitter patter
party on the forbidden staircase, is punctuated
with hearty applause; you're your own
second-biggest fan (behind only me). you march

to the applesauce-stained mirror to give
the cute baby a kiss, to practice
the kind of self-love extinct
in our economy of social media and

perpetual dissatisfaction. a master
of modern art, your exhibition in non-toxic
marker ink isn't limited to the blank
page but also to the blank
carpet, the blank wall, your blank skin and tongue,

and your hand-made blanket. you
aren't afraid to paint your personality
over the past with reckless optimism.
the world's going to need minds like yours.

you feed the fuzzy monkey invisible oatmeal
with a beach shovel, feed the dog
your breakfast egg when we look away,
nuzzle his face, fill him with cheek crumbs.

each moment is a bubble waiting for you
to pop it, your smile hiding the bitterness
of teething, the nagging itch of growth,
of rupture, of nature.

you are wisdom. you are
spirit. you learn so much each day
about fitting shapes into their proper slot,
boxing in ideas and feelings with your big kid

words. just don't forget
everything that you know now
about freedom, about being, about
seeing the world as it is, about love.

Jesse Vazquez

In The Projects

Peas in a pod
They were there
We were there,
They were black
We were Puerto Rican
Most of us like peas in a pod in the
projects.

Six Floors,
Twenty four families,
One Irish- another Polish and the other Jewish.
But mostly black and Puerto Ricans
All waiting to get out,
But then something happened.
It all gradually shifted to people of color.

Never imagined how or why,
But we all assumed we would leave some day.
Living elsewhere,
Going elsewhere.
Maybe to Fort Dix in New Jersey,
Fort Myers in Virginia,
Army, Navy, Air Force, or Marines.
That is where others went before us,

They would return in uniform
with tales of wonder,
If they returned at all.
So why not imagine ourselves
going to those far away places?
We all suspected that
that place was not the end point.
Perhaps we believed in the well-worn cliché of movement
in America.
Perhaps leaving a place was a fundamental American necessity.

I think of the family on the sixth Floor
Are any still there, I wonder?
I think of oldest girl, Fannie, then the oldest Boy, Ronny,
followed by Rustie, and the twin girls and the youngest -Skippy. I wonder if they are
there, Still,
I wonder if those old black men and women
I see on city buses these days are my old young vibrant,
Stick-ball playing friends and neighbors
Grown as old as I am now.
I know that some never left,
Died there —perhaps,
While their spirits haunt those hallways

I wonder if they ever left.
Or did they not survive that place of brutality
Condescension and invisibility?
A place where we were shoved against the borderlands
of deprivation, want, and anxiety,
never expected to thrive
But many of us did survive and thrived
— I think
No thanks to that great social experiment.
And our survival is a mixed blessing
with sadness, fear, shame—
Maybe a little shame?

Or maybe they are still there
Those friends and neighbors
Still running around jumping and youthful.
Did I grow old and older by simply leaving that place
That reservation for those on the margins?
Cozy as peas in a pod
In the projects.
Or was it our Brigadoon?

Daniel Tobin

IMPLACABLE

After Rilke

Implacable, I will stay the course.
I'm frightened when mortal things hold me.
A womb cradled me once.
Wrestling free from it was deadly:
I grappled into life. But arms are so earthed,
they are so prolific, what chance
is there that they should shun
the looming trauma of the next birth?

Claudia M. Reder

One-Sentence Stories

Sometimes mother's words are stranded
on the tip of my tongue like pepper that makes me sneeze.
Sometimes I wish I had created a dictionary
of her sayings. Her words push through the floors
and reshape themselves as ashtrays,
her cigarette case, her tattered Vuitton luggage
that transported her secrets.

Staring at a recent photo of a Dutch woman
in a newspaper, I swear I see my mother's face.
She even wears the same shaped glasses,
that European chin, the broad cheeks.
I wonder what secrets live in her storied brain.
What histories you and she might share,
what lives erased.

Then I remember your friend Boria.
You would visit him and never let me join you.
Was it a love? I asked.
Ach, no, you would laugh.
I played ping pong with him in Riga when I was ten!

After imprisonment in camps, the last, Buchenwald,
he arrived in New York City and founded No Art,
antithesis to Rothko and abstract expressionism.
You taxied alone to his apartment with its black painted walls.
Another secret room in your memory palace.

Your one-sentence stories follow me
like the well tread staircase of a childhood home,
including the creaks that still wake me in the
night. I wonder whose footsteps I hear
on the stairs. The house makes space
for its ghostly guests.

In later years, you dream you are directionless.
You recall Latvian lullabies. They have lodged
in my throat, phantom poems.

Elisabeth Murawski

Candles

There should be rain.
There should be silence for a quarter of an hour.

There should be thunder,
a riderless horse. Mahler
on a loudspeaker
in Times Square.

He kisses her tiny hands and feet
over and over. Tubes gone.
My daughter!

He writes everything down in great detail,
the prognostications,
the ministrations,
the esoteric names of pharmaceuticals
that failed.

He tells her story.
Her story is the stone he drops from a ruin
into the sea.
It falls and falls
and we must hear the end,
the fruitless compressions
of the spent chest.
Little bird.
Little suffering bird.

He tells her story
against the dull roar of the sea.
The sun should not be here,
should not be shining.
The best friends know this.

The best friends listen
as he wrestles
with her story.

They watch and wait,
mute as pilings on the beach.

George Kalogeris

HELL'S ANGEL

Us kids were playing dodgeball. But no
Avoiding that swerving car that knocked
My little cousin Theo unconscious.
And now it's my aunt in shock as my mother
Shouts from the back of the ambulance:

"You watch the house!" A little bit later,
Death comes up the hill in his iron
Chariot, with its empty sidecar—
That little car whose bullet-shaped bucket
Was like the rides at Salem Willows.

The biker was driving ever so slowly,
Looking this way and that, as if
Not sure about which house he was going
To stop at. It must be suppertime:
There's no one out on Locust Street.

I'm crouching down on the front porch steps,
Holding my breath until the Harley
Has passed our house, and turned the corner...
Who knew that we would dodge a bullet
While playing dodgeball? So too, whose little

Bruised and bloodied *Theodora*,
Whose "Gift of God" is getting ready
To go with the Angel of the Iron
Chariot now? O bearded one
Who lets the children ride in his sidecar.

Deborah Bacharach

Adrift

Admit you're bored. Your life
adrift on an ice flow. Day after day
you don't cumin or chili.

But here are daffodils and crocuses
before they've stunned the earth.
I can't promise your parents won't die.

Reset the electric charge in the heart.
Under the slick curve of lemons,
look up and see the mountains

your three-year-old tells you to see
harnessed as he is for safety.
Every day stand up for beauty.

DeWitt Henry

BEAUTIFUL FLOWER

1.

Here is Evan Fraser, Amherst sophomore, dreaming of a just society. Son of an English professor at the University of Northern Florida. Came to Amherst on a merit scholarship. He wrote his high school English teacher that he sought with his life to express a brilliance that would stun the eye, so the image would linger. Five feet, six inches, 140 pounds, white male, reads the Town of Amherst Police report. No evidence of drug use. Interviews with students, teachers, and neighbors determined that he was a “normal young man,” “decent,” “earnest student,” “good sense of humor.” He lived in an apartment off campus, where residents saw him working hard, riding his motorcycle. He was survived by an older brother and sister. Mother died when he was fifteen. Father baffled. The message, the letter left for friends, society, the world: “I am Socrates, Jesus, Gandhi. Love one another.”

2.

Long run first, perhaps. Wonder at this world, this envelope. The shower, scalding, then cold. Skin glows. Shaves. The layered, cotton clothing in 80-degree heat. Save the Whales t-shirt. Heavy socks. The five-gallon can, full and sloshing. The rehearsals and viewings of news clips over and over. Saturate grass first. Heave can over head, after clothes have been soaked. Sting in eyes, bitter on lips, fumes, cough, breathe deep. Quick, before anyone realizes or interferes. Intensity of purpose, graceful, efficiency of movement. Like ablution. Flick the Bic.

3.

Sears like hunger, rape, birth, bursting bones, like impotence before earthquake or tidal wave, like cancer at its worst, like killing cramps, migraine, jaws, tightening, tightening. The pain is other, tangible, enemy and lover, engrossing, intimate. A corridor. A tunnel that I shoulder through, breathless and gasping. But then sheer vision, faith.

4.

Recorded lifetimes, stop-time photos, sped up after 90 years, so that faces morph like unfurling, then withering flowers. The immolator, one of this study, needs to be slowed down in order to match the rhythm; his 19 years ending in the stop frame, now, of two minutes, slow motioning his lighting of the bic, the flame like a bud, a flower unfurling, and then the bloom slowly wrapping him like a silken, bright robe, or even garlands blooming, something fragile, fragrant and soft, his face dissolving, as others melt at other speeds, within the liquidity, the pouring and the light.

5.

He stands before his 15th annual class in Shakespearian Tragedy. "Liebentot," he says to the 13 faces, bright, young faces, college juniors, though sleepy and hung over this Tuesday, "dying for love. How do we understand this? Tristan and Isolde? Dido for Anaeus? Romeo for Juliet (the dope); Juliet for Romeo? Othello for Desdemona? Anthony for Cleopatra, and then a whole act later, Cleopatra, with the asp sucking its mistress asleep? What is this? Jonestown?"

6.

You, Ms. Bright one, Ms. Mystery, YOU say: "Not Jonestown. Just proof. Proof of eternal devotion. Most lovers die one day at a time, like alcoholics stay sober. The silver, the golden anniversary. There's our proof, whatever they may think they mean themselves; they mean what they do. The deed in living, like those *gison* statues that Leonard Baskin did on the Smith College campus. Let attention be paid. Not kings and princes, memorialized for nobility on burial caskets. But a steelworker, a miner...beer belly distended, naked, noble too in his self sacrifice, his daily endurance, his lifetime's love---" or perhaps, you sneer, "his failure of imagination." I wait and you go on. "One day at a time, like an alcoholic staying sober.

Down all the days, adding up. A marriage, a career, a life's meaning. For the tragic characters, that's all sped up, is all. Same passion, less time."

7.

"An animal in its individual development passes through a series of constructive stages like those in the evolutionary development of the race to which it belongs...", states Haaeckel's biogenic law from 1868.

8,

Primordial soup. Thick and slab. Fire burn, and cauldron bubble. Blake: "Eternity rolled wide apart/wide asunder rolling." Complex protein. Protozoa, 4 billion years ago. Sperm swarm, tail churn. Nature's germaines. The single penetration, egg ignites. DNA. Chromosomes. Cells divide, divide. Germinal to embryonic. 3 billion years, future in the instant. Cambrian is gill arches. Placenta sea. My mother is a fish. Blake: "The globe of life blood trembled/ Branching out into roots/ Fibrous, writhing upon the winds." Now inner ear and neck, cartilages of larynx. Tail emerges, disappears. Zygote into embryo. Ordovician. 400 million years. 3rd moon, cartilage to bone. 4th moon, heart forms; 5th moon, ears, eyes, arms, and legs. Embryo to fetus. Mesozoic. Jurassic. 200 million years ago. 6th moon, early primates. Skeleton visible. Sex organs distinct. Translucent skin. Eyelashes. Eyebrows. Body movements. 7th moon, survival outside womb probable. Pleistocene. Homo erectus. Neanderthal. 100 thousand years ago. Holocene. Weight gains. Increased activity in kidneys, heart. 9th moon, fetus to newborn. You. Me.

9.

I ask you, now? The miracle, the life. The person out of the person, body from body, flesh from flesh, crying we come forth. Time itself, apocalypse; ignition; Adam to atom; all existence in the flash.

10.

King Nebuchadnezzar cast Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego into the *burning fiery furnace* but this was showmanship, the clincher, preserving flesh from fire: "the hair of their heads was not singed, their mantles were not harmed, and no smell of fire had come upon them." Then there is purgatory, holy fires cleansing

to essence. "I lean forward over my clasped hands and stare into the fire," says Dante, "thinking of human bodies I once saw burned, and once more see them there."

11.

To imagine burning is not to burn.

Alison Luterman

Including the Hidden Places

The gray-haired woman in the locker room
sits naked on the bench, applying lotion.
Once, long ago, her belly-skin stretched
wide over a baby's head, stretched and thinned
and never came all the way back,
so there are hills, now, little ripples and folds,
including the hidden places under her breasts,
which droop, like tulips on the fourth or fifth day,
nodding their heads over the lip of the vase.

A decade after my mother's death
I'm greedily watching this stranger
rub cream into her skin,
its smoothness and swells and mottled jiggly bits,
its secret pains and pleasures.
I want to speak to her though etiquette
of the locker room forbids it.
I want her to adopt me, old as I am,
and exhausted from feigning adulthood.
But the world doesn't stop for such longings. Nothing stops,
including this woman, who pulls on her pants
in silence. In silence I dry off my hair,
zip up my own jacket,
walk out into motherless air.

Elizabeth Koopman

Oxygen

The day my mother died my sister played Beethoven
all day, in her hospital room
everything she had.

Two thousand miles away, that day,
I played Beethoven for my mother
and for others who are gone.
I played the Fifth for my father
who wept once, hearing it,
in his big chair, in the moonlight.
I played the Moonlight Sonata for my grandfather
whose piano sent my mother to sleep
through all the nights of her childhood.
I played the Ninth for my mother's cousin
who sang the Ode to Joy with his whole body
his full joyous voice, for me,
in his 90th year, after my car was wrecked.
I played the Pastoral for myself
in my young years, discovering music
over again, far from home.

I played them all for my mother the day she died,
everything I had, over and over,
while my sister, calling again, said yes,
Mother had asked for the music to go on
instead of the oxygen, yes,
and calling again in the morning, said yes,
she died as the night turned
into her 86th birthday.

Hallie Waugh

Weathering Motherhood's Twin Burdens

Two months after my miscarriage, my husband and I took an early morning flight to the Gulf of Mexico. After renting a car and checking into our tiny, balconied condo, we picked up cheap striped beach towels from the grocery store and walked to the water. The towels wrinkled under our drip-drying bodies; we borrowed shade from neighboring umbrellas. We waded out to the sandbar and felt the smooth slip of fish against our calves. We tasted salt.

We had booked the trip in hopes it would be a babymoon—our last hurrah before welcoming a child. I would have asked for virgin margaritas and cradled a swelling bump beneath my belly button; I would've layered on sunscreen and worn a wicker hat to shield my newly sensitive skin. In my imagination, motherhood was precious, inevitable.

Instead, I spent our beach trip drinking glassfuls of wine and limey margaritas, ordering cheesecake for dinner. I slept comfortably and never once woke up to pee. I lay in the sun and felt my skin drying out from the heat.

At the time, I couldn't fathom that another pregnancy could be right around the corner. Grief had veiled my vision, whittling my sense of time and space to the thinnest core. There was only this moment, steady as tidewater. There were my husband's chestnut curls, thickened by salty air. There was the tang of cool

ceviche and the crunch of potato chips straight from the bag. There was no baby. I carried three books with me for the duration of the trip: a nonfiction read about life in Sweden, a book of meditations and prayers, and Madeline Miller's *Circe*, a mythological retelling of the island witch who almost kept Odysseus from returning home.

The beach is the perfect place to read *Circe*. It's set on the secluded and mysterious Greek island, Aiaia, where she is exiled after transforming the object of her jealousy—the woman her beloved chooses over her—into a sea monster. And so the spanning centuries of Circe's life rise and fall against the water, the island and its shores her most constant companion.

Much of what Circe learns over the course of her life revolves around control: what she can control, and what she can't. There are elements within her reach—herbs and spells she combines to initiate transformations or ward off danger. But there are also those that are beyond her: the rule of the gods, the whims of the sea, and the mortality of the humans she comes to love.

In the same breath, Circe's spells are a means of creativity. She explores them in pure delight; and she crafts spells out of terror, trying to ward off an unpredictable, vindictive world. The two motives—love and fear—cannot be untangled. Everything she creates, every spell she casts, carries both like glinting golden threads, knotted and steady.

Though Circe is a sorceress immune to death, she soon comes to know the inevitability of grief, and how inextricably it is linked to love. Nothing teaches her this lesson more acutely than the birth of her son.

*

During our five days at the beach, I would later learn, we conceived our son—the one I would carry ten days past his due date the following June, whose slippery and swollen body I would push out with the sunrise.

As I prepared for life as a mother, I thought I had left grief behind me. I ached for the baby I never held, but now I held a new baby, fresh and squishy and healing.

I didn't know my journey into motherhood would carry twin burdens, love and grief, equal in size and weight.

I marked the early days of my son's life on a feeding app, obsessively tracking how many minutes he nursed, how long he slept, how many wet and dirty diapers we changed. I remember wishing I could peel back his cheek to make sure he was drawing enough milk from my breast.

I soon learned he wasn't. Within days, his blood levels came back abnormal, and his diapers tinged bright orange—a symptom they call brick dust. He lost too much weight. The doctor handed us free cases of formula.

The first time I fed him formula, I did so through a plastic tube attached to my finger, with the hope that he wouldn't become confused, that he would still accept my breast as a form of nutrition. He slurped down the formula instantaneously and wailed for more. I hadn't known how hungry he was.

We sunned him on the porch, rocked him and sang into the morning light. We were falling in love. And that love was matched only by the gnawing fear and grief that kept me up at night: I couldn't protect him. I would never be enough.

*

Circe spends years of her exile considering, even longing for, life beyond the borders laid out for her by the gods. But she also passes the time honing her skills of herbalism and witchcraft, plucking its power like a harpist learning the strings. And after a particularly invasive and violent visit from a group of men, she turns those same powers into her weapon of protection.

Soon, we find her story intersecting with *The Odyssey* when the epic's namesake arrives on Aiaia's shores. Odysseus and Circe begin a guarded and intimate affair, and eventually, Circe comes to bear a son. As we know, Odysseus returns to Ithaca. So Circe raises Telegonus alone, buoyed by her powers to protect and remedy.

When Athena hears Telegonus will cause the death of Odysseus, she sets her sights on Telegonus as the target of her wrath. Athena would circumvent fate, killing Telegonus off before he has the chance to kill her favorite of the mortals.

And so Circe's care for her son is pricked with anxiety: she never knows when a creature may spring from a bush to devour him at Athena's bidding, or when a natural disaster will pop up, seemingly from thin air.

She is every mother who has ever lived.

She does the only thing she knows to do: she casts a powerful protective spell, stretching it over her island like a sheet. Athena cannot harm Telegonus while he is on the island. But as Telegonus grows, so do Circe's fears. She cannot protect him forever.

On multiple occasions, Athena visits, reminding Circe that as soon as Telegonus leaves the island, he will be subject to the whims and violence of the gods. Her magic is powerful, but in the end, it will not be powerful enough.

*

When my son was around 6 months old, a friend dropped off Anne Lamott's *Operating Instructions* on my porch. The book is a diary of her first year as a mother written in excruciating, validating detail. Reading her words, I felt sane.

Lamott captures the tenacity and tenuousness of new motherhood with her hallmark dark humor; she holds up a mirror of how desperate and acute the love and fear feel in those early months. Perhaps for the rest of our children's lives.

She wrestles earnestly with the paradox of bringing a tender child into a world you know is marked by pain. In my own life, I have never known hope and despair so intimately linked. Lamott wonders, "So how on earth can I bring a child into the world, knowing that such sorrow lies ahead, that it is such a large part of what it means to be human? I'm not sure. That's my answer: I'm not sure."

In another chapter, she writes of the solitary prayer she utters round-the-clock, “Please, God, let him outlive me.”

It’s the prayer all mothers pray in the hollow of their spirit: Let them live. Spare us that particular grief of a mother who loses her child.

It’s a prayer we’re willing to bargain just about anything for.

*

As Telegonus grows, he is visited by the gods’ herald, Hermes. With his help, Telegonus builds a boat and plans to sail to visit Odysseus in Ithaca. Circe does her best to convince him to stay, but her love for him wins out. She knows she must allow him to explore the world and find his father.

And so she lets him go, knowing the spell that wards off Athena reaches only as far as Aiaia’s shores. Telegonus will leave the protection of his mother, walk straight into danger, and she will stand by and watch.

But first, she strikes a bargain. She travels to visit Trygon, an ancient stingray who lives in the belly of the sea. She visits him and asks for his tail, admitting she would take the full brunt of its poison if it meant protecting her son. Trygon, seemingly awed by her disregard for her own life, grants her wish.

Circe sends Telegonus to sea, armed with a spear made of Trygon’s tail. He is not alone; he holds the mark of his mother’s mingled affections, a symbol of all the pain she would endure for him.

*

My son eventually gets enough food. He grows, he learns, we find our way into a new existence together. But there are nights when the veil between life and death feels absurdly thin, the stakes too high for comfort. On the night of his second Christmas, I hear him coughing and wheezing. I run into his room, navigating our furniture and hallways swiftly, even with the lights off.

I see his base of his throat making a little concave shape with every inhale, the way plastic wrap sucks into an open mouth. I don't know if the air is enough. I pick up his body, and his legs dangle beyond the length of what I can hold in my arms. I run downstairs awash with adrenaline, pull open the freezer, and plunge his head inside. I had heard this could help open the airway in children with croup.

It's not enough to help him breathe, so we rush to the ER where the nurses hand him a stuffed puppy and place a vapor mask over his face. When we get home, I keep watch in the recliner in the corner of his room. I never fully drift to sleep, ears perked for a change in the cadence of his breathing. I am struck by his hands, the perfect slope of nose, the dark fringe of his eyelashes. My fear has made his perfection stark. It is almost too much to take in; it feels like staring directly into the sun.

I don't pray it explicitly, but my body is praying Anne Lamott's prayer as my chest loosens by degrees and I hum *Silent Night*: Please, God, let him outlive me. I will do anything.

*

Telegonus eventually leaves Aiaia to establish his own empire. In traditional, semi incestuous mythological form, Circe marries Telemachus, Odysseus' son by Penelope. Circe uses her powers of transformation to make herself human. She bears children. She lives her life with Telemachus. She welcomes mortality and its specific grief and joy.

Near the end of the novel, Circe—who lived her life with immortal blood in her veins but has now succumbed to mortality—wonders at the precarity of her children's physical forms:

"In their beds, my children's skin shows every faintest scratch. A breeze would blow them over, and the world is filled with more than breezes: diseases and disasters, monsters and pain in a thousand variations. ... How can I live on beneath such a burden of doom? I rise then and go to my herbs. I create something, I transform something."

These days, I am teaching my son to garden. As soon as there's a warm stretch, we tromp out into the yard. He doesn't instinctively notice the plants, but I want him to love small things, to think of me and taste cilantro, to feel his toes in wet grass.

We walk around and give every plant the gift of our attention. I point out each one, showing him where flowers are about to spring up.

Our first gardening season, we grow the simple things: a hundred smaller-than-average tomatoes, one poblano pepper plant that gives and gives, a bunch of herbs, and enough spinach to make exactly half a salad.

Our second season, we plant lettuce seeds in mid-March, spinach and red lettuce and bib lettuce and an anonymous salad mix. He pours an entire seed packet into one corner of the plot, hereafter known as the microgreen corner. I show him how I plop the seeds into the dirt, pushing in with my finger to cover the seed with soil. His chubby finger pokes holes across the garden, eyebrows knitting together with the focus of a mechanical engineer.

When the leaf lettuces come up, their leaves are softer than hair, growing in diagonals across the bed rather than in tidy rows. We pick lettuce nearly every day; I eat a thousand salads dressed with lemon and oil. I give bags of greens to friends.

There are many days the fear feels too great, when the most horrific thoughts intrude by the hour. And there are days like this, when the world sings with magic, and I get to share it all with my wide-eyed child.

Perhaps this is the task of motherhood: to surrender oneself to the full heft of fear and love. To keep creating anyway. To be, as Christian Wiman writes, "like a ramshackle house on some high exposed hill, sing[ing] with the hard wind that is steadily destroying it."¹

¹ From "Mortify Our Wolves," an essay in *The American Scholar*



John Q McDonald
Black Temple

J Carraher

Fragments

After my brother died together
we watched the soft white sunset over the mission mountains
near the glacial lake where we used to walk in winter, bundled tight,
the water receding around stones, crimson and celadon,
once magnified beneath a rippling sheen, now shifting beneath our feet
to reveal bones of deer, elk and sometimes a young mountain lion,
maybe washed away upstream from the banks of the inlet as the soil
gave way under tiny clutching paws.

We sit and watch this same sun fall behind mountains
for its cyclical retreat, the outline of bats against pale light
moving this way and that, the wing beat of a nighthawk
as he dives toward the ground
like every other summer's midnight-dusk.

I now remember when I was five
how you convinced me that I could catch
that nightbird in a paper bag if I was patient
enough, if I sat outside, quiet and alone.
When a trick of the mind, my still baby-like imagination,
let me believe I had, brown sack quaking in tiny hands,
mimicking bullbat wings beating against crumpled paper -
I cried for hours, opening it, empty. You scolded those tears
because, you said, it had been a trick rather than a lie.

As the last of the sun drops behind mountain tops
you say to me *I swear, I never knew. I didn't lie to you*
I just never knew. And I will never know if you are
apologizing for the nighthawk or the brother
I would never know, never have the chance to save
because of you. A trick, not a lie.

I breathe deep, close my eyes and raise my face to the last
ray of warmth. I extend my hands toward the horizon where I know
there are splinters, fragments of truth,
dispersed like the dying light.

E.W. Herman

After Rehab

Start from the idea that something needs to be repaired,
Like a splintered window frame
Or a ratty shirt you've always loved, or start from
This: That everyone is injured but unaware.

Start at some young age when life turned
Over and most good things tumbled out. You
Listened as the beautiful and lucky acted out fresh
Scenes spoken in a tongue you hadn't learned:

Like watching a ship you'd never board
Pull away from a deserted pier to grow
Slowly smaller on evening's water
While overhead the sea birds soared

Then wonder where it came from: Your nagging sense
The world's not as it should be – or even was –
Then at 19 say *so long* to a dead friend and find
Injustice holds an easement that's immense.

Remember feeling once that the world was your own place:
Someone's child, you were welcomed and protected until
You weren't, and the hardest part was not
The pain itself but that pain's power to erase

Who and how you were before. Whole
Worlds and civilizations, kitchens and academies
Knocked down to dust. Or start from when
The first plane hit the tower with a loud roll

Of thunder on a sunny day. Begin that way,
And arrogate the power to decide
Repairs are needed. You're like some pediatric
Nurse who works a lot but not for pay,

Running to every injured child
Though no injuries are visible – an odd bird
Who hunts for wounded on a playground
As the ecstatic kids run wild,

But the playing cannot stop. The kids must run
Around; listen as the thrushes leave in
Fall despite the one left lying in the sun.
Start with the harm that you have done.

Jemeah Scott

That Creeping Thing

The old me was illusory,
a relic of sermon bellows and
backyard sprints in the wildwood of
creek-rotted churches, communion
crumbs forever flaking her fingers.

Pastoral hands shaped her visage with
mold-worn mallets, contorted nappy hair
to pin-straight braids, pants into pleated
skirts, and my voice within her gurgled
into quiet.

Her body was a blueprint from brimstone,
the dissonance found between burial and
clarity. Now that I've outshined her,
she hunches as the creeping thing inside,

slowly raking her fingers through my shadow
as a remnant of the pulpit, an echoed hollow
body of provenance thirsting to perform.

I feel her harden with every passing breath,
her moving limbs stunted beneath my chest,
yet I embrace her in the curve of my spine
as she merges with the memory of bone.

Fred Marmorstein

Crucifying

all spring
the gentian stooped dull yellow
in the field I could see them, flower by flower
a brocade of tiny blemishes, angry strokes
in the white of morning

you said, worship me
and the thistle and the leaves
forced my hands to my eyes
bitter elms waited
their limbs were my limbs, your weariness
was a promise of dead iris

the desire to be somewhere else
where crickets cry for hours
ripped the low hills
as I found your way
I listened for the dull thud of nails

I have no image to pray to
dressed in splinters
I waited for my fear
and the leaves fell
the leaves fell

Melissa Madenski

Winter Field Notes

Central Oregon Coast

Winter solstice, the coldest day yet of the year. Wind chill hovers around zero. It is rare to have snow at the beach, rarer still to have the banks of the stream frozen into the water. Both happened last night. At the edge of Neskowin Creek, boulders and one remaining stalk of yarrow. The silvery fields join the grey mist in a confluence under grey skies.

I think of my late husband, Mark. An east-coaster, he taught me more about the region of the west than any book or teacher ever has. Together, we explored the rivers, streams and mountains of the Northwest. We found forgotten homesteads and studied Neskowin Creek across from our home. Through his fresh eyes and our well-worn field guides, I re-visioned the stream I'd walked since I was a child. He held on to that rush of first love of place until his last arrhythmic heartbeat less than one mile from the Pacific.

Some say that death is simply walking through a door. I don't know. I do know that grief is more like walking *into* a door. *If I just understood the code*, you think, *I could bring that person home*. My son, Dylan, six-years-old when Mark died, spent years trying to figure out the cryptic logic that took his dad and left behind so much that was wrong. "I figured it out," he said one night before bed. "God," he gestured with his hands in a wild arc, "just made a mistake and pressed the wrong button." He sat back and looked at me, "Do you think that, Mom?"

The land, water and low-sloping mountains around our home define how impersonal death is. In this temperate rainforest, I learn to accommodate grief, to finally accept the inevitability of Mark's death and my own. I feel safe in these woods, not only from predators, but from despair that seems to grow stronger within rooms and buildings. I plunge into the woods, becoming as animal-like as possible. I trail my hands in icy blue creek water and watch leaves hang by one filament. Death and regeneration move me from the center of my universe to the side. Death is not aimed at me any more than at the spawned-out salmon, the half-eaten fawn or the road-killed beaver.

The spongy ground of the streamside meadow gives way to mudholes filled with slush. Elk graze the adjacent grasses. Snow, the amateur tracker's dream, borders heart-shaped prints where elk stopped, circled and moved away from the creek where I stand. In a herd of feeding elk, one or two will have their heads up, rotating their ears and guarding the rest of the community. I've seen a lone deer on the road, but never a solitary elk bull or cow. They cross the road so tightly together that I feel the vibration of their 700-pound bodies shake my car as I wait for them to pass at dawn.

At home, hatch marks print out bird movement. The charcoal-headed juncos usually arrive at dusk in scattered flocks that fan out in the garden beds. The winter wrens wing in all times of the day. Not as blatant as the hummingbirds in their territorial behavior, the juncos occasionally fan their tails and charge a wren or two. All the smaller birds fly away into the tangle of honeysuckle and ferns when the jays land.

In the coldest winters, rhododendron leaves curl up looking like hundreds of long green cigarettes hanging from thick branches. Ice shrivels and coats the hydrangea. Frigid temps have bronzed the Cecil Brunner rose vines. Snow inaugurates the new greenhouse. Three weeks earlier it withstood winds that toppled four old spruce trees on our land, making spaghetti piles out of power and phone lines. Storms keep residents busy with cleanup ranging from downed trees to leaking roofs.

Trips to the woodpile increase with cold weather. I damp down the fire about 10:00 PM and again at 3:00 AM. I hired a plumber to redo the well pipes several years ago, and procrastinated replacing the insulation. At dusk, I trek to the pumphouse, find a light bulb, a work lamp and heat tape and wrap the bare plastic pipe. It is dark by the time I finish, but at least it isn't the middle of the night as it was last year when a cold snap hit fierce and sudden, and I ran out with an old quilt to throw over the exposed pipe.

When the power stops so does the pump that brings water to the house. In freezing weather, we have to de-ice the buckets and haul water inside to fill the tub that gives us a source of work water in case more pipes freeze. Six jugs of drinking water are in the back room. My Norwegian grandmother, Ida, used to say that when sadness or loneliness comes you can get relief by cleaning, serving someone else or learning something new. I would add "move" to the list. Nothing clears my mind as effectively as hard, physical labor.

I wash our clothes at the laundromat and bring them home to dry by the woodstove. In town the cars are lined up at the tire shop. Uniformed employees run from bay to bay pushing tires in front of them. For once, I got my tires on in time. To live here, I work in several places, two over mountain passes and one over a seaside promontory named for its typical weather pattern – Cape Foulweather.

Snow falls steadily until the roads are covered. In the town of Neskowin, several miles from our home, summer cottages empty in winter leaving the one looping road shadowed by coast pines and spruce. Slab Creek Road, too, is dark and quiet. No streetlights illuminate the series of potholes the county can't afford to repair.

Winter solstice arrives. The night moon slides into place, shiny and round. The Milky Way sews up the dark sky. Tonight, I go out to the garden, the frozen garden and light a candle for Mark, who loved winter, who loved Christmas and me and our children. I light a candle for the safety of my son and daughter.

For years after Mark's death, I looked for a miracle during this season of possibility. The first Christmas after his death, the horseshoe that he had nailed above the front door for luck fell down; and the rose bush that I'd expected to bloom died in a freeze. I used to want mystic revelations or a reassurance that he was all right.

Now I just listen and remember. I'm glad I loved him those ten years and that he loved me, and finally this feels the true, best miracle.

Two weeks after solstice, and the stream has jumped its banks. Rain has turned Tillamook County floodplains into lakes. Driving Highway 101 south the only thing not covered by water is the road. Coming down off the mountain it looks as if someone has literally parted the sea to let me through. The Salmon River, its tributaries and the estuary have risen to pavement level. Wind blows small whitecaps against the road.

On Slab Creek Road, water softens the meadow. I go for the first time since September to the site of the upper beaver dam we watched over the summer. Wind and storms have closed Slab Creek Road for the winter just above the bridge that crosses over the creek. Fallen trees rest like some kind of rainforest ranch fencing for miles. I come to the dam site. Vanished. The sound of the water is the first thing I notice - a crinkle, a pop as if a thousand paper cranes unfolded at once. When I look closely, I can see bare spots where the dam's foundation rested against the bank. Several new trees are down. Caught in the limbs are small piles of beaver sticks, the rest of the dam distributed along the lower reaches of the creek.

I'm disoriented as when a furnished room is suddenly empty. I try to place myself without the beaver ponds as reference. The creek was a torrent last week, swelling tributaries to the size of the main stem in July. Logs sailed the center of the stream like small boats in a wide sea. Oddly, it is this destruction and revision that is more comforting than consistency. The creek redefines itself, though even that is a human notion. It keeps seeking the sea no matter what it has to lap over or run through. Located in this water and light and forest floor are glimpses that I will survive the revision that death creates, and so will our children.

I stare into the cold clarity of water. I talk to the dead with and without apology. I listen to hear what my dead ones say.

Heaven is a White-Tailed Deer

The walls are coming in and the dogs
whirlpool at my feet,
bored and hungry—
I feed them.
Supper can wait.
I walk out
into the woods where magpies mutter
about noisy crow neighbours.
I follow the overgrown path.
Bear scat,
bent grass,
a last
valiant wildflower.
I'm looking for
a feather—
Sharp Shinned Hawk or
owl—a sign
life can thrive in our cloaked and
choking sky.
Heaven is what my heart does
when I see an owl swoop
in at dusk
and we are all sitting at
the table,
safe in the shelter of
each other. This is good
conversation, where
everyone
has a turn to speak. Do you feel that
lift

in your heart, Mom? Can you hold it?
Can I?
I'm not talking about heaven
as spiritual ecstasy, when we fall
on our face because we feel
so small. The opposite.
Heaven, I think, will be our bodies—flesh and
spirit—
no longer hung up on
what we perceive is missing, or
unknown, or
mis-understood.
I think heaven will be
the click of
a final piece of
jigsaw puzzle set in place—
I remember that sound so well and the
satisfaction
that comes, unexpectedly. Complete,
we'll see
the entire design! Yes!
Something inside me
is laughing! I know you are too! No more
because I said so! No more
Because I am the head of this house! Imagine, no more
blame and silence defined
by gender

and justified by holy texts,
 shock collars, and
 long sticks.
I think Earth has always been
 the holiest place. Heaven must also be
 forgetfulness,
because forgiveness
 isn't enough.
 I don't find a feather.
When B comes home and asks me about
 my day I say *nothing happened*
 —he laughs—funny how he knows
the way I can compress myself
 when I'm distracted—
 distant
as the wildfire in Hope, and ethereal
 like smoke
 that rolls into our valley
each August and is in no rush
 to clear out.
 What I finally say to B is
I am walking
 back up to the house, and I meet
 a six point buck
with nerves of a canal horse.
 He steps straight into my path, stops,
 and stares at me.
I stand
 gawking, like a fool. I can't remember how
 to move my legs.
He burns the air
 with his holy breath—I lift my arms
 and fly.

Diane Vogel Ferri

Maybe a Prayer

Maybe a prayer is just
looking up once in a while
and seeing the trees like
it's the first time, and
noticing a bird sitting there
doing nothing but waiting.

And maybe a prayer
is having a dream
about your childhood home,
and instead of waking up
crying for what is gone,
you smile in the dark.

A prayer might be only taking
what you need and leaving
the rest for God to handle,
surrendering your heart
with all of your heart,
releasing your soul.

A prayer could be happening
when you are in the presence
of the people you brought into
this world, and then the smaller
people they brought with them,
and knowing you had something
to do with all of that beauty.

Maya Bernstein

At the Jewish Poetry Conference

i.

at dinner, when one poet asked how
to poach an egg in the microwave,
another poet said: *poke the yoke*

ii.

the organizer poet dropped a platter
of cut fruit – rolling, juicy marbles
underfoot – and the elder poet picked
a strawberry off the gray commercial floor
mat and popped it in her mouth
moaning mmmm, mmmmm, must
not throw away this berry – a throng
of followers chanted, *Save the fruit!*
Save the fruit! as the organizer poet
walked through their midst like one
of the mixed multitudes who crossed
the Red Sea with the Israelites
and dumped the leaking remnants
of sweetness into the compost bin

iii.

what was the purpose of the Jewish
Poetry Conference? it was meant
for just such a time as this moment
in which we now find ourselves

iv.

in the airport, on the way to the Jewish Poetry Conference,
a woman called my name, a shrill woman
called my name but wasn't calling me,

*You want the uncles to take you away
from me?* she said my name, she said, *you don't want to stay safe with me, you want
all the uncles in this airport to take you?* Her voice was like the voice of God when
the spies said, Milk and Honey, yes...However – about about His Promised Land

v.

when the poets sitting around a wooden table
outside the dorm on the university campus
were asked if they were in the group
going to Craggy Gardens, one poet
misheard and said, Cranky Gardens?

*can't you discern the ancient song
of Jewish flora, whining hydrangeas
whiling away, whistling
feh, these fuchsia petals, feh the yearly bloom,
weeping willows wallowing
in wind, grass groaning
its sway, rhododendrons droning*

vi.

what is this moment
in which we now find ourselves?
what is this place
in which we now find ourselves?

vii.

sleepless poets
slayed insomnia
with slivovitz
wild yam cream laced
with progesterone
pretty pills
pink, prune,
magnesium,
spiked milk

viii.

dream: an airplane landing like a heron
on a lake; dream: my sister sleeping
in my bed; dream: my grandmother
walking down a New York City street
saying, this is my last walk; dream:
loading up the black leased KIA
with my children's suitcases,
pushing it up a steep, snowy hill

ix.

Charlottesville, Pittsburgh, Wuhan, Kibbutz Be'eri
London, Gaza, Washington D.C.

x.

at the late-night "get-together," so named
so that the evil inclination would think
it was like any other "get-together"
and leave us alone, the tallest
and most eminent of the poets did not sit
but instead, in the dark, carried the heavy
university rocking chairs so that others
might sit, and still he did not sit, instead
he wiped the chairs with a square white
washcloth, sweeping away the remnants
of rain, and his face was like Elijah's
face, waiting at the door to be welcomed
to take his indiscernible sip of sweet wine

xi.

I looked for Lookout Point
the ridge revealed itself
the hawk exposed its span
the bunny with its tail

I climbed the hill until
the moon repaired its shape
the snake was startled too
the gate said privacy

xii.

at the Sabbath dinner, sitting next to two prestigious poets,
I overheard one say to the other, about a third prestigious
poet, *He said I should put more microwaves into my poems*

xiii.

to sanctify the Sabbath, one poet placed his hands
on the braided loaves and spoke:

put your hands on someone who touching someone who is touching someone who is touching the bread, he said, so all the poets touched hands, shoulders, smalls of backs, they chanted, sang, opened their mouths, were fed

Greg Mileski

Promised Lands

There is a world somewhere
that is all the things this one can't be.
Creations of imaginations, cosmic longings,
birthed by a world somehow out of step,
where all are created equal and firefighters rescue kittens from trees.
Israel's Eden, Christ's Kingdom, the Yugas of a perfect past
lying just beyond, over the next range.

Have faith and be baptized!
Step one foot toward paradise.
Go West, Young Man, Go West,
away from the Tammanys and Vanderbuildings,
from Bleeding Kansas and the pasts that claim you.
Come along with the guru
and see what's out there.
Go west where trials are heard by juries of our peers
and where we will all finally be
transnational, transrational, tetra-evolving away and toward.
Thank Goddess and finally hurry up, the rest of you—
it's just over there—Promise.

Heaven and Shambhala, the Svargah and the 1950s.
The Pure Land where all are created equal, I swear.
Go West, Go
to where the frailties we've always carried along are finally washed away.
Go West,
and see all the things we fear we'll never be,
all the things we know we are,
reflected back to us
fallen from our heavens.

Richard Chess

The Loneliest Monk: Ink Lit

How long have you been waiting?

Since the hour I was weaned.

What are you waiting for?

I've been grooming myself for the Divine.

How are you preparing for her?

My gaze darts from title to title.
I select the book of life and settle in.

An open book will draw her near?

Neighbors long ago withdrew from me.
I made it clear I would not be known
beyond a nod hello. Even a congregation
of solitary readers would not appeal to me.
I will not share what is awakened
in my lamplit chair.

Why are you speaking with me?

Without you, *aleph-bet*, the book
of life is blank. You illuminate
the unnamed space between words
where I await Her arrival.

Kite Prayer

There's nothing like
the hand of God
for counsel— so like a kite

one can no longer see
for having traveled
so far away until

one day (maybe even at night, in stars)
one is surprised to feel a tug
at the end of the still held still flung
string.

Davis McCombs

Ora Et Labora

*Reckless urges to climb celestial trellises that may or may not
Have been there.*

—Lucie Brock-Broido, “Extreme Wisteria”

We follow the dips and swells of Arkansas Highway 22 through a low, wet country along the southern edge of Lake Dardanelle. Near the town of Paris, the massive, Romanesque outline of Subiaco Abbey shimmers into view. The sight of its pale sandstone walls, red tile roofs, and square bell tower never fails to thrill me. Founded in 1878 by Benedictine monks who came from Switzerland to the Arkansas River Valley, the monastery sits on a hilltop just north of the road.

This morning our first stop is Courty House, the monastery’s retreat and welcome center, where we check in on Abby, the affectionate tortoiseshell cat we’ve come to know in our visits here over the past year. The woman who serves as host of the welcome center refers to Abby as “the most photographed cat in Arkansas.” The sun is warming the concrete outside the glass doors of the main entrance and, as is so often the case, Abby is there. She curls around my legs, pushing hard against me with her head, and she appears to understand when I tell her how beautiful she is. Even Abby, it seems, adheres to St. Benedict’s monastic rule, set down in 516, that all guests who present themselves should be welcomed. Of course, we take a photo.

We find a table under a pergola near the highest spot on the monastery grounds where we eat the lunch we've packed. Looking up, I can tell that the weight and torque of the wisteria vines that rope themselves through the lattice above us are toppling the structure in slow motion. A few grape-like clusters of blooms embellish the morning air with what Linda Pastan calls "the heavy scent / of purple." A closer look and I see that this is Chinese, as opposed to Japanese, wisteria. I know because the vines of this variety, when viewed from above, twine counterclockwise. I love this.

My mentor, Lucie Brock-Broido, the best teacher and most original poet I have ever known, repurposed the word "wisteria" to mean "a state (of mind), the place one heads toward when feeling wistful." I think about the quick and match-like flare of spring in this southern state, the even briefer spark of these blooms. I would hate to miss this. I want it all, for as long as I can have it. I'm in a state of wisteria.

We first visited Subiaco nearly twenty years ago, shortly after we moved to Arkansas. Now, the monastery makes a perfect lunch stop on our trips home from visiting our daughter in college. To the right of the pergola, a gravel path ambles through the outdoor Stations of the Cross and Lourdes grotto replica. The view from our wrought-iron table sweeps west across the monastery grounds below. A turkey vulture is wobbling over the greening fields, teetering on updrafts. A herd of Angus drifts through buttercups.

Below us, less than half a mile to the south, is St. Benedict Cemetery and there, under a stand of pines, lies the grave of Frank Stanford: poet, self-described "dark-eyed orphan," literary cult figure, and resident ghost of the creative writing program I've directed for nearly two decades. I think of him as we eat. He finished his last two years of high school here in the boarding school for boys still run by the Benedictine monks. Forty-four years ago this June, on a cool spring evening, he shot himself three times in the chest. He was not yet thirty.

The only poem of Stanford's I know from memory is called "The Minnow" and it was published in his first book, *The Singing Knives*:

If I press
on its head,
the eyes
will come out
like stars.
The ripples
it makes
can move
the moon.

I've always liked this quick glint of a poem, the way its narrow lines, broken against syntax, seem to dart away before you can get a good look at them. In contrast to the loose and brutal sprawl of much of Stanford's poetry, "The Minnow" is condensed, restrained. It glitters.

A friend of ours, a contemporary of Stanford's in the MFA program, told me once that she still wakes in the dark to what she imagines is the ghostly sound of his pickup truck gunning its engine down the street she's lived on for decades. The ripples keep emanating from that still center beneath the pines.

Before getting back on the road, we slip into the cool and eerie stillness of the church, and I light a tall votive candle in the chapel of St. Scholastica. I've probably spent as little time in churches as anyone my age who grew up, as I did, in the small-town South, but there's something about the generations of people coming to this spot, lugging their burdens and desires, lighting one flame off another, over and over, decade after decade, that speaks to me. Increasingly, I find that I crave these moments of connection to something older, vaster, deeper—not religion exactly, but ritual.

The tolling of the bells in the campanile announces that the monks will soon be entering the church for their midday prayer. I snuff my wooden taper in a tin of sand and we hurry out into the ache of sunlight.

I once read about a theory, based on circumstantial but grimly believable clues, that Frank Stanford was molested by the priest who was his English teacher during his time as a student here. Decades after Stanford's death, the priest

became the subject of “established allegations of abuse made by multiple victims.” I almost can’t bear to think of this. Sometimes, when I’m confronted with the cruelty, sadness, and injustice of the world, I feel as if a great pit is opening up beneath me.

So often in my life, when I have found myself on that crumbling ledge, I have clung to poetry—for meaning, purpose, solace. One of my students used to drive around town in an old car with “POETRY SAVES” emblazoned in huge letters on the rear window. Spending time with the extraordinary young people in my classes, watching them begin to write and study poetry, I see again and again the art form’s transformative power.

And yet, these last years, I’ve found it difficult to locate comfort there—or anywhere. I’m getting old, I suppose, accumulating griefs and worries. Sometimes they nearly crush me. I try hard to leave those troubles behind, to join them to all the others that have been brought, and will be brought, to Subiaco. I want to believe I can.

In 1797, Wordsworth wrote the first and best version of his great blank-verse poem “The Ruined Cottage.” In the narrative’s framing story, two wandering peddlers, the speaker and “the venerable Armytage,” meet at the ruins of a stone cottage somewhere in the Lake District of northwest England. Armytage then relates the story-within-a-story of the doomed Margaret and her family, the one-time inhabitants of that “wretched spot” and its “four naked walls.” Hearing this “tale of silent suffering,”—breathtaking in its bleakness, devoid of redemption—brings the narrator to the brink of despair. But then, out of his anguish, out of “the impotence of grief” comes a startling [change/transformation] reversal: “I turned away,” the speaker declares, “And walked along my road in happiness.”

The surprise of those final lines speaks, it always seemed to me, to the human capacity to be profoundly moved and changed by “sorrow and despair,” but then to put them aside, to find meaning and even joy in a world full of suffering. “Enough to sorrow have you given,” Armytage tells the narrator, “Be wise and chearful.”

I want to believe it’s possible. As Wordsworth would have it, all of our lives—their sadnesses, tragedies, triumphs and joys—occur “’mid the calm, oblivious

tendencies / Of nature.” I don’t know how much comfort that zoomed-out, Romantic perspective still brings me, but in spite of everything, in spite of the troubling turn my thoughts take on this perfect spring day, something like peace or a kind of inner stillness sends its tendrils spiraling through me in this quiet and beautiful spot. I want to believe the feeling will last, and that somehow, believing it will make it true.

a smell like water
dripped through blocks of quarried stone—
the Angelus bells

Caleb Westbrook

Praying in Tongues Before Bed

Okay, *vamos a orar*

Let's pray

Dear God,

Thank you for this day

Thank you for our friends

Please, help us to sleep

well tonight

I want to pray for *aquí*

(she interrupts in her

lilting, two-year-old Spanglish)

For your arm?

Yes, it hurts *aquí*

God, we pray for

my daughter's arm

that it feels better

I want to pray *comprar*

Band-aids Frozen

And that we can buy some

Frozen Band-aids for my daughter

And for *osito*
(pointing to the
pink stuffed animal)

Tu osito?

Yes, *Tío* give me

God, thank you for
the pink *osito*

And pray *Tío*

And we pray for *Tío* that
you would take care of him

And *dedos*

Okay, last prayer
You want to pray
for your fingers?

Uh-huh
I want to paint
dedos pink

Your fingernails?

Yes!

God, we pray that
maybe we can paint
my daughter's fingernails

some day. Amen.

Amen!

(I roll my eyes, laying
in bed next to her, grinning
nonetheless at my daughter's
earnest petitions, how direct
must be her connection to
the Intercessor to be praying
so boldly and uninhibited).





Sjafril
Unspoken Moon

Zixiang Zhang

the spirit lapses to protists

i've construed from the asphyxiation of bulbs
once the meristem dissolves,
a constitution
that splays to the indivisible elements
of a closed
procession of matter denying
the superstructure
from a node,

the antipodes
the spirit uses to claim descendance
from protists,
an ulterior life cycle.

as i wander
surely through
your proper fortress: traffic, talking overmen,
as i am taken, street doves
beginning
to preen, to pressurize the carrion;

on that first day of the rest,
revolution is return

to being, were the things we've thrown immaterial,
aloof all day
& fractaled, realizing circles. i do, i know, i even

hope there's a property in the air we proclaim & inhale
the union of

 extensions of time though time has no ties,
 time refurbishes our mother
for us, who'd fallen from
gravitas,

so i read this from a hymn.
i assume my position, the world becomes amidst perfection.

Maria Koors

Why Angels are Invisible

Faith would no longer be a choice.
It would be the end of epiphanies
and the gentle commandment of *Do not be afraid*.
We wouldn't seek any company or counsel
other than our guardians.
The diocese would charge fees
to watch the changing of the guard
outside cathedrals.
Nuns would collect their hair strands
for rosary threads.
We would shave their heads, braid their tresses into mops
to soak up floods and oil spills.
Their feathers would be black marketed
for miracles.
We would clip their wings
forcing them to work in factories
with payment of rationed manna.
The military and police would saw off their wings
for shields in riots, some stolen
by protestors in defense against police.
Scientists would conduct nonstop experiments
for cancer cures
or map the key to immortality.

Dictators would hold them hostage,
stripping their holy robes for uniforms
or fashioned into flags for protection from drone strikes.
They would dream of God
and ache
refusing to eat, drink, bathe or sleep.
They would forget the meaning of their Hebrew names.
Seraphim would forget the Trisagion hymn
and speak solely in English.
The government would exile them to barren lands
scalped by nuclear tests.
But woe to us humans!
For it is foreseen an archangel's fingernail will peel off a scroll's seal
and the vowels of *earth* will tremble into heaven.
Only then our free will shall be uncorrupted good will.

Neil Carpathios

God's Mirror

When God looked in the mirror
he saw an abstract painting.
Every day it looked different.

He had to get used to being
no one single thing.
Sometimes he'd look in the mirror

and see nothing.
Apparently, a thing doesn't
have to be real to exist.

He thought enough's enough.
He pulled the mirror off his wall
and threw it out his window.

On Earth it shattered into
the oceans, lakes, and rivers.
Which is why water enthralls,

why people pay fortunes
to live beside it.
Every thousand or so years

God tries to glue his broken mirror
back together.

But, of course,

the pieces melted into liquid.

Without a mirror he must
rely on how all the people

choose to see him.

Like a blind man

he has to take their word for it.

Marjorie Stelmach

Jesus Loved Us

Our father was driving. Our mother's hand,
lit softly in dashboard light, would rise
to touch his shoulder or forearm.

He'd turn to her.

A tiny light would catch in his eye or hers.
When he lifted his eyes to the mirror,
we'd seem to be sleeping.

Do you remember?

Those suppers with old family friends across town.
How, after we helped clear the table, we'd curl
into Afghan-draped rockers or the corners of sofas,
half-hearing the intermittent shift of ice cubes
sifting themselves away in tall glasses.

Soon,

we'd drift off beneath the lull of voices
that filled the remains of the evening with names
we recognized vaguely and stories we knew
were somehow our own.

After dark,

we'd climb into the backseat where silence
settled around us. We'd wave to the shadowy
forms on the porch and then, looking up
through the side windows, we'd watch as streetlights
and stars streaked away. Ahead, the dark opened,
easing us down the streets of Old South City—
Elm, Oleander, Potomac, Arbor.

One of us
would start singing, and we'd make our way
through our quietest songs, the ones we sang
only on nights like those: *I see the moon and
the moon sees me. Puff the Magic Dragon.
Jesus Loves Me.*

Home, on our bedroom wall,
Jesus the Shepherd waited on his hillside, fading
above our prayers and vanishing finally into
full darkness broken only by the passing
of headlights across the far wall.

We slept
well in those days, remember? We dreamed,
I suppose. Morning came. This was before
everything changed. Anyone would have
loved us then. It wasn't hard.

Tamar Reva Einstein

You Are Christ's Hands

After Teresa of Avila

Christ's hands
Worked healing miracles
A few Kilometers from here
Miracles we could use now
Healing
Feeding the poor
Accepting all humans
All based in ancient Jewish tenets
Who could imagine
How history would
Twist and turn
Christ was born
A few Kilometers from here
Where a well armed roadblock
Now welcomes your crossing over
Jesus would not have liked the weapons.
I almost gave birth
To my 30-year-old son
During an Intifada
At a Muslim wedding
Me
Probably the only Jew at the subdued celebration
That is a whole other poem.

But I think Christ would have seen the humor
In a Jewish woman's water breaking
At a Muslim wedding
In Bethlehem
Christ
I imagine
Must have had a good sense of humor
To live in this harsh
Part of the world.

Jennifer DeLeskie

Gird Yourself and You Will Be Broken

In those days, there was a donkey in Galilee who longed to see his cousin in Nineveh, whom he remembered as an unblemished yearling with speckles on her muzzle resembling the stars in heaven. “How wonderful it would be,” the donkey thought, “to stand beside my dear cousin at the manger and feel the warmth of her body spread comfort through mine!” The donkey was no longer a foal, however, nor even in the prime of his life; years of carrying his master hither and yon had worn his hooves to nubs and caused his withers to jut from his back like blades. Moreover, his eyes, once as bright as polished onyx, had become muddy pools, and his ears, once straight, now drooped. If he were to be reunited with his cousin, he knew it must happen soon. But the journey across the Jordan River and into the land of Assyria was arduous, and the donkey’s master had no reason to undertake it.

The donkey’s master was a morose and stubborn man, stingy with fodder and liberal with the switch, which he flicked across the donkey’s hindquarters each time he slowed to find his footing over a rocky path, or lowered his head to take a bite of the wild barley that grows thick in Samaria after the rain. The master abhorred company and never stayed in the same spot for long, preferring to seek out high places where none dwelled. Perhaps because of his stern and solitary nature, many considered him to be a prophet.

This was in the time when all creatures spoke: beasts, birds, fish, and even flying insects, although these latter spoke in strange buzzing voices intelligible only to their kind and to the cattle who have long lived beside them. Few bothered

to speak to men, however, for then—as now—men believed that they alone possessed the power of speech, and they seldom understood the words of lesser creatures. On those occasions when they did, they often put the beast to death, assuming that a demon had possessed it.

One day, on the road to Gath-Hepher, the donkey's longing for his cousin overcame him, and he cried out, saying, "Son of Amittai, arise and go to Nineveh, for you must warn the people there of a great calamity that will befall them if they continue to turn away from the Lord." The donkey knew that the men of his master's people must obey the Lord, for he had heard the priests in the temple say so often. He also knew that many considered his master to be a prophet. That was why he spoke to him thus.

The master had been dozing in the shade of a fig tree. At the sound of the donkey's voice, he awoke and prostrated himself in the dust, shielding his face so he would not inadvertently look upon the Lord.

"Hashem," the master said in a tremulous voice, "the Ninevites live outside your covenant and are enemies to your people. Their king wages war upon us and places us in bondage. Were calamity to befall them, it would be a blessing."

The donkey had forgotten about the special covenant between his master's people and the Lord. One man seemed the same as the next to the donkey, domineering and cruel, and he could not distinguish the chosen from the unchosen. But having started out on the path of deception, the donkey decided the only course was to continue along it with even greater determination.

"Do not disobey me," the donkey brayed, "for my wrath is great. Now arise and go forth, for your Lord commands it!"

The master saddled the donkey and they set off in haste. But at the first crossroads, the master urged the donkey toward Joppa, which lay in the opposite direction from Nineveh. The donkey was greatly aggrieved; he planted his hooves and refused to move. But the master beat him so severely that finally the donkey had no choice but to take the path his master had chosen.

At Joppa the master bought passage on a ship to Tarshish, which lay across the ocean at the very edge of the world. Now the donkey was furious. Having adopted the persona of the Lord, he was deeply offended that his master dared to disobey him. The donkey considered bolting and carrying on to Nineveh alone, but he knew that without a master he would soon be captured and put to work in the mines, where the remainder of his life would be miserable and short. And so he allowed himself to be driven onto the ship.

Not long after leaving port, the sailors set upon the master to rob him. But the master had spent all his shekels buying passage on the ship and had nothing of value, save for the donkey. The sailors, angry that the master's possessions were so meagre, cried out, "Let us kill this foreigner and cast his body into the sea." But the captain stopped them, saying, "Although this man is wretched, his life still has value. Let us bring him to Biau and sell him in the market there, for slaves are always needed in the mines."

The sailors bound the master's hands and feet and threw him into the ship's hold. The donkey, terrified to find himself at the mercy of pirates, charged back and forth across the deck, braying piteously. So the sailors bound the donkey, too, and threw him into the hold after his master.

"Now I will surely die," the donkey thought as he lay on his side in the dark and reeking belly of the ship, "either here on the sea or in the mines. How sad that my life must end so far from pastures, sunlight, and my sweet cousin."

Yet although the donkey's life consisted mainly of toil and misery, it was nonetheless precious to him, and he was not prepared to relinquish it lightly. He chewed through his bindings and set about looking for an exit, feeling his way in the dark. That was how he stumbled on his master.

The donkey was greatly relieved, for although he did not love his master, he was afraid and did not wish to be alone. He set to work at once chewing through the master's bindings. As soon as the master was free, the donkey thrust his soft muzzle against his cheek, desiring a comforting scratch on his forelock, or a reassuring arm around his neck. But the master pushed the donkey's face away and offered him no comfort. Nor could the donkey find a way out of the hold.

For three days and three nights they languished. The donkey passed the time thinking about his cousin. He thought, too, about sunshine, barley, and the scent of wild narcissi on the western wind. He felt that his days and nights had not been long enough, for he had not yet had his fill of these things.

The donkey's master, in contrast, passed the time muttering and laughing to himself, rejoicing that he was no longer part of the world above. He seemed to believe that the dark and stinking belly of the ship was Sheol, and that he himself was a shade. During this time, they were given neither food nor water, nor did anyone open the hatch.

On the morning of the fourth day, a great storm came over the sea, and the ship was tossed on the waves like a toy. "Now I will surely die," the donkey thought, listening to the creaking of the timbers. "How sad that I will never see

my sweet cousin again.” He flattened himself against the floorboards and hoped that his death would be swift. In contrast, the master seemed delighted by the storm. He leapt up and offered up a prayer of thanksgiving, singing:

“To you I cried out from my despair,
and to my despair you answered.
To the belly of Sheol you sent me,
cast me down to the heart of the sea.
To the underworld you sent me,
and I went down to the mountain’s roots.
Here, my life-breath grows faint in me.
From suffering you have delivered me,
from ceaseless struggle, unto my death.
Now my lips are for words of thanksgiving
and my life, for an offering to you.”

When he was finished, the master lay down and fell asleep, as if the thrashing of the waves were the gentle the rocking of a cradle, and the howling of the wind a lullaby.

Above them, the sailors cast their gear over the sides and cried out to their gods: Dagon, Ba’al, and Atargatis, goddess of the sea. But the storm did not abate.

The captain of the ship came down into the hold and approached the master, shaking him. “Wake up!” he said. “Do you not see that we are about to perish in this storm? Call out to your god, for perhaps he will take pity on us.”

“My god is not the god of your people,” the master replied, “and he will not take pity on you. Besides, it is all the same to me if I perish in this storm.”

Twice before, the master had hung a length of rope over the bough of an oak, looped it around his neck, and stepped from the donkey’s back. Twice the donkey had chewed through the rope and saved his life. On the first occasion, the master had beat the donkey so severely that the donkey vowed never to intervene again. Thus, on the second occasion, the donkey had, at first, done nothing. It had been a golden afternoon in spring; the hills of Galilee were carpeted with lilies and fat flocks of sheep. Yet the master was immune to such delights. The branch he selected was beneath a hollow in which some bees had made a hive. As the master kicked and thrashed on the end of the rope, the donkey watched the bees, dusty with pollen, fly back and forth between the hive and the pasture, listening to their sweet murmurings. The air had been fragrant with honey, aglow in the slanted, splendid light of late day. A day as nourishing as barley.

To take one's life amid such bounty had seemed obscene to the donkey. That was why he chewed through the rope, even though he had vowed not to and had known that the master would beat him.

The sailors drew lots to see to see on whose account the storm had risen, and the lots fell on the master. The sailors seized the master and the donkey and brought them on deck, arguing amongst themselves whether to throw them overboard. Then the master admitted to the captain that he had brought the storm on them by fleeing from the Lord and he urged them to throw him into the sea. "It is nothing to me if I die," he said.

Now the sailors knew that the master was a prophet, and they wept and gnashed their teeth for having abused him, thereby incurring the wrath of the Lord. They bent to the oars and tried to reach dry land, ignoring the master's exhortations to cast him into the sea. But the sea stormed with even greater fury and their efforts came to naught, and at last the sailors heeded the master and flung him over the side. The storm immediately abated. Then the sailors praised the Lord and resolved to make a sacrifice to him. They advanced toward the donkey with their knives drawn, but the donkey rushed to the side of the ship and threw himself after his master.

"Now I will surely die," the donkey thought as he sank. He closed his eyes against the murky water and imagined he was in a sunny meadow with his gentle cousin at his side. Suddenly, he felt himself being swept into a ferocious whirlpool. Tossed hither and thither, the donkey consoled himself that his death would be quick. Yet presently the churning of the water ceased, and the donkey found himself sprawled on a rocky beach beside his master.

Some fishermen saw the whirlpool disgorge the master and the donkey onto the shore, and they went and told others what they had seen. Soon a large crowd gathered. The donkey's master was furious at having been saved from drowning, for he had wanted to die with all his heart, but the people in the crowd rejoiced and they proclaimed him to be a great prophet.

"Son of Amittai," the donkey said, taking the opportunity to speak while the people were distracted by the miracle they had witnessed, "arise and go to Nineveh, for you must warn the people there of a great calamity that will befall them if they continue to turn away from the Lord." Now the master believed that he could not outrun the Lord, so he mounted the donkey and set off for Nineveh.

The crowd followed, growing larger as they passed through villages and towns and news of the master's miraculous salvation spread. Many of these followers carried swords and other weapons, for they despised the Ninevites and were eager to enforce the will of the Lord if they did not repent from their evil ways. By the time the donkey and his master crossed the river and neared the city, they were at the head of a great army.

"What do I care if men kill each other?" the donkey thought, eyeing the army nervously. The donkey had often imagined that if men no longer inhabited the earth, he should live like a wild ass in the desert and never toil for a master again. But in truth the donkey had now begun to regret his deception. He had heard of the terrible slaughter of animals committed at Jericho and at other places, where neither ox, nor sheep, nor camel, nor donkey had been spared, and he knew the beasts of Nineveh would not be spared either if the army entered the city.

Now Nineveh was huge, three days' walk across. Leaving the army in the hills, the master rode the donkey through its mighty gates and stood in the market, proclaiming, "Forty days more, and Nineveh is overthrown!" The people laughed and pelted him with rotten fruit and dung, for they despised the shabby foreigner, and they did not know that a great army was hiding in the hills. The master revelled in the abuse. He did not want the people of Nineveh to turn toward the Lord; on the contrary, he hoped with all his heart that the city and all its inhabitants would be destroyed.

While the master proselytized—*Thirty days more! Twenty days more!*—the donkey sought his beloved cousin, searching the face of each of his kind for the speckled muzzle he remembered so well. Yet the donkey's search was fruitless, and with each passing day, he fell deeper into despair. "It would have been better," the donkey thought, "if I had perished in the storm or been put to work in the mines, for without the comfort of my dear, sweet cousin, my life is of no value to me."

In the meantime, the people of Nineveh did not turn toward the Lord. On the contrary, they persisted in their evil ways, mocking the master and pelting him with rotten fruit and dung.

On the thirty-sixth day of the master's mission, when the donkey had carried him the length and the breadth of the city many times over, the donkey's grief overwhelmed him, for he was now certain he would never see his cousin again.

Moreover, because he had deceived his master and brought an army to Nineveh, all the beasts of the city would soon be put to the sword. As the donkey was thinking these sad thoughts, a shepherd walked past leading a small flock of ewes and lambs. The donkey pictured the little lambs being slaughtered, and this caused him such distress that he fell to the ground and began to roll in the dust, lamenting with anguished cries: *Eo! Eo!*

The sheep, who had stopped to watch the strange spectacle, asked the donkey why he lamented so. The donkey replied, "I came to Nineveh to find my sweet cousin, but I have not found her. Instead, I have brought disaster upon the city. There is an army hiding in the hills, and if the inhabitants of Nineveh do not repent and turn toward the Lord, it will come inside the walls and slaughter not only the men, women, and babes, but every ox, sheep, camel, and donkey. Not even the little lambs will be spared."

The donkey's words caused the sheep such distress that they, too, fell to the ground and began to roll in the dust, lamenting with anguished cries: *Mbaa! Mbaa!* The lambs, thinking it was a game, followed suit, bleating happily to feel the rough ground against their fleecy hides.

The lambs' innocent play reminded the donkey of how he had once frolicked with his dear cousin, and he was greatly moved. Though his life was as bitter to him as the leaves of the acacia tree, which only the goats and the camels enjoyed, the lives of these young ones were still sweet to them, and they did not deserve to perish.

"Listen, sheep," the donkey said. "If the people of Nineveh will not repent and turn toward the Lord, we must do so ourselves, for perhaps then these lambs will be spared. Go and tell the ox, sheep, camels, and donkeys to don sackcloth, to rub themselves with ashes, and to make a great show of penitence in the street."

The next day, the beasts of Nineveh donned sackcloth paraded through the city, extolling the inhabitants to repent and turn toward the Lord. Yet the people's ears and hearts were hardened, and they heard their urgings only as bellows, bleats, grunts, and brays. The crowd pelted them with rotten fruit and dung and mocked them for, in truth, the beasts looked ridiculous in their sackcloth trappings.

But some in the crowd were filled with misgivings. "Look! See how these beasts heed this foreigner's warning," they said to each other. "Perhaps we, too, should turn toward the Lord, although he is not the god of our people."

Spies had informed the King of Nineveh of the army hiding in the hills, and he had been preparing to make war. But when news of the beasts' crusade reached the palace, the fear of the Lord came over him, and his hatred for his enemies was surpassed by his love for the city and all its inhabitants. "It is better," the King thought, "to repent and turn toward the Lord than to gird ourselves and be broken." He rose from his throne, took off his mantle, donned sackcloth, and rubbed himself with ashes, decreeing, "Let neither man nor beast taste food, nor graze, nor drink water for three days."

For three days and three nights the inhabitants of Nineveh repented thus—every man, woman, and babe, every ox, sheep, camel, and donkey. Even the little lambs rubbed their fleeces in the dust and stayed off their mothers' teats.

Because the shepherds and merchants fasted and were weak, they no longer tended to their flocks and herds. Thus the beasts of Nineveh roamed freely, converging each night in the market near to where the master and the donkey camped. While the master slept, the donkey mingled among them, rubbing muzzle against muzzle, forehead against forehead, and shoulder against shoulder, and the animals breathed in the steam from one another's breath. The donkey had not experienced such comfort since he was a foal, when he frolicked in green pastures with his cousin, or—earlier still—pressed against his mother's warm, milk-scented flank. Slowly, the kernel of despair lodged inside the donkey's heart dissolved. His eyes brightened and his ears straightened. His life became precious to him once more.

In contrast, the master grew more and more furious with each passing day of the Ninevites' penitence. On the morning of the third day, which was the fortieth day of the master's mission, he mounted the donkey and left Nineveh, ascending a promontory so that he could see what would happen. When the army did not attack, he complained to the Lord, saying, "Hashem, this is why I did hasten to flee to Tarshish, for I know that you are a compassionate god and would show mercy on my enemies. Now kill me, I pray, for better my death than my life."

"Are you good and angry?" the donkey said, unable to resist rubbing salt in his master's wound.

"Yes, my Lord," the master replied. "I am angry unto death."

At mid-day, when the sun was at its zenith, the master took twigs from a dead acacia tree and made a booth to shelter in. But the booth was flimsy, and the sun beat down on him. The master cursed the sun and all creation, saying,

“It would be better for the world to burn and turn to ash than for me to endure this suffering a moment longer!”

Over the course of the day, the great army dispersed, and many of the soldiers passed the spot where the master and the donkey sat. Some of the soldiers wept and gnashed their teeth, for they had girded themselves for war and had wanted to slaughter the Ninevites. But others expressed wonderment that the Lord had shown mercy to their enemies. The master wept overhearing these sentiments, for he had wanted with all his heart for Nineveh to be destroyed.

The donkey, who had broken his fast that morning with some gourds, defecated near the booth his master had made, and a qiqayon vine grew from a seed in the dung and coiled around the booth. The master was very happy with the vine, for it provided excellent shade. The donkey had never seen his master take comfort in anything before and was surprised by his master’s delight. The master closed his eyes and soon fell asleep.

The donkey chewed the vine as his master slept, killing it. The master awoke when a sultry wind blew in from the east and cast heat and sun on his head. Upon seeing that the qiqayon was dead, the master fell to the ground and began to roll in the dust, lamenting with anguished cries, for he had loved the qiqayon with all his heart.

“Are you good and angry over the qiqayon?” the donkey said, once again unable to resist rubbing salt in his master’s wound.

“Yes, Hashem,” the master replied. “I am angry unto death.”

“How is it that you have pity for this qiqayon,” the donkey said, filled with righteous indignation, “for which you did not toil, and which quickly came and quickly was gone, and yet you have no pity for the people of Nineveh, or for its beasts?”

The master cast his gaze down and did not answer.

“And should I, the Lord, not pity all creatures equally, since all creatures seek and are deserving of comfort, even those that do not know their right hand from their left?” The donkey’s words gushed forth like water; in truth, he did not know from whence they sprang.

Still, the master did not answer. To the donkey, he now seemed pitiful and diminished, like a foal separated from its mother. Then the donkey regretted destroying the qiqayon and robbing him of his comfort.

Now the donkey did not know who was master and who was servant nor, indeed, if these distinctions mattered. For if all things in creation were deserving

of endless and unfathomable mercy, how could anyone or anything be above any other? The wild ass, the bees, and the beasts of Nineveh; his sweet cousin, the splendid sunlight, and the barley that grows thick in Samaria after the rain. The soldiers with their girded loins and clashing swords and the sailors with their knives. Even the qiqayon vine he had spitefully destroyed. Each deserving of mercy. The donkey did not know why this should be, only that it was so, for he had witnessed it himself that very day.

The donkey thrust his muzzle against the master's cheek, and this time the master did not push it away. Then the master arose and saddled the donkey and together they returned to Galilee.

Gloria Heffermen

Another Prayer to St. Anthony

St. Anthony, St. Anthony, please come around...

How many times have you helped me find
my car keys,
my glasses,
my other shoe.

Something is lost and can't be found...

There was even that time
Max got out of the yard
and we thought he was gone for good
as we searched everywhere,
calling his name and listening for his bark
until at last, I got back to the house,
clutching your name like a rosary,
and found him waiting for me by the door.

St. Anthony, St. Anthony, please come around...

There have been times when,
rebuking myself for carelessness,
I have refrained from calling on you,
telling myself it was my own fault,
and you had bigger fish to fry,
until I finally gave up and called your name,
and reached into a forgotten pocket
only to find, yet again, those keys
that seem to have a mind of their own.

Something is lost and can't be found...

St. Anthony, I have searched every dusty corner,
every closet shelf,
under every bed,
to no avail.

And so I turn to you again,
to help me find what I have lost...

My country, St. Anthony,
My faith in justice,
My hope.

Blake Kilgore

Filling Their Bellies

- on Laozi and the Gospel of Saint John

I.

how can I soften ambition so strength
can sink to bedrock and cling, so
coming storms won't sling
their souls into a boneyard?

how will I empty their minds of dreams, of
conquest, of gain? How can I show the
impotence of chains, shortsightedness of hemlock,
the limits of Rome at Golgotha?

how do I teach them poverty as stairwell
to underground springs, humility as mountaintop
footpath, loss as seed of majestic redwood canopy?
how can I fill their bellies?

chasing after and running from, speculation
on dangers and ruminations on
maybe joys are only vapor, yet-
every day there's another murder, hordes of assaults and rapes

oceans of lies drowning an age
in perversity, vanity, false piety,
revolutionary bombast a viral sinkhole
gulping down the meek and mighty, so-

how do I strengthen their bones so they
might wander, climb, endure, find home?

II.

when Nathaniel was under branches of fig,
sitting in the flickering shade of doubt
he heard rumor of hope, and stood, feeling
the soles of his feet in his sandals

on soil, saw rising sun dissipate morning haze,
inhaled the refreshing breeze that drifts in from
the Sea of Galilee, where the god-man from Nazareth,
place of no reputation, later walked the shifting table of the deep

defying the certain, the known, the absolute limits
of flesh and bone, Nathaniel leaned on, plodding against his mind,
but still one, at peace in his despair and in his form, paradox
incarnate. Do you believe? You will see the heavens open.

Riv Wren

Witnesses

*"I could listen to the trash can's tipped-over plea,
the skewbald hallelu of a dying lawn,
and praise nothing..."*

—Joshua Robbins

Always a preacher delivers one sermon
and a listener receives another, so when the evangelist
sent from the United States strangles his microphone,

sweats through his blazer, and bellows stentorian
over an audience of junior high campers,
the children get both his plosive homily
and the spray of spit that accompanies it.

He means to warn them of the fiery wrath of the unseen
god, of eternal conscious torment for all those who refuse
the cleansing blood of that god's son. He means to compel them
to share this message with their friends because those who deny
the son before their peers will be denied before the father.

This is the saving truth the evangelist has brought across the border.
But say a boy who hears this message receives only its shame,
its threats, its abusive father more monstrous for being ever off
camera, then the sermon the boy gets is no gospel at all,
only a call to lie to himself, to never make friends with reality,

and to witness to classmates by bearing false witness, breaking faith with himself. Decades later, at his kitchen table, he witnesses the ordinary sun's slow resurrection and a ghostly mug that hovers in his neighbor's yard. He sees through the apparition, a trick of the light, a reflection of his coffee cup in the window. He sips and welcomes any waking, the dance of dust in a bar of sunlight, its weightless rise and fall, the blooming brightness that vanishes the floating cup and brings back the miraculous absence of miracles.

Linda Laderman

Tell it to the moon

I'm angry with the moon—
how it shines the same
everywhere & for everyone.

With all that light & some
to spare, the moon should shine
more where it's needed most.

Think about Putin's prey,
or the mother scrounging
for food amid war's rubble.

Hey moon, reflect your full-
ness on children who wait
for their parents to be freed.

Why should those who spread
darkness enjoy the ecstasy of
the moon's glow, as others suffer.

Tell it to the moon, you say, after
my lament & I would if there was
any chance the moon might listen.

Jane Mary Curran

A Canaanite Woman Keeps Watch

*Jericho was shut up because of the Israelites;
no one came out and no one went in.*

—Joshua 6.1

I crouch low on the outer wall,
drenched in dark.
Stare. Wait.

The sun will not rise.
Dawn forsakes us.
Hot night winds blow past my face,
kick up dirt into snakes
that sprout spiny wings
and skitter along the ground. Shapes
sticky with shadows crawl toward me.
The air mutters.

I crouch blind on a ledge of rock.
We have no defense but the sword of fear.

The enemy breathes.



Cynthia Yatchman

Trianda

Donna Spruijt-Metz

Day 118: The Proper Way to Phrase the Prayer for Peace

—after Psalm 118, verses 25-29

What if I ask
for the wrong thing?
My words are imprecise,
and YOU tend
towards the literal.

I'm listening to the noise
that the hours make—waiting
for my heart
to soften—waiting
for the ribbons
that bind me
to loosen—

and then
I might know
what to ask—and how
to ask for it.

Lorie Ann Grover

Tune Thy Heart

Slick turquoise sink
cups clear water to the rounded brim
like a fount of every blessing.
Stippled with seeds of life,
strawberry hearts
tumble praise from her parchment hands.

Fruit floats.

She takes my small palm,
and we plunge below the
streams of mercy never ceasing,
veering them toward the Vietnam war
gasping from the nightly news.

Our melodious sonnet climbs
on our flaming tongues.

David Banach

Arch

at the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama

it is the way the world works the physics
force and mass and the gravity of things
a fist falls like rock an axe handle cracks
a head an equal and opposite reaction

as drops downward like clouds shift rivers run
power clings to power speaks only power
whose words are violence making us matter
God's law moving sticks and stones the water

beneath arched steel a miracle an arch
downward weight lifting up each part rests
holds up the other together they address
the sky *let us pass* before we fall again

it is a bridge an over that is through
hold my hand let the world fall around us

I think I see a way.

Marjorie Maddox

Curlew of the New Moon Discovers a Poppy,

-after two composite photographs by Karen Elias

discovers on the corrugated
surface of mud, a few
surviving petals of grief
from Flanders Fields,
the curlew's curved body
bending down to remember
where poppies once bled beauty
before buried by warfare.

Or the curlew—
Genus Numenius,
bird of the New Moon—
un-buries instead the curved
brilliance of joy, hallucinates
a happiness addictive enough
to be real.

Plucked by the curlew's
sleek beak, the red poppy
recalls constellation *and*
explosion, then tucks itself
into the curlew's speckled
attire of feathers.

Even here
beneath night's sickle
of light: the dangerous
burst of bloom, the intoxication
of possibility.

O curlew, fly back
to the moon that bore you,
where stars inhale everything:
the land of now, sky's simple curve

of before. Once there,
bestow on us this one sign
of wonder: poppy ignited

as comet—flight and curve
over earth—red, moon, and you

dazzling the planet with awe.



Karen Elias

Curlew of the New Moon Discovers a Poppy



One Sign of Wonder

Madronna Holden

Cease Fire

If a cease-fire might quiet the bombs
and allow the shipments of food and water
to stop the famine the armies create-
then my memory might take up
the daily life I lived among the Palestinians
in Ramallah that year
I taught students at Birzeit University.

I might think then
how we longed to make it
through the season of sleet
to the time when wildflowers bloomed
on the road to the Jordan Valley
and the warm winds blew
and drove the moisture
from our limestone homes.

Might we then forget
the soldiers pacing rooftops,
their rifles pointing down at us?
Might we forget
the lorries and helmets,
forget the checkpoints,
the settlers with guns—
as we heal the grave hunger
of bleeding children and rebuild
every shattered hospital?

Generations might then join together
in the olive harvest, giving
young men a purpose again
to nurture family and land.
There might be time for simple things
like the gifts for my daughter
piling up on my dresser,
or Arab music filling the streets
as children knock at my door
with treats in hand, saying,
For your baby.

Perhaps there would be words again
like those of our elderly Arab neighbor
who parted the rubble of bombed houses
scattered around an unlikely tree,
saying, *It is a pear tree: it deserves to live.*

But with the bombs that now fall
on Palestinian families and homes,
can they express the brave beauty
of painted shelters in refugee camps,
or the persistence of reading and writing
as older children teach the young?

A cease-fire is only one first step toward
a permanent peace: toward repairing
the goodness of daily life
as it makes a way for students like mine
to turn the pages of their books
imagining a future of possibilities
in their own state, a future
in which no Palestinian mother
will say again, as one said to me,
that she knows already her baby son
will one day die in the fighting.

Denise Provost

Souvenirs of the Holy Land

i. Village

I thought it was a shiny rock,
but after I had picked it up
I felt its curve and glaze.

It was pottery I'd found
amidst the rubble on the ground
in silent, damaged Lifta.

Clear spring water pools and runs,
conducted into aqueducts
constructed by the Romans.

Down the slope, shrill bird-cries fill
a grove of fig trees which grows, still,
in what remains of Lifta.

Built before the Arabs came,
this village keeps its ancient name -
lovely, abandoned Lifta.

Tucked into a valley's cleft -
all its inhabitants have left -
from afar, they mourn Lifta.

Militias shot up the café;
killed people. Others ran away,
avoiding death in Lifta;

believed they would come back someday -
troubles would pass, and they would stay
in their sweet enclave, Lifta.

Some returned to mosque and homes -
each with a hole knocked in its dome -
broken, rendered unstable.

These empty buildings shelter none
of its inhabitants, not one
remains living in Lifta.

One woman, who fled to the north,
sees her old house from her new porch
(she now lives near Ramallah.)

Her view, across a broad valley,
offers scenes only she can see –
her vanished life in Lifta.

ii. Town

I picked them up somewhere in the West Bank -
perhaps in Bethlehem, where metal shells
of tear gas canisters were commonplace.
I was intrigued by this repulsive waste.

They didn't look like much - broken and crushed,
coated with oily soot - sometimes engraved
with their US manufacturer's names.
Though I recoiled, I wrapped some casings up.

I put them in a tightly-lidded box –
why I still keep them, I don't understand.
I've never mentioned them. No one has asked,
did you bring keepsakes from the Holy Land?

They ooze dark residue. Their sharp smell stays.
I shudder; shut the box, put it away.

iii. City

A lawyer-*cum*-geographer
points out contested lands -
Describes various trouble spots
around Jerusalem.

On an elevated rock
we stand in brisk wind, looking east;
see Bedouins grazing scrawny flocks,
the Wall, a camp for refugees.

I gaze away, look down, and see
in dusty rubbish at my feet
a broken piece of plastic sign
adorned with red calligraphy.

A trophy and a mystery –
I bring it back, and ask a friend,
do you know what this word might be?
He says, *it is my name, Djamel.*

I think that he's teasing me;
he sees me doubting what he's said -
and repeats: *djamel means beauty.*

Unbroken word, painted in red!

Beth Brown Preston

Birth of the Blues

Was it Miles Davis' "Kinda Blue" bringing me home to you?
Or the musical memories of our mutual histories?
Scott Joplin and Jelly Roll laid back and fingering those piano keys,
on an instrument played by Langston Hughes, Bontemps, Zora Neale and Countee
Cullen
while Black women danced a close sweating two-step
with their men in Harlem jook joints?

Were the blues born on sultry evenings under canopies of stars?
Come into this world between dark southern thighs
while our enslaved ancestors danced to strumming banjos, wailing mouth harps
and ancient rhythms of violins, tambourines and drums?

Men and women dancing to words become songs:
work songs
praise songs
kin songs to the blues?

Were the blues born with the birth of "The New Negro?"
or "the flowering of Negro literature"? Or were the blues
more hidden, ever more subtle in the eyes and on the tongues of Harlem?

In the lyric of Billie Holiday crooning "Strange Fruit" at Café Society?
Or the crackle of Louis Armstrong's voice?
or the clarion call of his trumpet?
Was it in the unstoppable Trane: a love supreme flowing from his horn?
or in a Black child's first giant step?

Black man, my lover, I held your newborn in my arms
wondering just what he would make of this world,
a world he gazed on with sad, irreverent yet innocent brown eyes.

Black man, my lover, do not ask me
how you will survive without the blues.

Caroline Picker

One by One

for the practical abolitionists

Always first the mothers—
either she comes
or the lack of her comes
whispering: *we want her back.*

We say yes we can get her back
even though we never know
if our tools are good
or strong or right enough to break bars
built on centuries of throttling.
But always we say yes

yes

we will bring her home

because what we have
that is most likely to set its teeth
into the metal

to grip and heave
until the thing splits

what we have that is most likely to set her

to set all of us

free

is the compass

the whetstone

the gutting arrow of hope.

Marian Kaplun Shapiro

Over Here, Over There

Over Here,

Giant oaks, felled by windstorm/old age/un-
treated tree disease stretched out exposed
by the bald truths of winter, dead. Dead.

No doubt we were sleeping, or watching
the news, or zooming with our kids...

The crashes must have been as loud
as thunder. As lightning strikes. But we
heard nothing of them. We slept well.

In the morning, when we saw the corpses
of the trees, taller than our house they were,
we said, "Thank god they didn't hit our roof!"

But, in truth the loss stunned us and

yearning for the costume party – Spring
in all its shades of green –
we vowed to love the trees even better, those
that were still standing, remembering
their sistersbrothers on whose graves they
were growing ever taller.

Over There,

So many bodies babies menwomen babies
babies felled by bullets, bombs, illnesses
undiagnosed untreated, infected
malignant fatal there in the alleys
in the streets in the rubble... They must
have not been on tv or the news apps
so we heard nothing of them. We slept
well. In the morning there were pictures
in the papers/on the web we said
“Thank god we don’t live over there.”
We said it several times, and the next day
we wired money to the right place, and

Carol Barrett

Esther Metamorphoses into Princess Di's Therapist

This pain you eat instead of breakfast is not about the Prince – that reliable frog – but the Princess. Ten thousand bridal gifts, yet your idea of paradise: sit down with baked beans on toast and watch the telly. Let us begin. You were six, clutching the wrought-iron banister, when your mother, dress soft as smoke, drove out of your life. You have to hold her, Diana, child left to the tyranny of nannies. They laced your crumpets with laxatives. Stop swallowing that empty space in your heart for *Mummy*. Can you forgive her, the smoldering need, a woman apart from your Dad? (What if she had merely died?)

Let's talk about Charles, the king of pranks. The first Charles, your brother, that merciless tease who called you *Brian*, the slow and dull-witted snail from The Magic Roundabout. Your father conspired to want a *son* after the baby boy lived ten hours, just a year and a half before your waxen head crowned. They hadn't considered any names for girls, kept you a week in limbo. Small wonder the next Charles tells you to faint in private if you're going to faint. Answer, Diana, the wounds of words. Win what's yours. Don't be drawn to the flame, the losing match.

Now take this in, your sister, the older Sarah. *Charles courted her first*. Cinderella in the step-mother's house, beauty brought you the Prince. You were there to behold, not to speak. The slipper fits, but beware the irony of the crown. In Dorset they loved your doll self, fed silkworms twenty sacks of mulberry leaves a day. They adorned you with acres of ivory silk taffeta, feathery lace embroidered with mother-of-pearl sequins and jewels from royal beds of shells.

If your cheeks blush like an unexpected sunset, your gown blue
as the crushed petticoat of the sea, they will adore you.
If your hat tilts, flirting, away from the perfect cliff of your face,
brocade swirls like sea foam about your bird-breasts,
they will adore you. But they will not let you speak.

There is hope. It was Sarah's pearls you wore at your neck,
whisked away to the honeymoon, rose petals still dotting your dress.
Somewhere inside the cathedral, breaking tradition, she undid
the clasp, token of the ordinary woman, the sister who lost.
These beads slip into your legacy, strands of the lesser goddess
wrapping your throat, Diana, saying *speak, speak*.

Choose your moment. Choose well.
We risk everything for a hearing.

Jessie Brown

The Cup

In the old light of afternoon, before it's time
to turn on the lamp, I sit cross-legged with tea,
drinking in poems of Jerusalem, of Nablus, long
past the church bells, and the faint
six o'clock news. Past the campaigns,
death tolls, arson, past the window
falling into shadow. It's easy
to forget. To drink, to read
till something calls me out. A slow
warm smell: the mug tipped
on the carpet. Wet wool, deep blue
on light blue. Mopping, it's not the stain
that I regret as much as the loss of those last
dark mouthfuls. Oh lucky afternoon.

Lizzie Ferguson

Borderlands

Mary, you were the talk of that tiny town,
gave birth to a refugee and fled imperial rule,
wandered in the desert crossing
lines in the sand.

No room at the inn for an unwed foreigner,
so you kept your head down,
filled out the right paperwork
three times only to be denied again.

Since stoning has been outlawed,
we stack cement bricks instead,
like a string of pearls on the neckline of the states.
An attempt to make death look pretty.

Mary, I saw you in that NPR photo
Trying to cross the border
until the soldier's whipped you,
heaved this cross on your shoulders.

Lesléa Newman

UPON WRITING A POEM WITH MY CAT BESIDE ME WHILE MY BELOVED SLEEPS UPSTAIRS AND A WAR RAGES FAR AWAY AND CLOSE TO HOME

How easy it becomes
to forget the beauty
of our broken world,

how each elegant wisp
of fur on the cat's sleek back
be it black or white

or the exact color between
nutmeg and cinnamon
salutes the flat of my hand

as I command it to be
at ease, how the roasted almond
tea that I steep every morning

then doctor with a dollop
of cream and a sprinkle
of stevia never fails

to fill my mouth with delight
as if I hadn't sipped the same
concoction yesterday morning

and the morning before that
and the morning before that,
and how sweetly the mug,

a birthday gift from my beloved
that boasts my name in bold
black letters, warmly cups my hand.

It is so easy to forget
to remember the presence
of all these small presents

that enlarge my life,
the golden gifts
that mean nothing to anyone

but mean everything to me
and are scattered about my house
like the spoils of a scavenger hunt:

a scrap of black ribbon
once pinned to my collar
and slit up the middle

on the day that my mother
was cradled back to earth,
the cut-glass candy dish

that no longer holds chocolate
kisses like it did when it lived
on my grandmother's coffee table

in her Brooklyn one-bedroom apartment,
my father's foggy glasses which framed
his face for fifty years, now folded

and useless in a cracked case
in my top dresser drawer.
Why these things matter

is a matter of fact:
my mother was here
my father was here

my grandmother was here
and now they are not
and in this time of war

that would utterly kill them
I am grateful for that and that
despite everything I remain

here in this aging body
that creaks like a screen door
on its rusty hinges

when I rise in the morning
eager to dive into this day
and the day after that

and the day after that
not knowing which day
will serve me

my last mug of morning tea,
which day will offer
one last chance to worship

the elegant tri-colored cat,
which day will provide
the last chance to write

the last poem to outlast me,
the mug, the cat, the far off
flowering almond tree.

Thomas DeFreitas

A Look Askance at Spring

Arlington softly explodes in blossoms:
pink, white, lavender, sky-blue!
Delicious riot of floral generosity!

But my inner canon lawyer
has reservations.

Have they run all this exuberance
past Cardinal Stickler and Bishop Brusk?
Has all this bursting and blooming
cleared the Curia?

Has the paperwork of the chestnut-tree,
liberal with impertinent burgeonings,
gone through the proper channels?

And what about the publications
of this fresh magnolia?
Are they reliable?
Are they orthodox?

Has the sparrow,
little pouch of mischief,
suspicious ounce of happiness,
obtained the *Nihil Obstat*
and the *Imprimatur*?

Where is the hyacinth's certificate,
the daffodil's documentation?

Nothing seems to be following
the carefully laid-out guidelines!

Isn't anyone else
bothered by that?

Jane Putnam Perry

what is the path of Raindrop after falling?

iridescent Anna's Hummingbird drinks from shimmering dew
crevasses like elbows of lateral and vertical branches

salmon detects a single drop of water
their natal stream in hundreds of gallons of seawater

aquifers animate rain and snow that fell 10,000 years ago
forested watersheds provide two-thirds of our drinking water

wildfires lay alluvial landscapes with liquified sediment
waxy compounds in leaf litter vaporize

settle on soil that now repels
finicky monsoons bring black water

Coastal Oak layers the ground with acorns
catch the sun's flicker

Blackberry seeds even in the driest of soil
fill my mouth with jeweled juice

how would you live if you truly knew how much you were loved?¹
sing to Water every day on the way to school

sing [this song](#)
to the rivers, lakes and oceans²

¹ Asks Robin Wall Kimmerer in *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants* (2020, Milkweed Editions), p. 120

² Nibi/Water Song, Dorene Day, produced by Stephen Lang, ©2010 and in perpetuity:
http://www.emptyglassforwater-ca/nyk/?page_id=359. Used in this work with permission by
Wabanewquay Dorene Day, Sept 6, 2021 email to author.



Laurie-Lynn McGlynn
Adonis Blue

Betsy Sholl

Poem Troubled by a Line from Alicia Ostriker

Something with fins and a grim mouth,
left to rot on the dock, something that once
swam through sunlit shimmers of water,

nosed the surface, then slipped under
and rippled away—was already dead
when I poked it, so I don't have to feel

like a mini-Audubon with his gun,
his wires and sketchpad, with his slaves
roasting those songbirds for supper.

Still, we're all outside the garden now,
plucked from the river. "To love without cause
without cease" is a prayer too big for me.

To be loved like that is almost as scary.
The mind fills with questions, tiny fists,
pin pricks of *what if, what if*. Is there

such a river where a soul might drink deep
and not be afraid of its currents?
Because I don't know what to pray

sometimes I just say names like street signs,
hoping Love will find my people
and tell them they already belong.

This morning I carried my phone outside
to record a bird because I wanted the beauty
of its song to last, wanted to play it

for someone who would tell me its name,
so I could what—own it, tell others I heard it,
lucky me, possessor? But already

it was gone, drifting on that nameless river
of water, of air, of right here on the ground,
where not owning is how we belong.

Grace Massey

Japanese Maple

Have you noticed the maple
how its pale leaves cling through winter,
curled like an old woman's fingers
my fingers
as though touched with fire
but not yet dust?

Have you wondered why
they linger, why they have not yet
made way for eruptions of new growth
to come?

A few litter translucent snow
like paper cranes,
my child's impatient origami
now fragile as ancient lace.

Soon leaves will melt
into earth. For now, I dare
hope that new life
is merely hidden.

Jim Hanlen

Chester Creek Middle Fork

The creek is running thin
and doesn't say anything.
I see its annoyance,
turning like a dog on its bed,
twisting all around
hoping to settle.

It hopes to recall
the dream for a river,
all the water bugs dreaming
they'll settle if creek settles.

I hoped I would hear
something profound
but the creek resists
barely holding itself together,
such shallow water
this time in autumn.

Felicia Mitchell

Millipede

This millipede on a rails-to-trail trail
has no notion of eternal life,
no arrogance that its 100 feet
can outpace 100 humans.
It could take an hour to cross
or not cross at all, just fall there,
not so much a victim of a wheel
(because all wheels do is spin,
without vengeance or vindication)
but just a millipede getting run over.

The death of a millipede is not a tragedy.
All a millipede does is crawl,
no sense of urgency or eternity.
It does what millipedes have done
for centuries in these mountains,
even with bicycles in its path.
I, on the other hand, or foot,
am a kindred spirit out rambling.
I do not need a mountain bike to move
or get in touch with my primal cells.

The wildflowers are enough to lift me,
their colors all the stained glass I need.
Bloodroot hides its red rhizomes
under the freshly thawed earth,
its flower white as a first communion.
Perhaps I brood as much as a human might,
but I feel kinship with this millipede on the trail,
the difference between us small and large.

Mighty today, towering over something small,
I pick this millipede up gently in my hand
and carry it across the bike trail
before the next wave of cyclists flies by.
The millipede may not know to be grateful,
the course of its life its own mystery.
Even so, the world needs more millipedes,
when it is spring, in the mountains, in Virginia.

Lisa López Smith

Weekdays

1. Ocotillo

I make my way to the waters—
willows, swallows, herons,
wind, gloved fingers—
listen.
The birds have started
their calls again,
wild scents
of lime blossoms,
honeysuckle, lakeside garbage,
the echoing call of the blackbirds—
long tailed trills, whistles
cackling ducks, the water is still and
I sit next to it,
without company,
wild within.

2. Puente

Walking alongside the highway, wind
and early morning sun,
dusty grasses adorned with plastic
bags, empty Coke and tequila bottles,
a broken shoe, potato chip packages,
fractured pavement
dangling cables overhead

the finches first call my mind away—
chittering and hopping from branch to branch
in the thorny *huizache*. The coo
of the mourning dove, whoosh
of blackbird wings overhead,
the sky bright and oceanic.
One bird on the wire
tosses a seed, catches it,
flips it in the air again,
swallows it and flies away.

3. Espiral

Tuesday morning, 9:37 am, sitting
on a lake side rock, knitting,
swallows freewheeling
past willows and eucalyptus.
My green yarn, purl
row stitch on click of the bamboo
needles, its own song response
to the blackbirds,
a distant pump,
a duck, dump truck on the highway,
knit purl, a song unfolding in a blanket
nearly reaching the pebbles
and leaves on the ground,
the blackbirds sweetly questioning my presence.

4. Home

If life is a prayer
then there's something
sacred
in watching the butterflies
cartwheel across the wildflowers
growing as tall as trees,
in dicing celery for soup,
kneading bread dough,
when the neighbours come over to eat the soup,
and in lighting a candle, or the stove,
and in crying for days when your favourite dog
killed your favourite kitten,
and in washing the dishes—even the burned bean pot
left cooking on the stove with no water,
and in writing some poems and getting form rejections for them,
and in sitting still, listening to the chatter
of blackbirds and swallows
and the distant beat from a neighbour's stereo.

Deborah J. Shore

A Great Host

So many of the endangered species here
are birds—sedge wrens, dickcissels, short-eared
owls, black terns, least bitterns; the list goes on—
or bats—tri-colored, long-eared, little brown.
Much of the wonder birthed in sorrow now.
I've only spotted one in flight,
one grounded, and neither in this state,
not that I'm aware of. But I know the rare ways.
The extraordinary stands at the corner of the eye.
It was one of the first lessons I learned,
which, perhaps, only a four-year-old *could* learn
and keep in reserve. The shimmering where
we do not try at all to focus
on our line of sight
but, looking out, recede—
listen, let breath mist the lens—
and what we see, spinning,
limpid, through both air and light,
is a type of music, the prised
wardens of sudden, stunning heights.

Merryn Rutledge

Hildegard, Prioress of Rupertsberg, near Bingen

Hildegard of Bingen, 1098-1168

I don't remember much before I was sent away.
Helping my mother tend her flowers,
wondering, at Mass, about the voices behind the screen,
humming threads I could remember.
How Love visited—illuminations I did not yet understand.

When we left home,
they didn't say where they were taking me
until we could see the gate.
So many women!
Some girls, not many—Jutta, of course,
who I knew right away shared a soul with mine.
“Sister” was not just a title—I loved them all.

I felt safe.
Certainly, there were rules upon rules,
but on the outside, so many more for girls.
Deportment, chores, tedious womanly arts,
and only one path to tread—
toward marriage and bearing and bearing.
And if you lived through the birthing,
raising how many?
Every girl ending up as you would,
ruled over, worn out, if not dead.

Here I create tinctures and poultices
for the people who come for our help.
I grow every kind of herb,
notice and record what heals the body and spirit.
Chants and poems glide through me while I work,
ones I've learned and new ones,
like swallows winging into the cloister garden
to sing, as I teach my sisters to do.
I write books of melody and mysterious knowing.
Here, I compose myself.

*Thomas Merton. Spider & Owl.
A Full September Moon*

– after Guy Davenport’s *Tom and Gene*

I.

The cinderblock hermitage tucked back
among cedars sits on a bed
of hard, red clay & holds a well-earned claim
for existence as a small island of mid-century solitude
to house the single spider
settling in for her nesting season
as she seeks out any scant warmth in the furthest-back recesses
beneath the monk's thin, pancake mattress & squeezed up
against his set of bongo drums cuddling a birthday gift
that holds the scant remains of high-priced bourbon,
an inch or so still undrunk & asleep at the bottle's bottom.

II.

The spider, that lonely pilgrim, has found her place inside
this universe & refuses to be swept aside as she spins
her web during the night, plucking one filament
after another to the droning accompaniment
of the monks' plainsong, cowed as they are
& so cold in the monastery's choir stalls
down the hill & beyond the hermitage,
the dozen or so monks singing morning Matins.

Meanwhile, a “melancholy” barred owl asks a very simple question over & over from tree to tree not far from the monk’s long sought-after hermitage.

III.

Now the autumn moon looks
down & through the branches
into the hermitage's single windowpane
to gaze on Merton's tonsured head bent
over still another book as he holds tightly to his un-
shaken belief
that no one, indeed, no one in his right mind would willingly agree to ever
give up this life, this sweet nurturing earth.

C. Graham Campbell

Finding a New Home

We are all walking each other home.

Ram Dass

All who wander are not lost.

Tolkien

Wherever two or three are gathered in my name

I am there among them.

Matthew 18:20

The last time I felt comfortable in a church was more than forty years ago. Now in my seventies something very new is beginning to emerge.

*

In high school, sixty years ago, the Oxford United Methodist Church became the focal point of my life. The church was music to the ears of an adolescent who was without direction. This was in a time when the church was a kind, warm, and friendly place, before the tide of evangelicalism flooded America.

I went to a Methodist-affiliated college majoring in religion and philosophy and after graduation attended seminary. Eventually I was ordained as a minister in the Methodist church. I actually served as pastor of several churches mostly failing quite consistently until it all blew up. I left the ministry, got divorced and my father died within one year. A tornado bashed its way through my life demolishing everything I relied upon. Raising my two sons was the only thing that kept me tethered to reality during this “Dark Night of the Soul.”

A couple of years later I got remarried, had two more kids and my first two came to live with us. Fortunately, I also established myself in a career as a psychologist, a calling I loved for forty years. Happy times began to slowly return as I rebuilt my life.

We tried as a family to connect with a church several times, but it never felt right, safe, or comfortable.

During this time, I began actively wandering along other spiritual paths including meditation, Buddhism and Hinduism even under the tutelage of a Hindu guru for several years. Most importantly, I began discovering God in the natural world as I avidly hiked and explored a river near my home. I felt comfortable as a mystic in the natural world.

I gave up on the church and navigated a wide path around Christianity wanting nothing to do with its rising tide of right-wing idolatry, hostility, and pharisaic self-righteousness. It seemed that the church had abandoned the gospel as much as I had left it.

All of the paths I explored became an oasis as I, like the Israelites, wandered in my own spiritual desert for forty years searching for a Holy Land in which I could feel comfortable. Each of these havens were a wellspring that kept my soul hydrated as I traveled.

*

My son and his family began attending The First Baptist Church on the corner of Park Ave. and Salsbury Street in Worcester, Massachusetts. They reported positive experiences. But in spite of my great love and respect for him and his family, I didn't quite trust what they said. Besides, it was a Baptist Church. Baptist churches were sort of like Nazareth, what good could possibly come from them? (John 1:48) How would it be possible to feel comfortable there, in a not necessarily a den of inequity but likely a castle of Evangelicalism. But this church had flown a Pride Flag for several years until it was stolen twice. That was certainly in their favor. And the church was going to have a Sunday service celebrating LGBTQ pride on September 10th at 10am. I was quite anxious and suspicious but was also determined to support such a brave effort. So, I rose up out of decades of Sunday morning lethargy and followed my son's family to church. The service contained a transgender singer in drag singing. I immediately knew that these were a people who didn't do things halfway.

I've been at the church every Sunday for the last six months and intend to keep it up.

Every week we celebrate The Divine in all her genders as he, she, they, them, brother, sister, mother, father, son, daughter and everything in between. The Ultimate Mystery cannot be contained in any single human category.

After all these years I have at last found a safe home where I too am welcomed, included, and received as my own brand of straight, privileged, old white guy.

This is still tender, hard to describe, and vulnerable. I feel like a sensitive flower just opening to the sunlight as a gentle spring rain responds to how much I need its nourishment. I soak it in while staying alert to winds, insects, and future droughts.

But those don't happen.

My practice is to arrive half an hour before the church service begins. After greeting a few people, I am coming to know and look forward to seeing, I take my seat and begin meditating in one of the surprisingly comfortable pews. I meditate several times a week and this has become my favorite 'sit.' As I follow my breath, in deeply and out slowly, my shoulders relax, and I sink deeper into the pillowed pew. I can do this because I feel safe. No Bible thumper is going to clonk me on the head for the heresy of meditating or accuse me of being a pagan. After forty years of wandering around I have found a promised land. The morning sun shines through one of the very tall windows warming my face. I am grateful for the pew since my days of sitting cross legged on the floor are long gone.

During the best weeks the choir is rehearsing during this time, and I breathe in their aliveness, especially if the music is of the dynamic, hand-clapping sort. Makes me want to dance, sing and shout "AMEN" or better yet, "SING IT AGAIN." But I am not that brave yet.

And if I am especially fortunate, Wesley, the minister of music and arts, practices with the morning soloist. One Sunday, allergies were blocking my ears so I could not hear the actual words, but her voice resonated, reverberated with, and stroked the strings of my soul. During the service when she sang, I thought I would simply float away. She activated the neurochemicals not only of happiness but also of awe. Lots of churches have beautiful music. I've heard some of it.

But none has ever affected me this deeply.

My body empties out, the inner space fills not with void but with numinous wonder. There is even a physical chill running through me. At first this scared me.

But my soul whispered, “Stay right here. This is exactly where you are supposed to be. Stay in your heart.”

I realized it was the same sensation I had in the deep forest. The nature mystic is becoming a church mystic. I am as safe here as on my river where I neither rusted nor melted. Now it is a blessing to be among people gathered in HIS name. The Ultimate is right here with me.

Of course, not everyone responds this way, nor should they. Requiring anything remotely resembling this would violate everything involved with inclusion. My responses are not better. They are simply my truth in this place and time.

The church isn’t perfect. New homes and churches never are. And of course, neither were the old ones. But it is a place with the intention of being an inclusive beacon of the Gospel. Many of us are delightfully ‘quirky’, while others wonderfully ‘normal.’ And to loosely quote folksinger Bill Staines, “All God’s Children got a place in the choir. Some sing low. Some sing higher.”

Each Sunday includes “Moments of Wonder” usually referred to as Children’s sermon in other churches. Children often come forward delightfully running or skipping to the front of the church where they are lovingly welcomed in their adorable cuteness and humorous comments by Seasonal Pastor Kathrine. The joy in the little ones reflects the authentic inclusiveness for all of God’s children.

Pastor Brent has been on sabbatical during these months so most of the time Pastor Kathrine has led worship, shared scripture, and wondered with us about its meaning. She often takes on difficult, uncomfortable passages of people behaving unexpectedly which are treated naturally and welcomed as anything else. Pastor Kathrine crosses formerly vast chasms of separation while embodying faithful inclusivity.

Next in the worship service we engage in what has become a common ritual of greeting one another. As I am coming out of my transcendent buzz, Spirit pulls me into its immanent presence in the midst of the people gathered in his name. That God loves these people is a given, a well-known miracle present throughout the ages. The immediate miracle in this moment is that I love each of them. My very strong introverted tendencies dissolve and I mostly seek out people I don’t know while restraining my desire to hug each one.

Pastor Brent returned from his sabbatical in early December. (This sabbatical to me was another thing this church had going for it. Any church smart and

compassionate enough to grant a sabbatical was a place I respected.) I thought of him as Senior Pastor and wondered how the return of 'the big dog' would affect the process. Much to my amazement, he assisted in the service rather than take the lead showing great respect for Pastor Kathrine and the community process.

However, I continued to be puzzled. He was not living up to my expectation and acting as 'Senior' at all. But after a few weeks Spirit nudged me into seeing this very differently. He is clearly a very gentle soul, an intelligent person who at times even edges toward wisdom with touches of humor in his sermons. But he is not the 'Big Dog.'

A brief sidelight, early in the sixties, a feminist leader said that anytime a woman felt disrespected a click should go off in her brain.

At this point, this male brain, as much as he hated to admit it, was retreating into a very traditional image which would be very disrespectful to everyone. CLICK, CLICK, CLICK, CLICKS were going off in my brain. What I now see is we have a very wonderful example of the Sacred Masculine partnering with the Divine Feminine and the process of the entire congregation. In this the Sacred Masculine does not have to dominate. And in many ways even if he wanted to, in the midst of all this Divine Feminine it wouldn't work well. Pastor Brent is present as partner, associate, companion with other staff and the congregation as we all find our way home together.

As the service concludes, the final hymn and benediction is not the end of church for the week. It lives and thrives every day in the world proclaiming in its every form a loving Gospel.

And the final hymn is like a grammar school bell announcing recess and many of us go to the playground upstairs for a social hour where the children continue to be delightful, and adults mostly talk about the ordinary things of their lives.

*

In these years, the later years of my life, I am guided to this home where The Ultimate Mystery continues to nudge all of us. I have found a home base from which I wonder through the world hoping to aid in creating a safe haven for all of God's children no matter how they sing or who they love.

In all of this, The Divine accompanies me wherever I am.

Elena Lelia Radulescu

THE MEMORY COLLECTORS

We clambered up the steps
of the old, Spanish tower
amazed by the view
down at the harbor,
the stonewall ripping tides
into silvery shreds,
small fishing boats
coming back to the shore.

Farther out,
the sun burnt the mist,
and an island emerged,
deep rich emerald green
like a peppermint leaf
floating on blue.

All that beauty
we could hardly bear
afraid we might lose
the moment, as if
such moments were rare,
glasswinged butterflies
pinned on black velvet.

Pia Quintano

Beloved Zebu





Charlene Stegman Moskal

From the North Sea

Ode to an eco-poet

She must have been a beautiful child—
the hurt writes a poem behind eyes;
holds all the pictures she didn't want to keep.

I imagine she was small; blonde hair
lightly curling, thin as cat's fur,
easily tangled in her bad dreams.

Limbs, thin too, like saplings
wrapped in early winter white flesh
on bones that struck poses of protection.

Her face easily bruised, a little scared
like someone almost ready to cry
even in the glory of summer.

She is her ancestors from the North Sea,
white froth, ice cold lace
bumping over and over against a rocky coast,

fathoms deep charcoal green
generations of fingers that tore holes
in the fabric of childhood.

Now with needle and thread
found in the bones and sinews
of fish and small animals

she seeks to repair herself,
make what was empty strong, whole,
alive with the essence of the land.

Yuandi Tang

The Whisper of HayMagic

Sunshine graces the Public Garden with its golden light,
A stone's throw away lies the groceries, a hustling sight
Not far off stands the happy mart, a place of delight,
Where luxury shops shimmer, a true urbanite's right

Sliding carefree by the Government Center's grand display,
Bowling in respect at the serene cemetery's array
Peering through the green boat car, life's colors at play,
Navigating arbitrary roads, in the city's ballet

A gentle breeze whispers secrets into my eyes,
I shut them briefly, lost in nature's sweet guise
Oranges leap from my bag, a fruity surprise,
Diving into the pond, transforming before my eyes

Lettuce stretches out, becoming a lush green lawn,
Blueberries roll, a dance of colors at dawn
Drizzling lettuce with tiny blue flowers, nature's drawn,
Celery pillars the bridges, a sight to fawn

Jazz music plays, a melody for the snake charming show,
Hey the magic journey, where life's rhythms flow

Tomas O’Leary

Keeping in Mind

Keeping in mind that there is no mind
the thoughtful thinker shepherds
his thoughts to a restful grove
under starlit skies where they laze about
mindless as sheep, and he counts them
and falls asleep. What is
the nature of mind, is the question
that never lets go of him, sleeping or
waking. It all has to do with
subscription, he canceled his ages ago
but sometimes still gets mind
and this annoys him. When it comes
right down to it, he proclaims
to himself at his most lucid, mind is
a trick mind plays on itself
that makes it seem to be. But the thoughts
of a lifetime prove nothing of mind—
what it is, where it is, if it is—
and the thinker’s communion with starlight
rests his case: fine night, where’s mind.
Who can say how right or wrong he is?
He is older than the village, no one
questions his impeccable profundity.
His disciples are few, yet ardent.
All dwell in paradox: they long to question
their fabulously wealthy mythic state.
Their guru winks with merriment.
Mind holds its golden tongue.

Martín Espada

On Friday, We Will Wear Blue

On a Friday morning twenty years ago, the new teacher saw the other teachers dressed all in blue, blue hats, blue sneakers, looping the sidewalk at the school, chanting in rhyme for a contract, the chant calling to her, picket signs waving to her. Her feet joined the other feet, weary even before the school day began, and the teachers draped her in a blue T-shirt three sizes too big, inscribed with the logo of the union. Cars slowed on gravel so hands could fling cups of cold coffee, muddy grenades bursting at their feet.

The department chair watched them from the window of his office upstairs in his goatee and ponytail, garlic steaming from his pores as if he drank garlic tea, wore garlic cologne, lathered his ponytail in garlic shampoo. The new teacher knocked to ask him about the 11th grade boys, who never handed in papers, eyes blank as paper, lobotomized patients of adolescence.

The chair wrote poems in his goatee and ponytail, an epic gone brittle in his desk like the half-moon of a cookie nibbled by mice, a bumper sticker about the magic of metaphor pasted over the doorway of his office. He swiveled to face the new teacher, and a gust of garlic wrinkled her nose. *I saw you out there on the picket line*, he said. *You shouldn't be out there*. His eye scanned the blue T-shirt three sizes too big. *As for the boys*, he said, *maybe you should wear something to flatter that cute little figure of yours*. She cursed him as the coffee bombers cursed the picket line, stalking from the office that stank of magic, the magic of metaphor, the magic to ward off vampires. Later, he would lurk in the back of her classroom to evaluate her, writing his report to be sure she would never teach again.

Twenty years after the lesson of the garlic poet, at a school where the teachers would dump him on the sidewalk like a cup of coffee garnished by a dead mouse, she says to the other teachers: *On Friday, we will wear blue. When they ask why, we'll tell them: We want a four percent raise*. There is blue in every closet, rhyme in every chant. The teacher in tears at every meeting clears his throat to speak.

Ceridwen Hall

Composition

A buckeye falls between me and the dog,
 loud, sudden, cracking its own case
open. This is what the woods know
 about power and how they say it—
now. Acorns pile and roll
 under my feet. I almost trip, admiring
the hundred shades of scattered
 leaves. Distracted, I'm trying to ask
brave questions here, where ghosts tug
 at my knees, and in the other world
with its looming screens. How
 do I surrender my work? And to whom?
A leaf with bright green veins
 makes me think of the skeleton, full
and luminescent, my teacher asks me

to imagine for myself. Effort is never
quite enough, though; ideas need
to be invited rambling, then maybe home
through the mind's backdoor. If I repeat
a question, will it become a prayer, the way
a walk is a ritual? A branch snaps
when the doe leaps and my head hammers
unsureness—the kind of fear I think I give
my students when I say they must find
what can't be Googled. The dog barks,
then silence. We fail one another, like leaves,
in bright spirals.

Christien Gholson

Everything Has Its Own Prophet

The stone washed up by the last wave, the one that fits into the snug center of my palm, was once the prophet

for a bullwhip kelp forest, long gone. It whispers about ruins and space. The thread of bladderwrack near my feet

was once the prophet for the kingdom of salt. It whispers about the tricky balance between the fear of the insoluble

and the fear of dissolution. Salt in our eyes, after a wave batters a dolmen-shaped group of boulders, are the prophets

of the Dungeness crab. They whisper about illusion, paradox of stability, the struggle of a calcified shell in a transient

world. Fate chases destiny or destiny chases fate out over the Bering Sea, heads south, ahead of cyclonic winds, flow

over miles of wet flats. The shifting sand particles, my prophets. They whisper to me about how dim, grey sunlight chills

the eyes of ospreys into a narrow, deadly focus. The osprey lands on its old, abandoned nest, tears at a bass with its beak.

The sand tells me I was once a twig in that nest, built high up on an abandoned train trestle stretched across an abandoned

river, how this fact will surely have an effect on the next minute, the next hour, decisions I make seven years from now.

Down the beach, driftwood smoke at twilight. Flames chase
each other through a labyrinth of flickering messages, images;

future and past collide inside shadows cast across the sand. In-
rolling sea mist is prophet for the flames, and we realize that

we are the designated prophets of this evening's mist, bearing
witness to the arc of its journey. Clusters of foam, swept from

the tide line skid past us, ephemeral creatures, broken apart by
stones, stranded kelp, an open crab shell. We can hear ice

forming, just this minute, between smooth black stones, where
the creek runoff snakes onto the beach sand. Crystals reach out

to each other, blind. They know the way.



Galen G. Cortes

Living Underwater



Herman Hesse

Feierliche Abendmusik 1911

Allegro

Gewolk zerreisst; vom gluhenden Himmel her
Irrt taurmelndes Licht über geblendete Taler.
Mitegeweht vom fohnigen Sturm
Flieh ich mit unermüdetem Schritt
Durch ein bewolktes Leben.
Oh, dass nur immer für Augenblicke
Zwischen mir und dem ewigen Licht
Gutig ein Sturm die grauen Nebel verweht!
Fremdes Land umgibt mich,
Losgerissen treibt von der Heimat fern
Mich des schicksals mächtige Woge umber.
Jage die Wolken, Fohn,
Reisse die Schleier hinweg.
Dass mir Licht auf die zweifelden Pfade falle!

Andante

Immer wieder tröstlich
Und immer neu in ewiger Schöpfung Glanz
Lacht mir die Welt ins Auge,
Lebt und sich in tausend atmenden Formen,
Flattert Falter im sonnigen Wind,
Segelt Schwalbe in seliger Blau,
Stromt Meerflut am felsigen Strand.
Immer wieder ist Stern und Baum,
Ist mir Woge und Vogel nahe verwandt,
Grüsst mich als Bruder der Fels,
Ruft mir freundschaftlich das unendliche Meer.
Unverstanden führt mich mein Weg
Einer blau verlorenen Ferne zu,
Nigrend ist Sinn nigrend ist sicheres Ziel—

Wally Swist

Solemn Evening Music - Translation

Allegro

Cloudbanks break up; glowing in the sky,
Phantasmagoric light blinding the startled valleys.
Blown along by the storm winds
I rush, with an untiring pace,
Through a clouded life.
Oh, that for only a moment,
Between myself and the eternal life
That a storm would be kind enough to blow away the gray mist.
A foreign land surrounds me,
Ripped loose, away from home,
The waves of fate forced me to move around.
The south Alpine wind scatters the clouds,
Tears away the veil,
That light should fall on a path of doubt.

Andante

Always comforting
And always new in eternal creation shines
The world laughs in my eyes,
Lives and moves in a thousand breathing forms,
Butterflies fluttering in a sunlit wind,
Swallows sail in the blissful blue,
The sea tide flows onto the rocky beach,
Again and again, there is a star and a tree,
Cloud and bird are closely related to me,
The rocks greet me as a brother,
The endless sea calls me amicably.
The road ahead, which I do not comprehend, leads me
Toward a blue, lost distance,
Nowhere a meaning, nowhere a certain goal—

Dennoch redet mir jeder Waldbach,
Jede summernde Fliege von tiefem Gesetz,
Heiliger Ordnung,
Deren Himmelsgewolb auch mich überspannt,
Deren heimliches Tönen
Wie im Gang der Gestirne
So auch in meines Herzens Taktschlag kilngt.

Adagio

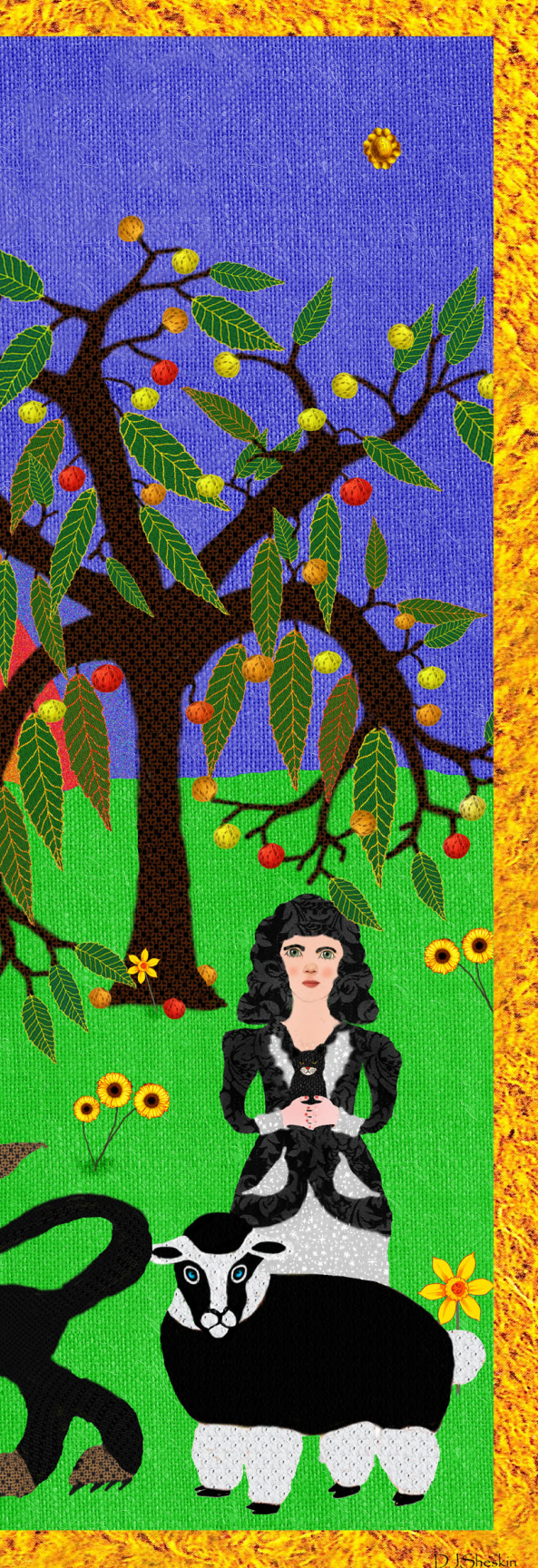
Traum gibt, was Tag verschloss;
Nachts, wenn der Wille erliegt,
Sterben befreite Krafte Empor,
Gottlicher Ahnung folgend.
Wald Rauscht und Strom, und durch der regen Seele
Nachtblauen Himmel Wetterleuchten weht.
In mir und susser mir
Ist ungeschieden. Welt und ich ist eine.
Woke weht durch mein Herz,
Wald traugt meinen Traum.
Haus und Birnbaum erzahlt mir
Die vergessene Sage gemeinsamer Kindheit.
Strome hallen und Schluchten Schatten in mir,
Mond ist und bleicher Stern mein vertrauter Gespiele.
Abe die milde Nicht,
Kusst mich Lachelnd in unereschopflicher Liebe,
Schuttelt traumerisch wie in alter Zeit
Ihr geleibetes Haupt, und ihr Haar
Wallt durch die Weit, und es zittern
Blass aufzuckend darin die tausend Sterne.

Nevertheless, every forest brook speaks to me,
Every buzzing fly, of a deep law,
A holy order,
Whose skies span me too,
So secretly sounding,
As in the course of the stars,
So also in mine, this is how the beat of my heart sounds.

Adagio

Dream accords what the day adjourned,
At night when the will succumbs,
Liberated forces strive upward,
Following divine premonition,
And rustling forest and streaming current, and through the rain the soul
Lights up the night blue sky in blustery weather.
Everything within me and outside of me
Is absolute. The world and I are one.
Clouds drift through my heart,
Forests dream my dream,
House and pear tree tell me
The forgotten story of common childhood.
Streams echo and canyons cast shadows in me,
The moon, and the pale star, are my familiar occupations.
But the mild night,
Leans over me with its gentle clouds,
Resembles my mother,
Kissing me, smiling in inexhaustible love,
Shaking her head dreamily, as in the old days,
And the hair on her beloved head
Unloosens through the world, and it billows,
The thousand stars in it, awakening, turning pale.





David Sheskin
peaceable kingdom 13

Marya Summers

The Congregation

For my fellow travelers

We are each wayfarers, navigating
our craft, finding grace as we steer
a course by the stars. But some hearts
truly let go to wild, embodied faith
with apparently little to nothing
between themselves and danger,
daring to venture where spirit leads
into a giving web that meets each need.

In Southern Oregon, the same
heat that gathers golden plums into sweetness
collects young men in the shadow of a bank.
Fox and Tarzan offer gracious conversation and
easy laughter. Even their stories move
like vagabonds, wandering yet purposeful.
From my camper, I bring breakfast.
Our wealth is open hearts, extended hands, bare feet.

On Mount Shasta, grandmothers make homes
on wheels, trusting their vehicle's safe passage
as fires swallow forests. In the smoke
and ash of hubris mingle the small clouds
of our pipe ceremony, elevating incineration

to a new start. Hummingbird smears bear fat
and red ochre on our foreheads and we shake
rattles under the firs and call in the spirit of healing.

Alone I often do not see my own divinity
and cannot separate my circumstances from my worth,
but among other chrysalis souls, I awake to immanence:
not just a tragedy of illness and disability
but a miracle of breath and dirt.

We are one body blessed by the struggle of
forging faith from calamity, each ministering to each.
Wherever two or more gather –
a community, a church, a home, a choir.

Contributor Bios

Jessie Brown has published in journals like the *Comstock Review*, *New Madrid*, *Full Bleed*, *Fieldstone Review*, and *Minerva Rising*, in addition to two chapbooks, *What We Don't Know We Know* and *Lucky*. A resident of Arlington, Massachusetts, she also collaborates in public arts projects in poetry and the visual arts.

www.JessieBrown.net

Deborah Bacharach is the author of *Shake & Tremor* (Grayson Books, 2021) and *After I Stop Lying* (Cherry Grove Collections, 2015). Her work has been published in *Poetry Ireland Review*, *New Letters*, and *Poet Lore* among others. She is a college writing instructor and tutor in Seattle. DeborahBacharach.com.

Stefan Balan is a Romanian-born American living in the Greater Boston area, where he works as an oncologist. In Romania he published one book of poetry and co-authored a volume of film criticism about Lars von Trier, which received the National Critics' Award. His English writings appeared in, among others, *West Branch*, *Frog Pond*, *Sheila-Na-Gig*, and *Lifelines*. His essay "Masahide and the Moon" was included in *The Red Moon Anthology*, which culls from the best haiku-related literature in English. He is the 2024 recipient of the 3rd *Wednesday* magazine first prize for poetry.

David Banach is a philosopher and poet in New Hampshire, where he tends chickens, keeps bees, and watches the sky. He likes to think about Dostoevsky,

Levinas, and Simone Weil and is fascinated by the way form emerges in nature and the way the human heart responds to it. You can read some of his most recent poetry in *Isele Magazine*, *Neologism Poetry Journal*, *Passionfruit Review*, *Terse*, and *Amphibian Lit*. He also does the Poetrycast podcast for *Passengers Journal*.

Carol Barrett has published three volumes of poetry, most recently *Reading Wind*, and one of creative nonfiction, *Pansies*, which is the first book in English about the Apostolic Lutheran community for those outside the fold. An NEA Fellow in poetry, Carol has poems appearing in seven countries and in over fifty anthologies.

Maya Bernstein is on faculty at Georgetown University's Institute for Transformational Leadership and Yeshivat Maharat, a women's Rabbinical School. She serves on the board of Yetzirah: A Hearth for Jewish Poetry, and is pursuing an MFA in poetry from Sarah Lawrence College. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Adanna Literary Journal*, *The Amethyst Review*, *Allium*, *By the Seawall*, *The Cider Press Review*, *The Eunoia Review*, *Gashmius*, *Rue Scribe*, and *Tablet Magazine*, and her first collection is *There Is No Place Without You* (Ben Yehuda Press, 2022).

Elizabeth Rae Bulmer has been writing poetry since the age of seven. Bulmer's poetry has appeared, or is forthcoming, in *Pensive: A Global Journal of Spirituality and the Arts*, *Peninsula Poets*, *Her Words*, *Sky Island Journal* and *Rockvale Review*. Her most recent chapbook, *Skippping Stones on the River Styx*, is forthcoming from Finishing Line Press. She is a licensed massage and sound therapist and mother of two phenomenal humans, living with four fantastic felines in Kalamazoo, MI.

C. Graham Campbell, Ph.D. was born in Canada and immigrated to the U.S. with his parents at the age of three. He is a seventy-five-year-old retired psychologist and a late blossoming author. He has a master's degree in theology, a doctorate in pastoral psychology and training in spiritual psychology. He now spends most of his time involved with family, writing, meditating, and exploring what being an elder means. His work has appeared in *Ravens Perch*, *Bicopa*, *Braided Way*, and *Steel Jack Daw*, among others.

Neil Carpathios is the author of seven full-length poetry collections, most recently, *Lifeaholics Anonymous* (Kelsay Books, 2023). His book of original aphorisms, *The Lost Fragments of Heraclitus* (Wipf and Stock), was also released in 2023. Currently, he is Writer-in-Residence at Malone University in Canton, Ohio.

J. Carraher is a San Francisco Bay Area writer whose recent work appears in such venues as *Sunspot Lit*, *Alternating Currents*, *Relief Journal*, *Cirque* & others. She studied folklore at UC Berkeley, holds a Masters of Science from UCSF and works as a sexual assault forensic examiner and obstetric nurse. She lives with her family on a small farm in Freestone.

Richard Chess is the author of four books of poetry, most recently *Love Nailed to the Doorpost* (University of Tampa Press, 2017). His poems have appeared in many journals, including *Poetry*, *The American Poetry Review*, *Ploughshares*, *Pensive*, and elsewhere. He is professor emeritus at UNC Asheville, where, among other things, he directed its Center for Jewish Studies for 30 years. He serves on the boards of Yetzirah: A Hearth for Jewish Poetry and the Black Mountain College Museum & Arts Center.

Galen G. Cortes is a Filipino Redemptorist of the Cebu-Province, Philippines. He is currently on sabbatical leave.

Jane Mary Curran lives in Asheville, North Carolina. She is retired from a college professorship in piano and her second career as a hospice chaplain and spiritual director. She is the author of *Indiana Girl, Poems* (2019), and *Midwives of the Spirit: Thoughts on Caregiving* (2002).

Thomas DeFreitas was born in Boston in 1969. A graduate of Boston Latin School, he attended the University of Massachusetts, both in Boston and in Amherst. His poems have appeared in *Autumn Sky Poetry Daily*, *Plainsongs*, *Dappled Things*, *Ibbetson Street*, *Pensive*, and elsewhere. Three of his collections have been published by Kelsay Books, most recently *Swift River Ballad* (2023).

Jennifer DeLeskie (she/her) is a writer based in Tiohtià:ke (Montréal), on the traditional and unceded land of the Kanien'kehá:ka people. Her writing has appeared in *Beneath Ceaseless Skies*, *Exile Quarterly*, *The Dalhousie Review*, and elsewhere, and has been nominated for awards such as the Carter V. Cooper Short Fiction Award and the Fish Short Story Prize.

David Ebenbach, a former contributor to *Pensive*, is also the author of ten books of fiction, poetry, and non-fiction, winners of such awards as the Drue Heinz Literature Prize and the Juniper Prize, among others. He lives with his family in Washington, DC, where at Georgetown University he teaches creative writing and literature and works with faculty and grad students to help them become ever more passionate, equitable, informed, and skilled teachers. You can find out more at davidebenbach.com.

Tamar Reva Einstein is an Expressive Arts Therapist, artist, writer, and mother, who dwells in the holy and beautiful and challenging city of Jerusalem. Poetry is one of the ways in which she traverses the rocky terrain and reaches all folks on all sides of the visible and invisible divides.

After teaching college English for 40 years, **Dr. Karen Elias** is now an artist/activist, using photography to record the beauty and fragility of the natural world and to raise awareness about climate change. Her work is in private collections, has been exhibited in several galleries, and has won numerous awards. She is a board member of the Clinton County PA Arts Council where she serves as curator of the annual juried photography exhibit.

Martín Espada has published more than twenty books as a poet, editor, essayist and translator. His latest book of poems is called *Floaters*, winner of the 2021 National Book Award and a Massachusetts Book Award. His forthcoming collection, *Jailbreak of Sparrows*, will be published by Knopf in spring 2025. He has received the Ruth Lilly Poetry Prize, the Shelley Memorial Award, a Letras Boricuas Fellowship, and a Guggenheim Fellowship. His book of essays and poems, *Zapata's Disciple*, was banned in Tucson as part of the Mexican-American Studies Program outlawed by the state of Arizona. A former tenant lawyer in Greater Boston, Martín Espada is a professor of English at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst.

Irish-Canadian **Lesley-Anne Evans** is author of *Mute Swan* (The St. Thomas Poetry Series, 2021). Her work appears or is forthcoming in *The Antigoneish Review*, *Banshee Lit Mag*, *Cascadia Review*, *CV-2*, *Ekstasis*, *Lake* (UBCO), and *Letters* (Yale), among other publications. In 2023, Lesley-Anne was selected for a small cohort at the Seamus Heaney Poetry Summer School, Queen's University, Belfast. Lesley-Anne lives in Kelowna, BC, where she hosts Feeny Wood, a retreat for creatives and spiritual seekers.

Lizzie Ferguson (they/them) is a Chicago based poet, environmental activist, and interfaith leader. Previously their work has been published in *Gardy Loo Magazine*, *Secret Restaurant Press*, and *Tiger Moth Review*. Their chapbook *I Never Leave Lost Teeth Under My Pillow* was published in 2022 through Bottlecrap Press. They can often be found at open mics and readings throughout the Chicago land area, on a run, or with their cats.

Diane Vogel Ferri's full-length poetry book is *Everything is Rising*. Her latest novel is *No Life But This: A Novel of Emily Warren Roebling*. Her essays have been published in *The Cleveland Plain Dealer*, *Scene Magazine*, and *Yellow Arrow Journal*, among others. Her poems can be found in numerous journals. Her previous publications are *Liquid Rubies* (poetry), *The Volume of Our Incongruity* (poetry), and *The Desire Path* (novel). Her poem, "For You", was nominated for a Pushcart Prize and a Best of the Net prize.

Margo Fuchs Knill is a professor, psychotherapist ASP, expressive arts professional, supervisor, and poet. She is the Founding Dean of the MA Program, Division of Arts, Health and Society at EGS European Graduate School, and a member of the original Core Faculty. Previously, she was an Assistant Professor at Lesley University, Cambridge, MA. Latest publications: *Leben will leben. Love Survives*. (2022) *Wolfbach Poetry in Expressive Arts: Supporting Resilience through Poetic Writing*. (2021) Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Christien Gholson is the author of several books of poetry, including *Absence: Presence* (Shanti Arts) and *All the Beautiful Dead* (Bitter Oleander); and a novel, *A Fish Trapped Inside the Wind* (Parthian Books). Several of his chapbooks can be found online, including *Tidal Flats* (Mudlark). He lives in Oregon and works as a somatic-oriented mental health counselor. He can be found at:

<https://christiengholson.blogspot.com/>.

Lorie Ann Grover's poetry is forthcoming in *Rising Phoenix Review*, *Eunoia Review*, and *Moria Literary Magazine*. She has also published poetry for children in periodicals and collections while authoring fifteen books spanning best-selling board books, middle grade verse novels, and YA. Her children's books have been named a VOYA pick, Bank Street College Best Book of the Year, Parents Magazine's 20 Best Children's Books, and a Carnegie Library Best Book. Lorie Ann has mentored for the Children's Literature Fellows Program of Stony Brook Southampton's MFA in Creative Writing and Literature.

Ceridwen Hall is a poet and educator from Ohio. She is the author of *Acoustic Shadows* (Broadstone Books) and two chapbooks: *Automotive* (Finishing Line Press), and *fields drawn from subtle arrows* (Co-winner of the 2022 Midwest Chapbook Award). Her work has appeared in *TriQuarterly*, *Pembroke Magazine*, *The Cincinnati Review*, *Craft*, *Poet Lore*, and other journals. You can find her at: www.ceridwenhall.com

Jim Hanlen retired and lives in Anchorage, Alaska. He has poems recently in *Abandoned Gold Mine*, *Cirque*, and *Dorothy Day Labor Forum*. His last book was *Postcards to Jim*. coauthored with Jim Thielman.

Sarah Harley is originally from the UK. She works at Milwaukee High School of the Arts where she supports her refugee students in telling their own stories. Sarah holds a BA in Comparative Literature and French, as well as an MA in Foreign Language and Literature. Her essays have appeared in *Halfway Down the Stairs*, *Idle Ink*, *The Thieving Magpie*, *Quail Bell Magazine*, and elsewhere. You can find her online here: <https://www.sarahharley888.com>.

Gloria Heffernan's *Exploring Poetry of Presence* (Back Porch Productions) won the 2021 CNY Book Award for Nonfiction. She received the 2022 *Naugatuck River Review* Narrative Poetry Prize. Gloria is the author of the collections *Peregrinato: Poems for Antarctica* (Kelsay Books) and *What the Gratitude List Said to the Bucket List* (New York Quarterly Books). Her forthcoming chapbook, *Animal Grace*, was selected for the Keystone Chapbook Series prize. Her work has appeared in over 100 publications including *Poetry of Presence* (vol. 2). To learn more, visit: www.gloriaheffernan.wordpress.com.

DeWitt Henry's recent books are *Restless for Words: Poems* (Finishing Line Press, 2023); a new U.S. edition of *Foundlings: Found Poems From Prose* (with art by Ruth K. Henry) and *Trim Reckonings: Poems*, both from Pierian Springs Press in 2023. *Long Poems* is forthcoming from PSP in 2024. He was the founding editor of *Ploughshares* and is Professor Emeritus at Emerson College. Details at www.dewitthenry.com.

E. W. Herman is a former newspaper reporter and editor who lives in Evanston, Illinois, just outside of Chicago.

Herman Hesse (2 July 1877 – 9 August 1962) was a German-Swiss poet, novelist, and painter.

Madronna Holden is using her retirement from teaching to concentrate on her poetry, which won the 2022 Kay Snow Poetry Award. Besides a previous appearance in *Pensive*, her poems have appeared in forty literary journals and anthologies, including *Verse Daily*, *Cold Mountain Review*, *The Bitter Oleander*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, and *The Plumwood Mountain Journal*. Her chapbook, *Goddess of Glass Mountains*, was published by Finishing Line Press.

George Kalogeris's most recent book of poems is *Winthropos*, (Louisiana State University, 2021). He is also the author of *Guide to Greece* (LSU), a book of paired poems in translation, *Dialogos*, and poems based on the notebooks of Albert Camus, *Camus: Carnets*. His poems and translations have been anthologized in *Joining Music with Reason*, chosen by Christopher Ricks (Waywiser, 2010). He is the winner of the James Dickey Poetry Prize, the Stephen J. Meringoff Award, and the Sheila Margaret Motton Prize.

Marian Kaplun Shapiro, a practicing psychologist, is the author of a professional book, *Second Childhood* (Norton, 1988), her first poetry book, *Players in the Dream*, *Dreamers in the Play* (Plain View Press, 2007) and two chapbooks. A resident of Lexington, she is a five-time Senior Poet Laureate of Massachusetts. She was nominated for the Pushcart Prize in 2012 and 2021. Her collection of experimental poems, *At the Edge Of the Cliff*, was published by Plain View Press in January 2021. Her latest book, *Upbringing*, a collection of graphic poems, was published by Plain View in January, 2023.

Kelsey Kessler is a writer located in the Boston, Massachusetts area. She has been published in multiple journals and is featured on the *Viewless Wings* poetry podcast.

Blake Kilgore the author of *Leviathan* (2021), a collection of poems wrestling with faith and doubt. He teaches history and coaches basketball during the workday and tries his best to love his wife and four sons when he goes home. His writing has appeared in many fine journals, recently including *Common Ground Review*, *Fare Forward*, and *Vita Poetica*. You can find out more at blakekilgore.com.

Elizabeth Koopman is a retired psychotherapist living in Maine; at various times in her life she has lived in ten different states and two countries. Twenty years ago she formally reclaimed her family heritage of Judaism. She has written poetry all her life, mostly of the lyrical persuasion.

Maria Koors has a B.A. in Moving Image Arts from College of Santa Fe in Santa Fe, New Mexico. She attended graduate school at the University of Alabama at Birmingham for creative writing. She has received support from Bread Loaf Writers' Conference. She thinks you're amazing.

Linda Laderman is a Michigan poet and writer. Her poetry has appeared in numerous literary journals, including *The Burningword Literary Journal*, *Swwim*, *One Art*, *Thimble Literary Magazine*, *The Scapegoat Review*, *Rust & Moth*, *Minyan Magazine*, *3rd Wednesday*, and *Mom Egg Review*. She has work forthcoming from *Action-Spectacle* and *Quartet Journal*. She is the 2023 recipient of Harbor Review's Jewish Women's Prize and was recently nominated for a Pushcart Prize. Her mini-chapbook, *What I Didn't Know I Didn't Know*, can be found online at <https://www.harbor-review.com/what-i-didnt-know-i-didnt-know>. Find her on Instagram @ellelp72 or at lindaladerman.com.

EB Lockman (it/he) is a Welsh creative. It writes about language, gender, and living as a disabled person. His poems are eclectic, sometimes sparse and sometimes full of detail.

Lisa López Smith is a shepherd, writer, equine therapist, and mother making her home in central Mexico. When not wrangling kids or rescue dogs or goats, you can probably find her making magic in the kitchen or the backyard! Recent publications include: *Huizache*, *Live Encounters*, and *The Normal School*, and some of these journals even nominated her work for Best of the Net, Best New Poets, and the Pushcart Prize. Her first chapbook was published by Grayson Books in 2021.

Alison Luterman's four books of poems include *The Largest Possible Life*; *See How We Almost Fly*; *Desire Zoo*; and *In the Time of Great Fires*. She has published poems in *The New York Times Magazine*, *The Sun Magazine*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Nimrod*, *Rattle*, *The Atlanta Review*, and many other journals and anthologies. Two of her poems are included in Billy Collins' Poetry 180 project at the Library of Congress. She has taught and/or been poet-in-residence at California Poets in the Schools, New College in San Francisco, Holy Names College in Oakland, The Writing Salon in Berkeley, at Esalen and Omega Institutes, and the Great Mother and New Father Conference. www.alisonluterman.net.

Commonwealth University professor **Marjorie Maddox** has published 16 poetry collections, *What She Was Saying* (stories), and 4 children's books. Assistant editor of *Presence*, she is the 2023-2024 host of WPSU's Poetry Moment. With Jerry Wemple, she co-edited *Common Wealth: Contemporary Poets on Pennsylvania* and the forthcoming *Keystone* (PSU Press). www.marjoriemaddox.com

Melissa Madenski lived for thirty-five years at the edge of the Siuslaw Forest in Oregon, where she and her children walked headlands and paddled coastal rivers and streams. Her poetry and essays have appeared in journals, anthologies, magazines/newspapers and a chapbook, *Endurance*. She writes and teaches now from her birthplace in Portland, Oregon

Fred Marmorstein taught Language Arts for 28 years. He has published fiction, non-fiction and poetry from blogging to writing stories on autism. His work has recently appeared in *Agape Review* and *Clinch Mountain Review*.

Grace Massey is a poet, classical ballet and Baroque dancer, gardener, and socializer of feral cats. She lives in Newton, Massachusetts with her husband, Michael, and a formerly feral cat, Penelope. Grace was Executive Editor for Social Studies for Pearson Education for many years and has degrees in English from Smith College and Boston University. Her poems have been published in numerous journals, including *Quartet*, *Thimble*, *Lily Poetry Review*, *One Art*, and *RockPaperPoem*.

Davis McCombs is the author of three books of poetry: *Ultima Thule* (Yale), *Dismal Rock* (Tupelo), and *lore* (University of Utah). He has received grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Guggenheim Foundation. His poems have appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Poetry*, *American Poetry Review*, *The Missouri Review*, *The Southern Review*, *Kenyon Review*, *Virginia Quarterly Review*, and *Oxford American*, among many other publications.

John Q. McDonald is a visual artist and space scientist who lives, writes, and paints in the San Francisco Bay Area. The experience of place, both natural and man-made, are themes in John's creative work. He has been painting in oils and writing essays and short fiction since 1992. John has had several pieces published, most recently in *Ab Terra* and *Sequestrum*, and he is at work on a draft of a novel.

Artist **Laurie-Lynn McGlynn** is Toronto born and currently works and resides in England. She was a long-term Artist Member of Gallery 1313 in Toronto. Awards include: Robert Pope Foundation Graduate Scholarship, NSCAD University, Nova Scotia 2016 Elizabeth Edwards Memorial Award for Fine Art, University of Waterloo 2016 Lynn Holmes Memorial Award for Fine Art, University of Waterloo, 2015 Vernon Hacking Memorial Award for Fine Art, University of Waterloo 2014. McGlynn's work has been exhibited in public galleries across several Canadian cities and in private collections. Her most recent exhibition was the 2023/2024 Winter Show at the Meffan Gallery in Forfar, Scotland.

Mary Mercier is a Midwestern writer whose work is grounded in a sense of place. Her chapbook *Small Acts* was published by Parallel Press and her poems have appeared in *Northern Woodlands*, *The Comstock Review*, *Abandoned Mine*, and other journals. A finalist for the Birdy Poetry Prize, her book *Five Reports of Fugitive Dust* was published by Meadowlark Books in spring.

Greg Mileski is a doctoral candidate and teacher in the Boston College Theology Department where he studies issues within the Buddhist-Christian dialogue. His academic work has appeared in *Dialog*, and *The Journal of Interreligious Studies*, and elsewhere. He is ordained in the Lutheran tradition (ELCA) and enjoys preaching with a Buddhist accent, and he is a contributor to the upcoming poetry anthology *Thin Places & Sacred Spaces* (Amethyst Press, 2024). He is also managing editor for *Religion and the Arts*.

Madelaine Millar was born and raised in Missoula, Montana, and spent five years in Boston, Massachusetts studying journalism at Northeastern University, where she was a founding member of the *Pensive* board. She rediscovered her love of visual art during the pandemic, and began to identify her unique artistic voice when an overlapping bad breakup, unexpected move, major job change, and serious surgical procedure made for a deeply strange 2022. She is now a painter, writing tutor, freelance writer, and part-time digital nomad based out of Montana; her work can be found at soupinthewoods.com.

Felicia Mitchell's recent poetry collection is *Trail Magic* (Wising Up Press). Her work has been published in journals and in anthologies including *The Southern Poetry Anthology, Volume IX: Virginia* (Texas Tech Press). Outdoorsy, she loves living in the mountains in Virginia. Website: www.feliciamitchell.net

Levi Morrow is a writer, teacher, and translator living in Jerusalem with his wife and their children. He is a PhD candidate in the Jewish Philosophy Department at the Hebrew University, focusing on the Political Theology of Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik. Levi teaches medieval and modern Jewish theology, and his poems and translations have been published in *Gashmius Magazine*, *The Southshore Review*, *The Jewish Literary Journal*, and *The Barnacle Goose*.

Charlene Stegman Moskal is published in numerous anthologies, print and

online magazines including: *TAB Journal*; *Calyx*, *Humana Obscura*, and *Mac Q*. Her chapbooks are *One Bare Foot*, (Zeitgeist Press, 2018), *Leavings from My Table*, (Finishing Line Press, 2022) , *Woman Who Dyes Her Hair* (Kelsay Books, 2023) and a full length poetry book, *Running the Gamut* (Zeitgeist Press, 2023).

Elisabeth Murawski is the author of *Heiress*, *Zorba's Daughter* (May Swenson Poetry Award), *Moon and Mercury*, and three chapbooks. *Still Life with Timex* won the Robert Phillips Poetry Chapbook Prize. A native of Chicago, she currently lives in Alexandria, VA.

Alexis Musaelyan-Blackmon creates space where words become a form of healing, blending lyrical expression with her love for music. Balancing her background in data science with a passion for creative exploration, she offers her words as a lantern to readers on the path to self-discovery. Guided by the principles of mystical ancient writings and the silence of meditation, Alexis' writing offers an invitation to embrace inner harmony and self-compassion amidst the noise of modern life.

Lesléa Newman has created 86 books for readers of all ages including the dual memoir-in-verse, *I Carry My Mother* and *I Wish My Father*, the novel-in-verse, *October Mourning: A Song for Matthew Shepard* and the children's books, *Joyful Song: A Naming Story*, *Sparkle Boy*, and *Heather Has Two Mommies*. Her literary awards include poetry fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Massachusetts Artists Foundation, two American Library Association Stonewall Awards, two National Jewish Book Awards, and the Massachusetts Book Award. From 2008 - 2010, she served as the poet laureate of Northampton, MA.

Tomas O'Leary is a poet, translator, music-maker, singer, artist, expressive therapist. His New & Selected Poems from Lynx House Press is *In the Wellspring of the Ear*. Previous books of poetry include *Fool at the Funeral*, *The Devil Take a Crooked House*, and *A Prayer for Everyone*. A teacher for many years — college, high school, elementary, adult ed — he also worked for decades with folks who have Alzheimer's, playing Irish accordion and eliciting cognitive and emotional responses through songs, stories, poems, & free-wheeling conversation.

Naomi Pattison-Williams is grateful to live at Asiniskaw Sipisis, Treaty 6 territory in rural Alberta, raising two little boys and writing about life as it happens. Having written a poetry chapbook called *Fragments* as part of her MA in Theology and the Arts at Regent College, her poetry has also appeared in *CRUX Journal*, *Ekstasis*, *Fathom Magazine*, and *Sheloves Magazine*.

Caroline Picker (she/her) is a queer parent, poet, community organizer, and fundraiser for movements for collective liberation living in Southern Vermont on Abenaki land. Her writing has appeared in *West Trade Review*, *Tikkun*, *Make/shift magazine*, *Saltwater Quarterly*, and the anthology *Queering Sexual Violence*. She's committed to movement building, healing generational trauma, and imagining and fighting for a better future using all the tools available, including poems.

Marge Piercy has published 20 poetry collections, most recently, *On the Way Out, Turn Off the Light* (Knopf); 17 novels including *Sex Wars*. PM Press reissued *Vida, Dance the Eagle to Sleep*; they brought out short stories *The Cost of Lunch*, ETC and *My Body, My Life* [essays, poems]. She has read at over 575 venues here and abroad.

Beth Brown Preston is a poet and novelist with two collections of poetry from the Broadside Lotus Press and two chapbooks of poetry. She is a graduate of Bryn Mawr College and the MFA Writing Program at Goddard College. She has been a CBS Fellow in Writing at the University of Pennsylvania and a Bread Loaf Scholar. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in numerous literary and scholarly journals.

Kimberly Ann Priest is the author of *tether & lung* (Texas Review Press), *Floralia* (Unsolicited Press), and *Slaughter the One Bird* (Sundress Publications). An assistant professor of first-year writing at Michigan State University, her work has appeared in *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Copper Nickel*, and *Birmingham Poetry Review*. She lives, with her husband, in Maine.

Denise Provost has published two poetry collections, and in *Ibbetson Street*, *Muddy River*, *qarrtsiluni*, *Poetry Porch*, *Constellations*, and *Light Quarterly*.

Twice Pushcart-nominated, Provost won Best Love Sonnet in the 2012 Maria C. Faust Sonnet Competition; the 2021 Samuel Washington Allen Prize and was elected co-president of New England Poetry Club in 2022.

Jane Putnam Perry, she/her, guest on Lisjan Territory (Oakland, CA), member of 1000 Grandmothers, writes and creates art with her cross-genre *White Snake Diary* (Atmosphere Press) and pieces in *McSweeney's Quarterly Concern*, *The Oaklandside*, *The Gloucester Times*, *Paper Dragon*, *Alluvian*, *Still Point Arts Quarterly*, *The Ravens Perch*, *The Bluebird Word*, *Glacial Hills Review*, *The Mail/The New Yorker*, and several academic publications including *Outdoor Play* (Teachers College Press). Jane's *Echo Bridge* was a 2021 audio poetry finalist in The Missouri Review and her nonfiction *The Liminal Diary* was a 2023 finalist in the Phil Heldrich Nonfiction Contest at Choeofpleirn.

Pia Quintano is a NYC-based writer/artist who often paints people and animals within a tranquil environment. Her paintings were sold at the Frank J.Miele Contemporary American Folk Art Gallery in NYC until it closed.

Daniel Rabinovitz is a Northeastern University student pursuing a Master's in Data Science. Daniel is on the Autism Spectrum, Jewish, and Queer. In his free time he is an author, composer, and social media creator with 90,000 followers on TikTok. His written works focus heavily on personal growth, the power of contradictions, and the intersection of invisible identities that make up a whole bigger than the sum of its parts.

Elena Lelia Radulescu is a Romanian-American writer. Her poetry, essays and short stories have been published by *Visions International*, *Square Lake Review*, *The Spoon River Poetry Review*, *Chelsea*, *Karamu*, *CALYX Journal*, *Trajectory Journal*, *The Cape Rock Review*, *Magnolia Journal*, *Gastronomica Journal*, *Third Wednesday Journal*, *Concho River Review*, *Ocotillo Journal*, *Voices de la Luna*, *Evening Street Journal*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Blue Earth Review*, and other literary publications. She is a retired teacher and lives in New Mexico.

Claudia M. Reder is the author of *How to Disappear*, (Blue Light Press, 2019), which won the Pinnacle Award and *My Father & Miro* (Bright Hill Press). Main Street Rag is publishing her next book, *Dizzying Words*. You can find more

information at: <https://yetzirahpoets.org/jewish-poets-database/> <https://www.claudiareder.com/>.

Chris Reisig (they/them) is a member of the Dramatists Guild and Working Title Writing Group. They have been published in *10th Street Miscellany* and *Moonstone Arts Center's New Voices Anthology*. Chris received the 2023 District V KCACTF Darrell Ayer's Playwriting Award and Honorable Mention for the Julie Jensen Playwriting Award. <https://bio.site/chrisreisig>

Thomas Rions-Maehren is a bilingual poet, novelist, and chemist who explores the dark places of human experience with humor, science, and (at times) tranquility and wisdom. His scientific research has been published in *ACS Nano*, and examples of his Spanish-language prose can be found in his published short stories and in his novel *En las Manos de Satanás* (Ápeiron Ediciones, 2022). More of his poetry in both languages can be found in a number of journals, such as *The Elevation*, *Livina*, and *Welter*, at his blog (tommaehrenpoetry.blogspot.com), and at his website (thomasrionsmaehren.com). He is on X and Instagram @MaehrenTom.

Sjafril, was born in Pasuruan, Indonesia. He is a full-time artist and writer. Self-taught, he have honed his skills independently. With a passion for both visual arts and literature, he has exhibited artwork in various cities and actively organized solo exhibitions. In addition to painting, he is also an author, writing essays, poetry, and novels. His creative journey is marked by a dedication to self-expression and a commitment to exploring the depths of human experience through multiple artistic mediums.

Based in Montreal, Quebec, **Claire Russell** teaches English at John Abbott College. Her work has been published in *Outlook Spring* and *The Good Men Project*. This is her first published poem.

Winner of Orison's' 2023 Best Spiritual Literature for poetry, **Merryn Rutledge's** work has appeared widely. A collection, *Sweet Juice and Ruby-Bitter Seed*, is available from Kelsay Books. Merryn's sonnet for Julian of Norwich appears in the commemorative anthology *All Shall Be Well* (Amethyst, 2023). A Best of the

Net 2023 nominee, other poems were recently published in *Last Stanza*, *Blood & Bourbon*, *Pure Slush*, and *WayWord*. Merryn teaches poetry craft, reviews poetry books by women (*Tupelo Quarterly*, *Pedestal*, *Cider Press Review*), co-leads the *Embarrassment of Riches* poetry discussion series, sings, dances, and works for social justice causes.

Terry Savoie's poems have appeared in more than 400 literary journals, anthologies, and small press publications over the past four decades including *APR*, *Ploughshares*, *Prairie Schooner*, *America*, *North American Review*, *Commonweal*, *American Journal of Poetry*, and *The Iowa Review* as well as recent numbers of *Chiron Review*, *Tar River Poetry*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, and *Cumberland River Review* among many others.

Jemeah Scott's work aims to cultivate narratives related to the emotional turbulence of young adulthood and the experiential knowing associated with breaking away from generational scripts. Her poems "In the Backyard" and "Choice" were published in the 2023 edition of Monroe Community College's *Cabbages and Kings* and she received the Cloos-Susskind Award for Monroe Community College's 2023 Student Writing Contest. She is set to graduate from Monroe Community College with an A.A. in Creative Writing and Advanced Studies with Thesis certificate in May 2024 and plans to continue her studies in Creative Writing and Sociology at her next college.

A self-taught artist, **David Sheskin** created his first work of art at the age of 40. His initial efforts were pen and ink drawings followed by acrylic paintings, sculpture, collage and digital images. Over the years his art has been published in numerous magazines as well as in other formats.

Betsy Sholl's tenth collection of poetry is *As If a Song Could Save You*, (University of Wisconsin Press, 2022.) Her ninth collection is *House of Sparrows: New and Selected Poems* (also University of Wisconsin, 2019). She teaches in the MFA in Writing Program of Vermont College of Fine Arts and served as Poet Laureate of Maine from 2006 to 2011.

Deborah J. Shore has spent the better part of her life housebound or bedridden with sudden onset severe ME/CFS. This neuroimmune illness has made engagement with and composition of literature costly and, during long seasons, impossible. Her most recent or forthcoming publications include *Nashville Review*, *Prelude*, *THINK*, *Thimble Lit*, *Amethyst Review*, *ballast*, *Ekstasis*, *Reformed Journal*, and *Christian Century*. She has won poetry competitions at the *Anglican Theological Review* and the *Alsop Review*.

Donna Spruijt-Metz's debut poetry collection is *General Release from the Beginning of the World* (Free Verse Editions, Palette Press, 2023). She is an emeritus psychology professor, MacDowell fellow, rabbinical school drop-out, and former classical flutist. She was featured as one of '5 over 50 debut authors' in *Poets & Writers Magazine* (11/23). Her chapbooks include '*Slippery Surfaces*', '*And Haunt the World*' (with Flower Conroy). and '*Dear Ghost*' (winner, 2023 Harbor Review Editor's prize). Her poems appear or are forthcoming in *The Academy of American Poets*, *Alaska Quarterly Review*, and elsewhere. She reads for *Psaltery & Lyre* magazine and co-stewards the *Poetry Grind*.

Charlene Stegman Moskal is published in numerous anthologies, print and online magazines including: *TAB Journal*; *Calyx*, *Humana Obscura*, and *Mac Q*. Her chapbooks are *One Bare Foot*, (Zeitgeist Press, 2018), *Leavings from My Table*, (Finishing Line Press, 2022) , *Woman Who Dyes Her Hair* (Kelsay Books, 2023) and a full length poetry book, *Running the Gamut* (Zeitgeist Press, 2023).

Marjorie Stelmach is the author of seven volumes of poems, most recently, *Walking the Mist* (Ashland Poetry Press, 2021) and *The Angel of Absolute Zero* (Cascade 2022). Her work has appeared in *American Literary Review*, *Baltimore Review*, *Gettysburg Review*, *Hudson Review*, *Image*, *Poet Lore*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Water-Stone Review*, and others.

Marya Summers is a disabled poet who lives unhoused with her cat Perceval as a result of environmental illness. She is a 2023 Lighthouse Writers New Voices Fellow and former Poet-in-Residence at Palm Beach Institute of Contemporary Art. Her work has appeared in *Pleiades*, *Tiferet Journal*, *Kaleidoscope Magazine*, *Braided Way*, among others. Find her at whollycreative.com.

Wally Swist's books include *Huang Po and the Dimensions of Love* (Southern Illinois University Press, 2012), selected by Yusef Komunyakaa for the 2011 Crab Orchard Open Poetry Competition, and *A Bird Who Seems to Know Me: Poems Regarding Birds and Nature*, winner of the 2018 Ex Ophidia Poetry Prize. Recent essays, poems, and translations have appeared in *Asymptote* (Taiwan), *Commonweal*, *Comstock Review*, *Ezra: An Online Journal of Translation*, *The Mantelpiece* (Iceland), *La Piccioletta Barca* (U.K.), *Presence: A Journal of Catholic Poetry*, *Today's American Catholic*, *Poetry London*, and *Your Impossible Voice*. *Shanti Arts* published his translation of Giuseppe Ungaretti's *L'Allegria* in 2023.

Yuandi Tang, a computer science student at Northeastern University, combines a technical foundation with a unique perspective shaped by a background in liberal arts. His ability to navigate the intersection of emotional and rational aspects of life sets him apart, allowing for a holistic approach. Yuandi Tang's journey embodies a blend of analytical thinking and empathetic understanding. Yuandi's works have been seen in Boston University's first-generation student magazine *Elevate* three times.

Daniel Tobin is the author of nine books of poems, including *From Nothing*, winner of the Julia Ward Howe Award, *The Stone in the Air*, his suite of versions from the German of Paul Celan, and *Blood Labors*, named one of the Best Poetry Books of the Year for 2018 by the *New York Times* and *The Washington Independent Review of Books*. His poetry has won many awards, among them the Massachusetts Book Award, the Merringoff Award from the Association of Literary Scholars, Critics and Writers, and fellowships from the NEA and the Guggenheim Foundation. His trilogy of book-length poems, *The Mansions*, appeared from Four Way Books. in Fall 2023.

Angela Townsend is the Development Director at Tabby's Place: a Cat Sanctuary. She graduated from Princeton Seminary and Vassar College. Her work appears or is forthcoming in *Arts & Letters*, *Chautauqua*, *Paris Lit Up*, *The Penn Review*, *The Razor*, *Still Point Arts Quarterly*, *Terrain.org*, and *The Westchester Review*, among others. She is a Best Spiritual Literature nominee. Angie has lived with Type 1 diabetes for 33 years, laughs with her poet mother every morning, and loves life affectionately.

Jesse Vazquez is a retired professor from Queens College CUNY who served for 41 years as a counselor, Director of Puerto Rican Studies, Coordinator and Professor in the Counselor Education Program and Chair of an interdisciplinary Graduate Department. He continued to work with colleagues on other CUNY campuses and other universities. He was a Board Member and President of the National Association of Ethnic Studies.

Hallie Waugh is a copywriter by day, poet and essayist by night. She holds an MFA in Poetry from Seattle Pacific University, and her poetry and essays have been published with or are forthcoming from *New York Quarterly*, *Windover*, *Fathom*, *Ekstasis*, and more. She lives in Oklahoma City. You can find more of her work at halliewaugh.com or follow her on Instagram at @halliewaugh_writer.

Caleb Westbrook is a high school teacher with degrees in both English and religion. He lives with his wife and two children in Antigua, Guatemala. His poetry has been published in *Vita Poetica*, *Havik*, *Nassau Review*, *Glass Mountain*, *Time of Singing*, and *Grim & Gilded*; and his essays have been published online for *Ekstasis* and *Dappled Things*.

Riv Wren grew up in Canada and now lives in Ohio. He received an MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and an M.Ed from Xavier University. Recently, he accepted a role with the fancy title of Director of Spiritual Growth at an open-minded, open-hearted church.

Cynthia Yatchman is a Seattle based artist and art instructor. A former ceramicist, she received her B.F.A. in painting (UW). She switched from 3D to 2D and has remained there ever since. She works primarily on paintings, prints and collages. Her art is housed in numerous public and private collections. She has exhibited on both coasts, extensively in the Northwest, including shows at Seattle University, SPU, Shoreline Community College, the Tacoma and Seattle Convention Centers and the Pacific Science Center. She is a member of the Seattle Print Art Association and COCA.

Zixiang Zhang (he/him/his) teaches high school Earth Science in New York City. He has a B.S. in geology from Stanford University, and studied ancestral pronghorns as a National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellow. His poems can be found in *Hanging Loose*, *Cathexis Northwest*, *The Consilience Journal*, and others. He can be reached at zixiangzh@gmail.com.