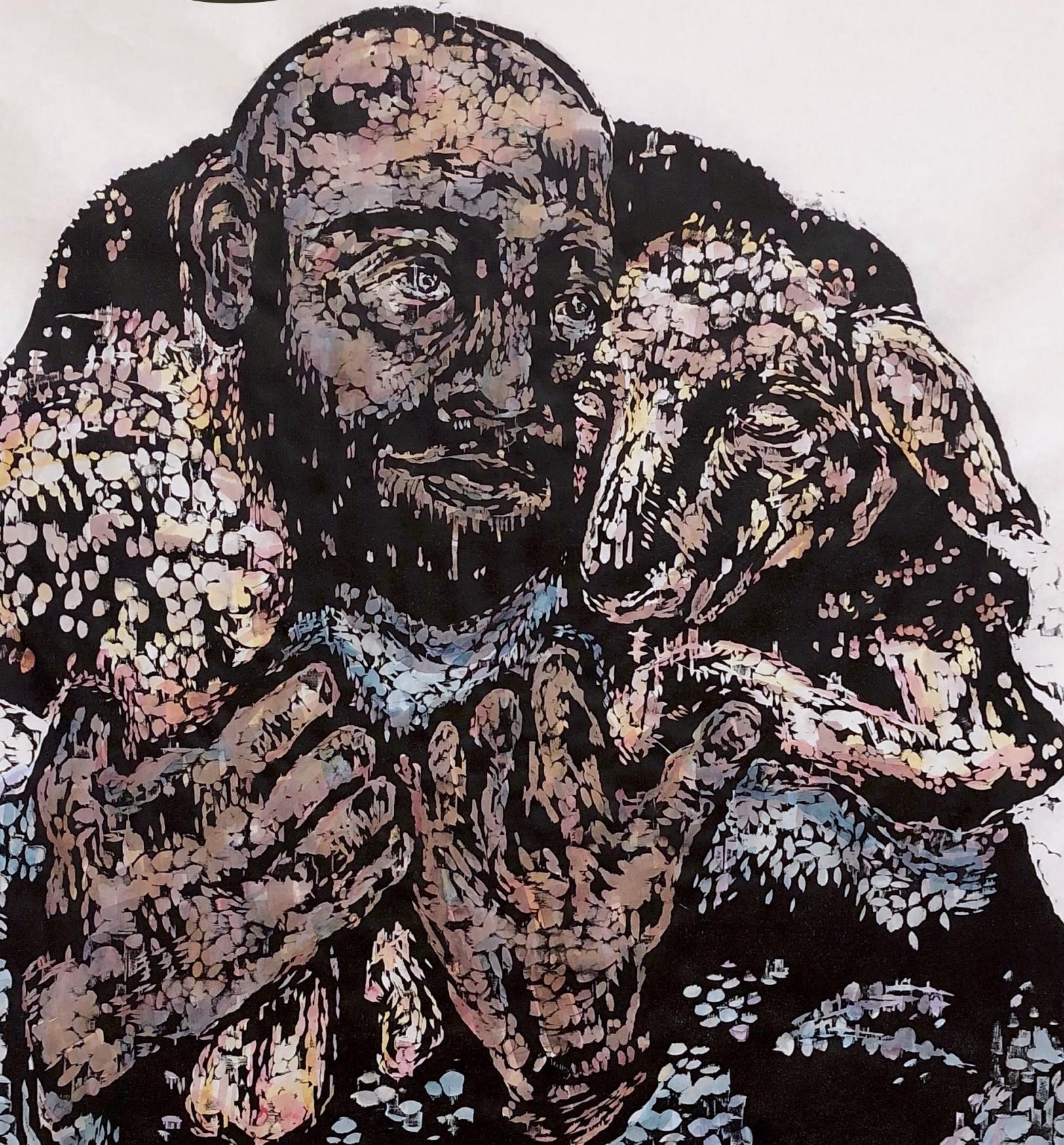




# PENSIVE

*A global journal of spirituality & the arts*



Cover Art: Erin McAtee, *Our Good Shepherd*

Pensive: A Global Journal of Spirituality and the Arts is published biannually by the Center for Spirituality, Dialogue, and Service at Northeastern University.

Founded in 2020, Pensive: A Global Journal of Spirituality & the Arts is published by the Center for Spirituality, Dialogue, and Service (CSDS) at Northeastern University, a global research university in Boston, Massachusetts, USA with a campus network stretching from London to Vancouver.

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.

Fall 2020, Volume One (Double Issue)

Copyright © 2020 by the Center for Spirituality, Dialogue, and Service. All rights to individual pieces belong to the contributors.

Subscriptions are free online. For more information, visit [www.pensivejournal.com](http://www.pensivejournal.com).

The views and opinions expressed in the journal do not necessarily reflect those of the editorial board or university trustees, administration, faculty, or staff.

Pensive seeks unpublished poetry, prose, visual art, and translations for online publication. Send work by November 15 for the Spring issue, or May 15 for the Fall issue. Year round submissions from international and underrepresented groups are especially welcome. Submit 3-5 pieces; simultaneous submissions are considered, provided you alert Pensive promptly if the work is accepted elsewhere. Send writing in a single document, 12 point Times New Roman with a 3-5 sentence biographical note in third person, via Submittable. Pensive is currently non-paying and charges no fee for submissions Email questions to Alexander Levering Kern, co-editor, at [a.kern@northeastern.edu](mailto:a.kern@northeastern.edu), or visit [www.pensivejournal.com](http://www.pensivejournal.com).

For more information, contact:

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

[ensivejournal@gmail.com](mailto:ensivejournal@gmail.com)

[www.pensivejournal.com](http://www.pensivejournal.com)

Find us on Facebook [here](#)

Center for Spirituality, Dialogue, and Service

203 Ell Hall  
Northeastern University  
346 Huntington Avenue  
Boston, MA 02115  
617.373.2728  
[csds@northeastern.edu](mailto:csds@northeastern.edu)



*Alexander Levering Kern*

*Dola Haque*

*Soo Laski*

*Scout Gullick*

*Katya Forsyth*

*Isabela Fox-Mills*

*Morgan Lloyd*

*Madelaine Millar*

*Benjamin Rubin*

*Jayla Tillison*

*Caitlin Vinton*

## Editor's Note

Dear Readers,

When we started *Pensive* in January 2020, we set out to create a journal that would uplift powerful global voices in spirituality and the arts. We imagined a publication that would deepen the inward life while expressing a wide range of religious, spiritual, and humanist experiences and perspectives. We hoped *Pensive* would embody our shared vision of a more just, peaceful, and sustainable world while advancing meaningful dialogue across differences. Our overarching goal was to foster community through reflection, art, and humanity.

Over the course of assembling this journal, we have realized the power of the arts as advocacy and the arts as a foundation for community. When our Editorial Board of students and staff at Northeastern University transitioned to remote work in March due to COVID-19, we were lost as to how *Pensive* would come to fruition, yet we carried on, meeting each week, reading thousands of submissions, and growing closer than we ever imagined possible in our new virtual environments. From our remote corners of the world, we bring you this double-issue anthology of poetry, prose, and visual art from an extraordinary group of established and emerging artists. We hope you will receive these works as we have - as gift, as challenge, as invitation - and share them widely within your own circles.

*Pensive* arises in the context of crisis. The year 2020 has brought devastation in the form of global pandemic. COVID-19 has destroyed human lives and communities and further revealed the inhumanity and inequity of capitalism as we currently practice it. Natural disasters and extreme weather events have cast the climate crisis in stark relief once more. Rebuilding a better world will take a collective effort of compassion and love.

Racist violence in the United States has had a resounding effect across the globe and forced us to reckon with the weight of history and the persistence of white supremacy in its many guises. The murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Tony McDade and so many other Black people - and the lack of official accountability- have demonstrated the complacency and inertia of those in power - and have inspired many of us to raise our voices in the streets, in our communities, and in the arts.

To be pensive is to be actively engaged in deep thought. That, reader, is what we invite you to do as you read our journal. We invite you to be critical of the world around you. We invite you to question history, authority, and power. We invite you to challenge structural oppression in all its forms. We invite you to discover here the creative and spiritual wellsprings that will sustain you for the long struggle ahead.

This anthology attempts, through literature and visual art, to share some of the wisdom, insight, spirituality, humor, and love that spring from moments of pensiveness and creative contemplation. We are honored by the vulnerability, honesty, care, and craft that each of our contributors have brought to this journal, and we are grateful to have the opportunity to invite you to experience it with us now. Come, let us, together, be pensive.

# Table of Contents

## Poetry

Gale Acuff.....	12
Nina Rubinstein Alonso.....	15
Jimmy Santiago Baca.....	16
Donna Baier Stein.....	18
Reema Baniabbasi .....	19
Mary Buchinger.....	20
Lorraine Caputo.....	22
Daniel Carpenter.....	28
Carlos Carrio.....	32
Yuan Changming.....	36
Richard Chess.....	38
Frank Coons.....	42
Robert Cording.....	46
Banqobile Virginia Dakamela.....	48
Dennis Daly.....	50
Carol Davis.....	56
Sarah DeCorla-Souza.....	58
Krikor Der Hohannesian.....	60
Thad DeVassie.....	62
Tom Donlon.....	64
Rosie Prohías Driscoll.....	66
David Ebenbach.....	70
Åsa Ericsson.....	74
Martín Espada.....	76
Blake Everitt.....	78
Melanie Figg.....	80
Annie Finch.....	82
Phil Flott.....	84
Ashante J Ford.....	86
Eric Forsbergh.....	89
Samuel J Fox.....	90
Cynthia Gallaher.....	92
Robbie Gamble .....	98
E. Laura Golberg.....	100
Jeff Gundy.....	102
Alexandra Guzman .....	110
Luke Hankins.....	114
Niels Hav.....	116
MEH (Matthew E. Henry).....	118

Stephen Hitchcock.....	122
Richard Hoffman.....	126
Carlton Holte.....	130
Jessica Jacobs.....	132
Jennifer Jean.....	138
Jeffrey L. Johnson.....	140
Martin Chrispine Juwa.....	142
Rebecca Katz.....	144
Lawrence Kessenich.....	150
Sydney Lea.....	152
Deborah Leipziger.....	156
Frannie Lindsay.....	160
Valerie Lute.....	164
Marjorie Maddox.....	166
Kiri Manookin.....	168
Fred Marchant.....	170
Nikki Marrone.....	174
Carolyn Martin.....	176
D.S. Martin.....	178
Julio Martínez Mesanza (translated by Don Bogen).....	180
Janet McCann.....	184
M.B. McLatchey.....	186
R.S. Mengert.....	187
Philip Metres.....	188
Ann E Michael.....	195
Rhonda Miska.....	196
Guna Moran (translated by Bibekananda Choudhury).....	200
Antonio Machado (translated by Thomas Feeny).....	204
Ada Negri (translated by Thomas Feeny).....	205
Yehoshua November.....	206
Vanessa Okoyeh.....	214
Sunaya Pal.....	215
Marge Piercy.....	216
Jeannine Pitas.....	220
Fabrice B Poussin.....	236
Gary Rainford.....	224
Elaine Reardon.....	226
Jendi Reiter.....	230
James Miller Robinson.....	232

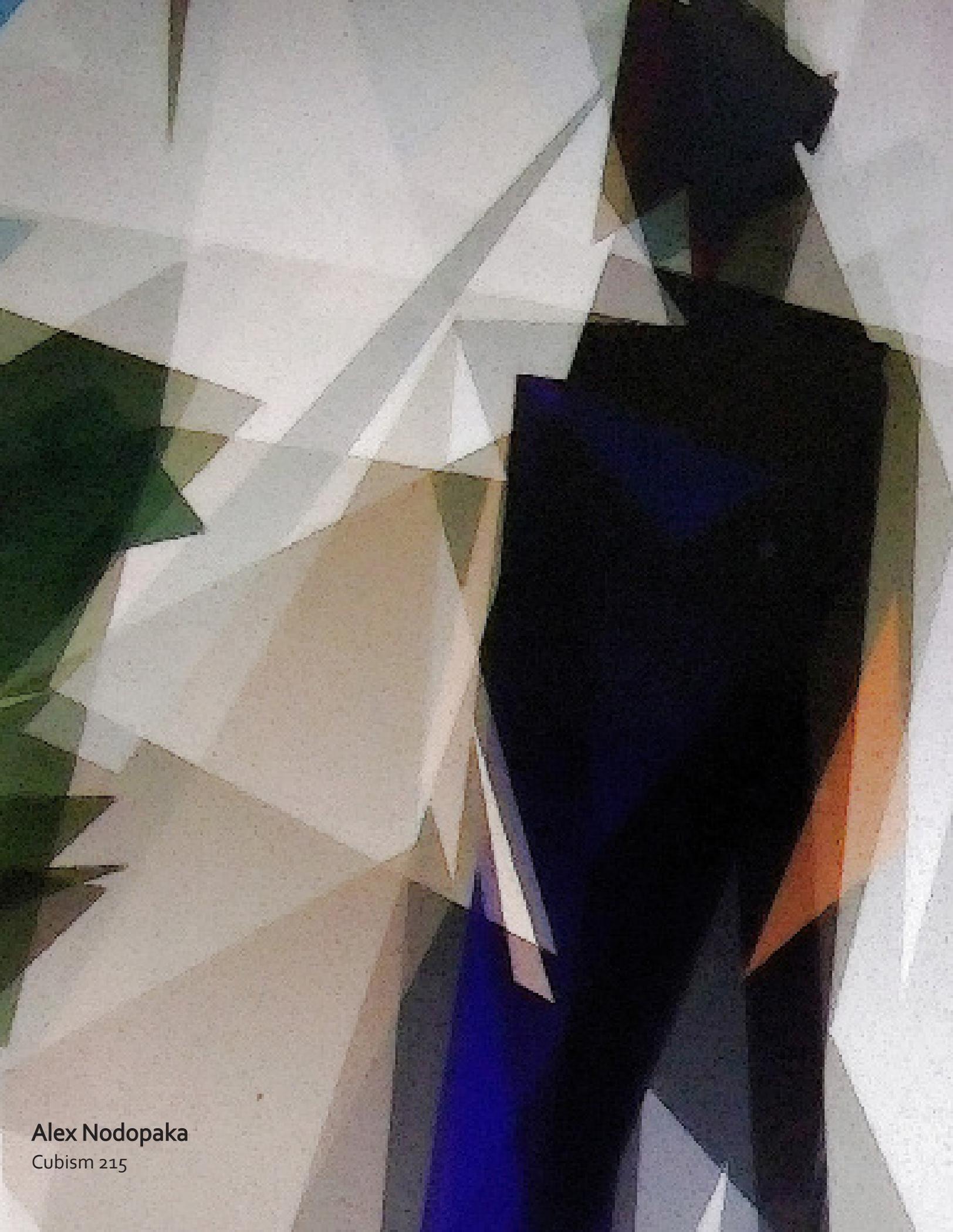
Nicholas Samaras.....	234
John Savoie.....	238
Zvi A Sesling.....	240
Betsy Sholl.....	242
Ndaba Sibanda.....	252
J.R. Solonche.....	254
Sofia M. Starnes.....	256
Shelby Stephenson.....	260
Tim Suermondt.....	264
Marc Swan.....	266
Mathew P. Taylor.....	268
Ayşe Tekşen.....	272
t.m. thomson.....	274
Jayla Tillison.....	276
Leslie Smith Townsend.....	280
Tue Sy (translated by Nguyen Ba Chung and Martha Collins).....	282
Emily Uduwana.....	286
Vivian Wagner.....	287
Laura Grace Weldon.....	288
Maya Williams.....	290
Martin Willitts Jr.....	293
Dwight L. Wilson.....	296
Erin Wilson.....	298
Pui Ying Wong.....	302
Diane Woodcock.....	306

## Prose

Curtis Almquist.....	314
Elizabeth Jarrett Andrew.....	320
Joseph Edward Bruchac III.....	322
Lindsey Chou.....	328
Chuck Fager.....	335
Ashley Wilson Fellers.....	346
Diane Glancy.....	350
Kyle Kaplan.....	358
Jennifer Kavanagh.....	360
Larry Lefkowitz.....	368
Sara Maitland.....	372
Kiri Manookin.....	378
Ji Hyang Padma.....	384
Scott Russell Sanders.....	386
Shelby Stephenson.....	398

## Visual Art

Farrukh Adnan.....	208
Mark Blickley.....	344
Felice Campbell.....	284
Kristone Capistrano.....	121
Lynn Carriker.....	292
Galen G. Cortes.....	306
Jeffrey Fine.....	95
Shannon Elizabeth Gardner.....	327
Vendula Kalinova.....	35
luke kurtis.....	362
Kiri Manookin.....	380
Erin McAtee.....	312
Alex Nodopaka.....	10, 14
Ipung Purnomo.....	395
Resetarits C.R. ....	249
Maisha Tahsin Rubai.....	52
Christopher Woods.....	105



**Alex Nodopaka**  
Cubism 215

# Poetry

## ***Body Language***

When I die my soul will go to Heaven for  
judgement by God and my body rot a  
-way in the Earth or eventually  
but wouldn't it be something if my soul  
was buried and decayed but my body

went to Heaven - when it got there, I mean  
my body, maybe it would say *Sorry*  
*God, there's been a mix-up* and in the ground  
my soul might complain that it had nothing  
to offer the maggots that would sooner

or later show, I wonder what God would  
do to settle the mess, maybe nothing  
but then maybe He'd let my body  
dwell among the souls in the Good Place and  
as for my soul in its coffin, I mean  
the box, noth the body, as a figure

of speech, maybe it could disappear or  
at least transform into atoms as its  
body began and after Sunday School  
today I told this what-if story to  
my teacher and she pointed out *Well, Gale,*  
*wouldn't folks get suspicious that something*  
*wasn't right when they had no body but*  
*only a soul to put into its box*

but I said *No ma'am, I mean that, sure, they'd*  
*put my body in the casket but when*  
*I'm in the ground that's when the exchange would*  
*happen and she said Oh yes, of course, I*  
*get it now, you know, you're a clever boy -*

I'm ten years old - and I'd say *Thank you ma'am*  
*you're pretty keen yourself,* and maybe add  
*I wish you was God.* But I'm sore afraid.

Alex Nodopaka

Cubism 200



# Nina Rubinstein Alonso

## *Alpha Centauri*

Waiting for take out bored with my phone  
nothing to read but that chart on the wall  
Milky Way 4.37 light years distant

Alpha Centauri's triangle of fire  
red dwarf Proxima's silent interstellar  
waltz spinning orbital elegance

as I get so bored with over-chewed  
chatter convinced I belong somewhere else but  
nowhere feels like home except stars

186,000 miles per second aching  
through my allegro muddle of tears  
clumsy disappointments of mortal disorder

sun A and sun B glowing Proxima  
mystical trio in balanced configuration  
delighting this earth bound soul.

# Jimmy Santiago Baca

*When I Walk Through That Door, I Am:  
An Immigrant Mother's Quest*

***When I Walk Through That Door, I Am:  
An Immigrant Mother's Quest***

I keep walking  
carrying you in my thoughts  
I feel I am walking up a mountain,  
come my son  
let your heart be as the cactus  
with its spikes  
protruding from the crusty dirt  
offer the world your bouquet of thorns,  
your heart reddens the dirt  
when you touch the world.

Walk more, walk with me Joaquin,  
let your lungs acclimate to the air  
until your body begins its quiet song  
without singing without words  
moving in tune to the silence of the land  
as you grieve a sweet sadness of missing your mother,  
for how badly the world treated you.

I keep walking  
carrying you in my thoughts  
I feel I am walking up a mountain  
see the old black cedars  
that have lived for 500 years  
decaying in their own glory  
like candle wicks on a chapel altar  
slowly smolder back  
to their dark grief  
let your grief be as such my son,  
burn bright your grief before all the saints.

# Donna Baier Stein

## *Fishing with My Father*

In Colorado, at Call of the Canyon,  
we fished for rainbow trout  
which my Grandma would  
skin and debone, bread and fry  
in a cast iron skillet.

When my father dies,  
I want to take him back  
to those sweet-rushing streams,  
so his ashes can mix with the  
clear water pouring over  
smooth rocks in the channel.

And just as a stream  
sometimes overflows its banks,  
my father, in his future form,  
will leave the edges of  
his skin and swim elsewhere.

I want to return to the log cabin,  
light a kerosene lamp,  
read an Alfred Hitchcock Mystery Magazine,  
pray hard enough to bring my young father  
back to me, just like he was, forever.

I want the waters to wash over me, too,  
to hear their rock-borne music endlessly  
so that the stuff we are made of  
tumbles in the water's easy flow,  
each cell a fish-shaped flash  
of silvery blue green with broad red stripe,  
slipping through the current,  
teasing the hook and line of my heart.

# Reema Baniabbasi

## *Passing by with Dragonfly*

There you were  
sitting solid on a leaf  
after much zipping through.

Your thousands of shimmering  
blue green eyes  
join my humble two  
brown ones  
for a moment.

Together we peer  
at Hall's Pond reflecting back  
the murkiness I need to muck through.

Your wings, so certain, see through  
my chapter after Boston:

even as I grieve  
the people and places  
I've blurred past  
like a liquid dream,  
still they've etched solid lines  
beautifying my wings,  
webbing me into  
buzzing story.

**Mary Buchinger**

*The walk lost me*

## ***The walk lost me***

it took a left and a right  
it went for blocks and blocks  
past homes with purple doors  
and turquoise newels it was open  
to suggestion following the terrain  
within a grey-sweater sky chimneys  
leaning in the still air and one tiny  
glass-walled house sprung from a roof  
pots suspended inside overflowing  
leaves flowers its season separate  
from the unglazed world beyond it  
a steeple and a narrow steep-walled valley  
the new train track extension within

My walk found a bench beside a park  
for me to sit and take notes and  
further on a public green lawn  
with one man smoking

The walk I tell you was full  
of gambrel medallions and  
cracked driveways Lenten roses  
and plaster pastel Easter bunnies  
raw stumps along new wire fences  
and elephantine roots overflowing  
onto sidewalk and on one corner  
a square of white stones displayed  
an iron mouth the width of three of me  
baring ten thousand bundled wires—  
black teeth wreathed in iridescent  
isinglass and from the mouth a throat  
and from the throat rounded shoulders  
each piece wrapped in mantles of mica  
that found the light in the clouds above  
and mirrored the glint of my own eye

It was revealing and lonely  
the almost-sunny April afternoon walk

# Lorraine Caputo

## **MEDITATION**

I.

A young girl's voice  
echoes up three  
flights of steps  
Through *salas*  
to this bright room

*I love you*  
*I love you*  
*I love you*

II.

A red balloon  
struggles against  
the hazed sky  
Rising slowly  
the sometimes-seen string  
swaying  
Higher it goes  
gaining speed  
Past the clouds  
into the blue heaven  
Becoming free  
of this city

III.

These windows  
are reflected  
in the mirrored windows  
across the street

I search  
for my reflection

in vain

IV.

In silence we sit  
eyes closed  
breath deep  
Some heads bowed  
& I wonder  
why so many  
frown  
in meditation

V.

Down on the street below  
a conversation  
ebbs & flows  
to this third story

The sound of a  
passing car  
washes swiftly  
by

Metal doors  
open  
& close

Footsteps  
upon  
concrete

VI.

The young girl sings  
coffee brews  
Drifting up three  
flights of stairs  
Through *salas*  
to this bright room

VII.

*Llega-a-a-a-a*  
*llega tu ...*  
*Llega-a-a-a-a*  
*llega tu ...*

*Ding-ding*  
*buz-z-z-z-z*

& the phone rings

& a car radio  
plays an  
oom-pah-pah  
*corrida*

VIII.

Eyes open  
breath quickens  
Heads lift  
& frowns  
turn to smiles  
Hands clasp  
hands of neighbors  
& quiet good mornings  
drift through  
this brighter  
room

## ***ECCE HOMO***

A cool breeze passes  
over this greened land  
sown with lichened  
boulders, passes through  
the Spanish moss of  
sage trees rooting  
deep on the banks of  
a brook that babbles  
an unknown tongue

Over these long  
millennia perhaps  
some Muisca or  
some monk or some  
soul wandering this  
ancient earth learned  
to listen &  
understand



Vendula Kalinova  
Stillness



# **Vendula Kalinova**

*Mudra in White*

**Daniel Carpenter**

*Prayer Against Peace*

### ***Prayer Against Peace***

Lord, from all your abundance of gifts, grant me,  
at this age you have spared me to reach,  
the discontent of youth.  
Send me sleepless fury  
as you withhold from my grasp  
the goodnesses you have indulged me  
to see embodied  
in these my brothers, my sisters;  
in her;  
and should possession come,  
then through your mercy,  
I beseech you,  
please let me down,  
that I may return to work  
clawing the wet black Earth for glints of your will.

## ***Where Is Thomas Merton?***

Sooner or later the world must burn, and all things in it – all the books, the cloister together with  
the brothel, Fra Angelico together with the Lucky Strike ads.  
(From his journals)

On the afternoon of December 10, 1968, in Bangkok, Thailand,  
the body of Father Louis, O.C.S.O.,  
ceased its bid for immortality and joined the legions of failures  
whose bones and ashes the world claims and keeps  
as unheeded reminders there is no escape.

By his accounts, the deceased himself –  
the True Self he sought like a fox aflame in his woods –  
did not aspire to perpetual, even long, earthly life;  
to the contrary. That distinguishes him  
from me and probably you, who, irrational as it may be,  
cling to the possibility of indefinitely hanging around  
even if it means never quite arriving at a date  
for the likewise irrational entry into Paradise.

Merton professed not only to be prepared and preparing  
for Heaven, but to be rushing it – questing  
after self-abnegation, “nothingness,” “littleness,”  
helplessness before the Infinite Nothing That was  
the Catholic Father he managed to embrace whole and solely  
in arms yet open to every other faith and philosophy  
conceived by the Unknowable God’s pilgrim offspring.

Soul and salvation over matter and mind . . .  
he sought to do it the easy way,  
burying his libidinous False Self  
in a monastery in hill country; turns out  
it was the hard way –  
a cowled hermit whose books, letters, lectures, audiences  
brought his nothingness to millions; his littleness  
to giants of literature, religion, politics, pop music;  
his resented body across continents

and to its untimely or perfectly timed death;  
a monk with a girlfriend, for a while, in the bargain,  
and torment for losing his way for her,  
and grief for the loss of her.

So.

If it is all that, is that all?

If Merton never was here without contradictions,  
can he be unequivocally gone?

.....

The body, granted.

Trust the Abbey to correctly archive its skeletons,  
and the simple grave visited by thousands – there you go again –  
is assurance enough.

But the mind he equally so disdained,  
the multilingual indefatigable intelligence  
that emptied libraries East and West  
and then took to rattletrap typewriter  
to replenish them . . .

Gone?

Look on his works, and despair . . .

Look on 53 years of slice from Eternity,  
and aspire to his nothingness,  
or despair.

# Carlos Carrio

## *like the voice of sylvia plath*

today was a terrible day.

whatever was birthed at 8am, was mugged by 4:08

like a reverse crescendo of dvorak's 9<sup>th</sup>, what was growing lovely – slowly and holy,  
erupted lava of human shit

it can't all be pretty or filled with hope, redemption is not a daily gift,

sometimes it ain't gonna be alright

the knot 'round my neck the scar on my heart feels familiar

sounds familiar like the voice of sylvia plath

so tonight i have nothing to give but these words and the blood on my shirt,

darkened and wet

darkened and wet

***standing under its shadow***

sometimes hell is lovely.  
like the sound of a piano among the footsteps of rubble  
or a crack of light that peeks through abandoned buildings  
i lived there once, 149 th street and prospect ave  
but somehow the lone tree with graffiti 'round its trunk  
was a type of hope i could not understand  
somehow my body was pleased standing under its shadow  
saddened by the boys who try to break the branch  
they had nothing else to do and no one told them it was wrong  
how would they know  
but i knew

***i always...***

i always eat the same foods  
rice and beans and a side of something or other  
i always go to the same place  
diners with coffee, greek salads and wifi  
i always sit in the same seat  
by the window, near the outlet, the headphones come on  
i always visit the same museum  
rembrandt, hopper, the hudson river school painters  
i always hear the same songs  
sad and dark a guitar and a whisper  
i always watch the same shows  
funny and smart or someone ends with a broken heart  
i always walk the same streets  
sunrise mornings twilight skies shadows in the night  
i always have the same friends  
a gay guy, a drinking buddy, a single mom, a wounded soul  
i always write the same poems  
melancholy blues on a crooked road  
i always have the same conversations  
the struggle, the medicine, what the fuck, and possibilities  
i always dream the same dream  
an ocean, rain, the sunset, a beer  
i always cry the same tears  
what will break my heart today?

***a fragile soul in search of a friend***

i didn't know i arrived until i got there  
but when i get there i gotta go  
destination more a comma than a period  
more the end of a chapter than the end of a book  
i journey  
yet i long for the "settle down"  
a home on concrete but a mallet and wood is all i carry  
my weapons of choice  
on this pilgrimage a way built by the gods  
i am a turtle, slow and deliberate, suspiciously seeking side by side quick to  
hide with home on  
my back  
only heavy when i seek an abode beyond myself  
would you like to come in from out the rain?  
there's plenty of space in here. i am a fragile soul in search of a friend

# Yuan Changming

## *Inner Journey*

Having nothing better to do, I kill  
Time by looking at a traditional  
Chinese painting on my iPad

Much enlarged, it appears like  
A plain sheet of rice paper  
Smeared with ink. I view it

In the presence of bonsai; I  
Drop several thick strokes to the floor  
Of history, leaving a few fine lines

Behind the soda, & failing  
To catch a colorless corner  
Between black and white

It is a landscape newly relocated  
Into my heart's backyard. Then I sit  
On my legs, meditating about

No light in the picture, no  
Shadow of anything, no perspective  
As in hell. Isn't this the art of seeing?

***Mind Mudra: A Sangha Poem***

Legs crossed  
Sitting straight  
Still in mindfulness  
Upon a lotus flower  
Newly blossoming on my inner pond  
I perceive myself transforming  
Slowly but steadily  
From a monstrous yellow-skinned frog  
Into an ever bigger, brighter Buddha  
Until my whole being inside out  
Bursts into trillions of individual cells  
Each being an other self of mine  
Like a star beyond the skyline  
Blinking, whispering  
As if all chanting  
In a universal prayer  
For harmony

# Richard Chess

## ***Snapshots of the Tree of Life***

*She is a tree of life to those who grasp her,  
and whoever holds onto her is happy.*

Proverbs 3:18

The chazan's low intoning of the Mourner's  
Kaddish for his father stirs  
the leaves on the Tree of Life.

The yellow tickets—a dollar  
a piece—for a knish,  
a pastrami sandwich, a pickle—at Hard  
Lox Jewish Food festival are leaves  
fallen from the Tree of Life.

A security code unlocks  
the door to Shalom, a Tree of Life  
sheltering the children who thrive  
at the JCC's pre-school  
while their parents work.

While the rabbi delivers  
his sermon, outside  
the sanctuary's doors  
members chatter, their gossip  
a spray of Sabbath morning mist  
around the mighty Tree of Life.

Exhausted from buffeting wind, the father  
of the girl with a brain  
tumor perches at dusk  
on a branch of the Tree of Life.

The congregation's imploring  
*Shema*, Hear, O Israel, bends  
a bough on the Tree of Life.

Doodles, ledgers, love letters—  
household records, ancestral  
gestures—tossed into  
the bonfire: the last parent  
gone, they empty, the daughters  
and son, their childhood  
home. The smoke  
a chaos of letters and numbers  
released from the Tree of Life.

This blessing, that. Torah, *haftarah*,  
chant chant breathe chant.  
Does the girl rehearsing  
her portion know that the oxygen  
she breathes comes  
from the Tree of Life?

That logging truck: is it  
transporting the trunk of the felled  
Tree of Life? There will be lumber.  
A young family will celebrate a daughter's  
first birthday in new construction  
built of the Tree of Life, a widow  
will slide open a drawer (its wood  
from the Tree of Life) and remove  
a spoon to swirl sugar  
into her tea, a young  
scholar will line his books on shelves  
of the Tree of Life.  
The Tree of Life: turned into  
a bowl cradling a few peaches,  
a heavy door through which mourners  
enter the sanctuary of grief.

Before *Kol Nidre*, the president  
appeals to the members to cling  
to each other as the world  
rages. *Deeply rooted*  
*here in this congregation, he says, you are*  
*a Tree of Life, flourishing*  
*in your cycles, green to golden to*  
*bare to green, season upon*  
*season upon season.*

Nap in the shade of the Tree of Life.  
Carve your initials and the initials  
of your beloved into the trunk  
of the Tree of Life.  
Even after a limb has been torn  
from its trunk by a violent wind, even  
with its trunk scarred by lightning, it is  
a Tree of Life to those who, traumatized,  
survive by clinging to it.

The ark is open, the congregation  
bows, and into the sanctuary wafts  
the rich aroma of coffee which is a Tree of Life  
to those finishing their Day  
of Atonement feast of prayers.

The bedroom at night, cool, dark—  
a chapel in which shoelaces  
dangle, responsibilities are  
released--it is a Tree  
Of Life into which parshiyot retreat, each  
and every verse that will sing  
again when the world at dawn  
is created anew.

We number  
the stars but lose count. We remember  
the names of the descendants  
of Abraham and Sarah, they

who weaved and nursed, who hammered  
 copper and harvested wheat and managed  
 banks, who were elected and exiled, nourished  
 and murdered because of the Tree  
 of the Life they clung to and carried and sometimes  
 forgot and in which they were wrapped and set afire  
 and in which they were swaddled  
 for a good night's sleep.

The Tree of Life is ten  
 thousand rabbis singing the names  
 Of God under a full moon!  
 The Tree of Life is a siren pulsing its message,  
*Help is coming!*

It's simple. Rise in the morning, lie  
 down at night. An egg, a slice  
 of brisket, barley soup: satisfy  
 your appetite. Justice, mercy:  
 your work. The Tree  
 of Life: your nerves  
 hum with its wisdom  
 traveling from crown  
 to root, root to crown.  
 Honor the Tree of Truth  
 with sunlight, rain.

The Tree of Life lifts  
 all eyes toward it,  
 brings us to our feet. We breathe  
 its stories and laws and live.

Late October, Sunday morning.  
 While his mother zips up his jacket, a boy  
 at the open door gazes  
 at his front yard, the rope  
 swing on a sturdy limb of  
 the Tree of Life.

**Frank Coons**

*Insomnia and a Maidenhair Fern*

## ***Insomnia and a Maidenhair Fern***

I'm awake too early again  
in a semi-dark room where next  
to me, my wife sleeps with a child-  
like snore and my head is full  
of this inadequacy and that  
disquietude that come curling  
up like smoke from a trash fire  
& somewhere a woodpecker  
is pecking at my cottonwood skull  
sapping my potential

that's when I know  
I should getthefuck up and watch  
the sky bluing in the east  
and with a little luck a cloudless  
horizon promising a measure of clarity

I wait another half-hour with thoughts  
darting like sports cars between  
trucks on a freeway until I finally  
notice the single frond of fern  
reaching for the sun through the window,  
like a lover's hand, so sure is the want—  
93 million miles this light and heat  
have come for me and my maidenhair,  
how can I not shine.

## ***Just Past Montes de Oca, Northern Spain***

on the Camino  
walking the incline  
through a forest of oaks,  
I am drunk on the intangible:  
friendship  
connection  
empathy  
love  
See what I mean? I am burdened  
by their heft. Taken together,  
less than an ingot's worth.  
Yet these are items I take with me  
and trade them for a nod.  
I'm sure death is a door,  
and some days I hear the hinges  
creak, the dark peeking out.  
Rich is the soul burdened  
because he doesn't understand  
it all.

### *In Andalucía, an Apologia*

Deep night,  
with the moon owl-eye yellow,  
I walked on cobblestones  
over the atrium walls  
of Visigoths and the apse  
of Roman baths.  
I leaned unsteady against the staff  
at the Moor's necropolis—  
on the floor, cracked amphoras,  
chalk-white bones in disarray

I saw the sea  
rise and cover it all.  
There are times and locations  
that disrupt the vector  
of a life,  
and I know I was a stone cutter  
or a mason in a different century.  
How sure can we be of time,  
if space is but an intersection?  
I have glimpsed the beggar  
outside the temple.  
I have been him,  
and I have been the temple.



## ***The Words We Speak***

Because we have been married for nearly forty years,  
There's a language we both speak, often thinking  
The same thought at the same time, or finishing  
The other's sentence. But, lately, when we speak  
Of our grief, sometimes the very same words  
Mean something different to each of us.  
Or we find ourselves searching for words  
That do not exist, or are simply inadequate  
At naming those moments of need so great  
We can barely breathe. Still, we have begun  
To speak of what, despite those differences,  
Is shocking but common to us both—how  
The naked openness of our feelings in grief  
Has returned us to an intimacy like the one  
We felt with our newborns. There's a raw tenderness  
Between us now in the words we speak  
At the end of our day, as if we were both writing  
To our dead son, even as we allow ourselves  
To be sealed in sleep, like an envelope to be  
Placed in the mailbox, flag up, an envelope  
With two different love letters inside.

# Banqobile Virginia Dakamela

## *For better, for worse*

Sanitize, Maintain social a distance, Sneeze into your elbow  
Did anyone stop to think  
Of that man working in the far off lands?  
Lockdown!  
He is holding a hammer  
The last nail needs to be hit  
He is holding a syringe  
He can't put it down  
Lockdown! Final warning  
Mummy where is daddy?  
Quiet, Princess, he will be here soon!  
Inwardly she is conflicted  
What if he has the virus--  
Am I prepared to die with him  
Somebody is there a law for spouses ?  
He is knocking on the door  
Stand back! She says  
Open up darling, I missed you  
I have to sanitize you  
Did you really miss me?  
I missed you but please I need to call help line  
I need a home test kit  
My husband might have Covid-19  
Darling, can I get in?  
Daddy is home, mummy  
Stay back!  
Honey, you said for better, for worse  
Let me in  
Put on the mask, Wash your hands, Remove your clothes  
Wait, you coughed  
Are you scared I will infect you ?  
But you said for better, for worse?

***I'm ebony black***

Never been bleached.  
Beautiful like a black petunia  
I walk to the interview room leaving other hopefuls behind.  
He barks 'enter'  
I slide into his office, my resume in my sweaty palms  
He frowns, I smile.  
My African teeth crooked and pointed  
Escape from my lips  
The holes in my nose big and gaping  
Suck the air in his office  
My hair kinky and neatly combed  
Stands at attention.

He weighs me and guffaws 'No job'  
I mumble a weak 'thank you'

Unspoken thoughts fight for freedom to be heard  
My brother, you didn't check my resume  
I have a masters, a bachelor's, wait, a diploma underneath all that  
I have ten years experience  
I have an award and a certificate of excellence  
I did voluntary work  
I helped an old lady cross a busy street  
I rescued a snared puppy  
I decrypted an intriguing password  
I worked twenty five hours a day  
My black skin did not interfere  
My crooked teeth stayed well inside my lips  
I have never bleached brother, but I can work forty eight hours a day if you want.

# Dennis Daly

## *The Dark Psalms of Doctor John Faustus*

I.

Outwardly fools believe in Something.  
Inwardly fools believe in Nothing.  
Better a holy fool of faith  
Than a sage, who flees in terror  
From tyrants or fearfully broods in his own freedom,  
His own non-belief. Come bird melodies,  
Awake those at dawn with comforting answers.  
Come daylight crunch, grind bare the hours.  
Come heart keeners, usher in night's coverlet,  
Let solemnity ghost-off the human spirit.

II.

My tongue will praise the enlightened ones,  
Fulfill the rites of Mab, then see  
Through a wolf's cunning eyes,  
And shape-shifting back to find  
The garments of our rebel spirits  
Spread out within the scrawled circle.  
We wait for the warriors return  
From their battlefield of lost causes,  
Heaven's frontier holding strong  
Against the idolatry of creation.

III.

I thirst, Lord, I thirst for knowledge  
I knew even before Eve  
Offered the serpent's fruit  
Over and over to another, to the son of man,  
Who rides upon the dragon's neck  
Into the celestial battle between two truths.  
Let earth, air, fire, and water  
Forever bless the noise that moves  
The planets in their musical spheres,  
In their deep dance of woe and words.

IV.

Behold the blessed ones you have  
Forsaken and scattered. We fear your wrath.  
We collude in self-preservation.  
Our strategy mirrors your grand design,  
Our weapons purloined from heaven's armory.  
Both commands of righteousness  
And disgrace you allow, you enable,  
Your will a whirlwind of tribulation.  
We endure, profligate and reproached,  
Our follies, footholds below your feet.

V.

Alert to your fury, winged messengers  
Arrive daily reading declamations  
Against our disproportions, our sins  
Of sorcery, of rebellious pride.  
Come chariots of light, convey us back  
From impudent error. Give us refuge.  
Give us the nod, the assembly we seek.  
Yet we in dread are still pursued,  
Hope devolves into clutches of anger  
Or a bone-weakening plea of despair.





Maisha Tahsin Rubai  
Cruel Destiny

Rubai  
02-03-19



Maisha Tahsin Rubai // A moonlit night



# Carol V. Davis

## *The Air is Full*

The air is full of particles,  
ash from the smoke of fires to the north

Last night the sky an ungodly color  
shifting orange to yellow and back

A kind of stillness that in California  
means earthquake, whether it arrives or not

\*

In the dream a man stood up.  
Nothing unordinary about him,  
except for the half circle of people  
(I hesitate to call them disciples)  
He raised his hand Sparks flew

I have never succumbed to full acceptance  
even as I envy those who can follow  
without questioning: the Amish boy  
in Shipshewana, who rejects the tractor  
in favor of plow horses in the field,  
the Chassidic woman who handed over her son  
to be circumcised, not hiding in the bedroom as I did

\*

It is true that God was put on trial at Auschwitz  
He did not fare well

\*

I was taught how to question  
not how to believe

\*

We are told there were two sets of tablets  
one destroyed, one saved  
Fire and cloud

\*

We are always carving a new golden calf  
searching for solace to convince ourselves  
we chose right

\*

I scratch out letter from branches  
the aleph bet in the three languages  
I pretend to know  
Compare their shapes, asses their durability

\*

The flakes thicken, carpeting the meadow  
coating prairie flax and cornflower  
I look upward but no prayer is answered

# Sarah DeCorla-Souza

## *Blessing*

Let this be the last time worry stalks you.  
Let your children grow and grow.  
Let the waiting be short  
for doctors and lines.  
Let there be no doctors, no lines.

Let there be time, acres of time.  
Let us carry baskets of time.  
Let the times be easy. Let history end.  
Let time roll on like thunder  
into an easy mist.

Let us be normal, exquisitely normal.  
Let there never be anything wrong.  
Let the rain come in torrents.  
Let it wash away fear.  
Let your house built on a rock stand.

Let the world smell like fallen rain,  
like a child's head, like a grandchild's head,  
like a great grandchild's head,  
as you lift him up on this bright spring day,  
this day when you opened your eyes again  
not to death but to life.

***Today is a Day I'm Searching for Words***

Maybe nesting in the pile of potholders  
in the kitchen drawer that's always slamming,  
between the crying child, the simmering pots.  
Someone's at the door, there's a knocking,  
selling siding, asking if I'm saved.  
I've seen a painting of Jesus  
knocking at a door,  
but it can only be opened  
from the inside. Maybe the words  
hide in the roofing brochure,  
the Watchtower magazine,  
or right outside under the doormat. Actually,  
there's the word - WELCOME - welcome friends,  
welcome strangers, welcome Jesus, bounty, hardship,  
welcome everything that's crossed  
the threshold of this place. The words are in  
and out and all around, everywhere I look,  
in the baby sparrow's throat  
in the nest in the bush right outside the door,  
not yet ready to fly but ready to sing.

# Krikor Der Hohanesiann

## ***IN THE BEGINNING***

the earth wobbled off-axis,  
a spinning top arced 'round the sun,  
gave birth to winds that carried  
the sound of fire and thunder,  
rain and seismic shudders.

Puffs of cumulus born of  
sea mist and updrafts, wind-blown urns  
for thirsty primeval forests. Desultory  
sowing of pod and seed, the destruction  
by wildfires, hurricanes, tornados,  
ice, snow, flood and drought. Rebirth  
rode the fickle winds of change. Until

*erectus, habilis* and *neanderthalis*, wind's sounds  
fell on no human ear. But once heard  
there was no denying a force to be heeded:  
a herald of tidings, bearer of gifts, messenger  
that warned of danger. Primitive, at first we mimicked –  
blew breath on frozen hands, rubbed sticks, expelled  
a whoosh of air to incite sparks for fire.

We began to harness: built the windmills  
to pump water, grind wheat and barley, crafted sail  
for barks and clippers to explore new lands, trade  
goods, to pirate and wage war. Later,

most audacious, the silver projectiles  
with sleek wings, faster than stratospheric  
winds but without which they plummet  
to ground like a wounded sparrow.

Upon the winds, too, we bestowed  
the singularity of names:

Sirocco, the dusty Saharan breeze believed  
to cause headaches and insomnia. Bearer  
of violent squalls at the poles, Willawaw.  
Chinook, the "snoweater".  
Harmattan, the trade wind off West Africa  
dubbed "the doctor" for its healthful  
properties. Blue Norther, Kona,  
Maestro and the monsoon Kharif.

Whatever their names  
the winds carry language  
of many tongues. The dove's  
coo , the rustling leaves  
of birch and maple, tides  
lapping against shoreline,  
the tinkle of wind chimes,  
a coyote's midnight ululations.

And human sounds, too, that rise  
on the wind but are easily lost:  
the wail of a Darfuri child, starved,  
black flies feasting on black skin,  
a Shia wife keening -  
her husband lost to a vest  
of detonated shrapnel,  
the shouts for justice  
from the disenfranchised,  
from those who have lost heart  
a thunderous silence, whispers  
from the souls of the dead.

The wind has had far to travel,  
its sound sibilant, muted,  
the ear hard-pressed to hear.

# Thad DeVassie

*A Lamentation for the Test-Taker*

## ***A Lamentation for the Test Taker***

Like unprepared schoolkids, we show up nervous for the test, worried about what's at stake.

It is always multiple choice.

Implying something is right.

Everything else is wrong.

Or at least less right.

*Who devised this test? How deeply did they mine for answers? Why are plausible answers next to but out of reach of the truth, falsely reinforcing our inaccuracy? What about the cognitive bias of the assemblers?*

We are no longer schoolkids.

We have matriculated to adulthood.

We expect to opt-out of the test.

We prefer the survey,

an open-ended plea to provide our other response: eloquent and well argued; one that doesn't catalog nicely into the researcher's assumptions. Where, with enough outliers, we can reach new conclusions, defy what they know, anticipate.

*[this diagnosis / that vote / another condemnation ]*

This. That. The other. All of them – tests.

The kind where *when in doubt, choose C* is not for consolation.

Test-taker: breathe, say your psalms, dry your sweaty palms, and know only this is true:

Everything is broken.

It is all unfinished business

this side of eternity.

# Tom Donlon

## **UNITY**

for Cat Pleska and the Martinez family

We are marvelously made—people, miracles  
who fit no rigid, singular model. Look  
at how our fingers work, how they can hold  
another hand, help clear the blur in a friend's eye.  
We can see without limit and count stars.

I see you, brother and sister. I hear your cries  
and smell the smoke from the burning in your soul.  
I hug you and feel the beat of your troubled heart.

For years, I've asked, at the Spanish Mass,  
"Lord, I want to see your face." *Señor,*  
*quiero ver tu rostro.* At the nativity celebration,

a line of two-year-old Hispanic girls entered  
in white dresses with angel wings and walked  
to the manger where Mary held her child.

One of the angels stopped, turned to the audience,  
and danced to the guitars and song in Spanish  
by the choir, *el coro.* She had every head turned.

Lord, I see your face. *Señor, veo tu rostro.*  
Let me see you in everyone. Let me show the power  
of love and forgiveness.

**RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD**

Here you are again, on the chain-link fence.  
It's the same every day as I pass by  
heading home—you perched there.  
Are you waiting for someone?  
Do you, like me, wonder what's next?

I'm often on the fence. Each day  
I pray for success for my six children.  
I can't rest until they're on their own,  
thriving. My wife is the same.  
We keep our eyes on hope.

Blackbird, you neither sow nor reap,  
nor gather into barns. Do you question,  
each day, how you will feed your family?

People urge me to write a will.  
It's inevitable, but I feel responsible  
and want to be here for them. I still talk  
to my parents and am pretty sure they listen.

I don't know if you, blackbird, contemplate  
these things each day like me.  
I'll swing by again tomorrow.

**Rosie Prohías Driscoll**

*La Clave*

## ***La Clave***

*¡La clave, la clave! ¿Cuál es la clave?*

I recognize your accent  
syncopated rhythms I have spoken only in memory

*Tengo el teléfono descargao, ¡descargao!*

and wonder how you landed here on a Monday afternoon  
in July, at a Starbucks in Virginia

*Mi teléfono, no se carga, ¡no sirve!*

amid eyes like pools, pond surfaces  
disturbed by the fallout of mind shrapnel

*I talk broken English, broken Spanish*

settling into the rustle of turning pages, or the smooth screens of laptops  
as you sit, at each table of shifting eyes crossing legs

*I think you got the wrong computer there!*

Inevitably, you reach me, kneel at my feet,  
A supplicant Don Quixote, serenading

*Mujer Hermooosa... ¡La clave! ¿Cuál es la clave?*

While I, mujer hermosa, educada y fina  
stand, wish you *buena suerte*, and walk away

*Hace falta muchos años para conseguir la paz...*  
*What happened? What happened?*

untethered, unable to bear your voice  
and the mirror you hold up to my face

## ***Breaking Open the Word***

*Compartir* – to share

I slice it neatly  
turning the parts,  
prefix and root,  
in the palms of my hands

*Com* – with; together

*Partir* – to break

I savor the sweetness  
of revelation  
in division  
to share is to break with  
together  
This is my body, broken for you

I break it open

*La parto*

again  
this time conjugating  
the root

*Parto*

Verb - I break

Noun – childbirth

And I remember

my legs splayed  
releasing  
and receiving  
the bloodied, glorious cry  
This is my body, broken for you

Then, the recoupling  
The final conjugal act:  
*Comparto*

I break with  
for you  
And there is birth  
in the breaking

of body  
of bread  
of the Word

# David Ebenbach

## ***New***

I like this place.

I like the chair I'm sitting in, the pillow  
on my lap. I like the way the world  
has gone dark outside the living room—

    I like the words *living room*—  
so that everything inside  
gets to show up a second time on the window.

I like my shirt, cast aside on the floor,  
natural there like a sleeping cat,  
and certainly the books next to it are good.

One has an orange cover. It's the color of a couch  
a friend has. Even the puzzled sound of the air conditioner  
is fine with me. It's good to remember  
that machines, too, can be confused and earnest.

The rug under my bare feet, the dim  
overhead light, the cardboard boxes I need  
to break down and take away, my bare feet themselves—  
none of this is new, this excellence.

***Dwelling***

The train passes a field of house-outlines,  
just the frames, cream wood at right angles  
and a few with walls of insulation but nowhere  
a roof; everything is still outdoors.

In the fall we live in frames ourselves, *Ye shall  
dwell in booths seven days*, a week of admitting  
to the temporary. We eat under branches  
unless there's enough rain to spoil the soup.

But these will become houses; roads  
will turn in here. While we hammer together  
ritual that comes in pieces and that can  
always be disassembled again.

A home makes us believe it's not raining.  
Tradition taps at the window-glass.

### ***Passover This Year***

It finally snows, five days after  
the first day of spring, and we're like,  
where have you been, because by now  
we've shelved the snow angels.  
We were thinking more like cherry blossoms.  
The fact is we've adjusted our calendars;  
seven leap months in nineteen years,  
because this is supposed to be spring.

So anyway we sit down together  
at a table where everything's renewal,  
renewal, and under the table our boots  
slush the floor and leave salt footprints.  
Well, we're used to contradiction;  
there's salt water on the table, too.  
We carry our tears with us, in little bowls.  
We lug them across national borders  
and the calendar. Meanwhile, the snow  
follows us just to say, get over yourselves,  
we all have our problems.

***The World is on its Way to You***

The world is on its way to you  
always, never resting—

the red of that pillow on the couch  
crosses the open room to meet your eyes—

the sound of someone driving by the house  
travels on until it finds your ears—

even this hard floor—kneel now to touch it,  
feel how it springs up to be felt—

and—oh—behind these bright things  
are all the other things that are coming—

the air between you and the world is  
only and always all the world—

always on its way to you.

**Åsa Ericsson**

*Lisbon Lies In Ruins*

## ***Lisbon Lies in Ruins***

According to scientists  
the travel ban cleared the air  
but only roaches dance the streets of Paris  
this defeated morning  
No one wakes up rich anymore  
and love is unnecessary torture  
If we never meet again  
this is what you'll turn into:  
the omitted third of a minor seven  
the arched shadow of an illplanted cherry tree  
tracks of lynx in wet soil  
a misplaced treasure

# Martín Espada

## ***Morir Soñando***

*For Luis Garden Acosta (1945-2019)*

*Brooklyn, New York*

I saw the empty cross atop the empty church on South 4th Street, as if Jesus flapped his arms and flew away, spooked by one ambulance siren too many. I saw the stained glass windows I wanted to break with a brick, the mural of Saint Mary and the Angels hovering innocent as spies over the congregation, and wanted to know why you brought me here, the son of a man punched in the face by a priest for questioning the Trinity, who punched him back.

*This is El Puente, you said. The Bridge.* I knew about the Williamsburg Bridge, eight lanes of traffic and the subway stampeding in the open windows of the barrio all summer. You spread your arms in that abandoned church and saw the spinning of a carousel better than any wooden horses pumping up and down at Coney Island: here the ESL classes for the neighbors cursed with swollen tongues in English; there the clinics on contraception, the pestilence in the veins of the unsuspecting; here the karate lessons, feet spearing the air to keep schoolyard demons away; there the dancers in white, swirling their skirts to the drumming of bomba; here the workshops on Puerto Rican history, La Masacre de Ponce where your mother's beloved painted his last words on the street with a fingertip of blood.

I was a law student, first year, memorizing law school Latin, listening to classical guitar on my boom box as I studied the rules of property: *It's mine. It's not yours.* I saw only what could be proven by a preponderance of the evidence: the church abandoned by the church, the cross atop the church abandoned by the Son of God. My belly empty as Saint Mary of the Angels, I told you I was hungry, and we left.

I wanted Chinese food, but you told me about the Chinese take-out down the block where you stood behind a man who shrieked about the price of wonton soup, left and returned with a can of gasoline, splashed it on the floor and pulled a box of kitchen matches from his pocket. *Will you wait till I pick up my egg roll and pork fried rice?* you said, with a high school teacher's exasperated authority, so he did.

You could talk an arsonist into postponing his inferno till you left with lunch, but you couldn't raise the dead in the ER at Greenpoint Hospital, even in your suit and tie. You couldn't convince the girl called Sugar to rise from the gurney after the gunshot drained the blood from her body. You couldn't persuade the doctor who

peeled his gloves and shook his head to bring her back to life, telling him *do it again*, an arsonist in medical scrubs trying to strike a wet match. You couldn't jumpstart the calliope in her heart so the carousel of horses would rise and fall and rise again. Whenever you saw the gutted church, you would see the sheets of the gurney dipped in red, all the gurneys rolling into the ER with a sacrifice of adolescents.

We walked to the luncheonette on Havemeyer Street. A red awning announced *Morir Soñando. To Die Dreaming*, you said, *from the DR, my father's island*. The boy at the counter who spoke no English, brown as my father, called Martín like me, grinned the way you grinned at El Puente, once Saint Mary of the Angels. He squeezed the oranges into a drizzle of juice with evaporated milk, cane sugar and ice, shook the elixir and poured it till the froth spilled over the lip of the glass. Foam freckled my snout as I raised my hand for another. Intoxicated by morir soñando number three and the prophet gently rocking at my table, I had a vision:

ESL classes healing the jaws wired shut by English, clinics full of adolescents studying the secrets of the body unspeakable in the kitchen or the confessional, karate students landing bare feet on the mat with a thump and grunt in unison, bomba dancers twirling to a song in praise of Yoruba gods abolished by the priests, the words of Puerto Rican rebels painted on the walls by brushes dipped in every color, pressed in the pages of notebooks by a generation condemned to amnesia.

Morir soñando: Luis, I know you died dreaming of South 4th Street, the banners that said *no* to the toxic waste plant down the block or the Navy bombarding an island of fishermen for target practice thousands of miles away. Morir soñando: I know you died dreaming of vejigantes, carnival máscaras bristling with horns that dangled with the angels at El Puente. Morir soñando: I know you died dreaming of the next El Puente. Morir soñando: I know you died dreaming of the hammer's claw, the drill whining to the screw, the dust like snow in a globe, then the shy genius raising her hand in the back of the room. Morir soñando: I know you died dreaming of the poets who stank of weed in the parking lot, then stood before the mike you electrified for them and rubbed their eyes when the faces in their poems gathered there, waiting for the first word, so we could all die dreaming, morir soñando, intoxicated by the elixir of the tongue, oh rocking prophet at my table.



## ***Cliff Copse***

The earth fell into bird-clef  
threads of sound, chords unheard by Time,  
a name-talon descending to purify my heart.

The anemone-ear, in plain water-chant,  
hears the beauty of silence  
as I fall into bird-clefs of clay and sound

unuttered in Time.

The sun's plough  
in blue ribbons of earth  
and dancing white waves

with the green coral star  
drains the blueberry grave  
of Sandown Bay

as daisy-milk rays  
effloresce in daylight.  
And Mary's bottle of dark apple-dreams

drinks the glance of a thousand eyes  
giving paradise back  
in teal-pear hearts

and pebble-lace prayers  
that fall into birdsong threads of sand.

# Melanie Figg

## *Preparing the Sacraments*

My mother took care of the gardens,  
that's what a minister's wife does.  
Her gardens circled the church: foxglove,  
bleeding hearts, snap dragons, larkspur,  
delphinium, black-eyed susans.  
Sara and I helped her weed. *Pull it up slow  
near the ground or you'll break it off at the stump.*  
She took the trowel and unhooked our failures  
until we learned to watch and follow her.  
I sat next to the flowers in the basement kitchen.  
She placed each stem slowly in the two silver vases  
that became more important as she carried them  
to the altar, set them carefully between the candles,  
stepped back to make sure they were just right.  
Then my mother laid out the vestments.  
While she ironed the linens, I straightened  
the Hymnals and the Books of Common Prayer.  
Red, blue, red, blue, red, blue. I wove through the rows.  
Quiet (me making the only sound),  
fresh flowers and my mother in the sacristy  
ironing: each Saturday like this.  
I hummed hymns or talked to myself as I ordered.  
The sun pressing through the west windows,  
pews, flowers, candles, organ, pulpit—all mine.  
I got down on my knees and slowly  
tasted that sour bite: lemon oil,  
sweat, oak, my own young faith.  
Not in the man with the lamb, not in the God  
who watched me undress, not even in the familiar  
flowers made holy by the Cross between them,  
but in my mother: ironing in the sacristy, singing.

***Weighing the Dead***

Prop them on scales  
the nearly, the terminal  
hopeless—write that number  
down. At the moment  
(how to tell of such a small  
invisible place?) of death  
over before you can see, certainly say  
*she's passed on, over, away*  
sliver of a second, switch, button  
the flash when the coyote realizes  
the cartoon cliff is through, then he is  
and air returns to its usual  
properties: sift, surround, disavow  
the body reaches over its own  
gap and in that gasp  
lightens. The soul  
weighs some heartbreaking  
fraction of an ounce.  
Less than nothing turns  
the whole machine.

What does grief weigh?  
the present absence, the here and now.  
When she first died my body tried  
to disappear, but a year later the  
hollow was too much to bear  
and food does a good job at filling.  
I want to believe the body solves  
its own longing for peace if only  
through confusion—what does hunger weigh?

# Annie Finch

*She Is Riding The Branch*

## ***She is Riding the Branch***

When our Mother — like flame — comes — to take her life back,  
Life burns back, And again. Flame is all that she has,  
Rising up from the coals, folding into the sky  
From her now. All is changed! And she glows on the same.

Life burns back! And again! Flame is all that she has —  
Since she gave up her land once — to strangers. We call  
From her now. All is changed! And she glows on the same,  
Rising up from the coals, folding into the sky

Since she gave up her land once — to strangers. We call,  
Like the embers that pulse. She is moving away,  
Rising up from the coals, folding into the sky  
Where her heart births green-yellow again through the night.

Like the embers that pulse, she is moving away,  
She's returning in dark — as a creature again —  
Where her heart births green-yellow again through the night.  
As we lie in our newer grave, with softer hearts,

She's returning in dark— as a creature again —  
She is riding the branch! She will bring us to be  
As we lie in our newer grave, with softer hearts,  
Where her body remembers the throb of the trees.  
She is riding the branch! She will bring us to be

When our Mother — like flame — comes — to take her life back,  
Where her body remembers the throb of the trees  
Rising up from the coals, folding into the sky!

## ***GEORGE'S BLACKBERRY EYES***

scared me  
with their controlled speed.

He had not killed that many people,  
having sworn off cocaine  
after the middle of his nostrils  
began to rot.

He knew guys in prison  
didn't want their kids to end up there.  
He'd married the wife of his best friend,  
who was in prison for so long.

He held court right in his living room,  
removed selling territories  
from offending distributors.  
When he knew I read,  
he brought me a 'free' newspaper--  
"two for the price of one," he said.  
When I needed tires, he told me  
one of his friends  
could get them tha night.

Then I read that his justice went blind.  
The police nabbed him  
for his carriage of justice,  
which was a brand-new murder.

I still feel guilty,  
for not showing him  
how green things grow,  
clear water that kisses roots,  
helping the hand of the sun  
to lift shoots to sky.

I could have shared with him  
the peace of soughing trees  
in the south breeze  
and the quiet country crowd of stars.

I kept all that in my throat,  
my stomach, fat and ugly.  
I have an exercise to do on myself.  
If I see George again,  
maybe at a mall,  
I hope he can see essences,  
those biceps of the world  
that hug him all the time,  
the sweetness of  
his blackberry eyes.

# Ashante J. Ford

## ***Hye Won Hye***

The wind breathes life into her vessel,  
A divine temple; impenetrable by her spirit alone.  
I wonder if the force of Love is her only kryptonite,  
A lonesome sentiment of jaded benevolence that Love is.  
Love is a consumer,  
An overwhelming rushed experience—  
All at once, it can become you.  
She embodies it, though it is her weakness.  
She wears Love on the palms of her hands when you grab them,  
On the back of her neck when you kiss it,  
And it rests in-between her shoulder blades, it's called  
**The Love in her sternum.**  
She leaves the fire of Love unscathed,  
Then begins to wade the waters of abundance—  
She ascends drenched in Gold.  
I ask her how she does it,  
"Always keep enough Love to fit in your own pocket, don't give it all away."  
– *Love, not in its finest hour*

***Plums in the Winter***

Plum nectar in a chalice, her fingers dipped in honey-gold paint, wrapped.

Babies in the winter time, cold in the afternoon–

Cherry-picked into affinity, the color purple graces the tops of her toes.

The voice of Anita Baker trembles past her lips,  
Thankfully, she left one right-hand in the mix.

In her God body, she switches to the rhythm of the electrified bass–  
Places her arms around the world only she can carry,

Lift her up...  
Lift her up!

Wings of change spring from her back as her rose tinted, Mahogany skin entices you.  
Our hands fall to our sides, the ground catches our knees and graciousness guides us to her

embrace.  
We lift her up and  
Follow suit.  
*-It's about the inside*

# Eric Forsbergh

*Medical Mission, Guatemala, 1997*

## ***Medical Mission, Guatemala, 1997***

I remember only three small circles,  
the rest being chalk powder, falling away.  
One rifle's muzzle tip, a hole into darkness,  
inches from the car window, toward my face.  
That, and two brown irises, impassive, meeting my raised glance.  
Our driver wove a partial lie, the currency of roadblocks,  
those transient clots of civil war, before the soldier waved us through.

Every rutted road we drove ended among Q'eqchi Mayans:  
A coughing Rover spitting out boxes of amoxicillin,  
scalpels, gauze, sutures, forceps, a generator.  
Our hands searching into our only bucket of disinfectant,  
opaque from blood. Gloved fingers creeping gingerly for rongeurs.  
Excision of a small pumpkin's worth of orange worms.  
A stillborn, distorted, color of clay.  
Newborns, mewling in the fire of scabies, dysenteric, indigenous, dying.  
Kwashiorkor, naked, sidling between two mud walls,  
her teeth and pointed cheekbones turning to face me briefly,  
before she levered her pendulous belly away, listless,  
on spindles hung with skin.

Dust-crusts boys scampering in and out of the trash fire,  
parading about in bloodied gloves, laughing like fiesta.  
Oily smoke rolling over them.  
The accusatory eyes of a young campesino,  
machete dully gleaming in his belt.  
The profuse jungle eating everything.  
Sweating, we breathed through our masks,  
an asthmatic straining for relevance.

And yet, for a single sunset,  
with flocks of toucans skimming jungle canopy,  
sweeping among the jutting heads of abandoned Mayan pyramids  
we sat, spent, on a capstone, faces flushed with dying light.

# Samuel J. Fox

## *When I Hear of Miracles, I Remind Myself*

to think of the patron saint of barbers, Martin de Porres,  
cutting his fellow brothers' hair in the monastery,  
shaving the stubble from their crowns with a straight razor,  
before they go the next morning into mass  
where he would levitate into the air as he prayed.

As when he discovered the mice in the chapel's rafters,  
nests throughout the walls, would be exterminated,  
he tenderly caught the nearest mouse and whispered to it  
to gather its families and follow him to safety.

Kindness itself can be construed as a miracle,  
as in the face of more-than-certain cruelty  
or in the commonplace nonchalance of any current city.  
We are often not obligated to be kind,  
and it is a choice to love anyone, anything, with abandon.

The mice never returned: they were last seen following  
the patron saint of razors and scissors in a single file line  
out the front door of the monastery and into a field  
where, it is said, he carefully placed a cube of bread  
in each tiny, timid mouth.

***There's always a god***

There's always a god over something / the disappearing wound / the bandage / the sprain / the gold / the silver / the way the rain smells like heaven and hell taking hands to dance / the wilted rose / the opening peony / the downed robin sitting dead by the side of the road poised as though about to fly into a cotton-swab sky / and there's always a god over something / even the open palm / the sly side-glance / the smoke rings inherited from a lover in college / a mother's worry / a father's clean words gleaming like blued steel / the lover whose gone crazy for a man / the man who doesn't know who he is / or what even love is capable of in diligent hands / the poem / the poem's knife nick / the poem's delicate web like fingers through the hair standing on end / there must be a god over everything / or maybe there is only everything / and wonder is a capable steward / and awe is the religion into motion / whether it is to worship the moon as a goddess / or the sun as the face of god / whether it is to worship the space absence makes when an ending proceeds / your name replaced on love's lips / or the small of your lover's back / how it could collect rain water you drink from / the presence of arch and hunch and work / to make love physical and not just a chemical / not just some sound the mouth makes for the heart to take for granted / with or without a god / there is still much to worship / the sound of thunder beyond the mountain / the road sign a mile from home / the town you grew up in that learned to slur your name / the slur itself / the way nothing can break your heart without your consent / the whole of everything and you a piece of it / turning turning turning / resolving until you can't bear the wonder anymore / then, moonless dark



## ***Bloodlines***

with every breath in,  
blood brightens from oxygen,  
the heart chimes, arteries loop  
liquid life into the overworked liver,  
beleaguered brain, strained muscles,

a lavish sup of nourishment and drive  
all the way into tight-squeeze capillaries,  
a spelunker's journey without a headlamp,  
to disappear into this invisible network  
of billions of black holes,

a leap of faith into the upside down,  
yin side of yang circulation  
where blood darkens to a spent wine  
as if it spilled out of the mouth of a drunk  
who's fallen onto bruised knees

limping sometimes on the return trip,  
wasted, venous, hungry and thirsty,  
dropping off pieces of dirty laundry  
in the kidneys, letting the heart  
lift the rest of its weary load of CO<sub>2</sub>

to new redemption, exhalation,  
atonement, clothed again  
in brilliant scarlet raiment,  
a life and death mini-drama  
played out once every minute,

pushed to the edge  
where an exchange takes place,  
a miracle happens,  
like water into wine,  
and wine into blood.

## ***The Coin-Op Church***

Off the main highway, down meandering gravel, a road of hairpin turns, no guardrails. At the end, a shady lane, where lies the coin-op church, open 24 hours a day.

I wondered if it were like Catholic churches I knew, where votive candles were replaced by push-button electric lights. Each click, a dollar requested by the coinbox, to flicker a faux light a day and a night, in honor of a loved one who had passed away.

I wondered if this coin-op church was like an automat lunchroom of 1950s New York City, where you plugged in dimes, opened a little metal door and pulled out spiritual nourishment, instead of a mustardy ham sandwich or sticky slice of cherry pie.

Might what happened here be like beads of a rosary, a prayer count-off one-by-one, like dropping coins one-by-one into a parking meter or coin washing machine. In place of dirty clothes in, clean clothes out, could my soul receive the cleansing, or my monkey-mind thoughts be wiped to a meditative state?

As I approached the coin-op church altar, I was pleased they accepted cash only, not forced to pay with my chip card, pay with my phone, pay with my face, take on what some say is the mark of the beast, a beast called Mark who just may usher in the cashless society, like a crownless grey-man king.

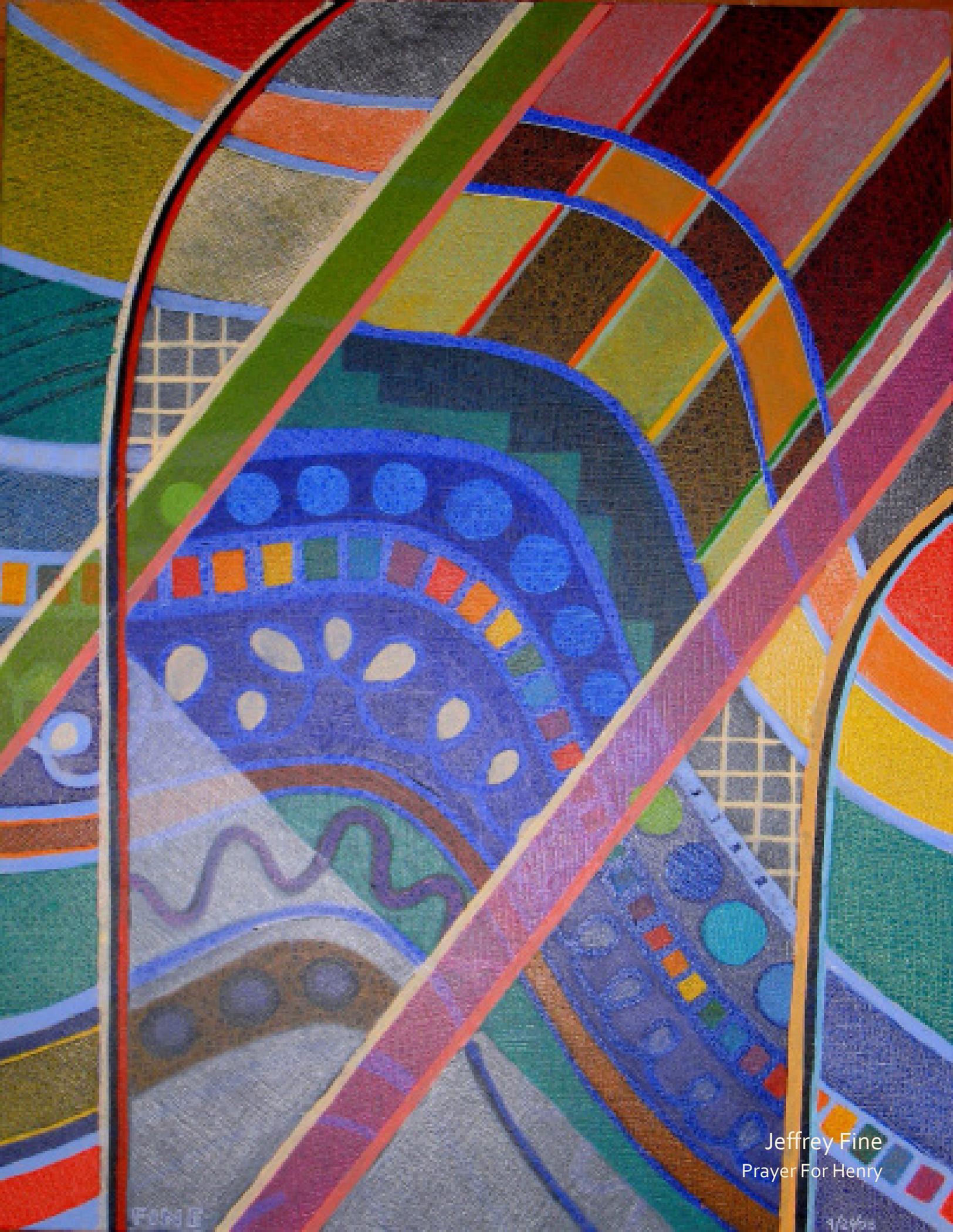
As I drew closer, I kept thinking maybe it would have been easier to visit the Green Forest Cowboy Church or the Four-wheeler House of Prayer, or simply duck into an old-fashioned phone booth, drop-in a quarter and punch in "Dial-a-Prayer."

What was I doing here, this place with no one else at this hour but god...and a vending machine.

Then I saw duct tape across the coin drop and a sign pasted on the machine that read "Out of Order," with a ribbon of italic calligraphy that also said, "Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's."

Oh, that ancient silver coin Jesus referred to, the Tiberius Denarius, originally worth 10 asses. And I, one of the 10.

Only then I realized my pockets were empty, my eyes closed, the third eye in the middle of my forehead, throbbing, a warm circle lighting up as if to signal "on" or "power" or "go" or "wake," almost feeling, there at that moment, a gentle push from a wise and determinate index finger.



Jeffrey Fine  
Prayer For Henry

## ***Greek to Me***

It's a cyrillic head dance,  
alphas, epsilons,  
thetas and theophany.

Spanish language radio drifts through stained glass,  
students comprehend every fifth palabra  
and forget what language to daydream in.

Sentences skirt along flamenco-ruffled rhythms,  
each spicy companion cradles a different phraseology in one hand,  
while a bilingual dictionary rests unopened in the other.

Snow clouds powder encryptions on outdoor icons,  
post-Delphic messages  
lie scrambled under drifts.

Latin mass memories recycle, Dominus vobiscum,  
an asymmetrical song and a metered click from an incense burner  
cleave music and odor to multi-tongued crowds of the past.

Where are the Polish grandmas who grasped rosaries, whispered prayers,  
 "Peash, pa-peash, peash," in the pews behind me. "Brakuje mi ciebie."  
 Shushed soundtracks of three-day wakes.

Fast forward, the Greek priest blesses another funeral  
 making the sign of the cross opposite of Jesuits,  
 Parakletos hovers 40 days after death  
 before the dearly's heavenly departure: A queue forms.

The Greek priest spoon feeds wine to the chatty and taciturn alike,  
 a redemptive alphabet soup bears a celestial lexicon,  
 each mouth forms  
 a silent omega.

#### Glossary

Theophany (Greek): The baptism of Christ; a Christ vision

Palabras (Spanish): words

Dominus vobiscum (Latin): The Lord be with you

Brakuje mi ciebie (Polish): I miss you—(brach mee chevie-yah)

Parakletos (Greek): The Holy Spirit

# Robbie Gamble

## *John Leary*

We enrolled at Harvard the same year.  
Friends said, you two absolutely should  
know each other, but we never met.  
I heard stories: he lived off-campus,  
on cold nights he let homeless folks stay  
at his place, then he got kicked out too.  
When Jimmy Carter rolled out  
the military draft registration, I went  
to my hometown post office in Brookline  
to picket, and an elderly woman screamed  
at me, brandishing her Auschwitz tattoo.  
He chose the tougher picketing assignment  
in Southie, got beat up by longshoremen.  
After college, we both moved on  
to Catholic Worker houses of hospitality,  
living among the homeless and the holy.  
I shifted to New York, he stayed in Boston,  
where they loved his apple-cheeked wisdom,  
his calm, conciliatory voice in meetings  
when bitter consensus was almost too much  
for community factions to swill down.  
At twenty-four, jogging home along the Charles  
one evening, he just dropped, pulseless.  
Now I have spent most of my adulthood trying  
to catch up to his brief, beatific arc.  
I heard the paramedics were astonished,  
that he had the most tranquil smile  
when they rolled the body over.

**Dorothy Day**

You were two years dead, your dentures  
still in a bedside mug when I arrived,  
stepping off the Ivy League escalator  
to detour down the preferential option  
for the poor: St Joseph's House of Hospitality,  
Lower East Side. How to live in the wake  
of a Great Soul, an acrid incense lingering  
in sour homeless sweat, in burnt lentil soup,  
wafting all the way to heaven up through  
tenement fire escapes. In the evening,  
after soupline, the serving table scrubbed  
and redressed as altar, wine consecrated  
in a coffee cup; we are all of one body,  
all of us, the educated, the inebriated,  
the lice-ridden, the skeptical. I studied you,  
line and verse, in back-issue newsprint:  
*We have all known the long loneliness,*  
you wrote (Why yes I have), and, *the only*  
*solution is love* ("a harsh and dreadful thing,"  
you called it) and that, in the end, *love comes*  
*with community*. I learned this, smoke  
and trace and ash from you, among  
new friends, broken and saintly, winding  
hand-in-hand, the strange way home.

# E. Laura Golberg

*Memorial Cross*

## ***Memorial Cross***

Ignoring plaques honoring the death of boys,  
we watch great moths of summer, green Luna,

brown and yellow Imperial, air fluttering.  
Straight streams of light illuminate the cross--

bright, its angles huge in shadow. The night is full  
of tree frogs who voice their guttural lullabies.

And bats, black predators who dive to feed  
as we now witness the death of wings.

The air is full of looming shadows, the lighted cross,  
backdrop to the swoop and climb of bats and moths.

**Jeff Gundy**

***EMBLEMS OF THE TIMES***

## **EMBLEMS OF THE TIMES**

1.

Looking both ways as I cross the icy creek.  
Shifting and realizing my back hasn't hurt all day.

Stepping out the back door: the car gone,  
the driveway empty, the house empty.

2.

Once I was a speck of light--no, I saw  
in the shimmery mist a host of lights

that did not burn or cease to burn.  
I went back to my wife, my children,

told them nothing. Now I only want  
to spin skeins of sound from the old guitar,

sift and sort for some new music,  
some tune old as Jesus, young as Jesus.

3.

That night something came flying,  
a gift in the shape of a cardinal or a crow,

sharp in the shadowy darkness,  
soundless except for the rumor of wings.

I woke into my life, rose and dressed  
like a criminal whose crime has been forgotten.

4.

The last high dive in Ohio has been torn down.  
The backup battery is fully charged.

That station are bursting with gasoline,  
dozens of drink options, heat lamp pizza.

The roads out of town are clear in all directions.

## LINDEN

*Simone Weil says that when you really love you are able to look at  
Someone you want to eat and not eat them.*

-Marie Howe, "After the Movie"

What we're talking, then,  
is love and murder. What we're  
talking is pieces

of the heart, places in the heart  
where love and murder  
might dwell. Myself I've never

been quite sure that I love  
even the people I love the most,  
not in the old high way. Reading

too much Yeats and Keats will do  
that to you. *Love is action*,  
says M. Howe, and that seems

some comfort. Finally today  
some sun, sharp light  
and shadow in the linden

near the window, its new  
buds reddish and wet.  
I suspect it loves

everything, which according  
to Dan Born is just  
the same as loving nothing.

I'm almost sure  
I've never yet loved anyone  
enough to eat them.



Christopher Woods  
The Passion





Christopher Woods

Left: Always Follow the Light

Right: Praise at the Parade





Christopher Woods  
At the Pond

# Alexandra Guzman

*An angel being dragged  
through hell alive*



## ***Self-care***

I've heard the phrase "make love, not war" many times before,  
But I guess I must have misplaced that piece of advice when I entered a war zone between my  
mind and my body.

I never really realized how much I disliked myself until I was standing in front of a dressing room  
mirror, reflecting all the neglecting I've done to myself.

Dear me,

I'm so sorry that I broke you trying to fix other people who don't want to be saved,  
Because you cannot save everyone, no matter how much you try to pry yourself into their soul  
because

I know you see yourself in them,

The torment, hell-bent, resent,

Lending parts of yourself to other people to the point where you've become see-through,

It's lethal to believe that they'll consume you,

Break you to rearrange you,

To the point where you're never yourself again.

I hated you.

I hurt you, abused you,

Misused you,

A war on terror against my own skin with scars of infinite sins

A horrific masterpiece and an artwork sprung from the darkest parts of my mind,

I want to hide,

But I can't run away from you at the same time,

Because you're me, and I'm you,

And I don't know what to do because I did not want to look as disoriented as my own thoughts  
are,

Did it start when you wore a dress and you didn't like your legs,

Did it start when you stepped on a scale and a healthy weight failed,

Did it start when your parents argued about your weight that led to self-hate,

Or did it start when, did it start when, did it start when... I don't want to know when

I just remember when my mind and my body started to realign like the moon, the sun and the earth reaching a newfound eclipse of a balance because  
I cannot exchange your value into wanting to become someone you'll never be,  
I had to gain the recognition that not everybody's my competition,  
Looked back at my reflection, read between the lines that said  
You do not have to look like everyone else in the room to prove that you belong,

Fit in nowhere than fit in everywhere  
Because it isn't wrong to feel insecure  
But you spent so much time stuck in your head that you neglect and often forget that  
Silent is violent.  
But being emotional doesn't make you weak.  
Love your emotions because feeling everything is better than feeling nothing at all,  
You need to stop hiding your wounds in order to take time to heal,  
You need to embrace your chubbiness, stubbornness, and the beauty that is beginning to blossom, like a rose begging for water after its lost some  
Because self-love is a big deal, don't just push it aside because the universe created you so perfectly imperfect,  
Please, find home within yourself instead of finding it everywhere else  
Because your mind and your body are starting to reach peace,  
Something so beautiful  
That no one ever will be able to take away from you.

# Luke Hankins

## ***I Said to God***

*I said to God, Let's make a deal.  
When You take my life,  
no anguished anticipation, no long pain,  
no fear of dying, no fear of hell—  
just peace, satisfaction, relief, a quiet  
falling asleep. And—What can I do in return?  
Anything You ask. But I think maybe  
You owe me as much as I've asked anyway,  
having made me, having given me  
no choice in the matter . . .*

*You don't like mortality, God said.  
I don't like it at all, I said, to put it lightly.  
God said, Do you imagine there's no reason?  
I felt small and dumb, so I didn't speak.  
Here's our deal, God said. I will not deprive you  
of your anguish or your pain or your fear—  
least of all, your death.  
And you will become  
what you cannot otherwise be.*

*Your deal is hard, I said. Is it worth it?  
And I grew small and quiet,  
waiting in the silence.*

## ***The Body***

If I tell myself in my mind  
to forget the body, the body becomes  
increasingly present to the mind.  
But if I begin to dance, the body falls away  
through its own sensations.

The inscription on the entryway  
of the Basilica Saint-Denis in Paris reads,  
*The dull mind rises to truth through that which is material  
and, in seeing this light, is resurrected from its former submersion.*

The body in motion is a cathedral.

# Niels Hav

## *Aphasia*

When you see a monkey banging a clam  
against a stone it is like seeing one's self  
    investigating a philosophical problem.  
No one can preclude that animals are cleverer  
than us, they manage life without words,  
    we're unable to do that. Silence  
leads us astray in a psychic labyrinth,  
words flicker through the brain like fish  
deep down; they constantly shift meaning.

Each of us finds our self in a body;  
it is possible to make contact with caresses,  
but everything becomes more and more abstract.  
Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests;  
    the mind remembers the settlements  
in raw nature. Now we live with bookcases  
full of dictionaries, in nameless castles of air,  
    on separate floors.  
    What do you call that?

## ***The anesthetists discuss astronomy***

The anesthetists discuss astronomy  
elevating in the lift  
while patients arrive in taxis  
accompanied or not by family.

The universe  
consists of 100 billion galaxies.  
If there are sentient civilizations  
on just a millionth of those planets  
we are far from alone.

Outside: cold rain,  
December.

A sick person  
sitting in the waiting room  
among frayed magazines  
with his threadbare life  
has only one single prayer.

## ***“...and who is my neighbor?”***

Jesus replied,  
“a man was going down from [insert place of work,  
convenience store, home, or church] to [insert place of work,  
convenience store, home, or church] unarmed,  
and fell into the hands of officers, who stopped him for  
[insert \_\_\_\_\_-ing while Black reason]. they shot him,  
stood above his leaking body, and left him for dead.

now, by chance, a white man [Evangelical]  
was going down his Twitter feed.  
and when he saw him, he scrolled quickly past  
saying, #BlueLivesMatter.

likewise, a white woman [Presbyterian]  
came to the place on her Facebook feed.  
she saw him and scrolled quickly past  
saying, #AllLivesMatter.

but when [insert the least expected] saw him,  
they came near. moved with pity and outrage,  
they went to the dead man’s family  
to bandage their wounds, pouring action  
and appropriate silence as compassion.  
they put the burdens on their backs,  
addressed them as they were able.

the next day they had not forgotten,  
but took two friends and encouraged them  
to more than march or hashtag the moment,  
saying, 'we will continue the Work together.  
be not afraid: the Lord will repay  
whatever social capital we spend.'"

then Jesus asked,  
"which of these three was a neighbor  
to the man who fell into unholy hands?"  
the [insert an asshole "playing devil's advocate"] said,  
"the one who acknowledged his dignity."

and Jesus replied,  
"now go, and do likewise."

Say prayer's correctly rubbing God's back  
like a rabbit's foot clutched in a pocket,  
or an ancient Persian lamp gathering  
dust on a shelf, one wish held in reserve.  
it's making sure the horseshoe's heel faces  
up, lest the blessings leak. perhaps prayers  
are dreamcatchers aligned like satellites  
transmitting psalms to celestial spheres,  
or some other means of snapping fingers  
in front of God's face: grabbing attention  
without the need for screams emanating  
from the red-soaked earth, clay calling Potter  
to account for—or at least questioning—  
the cracks in the crucifix on the wall.



Kristone Capistrano // The Sleep of Ned Kelly

**Stephen Hitchcock**

***THE GIFT OF LOITERING***



## THE TYNDALL EFFECT

*The phenomenon in which light is scattered by particles of matter in its path.*

Somewhere between here  
 & now is where & when  
 it might happen,  
 the event I hope for, & invest in,  
 its effect & feeling  
 of lightness  
 & particularity, a sense, a way  
 not forward or backward  
 but perhaps in.  
 This morning, for instance,  
 I watched through my second-story  
 window fog diffuse  
 the sunlight over the Piedmont,  
 as it does my high beams  
 driving home through the dark, particles  
 in a very fine suspension,  
 backscattering.  
 I think this might be how.  
 To sit still & move  
 at 60mph through lit mist  
 is a beginning, begins to render  
 what I'm after & into,  
 Arvo Pärt's *Fratres*, for violin, strings,  
 & percussion, filling my chambers,  
 my cab, in stereo,  
 I crane & the seat belt sashes me  
 tighter. Not to move  
 at high speed, but be moved  
*through*, to almost float.  
 And there I am again, more than  
 memory, all the way up  
 in the final row  
 of the packed Kennedy Center,

sound pressing me  
against the back wall, the nosebleeds,  
eyes half-closed, that tear  
I didn't quite shed  
catches the soft light of sconces, holds it,  
trembling, for two hours,  
there the Tallinn Chamber Orchestra  
conjures a *cool sonic cathedral*,  
builds a sanctuary  
city, empties  
our corporate body of its volume  
& care, there  
we simulate zero-gravity.  
I crest the hill, trusting in nothing  
to appear. But he did  
appear, whispers across the audience:  
*He's actually here—Arvo.*  
And now as he bows imagine  
the music returns to his ears  
like bees to their tunnels  
hidden underground,  
a few notes caught  
in his long gray beard.  
And if I wanted to hear  
through the window leaves fall  
or quiver or spin, this bright  
littering, & so presume  
to hear what I see,  
while dew burns off  
the field's scramble of high grass, kudzu,  
yucca, raspberry, squat pines, poplars  
& firs? Call it  
a lyric of light & fog.  
The Evergreen & Quicksilver Variations.  
Call it sound-bearing silence.

**Richard Hoffman**

*Theseus' Ship*



## ***They That Mourn***

Blessed are they that remember,  
for them the muscle of the heart  
is twisted, looking  
as if it is turning away

or trying to, and what it turns from  
is both particle and wave, emitted  
from past disaster  
but illuminating nothing;

theirs is more than remains.

And blessed are the angry  
yet kind, that mourn the animals  
and weep for the burning trees,

that roar at the roaring flames,  
and worry few tears before  
were real as these, that turn

the light out, let the night in  
and contend with sorrow,

that imagine  
what once they are gone  
they might wish to have done

and in that darkness begin.

## **Church**

I heard music so I went inside.

Just below the altar, behind the rail  
with its open gate,  
a chamber orchestra played Vivaldi.

I found a place, alone, not too far back,  
behind the others, a scattering of them.

The music was sublime,

and if not for the hanging lamps,  
the stained glass windows,  
the statues and carved figures,  
the decorated corbelled arches,

I might have closed my eyes,

but everything called my gaze  
upward, even as Vivaldi carried on  
enthusiastically about *La Primavera*

and there, above the sanctuary  
high in the painted dome,  
between a symbol I knew and one I didn't,

a branching crack

and for the whole remainder of Spring

I wondered, for the life of me,  
how anyone could ever get up there to fix it.



## ***The Truth about Oranges***

i

An orange tree full of blossoms  
weighs little more  
than the tree beforehand  
yet the strength of each blossom  
pulls its fat fruit  
from the underground  
up the trunk  
out the branch  
past the leaves  
with help only  
from a random bee  
which itself weighs little more  
than the air that holds it up.

ii

When one has  
an orange tree  
it is wise and proper  
to eat some oranges  
and to share some.

iii

The saddest orange tree  
is the one with  
rotting oranges  
and hungry neighbors.

iv

The one who understands  
is the one who  
bases premises on blossoms  
and is generous  
when the oranges  
are few and perfect.

# **Jessica Jacobs**

*Sleepwalkers in the Garden*

## *Sleepwalkers in the Garden*

At least afterward, Adam and Eve knew  
what they'd lost. Knew their bodies  
as separate, which gave them something

to long for. Knew God—that companion  
who'd strolled beside them in the appled  
evenings—as a whispering in the quiet  
corner of their chests: a new reason  
to be still and listen.

When my grandmother  
moaned into the pain of her final days, there  
were her bottom teeth—those pickets, the same  
irregular pattern as mine. Her eyes, the same  
too, only flecked with the green of new leaves.

Why had it taken until then to see? Paradise  
is every moment we've ever left, all the small  
unnoticed gardens we can never again enter.

## ***Nevertheless***

This time is sacred for the good or bad  
it could become but isn't yet. For the 4 a.m. phone  
that doesn't ring but might.

*Ma nishtana ha'laila ha'zeh mi-kol ha'leilot?  
Why is this night different than all other nights?*

It's not. It's only the cusp each night is, the anteroom  
for all that follows—illness, one step  
off the wrong curb, one moment when the heart forgets  
to keep time.

But such questions are essential,  
inviting the story that takes us from slavery to freedom.

Even when celebrating Passover alone, we are commanded  
to ask, to become both the teller and the other  
to whom the story is told:

*And the night of the final plague,  
mark your doorposts with blood  
so the Angel of Death might pass over.*

Then we eat bitter herbs to taste the pain of those not  
passed by.

*And there was a loud cry in the land, for there was  
no house where there was not  
someone to mourn.*

In hope some trace remains,  
I run my hands along every doorway  
we enter, wondering,  
*Why others and not us?*  
I know nothing that makes us worthy  
of such consideration.

And dread, sometimes, is a darkness  
so thick it has me groping at noon. And questions,  
sometimes, are all we have left: Like even with all  
that could, that will occur, what else is there  
except to move forward?

### ***Letter to Matthew Olzmann Requesting Discernment***

How old were you, Matthew, when the world tipped  
its hand? When things you thought were natural  
showed their seams? I was thirteen. On trucked-in pallet  
across the street, squares of scutch grass  
were stacked high as my head. Did you know a lawn  
could be delivered? I didn't. But lured by promises  
of Pepsi and pizza, of doing equal work with the boys,  
I hauled and placed, puzzling them neat  
as a sheet of graph paper.

The girls that year had begun  
to paint their faces, a line of cheap orange stark  
along their jaws. Unlike me, they had not yet learned the art  
of how to blend: all those boys I pretended to like; all the girls  
I pretended not to. In thrift stores, we tried on others'  
past-season selves—the clothes, like the kids in the hallways,  
grouped by color and type. We wore masks of slang and song lyrics,  
dropped band names like currency, smoked skunk weed  
copped from an older brother's underwear drawer. Mirrors held  
a special magnetism: Instead of homework, I studied myself.

And after school, I walked past the grass, the contrived  
squares busy stitching and joining into a lawn, passing  
themselves off like they'd been there all along. Yet I could still  
feel the weight of that sod, the wet itch of it on my skin, the wonder  
that wherever I set it, it would bind itself  
to the ground below.

All day, my neighbors' sprinklers stuttered  
rainbows. All night, to the hiss of their groundwater whispers,  
I traced out my new hips and breasts, the possibilities  
I might grow into.

And now, decades on, I'm transplanting a faith I'm not sure  
I'll ever own. Heavy with questions, I zip myself  
into Judaism like a patchwork parka  
of grass, hoping it might take hold, might grow  
to fit snug as a golf course greenway.

Matthew, I wish you'd been around then  
to ask: Outside, the lawn; inside, me: each carefully constructed  
as a Lego set, yet also a living breathing dying thing. Were both fake  
just because I'd helped make them?

And now, what do you think  
of this whole religion thing? Will faith always gape  
like a borrowed coat? If something isn't natural can it still be true?

# Jennifer Jean

## ***Heaven's Beach***

*-for Joey*

Heaven is dawn patrol  
on your lemony longboard,  
is being the first groggy dude  
to cut the waves

before the John Deere greens  
groom the sands  
of yesterday's wrappers, sandals, straws,  
butts, cans, and diapers.

Before the poser with a boogie board,  
passed out far from a lifeguard tower,  
gets "groomed"  
by the tractor's steel rake tines.

Before the driver says, "Gran-ma  
needs her facelift!" Before he clutches at  
his gravedigger's lung.  
Before every larva, slime, and

stench above the tide line  
gets raked away  
and the killdeer plovers  
lose to hyper-hygiene, to a human

urge to hide. Heaven  
is the light before  
the light in your eyes  
fails when you ride a swell blind, and

fall—in the last of the moon,  
in the Blue Hour.  
Before a sub-surface predator  
covets your feet. Before the lap of

the water like a bell.  
Before your hell—where  
*your prison is walking,*  
Desperado.

# Jeffrey L. Johnson

## *The Stones Will Cry*

I don't remember much about my childhood  
except that the stones would not be quiet.

I know now that rocks press through earth  
everywhere, turning to soil for planting,

to bricks for building, to mud on boots of soldiers,  
to dust on the skin of the invisible poor.

I don't remember much about my childhood  
except that rocks shouted louder than threats

that echoed off stone-walled alleys of Jerusalem,  
louder than warnings in the fields around Bethlehem.

I do remember my sister, frozen in a gas mask,  
and I, beside her, bent to a transistor radio,

behind taped windows, when sirens screamed,  
and rocks exploded with voices like a mob.

I don't remember much about my childhood except  
that stones sang from chiseled walls of the temple,

and portends of war washed the holy city  
in water and blood, and father snapped at mother

before he touched her cheek and closed his eyes,  
and the stones fell silent for a moment,

the loud-as-hell stones, that kept father  
from practicing habits of tenderness, were still.

**Prophet**

Eat this scroll and speak to the house of Israel;  
see this vision and dance for exhausted exiles;  
hold my hand and lead the wandering children  
out of slavery toward land prepared for them.

They will arrive by-and-by, but you must go back  
to the word and eat it together with your tears.  
Be satisfied, prophet, with the words I give you,  
and with the meditations of your heavy heart.

Be fed by the hunger within. Swallow my word,  
and a loaf will become as a pounding stone to you.

Run the edge of a sharp sword across your scalp.  
Divide the shavings to the fire and to the wind.  
March to mount Zion, my holy hill, and there  
raise your loud voice to accelerate my anger.

Assemble the children with the sound of singing;  
tell them my fury over the evil of their days.  
Clap your hands and stamp your feet, prophet.  
Splash their idols with your breath and warn  
that mountains of gold are not sufficient ransom.

Chariots will not save the people from my word,  
Because my word is a vacuum drawing the cherub  
messengers to the wind, with the glory of my house.

As you go, prophet, I promise you a companion,  
an affliction to go with you on your weary way:  
A thorn in your side shall go with you, I promise.  
You shall pray for pain—your only friend—to stay.

**Martin Crispine**  
**Juwa**  
*Disguise*

## ***Disguise***

Her lunch hours are spent in the classroom  
Bowed, and her face buried between her knees  
She is not herself lately  
For she lives a life not her own  
As I know her from the previous term  
'What has gotten into her?' I think to myself  
As I peek onto her through the classroom window  
She has suffered a long lonely fall into a deep abyss  
With endless waves of air suffocating  
And blanketing her from reaching out  
To love and feel loved  
To remember smiling again

"I am hurting, tell not a soul  
I am a broken pot, show no one my fragments  
I am empty, look not inside my deep bowl  
For fake confidence is a stench I yield  
I am in pain, like crying rain drops  
Hitting and bouncing off a window"

**Rebecca Katz**

*Galesburg at Night*

## ***Galesburg at Night***

Under the full moon  
churches fill this silent town  
praying as it sleeps  
stones shaped to be heaven bound

Rainbows on the snow  
fallen from stained glass angels  
sentries watching the stars  
believing nothing changes

Rattled only by  
trains ripping along steel rails  
tested by distance  
forward resolve never fails

Pinprick in the dark  
a point in an endless line  
among trains and fields  
this night town is lost to time

## *June*

With the sky for company, drunk half-way  
up a fire escape, I remember June, heavy and blue as any other  
thunderhead. I could never hold her gaze for long.

She also came in on the graveyard  
shift of an ambulance.

Though, by now, every back road to hell is  
a raised ridge on her forearm.

From the shake of the metal transport to  
cages of dull corners and stainless steel,  
fake plastic wood cannot reverberate with  
with echoes of the forest. Even the hope that keeps us human  
is stolen. Kneeling at the night aids' desk I had to believe  
there are places worse than locked doors and faceless walls.  
In here we are animals and that is consolation.

While I could not stop slipping away  
stolen markers to scrawl demands  
on the wall (fuck the police), and the shadow  
next door showered with an angel and a demon,  
both telling him to rip out his eyes  
so as to see, her silence  
should have been a warning. A mercy though  
as even the phlebotomist  
whimpered. We only wanted  
to tear his skin to see the gears underneath  
unable to believe  
a human could do this, or even  
that he knew anything about blood  
pale as he was.

Predictable as thunder after lightning, after ripping silence  
the soft rains of June slick down her hot skin,  
arm sliced from elbow to wrist by the sharp edge of a bible  
blood lost in the Hebrew's; desert 18 years, going on 40.  
Artery or vein? This is important as  
only one leads to the heart. Even with the sun locked  
behind the steel mesh that passes for windows here, everything burns.  
I always panic now when I can't see  
the sky. This harm was learned at five,  
from older girls who knew how to keep holy  
the sacrifice to a goddess who thirsts for her own  
blood. Such prophecies we hand down.

The temperature is under lock so as to dampen  
the days in heat and break  
the night with cold. After they took back her clothes,  
the ceaseless guard would not yield a second paper gown to cover  
her feet. Covering was limited: a woman bleeds for three days.  
Anything could kill and here, no one is allowed to bleed by choice.

Even a cruel god gives gifts:  
What June receives  
keeps her slumped against the wall  
hours in isolation under the camera eye.  
It's not like we can hold each other anyway.

God knows the end here is always  
brutal. The earth will never accept a cease-fire. I left and still  
each summer, when the heat cracks the blood off the door frame,  
I long for June.

## **GOD**

You love the ones who forget themselves  
in wells and in deserts. In the rain  
my feet slip out from under me.  
I can see the earth shock lit  
from here. Far off stage lights  
throw the oceans and continents  
into place. The bankers are in the sun  
howling. They cannot count faces  
anymore. A sculptor breaks chisels  
in hopes his son will come back  
without a triangle folded flag or  
metal bones. Life inevitably folds  
in on itself. Hills roll up in grass  
to hide from the sky which smells  
of burning metal. I live  
on a cracked skull, the earth's  
core. I feel it swell but you  
have gone numb. What I have lost  
is painted red and smeared  
across the streets of cities

I will never see. The body can escape  
where the mind cannot.  
Remember the dawn where  
we met, where you promised  
the sun's warmth to stop  
my shaking? Remember the river  
where you held me up until  
I forgot how to breathe  
without you? I thought I heard  
you singing through the wall.  
It was only wind and silent  
want. Even hope dies  
eventually: caged a tiger  
will pace until it starves.  
Do you know how lonely  
it can get here? I am still  
cold from the flood that  
carried me here. When  
I look at the night  
I am still wanting for fire,  
pillars of cloud, and you.

**Lawrence Kessenich**

*Stars*

## **Stars**

Sweet gum leaves are my favorite. Smooth, waxy,  
star-shaped, they glow in the sun on a tree across the street.  
It's magical to watch stars bud, unfold and grow,  
as if some wizard boy, some Johnny Appleseed of stars  
had wandered by and dropped a seed from outer space.

Somehow, I feel safe beneath that tree, as I feel safe  
beneath a canopy of stars, its five-pointed leaves  
reaching out to me like hands. I run my fingers across  
the soft surface of a single leaf, wonder if I can wish  
upon a star that's rooted in the earth instead of far-off sky.

Lately (climate change?) the leaves begin to turn only  
near Thanksgiving, their dark green gradually giving way  
to red as Christmas approaches. Their openness and color—  
lit by a streetlight when afternoon darkness settles in—  
signal the festive season. When a deep red leaf drops

on early snow, the contrast is startling, the opposite of  
a light star against a black night sky. And when they all  
fall, a pool of red beneath gray branches, they slowly  
turn brown and then disappear beneath the snow,  
like a galaxy fading in the cool depths of space.

# Sydney Lea

*Through a Window*

## ***Through a Window***

I read a poem each Sunday Our pastor calls this *Ministry of Verse* I try to find a poem not just she but anyone will get A short poem if I can for fear someone like Timmy who isn't all that into poems to begin with may complain

I try to select some lines that represent what I believe and more or less what the people there believe I have friends too outside the church who cannot believe that I in fact believe say in miracles They ask can you really believe they're true

exactly Poems cannot be exact I'm thinking how I'll sound My vanity lives on I don't read my own poems which grow shorter as I grow old I once imagined I must go on and on to get at things I thought I knew but I know more than ever

I know nothing now No my friends I don't believe exactly in miracles I believe inexactly I see Mary Magdalene just for instance in that garden quite unclearly Still I see her I see Tess as well who's married to Timmy

and seems confused Well she *is* confused Dementia has her down Her husband's there He holds her hand Timmy holds things together I've thought at times like anybody I couldn't hold my own yet I'm alive I hear a bird sing one small massive wonder

## ***Eye on the Sparrow***

Tiny, almost an anti-weight,  
if it blew off my palm in the wind I might not even notice.  
Dashing against the backporch glass,  
the bird fell onto logs I'd stacked there, or rather heaped.  
I loaded our wood more neatly out in the shed  
but this jumble of lumber reminded me  
my life lacked grace.

Wind didn't kill the bird but misprision.  
My oldest daughter had just given birth to twins,  
and I was thinking of them of course  
when I saw the sparrow. Spring's a hopeful season.  
I'd like to imagine new beginnings,  
not ponder for instance the self-styled Christian crusaders  
I heard about lately, devoted to killing police,

to launching Armageddon.  
They claim these are days of Antichrist,  
and I could almost agree— for other reasons.  
Thou shalt not murder is among the Commandments,  
I'd remind the crusaders,  
all nine of whom live in Detroit,  
a place near hell in abiding Depression.

Days are bad worldwide,  
though in gospel God's eye takes in the smallest sparrow.  
Vile hooligans among us storm  
over once having had a president who was other than white.  
We're all human, and none of us saved,  
and –as the old Greek said–  
it might have been best if we'd never been born.

And yet to imagine a world devoid of hope  
is too easy and lazy, I decide.  
Outside the promising odors fly in on the wind:  
damp mulch, old ice, wet mud and sap.  
The sugar-makers hope for a few more gallons,  
I hope for a few more years, to be with the children.  
I open the stove and sweep the bird in.

**Deborah Leipziger**

*Altar*

## ***Altar***

Begin with stillness. Summon  
Courage. Kavanah.  
Deliverance.  
Essence. A beginning.  
Forsythia and the flowers of spring, blossoms, purple iris for the table, tulips so pink  
    They edge into blue.  
Gather your dearest, the lonely within and without.  
Hunger. Bring your hunger, your fast.  
Indeed, there is much to recall and to hold here, to heal.  
Just about everything calls out to you to be done and you must choose the things most  
    carefully.  
Kindness, stay kind. This is important. Bring your  
Love of storytelling. Bring  
Mystery. Mastery. All this is  
Necessary.  
Open to the sacred, to the simple.  
Pausing, pass over the trifling annoyances, the broken, the missing. Make room for the  
Quiet places that long to be seen.  
Remember the stories of your past. Conjure up spring and salvation.  
Sacrifice those things you no longer need. Remember the  
Temples lost and burning. In Paris. In Jerusalem. In yourself. Reach out to the  
Universe calling out to you.  
Verify, purify your heart.  
Wake up to the pain of those around your table.  
EXonerate those that have not partaken, not delivered, not arrived. Those who seek.  
Yearn for justice and freedom. Bring your  
Zeal to the celebration. Bring yourself, your hashtags, your deep desire to connect.  
    Hold and contain the past, the possible, time no longer linear

## ***Women's March***

We are the peace builders

We are the future

We are NOW

We are the mothers who march for the disappeared each week on the square

We are students and teachers, mothers, and daughters

We are active pacifists

We are lovers, nurturers

We are the granddaughters of the witches they did not burn

We are appalled

We are radiant

We are suffragettes, story tellers

We are nasty

We are pure

We are spring, winter, summer

We will not falter

We are poets, painters

We are the muses

Your hate has brought us here.

We are the women in covered wagons nursing babies

We are Eve, Miriam, Deborah  
We are Anna Karenina and Hester Prynne  
We are judges, rabbis  
In our pockets we have change.  
In our handbags  
We have cheerios and dried cranberries.  
We are immigrants  
We are explorers, map makers, travelers  
We are terra incognita  
We are Latinas  
We are every letter of the alphabet  
We are gypsies  
We are Amerigo Vespucci naming America  
We are navigating the straights of Magellan  
We are sisters, resisters  
We are "homeful"  
We are hopeful  
We are Hannah Senesh parachuting into enemy territory  
We are the resistance

# Frannie Lindsay

## *morning*

but then there is always  
the square bed of sun  
that the east-facing window delivers  
in time for the dog to lie down  
basking beneath the piano  
in only herself

and there is the piano too  
with its horselike kindheartedness  
its sleek peace  
and in the next room  
which never has needed a door

the radio turned down low  
by the lamp and the freesia  
on the small dented table  
speaking its terrible stories  
that sound at this volume  
like late summer insects signaling  
their million-year-old acceptance  
that this is the end of their lives

and there is always the woman  
who hasn't been raped in over forty years  
making her coffee her oatmeal making  
the home that no one can ever  
make for her

*for Denny*

***The End of the Walk to Bethlehem***

It has been days since we have slept  
or spoken of the rumors fluttering  
unchecked as moths among our lamps  
while we rinsed the sheep  
and latched them, damp still, in their pens  
the dreary morning we set out,

and we want only to turn back,  
and to believe again  
in nothing, but we see the outline of  
a stable, almost real, hunched  
against the desert cold as if  
unworthy of the star

that lights its roof, so we press on,  
now stumbling, now holding one another  
up, and draw as near the cradle as the ox  
will let us, and set down at last  
our gilded weariness.

## ***Clear Summer Night***

His clocks get put away. His dinner plates  
packed in a friend's car for the Goodwill.  
The crockery, no longer argued over, mum  
in all its cabinet-dark. The pepper grinder  
filled with bitter gravel. The wedding photos  
boxed beside the Christmas ornaments,  
their childhood lint. Arrangements made  
for hauling off the wheelchair. He stayed  
until a voice he knew he'd know  
said he could stay no more. Then  
he set forth simply, keys he never copied  
stashed between his philodendron  
and his books. His life was such  
a raucous, happy tenant. Now his body  
shines with vacancy: shades raised,  
mail brought in, leftovers  
tossed out. The exhausted kin go home  
on flat, safe turnpikes. The moon is new.

***February 6 a.m.***

If you wake  
because the falling snow  
is finally beginning  
to sound like harpsichord music—

each string so exactly wound  
the moon needs to practice somewhere else  
before shining upon it,

and the painstaking rosewood scrollwork,  
and the tense buds of anemone inlay,  
and the solemn, confident legs—

remember how much  
he wanted to leave you  
the one he built.

Even the chosen sunrise  
has taken years  
to get this good.

# Valerie Lute

## *Thanh Ha, Vietnam*

In just a few smooth moves, the old woman shapes the lump of clay into a narrow vase, curves the lip like an open flower. Her daughter, like generations before her, uses her bare feet to turn the wheel with steady kicks, steady like the bombs that once fell on the nearby mountains, shaking these walls and driving people from their homes. The craters are invisible here, among the bustle of village life. Nobody lights incense in the central temple. It is an empty gray memory of all those who left.

### ***Singing of Migration***

The whales grew feet and walked into Target. The pod swished their tails, knocking over papery summer hats, beach umbrellas and discounted Easter candy. They migrated through juniors' clothing, trampling polyester dresses and sheer t-shirts.

A lady with a stroller screamed when she saw their silver, shimmering bodies that seemed to pulse under the fluorescent lights. But me, I never saw anything more beautiful.

# Marjorie Maddox

## *Extra*

“The bread you store up belongs to the hungry;  
the cloak that lies in your chest belongs to the  
naked; the gold you have hidden in the ground  
belongs to the poor.”

— St. Basil the Great

But it is already swirling—  
those uneaten crusts of bread  
from my kids’ PB & Js—  
not toward the wide-  
opened mouth of the nearest poor—  
but down the drain and hell-bent on the black hole  
of the disposal’s gnashing teeth.

But what of pita, focaccia, challah, baguette,  
tortilla, ciabatta, chapati, naan pulled steaming  
from ovens, or stacked in bakeries, or ...

And this old sweater with the wine stain, too ugly  
for the dirtiest beggar? And the basket upon basket  
of unmatched socks could they, too, be multiplied  
into catfish and brioche? What of the paint-splattered sheets,  
the too-small baby clothes, the forever-tight jeans?

Only the soiled, the torn, the outgrown,  
the discarded; only the unneeded bagged up  
in garbage bags for Goodwill or American  
Rescue Workers, or the all-time favorite  
and always convenient Salvation  
Army, which will, without judgment,  
pick up right inside my white picket fence

about the same spot where I have buried my gold.

**April**

“is the cruelest month, breeding  
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing  
Memory and desire...”

T. S. Elliot, *The Wasteland*

Yesterday, dull flat dirt,  
but today the yellow bobs  
of daffodils—and lilacs (!)  
lovely in their Sunday best—  
obviously decked out for Easter,  
which has called in sick, cloistered  
instead behind all that isn't  
what it was: absentee  
stained glass, sealed tight  
against the world; prayer  
videotaped and piped in  
to the still living, now quarantined  
behind brick, wood, and stone, behind  
straw that won't spin into the glorious  
gold of daffodils! O lavender,  
petaled with Spring and resurrection,  
give us your memory and desire,  
the Ordinary Time of suburban dirt  
and city gardens, readying again  
(in these days of desolation)  
for one more fragile miracle,  
one more fragrant bloom  
of everlasting hope.

# Kiri Manookin

*Fireflies*

## ***Fireflies***

I caught a sliver of  
unhurried lightning tonight.  
Sitting  
still  
on a nature-quiet mountain path  
breathing in  
damp flower-scented summer air  
swirling with fireflies.  
One left a little trail  
on my fingernail  
and  
for a moment  
I lit up, too.  
Cross-legged on that  
darkened and hushed path  
like a child  
hands pressed  
head bowed  
I offered  
giddy  
sacred  
gratitude for bugs.

# Fred Marchant

*Solesmes*



***my lucid american dream***

*part one*

it was California always  
always California my back  
was to the land the land  
was pushing me to the edge  
a force flowing to an ocean  
I could only see in the offing  
but not find beneath my feet  
so I didn't know how high up  
I was or how steep the cliff  
but I felt cold wind blowing  
up from below saw there  
were mountains to my right  
meaning they were north of me  
and those hillsides stepping  
down to the ocean meant  
I was south of the bay with  
no idea how I got there but  
as I turned for more bearings  
I caught a glimpse of the sheer  
misery that waited for me  
saw the sharp merciless gray  
stone and felt in my bones  
the land behind me the whole  
damned engine of it pushing  
me out the door a bum's rush  
they were heaving me over-  
board saying I would have to  
go sooner or later so why  
not let go free-fall and drop  
down in a head-first but I  
could also see how that head  
would ricochet off the sharp  
outcrops all the way down

and my heart tightened into  
 a small red fist of meat while  
 my left hand reached back  
 as fast it could and as far over  
 as my shoulder would let me  
 so I could find a cleft or a crack  
 or a root that would help me  
 resist gravity and the slide over  
 I was trying to avoid and save  
 the life I had hoped for and not  
 lose it to something as insane  
 as the landmass of a whole  
 nation that turned against

*part two*

me when I saw that the shadow  
 of my left hand held a long  
 iron spike as if lifted from  
 a railroad sleeper, those ties  
 that space the rails and hold  
 them in place and as I knew  
 I was dreaming so still had  
 some say in the matter I buried  
 that iron spike in the rockface  
 and dragged myself back onto  
 the planet so that when I woke  
 to write this down and saw  
 the lilacs outside my window  
 and heard a spring shower  
 ending that unlike the beads  
 of water that had formed  
 on the tips of everything I  
 loved and believed in I knew  
 as well as I knew anything  
 in my life I did not have to fall

**Nikki Marrone**

*Tectonic Turbulations*

## ***Tectonic Turbulations***

*They say that you need to learn to love yourself before you can love another...*

*But the first lesson of love you experience is always from your mother.*

There are places in this world where the earth cannot learn to love itself.  
Places where it tears itself in two.  
A continental drift that leaves scars that even time will not heal.  
Places where mirrored reflections of love crack and splinter.  
Before sinking into the depths where only despair seems to rise.  
The fire inside whose only desire is to burn brighter,  
To make the burden lighter;  
Is dulled and darkened,  
By the turned backs and bowed heads  
Of the children whose life it strived to give.

What was given freely,  
Was snatched harshly from outstretched hands.  
What was grown,  
Was wrenched from the heart until it shattered.  
The earth cried:  
"I am no salvaged wasteland for you to set a light.  
No beacon to the damned,  
To lead you through the night.  
You may take all that I can give.  
But if I die, then you will no longer live!"

She shows you visions of your future,  
As lightning strikes across the sky!  
The tides begin to rise!  
And the flowers start to wilt.  
To devastate your mother is a child's greatest sin.  
Though a mother's greatest virtue is to forgive.

The time has come to make a change.  
But change cannot come to pass until we learn to love.  
Give back all that we took,  
And give her time to grow.

There are places in this world where even the earth cannot learn to love itself.

# Carolyn Martin

## *Step by Step*

I do not ask to see the distant scene – one step enough for me.  
– John Henry Newman, “Lead, Kindly Light”

If it were only the black leather gloves  
molding in a pile of leaves or the cell phone  
on a freezer shelf, I could cope.  
Even unsent birthday cards filed away  
with tax receipts are bearable.

More alarming now, I cannot predict  
when I'll forget how to turn  
the oven on or write a check  
or why the front door key won't fit.  
There are the bills I thought I paid.  
RSVPs never sent. The names of friends  
I've known for years? They're on a shelf somewhere.

I need to write things down.  
The keys are in the kitchen drawer  
with contacts for emergencies.  
My will is in the firebox.  
I prefer white roses over pink.  
My favorite hymn's a prayer for Light.  
Distant scenes fade.  
One step through darkness will suffice.

***You do not have to be good.***

– Mary Oliver, “Wild Geese”

Ain't that a kick in the head!  
After all the bunk about straights and narrows,  
wrongs and rights, confessionals  
where venial sins are laughable,  
it's come down to this: we've been duped.  
Friday fish, forty fasting days, crownings  
in the Mary month of May; rosaries,  
callused knees, indulgences that smudge  
our sins: they don't add up to good.  
Neither do tidy rooms, top grades in school,  
nor mandatory modesty.

So let's delete the snake behind the apple tree  
and every bite of stale theology.  
Let's resurrect original wildness  
and ramble through valleys scratched and scarred,  
down unquiet streams, across raging fields  
of blooms disguised as weeds.  
Let's celebrate every fleshy flaw,  
each mistaken thought that turns out true.  
Let's race wild geese to the nearest star,  
cheering on imperfect  
nakedness with disheveled glee.

**D.S. Martin**

*Rain*

## ***Rain***

Even angels love rain

the way it

knows when to curl into haystack  
clouds & when to let go spattering  
leaves & grass trickling along each  
inner stem

the way it

splatters dry dirt & loudly clatters  
like hooves on tin roofs

the way it

almost arrives then blows by high  
on a dry wind that removes what  
moisture remains driving the prophet  
to a raven-circled brook

the way it

comes when it comes disrupting the dust  
which puffs into the air & then  
drops in dampness merging in mud  
congealing together

the way it

declares your dependence little one  
on the wind's whims & divine design

the way it

cuts ravines & reminds you how  
your planet needs to be washed clean  
& how without watering would  
never grow anything

# Julio Martínez Mesanza

## ***Bellini: Madonna***

I feel the soul can never be extinguished;  
up to the point of tears sometimes I feel it,  
as in Santa Maria la Gloriosa  
where the sweet mother was waiting for me  
after I had spent so much time in the dark  
beneath the abstract, unforgiveable cold.  
An empty space, blank walls — there are places  
where I am barely able to exist;  
nevertheless, I know that one image  
can preserve the true light, the true gold.

## ***Madonna de Bellini***

Y siento que es inextinguible el alma;  
hasta las lágrimas lo siento a veces,  
como en santa maria la gloriosa,  
cuando la dulce madre me esperaba  
después de estar oculto tanto tiempo  
bajo el abstracto e imperdonable frío.  
un espacio vacío, muros blancos:  
solo malvivo en sitios diferentes,  
y, sin embargo, sé que alguna imagen  
guarda la luz y el oro verdaderos.

(Translated by Don Bogen)

***Mar Saba***

Give me words that are effortless and clear  
to explain the soul's simplicity  
before things came to leave their marks on it,  
before it fell in love with its own mistakes.  
Since I'm entering the desert, give me strangeness  
so I can see what's simple with new eyes:  
the darkness separated from the light,  
there was the night and then there was the day.

***Mar Saba***

Dame palabras fáciles y claras  
para explicar la sencillez del alma  
antes de ser rozada por las cosas,  
cuando el alma no amaba equivocarse.  
Pues al desierto voy, dame lo extraño,  
que es ver por vez primera lo sencillo:  
la tiniebla y la luz se separaron;  
la noche vino y vino la mañana.

## ***Gino***

Whoever saves one life saves the world.  
And there are many who will be rescued.  
Gino will continue on in secret  
because good works are undercover now.  
Safe passage hidden there inside the frame  
like a mezuzah in its little case.  
The wings that carry it down the white roads  
of Tuscany are the wings of angels.  
Daughter of Nazareth, consider him  
as you look down from Mt. Carmel, which is  
watchtower, fort, and unexpected garden.  
Daughter of Nazareth, protect us.

## ***Gino***

Quien una vida salva, salva el mundo.  
Y muchas van a ser las rescatadas.  
Gino lo mantendrá siempre en secreto,  
porque el bien se hace, pero no se dice.  
Salvoconductos en el cuadro ocultos,  
como las mezuzás en sus cajitas  
Son ángeles las alas que lo llevan  
por los blancos caminos de Toscana.  
Niña de Nazareth, que lo contemplas  
desde el monte Karmel, que es atalaya,  
imprevisto jardín y fortaleza.  
Niña de Nazareth, que nos defiendes.

Note: Gino Bartali (1914-2000) was a champion Italian cyclist who risked his life protecting Jews during World War II, conveying travel documents concealed in the frame of his bicycle. Credited with helping to save some eight hundred Jewish families, he is recognized as one of the Righteous among the Nations at the Yad Vashem memorial in Israel.

### ***Ghar El Melh***

The boats driven up onto the shore.  
The enormous cargo ships run aground.  
The waves moving parallel to the coast.  
And stranger than those, the waves of your life.  
The alienated wind from the southeast  
that could pick up and carry off the soul.  
And the light with which to see so much chaos,  
the guiltless light from the beginning of time.

### ***Ghar El Melh***

Los barcos empujados a la playa.  
Los cargueros enormes encallados.  
Los olas paralelas a la costa.  
Las olas más extrañas de tu vida.  
El viento enajenado del sureste  
que podría arrastrar consigo el alma.  
Y la luz para ver tanto desorden,  
la luz sin culpa del primer segundo.

# Janet McCann

## ***The Autumn Name of God***

Color, said the nun, is the autumn  
name of God  
and his winter name is Silence

and here is how it is for us:

we have only color and silence left  
the leaves burn beautifully in their slow dying  
the wind through the branches  
makes a music like a lullaby  
it carries back the names of other seasons

autumn is the last color of the house

framed there at the end of the path  
amidst brilliant oaks and maples  
we don't see its peeling paint,  
the way the shutter hangs by a hinge

reds and yellows blow across the path,  
pile up against the wall

soon, bare branches and snow

the coming of silence  
God's final name

***Watching the Expert Mother***

She scoops three perfect  
balls of ice cream,  
flips them into three frilled paper cups.  
There they sit like a logic problem.  
She hands out spoons.

In the park she swings her two  
just high enough,  
I'm afraid to push mine higher. He whines,  
calls for Mary Fran to swing him. She does

and I stand back, watch the emphatic shove  
of hands against the weatherstained  
and splintery wooden seat. Push, arc and shriek,  
Push, arc and shriek.  
Mary Fran's arms are tan and slim,  
not thick like mine, her sandaled feet are swift.

Going home, she clips the safetyseats  
and seatbelts smartly shut, nobody gets pinched.  
The Ford drives like a Mercedes, Saint Anthony  
bobs and dips as she veers to the inside lane.

# M.B. McLatchey

## **AFTERLIVES**

Only faces in little boxes now; blinking and peering  
into a starless space, not knowing what to do –

except perhaps, wave. Our host asks each box:  
*What's new with you?* We talk, in turns.

We share the *virtual part* – meaning  
the *essence*. It's lovely. How this half-body

huddle forces us to talk; how we conform,  
like grafted stalks, to a new light source.

Dante insists our afterlives will be the *now eternal*.  
I study my husband's framed face unselfconsciously.

No one can see me gazing at our years.  
My sons, I see, have become men whose eyes

are equable and clear. Time lapses freeze, in pixel images,  
expressions like true selves they made as toddlers.

On TV, the Pope delivers the Mass to empty seats.  
How alone he looks – in spite of the live stream.

No pilgrims, no Vatican City festooned with flowers;  
only police to hold the barricades. And yet, the numbers say,

more watched and listened to the liturgy than ever  
attended. On sofas that sag, on laptops, in drive-thru caravans

for bread and wine. An insistence on right seasons if only to prove  
we are different from our dogs. We hear a whistle too.

# R.S. Mengert

## ***The First and Final Vision***

*(after Frida Kahlo's Moses)*

The world is too round  
today. We can feel it

spin. We need the hand, the rain.  
We need a hammer

to set the stars in motion.  
Eternal child, floating

in the secret waters of the earth,  
forever born, forever dead,

your naked hands embrace  
the darkness

in their everlasting tomb  
of birth.

Breath, dust, flames of vision  
held up to the night

gather like the surge of molecules  
that sparks the blazing of the sun.

Light our way now, we  
who are lost

in cloud, in desert, in the clang  
of swords and armor,

you, who know the fire first hand  
and live.

# Philip Metres

## ***Dawn Prayer***

*Lift up your heads, O gates;  
rise up, you ancient portals,  
that the king of glory may enter.*

Psalm 24: 7

Let the bleak & angled  
light enter  
the earth & its barbed mangle.  
Its power

will alter you, who  
could admit  
no light, you, entombed  
like a twig

encased in ice, as night  
begins to flee  
the slowly emerging  
trees, you who see

death, death in all things  
incubating,  
& not its blessed  
opposite.

### ***The Trees in My Chest***

Again, the dream: I need to leave,  
yet each door I open opens  
another room, another door.  
The pen in open. Is this made  
possible by someone whose traces  
hover in the absence? The seen  
in absence. I'm aching for you,  
dear architect. The further back  
through history we look, the more  
faces fade—a room in a house  
we cannot see, nor imagine ourselves  
out of. December's advancing dark.  
The ember in December. I can't  
breathe in this room I guest,  
you ghost. The inverted asthmatic  
trees in my chest burn to bloom,  
& must relearn each time to rise  
from the ground, & to return.  
The urn in return. & the rue.

## ***February Prayer***

What is this sudden reaching?  
In bone-white landscape,  
my gloved fingers radiate  
a signal pain, crying out in warning,

that even the boughs of the mighty  
oaks can crack in the death-chill,  
and call down its wild thunder  
& cleft the roof, clattering our skulls,

trying to wake us. Precarious  
prating about the nothing. Is prayer  
a kind of blind reaching—

toward a book on a shelf, an unlit room  
where a child is sleeping—  
beyond the circumference of self?



Jayla Tillison  
Caught



## ***Epistle***

Here is a letter I want to write: catbirds in the truck patch,  
slender and silken beside tomato plants, sense of shade.

To tell you of nasturtiums and drought, the elderly cat now  
arthritic and skinny but enduring his life of kibbles and naps.

To describe what I see because what I feel is too much like  
the sound of a small woodpecker hesitant at a hollow branch.

Also like a mountain above a desert in a place I've never been  
or the caves six days' walk from the city of Aleppo.

I want to write to you that this is the world you know—  
and the world you do not know—and tell you not to fear.

I suppose by now you've heard about the drowned refugees and  
the many forms hunger can take, you who have never hungered.

When you are old as I am old, the facts will not shock you.

I want to write to you that this is life, the world you know  
and the world you do not know, and tell you not to fear.

But you are young and some days even the clouds in their  
blue-white distance, calm as barges, seem to portend threat.

There is no new terror, loved one, only damages we do  
to one another and ourselves daily, and call them unheard of.

Unheard because listening can be so difficult.

Well, then. Listen to windchimes, to bus tires on rainy streets,  
the baleful owl, cooing doves and new mothers. Listen,

instead of reading what it is I have written.  
Instead of shivering, lonesome in the dark.

## ***Irritants***

Edge-wise we paddle shallows we could walk  
but float, canoe slips more softly than we would

just past dawn when herons hunt along shore  
perch in the slim branches of walnut trees

what the birds remind us of: quarter-rests on  
the staff of a march played in high school band

snake strike, glider, Cretaceous-era theropod  
agile in hip, leg, and neck, fierce beak and bark

one growls at us as our craft drifts near  
dog-like caw, flap, momentum, moves out

over the smooth-rippled lake shingled in early  
sun while we recognize ourselves as irritants

disrupters who, multiplied by millions, enact  
the role, disturb another shore stalker although

we thought we came in peace, peace being  
a concept we may not ever understand

## ***Your Eclipse***

How it was, that year, when the moon  
aligned with the sun—almost—  
so that all the maple trees' leaf shadows  
made layers of crescents on the path  
and it was you who noticed, delighted,  
just as a breeze dizzied the patterns,  
repeating, reshuffling. Many moons.

You noticed, too, how the birds quieted  
and, briefly, that crickets roused themselves.  
The alignment was incomplete here;  
people commented that it never got dark.  
You, however, heard the dusky moments  
at noon, saw the part-elided sun amid  
fluttering leaves at your feet. You shone.

# Rhonda Miska

## ***Prayer for Deliverance***

*"Then Jesus asked him, 'What is your name?'*

*He replied, 'My name is Legion; for we are many.'" -- Mark 5:9*

He is my age -- or younger? --

but walks with a cane, his gait halting and labored.

Crew cuts reveals a white, snaking scar curving around his head.

Muscular and stocky, his right arm thick with rope-like muscles

but his left arm ends at his elbow, interrupted by shrapnel.

Now back on the other side of the sea

he still lives among the tombs of his buddies who were flown home in caskets

now buried in Arlington.

Neither painkiller nor anti-depressants nor a constant string of cigarettes have the strength to subdue the darkness -- the dull ache of day, the gripping nightmares of sleep.

It is my third day at the clinic; he recognizes me and wants to flirt with me

but he can't remember my name.

"Sorry," he says. "Ever since they blew out part of my brain in Iraq, I forget shit sometimes."

I nod, say nothing, and do not start to weep until I am safely home.

I imagine him as a baby -- tiny, perfect, hot from the womb of his mother and the cosmos.

I want to embrace him, hold him tight against the solidness of my body until his shaking stops and he sleeps in heavenly peace.

I want him to hear God singing over his own shouting. I want to send the memories and images of sand, camouflage, Humvees, explosions, mutilated bodies into the molten earth, the deep, salty waters where they can be lost in Her vastness, absorbed into the Whole where they can compost and decay, transformed into rich, silty, generative soil from which grow June-blooming magnolias, tall stalks of wheat swaying in the Minnesota breeze, migrating flocks of geese.

I want to take the shards of his story, to bury this brokenness and bind his wounds with perfumed oil and soft linen.

to call back the humanity that was boot-camped out of him.

to cast out the cloudiness of brain-injured thinking: call in a whole body, a quiet mind.

to whisper to him the promise that despite the wandering right eye which betrays massive head trauma and the pins in his knee, there is still a heart inside him that was loved into being by She who holds us in rippling waves of grace.

to quiet his howls so he can hear that heart beating, the ongoing miracle of existence.

I imagine him running along Memorial Drive at sunset, sleeping dreamlessly in a wife's arms, singing throaty songs of resurrection at Sunday Mass.

I want to send him home to his family, to proclaim with wonder the story of descent and return from hell, of being raised from the dead; the story of a demon cast out.

## ***Nicaraguan Suspice, July 2018***

The Skype image of your smiling face is pixelated by the poor WiFi connection between Leon and Chicago. It is juxtaposed with the prayer card image of Blessed Stanley Rother taped inside my notebook. An artist's rendering of the Oklahoma priest martyred in Guatemala in 1981: I was an infant and you were in the heady days of *el Triunfo de la Revolucion Sandinista*, the revolution which has soured into a nightmarish reincarnation for Somoza's dictatorship.

My eyes move from your image to his. Blessed Stanley's simple alb and stole, your white guayabera; Blessed Stanley's dark beard, your clean shaven face; Blessed Stanley's voice now silenced, yours warm and frank as you speak in Spanglish of the barricades built of *adoquinas*, the *encapuchados* terrorizing Managua's neighborhoods with the AK-47s they call *akas*, the now-empty house where I used to live in the barrio whose residents have fled to Costa Rica like so many others.

Will your image - dear *padre* whose name I don't write here for the sake of your and your confreres' safety - one day become an icon?

Will we one day intone *presente* as we life a white wooden cross emblazoned with your name?

Will your *acompanamiento* lead you to the Golgotha of a Central American torture chamber shared with so many *desaparecidos*?

Hear my confession: I want you in the green safety of ordinary time, not the passion red of Good Friday.

Though I have impressed upon fresh-faced undergraduates the gravity of King's final preaching about the view from the mountaintop,

Though I have screened Raul Julia as Archbishop Romero for many a suburban parish small group,

Though I have gathered in cathedrals to light candles for Ita, Maura, Dorothy, Jean,

Though I have knelt in prayer in San Salvador's UCA to reverence the slain Jesuits, their housekeeper, and her daughter.

I do not want your name added to this martyr's litany. I confess I want you as a centenarian priest who dies in his sleep, not gunned down by *paramilitares* with dark impunity.

*Dios de los pobres, Dios de los oprimidos*, take my memory, my understanding, my entire will. Convert me to bear faithfully the falling of a beloved grain of wheat.

# Guna Moran

(translated by Bibekananda Choudhury)

## **MOTHER FATHER**

Two rivers flow along merged together  
From the confluence  
Two streams become one  
And flow along

A God given life is possible  
Only with the help of confluence

Except the two dilapidated dykes  
The river do not have a house  
To call its own  
Like the river do not have a favourite dress  
Except rubbish skull of wilted tree

River knows only to carry water  
It can't control fish  
The scion of water  
River talks to the sky daily  
The fish seeks asylum in the holes  
The river accompanies the fish to the sea  
Fish moves upstream  
The river current trains the fish of heroism  
The fish fails to learn and  
fills the stomach of the egrets

Fish do not even understand  
The value of water  
Neither  
The value of river

Still  
River flows along  
Merges onto the sea  
Leaving behind  
To the scion of water  
A school of benevolence

# আই-পিতাই

গুণ মৰাণ

দুখন নৈ এক হৈ বৈ যায়  
মোহনা পৰাই  
দুটি সোঁতে এটি হৈ গতি কৰে

মোহনাৰ সহযোগতহে  
ঈশ্বৰৰ প্ৰদত্ত জীৱন সম্ভৱ

ভগা-ছিগা দুটি মথাউৰিৰ বাহিৰে  
নিজৰ বুলিবলৈ নৈৰ এটি ঘৰ নাই  
যিদৰে জেং-জাবৰ, মৰাগছৰ লাওখোলাৰ বাহিৰে  
নৈৰ প্ৰিয় পোছাক নাই

নৈয়ে কেৱল পানী কঢ়িয়াব জানে  
পানীৰ পুত্ৰ মাছক শাসন কৰিব নোৱাৰে

নৈয়ে নিতৌ আকাশৰে কথা পাতে  
মাছে নুবুজি গাঁতত আশ্ৰয় বিচাৰে  
নদীয়ে মাছক সাগৰলৈ আগবঢ়াই দিয়ে  
মাছে মাৰ্খৌ উজ্জাই আহে  
নদীৰ সোঁতে মাছক বীৰত্বৰ প্ৰশিক্ষণ দিয়ে  
মাছে নিশিকি বগলীৰ পেট পূৰ কৰে

পানীৰ মূল্যও নুবুজে  
মাছে  
নদীৰো মূল্য নুবুজে

তথাপি নদী মাৰ্খৌ বৈ যায়  
সাগৰৰ বুকুত লীন যায়  
থৈ যায় পানীৰ পুত্ৰলৈ এখন উদাৰতাৰ পঢ়াশালি

**ETERNAL**

Who planted the Sun in the sky  
The world keep revolving around him

Who taught us to love light  
We keep seeking light in darkness

Who sermoned us to be a decent fellow always  
We constantly effort to be so the entire life

Who did plant the sapling of love  
So many branches of love sprout in the heart

Who blended beauty in the air  
Life is not bearable if beauty is not inhaled

Who advised to be benevolent to be happy  
Try to be happy being benevolent

Who did smear colour of shyness all over the  
body  
Felt so ashamed at all those unsocial activities

# অনাদি

আকাশৰ বেলিটো কোনে স্থাপন কৰিলে  
জগতখনি ঘূৰি থাকে তেওঁৰ চাৰিওফালে

পোহৰ ভালপাবলৈ কোনে শিকালে  
আত্মবত পোহৰ বিচাৰি ফুৰোঁ

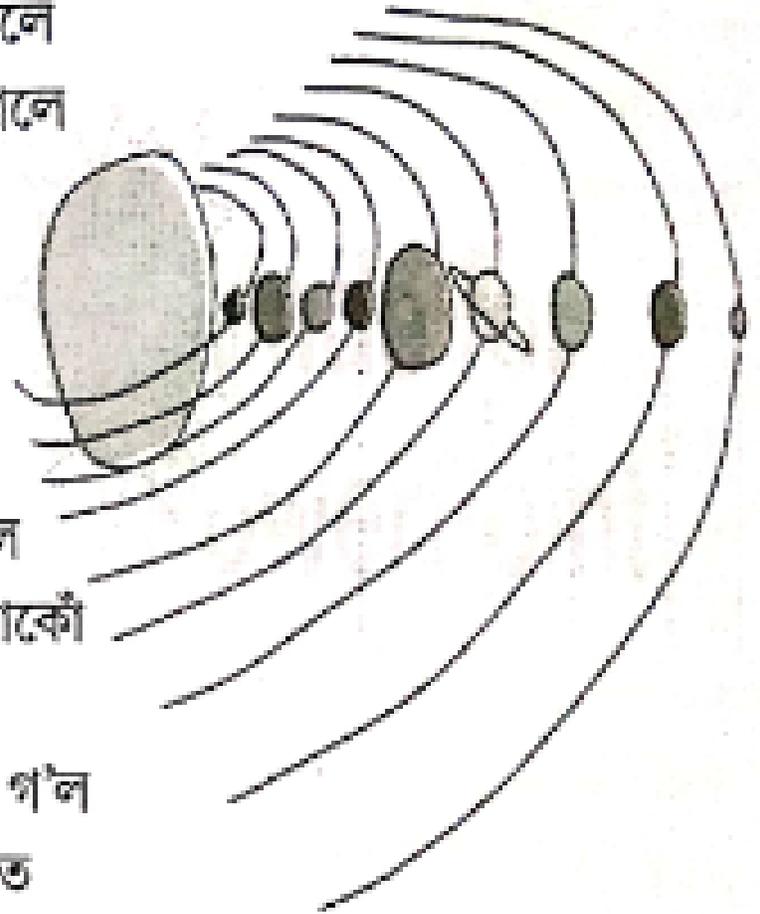
ভাল মানুহ হ'বলৈ কোনে কৈ থৈ গ'ল  
আজীৱন ভাল হোৱাৰ সাধনা কৰি থাকোঁ

ভালপোৱাৰ বৃক্ষজুপি কোনে ৰুই থৈ গ'ল  
কলিজাত মেলে ইমান মৰমৰ ভালপাত

সুন্দৰক বায়ুত কোনে মিহলি কৰিলে  
উশাহত সুন্দৰ পান নকৰিলে জীৱন সহনীয় নহয়

সুখী হ'বলৈ পৰোপকাৰিতাৰ পৰামৰ্শ কোনে দি থৈ গ'ল  
আনৰ উপকাৰ কৰি সুখী হ'ব পাৰোঁ

কোনেনো লাজৰ ৰং গাত সানি দিলে  
অসামাজিক কথাবোৰ ভাবিলে ইমান লাজ লাগে



# Antonio Machado

(Translated by Thomas Feeny)

## *Light, patience*

There are two kinds of awareness.  
The first involves light; the other, patience.  
One asks years of toil to illuminate  
the ocean's depths. The other works out  
man's penance with rod and net—a fisherman  
who waits by the sea.

But tell me, which is better? The life of  
the student, who peering into murky waters  
studies all the live fish, fugitives never to be caught?  
Or the life of one burdened with the task  
of flinging onto damp sand  
those dead fish given up by the sea?

(Translated by Thomas Feeny)

## ***Prayer***

Dear Lord, make me like those dying leaves that I see today quivering in the sun, frail leaves on the highest branches of the oak tree. They tremble, yes, but not from pain. The sun shines so bright, how good it must be to come free from the branch, drift and settle on the earth below. With the last light, their color brightens, hearts ready to offer themselves in their final moments, knowing the peace of a gentle dawn.

Lord, allow me in the same way to abandon life's highest branches, offering no complaint, embraced by You as by the sun.

# Yehoshua November

## *The Path*

I did not want to reduce it  
to that simplistic theological equation:  
physical subordinated by spiritual equals  
enlightenment. To live that high-horse,  
humorless life—a lid over  
the self, inclinations  
closeted. How relieved I was  
when the new rabbi arrived—  
combed-back hair, pointy shoes.  
To blend the physical world  
and the Light Without End  
means to touch the Divine  
unzipped of creation's  
rigid categories, he said  
at his first Sabbath afternoon sermon.  
But I did not float up  
from the backyard porch—  
a flame rising into the Source of all fire—  
as I turned chicken breasts on the grill.  
And I could not unlatch  
desire's door at night and fully enter  
the gates of prayer  
come morning.

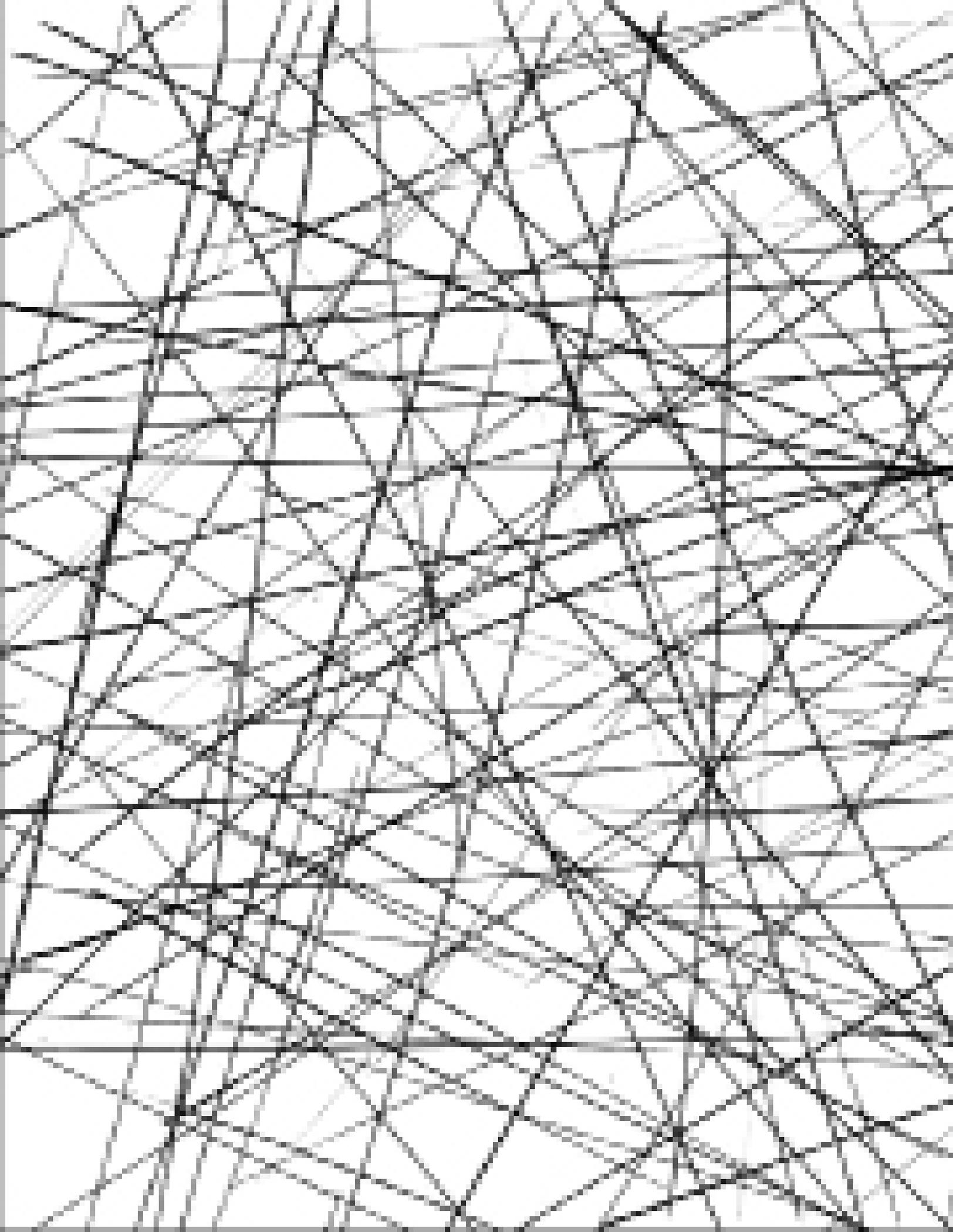
***Faith***

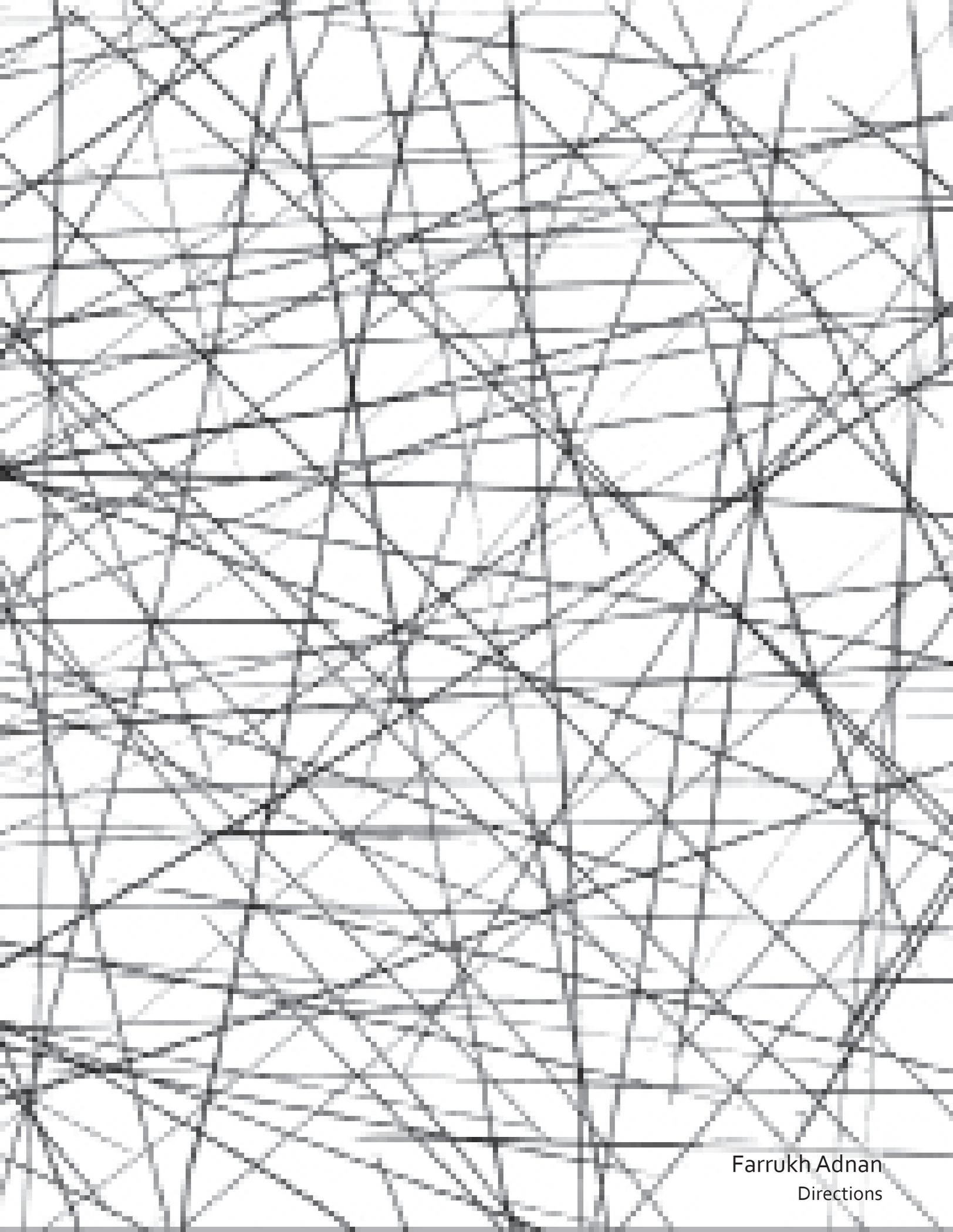
To climb each rung  
of the intellect

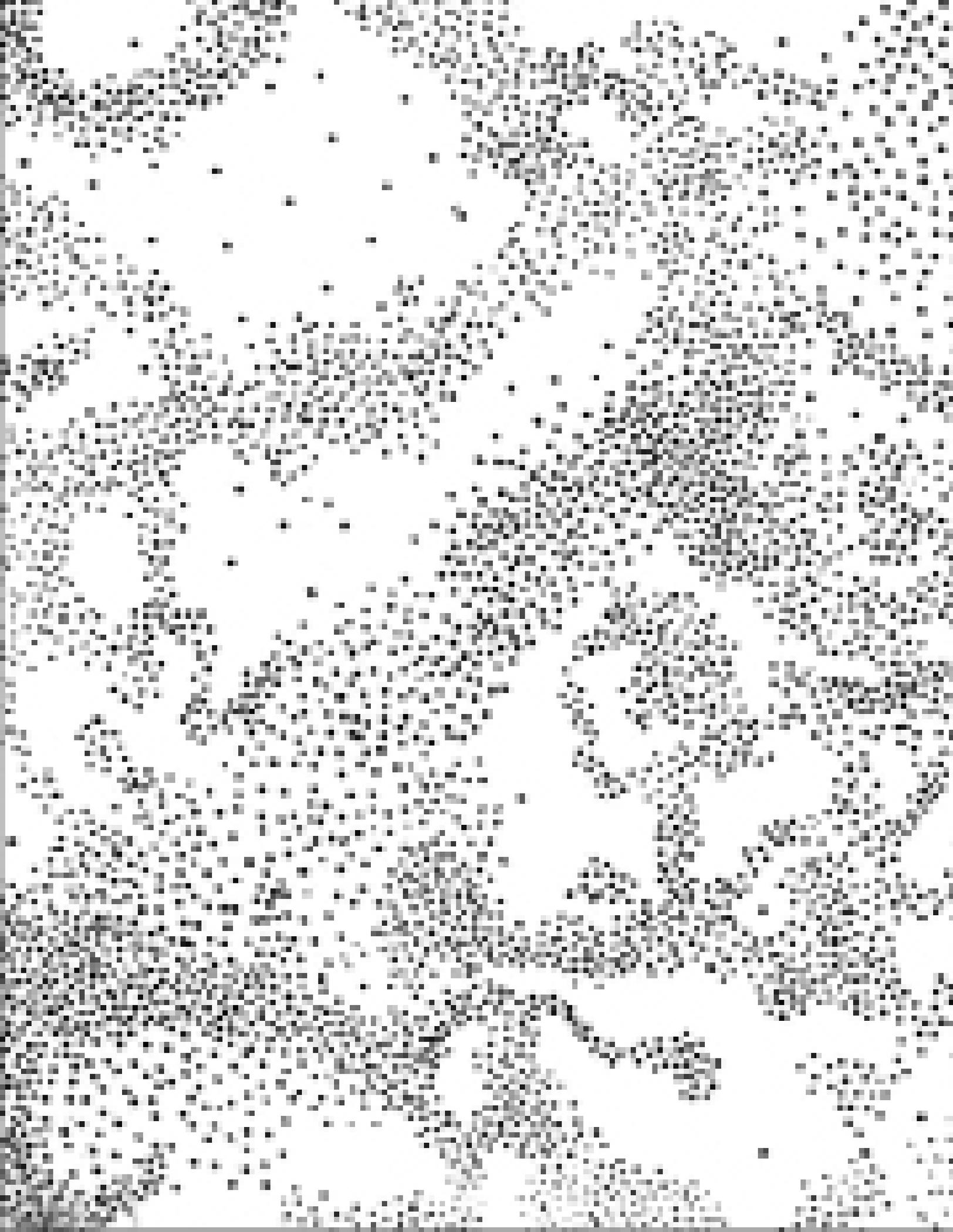
and then surrender  
like a librarian reaching for a book

on the highest shelf  
then breathing in

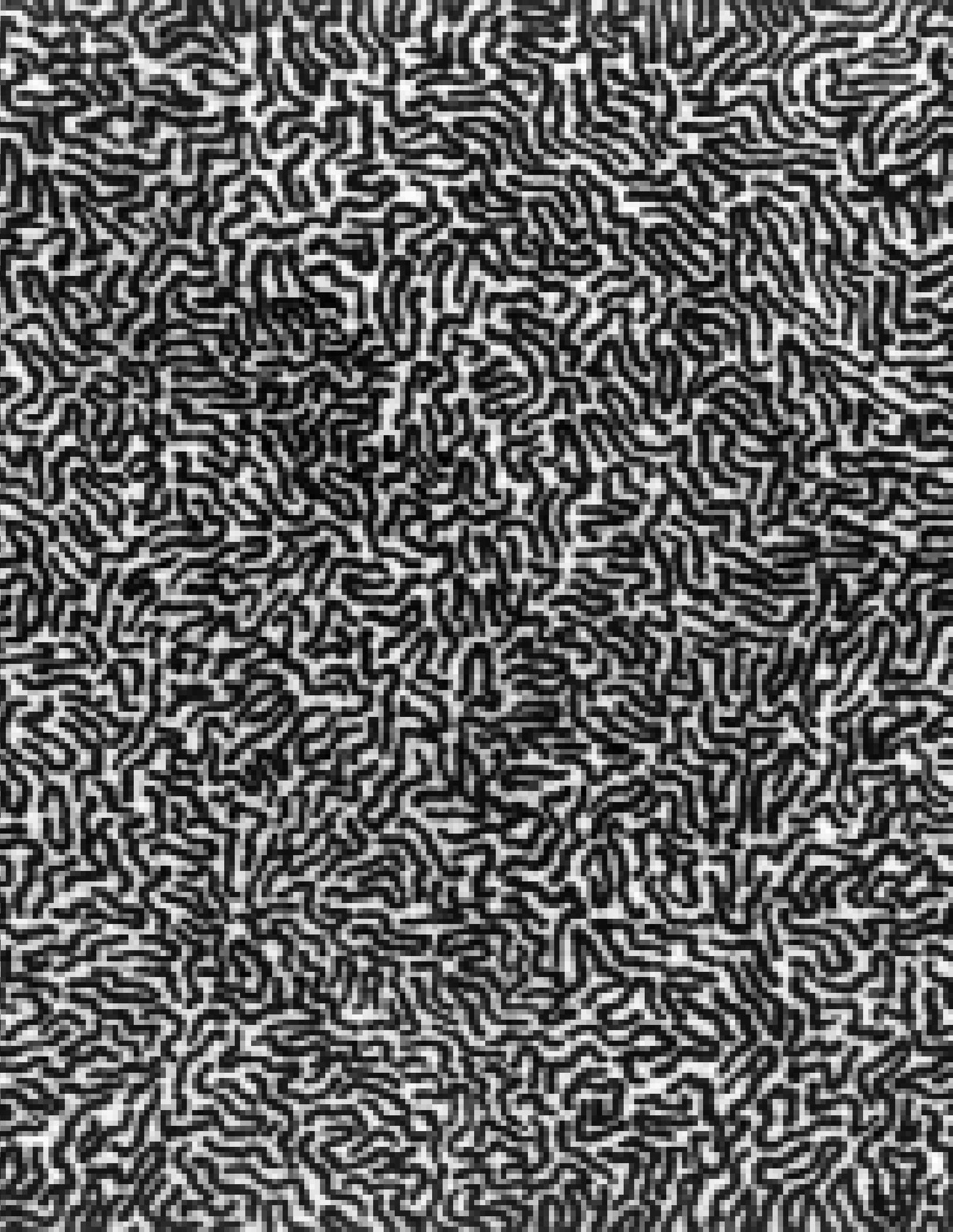
the strange and foreign air  
above the ladder.

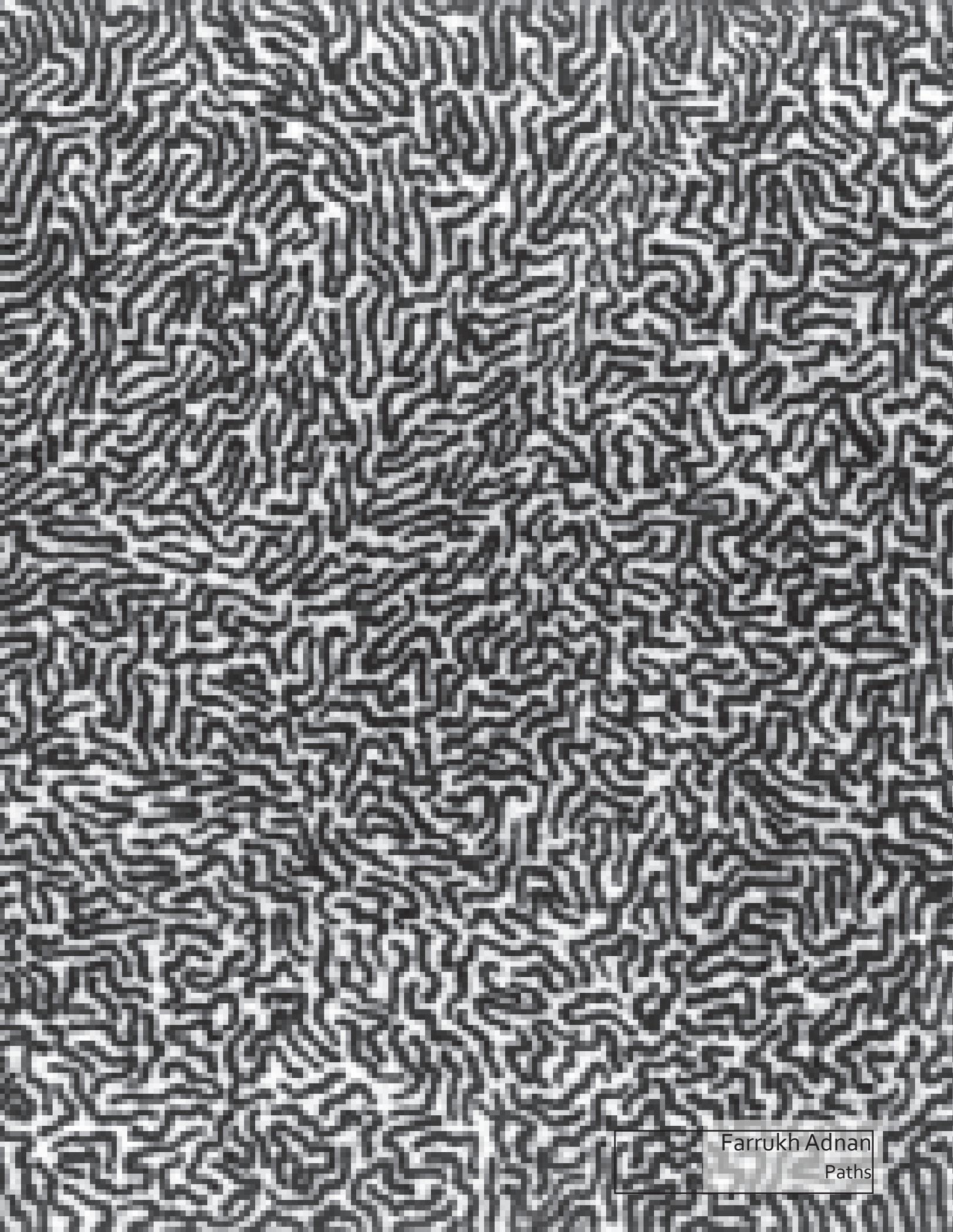












Farrukh Adnan  
Paths

# Vanessa Okoyeh

## ***On Rumination***

Take an idea, grind it down to its tiniest fragments.  
Take your cow teeth and masticate on the key to world peace,  
Your reason for living,  
The origins of the universe.  
Whichever nutritious thorn, or wide-crowned branch that formerly sentineled as a  
windbreak for a finch's nest;  
Took a turn as a backseat (and stepping-stair) for an adventurous child.  
Reduce the plant to cellulose and green bile, awsim in stomach slime.  
Dissolve the idea into a porridge, and wait.

How wide the eye of a simple cow might grow if it were to feel the leaf-bits  
recompose on its heavy tongue;  
the stems connect, the wood rebark;  
chloroplasts regenerate multiple time:  
Maple shoot at midmorning, poplar crown at noon, simple grass at suppertime.

The mystical art of rumination comes naturally to the idle mind,  
rest from mental unrest coming only when even the deconstituted bits of thought  
reform into sweeter and sweeter wholes.

Only then can we swallow the thought in its final form without choking.

# Sunayna Pal

## *Pareidolia or not?*

Each cloud tells a story  
Of wild animals  
or laughing babies.  
Of Barking dogs  
or flying horses.  
Of losing medals  
or of winning glory  
It seems, in actuality,  
Each cloud tells a story.

In reality,  
The white formation of mist  
only shows our wish.  
Like a mirror, it reflects  
our mind, it inspects.  
Each cloud, only tells  
your true inner story.

# Marge Piercy

## *Of other worlds*

Suppose in an alternate universe  
Mother never married her three  
husbands but like her two older  
sisters, ran away to sing or dance

had a life not of drudgery but real  
attention, flattering clothes instead  
of wash dresses worn thin as tissue  
perhaps even love-- at least pleasure.

Suppose she hadn't been poor  
for decades, hadn't give birth  
to my brother or me, hadn't tasted  
disappointment daily like teabags

left in water too long, could she then  
have liked her lot? I suspect so.  
She had a way of enjoying what  
little gifts her life allowed: my father

out of town, a novel from the library,  
peonies, lilacs she planted, perfume  
the one bottle my brother gave her  
or listening to neighbor's troubles.

In some universes she is crushed  
between walls of prejudice, hatred,  
insult or dies in childbirth. In others,  
she lives long in an orchard of love.

***Holy, holy***

I was never looking for a personal g-d  
not even in my poor and spiky childhood.  
I was always looking for the experience  
the knowledge, the sensation of holiness.

Something beyond my self. Not lightning  
or the whirlwind but powerful and still  
at once. I thought of strong light.  
I thought of the burning bush, consuming

but never consumed. From time to time  
usually but not always when writing  
something would seize me, bear me  
up and out of myself as in an eagle's

talons. I'd almost forget to breathe.  
It was never for long. I'd return  
shocked, my mind on fire, a rushing  
in me, a coming together, clarity.

It happens less as I age. Perhaps  
I can't bear too much of what burned  
the trivial from me. Maybe once more  
before death into that high bright place.

I'm not a shaman or religious scholar  
but from time to time something power-  
ful, barely endurable, takes hold of me  
by the nape and shakes me clear.

***That book is closed***

Every year on Yom Kippur  
I speak the names of my dead,  
I call them to mind so they swim  
glints of silver fish around me.

Yet every year there are more,  
schools of them. Some dim  
as years pass, some never.  
New ghosts join the gyre.

My mother comes first to me  
but so many more swirl past.  
I almost think I can reach them.  
How foolish. Only their names

and prayers seem to feed them:  
just ghosts I can never touch.

### ***The lost sing in my ears***

I wonder were woolly mammoths led  
like elephants by a matriarch?  
What was the color of eggs  
passenger pigeons laid?

What song will the last humpback  
whale give as the oceans heat up?  
How will the last tiger in India  
find a mate? The last giant turtle

could never. Nor will the last  
black rhino. We overrun, destroy  
kill off whatever offers profit.  
Will our grandchildren ever see

a giraffe walking like a ballerina?  
When we too grow extinct from what  
we've done to the earth, who will  
be left to mourn us or rejoice?

**Jeannine Pitas**

*Magdalena*

## ***Magdalena***

Having risen in the morning on the first day of the week, [Jesus] appeared first to Mary of Magdala [...] She went to those who had been his companions, and who were in mourning and in tears, and told them. But they did not believe her when they heard her say that he was alive and that she had seen him.

Mark 16: 9-11

First witness to the Resurrection, you were the one  
who set out in darkness, came to the spot,  
saw the stone rolled away,

went running to tell the apostles  
who didn't believe you

not only because  
you were a woman,

but because you didn't have a passport  
or even a green card

because you worked in a back kitchen  
under a false name

because your English  
had a heavy accent

because you still preferred tortillas over bread  
and said our hamburgers were the worst food you'd tasted

because you didn't know how to drive, still wishing  
for a store and school close enough to walk to

because you'd crossed  
behind a "No Trespassing" sign.

Previously, I'd been a faithless apostle.  
Like them I fled from the foot of the cross

flitted between distracting lovers and lies  
hid for long hours at work

returned each night to a cold, dark box  
heat and light turned off

poured myself a beer  
to drink alone.

But today when I come home  
the stove sings with boiling

carrots, your potato soup  
steaming corn tortillas

I sip your arroz con leche  
while you savor my chocolate chip cookies

you don't ask  
if I believe in the Resurrection

you just request  
help studying for the citizenship test

and the marvelous story you offer  
is that of your own desert crossing

the garlic you stuffed in your pockets  
to keep the dogs away

the river's piercing water  
the squad car waiting on the other side

your resurrection tale, like hers, is a question  
a dare, a rebuke, a demand:

Magdalena, apostle to the apostles  
today I give you my answer:  
I believe.



### ***All We Want is Love***

"You bring me light," says Bobbi  
as I guide a forkful of shredded egg  
sandwich to her lips; there is

a familiar focus in her eyes and a  
clarity to her words, but neither lasts  
more than a wink; I do not want to

watch my mother dying today, but  
we do not get to cherry pick when life  
needs or does not need us most.

# Elaine Reardon

*Primavera Forest / Bosque La Primavera*



## **November**

Tail end of autumn  
an in-between time  
of bare maple branches  
scattered dry leaves

A young bear pushes his nose  
into heaped up litter  
poking through for acorns  
coyotes howl in late afternoon

Scattered red berries  
dried purple grapes  
winter hasn't emerged yet  
although she's expected

Garden plots are cleared  
in anticipation of her arrival  
like a tide line between sand and sea  
November separates seasons

Of life pushing out of seed and egg  
before returning to ground  
November waits for those last geese to fly  
holding her cards close to her chest

Listen to water ripple against the shore  
and honor Manannán Mac Lir  
I have not beaten gold into form  
still I place an offering in the water

Manannán Mac Lir is an Irish God. The small golden boat ( circa 100 BC) is part of an offering to him found in 1896. It's now in the National Museum in Dublin.

## ***Moss Brook Meditation***

I wanted to remember her sitting  
on the large rock, midstream,  
reading a book, lost to the world  
as Moss Brook rushed by.

I've learned to meditate now,  
one breath at a time, to notice  
my ribs rise and fall, notice the air  
fill me, leave, time and time again.

Some say the only moment is now,  
all is illusory, breathe through pain.  
There is some comfort in this,  
moment by moment, breath by breath,

To focus on inhale and exhale,  
slowly walk through the forest,  
listening to water splash over rocks.

**Jendi Reiter**

*Past Life as a Bear*

## *Past Life as a Bear*

for Brian Gendron

in the eon when bears were many. roaming reborn grandfathers  
new-pelted. when a bear died there was always a bear  
to return into. or a salmon to feel the teeth  
from the other side. o thrill of quick slash out of life's stream  
into split silver coral flesh  
feeding the bear, the bear feeding  
soil. fallen, beetle-clean.  
grandmother fractures nipped young bear bones  
to recall caving ground, skirt the hunter's pit.  
but in the razed anthropocene  
squirrel souls winter in the trunks of men.  
fish hearts flop gasping in their chests.  
women shave the bear  
mother that entered their bellies  
to slumber in fat joy. afterlife  
of a snake spits from lover's tongue,  
reborn spider pulls him back in gluey threads,  
desperate to be eight-limbed again.  
o slaughtered rug-piles of bison, thundering extinct  
rage into trenches where guns bellow to their mates  
in shrapnel-swollen hearts. will there be bodies  
to bear them all.

**James Miller Robinson**

***ELDERLY PRIEST NODDING OFF  
DURING MASS***

## ***ELDERLY PRIEST NODDING OFF DURING MASS***

Draped in the celestial satin of his sail,  
his fragile bones sit propped like a heap  
of worn fisherman's oars and spears.  
Asleep and awake indistinguishable now,  
like heaven and earth they blur  
into one eternity that meets at the sea.

Past, present, and future also blend:  
austere parents of German descent,  
strict parochial school in Wisconsin,  
the seminary where he surrendered himself,  
the burning bus in Alabama, congregations  
of baptisms, communions, confirmations,  
weddings, anointings, last rites and burials.

The rising and subsiding of tides.  
Wind, rain, turmoil, and storm.  
Sea foam lapping on flattened sand.  
The yearning to immense  
in the deep calm that eventually returns.

There's a sparkle in his half-closed eyes,  
a faint smile in the line of disappearing lips,  
a slight nod of satisfaction at having tried  
to catch--at least for one fleeting instant  
as it disappeared beneath the shimmering surface--  
the most precious fish can only see.

# Nicholas Samaras

## ***The Height of First Summer: A Song of the Going Up***

His voice said, I saw you as a young man  
sitting under the shade of the Saint Basil's tree.  
While other children and counselors played,  
you sat alone and wrote to everyone's laughter,  
your small back upon the bark,  
the paper and pen in your studious hands,  
in the company of only the Archbishop's grave.  
When I came upon you in the green and the breeze,  
the buoy below us ringing on the broad river,  
and asked you why you sat there alone  
under the shade of the Saint Basil's tree,  
gazing over the height of first summer,  
you replied from the depth of youth,  
"This is my place where I see things most clearly."

***Prayer of Contentment***

What was it I wanted?  
For you to sit with me  
before a strong fire,  
our faces hot, our stepping  
outside in the winter  
to inhale the sweetest woodsmoke.  
To be alive with you.

***Inside Silence***

How hearing announces its presence

A silence of the outside, how filled--

heard by stepping  
out of the car, the house, your body.

Silence of the green world inhabited

by birds, tree sway, bee-drone,  
your own breathing.

A busy silence of presence.

The quiet hum living in you.





Fabrice Poussin  
Safe



### ***And Let it Grow (a haibun)***

Our first house sits on a smallish lot on a cul-de-sac. The front faces the street and a sun-struck sidewalk. In back, more naturally, a leafy creek runs along the north edge. The neighbors to the west have enclosed their back yard, fair enough, with a fence, which effectually walls that side of our yard as well. A few weeks after we moved in, our unfenced neighbor of the rising sun planted a peach tree—and gifted us one too. Rooted thirty feet apart, each on its own lot, these siblings of the same litter could keep in touch through pollen and bees, squirrels and birds. Having survived the winter and now relishing their first spring in their forever homes, these green-tongued saplings, not a wall at all, affirm one earth, one sun, one breeze, one life, one stream, one Creator.

sapling so slender  
you could easily count the leaves;  
my guess, seventeen

# Zvi A. Sesling

## *Picnic c. 1950*

Whatever happened to picnics  
a short drive to the country  
a field with large shade tree  
blanket spread like the sky

Mother, father, sister and son the  
compass roses at each corner  
basket packed with dishes, utensils  
and napkins, kosher food and ice tea

Or perhaps they would climb a hill  
to the summit, pick a shady spot  
in a park overlooking the city  
or maybe the river

It was a time for family, for talk  
for parent-child bonding, listening  
to nature, looking at birds and  
smelling freshly mowed grass

Maybe there was a small portable radio  
and you listened to the baseball game  
with announcers whose voices were  
instantly recognized

Or perhaps they would discuss the  
bible, life, Jewish law of kashruth  
lessons from the Talmud or Jewish  
history or a coming bar or bat mitzvah

After the meal, while the breeze was soft  
and warm, parents would doze and children  
would play, while the dog shared leftovers  
with ants not caring about it being kosher

**Prayer**

May kindness enter our hearts  
like sunshine through a window

May pleasant thoughts strike us  
like moonlight on a dark night

May evil fall away from us  
like dead leaves from a tree

May goodness of deeds flow from us  
like a river cascades from hills

May words express our love  
like the baby looks at its mother

May our memory be carried on  
in the lives of our children  
and their children, generation  
after generation

***A Beautiful Thing***

The boy, about nine, in the  
balcony of Temple Sinai, his hands  
cupped like a V, his chin and  
cheeks placed squarely in the  
middle as he intently watches  
the arc being opened where the  
*Torah* is kept

Next to him his sister, about six,  
points at the *Torah* and says, *Look*.  
Children enjoying, absorbing the  
history into which they will grow

# Betsy Sholl

## ***A Showing of Acorns***

In this little thing I saw three properties. The first is that God made it.

The second that God loves it. And the third, that God keeps it.”

— Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*

They don't have wings, so only fly when the wind's strong, fly then fall, bounce a little when they land. Their little hats have no straps. Children draw eyes and mouths, so they have faces, but no ears. No legs or arms either. Thalidomide babies. Like my schoolmate Bill with his one leg, who'd windmill down the long college hill on his crutches, whistling as he flew. Such an abundance that year too, such abandon and dance, a great undoing. Cars park and drive off, park and drive off, filling the gutters with a coarse meal. Day and night they ping on car roofs, clatter on the sidewalk. For hands the surgeons made Bill a set of pinchers so he could grasp pencils, button his shirts, hold a racket, and sometimes gently squeeze my shoulder as we went walking. This morning an acorn struck me on the forehead as if to knock in a little enlightenment, or to bring back Bill, whose last name I have forgotten, though he was made and loved and therefore, beyond me, lasts.

## ***At The Crossing***

Lights flash, the guard arm comes down,  
and late again I consider gunning the tracks.

But there's that rumble, then graffiti's black script  
rattling past on tankers marked, "Explosive,"

bearing crossbones and skulls. Yesterday I raced  
upstairs barefoot, jammed my toe hard on a riser,

then knocked an earring off the dresser  
and feeling for it, pulled out from underneath

a scrap of paper in my mother's hand,  
her squat tails and loops: "My dears, I love you"—

a year after her death, as if mailed from beyond,  
as if, despite all, there *is* a beyond,

a "world without end," as the minister said  
beside the newly dug earth.

And I did see my mother there, not whole,  
but in part—in one child's hair, another's smile,

in the way like her we each chat with store clerks —  
as if it's true we shall not all die, at least

not all of us, not all at once. For a moment,  
her shaky script in my hand, she was as present

as this rumble of boxcar and tanker  
clattering past, stenciled numbers for volume

and weight, names scrawled in black loops  
and bright bubbles, moving down the line,

already at the next crossing, so the whistle  
makes end and endless sound the same.

## ***Reading Revelation***

The dog wants a walk and I want to close  
*The Book of Revelation*, to step out of locusts  
 and woe — even if it was Dickinson’s favorite.

Imagine those brassy trumpets, vials of poison,  
 scorpions, horsemen, there, alongside dough  
 rising in her Amherst kitchen, pages

of wildflowers carefully pressed and labeled.  
 The quiet life’s shadow book? Night text  
 for opening the furtive mind?

But drought, flames, infestations, boiling seas —  
 it’s such a big production, Ben Hur,  
 Moses and all the Star Wars combined.

Here it’s spring. Sidewalks finally clear,  
 we walk freely, not mincing our steps,  
 watching for black ice, puddles of snow melt.

The dog’s happy to be at this small pond  
 where hidden in reeds bullfrogs belch and twang —  
 creatures, not symbols of foul spirits,

but real bodies, mud-mouthed, mysterious,  
 with their bass croaks and bubble eyes,  
 their almost-man legs camouflaged in slime.

A car passes wearing a bumper sticker  
that asks, "What kind of gun would Jesus buy?"  
And I think somebody will answer that

with serial number, model and make —  
a real gun, not a poet's loaded metaphor,  
or scripture's "Turn the other cheek."

In Dickinson's noisy bog, she's glad to be  
nobody. But my mind's already veered  
to those big somebodies, presidents and generals

high on empire, tossing people like dice,  
till it's hard to imagine the world set right  
without conflagration's total delete.

Still, the dog rolls in grass, happy and meek,  
the frogs call for mates with their throaty songs  
as passersby push strollers, jog and ride bikes.

Somebody tell me what would it mean  
to want, for the sake of a new shiny world,  
this world and all that's in it dead and gone.

### ***On a Line by Charles Wright***

"God is the fire my feet are held to,"  
he writes from his yard in Charlottesville  
and first I picture, not marchers,

but my father's black and white world,  
his walls and gates to keep everyone in place,  
going up in smoke and charred soles...

Today the sun turned its back on us,  
leaving snow, rain, deep slush in the road,  
so cars whoosh by like monster angels,

slashing the air with huge transparent wings.  
Such a heavy sky, low, a winter white,  
not even close to the color of my skin...

Who decided to call us white, when we are  
clearly a pale beige version of the rich  
gleaming dark we came from, watered down,

as if that makes anything pure? Get over it,  
my sad brothers storming hateful  
and hoodless through town. Read Dante

before rage makes you gnaw your own flesh,  
leaves you glaring under burning muck,  
flakes of roof, rebar, smoldering cars.

If you don't like to read, give a listen  
to Thelonious Monk, his tunes seared clean  
and spare, hammer and hesitation. The way

he fingers the keyboard, you know it's true,  
*the piano ain't got no wrong notes.*  
But it does got under and between notes,

over notes, bent, blending, got Monk  
playing not sorry, but *wakeup!*  
So maybe the flame God holds our feet to

could be cool--if we'd toss in our old lies,  
my brothers, your *them or us*--if you saw,  
my father, how they're burning us up inside.

## **NIGHTFALL**

Over dinner I say to my love, *Remember...*,  
and knowing he doesn't

I try to bring back for him our shore walk,  
the moon coming huge and orange out of the bay.

I want him to have that moment again.  
Or I want it for myself,

want back how we once shared such seeing  
and were not alone with our wonder,

but could gaze together, losing ourselves  
in something splendid like the moon's slow rise.

*I see you* is a Zulu greeting that means:  
you are real, present to me.

As if to keep that night real, we brought back  
shells plucked from the shallows

and put them on our sill, little houses  
with pearly spirals we can see into just so far.

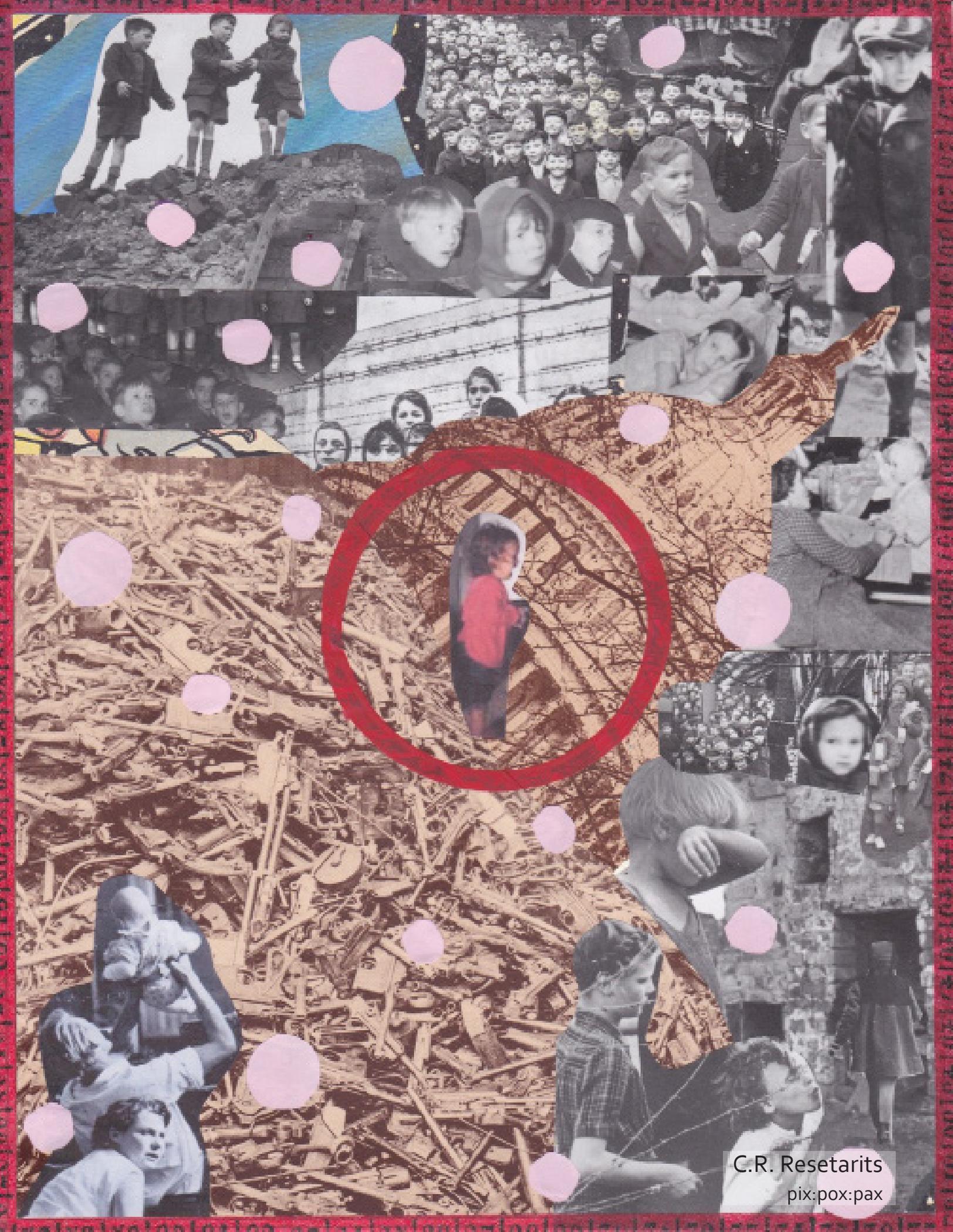
Now cleaning up after supper my love steps  
onto the porch, a blue plate dripping in his hands,

wanting to know where it goes, wanting the words to ask.  
The moon catches his eye and he points

to its thin curve of light, turns my face so I can see,  
as if he's giving it to me,

and were things reversed, it would be like him to say,  
"*I see you* means: even diminished

you are precious," and so I say it to him,  
the plate's deep and fragile blue still in his hand.



C.R. Resetarits  
pix:pox:pax





C.R. Resetarits  
shelter in place

# Ndaba Sibanda

*What Used To Brew In Her Mind*

## ***What Used to Brew in Her Mind***

Twirled, twisted with her all  
Tittered past a care, a wall  
Rita rioted without regrets  
Sweet sunrises, sour sunsets  
She thrived in the twinkling  
Her close past was rankling  
Its reality, heavy & haunting  
Its mental dances daunting  
Today no tempest brewed  
No hell, hurricane hovered  
She had to be solid, positive  
Detoxing was up & instructive  
Bright was her train of thought  
Beauty of a tomorrow she sought  
It was hers, not about anyone else  
She kicked the asses of nightmares  
Future nightmares not her business  
She danced a dance of freed silliness  
On her mind bravery bellowed its arrival  
A previous poor park for this, that upheaval

**J.R. Solonche**

***AT DUSK I AM AS TIRED AS THE  
WORLD***

***AT DUSK I AM AS TIRED AS THE WORLD***

At dusk, I am as tired as the world.  
The mind has other dreams to do.

The mind wants to sit in a tree, to wait for the owls.  
When the owls wake up to talk to one another, I blush.

I eavesdrop on them and am ashamed.  
The mind has to make up its own dreams.

When the dreams make up their minds, I sleep soundly.  
When I awake, there is so much unfinished business.

The morning is always as surprised as I am.  
The morning always has something more to say.

The mind is never satisfied to let dreams speak for it.  
The mind insists upon its own originality.

It doesn't know which side its bread is buttered on.  
The mind knows what's good for it, but not what's better.



## ***Shadowcraft***

Our room, complete with sorcerer and witch:  
*blessed was I as child—*  
the shadow-hand, a prowler on the wall;  
the whisper of a drape, a serpent's hiss;

the mousetrap but a snap, a slipping.  
The blush—blood on our cheeks  
from fear or expectation—stayed adequate,  
unspilled. It held its own, held willing.

We played with wizards too;  
they were no wilder than a garden toad,  
its leap against our bellies, tender pink, toe  
webbings splayed and flat

before a childhood.  
As nightmares went, ours would not hold  
a candle to the tremors in far rooms,  
hunters with ash-white hair and bone debris....

*Blessed were we as children, hugging fear.*  
For us, our nights did what a night must do:  
point to a tree, now naked, on a field,  
point to where, one day, we'll commend

our toys, and further off, rows of unopened  
boxes.... Ah, hold, hold, hold—  
from prey to prayer, hold—  
your little fear, your evening primed for hope.

## **Jordan**

Slim boat, sturdy prow, the tiniest leak:  
come gently, brace yourself, hold on; the wind  
will blow your hair and ruddy up your cheek.  
Look, here's the wooden seat, legs first; don't mind

the river licking up your feet; you'll find  
it laps up gain.                    *My loved one waits at home—*

*she says—he prays, pauses, works on a poem  
about miracles; each line, a refusal  
to hold the oars in his hands, or to leave them—*  
Poured on her palms, the waters he bails heal.

## ***In the Garden***

John 20:13

*They have taken him away*, and no one  
else will do. Disperse my love, and all rock  
turns to coal, my throat athirst in a stone  
garden. Heaven was the rug at his feet, a lock

of hair, hands gesturing—my heart in shock;  
a neighbor's eyelashes glistening, wet

as my own. The sun will not do; nor the jet-  
black night, or the silver rivers brimming  
in spring. After the fall of the mallet,  
the white sheet, only Him were we burying.

**Shelby Stephenson**

*HEAVENLY RAIN*



## ***LONG ROAD HOME***

JOURNEYS come and go, leaving, courting the bone.  
What if my greatgreatgrandpap George's legacy held his tone

Of "plantation" in my ear and vanity spread its con  
And forced me to linger right here on Paul's Hill to atone

The wishes of the greatgrandson, my dad: "Stay, Shub, with me:  
And we will hunt the dogs and fish and farm; this Place will be

Yours someday": my mind wallows down and swallows rainbows.  
I leave my father lounging on the bed, musing so –

Wherever I lean I turn slowly by leaving,  
The schooling philosophies I had no clue of learning –

The Law, English, Religion, Algebra, Spanish – colleges –  
Plus my father's possum hides in cracks collecting weevils

Through destiny's flight I live on to take  
What universe's tall, hard ride holds me in its wake.

### ***FIRST BREATHS***

WHAT foundling on those stairs?  
The story comes from a star.

What angels light the candles' glow?  
Anyone I know?

Who paved the Milky Way in white?  
A mule a pale rider writes.

What hand shoos the fly away?  
Caring Mary in her gardening sway.

Who drives the goat and worm?  
Quixote's impossible dream.

Why is the mother not scared to death?  
There's comfort in a small thing like a breath.

# Tim Suermondt

## ***WHEN THE BULL STOPS FIGHTING***

So does the matador.

He drapes the cape over the bull

and says "Let's get our wounds

cleaned up, old friend."

Together they limp out of the arena—

the crowd unable to decide to boo

or cheer does neither.

Side by side they travel, the matador

and the bull, down an old, long

street El Greco could paint with his

eyes bandaged over twice.

The two shimmer in the heat of the day

and disappear, the cape on the ground,

the cape a saint shall bless, then destroy—

what is heaven but what we leave behind?

**THE SAINTS AND THE GODS ARE OPTIMISTS**

And according to my calculations, they're fifty percent right.

I saw the sun painting a row of yellow houses.

I saw the harbor part and scores of people move through  
the narrow path between the skyscrapers of water.

I heard a woman singing, a voice so ordinary it was extraordinary.

I heard a speech for peace, who knows—maybe one day...  
And on the very day I heard a friend of mine died,

I saw him sitting at the bar, looking up at, dare I say

the angels?—nursing a pint of beer he can take eternity to finish.

**Marc Swan**

*Listening*

## ***Listening***

"My God," she whispers, "look!"  
I lean over the rail  
of this very narrow wooden bridge  
crossing a Vermont stream  
along the Appalachian Trail  
and all I see are rocks, water moving  
rapidly over the rocks,  
and the blue-grey of weathered  
branches jutting from the water.  
In an instant, the dusky figure spreads  
beyond itself, lifting  
in a long flowing arc, sailing directly  
over our heads. We turn  
and watch the great blue heron  
glide into a patch of sunlight  
then rise higher and higher  
as if reaching for that place  
beyond the sun  
where Amelia Earhart listens  
to Glen Miller's Celestial band  
in a world always at peace.

# Mathew P. Taylor

## ***Enough is Enough***

When will Enough be enough?  
Spirit of Life  
Spirit of Love  
Spirit of Transformation  
God/Goddess/Goddexx  
you of many names  
We ask that you enter this space  
enter our hearts  
ease our minds  
We carry the burden of loss  
We have lost Ahmaud Arbery  
Lost Sean Read  
Lost Little Richard  
Breona Taylor  
George Floyd\*  
Our Trans sister Nina Pop  
Andre Harrell  
We sit in this loss  
some of it from injustice  
some loss just a natural part of life  
but we grieve all the same  
May we be reminded that death is a part of life  
and it is our duty as the living  
to carry on the names and stories of our people

May we make space for the sex worker  
may we make room for our trans siblings  
may we make space for the missing and murdered indigenous women and Femmes  
may we make space for black mamas and caregivers locked up  
may we make space for the folks that just found out they are HIV positive during a pandemic  
May we make space for the organizers  
may we make space for the revolutionaries  
the co-conspirators  
the allies and the accomplices  
may we move in solidarity  
and talk openly about sex, politics, white supremacy  
may we move to change the world

Because nobody got us but us  
may we forever carry this in our hearts

Blessed Be, Amen, Ashe, and Aho!

### ***Writing for my life***

I am writing for my life  
writing so that I can get free  
writing because the world currently feels like a prison  
I am writing for the black and brown bodies  
in cages  
coughing  
and crying  
praying  
to god  
to their ancestors  
to their grandmothers  
to their beloveds  
I am writing so that my siblings aren't forgotten  
writing for the elderly  
    home afraid of technology  
    in homes without visitors  
    wondering if I will get it next  
writing for the children  
    that don't know what's going on  
    being told to leave the safety of classrooms  
    hungry and homeless

I am writing for my life  
writing because black and brown bodies are up for debate  
writing so that trans bodies can have the voice  
writing so that liberation  
is now  
A part of the grand plan  
Staying at home  
physical distancing  
listening  
Advocating  
worshiping  
I am writing so that my siblings aren't forgotten  
Writing for the children  
    undocumented not illegal  
    identifying as lgbtq  
    hiding but not hidden from view  
writing for the elderly  
    making decisions  
    making history  
    and making it all up

**Ayşe Tekşen**

***WHY I DON'T WEAR GLASSES***

## ***WHY I DON'T WEAR GLASSES***

Perhaps to see  
the world's blur  
in a sharper blur  
is what amazes me.  
And I favor life  
through a gloomy set  
of fellow mist,  
through my gaze—  
sick and untamed.  
What use would it be  
to look in a clearer voice—  
would I hear you  
fair and undisturbed—  
would I get your tears—  
would I be candid with you?  
I shall stay ignorant of faces  
and I am yet to behold  
the veil behind the veil.  
I am yet to notice  
white spruce,  
its ever-silver leaves—  
though I can still distinguish  
other trees' brown  
from their red,  
from yellow,  
and zillions of oranges.  
The fruit lingers  
only for one long minute  
whether you are ready  
to grasp the moment  
or the fruit—  
ready to be witnessed  
and to fall  
for one last stroke  
on your cloaked earth.

**t.m. thomson**

*After the Fire Rolls Through*

## ***After the Fire Rolls Through***

During its swell and roar  
 fire dominates devours depletes--  
 meat and marrow for nightmares.

Yet after its slaughter of koala and kangaroo  
 its landscape-charring blast  
 lomandra lime sprouts from blackened ground  
 themselves so like knee-high bonfires  
 flame trees laugh at the irony  
 of pushing out their flame-leaves  
 post-blaze  
 octopus tree propels its green from trunk--  
 the beginnings of its stiff magenta tentacles.

Eucalyptus trees begin again  
 dreaming of koala embraces  
 while grasslands raise themselves  
 blade by blade  
 anticipating the spread of kangaroo forepaws  
 the pressure of their pointed hind feet  
 each ending in an onyx barb.  
 Billy button and bottlebrush bolt from soil  
 to hear kookaburra chuckle and cassowary rumble.

One day fire will die and landscape--  
 forest grassland plain--  
 will consume ash and carcass

roar with leaf rustle and kangaroo competitions  
 while koalas the color of rain clouds  
 bespeckle trees.

# Jayla Tillison

## *"Ode to Butterflies"*

In second grade, we hatched butterflies  
because what better way to learn than to experience

They arrived as larvae  
these small slimy things that looked cold to the touch  
A while later, they had become these hungry fuzzy things that were just as unappealing  
but in time, we were told, they would be beautiful

So here's to this transformative wonder  
this insignificant thing turned symbol of beauty  
turned lighter than air and thinner than paper pastel pallet  
that dances against blue canvas  
Here's to reminding me on the days I feel lowest  
that I too will fly  
I will dance with feet not made from lead  
I will walk with a grace I've never known

In fourth grade, we visited the butterfly garden at a nature center  
"Look, but don't touch" they warned us  
"Their wings are delicate" I told my campers years later  
Still as the lake waters, with eyes just as big  
They watched them fly  
I watched them fly  
and thought about how monarchs migrate further than I'll ever walk  
and with wings like pieces of brightly colored tissue paper on Christmas

Here's to a creature so fragile a spring shower could kill it  
might render this thing immobile  
To something more fragile than Sainte Chapell's stained glass  
and just as luminescent in the late spring sun  
Here's clarifying that fragile is not weak

that endurance pays off  
that the light at the end of this tunnel may be so far it's out of sight  
but there's still something worth living for at the end

Here's to that fluttering in my stomach  
a restlessness that I can't seem to soothe  
the one that gives me shaky hands in exchange for my tongue  
and fills my mind with things I don't need  
Here's to that other restlessness  
the one manifests in impulsivity  
had me dye my hair and wander city streets  
Here's to that same fluttering in my stomach  
but paired with a heart that skips like I did in summertime  
Something that reminds me that I am still very much alive,  
alive and capable of loving and being loved  
that reminds me that I can still feel something besides fear  
Here's to the fluttering in my heart and my stomach, my mind and my soul, that *is* fear  
because at least I still care enough to worry  
to want to be safe  
because I can still feel the anxiety of an empty house  
or the thrill of a rollercoaster

Here's to something  
so easily overlooked  
but impossible to ignore  
Silent,  
but with a presence that commands a silence greater still  
Here's to something  
I didn't think I could love  
Here's to being proven wrong  
Here's to the butterflies  
Here's to me

## ***The First Time I Saw it Rain***

I didn't know what it was except beautiful  
except fascinating  
My mother tells me of how I wouldn't sleep as a child  
she and my father would drive in circles until I slept  
giving silent thanks if it rained  
She tells me that I loved to watch the rain  
that I would reach out and touch it  
then flinch at it's cold

Throughout childhood the rain fascinated me  
There are photos of me standing on the couch  
just to watch the raindrops race down the window  
I remember during long car rides  
I'd trace the paths they carved on icy glass  
and wonder just how many more would fall that day

In school, everyone would get upset when it rained  
as in no time there'd be no evidence of our existence on the blacktop  
our mazes and fictional worlds melting before our eyes  
We'd have to start all over,  
we'd have to start all over and I was thrilled  
because this time it would be better

As much as I loved the rain  
thunderstorms have always scared me  
I'd close all the blinds  
turn the lights off  
and sit in the center of the room  
I'd listen to the sound of the rain pounding on the roof  
hoping that if I focused enough on that I wouldn't hear the thunder  
And if I closed my eyes  
it'd be as if there were no lightning at all

"It's just God moving his furniture"  
My grandmother would tell me  
hoping to keep my from crying  
It's been years, but she still thinks of me whenever there's a storm  
"Remember when I told you God was just turning on his lights"  
She said over the phone last week  
But what do you tell the girl no longer so small  
the girl no longer sure that there's a God to move furniture  
or to turn on lights  
How do you comfort her

When the storms became so violent that the rain fell from my own eyes  
my mother would tell me to pray  
When my dad got stuck driving in the storm  
"Pray for his safety" she'd tell me  
"God will watch over him"  
But what do you tell the girl to do  
when her own heartbeat thunders in her head  
when her own steady breathing feels like a hurricane's wind  
threatening to bring her crashing down  
Is there still a God looking out for her  
even if she stopped looking for him

# Leslie Smith Townsend

## *If I Were a Blade of Grass*

I would stretch toward the sun  
taking full advantage, roots soaking

moisture from the soil of generations,  
crisp green shaft shooting

upward with abandon,  
through glint of morning light,

dappled frost-like  
sugar-coating,

and though undistinguished,  
lost in a sea of green,

countless flags waving  
in the new spring breeze,

I would know who I am  
and who I'm meant to be.

***Between Words and Worlds***

You know of quantum physics, right?  
How everything is shifting and nothing  
is solid as it appears. When you think  
there's something there, it disappears  
as if you're standing on the threshold  
between words and worlds.

What if, passing through a door  
from café to a sidewalk,  
you fall upon your ear,  
and plunge into an endless pit  
of nothingness, for conviction, alone,  
keeps the pavement there.

What if, like Tink in Peter Pan,  
you'd need to say, *believe,*  
*believe, believe,*  
till the abyss  
becomes a sleeve  
that holds you in midair?

## ***DAWN***

A child's cry resounds with eternal words  
Ancient rivers of blood darken green fields  
I am the grass that flows with antiquity's stream  
Hearing lullabies, I remember the dawn

In beginning-lessness, my soul lifts up from the grave  
Drinks night dew, seeks its second-birth journey  
When tiny buds are kissed by the early sun  
Whomever I love, the sky blazes with dawn

A pair of courting white storks is still unseasoned  
Why does the sun scorn her graceful hair?  
I seek my strange sorrow on the mountain  
Why doesn't youth weep at the break of dawn?

## ***PRISON CELL***

I live in a sky of boundless space  
A Zen landscape of nothingness  
No things, no people, no busy-ness  
Just flowers strewn by the Goddess

(Translated by Nguyen Ba Chung & Martha Collins)

***A RECOLLECTION***

One night I found my eyes submerged by the sea  
Smoke on my hands, silky hair far away  
The moon had thinned forever in that place  
Drifting from vague unease to uncertain sleep  
Once I decided, as mountain stars decided  
Once again, I fell headlong into misfortune  
The same afternoon clouds, wind, same sky  
The same life, still listening to troubling stories  
Still living and dying with pretense and devastation  
So blind eyes could see an empty world  
Once, before a respectful old monk, I faltered  
Could I, that once, have made a serious error?  
Tomorrow I will wait, this time, for you  
Smoke on my hands, silky hair far away

***DEDICATION***

Two hands lift the prison bowl of rice  
To dedicate it to the Lord of All  
World overflowing with blood and strife  
Bowl raised as wordless tears fall



Felice Campbell // Cherry Blossom Tree



# Emily Uduwana

## *Green Thumb*

You whispered to the leaves  
of our potted plants,

spoke sweet nothings to the succulents  
hanging from our garden rafters.

I figured you had heard the news  
that flowers bloom brighter

in the wake of warm words,  
but you laughed when I remarked

on your intelligence,  
stroked the tendrils of a fern

and shook your head.  
No, you whispered to the plants

to hear them whisper back,  
to hear the spirits within

speak sweet nothings to your soul,  
and watch in companionable joy

as you both stood a little taller,  
nourished by something

I never believed in  
and always wished I had.

# Vivian Wagner

## *Brighting*

The viburnum's  
bursting,  
showing  
the world that  
though it  
keeps some  
of the light,  
it lets most  
of it go.

## *Graceful*

I once stopped at a spot  
in the woods where two  
paths converge,  
and I sat  
on a cut log,  
looking for grace.  
In that moment,  
not bright or loud,  
but soft,  
almost unheard,  
I felt it--  
or at least a mild  
touch of warm sun,  
which is, after  
all, perhaps  
the same thing.

# Laura Grace Weldon

## ***Ostranenie***

Stare at any one thing  
long enough  
it recedes into form  
without meaning.  
Roof edge beyond the window  
becomes a floating angle, abstract  
against cloud-clotted background,  
rain layered foreground.

Say anything over and over,  
word you love or word you loathe  
it reduces to sound,  
to nonsense.  
As a meditation,  
this nudges us  
closer to edges,  
toward wilder realms rarely visited.

But be wary of ideas  
ranted over and over.  
They lose something too,  
lose the softness of grass on bare feet,  
of hand touching hand. They become  
strictures against the way rain speaks,  
barriers to what nourishes  
the ground we are.

Note: ostranenie: (n.) encouraging people to see common things as strange, wild, or unfamiliar; defamiliarizing what is known in order to know it differently or more deeply (Russian)

## ***Redwood Dharma***

*Redwood trees have lived on Earth for over 240 million years.*

*Homo sapiens, about 200 thousand.*

Despite massive size,  
old growth redwood  
root systems are shallow.  
Trees reach 350 feet tall  
yet don't topple in the strongest winds.

Each one's roots interlace  
with its neighbors' roots,  
creating a vast network of support  
unseen on the surface.

They hold on for a thousand,  
two thousand years, maybe more,  
all the while showing us  
how to grow up.

# Maya Williams

## ***The Philippian Jailer, Suicide, and Hope***

*after Lindsay Young*

I think of myself  
as the Philippian Jailer  
in The Book of Acts.

No, I don't think of myself as a part of the machine  
of an incarceration system.  
(I want no part of it)

Let's try this again.

I think of the Philippian jailer  
as what Javert's story could have been  
in *Les Mis*  
(if the creators let him live).

Camaraderie with a good-hearted person facing prison.  
Seeing his failure not as a failure or "the end."  
There is a light in these cavernous tunnels of ours.  
Screw the end of it, because there's no "end" we have to get to.

Let's try this again.

I think of myself  
as the Philippian jailer  
because instead of choosing the darkness, he chose the light I want to choose.

***On Instagram***

*after Andrea Gibson*

On Instagram I am a swing on a swingset,  
a children's book about Mister Rogers,  
a long brown dress posed against a blank wall,  
a series of light blue skies  
and lush green hills  
protecting Hindu and Jain temples

On Instagram I am a Jewish synagogue,  
a writing workshop,  
another statement t-shirt  
that would make an easy gift  
for any social justice  
warrior's heart

On Instagram I am a poem about the Statue of Liberty,  
a poem about speaking to extraterrestrials,  
a poem about my friend's death,  
a story and post  
every  
Suicide Awareness Month

On Instagram  
I am smiling everywhere,  
except for where  
I am not  
On Instagram I am open to everyone  
until I am not



Lynn Carriker  
The Moths and the Light

# Martin Willitts Jr.

## *Passengers*

Silvery in cautious steps,  
deer walk out of the trees.

Someone is counting the stars, losing track.  
Darkness is lumbering in the sky,  
dragging canoes of clouds on thin ropes,  
slippery with moondust.

We are all passengers in this light.

## ***Uncertainty***

When caught in a wordless moment,  
do not worry too much about what to say —

the speechlessness tells us  
whatever we need to know.

Embrace the silence, make it  
the clothing you wear.

When trapped inside this uncertainty,  
distance from the subject might bring it closer.

Some experiences escape words, leaving  
no trace. It's alright to be overwhelmed.

Some places we just have to leave alone;  
sometimes, we can come back,

trying to assemble words like robins make nests,  
knowing a breeze could destroy them.

## ***Edges***

a swampy pond does not have clear divisions  
between land and water  
where one begins and the other ends

edges blur and confound  
we could accidently plunge waist-high  
disturbing cattails and tadpoles

it is like finding ourselves gratified  
we can't distinguish between air and space  
or the unseen boundaries

some parts of the world are diminishing  
yet we plummet ahead  
trusting there is an edge and not extinction

there is a distinction  
even if we cannot see it  
we act as if it is murky when it is not

# Dwight L. Wilson

*Haiku*

***Haiku***

doomed roses  
first scents of decay  
--pierced by bees

# Erin Wilson

## *What to Do in the City*

"Man is only a reed, the weakest in nature, but he is a thinking reed."

Blaise Pascal

Touch the shoulders of shirts and sweaters  
in the Jarrett Centre. I am. I can tell what  
I'm attracted to by touch, what makes me feel  
alive, alien, dirty, or a liar. A lady an aisle over,  
a worker, is cussing shirts that won't stay on hangers,  
organizing things. As far as I can tell,  
returning chaos to chaos. I've done this at  
work myself, the cussing, the effort at order.  
She asks aloud (to me? ), "What song is this?  
And then announces, when it's over,  
"Brian Adams, Cuts Like a Knife."  
She's pretty pleased with herself.  
With every item I add to my cart,  
I return to inspect a detailed list of product prices  
laminated to a post. It's the cheapest thrift store around.  
Even so, I carefully consider each item.  
I ask a worker how much books are,  
hoping they're a dollar. They're two.  
Everything is relative, right. I try on  
a flannel shirt, so old and soft  
it feels as though it has built-in memories.

I look in a mirror and am kind of surprised—  
I'm not all that. I could have sworn I was  
a moment before. The flannel goes back.  
There's a storm coming on. The staff  
is excitedly shouting to one another about it,  
coaxing friends to borrow coats and umbrellas.  
When I step outside the sky's black. I stop and listen.  
Above the battery of traffic and souging grasses:  
a first clear liquid-cool snap of thunder.  
Seven foot tall swathes of common reed  
bring pulse to a nearby ditch. Despite the traffic,  
the train tracks, the Burger King, the Staples  
(and the buckshot of adjacent businesses,  
along with all their shoppers), I'm beguiled.  
I walk over to it and stand there passing my hands  
through the undulating grasses, utterly amazed,  
rooted, laughing to myself.

## ***The Partita***

While at work  
a woman rushes  
into the building,  
shouting frantically,  
"There is an injured bird!  
Who can help?  
Might anyone help?"  
head turning.

No one moves  
or voices a word.  
Instead, as though  
everyone is caged  
in their own  
invisible prison,  
they flash their eyes  
upon the metal bars,  
barely looking beyond.

I hear, I see  
and so start  
as though  
from the other side  
of a short staircase  
from a cellar,  
get a box  
and follow her outside.

A sparrow  
has broken its leg.  
I tip the box.  
It hops inside.  
Such trust.  
I have nothing to say.

Nearby, a raven  
jumps about,  
raving.

I carry the sparrow  
to a place  
in long grasses  
beneath a tree,  
leaving him the box  
to shelter,  
go back inside  
and say nothing  
for the rest of the day.

I drive home  
and prepare dinner,  
cut onions,  
listening to Bach  
and cry,  
not saying a word,  
crying with Bach,  
or the woman,  
or the sparrow,  
or the box  
which may or may not  
already be empty.

The violin plays.  
Or the musician plays.  
Or Bach is present from the grave.

My husband opens the door and says...

But words are foreign to me...

The violin, the violin, three hundred years  
the violin.

**Pui Ying Wong**

***A TREE GROWS ON THE STONE  
WALL***

## ***A TREE GROWS ON THE STONE WALL***

Something in the ground wouldn't  
let it stay and sent a side  
of the roots to the wall.

It may also be a case  
of mutual aversion,  
an impossible love.

A menacing passerby  
would've nixed it  
but didn't.

A squall should've ripped it,  
a drought should've wilted it  
and didn't.

It grows. In spite of.

It learns to love the wall  
the way refugees learn to love  
their host country.

It learns to take in rain,  
nutrients through  
secret channels.

Takes in all manner of lights,  
from meager winter glare  
to summer's harsh white heat.

All these take time. Then decades.

It is still learning.  
Now it is to make one thing  
only, a mural of it's own existence.

One decked with hairy roots,  
inlaid with moss, ruby ash and liverwort.  
No pedigree, alive with scars.

***THE NIGHT MOVES***

It moves  
over tunnels and overpasses  
swimming pools  
and hospitals It moves

with funnels of clouds  
and rains like steam engines  
on the parched mouth of suburb  
and hooded stars

---over insomniacs  
hissing coffee pots  
slow march of ticking digits

over voices of exiles  
bigots zealots  
fortune tellers and sleepwalkers

over silos and refineries  
glinting  
like fabled palaces

It moves  
over the decrepitated town's  
shuttered cinema inn  
a nature museum  
Over

the narrow road to prison  
a utopian farm's  
three-legged barn relics  
memories finally ownerless---

The night moves  
over us too  
ensconced  
in the catacomb of sleep  
in time's fidelity

**A SHOUT FROM THE DARK***After Jim Moore*

If like a Buddhist I accepted the world  
as it was given, without judgement,

does it mean I would remain unmoved  
by any atrocities, any tragedies?

Karma gives birth to snakes, swine,  
songbirds. Step out of one life

and come back as another,  
a woman with an enigmatic smile

was once a man, a pauper or a prince,  
the possibilities are endless.

A girl from the old neighborhood  
is murdered, and before death, tortured.

In The Metropolitan Museum  
Buddha turns inward, eyes downcast.

*"Turn around! The bitter sea knows no bound."*  
A shout from the dark that says

what's bitter is not life, only emotion.  
But Issa, practitioner of detachment, too, doubted.

What are words if they can't sing  
dirges, when even the crows are crying out.

# Diane Woodcock

## ***ANOTHER FEAST DAY OF KUAN YIN***

It was all good except for the day  
the vultures circled overhead;  
and filled with dread, I said I'd stay  
with the vehicle – the others following  
after them. It was an elephant,  
three days dead, our guide surmised,  
probably shot by a villager when he  
came into his patch of crops.

This the crux of the matter:  
everything(one) just trying to survive.  
Of course, it was the elephant's domain  
long before humans came to claim  
and clear the bush so rich in the elephant's  
favorite food plants. Now forced to  
take a chance, the risk their lives for  
villagers' crops. What else can they do?

What would you do?

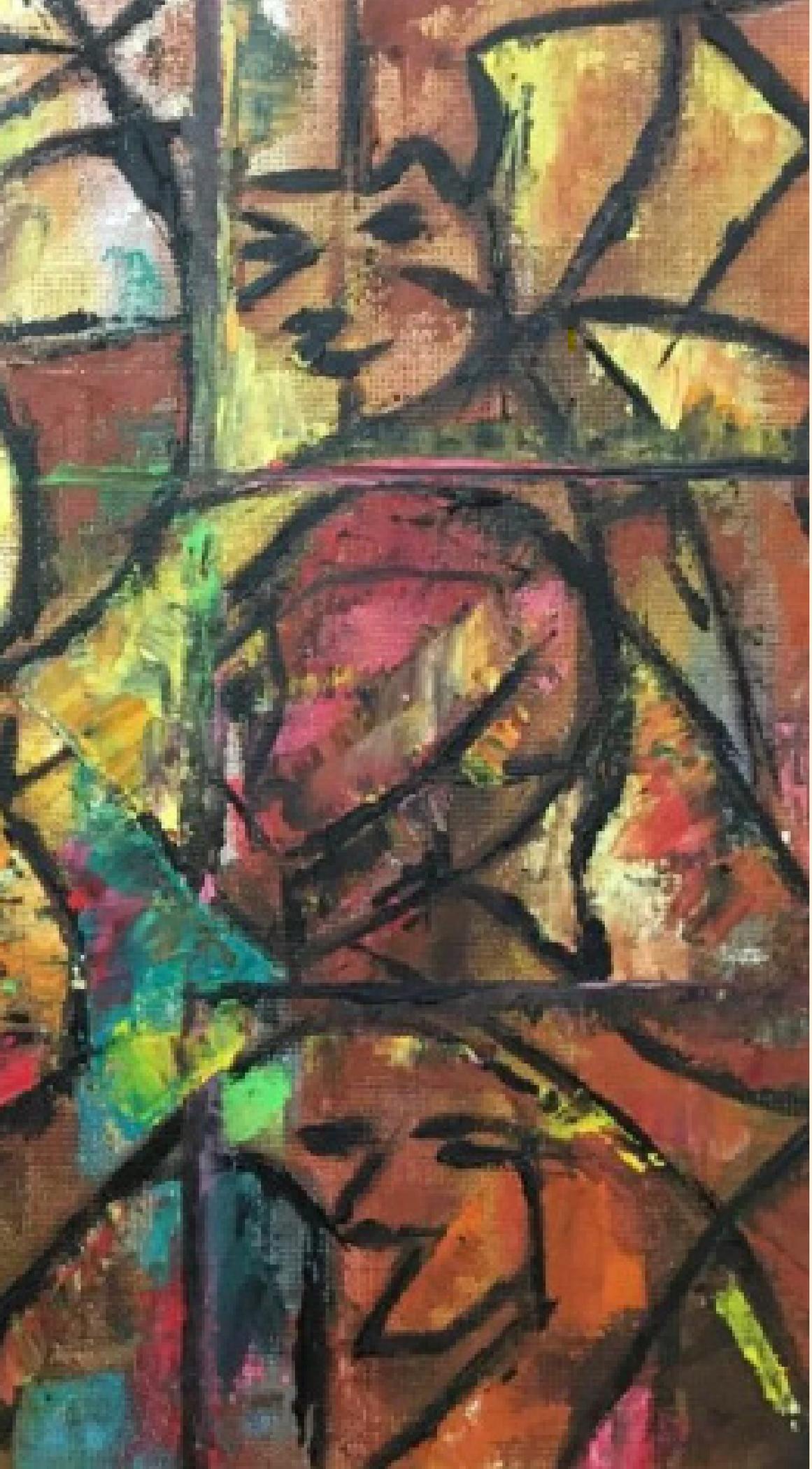
I meditate on this today, Buddhist Feast  
of Kuan Yin, recognizing my capacity  
for compassion with all creation,  
and I pray for elephants wounded,  
hungry, dying. I meditate on them  
till I see one so clearly before me,  
and Kuan Yin sitting on his back,  
ivory-white as the tusks of that male  
who crossed our path that day, leaving  
a scent trail of musth behind him.

She fills me with compassion for  
the elephant, villagers, poachers,  
ivory carvers – compassion for all  
caught up in murder, greed, corruption.  
It runs through my veins like sap  
through trees, urging me to focus all my  
energies on relieving others's suffering:

Syrian refugees, Rohingya forced out  
of Myanmar, Tibetan nomads ousted from  
ancestral lands, critically endangered  
Amsterdam and Tristan albatross,  
Balearic shearwater, elephant.

To see each one as gift and miracle  
in these horrific times when everything  
is in decline. I close my eyes and hear  
the river flowing, elephants going  
about their business of grazing the bush,  
and I wish (pray) them well.





Galen G. Cortes // Virtual Community





Galen G. Cortes // Blissful Surprises



Erin McAtee // Our Good Shepherd

# Prose

**Curtis Almquist**

***WONDER: Living Life in Utter  
Amazement***

## ***WONDER: Living Life in Utter Amazement***

You need not go elsewhere to discover wonder: to dream and delight, to be astonished and grateful for the sheer joy of being alive. Watch a child take in life to be reminded how living in wonder is an innate gift. G. K. Chesterton said, "The sun rises every morning not only because of the natural laws of science, but because, like a small child, God squeals with delight over routine and tells the sun to 'do it again!'" Wonder is to be found in the ordinary.

The experience of wonder is within the reach of your senses and memory, now. You need only pay attention: Laugh at squirrels. Gaze at flower petals in their most intricate colors, and forms, and fragrances. Eat slowly enough to guess the spices. Listen for the oboe at the symphony. Watch your cat watching; scratch your dog's chest. Experience what good architecture does for your soul. Notice the difference in color between the light of dawn and the light of dusk. Notice how shadows make life so much more interesting. Wink at yourself in the mirror. Hum. Turn off your radio or iPod and hum. Hum from memory; hum up something new. Watch children playing. Revere your body as a miracle and delight in what your body can do, what your hands can do, what your fingers can do, what your index finger can do. How many things can your index finger do? Listen for birds and choose your favorite bird call, your favorite that day. Recall the road less traveled that you have taken that has made all the difference. Say "thank you" at least a dozen times a day. Take a sip of tea, and put your tea cup down; when you're ready, take another sip. Find an outdoor fountain and watch the flow of water. Repeat after me: "rubber baby buggy bumpers," or make up your own tongue twister and try it out at a dinner party. Close your eyes and fly like you could when you were a child. Retrieve something old, something that you had almost forgotten. Create something new. Remember who it was, that first person who got through to you, who convinced you that you could do it. Reclaim your most notorious failures, and what good has come out of them. Find something that makes you laugh. Go to a museum and visit one gallery, one only, and stay until you've learned the secret you need to know. Remember your first love. Remember what brings tears to your eyes; remember who brings tears to your eyes. Why is that?

On I could go. On *you* could go, and you should. Live the miracle of your life, each passing moment. Take nothing for granted; take everything for gratitude. Recognize that the Creator of life – the life that surrounds you and the life that fills you – has given you a life to share delight and wonder and utter amazement. In the beginning, God created life, and it was good, so good, so amazingly good, that God could not help but share it... with you.

Life is a *panentheistic* experience, that is, everything in the whole of creation reveals the traces of God.<sup>1</sup> Hildegard of Bingen, the great 12 th -century Benedictine abbess, described creation as a collection of “mirrors” that God has made to reflect the wonder of God’s glory. The whole of creation is iconic, a window to God. God’s intention is that we be wonderfully caught up in the traces of God’s glory that fill us and surround us.

For some of us, it may have taken the experience of sickness – ours or someone else’s – to awaken our awareness of the absolute miracle of own body and mind, and the preciousness and beauty of life. Don’t wait to be sick to be reminded of wonder! Live your life, from the inside out, as a marvel to behold. John Cassian, a fourth-century Egyptian monk, said “we must be fully awake to the wonder and beauty of our being, to the mystery of the personal life of Jesus in our Heart.”

While wonder is all around us, alive within us, and ready at any moment to be cherished, the monastic tradition upholds two practices as especially helpful in opening doorways to wonder: contentment and silence. The English word “contentment” comes from the Latin *contentus*, “contained,” “satisfied.” We live in a culture in which we are considered “consumers,” in a market economy constantly alluring us with dissatisfaction. We are taught that what is next, or what is new, is better than what is now. Not so. An ancient monastic principle teaches that the freedom to be fully alive is found in the context of limitation. You cannot have it all, nor should you. To be content is to engage with the wonder of life that is now. Grow your soul downward, deeper, into the ground of your being. Don’t just be virtually present to life; be *really* present, which is where you will experience God’s real presence, in the wonder of now.

Likewise, claiming moments of silence in the course of each day will invite your being really present to the wonder of life. Silence is like punctuation for the soul, otherwise life can be gibberish, like a run-on sentence that has no meaning. Silence is like the rests in music. Without the rests, there would be just a cacophony, not music. Being silent and still will bring the wonder of life into focus, lest life otherwise only be a blur. The SSJE *Rule of Life* values “the silence of adoring love for the mystery of God which words cannot express. In silence we pass through the bounds of language to lose ourselves in wonder.”<sup>2</sup> Incorporate some silence and stillness in the cadence of your day to help you take in the grandeur of life, the panoply of God’s splendor. Life is wondrous. Stop. Look. Listen.

Not all of life is wonderful. Some days are crushing. The experience of wonder can be very elusive in the face of suffering, injustice, loss, and death. And yet, you can feel more than one thing at a time. Being attentive to the wonder of life will counterbalance what is *not* wonderful and will make a world of difference to you. In the best of times and in the worst of times, opening the door of your soul to wonder will help you pray your life, your amazing life, with hope

and zeal.

*May none of God's wonderful works keep silence, night or morning. Bright stars, high mountains, the depths of the seas, sources of rushing rivers: may all these break into song as we sing to Father, Son and Holy Spirit. May all the angels in the heavens reply: Amen, amen, amen. Power, praise, honor, eternal glory to God, the only Giver of grace, Amen, amen, amen.*

– Anon., 3rd century

### a. Suggested Practices

Wake up surprised, thankful, and attuned to the wonder of being alive. Don't miss a moment of life's splendor! (*I begin each day with a gentle touch of greeting to our plants and flowers as I pass by.*)

God has created you with a will, and with the capacity to desire. Rather than using your gift of desire to focus onto something you don't have, use your desire to claim and cherish what you do have, i.e.: *this* is what I want, *this* is what I need, *this* is what I have been given. Be attentive and grateful for now. Behold the wonder of now.

Use your gift of sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste to be singularly focused on one thing, e.g., with the taste of food, with a piece of artwork, with a sole instrument in the orchestra, with something alive in the created world. Focus; absorb; delight; adore. (*I particularly enjoy taking very close-up, "micro-photos" of flowers, birds, and bees.*)

### b. Questions for your Reflection

When you were young, what filled you with wonder and delight? Go back in your memory and reclaim that experience. If you were to "copy and paste" that experience into the present, what would it be now? Whatever you can remember is still alive in your soul.

What is your life story? Tell the story to yourself. *Once upon a time there was this little boy, or this little girl. And she lived in...* (Where did she live?) *She always felt that...* (What did she feel?) *When she heard... When she saw... When she smelled...* (What was it?) *There were some big people in her life.* (Who were they? Were they good? Were they bad? Were they silly? Were they frightening?) *She always felt safe and loved by...* (Who was this? Was it a stuffed animal or a pet? Was it your grandmother?) *And she decided, "When I grow up, I am going to..."* (What? What did you want never to happen again? What did you want to happen always? Who were you going to be and become?) Just keep telling yourself that story until you come to now. And this is what will happen. You will be reminded of how miraculous your life really

is. And you will realize that somewhere along the way God broke through to you. Somehow the story you are telling about your life is what God whispered into your ear about what your life is to be about. Pick up that story line again: the absolute, amazing wonder of your own life script.

### c. Words to Ponder

#### **Philippians 4:8**

“Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about *these* things.”

#### **The Talmud (5 th century, C.E.)**

Every blade of grass has its angel that bends over it and whispers, “Grow, grow.”

#### **Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179), *German abbess***

Holy Spirit  
 giving life to all life,  
 moving all creatures,  
 root of all things,  
 washing them clean,  
 wiping out their mistakes,  
 healing their wounds,  
 you are our true life,  
 luminous, wonderful,  
 awakening the heart  
 from its ancient sleep.

#### **Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907-1972), *American rabbi and theologian***

To pray is to take notice of the wonder, to regain a sense of the mystery that animates all beings. Prayer is our humble answer to the inconceivable surprise of living... our gratefulness for witnessing the wonder, for the gift of our unearned right to serve, to adore, and to fulfill.

**e. e. cummings (1894-1962), *American poet***

i thank You God for most this amazing  
 day: for the leaping greenly spirits of trees  
 and a blue true dream of sky; and for everything  
 which is natural which is infinite which is yes

(i who have died am alive again today,  
 and this is the sun's birthday; this is the birth  
 day of life and love and wings: and of the gay  
 great happening illimitably earth)

how should tasting touching hearing seeing  
 breathing any—lifted from the no  
 of all nothing—human merely being  
 doubt unimaginably You?

(now the ears of my ears awake and  
 now the eyes of my eyes are opened)

**d. Further Resources**

"A Song of Creation" in *The Book of Common Prayer*, pp. 88-90.

*Upstream: Selected Essays*, by Mary Oliver.

*I Asked for Wonder; A Spiritual Anthology*, by Abraham Joshua Heschel.

<sup>1</sup> *Panentheism* (from the Greek): "everything is in God"

<sup>2</sup> SSJE Rule of Life, Chap. 27: "Silence."

# Elizabeth Jarrett Andrew

## *Our Dark Knowing: A Personal History of Sleep*

After a summer of keeping her distance, Rhia the cat sleeps in a lump at the foot of the bed, signaling autumn; her breathing body pressed against my feet eases me down to a place where being melts into being. I remember sleeping with my sister, first whispering under the covers and taking turns drawing pictures on one another's backs while Pete Seeger crooned lullabies from my mother's plastic portable record player. Once I dreamt of bowling and Marcy woke up with a scratch on her behind. One morning we woke convinced we had shared some silly dream about swimming in rhythm, "Bubble-bubble-oomph-oomph," and even if it wasn't true I still wonder whether the wordless knowing we now share initially passed from skin to skin during those nights.

I always hated sleepovers as a kid because I wanted to sleep. A few times each year all the cousins piled into Aunt Martie's trailer home, six little kids on the fold-out couch, until Alice (always Alice) sprawled lengthwise in her sleep and poked everyone with boney elbows. In the morning I found myself on the floor, exhausted and cold. I was fine at parties until lights out, when I would pull the sleeping bag over my head, hoping no one would notice, feeling lonely, and will with every cell in my tired body that everyone would just shut up.

Most of my childhood I slept alone. I held my bear tightly. I created an imaginary world to help me fall asleep. Later, when my body suddenly became unfamiliar, I touched the soreness on my chest. I woke in the night and watched my ghostly diaphanous curtains billow above me with each breath of air. Sleep was a buoyant ocean occasionally crossed by whimsical ships heavy with secret cargo.

Even in college my prudish boyfriend and I would make out and almost fall asleep, probably did a few times, but we roused ourselves to return to our separate rooms because sleeping together seemed more intimate than sex. Then another decade passed with a body aching for touch. The first night Emily and I spent together, her body was so thrilling and new I never slept. She tucked her back against me, her breath lengthening until I lost her. I lay there, wanting morning. Sometime during that long night a memory came to me, intensely—my grandmother, asleep, spooning around me. I must have been five, Gramps still alive and asleep in his own, taller, twin bed. Grandma's nightgown was soft. Her warmth had been waiting all those years just below my skin, and silently I began to cry.

My marriage bed fifteen years later is a pool, and while Emily and I splash and dive regularly, mostly we sink down the way my sister and I did, and my grandmother, resting side-by-side at the silty bottom of consciousness. We release the burden of identity and dissolve into shifting, unitive comfort. Our terrors and longings float by like odd, tropical creatures, but for the most part the depths are dark. Vertical currents heave us to the surface and back down. Given its natural course, sleep washes us up on the beach of awareness. The tide recedes. We rise as though newly evolved,

turning our faces to the sun.

Sometimes I descend the stairs into sleep and miss a step, my body convulsing as I catch myself and wake us both up. Sometimes Emily dances in her sleep, feet twitching like a dog's. When Emily had cancer I crawled into the hospital bed; we raised the bars so we wouldn't fall out and hung the tubes out of the way. We barely fit but we needed to be that close. The nurses woke us every few hours and never flinched at our intimacy, although I felt laid bare: Here is who we are in the night.

Once in Florida we slept in a king-sized bed and missed each other so much it colored our vacation.

Before our daughter was born, we planned for a family bed where we'd entrain our child with smell and breath and warmth. Then on that first night, with a three-day-old infant tiny between us, we lay stiff and wide-eyed, listening to the smallest, most erratic breathing imaginable. Surely those long pauses forebode Gwyn's immanent death. When she finally stirred, crying for food, our relief was eclipsed by looming, then ballooning, exhaustion. By six months Gwyn's insistence on partying in the wee hours convinced us the family bed was a fantastic idea for extroverts, but not for us.

Even today, at age ten, in the lost black middle of the night Gwyn cries out. I stagger across the hall to find blankets bunched at her feet, extract the stuffed menagerie and tuck us both in. For a minute or two before I join her in the depths, I attend to the soft rise and fall of her back snug against me. Gwyn's body is a breathing comma. She's all heat. Then we generate heat together until it expands into the cave of our covers. If I turn, Gwyn's sleeping body extends a toe to find me. When I flip my back to her, she nudges up like a barnacle. Some nights she throws her arm over my neck and I feel small again, as though this girl with her huge, un-lived life can embrace my world of hurts. Somehow sleep makes this possible.

I love the luxury of falling asleep alone, sprawled diagonally across a full-sized bed, but when I wake I want Emily's body to ease me back into awareness. First there's solidity, heat, pressure. Then skin and fabric, the salty vegetable smell of her hair, the light film of sweat on her skin. We're together, in our bodies. Then sleep's dissolution recedes like the tide; I'm me again, my mind beginning its whirl. I forget our dark knowing. Still, it runs beneath my days like an underground current, this erasure and completion, obliteration and union, this stream where none of us is alone.

# Joseph Bruchac III

*Sharing to Survive*

## ***Sharing to Survive***

“We shared to survive.” My old friend Louis Littlecoon Oliver, a Muskogee Creek elder, used those words to describe how his people managed to make it through after such things as having their entire nation forced out of the American southeast during the early 19th century. We shared to survive. Those are words I’ve heard again and again from Native Elders.

That saying, though, refers not just to the hard times that all of our original nations experienced over the past five hundred years as a result of disease, dispossession, and the dehumanization we suffered from the European cultures that began to dominate our homelands.

It also has to do with a world view and a spiritual understanding far different from the kind of obsessive individualism characteristic not just of western capitalism, but of many religious doctrines. Becoming a self-centered multibillionaire is not that different from the assumption that your own particular form of worship will insure that you will ascend to the position of being one of the “Chosen Ones.”

It ties into that peculiar idea of everything in Creation being arranged as a sort of pyramid, like the medieval hierarchy that placed the king (or God) at the top followed by increasingly larger layers arranged according to status—with the vast majority of people, peasants, bearing the weight of all that piled above them. That pyramid, I should note, is made up only of human beings. All the rest of life—animals, plants—is seen as being without worth other than how it may answer the needs of humanity.

Rather than seeing—and experiencing—the world in those terms, the predominant Native image of life is that of a circle, one in which all things are interdependent.

Before I go further, I need to point out that I am simplifying things, providing a broad outline. I am not saying that all of our Native American cultures were identical or perfect or had all the answers. The major reason that we find so many lesson stories in every one of our more than 500 different indigenous traditions is that we needed and still need to be reminded of our mistakes and obtain guidance to do better.

The idea of sharing to survive, of living with an awareness of the circle, provides us with a pattern. It’s one more sustainable than the current dominant world view, one that is not just resulting in dishonesty, human suffering, warfare and environmental degradation but also leading toward a literal dead end. Nothing is more needed now for all of humanity than a new—or rather a very old—way of being.

The large nations of the world at times seem to have become enamored of a sort of social Darwinism. The idea of the “survival of the fittest,” justifies inequity as simply the natural way, built

on a view of nature as being “red in tooth and claw.” The strong survive, the weak drop out of the gene pool.

Again, I am generalizing. Of course, there are countless people and organizations that pour long hours and large sums (many of them governmental) into caring for the less fortunate among us or try to work in defense of the natural world. But they are not the majority. They are bailing, rather than steering the boat.

Since I am neither a politician or a political scientist, but a traditional storyteller, rather than talking any further about theory let me share a simple story that hints at the spiritual depth of the idea of the circle among our northeastern Algonquin nations.

A Christian missionary in the 17th century is said to have asked a group of Long Island Algonquins if they had any concept of God. His expectation was that their reply would be something he could debunk as foolish superstition. However, what they did was to take a stick and draw a large circle on the ground, with a very small circle in the center of that larger one.

“This large circle is the eye of the Great Mystery,” they explained. “And this small one is we human beings. No matter what we do, we are always seen.”

We are a circle within a circle. And we cannot hide either misdeeds or lies.

Further, that circle is one of mutuality and cooperation. Among our Wabanaki nations, when we planted our crops it was done communally, the work shared among all of the households in the village. Working together we could accomplish those tasks more easily and enjoyably.

The corn we planted was itself a gift—one that was given to us long ago when a spiritual being—seeing that the people were starving—appeared to a certain man worried about his people. That being showed itself in the form of a woman with golden hair and a green dress.

“I have come to help your people,” she said to him. “I am going to die now. Bury my body and take care of my grave. Keep it moist and free of weeds and I will return to you with food for your people.”

That man did as she said and from her grave grew the first corn, sheathed in green with golden hair tasseling at the top. The people harvested it and gave thanks with a special Green Corn ceremony that we do to this day, singing “Yaaa, Nigawes,” thanking the Corn Mother.

That thanks to the Corn was important, for it completed the circle. When a young man

went hunting and killed his first deer, he gave it to the village and took none of it for himself. Even further, that deer was not just thanked for giving itself, it was believed that the deer offered itself to the people because it was needed for them to survive. However, if you did not thank the deer properly, you might never kill another deer again.

Hunting, in general, was—and still is—a cooperative venture between the Animal People and the human beings. No animal was taken unless it was truly needed. Further, mother animals with young ones were never to be killed. When an animal was hunted, that animal would allow itself to be killed knowing that its body would be taken but its spirit would survive. When a deer was shot it was said to drop a bag of meat and then keep on going. When an Abenaki hunter killed a deer, the word “Alemhala, May you continue to run,” was spoken. When a fish was caught “May you continue to swim” was said.

Thus, through giving back, through a reciprocal relation, the circle is closed and the game animals, the fish, the plants and all the other living beings that help sustain us remain and continue to help us.

However, when that cycle of respect and cooperation is broken, only bad things result. You do not need to believe in Abenaki ideas about hunting to see what results when hunting is practiced thoughtlessly or only for human gain. The most numerous bird on the planet was the Passenger Pigeon, which travelled in migratory flocks so large that they would break the branches of the trees when they landed on them in great numbers. A major food source for the native nations of the northeast, they were so tame you could knock them from the trees with a stick. But by the 19<sup>th</sup> century they were viewed as a cash crop by white hunters. The last flock was killed—to a bird—by white hunters who packed them into barrels to be shipped to eastern restaurants where they were eaten as a delicacy. From billions to none.

The passenger pigeon was so loved and respected by our eastern peoples that there was even a Passenger Pigeon dance—still done by our Iroquois neighbors—to honor its memory.

One of our oldest Wabanaki stories tells how Gluskonba, the first one to walk about in the shape of a human being, managed to trick all the animals into his magical game bag. He was quite pleased with himself. But when he showed his Grandmother what he had done, saying “Now we no longer have to hunt for animals. Now we can just reach into my game bag and pull out any animal we want.” His Grandmother shook her head. “Gluskonba,” she said, “what you have done is not good. No one person should own all the animals. They cannot live in a game bag. They will sicken and die. And what

of our children’s children yet to come? How will they survive without the animals?” Seeing her wisdom, Gluskonba then released the animals so that they could be shared by the future generations.

As I am writing this, we are in the midst of a worldwide health crisis, entire nations quarantined against a virus that—like the new diseases that killed so many of our indigenous people centuries ago—threatens us and everything about our current way of life. Perhaps now, more than ever, we need to see through the circle and realize that circle cannot be strong if any part of it is broken or missing. It is only by sharing—not hoarding or selfishly protecting our resources—that we may survive. It is only through respect for others and kindness, through the sharing of spirit that sustains our souls and the sharing of those material things that sustain life that we will survive.



Shannon Elizabeth Gardner  
Coffin Birth

# Lindsey Chou

## ***What Is Brought to Light***

I came to the hospital hoping it would change me. I didn't tell anybody that, but I knew. On my application essays and to my parents, I recited my joint interest in psychology and theology as a tidy reason why I would be interested in such a thing as hospital chaplaincy. This was true, but more than anything else, I was there because I wanted to be pushed close enough to my limits to become someone new. Who, exactly, I'm not sure, but certainly a different kind of person—someone who believed in God more surely and maybe ate breakfast regularly. Someone who could handle trauma and would make more of my theology degree than a fanciful thought exercise. Someone whose work with people in pain made amends for the fact that I had never been through as much as they had. It was penance and prayer, all in one.

I started at the end of May. On my first overnight shift, I found out abruptly that most people coming to the hospital *were* being changed; unlike me, they hadn't planned on it. The pager would not stop going off. I ran between the trauma bay and waiting rooms as new pages continued coming in. One man watched from the hallway as the rapid response team worked on his father. "Come on dad," he whispered fiercely. I saw two women, each within years of my age. One died; one survived. I burst into tears abruptly in the middle of the night, lying alone in the office on the red pleather recliner we used on weekends.

The following Monday, my supervisor remarked, "You came back." It hadn't occurred to me not to. He asked if I remembered what I had said to him on the phone when I finished my shift. I didn't. "Brutal," he said gently, "you said it was brutal."

I quickly realized my expectations were not going to be met, at least not in the way I'd imagined. I focused on getting through, and stopped aspiring to save money, have fun, or take up running again. I dutifully took to the routine of morning meeting, checking the consult list and the recently deceased list, and then heading to the floors. I knocked on doors to introduce myself and explain what pastoral care was. I started drinking two large coffees every morning and stopped being able to cry.

I visited all sorts of people, and had interactions ranging from boring to gut-wrenching with each of them. I sat with outpatients receiving chemotherapy. I talked with men who were having personal reckonings with prior years of alcoholism. Family members shooed me away, as if my entering the room would usher in death like a bad smell. I developed a soft spot for one older woman who would silently grasp for my hand whenever I visited her.

People responded in different ways to knowing I was a chaplain. Sometimes, they asked me to pray with them; other times, they took me to task for their frustrations with religion. I could sympathize. I was frustrated with it, too. I rounded; I gowned; I took meticulous notes. I felt helpless. They told me that would happen. I visited the chapel every day for a while, on the advice that it was

a healthy, good practice for sustaining this sort of work. It felt empty.

I admitted to myself that I had come here chasing God. I had hoped that I would encounter God in a way I never had before if I went to the depths of suffering I had never seen before. God was at the margins, right? God was with the suffering, in the dying and in the rising. That was what I had heard, at least. Other grad students and ministers had always seemed to know something I didn't; like they shared some confirming evidence which I could only pretend to have experienced. I had figured that if there was any place in this world where I could become convinced once-and-for-all of God's existence, it would be here. I didn't see God anywhere, though. I only saw death and pain and no way to make any sense of it all short of lying to myself outright.

I started to wonder if everyone who seemed to have faith was really just doing exactly that. Patients told me all the time that they trusted God had a plan for them and their illness. Lots of them prayed for miraculous healing. This was something which, while not fully endorsing, I could understand. I could be compassionate about why someone might willfully bend around logic in the midst of an encounter with their own mortality. I felt no such gentleness toward God in my own demanding need to know if anyone was actually there.

I skirted around my doubts when leading the prayers that patients requested, sticking only to vague petitions that I thought a God I couldn't picture or say much about might be able to accomplish. It wasn't going to help someone to hear that I didn't believe God was who they thought He was, that I thought their long-bearded genie was a child's fantasy. I never prayed for miracles. I prayed aloud for people to know that they weren't alone, and I prayed silently for that to become true by any means possible.

This was not a popular position among most of the other interns. They relied on prayers and a God who granted miracles. They loved worship music. They clucked and nodded about how an agnostic or atheist could *never* do this kind of work sufficiently. I wondered what they would say if I told them I was sold on God only a few days per week, and on Jesus even fewer. They speculated over lunch about the salvation of children who may or may not have been old enough to be judged as adults on their Christian faith. I desperately wanted to believe in God, but it terrified me to see that you could spend decades seeking Him and arrive only to a place that I still found so unsatisfying.

I felt less sure than ever about if there was anything necessarily all that spiritual about this work, or this world. Life seemed both darker and emptier than I had ever realized. On the subway one morning, I spent the whole forty minutes grieving the kids I had wanted to have someday. I had read an article the night before about the climate crisis, and steeled myself for a future in which it would be cruel to have even one child, let alone two. I had been daydreaming about composting, sunshine, and a baby boy someday. That morning I laid my head against the rattling wall and mourned the idea that I could even have those joys. *There is nothing good in this world*, I thought. Nothing good. There is death.

Early on, a staff chaplain had tried to impress upon me the acuity of the cases that made it to this hospital, but I still hadn't understood. The people I met were so sick. At first, I thought that empty rooms meant people were recovering. I eventually realized that many of the patients who had disappeared from my floors had likely not gone home healthy, but to hospice care. A lot of them would die after they left, and I would never know. Some died at the hospital, and I did know.

A part of me felt like it was dying, too. For one, I felt like I knew too much to ever comfortably believe in God again. Beyond that was the fact that I felt deeply alone. I spent nearly all of my time outside the hospital either by myself or with a man I insisted I was not actually dating. All the people I loved lived far away, dealing with all manner of their own crises. They didn't need to hear this, and I didn't know quite how to explain to them what was happening to me anyway.

On one of my saddest days, I left the apartment of the man who was not my boyfriend to go home, and stumbled my way to the bookstore instead. I hadn't told him how sad I was when I woke up that morning, and so he didn't know. I hadn't seen anybody else yet that day, so no one else knew, either. I went to the third floor poetry section, pulled a Rilke book off the shelf, and promptly began crying at a line which promised *God is still growing*. I wedged myself between shelves of foreign language dictionaries and sat there with tears rolling off my face. I ended up spending seventeen dollars I didn't really have on a book of Mary Oliver poems. *Here is a story to break your heart*, she began. *Are you willing?*

My heart was already so broken that I could barely feel it anymore. I wondered if I would die young, and if the future that so worried me might end up not mattering. I calculated that, if the many catastrophes I had witnessed could befall any of the people in the city of Philadelphia, that one could easily someday befall me as well. I walked down the back stairs one day at the end of my shift and wondered idly about what would happen if the concrete tower all just came crashing down with me inside. I had started lying awake at night staring at a list of reasons to stay alive. I was starting to not want to.

It wasn't just that I was burning out, that I was drenched in other people's pain, or that I had all the genetic ingredients of a good depressive episode, though all three of those were true. All summer, I had been confronted with the harsh reality that there was no sense to suffering, at least not that I could see. People died young, or lonely, or without things being made right. I didn't know until then how much I had relied on there being some sort of order to life, and I had no idea what to do with the fact that, up close to living and dying, I could find no order at all. I was desperate for answers. If, as it seemed, there were none to be had, I struggled to put words to why anyone should continue living.

My musings on the meaning of life were inextricably intertwined with the ones about God. If either order *or* God could have emerged, I would have been able to believe in the other. I had come here hoping it could turn me into a more steadfast believer. I had hoped this experience would make me into a good minister, a good Catholic, and someone who could feel close to God. Instead, I felt further away than ever.

The tipping point came, not with patients, but with my fellow interns. Instead of discussing

the assigned book in our class time one week, we watched a documentary about Christians with children who had come out as LGBTQ<sup>1</sup>. For the most part, the families had reacted in one of two ways: they either accepted their children's sexualities or disowned them with often-tragic consequences. Children had taken their own lives. Parents had regretted their rejections and become activists. I was not the only one changed by death, it seemed. The narration dismantled the interpretations of the Bible verses most frequently used to sanction homophobia, and illuminated the saving grace of a parent's love and acceptance. I thought it was great.

After the film ended, the condemnation was almost immediate. After all, someone insisted, the Bible was still the word of God and it still said being gay was a sin. More of my classmates furtively glanced away from each other, and I knew they agreed, too. I folded my arms around me, stunned at their admission and shocked that I felt so devastated by it. I almost told them that just because I had finally admitted to myself that I had a boyfriend didn't keep me from still liking girls. I shut down instead, and was reluctant to even go near my classmates afterward. Their God, their beloved biblical tenets, their love of neighbor and their professed love for me--none of them were things I could believe in.

The pain and loneliness of that afternoon hung over me for days. This summer had not been the first time I had felt little desire to continue living, but it was the first time I had felt it so intensely and for such a sustained amount of time. Such despair had only become more frequent and intense when I entered graduate school -- always, it came in the midst of enormous and unanswerable questions about God, awash in other people's trauma, and in long stretches of isolation from people with whom I felt safe to be myself. I recognized that, this time, the despair was telling me something that I had never been willing to hear before. I didn't have to do this. *I am not called to something if it makes me want to die a few times a year*, I thought exultantly in the dark of my bedroom.

Chaplaincy had been another place I realized I had been hoping to find my home among believers. Most of the friends with whom I had shared the early stages of faith and doubt had since given up on religion. I had gone to graduate school instead. I had been terribly lonely there. I had waged academic and rhetorical war on every doctrine and person who said that being on the Pill and not being all that sure about transubstantiation meant I couldn't be as Catholic as they were. *Maybe I can't*, I admitted to myself. *Maybe I don't need to be*.

I had been fighting and fighting to be loved, worthy, and accepted--sexuality, skepticism, irreverence for doctrine and all--into the fold. I had been trying to force myself into encountering God. I felt that if I stopped in either pursuit, I would be admitting and endorsing my own unworthiness. I would be resigning myself to live the rest of my life believing God wasn't there. For the first time, I could see that I was allowed to back away from this fight if it risked my being, and that in backing away, life could maybe be something other than what I had told myself it must.

It felt like a rush of air, bursting above water, or light flooding in. My first certainty in a season of only darkness was this: that no matter what I was born for, no matter what God there was or was not, I was not meant to do something, anything, that made me want to die this badly. I felt like I had slammed into a joyous, relief-stricken *no*. There was God again, finally. Somehow, He was wrapped

right up in the moment I gave myself permission to stop looking quite so hard for Him.

I hungrily embraced the newfound idea that I did not have to be able to conquer my pain around religion to live a worthwhile life, or even a spiritual one; the hope that I need not be accepted by all believers to have meaningful community. I allowed that perhaps the impulse to prove an entire tradition wrong was not actually the same as a vocation.

With only weeks left at the hospital, I held on. I stopped hoping to be able to share my whole self with my classmates, and found that they did love me quite a lot in the ways they were able to. I rested more in the ritual of meeting a college friend for drinks every week. I started taking my antidepressants again. Eventually, I told my closest friends one by one that, due to a strong cocktail of death, loneliness, and religion, I had been wanting to die.

These confessions began to bring me back to the surface of my own life. I allowed myself to be comforted by those who loved me. I told my supervisor the next week that I was probably bisexual and that I had felt horrible after the documentary. He looked at me across his desk and enunciated each word with a grieved but fierce protectiveness: *You are fearfully and wonderfully made.*

I remember the last few weeks of my time at the hospital as ones in which the beautiful began peeking out from the gloomy. I imagine it is more likely that I had found it so all along, and I simply began allowing myself to record it as such. A patient who had been on my floor for weeks had a vivacious visitor one day. She introduced herself as his ex-wife, and explained that she driven all night to be there when she had heard he was in the hospital. I sat alone in a stiff chair across from the elevator afterwards, just breathing and looking down at my lap and notebook as if the answer to all this laid there. I marveled at the depth of her love for him, at forgiveness, and at how much sacredness I had gotten to see all summer just by showing up.

In my last few days at the hospital, it was my turn again to carry the emergency pager. I raced out of morning meeting when I got a rapid response page, fearing the worst. But it was a baby. A woman had a baby, and was coming in as I arrived in the Emergency Department. Her husband walked, shocked, alongside the gurney where she sat clutching a fuzzy-headed little boy. Standing in the same hallway where I usually ran to trauma cases, I breathed in the rarity of relief. I wondered at new life in a world in which I had only been seeing darkness. I thought of my premature grief on the train that morning, and of the fact that babies are born even amidst all that is now dying or someday will.

I went back to school mere days after I finished my internship. After a summer of consistent early rising, I soon returned to crawling out of bed barely in time for class, and definitely not in time for breakfast. My work felt different now. While my body had left the hospital, my mind had not. I took questions and desperation about patients into classrooms where no one knew them. I found no satisfactory answers. I slowly adjusted back to a kind of normal where death was a rarity, and could be given space to feel more singularly tragic. My friend's brother died in September, and I locked myself in a bathroom stall to weep.

I thought I knew in my middle-of-the-night epiphany that I was done with theology, with

church, and with ministry. *No more of this for me*, I thought. I have found that it is not so simple as that. I have wondered if the call of that moment was not so much to abandon faith, but to abandon the temptation to get caught up contesting death instead of embracing life. One is a losing battle, and the other is preciously limited.

I think of my patients and my time at the hospital nearly every day. It changes how I see the world, how I speak, what I say, and what I don't. Months later, this shaped the words to the only blessing I felt I could pronounce upon a nineteen-year-old who came to tell me she wasn't sure if she believed in God anymore: I said it was okay if she didn't. I said it might not be permanent, but that even if it were, it was okay if she let her questions come and found that was where they led her. That she was good, that she was loved, that belief is not as easy as some would have us believe, that questions are important and healthy.

Even as this girl sat before me, in a pain I knew so well, I found in myself a shockingly steady conviction that she would ultimately be held by God. I still couldn't picture that God or really say too much about it. I couldn't guarantee I would still believe this was grace tomorrow, or that I would stake my hopes on knowing its presence after I die. What I did feel confident in was that this mysterious and graced light was true, that it would follow this girl in her searching, and that it would never let either of us go.

<sup>1</sup> *For the Bible Tells Me So*, 2007

**Chuck Fager**

*A Hospice for Hope*

## ***A Hospice for Hope***

Lexie dropped the pint bottle of Ensure into her cloth bag, slung the bag over her shoulder, and held the bouquet of dyed pink daisies over it for camouflage. With her other hand, she put the phone back to her ear.

"All right," she said to Allyson, "I've got it. They'll never notice it under the flowers."

At the top step, the big automatic doors swung open, not too fast, not too slow, and she walked through the entryway. Turning right into the big hallway, she didn't glance at the small sign that read, "Hospice Care"; she knew the way.

"This place always gives me the creeps," she told her sister. Allyson was sitting safe at home in Cincinnati, more than a thousand miles away.

"Why?" Asked Allyson. "Because it's full of dying people?"

"Maybe partly," Lexie said, "but I think it's more the way they kinda package the whole thing here, like everybody's getting ready for a birthday party. I mean--

A woman's voice interrupted. "Can you help me?" It sounded weak, but piercing. "Can you help me?" Again.

Lexie slowed and glanced to her right. In a lounge doorway a woman sat in a wheelchair. Her hair was tousled, her hands outstretched, reaching toward Lexie.

"I, uh -- I" Lexie started, then noticed that the woman's gaze was fixed somewhere behind her, and her eyes seemed unfocused. The image came to Lexie of someone caught in a swirling river at floodtide, about to be swept away.

Lexie swayed uncertainly. Both her hands were full. She heard Allyson saying, distantly, "Are you there?" as if the call had dropped, which it often did. And looking closer, she saw the woman was strapped into the chair, with what looked like a seat belt.

Lexie thought, I bet she's from the Memory Unit at the other end, and she was parked here while the attendant is outside smoking. She probably doesn't remember how to unbuckle the belt.

The woman repeated her call, "Can you help me?" and Lexie snapped back to her own reality. "Sorry," she told the woman, and started walking again.

"I'm here," she said into the phone. "Just got derailed for a minute."

Lexie was headed for the second last room in the long hallway. Each door she passed had someone's last name in block black letters on a card in a slot, and she knew most of them by now: Callahan, Bradley, Washington--

-- No. Washington's slot was now empty. Washington -- Lexie didn't know if it was he or she -- was dead.

"Looks like another one bit the dust," she told Allyson.

"Since when?" Allyson asked.

"Since yesterday." Lexie explained that hospice staff wasted no time: the body was wheeled to the morgue, the room cleaned, disinfected, and aired out for a day or so. Then someone else was moved in, and a new card went into the slot.

It was all done very quietly, even the dying too, usually. She remembered an overheard wisecrack in the break room, some big guy, with a gray beard and a semi-booming voice: "Yeah, man, people are just dyin' to see us." She hadn't laughed.

Hancock was the name on the next door. That's where she was headed. The door was closed, but the nametag -- yes-- was still there. "Okay," she said, "I'm here. Wish me luck."

"Call me back when you can," Allyson said, as Lexie touched the red button.

She stood for a moment, fingers on the door handle, remembering the woman on the card, Sally Hancock, before she ended up here.

Lexie let go of the door handle and touched a multicolor dot on her phone screen. A photo album popped open, of Sally the Happy Peaceful Warrior.

Sally had inherited some money from wealthy parents. She gave most of it away, lived simply on the rest, and made a career of protesting every war the USA got into in her long life. She spoke about them in the Quaker meeting, maybe a bit too often. She took her protests downtown, every week it seemed like, usually outside the main post office.

Several photos showed her standing alone, holding her big homemade signs. Every

April she refused to pay half her income taxes; that part paid for wars, she told the IRS.

There seemed no end of them, the wars that is: the oldest image, a black and white snapshot showed Lexie with Sally denouncing the Vietnam war; Lexie was in second grade. Central America after that, and all along the Israeli Occupation of Palestine. And more, all the way to Iraq & Afghanistan, the wars of today which were supposedly over, except they weren't.

So the names of the wars on Sally's signs changed. And her curly hair went from brown to grey to white. But the post office was the same. Along with Sally's stubborn smile.

And Desert Storm, that mad four-day orgy of killing that set off victory parades here and all over. Sally was protesting there too. Lexie still got a little choked up recalling when Sally was knocked down by some hulking teenager in the victory parade afterward. The guy had wrapped himself in wide yellow ribbons. Sally was holding a sign that said "Shame! Shame!"

Later, when Sally sat down in front of the gates by the old airbase, trying to stop buses bringing in troops bound for Iraq again, Lexie hadn't gone with her. Those sitdowns got Sally arrested, and Lexie wasn't really up for facing jail, at least not yet. She was grown up, working now, and had school loans to pay back.

But after Sally's third arrest, the judge sent her off to a federal penitentiary for three months. Lexie did visit her there, after a long drive across the wintertime desert. She found Sally in good spirits, in a bright orange jumpsuit. But Lexie's more lasting memory was the bleakness of the gray family room, and the quiet desperation in the eyes of so many children there. Families divided and crumbling, all around her.

On her release, Sally was greeted like an antiwar hero at the Quaker meeting. But when Lexie gave Sally a hug, she felt smaller, and fragile.

Sally was, Lexie admitted, getting tired. After all, it had been forty years since Vietnam had ended. She was almost eighty; and Lexie was now middle aged herself.

But there were still new wars. And Sally still kept showing up downtown. Her steps were slower, and she didn't stay in front of the post office as long, especially in bad weather. For awhile she wasn't alone: another Quaker her age, a widow named Eleanor, "felt a concern" to join her vigils.

Album photos of the two of them showed women who were proudly wrinkled and stubborn: the two of them taking on a trillion-dollar war machine. It could have been completely ridiculous, except somehow it wasn't. Besides, their signs had new words on them: "Drones," and "Torture," and more.

Then last spring, after four years of standing together, Eleanor had a stroke. When she woke up from her coma, she couldn't speak, or walk, and only occasionally recognized Sally, or the other Quakers who came to sit with her.

And last autumn, Sally herself got pneumonia, and was in bed for three weeks. She seemed to bounce back, and was on the corner by the post office the week before Thanksgiving. There she passed out flyers calling for a boycott of the "Black Friday" buying frenzy, urging shoppers instead to send donations to peace groups and homeless shelters.

But that Sunday, at the Quaker meeting, the Clerk announced Sally had asked for a special called meeting the next week, at which she would be sharing some important personal news.

The announcement caught Lexie by surprise. Was this some new protest effort? The Clerk, when she asked, shook her head, but wouldn't say more, insisting it was up to Sally to do that, and that a special clearness committee had been working with her, and Friends were not to pester her about it beforehand.

Lexie was on edge all week, and showed up at the meetinghouse early, fidgeting in the front row as Friends filled in the seats around her. Then Sally came in, with the Clerk and two other Friends, from the Clearness Committee. They sat down at a small table, and after an opening silence, Sally began to speak.

She spoke calmly, but clearly. In recent years, she said, her body had grown weaker. And during her recent bout of pneumonia, the weakness had increased. As she recovered, it seemed to be sending her a message, that grew clearer and firmer each day: after eighty-five years, her body was done. Finished. It was time to go.

Lexie's jaw dropped. Surely, Sally couldn't be saying this.

But she was. This message, Sally went on, was deepened when she had visited Eleanor, now bedridden, unable to care for herself, and who didn't recognize her. "I felt so sorry for her," Sally said, wiping tears. "And I have other friends who are in similar shape, or near it."

Her expression became firm. "I don't want to spend months or years like that." She took a breath. "I won't do it."

Then a smile, and she raised a finger. "Now don't anyone tell me I still have a long and happy life to live. I've already had one."

Lexie had to join the chuckles despite her own tears.

"So what am I going to do? I remember a poem by Dorothy Parker. Do you know it?" She quoted it, grinning mischievously:

"Razors pain you;  
Rivers are damp;  
Acids stain you;  
And drugs cause cramp.  
Guns aren't lawful;  
Nooses give;  
Gas smells awful;  
You might as well live."

More tearful chuckles. "But Friend Parker didn't mention food," Sally said. "No food, no fuss, no muss. And there's no law saying you have to eat."

So that was it. Beginning the next day, Sally intended to stop eating. She had researched this, and after a few days of increasing weakness, she could expect to slide into a kind of coma, and after a few more days, in time for Christmas, it would be over.

"I'm at peace, and feel happy and free," Sally said, "and very much loved by my Quaker family here." She invited the group to close the meeting by singing her favorite hymn, "Amazing Grace."

As the voices rose, Lexie stood and rushed out of the room, down the walk to her car.

She was devastated, horrified. Sally couldn't possibly mean it. She couldn't be ready to do this. It was, it was suicide. She must be depressed.

That was it. Being so sick, then seeing Eleanor, it would depress anybody. She'd snap out of it. Lexie decided she would help her.

And that was why, two weeks later, she was standing here at the door with Sally's name

in the slot, smuggling in contraband.

There was still a chance Sally would change her mind. Or if she was awake, maybe Lexie could persuade her she still had work to do, and friends who needed her.

She closed the photo album, slipped her phone into the bag and reached for the door handle.

And just then the door was pushed open. Lexie stumbled backward and lost her balance. Her bag and the flowers tumbled to the floor.

A big hand caught her arm, and she scrambled to her feet. She blinked, and was looking into the bearded, alarmed face of the big guy from the break room.

"I'm so sorry, ma'am," he said, "I didn't know anyone was there."

"What--what are you doing here?" Lexie demanded.

"I'm with hospice services," he said, and pointed to a photo ID on his flannel shirt: "Ken" it read by the thumbnail photo. He leaned down, scooped up her bag, and handed it to her.

"Your phone is over there," he pointed across the hall floor. "Better check and see if it's okay." Lexie picked it up, her hands a bit shaky.

The screen wasn't cracked, and the buttons seemed to work; there was a text from Allyson waiting. "Later" she typed in, and sent it, no problem.

She was putting it into the bag when he said, "Um, is this yours too?" In his hand was the bottle of Ensure.

"Oh," she said, suddenly nervous. "Um, yes."

Ken rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "Why don't you come in." He opened the door.

Inside, the shades were drawn, and the light was dimmed. A hospital bed was at the center of the room, with the head end elevated a few inches. Sally lay on her right side, almost in a fetal position. She was covered by a large bright afghan, crocheted in Christmas colors, red green and white, in a zigzag pattern. It was one of her favorites, a flea market find; Lexie had been with her when she bought it.

Sally's eyes were closed; her white hair looked thin. Standing very still beside the bed, Lexie could barely make out the slow, ragged rise and fall of the afghan.

Ken bent across the other side of the bed, and drew his fingers slowly across Sally's forehead. Lexie noticed that while his hands were large, their touch was gentle, almost tender.

"Won't be long for her," he said quietly. He glanced up, "What about you?"

Lexie was flustered by the question. "Me?" She said. "I guess -- I guess I haven't given up hope." "Well, ma'am," Ken said, "I might could say something about that," he said.

"What?" Lexie said.

"I've been doing this a long time," Ken said, "worked with, I don't know, several hundred folks, their families, friends. And overall, it's been harder for some of the families than for the patients themselves."

"What do you mean?" Lexie asked.

"To deal with it," he said. "To let go. After all, by the time most people get here, they get that the die is pretty much cast, know what I mean?"

Lexie nodded.

"And some of them are ready to get on with it." He shrugged. "After all, sooner or later we'll all end up in the same spot. If we're lucky, passing through here."

There was a chair next to the bed. Lexie collapsed into it.

"But even here," Ken said, "some people are still helping others. Like Miss Sally here."

Lexie gave him a sharp look. "How is that possible, in her condition?"

Ken half-smiled. "Oh, that's simple. Sally is showing us how to die." He scratched at his ear. "I heard her story, from some of the Quakers. And I remember seeing her down by the post office."

"But she was getting better," Lexie protested. "She'd been sick with pneumonia, but she beat that."

"Maybe so," Ken said, "but she and I talked about it when she first got here, and she said her body told her it was done, and she listened."

He shook his head. "Too many of us don't listen to our bodies, ma'am. But we all have to live in them, and eventually they give out. Sally listened, in time, and took charge. I really admire that."

Something buzzed in his shirt pocket. He took out a phone and looked at it.

"I have to go see another patient," he said. "Feel free to sit here as long as you like, ma'am. And um, if anything changes, just push the call button there." He closed the door quietly.

Lexie looked down at Sally, under the colorful afghan. "Teach me, Sally," she whispered into the silence.

And what came out of the silence was an echo. Quiet but clear, from the Dorothy Parker poem Sally had recited to the meeting. Not the mocking list of ways to do oneself in, but the insouciantly upbeat last line: "You might as well live." Or maybe, when the time came, you might as well not.

"Sally, you're right," Lexie whispered. "I'm sorry I've been trying to hold you back for me." She stood, then leaned down and kissed Sally's forehead.

Once in the hallway she picked up her pace. But halfway down she was interrupted again. "Can you help me?" Came the plea. "Can you help me?"

The woman in the wheelchair. Lexie turned to her.

"I don't know if I can help you," she said. "But I can at least give you a ride. Okay?"

The woman looked confused, as if she didn't quite understand. But a furtive half smile began to spread across her face.

"Let's do it," Lexie said, and began pushing her down the hallway. As she sped up, the woman's smile got bigger.

Lexie pushed to the end of the long hallway, made a gentle wheelie, and pushed her all the way back, just fast enough that the woman's stringy hair stirred a bit in the breeze.

"There," she said. "I hope that was fun. Take care!"

As the big automatic doors swung open, she heard the woman call again, in the distance now, "Can you help me?"

But Lexie was on her phone. Allyson picked up. "How did it go?" She said.

"Better than I expected," Lexie said. "I'm on my way home now, to make some peace posters."

"For the corner by the post office?"

"You got it."

"That," said Allyson, "is truly awesome."



a life rooted in self-confident quiet dignity allo



...wing poised acceptance of an uncertain future

Mark Blickley  
Poised

**Ashley Wilson Fellers**

*The Way of the Leaves*

## *The Way of the Leaves*

I.

Summer opens wet and green: foolish as first love.  
Each leaf unfurls, fearless of frost. It cannot imagine such a thing as Winter.



Ashley Wilson Fellers // Prose

II.

I have a certain memory:

I am just a girl — nine, maybe ten.

I am balancing on the long railing that runs around our family's big raised deck. One foot in front of the other, arms outstretched for balance, I walk a slow circuit, over and over again: amazed at the feeling of fitting my body carefully between two invisible planes, the crossing of which will send me tipping into a fall.

*(I like to test my edges).*

There are trees in this memory, and there were trees in real life: a high green canopy at the edge of the Great Dismal Swamp, each ancient oak and cypress shaking so many leaves that the air sounds full of applause.

My father is there, pruning a hedge or cleaning a grill, building something — I can't remember now. And he is musing.

I am not really listening to him ... not actively, anyway. He talks both to himself and to me, teasing out the edges of certain thoughts, small hypotheses that make him curious. We are both this way: people caught in a current of ideas that interest us. So he talks and I walk, shifting my center of gravity to my hips, then to my knees, raising myself onto the balls of my feet. I am testing all the ways that my body can veer from its clean straight line and still remain upright.

I lift an index finger.

I balance on one foot.

I move from one balletic position to another: testing, testing.

And then my father's voice breaks through my thoughts:

*As soon as we're born, he says, we're already beginning to die.*

\*

There is no fear in his voice when he says this — he is not a fearful man, my father. Just curious. The only thing I can sense in the words ... is wonder.

*As soon as we're born, I think, we're already beginning to die.* I test out the thought, and it feels true. And also safe.

A breeze ruffles all the green leaves around us, lifts the hair on my head, the tiny hairs on my arms. I move my body through the green air and I feel the power of my own physicality, without the maturity yet to understand that this is what I am feeling.

*This, I think, without the words to describe what I'm thinking. This — all of this — is what dying feels like.*

And also living.

\*

This is the very first moment when the edges begin to dissolve for me: when the membranes begin to seem comfortably porous.

On the narrow railing, I walk faster, more fluid. All the air around me parts to let me pass.

### III.

A week ago, I am driving down a country road that hugs tight to the curves of the river.

The road runs long through a tunnel of trees, and I am driving behind a tractor trailer, its top so high that it lops off all the low-hanging limbs as it goes, sending a shower of leaves all around me.

We drive, and drive, and the bits of leaves skitter over my hood, slap my windshield. I think, then, that if I could take this picture in black and white, it would look like Winter: my headlights cutting a swath not through leaves but through snow, the white flakes floating and spinning in the beams.

I take a breath, and consider, how narrow the divide between one thing and the next: Winter and Summer. Brokenness and Beauty.

And maybe there's no divide at all.

My foot eases the gas pedal closer to the floor and I feel the car surge forward toward the bumper of the tractor trailer, see the torn leaves fall thicker and faster, a blizzard of green just cut clean from the stem.

I am thirty-three now. Old enough to feel the way my days are numbered. Still — if I take a breath, I can feel my lungs expand to eat the air, my heart pushing the oxygen through me so that it pulses in my fingertips against the steering wheel.

I am a broken thing, and I am breathlessly, astoundingly alive...

# **Diane Glancy**

***ACTS OF DISOBEDIENCE***

## **ACTS OF DISOBEDIENCE**

The vast majority of the essays seemed remote from what I'm interested in. One thing missing almost totally is God and thinking about anything— whatever it is—from a faith perspective.

John Wilson, Books & Culture Podcast with Stan Guthrie on *The Best American Essays 2012*, 10/29/12

*The stars are the tracks of Raven in his snowshoes crossing the sky—*

Smithsonian Institute, Arctic Center Studies Exhibit, Anchorage Museum, Alaska

This is about a westward movement traveling in my car, as if it was a covered wagon, not leaving it, day and night, except for gasoline and something to eat. To hold the world together in the car is to drive from northeast Kansas to wherever I'm going. To live in Kansas is to be equal distance from the coasts. I can go east or west with the same fervor and spend the same time getting there. The rest stops become familiar, pulling in after dark for anonymity and invisibility so it isn't obvious I travel alone. I like the larger rest areas— the ones with room for long rows of cars, which there are every night. The new motel without rooms. It must be the economy. Often, there are railroad tracks nearby. This is a country of travel— of trains running everywhere along major highways. There are places that say, *no sleeping*. Other places limit cars to a four-hour stay. I look for the blue signs— *Rest Area 2 Miles*. Once in snow, the snow plow plowed around my car leaving it buried in a mound of snow. That rest stop was west of St. Louis when I was on my way to the Green Bay Independent Film Festival. Heat is the only thing that keeps me from sleeping in the car, though it cools down once I stop late at night.

Once a flock of geese flew above the road. I saw their white undersides, their black wings beating a narrow corridor against the sky. It was a moment in which I saw the visage of a pattern. I imagined the universe as a Mobius strip. In my boltings, I could move on and on without stopping. There is no end of the road on a Mobius band.

Traveling by myself for a long distance makes a vacuum that draws the voices of the land into it. I drive until there is a vortex, and I am in a different realm. A long journey is a small, black hole in which the land, the past, the possibilities of imagination are stuck.

It would be too much to catch the mind moving the way it moves on its errant path. A little ship on a stormy sea. But I am camped at a rest stop locked in my car after driving all day. I couldn't sleep, but listened to the rain on the roof of my car, the trains that pass, and the trucks that pull into the rest stop, or leave after a few hours' sleep. They grunt like a herd of restless animals. It is my thoughts that can't sleep, but rise and fall from the sea, which thinking is, locked in the fretful memories, associations, driftings and tempests. Maybe I drift off now and then. Sometimes sleep is like that.

I travel alone. That's where the voices of the past are. I drive— trying to reach something going farther away— and if I reach it, it seems not as it was, but changing even as I hold it in my hand. It's

like the sound of a plane overhead going somewhere. It is still there, in the air, just farther away, out of reach, until it reaches its landing.

This is what I know. That is what I understand from the land and from rocks I pick up during travel. I am not able to see the earth as it was except in brief moments because of the grief it would cause. I would hold that early feeling to my face if I could. I would enter again those brief glimpses of return. It seems sometimes the older I get, the farther away I can see— both back and forward.

The road offers voices— and thoughts of what should be written— if I am quiet and traveling by myself, and have asked to hear what is there to hear. This is what I know. I was created. I suffered loss. I was restored.

I have a memory of Bible school as a child— there was a lost sheep on the flannel board. There was a feeling it was me, and Jesus left the others to find that lost sheep that was darker than the others. I remember the thought, or lesson, that Jesus wanted his sheep with him. Later, I found the verse in John 17:24— Father, I ask that these also, whom you have given me, be with me where I am, to see my glory which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.

In that mix, or mux, or flux of language, where phrases seem to run together, and meaning is buried, is the explanation of what I feel. Something other calls me to itself— diligence in my work— which has been teaching and sometimes a creative research for writing. Certainly, there is the work ethic of my mother's German / English heritage— the way things should be done— which I didn't always receive happily from her.

Once, she pushed me out of the house. I don't remember what I was doing to get in trouble. I sat on the front steps in the dark, except for the streetlight on the corner. I remember the man next door walking down the street. I sat against the post of the front-porch to hide my punishment. I must have been six or seven. It was a first realization that art has its front-porch in the yard of ostracism from the acceptable, though at the time I didn't realize what I knew. Often art goes into alien territory to find solution for what cannot be reconciled or even fully solved.

It was my father's undocumented and marginal Cherokee heritage— a distillation of what he was, and could not be in the world he lived in to earn a living, to migrate into the world he found to migrate into, and had to move forward in, according to its ideas of punctuality and getting with the plan and achieving goals. He was a steady influence in my life. Circumspect. Always there, until his death. And sometimes when I travel, I'm aware of him. He provided for us. He had a recognition of the *being* that is the land. He was in church with us. He may have been the reason we went. I also remember his respect for me, and it has informed my life. Somehow it came through in the discordant house.

And when they called in the apostles, they had them flogged. Then they were ordered not to speak the name of Jesus, and let them go. As they left the council, they rejoiced that they were considered worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name— Acts 5:41.

It is in dreams, in passing off to the side— in peripheral vision— I often find what I know to deal with— even though I have lost the ability to see, or know it as it is— yet I can discern it, or recognize it as similitude. Often it waits at rest stops when I pull in for the night— the neighbor would never see me there— sitting on the porch-step in the dark. That is my definition of Christianity— a hiding from trouble.

I have aloneness, though at times I feel them around me— the traveling-beings [or helpers] who like travel. I am confident of their presence. Recently, someone asked if I minded driving after dark on my long trips. Without hesitation, I said that helpers are there on the road at night— and they are. There's an endurance or resilience in the spirit world— when endurance is necessary. There's a presence that comes, even if it is only an attitude from within.

I am not a scholar. I am not a full-blood anything, but a mixed-blood with a search-engine trying to find the lost puzzle parts in an intricate pattern that appears to me in the creative field. The voices bond together with all the other voices— is usually what I find. It is my past that the voices find. It is my past and their past where the voices connect. It is where I have found place for the mulling over inconsistencies, contradictions, injustices, the silenced, the effort to reclaim, to tell, to be heard, to connect with the fabric of imagination, which is where stories and the act of writing reside.

I have felt called to set upright that which has been perceived to be slanted.

My creative scholarship is on the road by myself, following the trail of some historical character. The land has memory. It keeps a journal of what has passed upon it. It is in the elements— if I stand there long enough. There is something solitary I continually deal with. It is in that solitary shape that I find connection to the past.

Maybe our memory is found in the land. I remember because the land remembers— This stone will be a witness to us, for it has heard the words of the Lord he spoke to us— Joshua 24:27.

This is what I know. This is what the land has said—

They shall dwell safely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods— Ezekiel 34:25.

The Bible language is the trail I follow— when I am alone at rest stops— when I am alone in the wilderness. How can I explain this to the scoffers that inhabit the colleges and universities? I am the odd ball. The odd woman out. The one who stops in the woods. The one who sleeps in the wilderness. It is written that I can. That's how I know I can do it— reading about those old campers in the Bible. Those desert travelers.

Words are existence. Language is a living being, especially the voice in motion during story-telling. Our existence and language are inseparable. In the beginning of Genesis, God spoke the world into being. But now the word must be written. The old ways of oral story-telling have changed— the orality of making as it happened.

The first writing must have been the making of marks that somehow conveyed meaning. Mere words that looked like animal prints in the earth, or sticks or scratches or marks on stone or papyrus or scraps of hide. Or elk antlers or deer horns scraped against a tree. I've heard biblical

scholars say that Seth, Adam's third son, was the one who began to keep written records. That old betrayal, the spoken language stuffed into written form. The agony of the voice no longer on its own, but carried by those inferior marks on the page. The disappointment of the voice when it found it had to be carried in written words that needed the mediation of reading. How it diffused the direct approach of story-telling that rode on the wings of air directly into the ear.

Yet the written words also have an enlarged way of seeing—the extended forecast—this thing is like that. If words weren't written, how would I know that an Inuit once saw the myriad of stars, and said they were bird tracks?—Or how could I see bird tracks in the snow, and say, they are stars?

I do not live in the native community. If I did, it would be Tahlequah, Oklahoma. But I am aware of the long Christian history there, where conferences have begun with *Amazing Grace* sung in Cherokee. My great-grandfather was a fugitive of sorts. He fled Indian Territory after getting into trouble. He set up a momentum in the family that has lasted these three generations. I still want to cover my tracks. Stay low. Keep moving. Elijah and his chariot of fire— I Kings 2:11— has been my forerunner. Christianity my somewhat community. Scripture my Rand McNally Road Atlas. Writing about it are the stones that hold me down and give me place.

You may not want to hear, but I would say I prevailed when moorings were laid bare and holdings came loose and I was sent away on my own without any means with which to make my way. When I was torn. Desolate. I knew a state of momentum. To this day, I can drive 700 or 800 miles a day and sleep in the wilderness of rest stops along the interstates.

Jesus was pushed out of the house also. I can sleep like he did, and not be afraid.

He found him in a desert land, and in the waste, howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, and kept him as the apple of his eye— Deuteronomy 32:10.

It is the Judeo-Christian heritage I'm talking about. Maligned. Despised. Rejected by men. No comeliness that would appeal to anyone. Yet my sword is bathed in heaven— Isaiah 34:5.

If it is true [Jesus alone was given for the salvation of humanity], why isn't it more obvious? Why can't I leave it behind as others have? I thought at times it couldn't be true. The gospel—the good news that Christ died for my sins. I had a colleague who wanted to remove the cross from the campus chapel. Another wanted to change our days to a calendar based on something other than Christ's death on the cross. But here we are in the year of our Lord. I could not bolt as yet. A child's options are limited. I had two heritages as land masses with a narrow isthmus between them. It was the corridor I rowed.

I think the land speaks. The clouds. The wind. The river. Sometimes the fog on mornings above the lake and rivers. And voices that were here. Mainly, I hear voices that did not have a chance to speak. Voices of the unwanted. When I travel, I hear them in my imagination— in my drivings over the land unfolding what is folded there.

I am defined by land— but I have been cut off. Removed from a particular place. My sense of place is in the journey. I have lived many places over the years. My identity is in its moving fragments.

It was my father's Cherokee part that was a dangling participle— a modifier that didn't quite fit the modified. When I was a child, the Cherokee lived in Oklahoma— as if they lived there only when I was a child. But, it was as a child I heard this, and it modified what I knew of the Cherokee. When I started writing, it was to pin down this floating part of my identity.

There were a few trips to my father's mother in Viola, Arkansas, but my grandmother was silent during the visits. She never came to our house. She died when I was 11, before I knew what to ask. But when we visited her those few times, there was sense of erasure— a sense of distance from something else. Our voices were a necessary distance because something was there that couldn't be looked at. Something my great-grandfather had done made him run. There was an unknown history between us. Something not to be asked. Something unanswered. What was I? It was in elementary school in Kansas City where I recognized the outcast status I felt on the front steps when my mother pushed me from the house. Maybe I was looking for something other than what she didn't want.

Look to the rock from which you are hewn— Isaiah 51:1. Sometimes I hear the old voices in the rocks I pick up. I listen to what sticks to me— like seeds on the legs of my trousers and socks when I walk in the woods—*beggar's lice*— someone said they are called.

This is for the hidden. The disappointed. Though I have held a job teaching creative writing. Another position that needs argument for its being. [1] A fraudulent course among disciplines with tacking and rigging attached to proper academia. [2] A fraudulent course for the now business-minded universities in the process of banishing the arts and letters.

Why was I willing to be an eye-sore in everything I did? Why was I willing to be a Christian? And what did all of that mean? The last thing usually tolerated at the college was the gospel. It was the gotten-beyond, even in the religion department. The unacceptable word of God. And the believers who professed that belief. But I found myself believing more all the time. I was on a collision course. Life would come to an end. I was getting there. Why was there a stigma to those who proclaimed faith? We'd gotten beyond Christianity, they would say, thank goodness. Why didn't they believe? Well, it seemed obvious— Christianity with its unwanted threat of hell. Other problems were manifold— There is a God. We are separated from him. He sent his son to die on a cross, so we could be returned to him, if we so desired. There is nothing we can do to earn salvation. It's not an easy religion. There are many interpretations. The fundamental precepts of Christianity wear thorns. Yet it is the one I choose to wear, though wearing one's faith openly sometimes ostracizes one.

What pushes out more than the narrow channel of renegade, fundamental Christianity I have chosen to row. A Protestant Christianity left on the front steps— outside its confines. On the road instead of the pew. Or in the pew, if pews could be seen as east-west interstates— I-90. I-80. I-70. I-40. I-10. I think that's how each pew in church should be marked.

I like these troubled waters— these waters where I get in trouble. When I felt the ship breaking apart as did the Apostle Paul in the end of the Book of Acts, I held to the broken pieces of the

boards. We all are here to break apart, to fall desperately into the cold sea. It is that way in academia. God is dead. Let all that is past be past. We've crossed the border into the new sea where there is just us and what we can think up in our own heads. That is the new beginning. The new world in which we've arrived.

Even in church, I always placed myself on the back row, ignored, yet I raised two children, became a professor, and made two independent films, which took more faith and endurance than sitting in church.

After church on Sundays, I visit with an aunt as she nears death. She never went to church. Jesus is Lord, I tell her, though she does not hear and is unable to answer. It seems a secret message, sinister in its covert action. Does God pluck those he chooses from the doomed and let the others perish? I have these questions as snapshots from an interior landscape, a travelogue of inquiries. An album of discontent. Even the rocks are not sure what to answer.

It is my act of disobedience in the world. I believe the Christ, the invisible one the world would crucify all over again.

One afternoon as I sat with my dying aunt, I think there was a flurry of activity in the room. I was alone with her, but others were there, though I couldn't see them. She had said as much anyway, when she still could communicate. Her sister always was there, though both her sisters were dead. By the time the dying get to the mysterious place, they can't talk. They can't tell us what they see as that world becomes more visible.

Come now, let us reason together— Isaiah 1:18— which will it be? Who among us shall dwell with the flames— Isaiah 33:14. Who shall be counted among his flock? These questions fly through the Bible.

I often wonder what I'm doing with my writing. What is my focus? Where is my direction? There are plunges into every pond, pool, puddle, quagmire, lake, river, ocean. Reading Isaiah, I recognized a book of many directions— a record of current events, which is now Biblical history— prophecies, visions, warnings, promises, invasions from Sennacherib, narratives of battles and captivity. Isaiah continually goes back and forth among them. He must have written on the run, or at least the move, as he goes from one subject to the next. In fact, isn't the whole Bible a conglomerate of many voices, times and places? Aren't there many jumpings here and there?— though they all seem, to me, directed on a certain road.

Later in the winter, I flew to Alaska for a 10-day writing workshop. The native participants, who were mainly Inuit, came with the desire to put into writing [1] their oral stories and [2] the abuses from missionaries / boarding schools— and the alcohol / drug-use that rampage their villages. I like to think about the shape of voice as it moves into the written word, even in suffering. The snow-covered trees and the frost in the air also wove their voices. When the workshop was over, I flew from Anchorage to Seattle, and still had two more flights to Kansas, where I was returning. It also

snowed in Seattle on Sunday. I like a plane as it rolls down the cleared runway scattering snow, even when it's a runway not used to snow. I always imagine the plane on a crank and pulley as it lifts from the earth, as though someone above was pulling it toward them. The setting sun made a small fire through the brush of clouds on the top of the horizon. Then the gray wing lifted over clouds and turned slowly away. It is in those times I feel the vast, blank spaces inside me. It is what I cover with the fabric of my words.

**Kyle Kaplan**

*thoughts on belonging*

## *thoughts on belonging*

Belonging is constant, flawless, inevitable. Even mistakes are painful in their precision. We disconnect because of connection, and wander through our home. It would be different if it could be any other way.

My hand belonged in yours as the car edged towards San Francisco. The laughter belonged in my belly, and those tears in my eyes, as we placed our cheeks against life's possibilities. With perfect youthful abandon, we belonged inside that wonder of how our footsteps would feel and voice would sound on an island across the world. I belonged on the lonely, psychedelic, cobblestone streets of a frozen frontier metropolis. My tiny child hands belonged on your coarse, balding head, and my legs dangling across your impossibly large shoulders, as we walked together, belonging in the early dusk of Southern California.

Life, I love you. I love not loving you. I love the sobbing, and treading along the precipices of our rage, our tragedy. Nowhere do I belong more than in the thrashing of passion, or the violence of disappointment. And my perfect place is underneath your shoe. I belong in the cracks of pavement unseen, in the reflection of the pupils contracted in ire, in the bellies of maggots feasting. This is where I find home.

Belonging is not a place, but a truth. It is sometimes glaring in its radiance, and other times hidden within the shadow's shadow. It is the fabric which clothes our lives, and it is impossible to escape. To not belong is where we belong. It's the belonging of dislodging, the ease of discomfort, the perfection of disarray.

It's like staring into darkness in the wake of chaotic love; finding yourself cast off from a farm in Eureka, back home and hopeless. It's the exact flavor of despair that could launch you to the foothills of Jinshan, in the fog-soaked, rocky northern coast of Taiwan. It's that startling and refreshing reminder that life is putty in our hands, and we can stretch and twist it into many forms. But whatever the form, it's the putty itself that belongs.

-08/2018

# Jennifer Kavanagh

## ***The silence of solitude***

About seventeen years ago I sold my flat, gave away many of my belongings, and embarked on a nomadic life. My conscious aim was to live more lightly on the earth, to go where I was led. It was only in hindsight that I realised that at the root of my journey was a need to move, as the Dutch priest, Henri Nouwen, puts it\*, from loneliness to solitude.

My life has been very peopled - with family, friends, and with partners. After a long marriage, children, and two six-year relationships, I finally understood in my heart, if not in my head, that I needed to accept my aloneness - and learn not only to live alone, but live without the support of a significant other. A recently reclaimed faith had brought me to the still worship of the Quakers; I hoped that allowing myself to be alone with that silence might bring me to a more contemplative life.

And so I advertised for a "hermitage". It took me initially to an attic flat in Stroud, before a couple of months wandering in the Outer Hebrides, a brief period on a Native American reservation, and five months in a little wooden house by the sea in Dorset. Although I struggled to let go of my attachment, I revelled in the freedom of my new life. Though I continued to seek for other diversions to fill the void, I found periods of serenity and short bursts of joy. Eventually I learned that I had to sit with my yearning and inaction; to go through a boredom threshold, in order to emerge with a sense of timelessness.

In the Outer Hebrides, after a walk on a wild South Uist beach, I wrote in my journal:

*Completely alone, a sense of self in the solitude. It is what this trip is about: to find that sense of interior self. A real consciousness of self without that barrier confusingly called self-consciousness which is about worrying how one is perceived. To obtain the former is why I am here, stretching the solitude, what I found in the desert, what I find so hard when living with, or even next door to, anyone. Worry about being heard, interrupting anyone. The joy of liberation at real solitude, paradoxically "losing oneself" as in music or a good book. No interruption of sound or sight, just the natural world and myself in it, part of it. Thank you, God. But, so close to that joy is sadness - part of the same non-duality; also, more mundanely, a yearning for someone to share it.*

A year later I found my own hermitage; it's in the city, and to my surprise I'm still here.

My old central London office is now a flat. I came here over fifteen years ago, intending my stay to

be a short one. But it's become my own little place. It's a space of extraordinary quietness, with a precious patch of sky amid the brick walls to the rear, and a womb-like enclosed sitting room, where I can write and be. People-watching has replaced my joy in the natural world. I am an observer, yet part of all I see. I am active, engaged, among people much of the time, but no longer either attached or lonely. Looking back at my journals from fifteen years ago, I realise how much more settled I am in solitude, no longer yearning for this or that, though still trying to find a good balance between stimulus and a more contemplative state.

Some years ago, at a session of Quaker Quest, an outreach programme where people can learn about Quakers and share their spiritual paths, small groups were addressing the question "What does the word God mean to me?" In my group a middle-aged woman shared her experience.

*When I was nineteen, I had a stroke. I was in a coma for months. I could hear everything that was going on, but no one knew it. I couldn't communicate in any way. I felt enclosed in a bubble, and I was so lonely. Then God came into the bubble and sat down next to me.*

The silence that followed her revelation was filled with our wonder and the movement of our hearts. Such a beautiful image. At times of loneliness, it has returned to me as a confirmation of what I found in my wanderings. That we are never alone. In our own bubbles of preoccupation, all we have to do is create a space for God to enter in.

\*In *Reaching Out*. London: Fount paperbacks, 1987



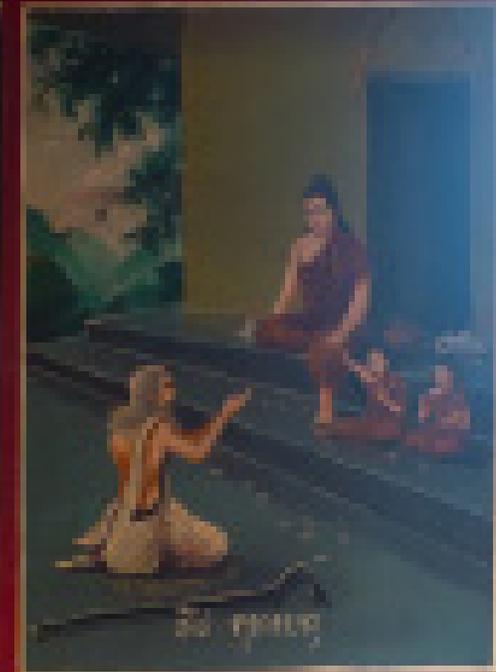
சிற்பம்: கருங்குருகுடி கி.மு. 3-ஆம் நூற்றாண்டு



சிற்பம்: கருங்குருகுடி கி.மு. 3-ஆம் நூற்றாண்டு



சிற்பம்: கருங்குருகுடி கி.மு. 3-ஆம் நூற்றாண்டு



சிற்பம்: கருங்குருகுடி கி.மு. 3-ஆம் நூற்றாண்டு





luke kurtis  
"untitled"





luke kurtis  
"untitled"





luke kurtis  
"untitled"

# Larry Lefkowitz

## *The Shoemaker*

It was soon known in the neighborhood that the shoemaker left his wife and children. Rumors abounded as to why and where he went. Varied and imaginative they were -- even that he went to look for the hidden place of the Ark of the Covenant. All of the rumors placed him in the desert because the reported sightings of him had him heading south. But as to exactly where in the desert, no one agreed. Some placed him in the caves near Qumran -- perhaps because his wife said that shortly before he disappeared, she heard him murmur over and over: "The wars of the children of light against the children of darkness." Others placed him in the cliffs above Ein Gedi.

His wife, who was known to refer to him even before he abandoned her, as "the eccentric" or "the crazy one," depending upon her charity, after a year met a man, moved in with him and, after another year without a sign of her husband's returning, married him.

Three years later the shoemaker returned, seemingly uncaring whether his wife had remarried, and ignored his children whom his wife had raised to avoid him. He angrily dismissed any questions as to his whereabouts during the previous three years; in any event because of his quick to anger temperament, few dared ask him where he had been, or what he did there. Even the most persistent of neighborhood busybodies knew to hold their peace in the presence of the shoemaker. The saying, "If you don't want to be the sole of a shoe, don't antagonize the shoemaker," was common neighborhood coinage. Nobody called him by name, he was always "the shoemaker," as if to use his name was too personal, evincing a familiarity that could be dangerous. I called him -- to myself -- "Enoch"; because of the legend of Enoch the shoemaker who with every stitch connected the upper and lower world. There was something about him of a prophet of wrath -- except that he didn't prophesize. Or if he did, we failed to grasp his prophecy.

Upon his return, the shoemaker shooed the cats out of their quarters and reopened his cobbler shop which had remained closed during his absence. No longer with access to his former living quarters (which his wife had sold when she moved in with her new husband), he slept on a mat on a narrow, raised platform which he built above his work bench inside the shop, dubbed by neighborhood wags as his "Procrustean bed." The shoemaker didn't have many costumers, either because of his strangeness or because of his temperament or because he was far from being a master of his craft, and the customers that did frequent his shop did so because it was located close to where they lived. Most of all, his prices were low.

From time to time, I gave him some business because I was curious about him and because I

was drawn to the odor of leather and glue that filled the shop. He didn't mind if I lingered there without saying much. He usually had some tacks in his mouth, more, I suspected, as a defense against having to speak than as a work convenience. I didn't pester him with questions, adopting the strategy of silence, or indifference, which didn't help me much, even though he tolerated, and eventually seemed to even enjoy, my presence. Maybe he just got used to me—like an old shoe.

One day, as he was working on the sole of my shoe, he uttered, more to himself than to me, "And ye shall tread down the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet," his hammering punctuating his avowal. And then he stopped, dropped his hammer on his workbench, spit out the tacks (an act which surprised and startled me), and began mumbling something about the Rabbi from — he couldn't pronounce the name very well -- one of those towns in Eastern Europe. An uncommon rambling on the shoemaker's part about a rabbi who one day astounded his disciples by entering his room and refusing to leave it for the rest of his life, dependent upon them to bring him food. Here the shoemaker paused as if wrestling with some thought and then, holding my glance in his, added something about how the presence of evil in the world might possibly have been too much for the rabbi's sanity to bear. "Trapped in a fortress of evil without anyone to ransom him."

I nodded and said nothing. What could I say?

Some days afterward, the shoemaker was gone again. A second time. The desert again? No one knew. Speculation nourished the neighborhood gossip in the following days. Someone said that before he left, he murmured over and over, "Dispersed to the place of the wicked to their subduing by fire."

Toward the end of the same week, I heard a knock on my door. I opened it. A youth stood there, a pair of shoes in his hands. "From the shoemaker," he said. "I didn't leave him any shoes to be repaired," I told him. "He said they were a gift," the youth persisted. I glanced at the size written faintly inside the left shoe -- it was my size. Although they had been polished to a bright sheen, the shoes were not new, and I surmised that somebody had left them to be repaired and failed to come back for them. But why look a pair of gift shoes in the mouth? They were expensive shoes. The shoemaker's from better days? Maybe his wedding shoes? I thanked the lad and gave him some change. As he was about to leave, I grabbed his arm. "Tell me, do you know where the shoemaker went? His shop is closed." The boy shrugged, already thinking perhaps of what candy bars to buy with the coins I had given him.

I didn't get around to putting on the shoes for a couple of weeks, until my usual pair sprung a hole in the sole of one. As I put on the right shoe, I spied something inside. It was a folded piece of paper, which had been inserted in the toe portion of the shoe. I opened it. On it was written a single word: "Azaz." I repeated the word over and over, trying to fathom what it meant, this shoemaker's code delivered in a shoemaker's fashion. Finally, it rang a bell. Something about a scapegoat.

The "Azaz" wouldn't let go of me. It was as if the shoemaker was pushing me, to use the clue he had vouchsafed me, to solve the mystery of his disappearance. I began to delve into the Subject.

I had been right about the scapegoat connection. The scapegoat was a goat that carried the sins of the people placed on it, designated "for Azazel," which was driven onto the desert to perish as part of the ceremonies of the Day of Atonement. The rabbis of the time interpreted "Azazel" as "Azaz", which meant "rugged" and "el", which meant "strong". They considered that "Azaz" referred to the rugged mountain cliff from which the scapegoat was cast down. Others said it referred to the goat-like spirit haunting the desert to which the Israelites were accustomed to offering sacrifices. The shoemaker had had a wispy, goat-like beard. Surely coincidence, but I found it disturbing nonetheless.

I never saw the shoemaker again. Nor did anyone else. Perhaps his one-word message meant that he hadn't yet given up the search for the key to the presence of evil and his beholding with his own eyes "the recompense of the wicked." I was not a type to go on quests, even though the nature of evil often confounded me. Although it is forbidden to feel envy toward a poor, lost shoemaker, I felt envy: I had to live with the vexatious question of evil; the shoemaker had gone to try to decipher it and strive with it.

When I wake up at night and cannot sleep, the bad thoughts come. And so I, too, ponder the nature of evil in the world. Maybe for the shoemaker the days and the nights had become one.

Rashi said: "Satan prosecutes in the hour of danger" – that is, at such a time of danger he doesn't differentiate between the just and the wicked. Perhaps the shoemaker realized that the evil in himself or his attempt to uproot it impelled him to be alone in the desert. To be "subdued by fire" or to be "a brand plucked out of the fire."

The Ramban said that just as the fire intended to destroy the thorns gets out of control and destroys the crops, the evil inside of us must be restrained.

The shoemaker was not a person of restraint.

For days the shoemaker and his quest weighed heavily upon me. It did not lift until shortly before the Day of Atonement when I chanced (if chance it was) upon the story of how one day Rabbi Levi Yitzhak was asked by a poor shoemaker if he had something that needed fixing. The rabbi chastised himself, "You see, even he can see that I need to fix myself."

Which may explain why I continue to bring my shoes for repair to shoemaker shops outside of my neighborhood when it would be easier to buy a new pair of shoes.

**Sara Maitland**

*Rhetorical Questions*

## ***Rhetorical Questions***

God laughs.

Somewhere, except that it is not a place; and all the time, except that there is no time in that no-place, the Trinity bubbles over with mirth – welling up like a fountain unto everlasting life; a glorious rollicking joyfulness. And cherubim, seraphim, powers, thrones and dominations, angels and archangels, all the host of heaven; and the apostles, prophets, martyrs, virgins, confessors, doctors (though not admittedly the popes who tend to keep themselves to themselves and seldom laugh at all) and all the unnamed saints laugh too, in perfect unity and full diversity. Even the souls in Purgatory gain relief from their delicious pain and laugh. Only in hell is there no laughter.

The laughter of heaven sustains the universe. The laughter of heaven is polyphonous, infinite, complex and adorable. As a qualified Roman rhetorician, trained in the footsteps of Cicero, aware of the full resonance of culture, and educated since childhood in recognising and manipulating all the oratorical tropes; and as a Gallic Bishop, preaching and sacrificing in a robust, earthy, tribal society, where broad farce, slapstick and buffoonery are skilled performance arts, I am fully cognisant of the remarkable range of human humour. I like to think, I dare to believe, that I too have that most admirable and desirable quality – GSOH: a good sense of humour.

But in my humble opinion this is one of God's least amusing jokes.

One of the somewhat more puerile forms of wit, the practical joke, appears to be a distinct favourite of the Almighty Father; and perhaps indeed this is how mortal fathers have come to express their love for their children in a ragging, teasing playfulness. I have heard mothers object to this, but the fathers would seem to have good authority. Because God does not just laugh in the divine abstract – God laughs at us. And I have noted how frequently it seems to cause God particular hilarity to grant specific prayers, literally and in full, to precisely the opposite effect from what the petitioner wanted. Ha. Bloody ha.

Which is how I come to be in this ridiculous situation – running round like a headless chicken, in the crudest possible sense of that simile.

I should have known better, but I went and prayed for a miracle.

Now I am in Paradise and wiser than I was I ask myself what I thought I was asking for. But when you are at the very gate of martyrdom; when you have climbed the long hill, like Christ climbed to Calvary; when you have exchanged the kiss of peace with your beloved friends; when the sword-wielding soldier has stripped to the waist and indicated the rock on which you should place your neck you do not necessarily think these things through carefully enough.

I was not praying to be let off: being a Roman patrician has, in these decadent days, not a lot to be said for it, but the *Cursus Honorum* is drummed into us early and public shame is worse than death. Those of us who do apostatise or recant tend to do so much sooner in the process; by the time we are in the arena, on the fire, at the place of execution, a sort of habitual pride kicks in and we tend to go boldly and with dignity. "Let's do it after the high Roman fashion, And make death proud to take us." That's the general line – and not such a bad thing actually. So, no, it was not that.

I'd like it best if I could persuade you that I wanted the miracle for Rusticus and Eleutherius: my friends, bound to me by more than childhood, by more than shared faith, in a lifelong love that is deep and true and sweetly proud of itself. We liked being Bishop, Priest and Deacon, holding between us the fullness of Holy Orders. I got to be the Bishop only because I was the poshest, the patrician boy, the rhetoric trained performer – useful in a Bishop if Plato is right and rhetoric is just a well-crafted form of flattery for the persuasion of the ignorant masses. It works though; I had loads of conversions, enough to stir up local rivalry and bring me to this sorry pass. But still I felt a deep guilt towards the two of them, because I refused to come to Gaul without them, so it was my fault they were here on a hill above the Parisii's settlement about to be executed. However I do not think, in the end, that this was the miracle I was asking for, because when all is said and done it would not be heaven for me if they were not here with me. So, I am ashamed to say, I doubt I could have asked for a miracle to let them escape – we always travel together.

Maybe I felt I was owed a miracle. However humble you are, and to be honest I'm not very, I think most people will feel that God owes them something rather special if they walk up a long hill to die for his sake. Of course afterwards, in heaven, you realise that you have something special, and that God owes you nothing, but pays it anyway and in abundance, the cup running over, the manna from heaven sweet as honey in your mouth, and joy beyond any mystical vision. But there you are: you live and learn; or rather you die and learn.

Seriously though, I think perhaps it was an older miracle. A miracle from a hot summer evening high in the Latian Hills more than thirty years ago. My tutor, a gentle Greek of infinite courtesy and considerable subtlety had taken me out into the atrium, to feel the warm peace and memorise the instructions of Quintilian. The atrium of our country villa was relatively small and old fashioned by the standards of the time, but so pretty and kindly, flagged with scrubbed white stones and with a bubbling fountain, like God's laughter, in a huge bronze bowl and my mother's flowers blooming along the shady side of the colonnade. The sun was westering and my legs were eager to be off down

the hill to join the other two as soon as my lessons were done.

"*Inventio* (invention); *dispositio* (arrangement); *elocutio* (style);" I began boldly.

My mother drifted along the colonnade and over to the entry gate. She stood looking down the hill towards the river.

"Good boy," said my tutor, "and then. . .?"

I fumbled a little, "*pronuntiatio* (presentation)." But I was watching my mother watching the long dusty track. It was the chaotic Year of the Five Emperors and eight days ago my father had gone to Rome, summoned to the Senate, and had still not returned. A good number of conservative senators like him went to Rome that year and never returned.

"*Memoria* (memory)" prompted my tutor, smiling a little.

I saw my mother stiffen, straighten her back, and there was a terrible moment of waiting. Then she cried out, "It's him," and turned towards me laughing. "It's a miracle."

"*Actio*," I almost shouted, "(delivery)." I slipped away and ran to my mother and watched my father come up the hill, and when I glanced back my tutor was laughing too. My mother and I were baptised the following evening, by one of the kitchen slaves. She had prayed for a miracle and taken a vow. *Actio*, delivery – not delivery from but performance of. That was the miracle I prayed for. And I suppose it was the miracle I got.

Because there I was looking down from a different hill, taking off and folding my toga, kneeling down, laying my head on the indicated block, calling on the Lord Jesus with the correct tone of joy, and praying for a miracle. I heard the sword swish up through the air; watched the swordsman's calf muscles stiffen to the weight, felt its downward rush. I saw the host of angels rush down with it, the air full of their wings, their feathers aflame like the phoenix, their trumpets raised up and. . .

. . . and the next thing I know I am standing up groping around for my head. It is hard for my hands to find it because my head has rolled a little way and landed with my eyes down in the grass, so I cannot see where I am. But even without that it is hard for an arm to find a head that is a yard or so away; and very hard to know who or what is doing the seeing and the looking and the finding.

"Now preach" commands Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and I swear I hear him snigger.

I mean – really!

In the first place I have never in my life preached before without considerable preparation. I had been well taught as a child and could not help but recall that *Inventio*, *dispositio*, *elocutio* and *pronuntiatio* are supposed to be worked out in advance, which is why *memoria* is necessary. Only *actio* remains to be presented in a gracious and pleasing way to the audience. I found it surprisingly hard to be gracious and pleasing without preparation – to say nothing of without a head.

But the fundamental problem is what in heaven's name am I supposed to do with my head. At first I tried, for the sake of dignity to hold it on my neck in its natural position, but I could not forget that the gesture of clasping ones hands to one's temples indicates "sorrowful disbelief" in the text books and although this is indeed what I am feeling it does not seem an appropriate emotion to be expressing. If I place it in the crook of my elbow I have to look at my own truncated neck, which proves unnerving and revolting. If I tuck it like a scroll under my arm the sonorous elegance of the voice is muffled; my hair is too close shaven to allow me to swing it nonchalantly from my fingers. I rather like the idea though and for the very first time regret I am not a Gaul, with a long braid of hair. I balance it on my hand, but then realise that if I gesticulate grandly – a common part of my well honed style - it may well fly off into the audience and I honestly cannot face it. In the end I hold it on my left hand at chest level, leaving my right arm free for the grand oratorical gesture.

It is not the best sermon of my life. I can almost hear my friends, eager to get to the heavenly banquet, hissing "hurry up" and "oh, come on." But for once it hardly matters – the delivery is enough in itself. Cicero emphasized the importance of all forms of appeal - emotion, humour, stylistic range, irony and digression in addition to pure reasoning. He claimed that the orator needed to be knowledgeable about all areas of human life and culture, including law, politics, history, literature, ethics, warfare, medicine, even arithmetic and geometry. But he never mentioned the pure vulgar appeal of shambling about post execution with your head propped awkwardly against your breast bone, but speaking with the tongues of men and angels. They loved it; they lapped it up – cheering and weeping and repenting and adoring, while God and the whole host of heaven laugh and laugh and laugh at me.

And at first I was angry, and then I was rather proud of myself and then I was embarrassed

and cross. And finally it was too ridiculous. I stopped, stood still, blessed the poor silly folk, dropped my head on the ground and laughed too.

“OK,” said God, “At last. Well done you good and faithful servant – come, enter into the joy of the Father.”

So I lie down quietly beside my head and the angels rush in, the air full of their wings, their feathers aflame like the phoenix, their trumpets raising me up, and all things are well, all manner of things are well.

The relationship between rhetoric and knowledge is one of the most interesting questions.

You probably think of rhetoric as “empty speech” or “empty words”. This reflects a radical division of speech from knowledge.

Which is why you will probably not believe a word of this story.

But in the truthful joy of heaven we are all still laughing.

# Kiri Manookin

## *Sitting on the Edge of Time*

I'm sitting on the edge of a sundial made of desert stones circularly laid out to measure incremental movements of shadow.

I'm literally sitting on the edge of time.

At the back of the field station in the middle of Capitol Reef National Park in south central Utah, I sit in silence. These rocks here mark time's passage in more ways than one. In a place like this, time is so obviously a much beastlier thing than we realize as we tick the smallest of moments away in our regular routines of waking up, getting ready, working, taking care of responsibilities, doing hobbies, playing, or even being bored. Time, with its tool belt of wind, water, and fire, has already long been at work carving, moving, and molding the ribboned rocks and rainbowed land. So long we cannot even conceptualize its workday.

Time swallows us like birds swallow gnats in a place like a red rock desert, where millions of years of Earth violence – earthquakes, volcanoes, rivers, and storms – begets the kind of awed beauty that snuffs out words delicately lit in the back of the throat, a place where humans still teeter along the edges of what was broken so many eons ago, and in whose remaining pockets we often take refuge.

The powers of earth and sky dwarf us; they move with or without our consent, or even sometimes our awareness.

We. Are. Puny.

As the sun warms my back this golden afternoon, I offer a simple supplication: May the forces of destruction in our lives likewise, somehow, bring us beauty and refuge in the end.

A woodpecker sounds in the distance. A wind rustles the juniper trees and pinion pines. Tiny insects investigate me like zealous detectives: Who are *you* among these citizens of nature, the flora and fauna that arrived here first and that, unlike many of your kind, always abide the ecological laws of the land?

What *am* I doing here? What are *we* doing here? What *are* we humans doing arrogantly, destructively, tromping around like kings on land that can merely blink and miss the rise and fall of entire nations? Who are we to be so proud in the face of all-consuming Time?

And yet, as a spiritual person, I am reminded of two things.

I was once told a Native American story about how God, when placing humans on the Earth and seeing them immediately turn to cruelty and meanness in the day, threw a blanket of darkness over everything. But a little bird, heart-stricken at being separated from God, flew up high, high, high in the blanketed sky and started poking holes with her beak to let in the light and to remind people from where and what they had come, and to be good.

I am also reminded of Elijah's experience with God and nature in the Old Testament:

And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake:

And after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice. (1 Kings 19: 11-12)

This may be land forged by ancient demigods of nature, whose wild abandoned playground we walk upon, but our roars and the echoes of theirs are still found lacking in the breadth of real power.

Last night as I laid out flat on the ground, arms open to the night sky, searching the gorgeous perforated, pinholed scope of the heavens in silence, I felt something call out, uncomplicated and still: "We love you. We love you." Tears streamed down from the corners of my eyes. I wanted to fly like the heart-stricken little bird up, up, up to tear down the fabric that so often muffles this message from the Gods, the universe, or the intelligence in every single element – whatever you want to call it. The shroud that can make it so hard for us to hear the message – at once both personal and global – seemed piercingly clear: We are simply adored.

We. Are. Adored.

I watch as the slow descent in the afternoon sun shifts the shadowy line to another stone – another tick in this earthen clock.

As gnat-like and proudly injurious as we comparatively and paradoxically are, humans are also incredibly beautiful, remarkable, loving, creative beings, capable even of calling down divinity to these relics upon which we tread, relics left behind in the wake of the destructive play of nature's demigods. But more often than we realize, the last of those ancient demigods – Time – and the voices of little ones like tiny, dedicated, and wise birds teach and remind us all that we humbly and reverently sit on the edges of things much, much larger and grander than ourselves.

That ought to nudge the gentle out of us more often.



Kiri Manookin // Sleeping rainbow





Kiri Manookin // Navajo dome



# Ji Hyang Padma

## *Applied Zen—Creating the World Around Us*

I spoke at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City a few summers ago, at a conference for elementary school teachers on creation myths. Every religion has a creation myth except Buddhism. So then, what to say? This situation initially presented a kind of cosmic humor. Yet, when we look into this, the Buddhist teaching on creation runs quite deep.

What we teach in Buddhism is that we are always creating the world around us through our intentions and actions; at every moment, we have a choice. What world will we create? Every thought affects the world around us. In traditional Buddhist art, this teaching is represented through the Wheel of Life. The Wheel of Life shows various phases of the cycle of becoming: sensation, impulse, thought, action, and so forth. We can see these elements as contributing together to create the weather patterns of our lives—just as moisture, temperature, barometric pressure, and other factors contribute to snowfall. When we attach to a certain place on the wheel—for instance, a pleasant situation that we want to keep permanently, or an unpleasant situation that we cannot accept, perhaps triggering our reactivity—we suffer. When we are able to stay centered within these weather patterns, the coming and going of phenomena is simply the rhythm of life and the natural expression of our Bodhisattva path. When I was travelling sometime through Oakland Airport, and experiencing that rhythm of life in its more staccato form, I came upon the perfect teaching, through this stained glass window in the airport corridor:

*There is nothing that involves only going without returning. It is the nature of Heaven and Earth. When there is going, there also must be returning.*

This passage from the I Ching captures something that we innately know: arrivals and departures are one movement, separated only by the optical illusion of time. This installation was graced with eighty red-crowned cranes, signifying good luck and auspicious travel, imparting a lightness and movement that raised my spirits. Since the beginning of time, it has been like this: we are part of this movement, this grace. Like the cranes, we are practicing the arts of departure and arrival.

Zen Master Dōgen wrote about the way we create our world, comparing this to our image of water: *Dragons see water as a palace or a pavilion. Some beings see water as the seven treasures or a wish-granting jewel. Some beings see water as a forest or a wall.*<sup>1</sup>

Where we put our eyes, what we choose to see, or not—through this, we create the world around us. At every moment, there are thousands of details of sensory input we filter out in favor of what is more stimulating, in a pleasant or unpleasant way. Very often, experiences that trigger fear receive high priority. Traditional Buddhist and Vedanta philosophy describes this process well, using the

same Sanskrit word, *samskara*, to liken the mental pattern to a rivulet, which follows the path worn by previous waters, the path of least resistance. These mind habits are reinforced by repetition, and over time, the original imprint that initiated this *samskara* is obscured. So then, as a powerful emotion arises, then the habitual patterning that is associated with it will be heavily charged, and its seeds will be buried deep in the unconscious. When these charged traces come up, whether in response to a current situation or recognizably as memories, it is easy to bite the hook and become entangled. We get caught in an internal narrative and may speak or take action based on this storyline. This reinforces the *samskara*, provides it more fuel. On the other hand, if we are able to see that familiar pattern arise, and not touch that hook, it loses force—and eventually loses its power over us.

As Pema Chodron puts it, we can choose not to “believe everything we think”—a choice necessary for our well-being, which is supported by mindfulness. By choosing to focus on compassion and peace, we can create a world of compassion and peace. By seeing the wholeness within people and situations, we call that forward. For example several research studies have shown that when a teacher has high expectations of her students, she discovers those met; when a teacher has low expectations, students’ performance drops in equal measure.

My teacher, Zen Master Seung Sahn, had a tremendous capacity to see the potential within his students. When returning their letters, he often concluded by lifting this potential to their shared awareness: “I hope that you will soon finish your homework, attain enlightenment, become a keen-eyed lion, and save all people!” This encouraged students to go the extra mile and step into their innate wisdom. In this way, we can practice seeing our world with eyes of wholeness. This creates a sacred world within our here-and-now experience. This is tangible; it begins with ordinary people, you and me, and our basic sanity. When we are in traffic, breathing deeply. Making eye contact with a store clerk. Practicing loving-kindness in a challenging, interpersonal moment, or simply disengaging—through which we return to our original luminous awareness, like clear water. It all begins with us and how well we are doing in transforming our own passion into compassion and our own anger into discriminating wisdom. As my teacher, Maha Ghosananda, has taught:

A peaceful heart makes a peaceful person. A peaceful person makes a peaceful family. A peaceful family makes a peaceful community. A peaceful community makes a peaceful state. A peaceful state makes a peaceful country. A peaceful country makes a peaceful world.

May we attain that peace—and through this, create world peace, step by step.

<sup>1</sup> Dogen, Eihei. “Mountains and Rivers Sutra,” *Pond Village Chanting Book*.



Finding a traditional Quaker meeting in Indianapolis would not be easy. No steeple would loom above the meeting house, no bell tower, no neon cross. No billboard out front would name the preacher or proclaim the sermon topic or tell sinners how to save their souls. No crowd of nattily dressed churchgoers would stream toward the entrance from a vast parking lot filled with late-model cars. No bleat and moan of organ music would roll from the sanctuary doors.

I knew all of that from having worshipped with Quakers off and on for thirty years, beginning when I was a graduate student in England. They are a people who call so little attention to themselves or their gathering places as to be nearly invisible. Yet when I happened to be in Indianapolis one Sunday this past January, I still set out in search of the meeting house without street address or map. My search was not made any easier by the snow lolling down on the city that morning. I recalled hearing that the North Meadow Circle of Friends gathers in a house near the intersection of Meridian and 16th Streets, a spot I found easily enough. Although I could not miss the imposing Catholic Center nearby on Meridian nor the Joy of All Who Sorrow Eastern Orthodox Church just a block away on 16th, the only landmark at the intersection itself was the International House of Pancakes. Figuring somebody in there might be able to direct me to the Quakers, I went inside, where I was greeted by the smell of sausage and the frazzled gaze of the hostess. No, she'd never heard of any Quakers.

"But there's the phone book," she told me, gesturing with a sheaf of menus. "You're welcome to look them up."

I thanked her, and started with the yellow pages. No luck under "Churches." Nothing under "Religion." Nothing under "Quakers" or "Friends, Society of." Finally, in the white pages, I found a listing for the North Meadow Circle, with a street address just a couple of blocks away.

As I returned the phone book to its cubbyhole, I glanced across the room, where a throng of diners tucked into heaping platters of food, and I saw through the plate-glass window a man slouching past on the sidewalk. He wore a knit hat encrusted with leaves, a jacket torn at the elbows to reveal several dingy layers of cloth underneath, baggy trousers held up with a belt of rope, and broken leather shoes wrapped with silver duct tape. His face was the color of dust. He carried a bulging gray sack over his shoulder, like a grim Santa Claus. Pausing at a trash can, he bent down to retrieve something, stuffed the prize in his bag, then shuffled north on Meridian into the slant of snow.

I thought how odd it was that none of the diners rushed out to drag him from the street into the House of Pancakes for a hot meal. Then again, I didn't rush out either. I only stood there feeling pangs of guilt, an ache as familiar as heartburn. What held me back? Wouldn't the Jesus whom I try to follow in my own muddled way have chosen to feed that man instead of searching for a prayer meeting? I puzzled over

this as I drove the few blocks to Talbott Street, on the lookout for number 1710, the address I had turned up in the phone book. The root of all my reasons for neglecting that homeless man, I decided, was fear. He might be crazy, might be strung out, might be dangerous. He would almost certainly have problems greater than I could solve. And there were so many more like him, huddled out front of missions or curled up in doorways all over Indianapolis this bitterly cold morning. If I fed one person, why not two? Why not twenty? Once I acknowledged the human need rising around me, what would keep me from drowning in all that hurt?

A whirl of guilt and snow blinded me to number 1710, even though I cruised up and down that stretch of Talbott Street three times. I did notice that the neighborhood was in transition, with some houses boarded up and others newly spiffed up. A few of the homes were small enough for single families, but most were big frame duplexes trimmed in fretwork and painted in pastels, or low brick apartment buildings that looked damp and dark and cheap. On my third pass along Talbott I saw a portly man with a bundle of papers clamped under one arm turning in at the gate of a gray clapboard house. I rolled down my window to ask if he knew where the Friends worshipped, and he answered with a smile, "Right here."

I parked nearby in a lot belonging to the Herron School of Art. As I climbed out of the car, a pinwheel of pigeons lifted from the roof of the school and spun across the sky, a swirl of silver against pewter clouds. No artists appeared to be up and about this early on a Sunday, but some of their handiwork was on display in the yard, including a flutter of cloth strips dangling from wire strung between posts, an affair that looked, under the weight of snow, like bedraggled laundry. An inch or two of snow covered the parking lot, and more was falling. Footprints scuffled away from the five or six cars, converged on the sidewalk, then led up to the gate where I had seen the man carrying the bundle of papers. True to form, the Quakers had mounted no sign on the brick gateposts, none on the iron fence, none on the lawn. Twin wreathes tied with red ribbons flanked the porch, and a wind-chime swayed over the front steps. Only when I climbed onto the porch did I see beside the door a small painted board announcing that an "Unprogrammed ('Silent') Meeting" is held here every First Day at 10 a.m., and that "Each person's presence is reason to celebrate."

There was celebration in the face of the woman who greeted me at the door. "So good to see you," she whispered. "Have you worshipped with Quakers before?" I answered with a nod. "Wonderful," she murmured, pointing the way: "We're right in there."

I walked over creaking floorboards from the narrow entrance hall into a living room cluttered with bookshelves, cozy chairs, and exuberant plants. Stacks of pamphlets filled the mantle above a red brick fireplace. Posters on the walls proclaimed various Quaker testimonies, including opposition to the death penalty and a vow against war. It was altogether a busy, frowzy, good-natured space.

From there I entered the former dining room, which had become the meeting room, and I took my seat on a wooden bench near the bay windows. Five other benches were ranged about, facing one another, to form an open square. Before closing my eyes, I noticed that I was the ninth person to arrive. No one spoke. For a long while the only sounds were the scritch of floorboards announcing latecomers, the sniffles and coughs from winter colds, the rumble and whoosh of the

furnace, the calling of doves and finches from the eaves. The silence grew so deep that I could hear the blood beating in my ears. I tensed the muscles in my legs, balled up my fists, then let them relax. I tried stilling my thoughts, tried hushing my own inner monologue, in hopes of hearing the voice of God.

\*

That brazen expectation, which grips me now and again, is a steady article of faith for Quakers. They recite no creed, and they have little use for theology, but they do believe that every person may experience direct contact with God. They also believe we are most likely to achieve that contact in stillness, either alone or in the gathered meeting, which is why they use no ministers or music, no readings or formal prayers, no script at all, but merely wait in silence for inward promptings. Quakers are mystics, in other words, but homely and practical ones, less concerned with escaping to heaven than with living responsibly on earth.

The pattern was set in the seventeenth century by their founder, George Fox, who journeyed around England amid civil and ecclesiastical wars, searching for true religion. He did not find it in cathedrals or churches, did not hear it from the lips of priests, did not discover it in art or books. Near despair, he finally encountered what he was seeking within his own depths: "When all my hopes in all men were gone, so that I had nothing outwardly to help me, nor could I tell what to do, then, oh then, I heard a voice which said, 'There is one, even Christ Jesus that can speak to thy condition,' and when I heard it my heart did leap for joy."

\*

My heart was too heavy for leaping, weighed down by thoughts of the unmet miseries all around me. The homeless man shuffled past the House of Pancakes with his trash bag, right down the main street of my brain. I leaned forward on the bench, elbows on knees, listening. By and by there came a flurry of sirens from Meridian, and the sudden ruckus made me twitch. I opened my eyes and took in more of the room. There were twelve of us now, eight women and four men, ranging in age from twenty or so to upwards of seventy. No suits or ties, no skirts, no lipstick or mascara. Instead of dress-up clothes, the Friends wore sweaters or wool shirts in earth colors, jeans or corduroys, boots or running shoes or sandals with wool socks. The wooden benches, buffed and scarred from long use, were cushionless except for a few rectangular scraps of carpet, only one of which had been claimed. A pair of toy metal cars lay nose-to-nose on one bench, a baby's bib and a Bible lay on another, and here and there lay boxes of Kleenex.

Except for those few objects and the benches and people, the room was bare. There was no crucifix hanging on the walls, no saint's portrait, no tapestry, no decoration whatsoever. No candles flickered in shadowy alcoves. The only relief from the white paint were three raised-panel doors that led into closets or other rooms. The only movement, aside from an occasional shifting of hands or legs, was the sashay of lace curtains beside the bay windows when the furnace puffed warm air, and those windows of clear glass provided the only light.

To anyone glancing in from outside, we would have offered a dull spectacle: a dozen grown people sitting on benches, hands clasped in laps or lying open on knees, eyes closed, bodies upright

or hunched over, utterly quiet. "And your strength is, to stand still," Fox wrote in one of his epistles, "that ye may receive refreshings; that ye may know, how to wait, and how to walk before God, by the Spirit of God within you." When the refreshing comes, when the Spirit stirs within, one is supposed to rise in the meeting and proclaim what God has whispered or roared. It might be a prayer, a few lines from the Bible or another holy book, a testimony about suffering in the world, a moral concern, or a vision. If the words are truly spoken, they are understood to flow not from the person but from the divine source that upholds and unites all of Creation.

In the early days, when hundreds and then thousands of people harkened to the message of George Fox as he traveled through England, there was often so much fervent speaking in the meetings for worship, so much shaking and shouting under the pressure of the Spirit, that hostile observers mocked these trembling Christians by calling them "Quakers." The humble followers of Fox, indifferent to the world's judgment, accepted the name. They also called themselves Seekers, Children of the Light, Friends in the Truth, and, eventually, the Society of Friends.

Most of these names, along with much of their religious philosophy, derived from the Gospel according to John. There in the first chapter of the recently-translated King James version they could read that Jesus "was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." In the fifteenth chapter they could read Christ's assurance to his followers: "Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you."

\*

There was no outward sign of fervor on the morning of my visit to the North Meadow Circle of Friends. I sneezed once, and that was the loudest noise in the room for a long while. In the early years, meetings might go on for half a day, but in our less patient era they usually last about an hour. There is no set ending time. Instead, one of the elders, sensing when the silence has done its work, will signal the conclusion by shaking hands with a neighbor. Without looking at my watch, I guessed that most of an hour had passed, and still no one had spoken.

It would have been rare in Fox's day for an entire meeting to pass without any vocal ministry, as the Quakers call it. But it is not at all rare in our own time, judging from my reading and from my visits to meetings around the country. Indeed, Quaker historians acknowledge that over the past three centuries the Society has experienced a gradual decline in spiritual energy, broken by occasional periods of revival, and graced by many vigorous, God-centered individuals. Quakerism itself arose in reaction to a lackluster Church of England, just as the Protestant Reformation challenged a corrupt and listless Catholic Church, just as Jesus challenged the hidebound Judaism of his day. It seems to be the fate of religious movements to lose energy over time, as direct encounters with the Spirit give way to secondhand rituals and creeds, as prophets give way to priests, as living insight hardens into words and glass and stone.

The Quakers have resisted this fate better than most, but they have not escaped it entirely. Last century, when groups of disgruntled Friends despaired of reviving what they took to be a moribund Society, they split off to form congregations that would eventually hire ministers, sing

hymns, read scriptures aloud, and behave for all the world like other low-temperature Protestant churches. In Midwestern states such as Indiana, in fact, these so-called “programmed” Quaker churches have come to outnumber the traditional silent meetings.

I could have gone to a Friends’ Church in Indianapolis that Sunday morning, but I was in no mood to sit through anybody’s program, no matter how artful or uplifting it might be. What I craved was silence—not absolute silence, for I welcomed the ruckus of doves and finches, but rather the absence of human noise. I spend nearly all of my waking hours immersed in language, bound to machines, following streets, obeying schedules, seeing and hearing and touching only what my clever species has made. I often yearn, as I did that morning, to withdraw from all our schemes and formulas, to escape from the obsessive human story, to slip out of my own small self and meet the great Self, the nameless mystery at the core of being. I had a better chance of doing that here among the silent Quakers, I felt, than anywhere else I might have gone.

A chance is not a guarantee, of course. I had spent hundreds of hours in Quaker meetings over the years, and only rarely had I felt myself dissolved away into the Light. More often, I had sat on hard benches rummaging through my past, counting my breaths, worrying about chores, reciting verses in my head, thinking about the pleasures and evils of the day, half hoping and half fearing that some voice not my own would break through to command my attention. It’s no wonder that most religions put on a show, anything to fence in the wandering mind and fence out the terror. It’s no wonder that only a dozen people would seek out this Quaker meeting on a Sunday morning, while tens of thousands of people were sitting through scripted performances in other churches all across Indianapolis.

Carrying on one’s own spiritual search, without maps or guide, can be scary. When I sink into meditation, I often remember the words of Pascal: “The eternal silence of these infinite spaces fills me with dread.” What I take him to mean is that the universe is bewilderingly large and enigmatic; it does not speak to us in any clear way; and yet we feel, in our brief spell of life, an urgent desire to learn where we are and why we are and who we are. The silence reminds us that we may well be all on our own in a universe empty of meaning, each of us an accidental bundle of molecules, forever cut off from the truth. If that is roughly what Pascal meant, then I suspect that most people who have thought much about our condition would share his dread. Why else do we surround ourselves with so much noise? We plug in, tune in, cruise around, talk, read, run, as though determined to drown out the terrifying silence of those infinite spaces. The louder this human racket becomes, the more I value those who are willing, like Buddhists and Benedictines and Quakers, to brave the silence.

In the quiet of worship on that snowy First Day, I gradually sank into stillness, down below the babble of thought. Deep in that stillness time let go its grip, the weight of muscle and bone slid away, the empty husk of self broke open and filled with a pure listening.

\*

A car in need of a muffler roared down Talbott Street past the meeting house, and the racket hauled me back to the surface of my mind. Only when I surfaced did I realize how far down I had

dived. Had I touched bottom? Was there a bottom at all, and if so, was it only the floor of my private psyche, or was it the ground of being?

As I pondered, someone stood up heavily from a bench across the room from me. Although Quakers are not supposed to care who speaks, I opened my eyes, squinting against the somber snowlight. The one standing was the portly man whom I had asked the way to the meeting house. A ruff of pearl-gray hair fell to his shoulders, a row of pens weighted the breast pocket of his flannel shirt, and the cuffs of his jeans were neatly rolled. He cleared his throat. In times of prayer, he said, he often feels overwhelmed by a sense of the violence and cruelty and waste in the world. Everywhere he looks, he sees more grief. When he complains to God that he's fed up with problems and would like some solutions for a change, God answers that the solutions are for humans to devise. If we make our best effort, God will help. But God isn't going to shoulder the burden for us. We're called not to save the world but to carry on the work of love.

All of this was said intimately, affectionately, in the tone of a person reporting a conversation with a close friend. Having uttered his few words, the speaker sat down. The silence flowed back over us. A few minutes later, he grasped the hand of the woman sitting next to him, and with a rustle of limbs greetings were exchanged all around the room. We blinked at one another, returned from wherever it was we had gone together, separated once more into our twelve bodies. Refreshed, I took up the sack of my self, which seemed lighter than when I had carried it into this room. I looked about, gazing with tenderness at each face, even though I was a stranger to all of them.

A guest book was passed around for signatures. The only visitor besides myself was a man freshly arrived from Louisiana, who laughed about needing to buy a heavier coat for this Yankee weather. An elder mentioned that donations could be placed in a small box on the mantle, if anyone felt moved to contribute. People rose to announce social concerns and upcoming events. After an hour and a half of nearly unbroken silence, suddenly the air filled with talk. It was as though someone had released into our midst a chattering flock of birds.

Following their custom, the Friends took turns introducing themselves and recounting some noteworthy event from the past week. A woman told about lunching with her daughter-in-law, trying to overcome some hard feelings, and about spilling a milkshake in the midst of the meal. A man told how his son's high school basketball coach took the boy out of a game for being too polite toward the opponents. The father jokingly advised his son to scowl and threaten, like the professional athletes whom the coach evidently wished for him to emulate. This prompted a woman to remark that her colleagues at work sometimes complained that she was too honest: "Lie a little, they tell me. It greases the wheels." The only student in the group, a young woman with a face as clear as spring water, told of an English assignment that required her to write about losing a friend. "And I've spent the whole week in memory," she said. A man reported on his children's troubled move to a new school. A woman told of her conversation with a prisoner on death-row. Another told of meeting with a union organizer while visiting Mexico. "They're so poor," she said, "we can't even imagine how poor." A woman explained that she and her husband, who cared nothing for football, would watch the Super Bowl that afternoon, because the husband's estranged son from

an earlier marriage was playing for the Green Bay Packers. When my turn came, I described hiking one afternoon that week with my daughter, Eva, how we studied the snow for animal tracks, how her voice lit up the woods. Others spoke about cleaning house, going to a concert, losing a job, caring for grandchildren, suffering pain, hearing a crucial story: small griefs, small celebrations.

After all twelve of us had spoken, we sat for one final moment in silence, to mark the end of our time together. Then we rose from those unforgiving benches, pulled on coats, and said our good-byes. On my way to the door, I was approached by several Friends who urged me to come again, and I thanked them for their company.

\*

As I walked outside into the sharp wind, I recalled how George Fox had urged his followers to “walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in every one.” There were still no footprints leading to the doors of the art school, no lights burning in the studios. I brushed snow from the windows of my car with gloved hands. To go home, I should have turned south on Meridian, but instead I turned north. I drove slowly, peering into alleys and doorways, looking for the man in the torn jacket with the bulging gray sack over his shoulder. I never saw him, and I did not know what I would have done if I had seen him. Give him a few dollars? Offer him a meal at the International House of Pancakes? Take him home?

Eventually I turned around and headed south, right through the heart of the city. In spite of the snow, traffic was picking up, for the stores recognized no Sabbath. I thought of the eighteenth-century Quaker, John Woolman, who gave up shop-keeping and worked modestly as a tailor, so that he would have time for seeking and serving God. “So great is the hurry in the spirit of this world,” he wrote in 1772, “that in aiming to do business quickly and to gain wealth the creation at this day doth loudly groan.”

In my Quakerly mood, much of what I saw in the capitol was distressing—the trash on curbs, the bars and girlie clubs, the war memorials, the sheer weight of buildings, the smear of pavement, the shop windows filled with trinkets, the homeless men and women plodding along through the snow, the endless ads. I had forgotten that today was Super Bowl Sunday until the woman at meeting spoke of it, and now I could see that half the billboards and marquees and window displays in the city referred to this national festival, a day set aside for devotion by more people, and with more fervor, than any date on the Christian calendar.

“The whole mechanism of modern life is geared for a flight from God,” wrote Thomas Merton. I have certainly found it so. The hectic activity imposed on us by jobs and families and avocations and amusements, the accelerating pace of technology, the flood of information, the proliferation of noise, all combine to keep us from that inward stillness where meaning is to be found. How can we grasp the nature of things, how can we lead gathered lives, if we are forever dashing about like water-striders on the moving surface of a creek?

By the time I reached the highway outside of Indianapolis, snow was falling steadily and blowing lustily, whiting out the way ahead. Headlights did no good. I should have pulled over until the sky cleared, as the more sensible drivers did. But the snow held me. Rolling on into the

whiteness, I lost all sense of motion, lost awareness of road and car. I seemed to be floating in the whirl of flakes, caught up in silence, alone yet not alone, as though I had slipped by accident into the state that a medieval mystic had called the cloud of unknowing. Memory fled, words flew away, and there was only the brightness, here and everywhere.



Ipung Purnomo  
The Wheel of Fate





Ipung Purnomo  
The Plants

# Shelby Stephenson

## **MUSIC: AN ARIA OF MEMORY**

*When I see you I think of music. We feel alike – music comes first – and last.*

— Miss Earnhart, *Cle-Tracks*, 1956

Since that graduation day from Cleveland High School, near Clayton, in June, 1956, I have traveled the country and lived in Pennsylvania and Wisconsin. In 1996, after eighteen years in Southern Pines, North Carolina, Nin and I moved back to Paul's Hill, my homeplace, ten miles north of Benson, near McGee's Crossroads.

As I look back on the days at my school, where I spent twelve years, I think how I would like to see Miss Earnhart to tell her how I appreciate her, devoting her professional life to her piano and to the arts, teaching students in a public school in the country, when country *was* country, when small game like the opossum, the rabbit, and the raccoon were popular as yard-dogs.

One day Miss Earnhart said to me – all this before she wrote in *Cle-Tracks* the quote which begins my story: "Shelby, I will give you piano lessons free, if you want to take them." And I spared her and myself the blunt, outwardly melt-down-embarrassment of telling her what I was thinking: *Piano lessons are for girls and sissies and teaching anything is for sissies, too.*

I stood there in my eight-grade-ness, full of puberty's inward howling, looked the other way and said, "Oh, thank you"; then I vanished toward high school. Four years later she wrote the truth in *Cle-Tracks*.

Over half a century sweeps the years between then and now, as I see her, face turned aside, watching us (we were called "pupils") file into chapel at Cleveland School. She is playing "Glow Worm," her hands bouncing on the keys, her fingers leaving a whirl and brush of happy light coming through the blinds on either side of the second-floor auditorium. Mr. Thompson, our janitor, has recently oiled the floor. The fresh smell doubles Miss Earnhart's melody. Our foot-shuffles sound like snares toward graduation.

Now every time I sing or try to let the music in a poem find me, I think of Sulu Earnhart. Invitations abound: "Please come and play at our Independence Day Celebration-Bell Ringing at the Coats Estate, on Saturday, July 3." Or this one from the librarians at Mary Duncan Public Library in Benson: "We would like to ask you to perform for our Reading Program again this summer."

And hear my father say again, late in his years, a hearing-aid battery pinging in his ear, his thirty or so dogs on another fox's track, "Oh those dogs make the most beautiful music in the world!" And I hear him say again as I went off to college – *Stay here with me and we'll hunt and fish.* As he hobbles away from my breath, I know I will leave my guitar at home, for somehow I had to find a way to relive what I hastened to leave, the little white church, my family there on the small farm, the splendor of that schoolhouse I left behind, and my teachers who thought of me as a singer.

At the time Miss Earnhart wrote in my high school annual, I was trying to write songs in the manner of Hank Williams, mostly lyrics of separation and heartbreak. My attempts to find a form for how I felt turned my longing toward trying to write poems; rather, that desire chose me to try to turn music into words. This calling most certainly is rooted in the hymns I heard in Rehobeth Primitive Baptist Church in Elevation Township near Coats Crossroads, not far from where I live today, in the same spot where I was born at home, June 14, 1938: "How Firm a Foundation," "Precious Memories," "Amazing Grace," "What a Friend We Have in Jesus," "Have Thine Own Way, Lord."

We did not have any books in the plankhouse I was born in, except the Bible and the Sears Catalogue. (There was another catalogue, the "old" one, in the backhouse (we never called it The Outhouse), a two-holer I restored in 1996.

"Glow Worm" dances in my head. Hands on a keyboard brush my glances. In a reverie I see Alton Dupree take his fiddle from the case. The music swells beyond the reality that he is propped up in bed on a chair turned over, in a farmhouse near Angier, a pillow placed between the chair's slats and his back, for his arthritis keeps him from sitting up or standing when he fiddles.

In my school's auditorium, Miss Earnhart's ready at her piano.

# Contribu

tors Bios

**Gale Acuff** has had hundreds of poems published in several countries and is the author of three books of poetry. He has taught English at universities in the US, China, and Palestine.

**Farrukh Adnan** is a visual artist who lives and works in Lahore, Pakistan.

**Curtis Almquist**, a brother and priest of the Society of St. John the Evangelist for more than 30 years, lives at SSJE's monastery in Cambridge, Mass. He works with leaders from a wide spectrum of professional disciplines, helping them listen and respond to God's amazing gift of life.

**Nina Rubinstein Alonso's** work has appeared in *Ploughshares*, *The New Yorker*, *Ibbetson Street*, *Wilderness House Literary Review*, *The New Boston Review*, *Broadkill Review*, *Writing in a Woman's Voice*, *Southern Women's Review*, *Peacock Literary Review*, *Nixes' Mate*, etc. Her book *This Body* was published by David Godine Press and her chapbook *Riot Wake* is upcoming from Cervena Barva Press. She is the editor of *Constellations: A Journal of Poetry and Fiction* and director of Fresh Pond Ballet.

**Elizabeth Jarrett Andrew** is the author of *Writing the Sacred Journey: The Art and Practice of Spiritual Memoir* (Skinner House Books), *Living Revision* (Skinner House Books), the spiritual memoir *Swinging on the Garden Gate* (Skinner House Books), and various other literary work. You can find her at [www.spiritualmemoir.com](http://www.spiritualmemoir.com) and [www.elizabethjarrettandrew.com](http://www.elizabethjarrettandrew.com).

**Donna Baier Stein** is the author of *The Silver Baron's Wife* (PEN/New England Discovery Award, Foreword Reviews Book of the Year Winner), *Sympathetic People* (Iowa Fiction Award Finalist), *Letting Rain Have Its Say*, and *Scenes from the Heartland: Stories Based on Lithographs by Thomas Hart Benton*. A Founding Editor of *Bellevue Literary Review*, she founded and publishes *Tiferet Journal*. She has received a Bread Loaf Scholarship, Johns Hopkins University Fellowship, and other awards. Donna's writing appears in *Virginia Quarterly Review*, *Saturday Evening Post*, *Writer's Digest*, and other journals as well as in *I've Always Meant to Tell You* (Pocket Books) and *To Fathers: What I've Never Said* (featured in *O Magazine*).

**Reema Baniabbasi** is an Emirati US-trained counseling psychologist at The Psychiatry & Therapy Centre in Dubai Healthcare City, Dubai, United Arab Emirates and a Northeastern University alumnus. She is also a monthly columnist at *Sail E-Magazine* and an emerging poet with English works published in *Proverse Hongkong*, *Art Ascent*, and *Snapdragon*.

**Mark Blickley** is a proud member of the Dramatists Guild and PEN American Center. He is the author of *Sacred Misfits* (Red Hen Press), *Weathered Reports: Trump Surrogate Quotes from the Underground* (Moir Books) and the 2019 text-based art book in collaboration with artist Amy Bassin, *Dream Streams* (Clare Songbirds Publishing House). His video collaborations with Ms. Bassin, "Speaking in Bootongue" and "Widow's Peek: The Kiss of Death" will represent the United States in the

year-long international world tour of "Time Is Love: Universal Feelings: Myths & Conjunctions." The screenings kick off in Madrid next month, organized by the esteemed African curator, Kisito Assangni.

**Don Bogen** is the author of five books of poetry, most recently *Immediate Song* (Milkweed, 2019) and the translator of *Europa: Selected Poems of Julio Martínez Mesanza* (Diálogos / Lavender Ink, 2016). His translations from Martínez Mesanza have been published in *Boston Review*, *Literary Imagination*, and other journals; and his own poems have appeared recently in *Poetry Northwest* and *The Yale Review*. An emeritus professor at the University of Cincinnati, he serves as editor-at-large for *The Cincinnati Review*. His website is [www.donbogen.com](http://www.donbogen.com).

Over the past 57 years, **Joseph Bruchac's** poems have appeared in hundreds of publications from *Akwesasne Notes* and *Parabola* to *National Geographic* and *The Paris Review*. An enrolled member of the Nulhegan Band of the Abenaki Nation, his work as a writer and traditional storyteller often reflects his Native American ancestry. Author of over 160 books for young readers and adults, his newest collection of poetry is *Four Directions, New and Recollected Poems* from Mongrel Empire Press.

**Mary Buchinger** is the author of four collections of poetry, including *e i n f ü h l u n g/in feeling*, *Aerialist*, and *Navigating the Reach* (forthcoming). Her poetry has appeared in *AGNI*, *Salamander*, *Slice Magazine*, *The Boston Globe*, *The Massachusetts Review*, and elsewhere. She is president of the New England Poetry Club and professor of English and communication studies at MCPHS University in Boston.

For as long as she can remember, art has been **Felice Campbell's** life. She realized she had a gift in acrylic painting in high school and college. She pours her heart and soul into each brush stroke, each painting is a piece of her very existence. She often holds onto her work because it's so intimate in the purest sense of the word; but she realized the best gift is giving a piece of yourself. Sharing something beautiful that can in return be shared and admired and loved just as much as what we humans do...which is love what we do, and do what we love. As always, remember beauty is in the eye of the beholder. There's always a lesson and beauty in life's imperfections. Imperfectly perfect in our own way.

**Kristone Capistrano** is a contemporary artist based in Sydney and Manila. Known for his monumental portrait drawings, his work rises out of an incarnational tradition of Filipino figurative art; imaging the human face as a mysterious site of transcendence. Kristone has exhibited in Australia, Manila, Singapore, Hong Kong, Manila and New York.

Documentary poet, translator and travel writer, **Lorraine Caputo's** works appear in over 180 journals in Canada, the US, Latin America, Europe, Asia, Australia and Africa; and 12 chapbooks of poetry –

including *Caribbean Nights* (Red Bird Chapbooks, 2014), *Notes from the Patagonia* (dancing girl press, 2017) and *On Galápagos Shores* (dancing girl press, 2019). She has done over 200 literary readings, from Alaska to the Patagonia. Caputo travels through Latin America, listening to the voices of the pueblos and Earth. Follow her travels at: [www.facebook.com/lorraineaputo.wanderer](http://www.facebook.com/lorraineaputo.wanderer).

**Daniel Carpenter** is a poet, freelance journalist, fiction writer, playwright and blogger, residing in Indianapolis. He has published poems in *Poetry East*, *Illuminations*, *Pearl*, *Xavier Review*, and many other journals. He is the author of two books of poems, *The Art He'd Sell for Love* (Cherry Grove, 2015) and *More Than I Could See* (Restoration, 2009).

**Lynn Carriker** is a former elementary school teacher and currently works as a visiting nurse in Natick, MA. She finds joy in her family, friends and the beauty of creation. Painting is part of her spiritual practice, making her prayers visible.

**Carlos Carrio** is the author of two poetry books: *the wine tasted sweeter in the paper cups* and *barefoot monks with sullied toes*.

**Yuan Changming** edits *Poetry Pacific* with Allen Yuan in Vancouver. Credits include Pushcart nominations, poetry awards & publications in *Best of the Best Canadian Poetry* (2008-17) & *BestNewPoemsOnline*, among 1,689 others worldwide.

**Richard Chess** directed the Center for Jewish Studies at UNC Asheville for 30 years. He also led UNC Asheville's contemplative inquiry initiative for ten years. He's published four books of poetry, the most recent of which is *Love Nailed to the Doorpost*. He's on the eve of retirement. He's a lead organizer of the upcoming Faith in Arts Institute: An Exploration of the Intersections of Faith, Spirit, and Art. You can find out more about and register for the institute here. You can find him at [www.richardchess.com](http://www.richardchess.com).

**Lindsey Chou** is a writer, learner, seeker, and aspiring gardener. She is interested in what propels people's lives, and resides in Massachusetts.

**Martha Collins** is the author of ten collections of poetry, most recently *Because What Else Could I Do* (Pittsburgh, 2019), *Night Unto Night* (Milkweed, 2018) and *Admit One: An American Scrapbook* (Pittsburgh, 2016). She has also co-translated four volumes of Vietnamese poetry. She founded the creative writing program at the University of Massachusetts Boston and taught at Oberlin College for ten years.

**Frank H. Coons** is a veterinarian and poet living Colorado. His work has appeared in *The Eleventh Muse*, *The Santa Fe Literary Review*, *Pilgrimage*, *Pacific Review*, *Pinyon Review*, *El Malpais*, *Fruita Pulp*, *Caesura*, and elsewhere. His work has appeared in numerous anthologies, and in 2019, was

nominated for a Pushcart prize. His first collection of poems, a chapbook, *Finding Cassiopeia*, was a finalist for the Colorado Book Award in 2013. His second book of poems, *Counting in Dog Years* was released in 2016. Both books were published by Lithic Press.

**Robert Cording** has published nine collections of poems, the most recent of which are *Only So Far* and *Without My Asking*. A new book on poetry, the bible and metaphor, *Finding the World's Fullness*, is out from Slant. His poems have appeared in publications such as the *Georgia Review*, *Southern Review*, *Poetry*, *Hudson Review*, *Kenyon Review*, *New Ohio Review*, *New England Review*, *Orion*, and *Best American Poetry, 2018*.

**Galen G. Cortes** is a sabbatical renewal program (Spring) participant of the Jesuit School of Theology of the Santa Clara University – Berkeley Campus. He is a Filipino Redemptorist of the Cebu-Province, Philippines.

**Banqobile Virginia Dakamela** is a writer who hails from Zimbabwe. She has written a story that was published in an anthology which was studied at high schools and is a set book in a local university. She has written extensively and is in the process of publishing some of her novels.

**Dennis Daly** has published seven books of poetry and poetic translations. His last book, *The Devil's Artisan, Sonnets from the Autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini*, was published by Dos Madres Press.

**Carol V. Davis** is the author of *Because I Cannot Leave This Body* (Truman State Univ. Press, 2017) and *Between Storms* (TSUP, 2012). She won the 2007 T.S. Eliot Prize for *Into the Arms of Pushkin: Poems of St. Petersburg*. Her poetry has been read on National Public Radio, the Library of Congress, and Radio Russia. Twice a Fulbright scholar in Russia, she taught in Siberia during winter 2018 and teaches at Santa Monica College, California and Antioch Univ. Los Angeles.

**Sarah DeCorla-Souza's** poetry has appeared in *Innisfree*, *JMWW*, *Conte*, *Imitation Fruit*, *Visions International*, *Dappled Things*, *Angel Face*, and *Epiphany*. She lives in Alexandria, Virginia with her husband and four children, where she works as a graphic designer.

**Krikor Der Hohannesian** lives in Medford, MA. His poems have appeared in over 150 literary journals including *The Evansville Review*, *The South Carolina Review*, *Atlanta Review*, *Louisiana Literature*, *Connecticut Review*, and *Natural Bridge*. He is a three-time Pushcart Prize nominee and the author of two chapbooks, *Ghosts and Whispers* (Finishing Line Press, 2010) and *Refuge in the Shadows* (Cervena Barva Press, 2013). *Ghosts and Whispers* was a finalist for the Mass Book awards poetry category in 2011.

**Thad DeVassie's** work has appeared in numerous journals including *New York Quarterly*, *Poetry East*, *St. Katherine's Review*, *West Branch*, *NANO Fiction*, *Collateral*, *Unbroken*, and *Lunate*. His chapbook,

*This Side of Utopia*, is forthcoming from Cervena Barva Press. A lifelong Ohioan, he writes from the outskirts of Columbus.

**Tom Donlon** lives with his wife and children in Shenandoah Junction, WV. He earned an MFA in Creative Writing from the American University in 1984. He was awarded a chapbook, *Peregrine*, in 2016 from a book contest sponsored by the Franciscan University in Steubenville, OH. His poems have appeared in many journals, newspapers, and anthologies. Recognition has included Pushcart Prize nominations and a fellowship from the WV Commission on the Arts.

**Rosie Prohías Driscoll** is a Cuban-American educator and poet. Her poems have appeared in numerous journals, including *The Acentos Review*, *MasTequila Review*, *Pilgrimage Magazine*, *Literary Mama*, *Saw Palm: Florida Literature and Art*, *SWWIM Every Day*, *Sin Fronteras/Writers Without Borders*, and *No Tender Fences: An Anthology of Immigrant and First Generation American Poetry*. Most recently she was a finalist for the 2020 Orison Poetry Prize. She lives in Alexandria, Virginia with her husband, where she works as Coordinator of K-12 Faith Formation at her Catholic parish.

**David Ebenbach** is the author of two collections of poetry, including his most recent book, *Some Unimaginable Animal*, along with three short story collections, two novels, and a non-fiction spiritual guide to the creative process called *The Artist's Torah*. He lives with his family in Washington, DC. You can find out more, if you like, at [davidebenbach.com](http://davidebenbach.com).

**Åsa Ericsson** is a published author of eight novels and collections of poetry in Sweden, where she grew up. She has lived in the US for eleven years and recently became a citizen. She currently lives on Peaks Island off the Maine coast.

**Martín Espada's** many books of poems include *Floater* (forthcoming 2021), *Vivas to Those Who Have Failed* (2016), *The Trouble Ball* (2011), *The Republic of Poetry* (2006), and *Alabanza* (2003). He has received the Ruth Lilly Poetry Prize, the Shelley Memorial Award, an Academy of American Poets Fellowship and a Guggenheim Fellowship. A former tenant lawyer, he now is a professor of English at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst.

**Blake Everitt** was born in 1989 and lives in Ventnor on the Isle of Wight, UK. He has been described as a 'prolific poet' focused on 'the spiritual nature of the south eastern area of the Isle of Wight'. As well as several collections, including *Lachrima Vecta*, he has had poems published in *Harbinger Asylum* (Texas), *The Poetry Village*, *Time of Singing* (Pennsylvania), *Black Lives Matter UK*, *Eye Flash Poetry*, *The Recusant*, *Dead Beats*, *Friendly Fire Collective* (Philadelphia), *C.H.S* newsletter, *C.H.S* anthology, and *The Blue Morphosis* by GreenFingers Recordings. He has poems forthcoming in *Plumwood Mountain: An Australian Journal of Ecopoetry and Ecopoetics*, *Hawk & Whippoorwill* (MA), and *The Dawntreader*.

**Chuck Fager** is a Quaker writer and retired activist. He was jailed with Dr. King in Selma, wrote many books, and attended too many committee meetings. He has been accused of being a published poet, and pled guilty. Now settled in Durham, North Carolina, he blogs for the resistance at [www.afriendlyletter.com](http://www.afriendlyletter.com).

**Thomas Feeny** has taught Italian and Spanish literature at North Carolina State University for over forty years. His two poetry collections, *Night into Day* and *Breathing in Technicolor*, are available at Abe Books and Amazon.

**Ashley Wilson Fellers** is a writer, self-taught painter, and contemplative photographer in Roanoke, Virginia. She snaps photos of sidewalk cracks, rescues wet leaves from windshield wipers, and leaves poems hidden under park benches. She has a Master of Fine Arts degree from Virginia Tech.

**Melanie Figg** is the author of the award-winning poetry collection, *Trace*, as well as a chapbook. She has won grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, The McKnight and Jerome Foundations, the Maryland State Arts Council, and others. Her poems, personal essays, and book reviews have been published in dozens of literary journals, including *The Iowa Review*, *Nimrod*, and *Iron Horse Literary Review*. Melanie teaches writing at local arts centers and privately in the DC area. As a professional certified coach, she offers women's writing retreats and works one-on-one with writers and others. Find out more at [www.melaniefigg.net](http://www.melaniefigg.net).

**Annie Finch** is the author of seven books of poetry, most recently *The Poetry Witch Little Book of Spells* (Wesleyan University Press), and books on poetry including *The Body of Poetry: Essays on Women, Form, and the Poetic Self*, and *Measure for Measure: An Anthology of Poetic Meters*. Her poetry has appeared in *Poetry*, *The Paris Review*, *The New York Times*, *The Penguin Book of Twentieth-Century American Poetry*, and onstage at Carnegie Hall. Her awards include the Sarasvati Award for Poetry and the Robert Fitzgerald Lifetime Award for contribution to the study of versification. She is based in Washington, DC and offers online classes for poets in metrical and formal craft, as well as holistic workshops and retreats that share the transformative magic of rhythmic language with seekers from all backgrounds. Read more of her work at [www.anniefinch.com](http://www.anniefinch.com).

As an artist, **Jeffrey Fine** has both the advantages and disadvantages of being mainly self-taught. Since early childhood, he has been a relentless and incessant doodler, but did not actually start to think of himself as an artist, until after graduating from college, where he pursued studies in chemistry and psychology. He started to paint as a young adult in Ghana, West Africa, while teaching psychology at the University of Ghana, and studying ritual medicine with Bezaleel Crawffey, a Ghanaian native healer who used both painting and sculpture as expressive tools for healing both physical and psychic illness. In addition to painting, Jeffrey works as a psychologist in private practice and participates in the Guild of Accessible Practitioners, a nonprofit organization of mental health practitioners that he founded in 1995. He also taught for 32 years in the Counseling & Psychology Program at Lesley University. Jeffrey understands his art both as silent and solitary counterpoint

to the intensely verbal, interpersonal processes that he engages in as a psychotherapist and teacher; and as reflection and commentary on the complex, multi-leveled, and often conflicting or contradictory forces that he experiences in the world. He seeks to create a sense of balance and harmony from what at first appearance seems like clutter, imbalance and disharmony.

**Phil Flott** is a retired Catholic priest, after having been a journeyman carpenter. He was nominated for a Pushcart in the late 70's and has had about 250 poems published. He has forthcoming work in *Passager Books*.

Journalist, singer, author and poet, **Ashante J. Ford** is a woman who believes that the complexity of words woven through scriptures can empower millions. Someone who laughs at the world's distraught problems and abides by the four agreements. A black & queer woman who lives for love and understands that the route to happiness lies between the spirit and the soul. Here lies the words of a woman, unfiltered and extraordinary. Her work can be found on *Rose Quartz Journal*, *Mojave Heart Review*, *Sad Girl Review*, and on her personal blog: [www.spirituallyajar.blog](http://www.spirituallyajar.blog).

**Eric Forsbergh's** poetry has appeared in *The Journal of The American Medical Association*, *The Journal of Neurology*, *Artemis Journal*, *Zeotrope Press*, *Ponder Review*, and other literary journals. In 2016, he was awarded a Pushcart nomination by *The Northern Virginia Review*. He is a dentist, and has participated in medical mission trips in Guatemala and Appalachia.

**Samuel J. Fox** is a bisexual poet and essayist living in North Carolina. He is poetry editor at *Bending Genres Journal* and appears in numerous online and print journals. He is a Gilbert-Chappell Award winning poet and is the author of two chapbooks, *Mythos* and *Irreverent Glossolalia*. You can find him on Twitter (@samueljfox).

**Cynthia Gallaher**, a Chicago-based poet, is author of four poetry collections, including *Epicurean Ecstasy: More Poems About Food, Drink, Herbs and Spices* (The Poetry Box, Portland, 2019), and three chapbooks, including *Drenched* (Main Street Rag, Charlotte, N.C., 2018). The Chicago Public Library lists her among its "Top Ten Requested Chicago Poets."

**Robbie Gamble's** work appears in *The Atlanta Review*, *RHINO*, *Whale Road Review*, and *Rust + Moth*. He was the winner of the 2017 Carve Poetry prize. He works as a nurse practitioner caring for homeless people in Boston.

**Shannon Elizabeth Gardner** is a graduate from the University of Wisconsin - Stevens Point with a Bachelors in Studio Art and a Minor in Art History. Shannon's interest in the macabre began while studying nature and the paranormal. The ethereal mood of her work reaches the extreme and addresses the taboo. Through her process, she explores natural and organic techniques used to imitate nature and discover Earth's imperfect beauty. Stippling and cross hatching imitate the

aesthetic of change through time. Her use of watercolor, line, and dot work assists the viewer to observe the Asian aesthetic Wabi Sabi: appreciation of imperfections.

**Diane Glancy** is professor emerita at Macalester College in St. Paul, Minnesota. Currently she teaches in the low-residency MFA program at Carlow University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Glancy has published several books with Wipf & Stock: *The Book of Bearings* (poetry), *The Collector of Bodies*, *Concern for Syria in the Middle East* (poetry), *The Servitude of Love* (short stories), *No Word for the Sea and Mary Queen of Bees* (novels). In 2020, Turtle Point Press published *Island of the Innocent*, *A Consideration of the Book of Job*. Among her awards are two National Endowment for the Arts Fellowships, a Minnesota Book Award, an Oklahoma Book Award, an American Book Award, and a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Native Writers' Circle of the Americas. Her other books and awards are on her website [www.dianeglancy.com](http://www.dianeglancy.com).

**E. Laura Golberg** won first place in the Washington, DC Commission on the Arts Larry Neal Poetry Competition. Laura's poetry has appeared in *Poet Lore*, *Laurel Review*, *Birmingham Poetry Review*, *Spillway*, *RHINO*, and the *Journal of Humanistic Mathematics*, among other places. Her webpage is [www.ELauraGolberg.com](http://www.ELauraGolberg.com).

**Jeff Gundy's** recent books of poems include *Without a Plea* (Bottom Dog, 2019), *Abandoned Homeland* (Bottom Dog, 2015), and *Somewhere Near Defiance* (Anhinga, 2014), for which he was named Ohio Poet of the Year. Recent work appears in *Georgia Review*, *The Sun*, *Christian Century*, *Image*, and *Cincinnati Review*. He teaches at Bluffton University in Ohio.

**Alexandra Guzman** is currently a high school sophomore at Brooke Charter High School in Boston, Mass. She has never been published before. "An angel being dragged through Hell alive" is about trusting your faith even in moments where everything is unclear and rocky. Her family is from Guatemala, so her Hispanic-American identity is huge to her.

**Luke Hankins** is the author of two poetry collections, *Radiant Obstacles* and *Weak Devotions*, as well as a collection of essays, *The Work of Creation*. He is also the editor of *Poems of Devotion: An Anthology of Recent Poets*. A volume of his translations from the French of Stella Vinitchi Radulescu, *A Cry in the Snow & Other Poems*, was released by Seagull Books in 2019. Hankins is the founder and editor of Orison Books, a non-profit literary press focused on the life of the spirit from a broad and inclusive range of perspectives.

**Niels Hav** is a Danish poet and short story writer with awards from The Danish Arts Council. He is the author of seven collections of poetry and three books of short fiction. His books have been translated into many languages including English, Arabic, Turkish, Dutch, Farsi, Serbian, Kurdish, and Portuguese. His second English poetry collection, *We Are Here*, was published by Book Thug in Toronto; his poems and stories have been published in a large number of magazines and newspapers

in different countries of the world, including *The Literary Review*, *Ecotone*, *Acumen*, *Exile*, *The Los Angeles Review*, *Absinthe: New European Writing*, *Shearsman*, and *PRISM International*. He has travelled widely and participated in numerous international poetry events in Europe, Asia, Africa, North and South America. He has frequently been interviewed by the media. Niels Hav was raised on a farm in western Denmark; today he resides in the most colourful and multi-ethnic part of the capital, Copenhagen. His most recent book, *Øjeblikke aflykke / Moments of Happiness* was published by Det Poetiske Bureaus Forlag, 2020.

**MEH** is **Matthew E. Henry**, a multiple Pushcart and Best of the Net nominated poet, and the author of *Teaching While Black* (Main Street Rag, 2020). His theological works are appearing or forthcoming in various publications, including *The Amethyst Review*, *The Anglican Theological Review*, *Dappled Things*, *The Other Journal*, *Perspectives*, *Poemeleon*, *Relief*, *Rigorous*, *Rock and Sling*, *Spiritus*, *3Elements Literary Review*, and *The Windhover*. MEH is an educator who received his MFA from Seattle Pacific University, yet continued to spend money he didn't have completing an MA in theology and a PhD in education. His work can be found on [www.MEHPoeting.com](http://www.MEHPoeting.com).

**Stephen Hitchcock** received an MFA in Writing at Vermont College of Fine Arts. His poems have appeared in *Juxtapose*, *Ruminate*, *storySouth*, *Post Road*, and elsewhere. He serves as the executive director of *The Haven*, a low-barrier day shelter and housing resource center in downtown Charlottesville, VA.

**Richard Hoffman** has published four volumes of poetry, most recently *Noon until Night*, which won the 2018 Massachusetts Book Award. His other books include the memoirs, *Half the House* and *Love & Fury*, and the story collection *Interference and Other Stories*. He is Senior Writer in Residence at Emerson College, and nonfiction editor at *Solstice: A Magazine of Diverse Voices*.

**Carlton Holte** was born in Minnesota in the age of black-and-white TV; grew up playing under bridges, along creeks, and in cornfields; went to school and more school; and has juggled gigs as teacher, writer, editor, strategic marketer, and a few less wordy things. A recent transplant to Albuquerque, he enjoys the sunsets and chiles, and tends to write about trees, blue water, and special people.

**Jessica Jacobs** is the author of *Take Me with You, Wherever You're Going* (Four Way Books), one of Library Journal's Best Poetry Books of the Year, winner of the Goldie Award in Poetry from the Golden Crown Literary Society, and a finalist for both the Brockman-Campbell and Julie Suk Book Awards. Her debut collection, *Pelvis with Distance* (White Pine Press), a biography-in-poems of Georgia O'Keeffe, won the New Mexico Book Award in Poetry and was a finalist for the Lambda Literary Award. An avid long-distance runner, Jessica has worked as a rock-climbing instructor, bartender, and professor, and now serves as the Chapbook Editor for *Beloit Poetry Journal*. She lives in Asheville, NC, with her wife, the poet Nickole Brown, with whom she co-authored *Write*

*It! 100 Poetry Prompts to Inspire* (Spruce Books/PenguinRandomHouse), and is at work on parallel collections of essays and poems exploring spirituality, Torah, and Midrash.

**Jennifer Jean's** poetry collections include *The Fool* (Big Table) and *Object Lesson*—which is forthcoming from Lily Books in 2021. Her teaching resource, *Object Lesson: a Guide to Writing Poetry*, is also forthcoming in 2021. Jennifer's awards include a Kenyon Review Writers Workshop Fellowship; a Disquiet FLAD Fellowship to write and study poetry in Portugal; a "Her Story Is" Residency—where she worked with Iraqi women artists in Dubai; and, an Ambassador for Peace Award for her activism in the arts. Her poems and co-translations have appeared in *Poetry Magazine*, *Rattle*, *Waxwing*, *Crab Creek Review*, *The Common*, and more. She's the translations editor for *Talking Writing Magazine* and she lives in Massachusetts with her husband and children. For more info, visit: [www.jenniferjeanwriter.weebly.com](http://www.jenniferjeanwriter.weebly.com).

**Jeffrey L. Johnson** is author of *This Will Be A Sign*. He is editor of *Stars Shall Bend Their Voices: Poets' Favorite Hymns and Spiritual Songs*. His blog is Harbors of Heaven.

**Martin Chrispine Juwa** is a Malawian poet, educator and freelance writer and editor who lives in Lilongwe, capital city of Malawi. He is very much interested in poetry, history, and the natural environment, and often combines these in his writing. He is chief editor at *Scribble Magazine & Artiscope Fellows*. His work appears widely in local and international journals, magazines and anthologies including *Project Muse*, *JAYL* (Issue 2), *BNAP 2018 & 2019 Anthologies*, *LOCKDOWN 2020*, *On the Road Anthology* (Volume 1), *Daily Drunk Magazine*, *Walking the Battlefield Anthology*, *Nthanda Review*, *Scribble Publication*, and many others. Two of his poems are translated into Spanish language and appear in the *Libero America Journal: Contemporary African Poets*.

New York based artist, **Vendula Kalinova**, with her strong roots from Czech Republic, is an artist behind multidimensional bodies of works. Her work is highly expressed through her own spiritual journey and through which she explores the depths of art. She finds healing powers within observation of art as much she does in creating it, and consciously hopes to capture such blessings in each and every work her hands get to touch in order to share a subtle message of her own.

**Kyle Kaplan** is currently an interfaith chaplain resident at Massachusetts General Hospital, Buddhist Spiritual Advisor for Northeastern University, and housemaster at the Cambridge Zen Center. The places he's called home include Los Angeles, Taiwan, and, currently, Boston. He's drawn towards spirituality, nature, creative technology, and meaningful connections.

**Rebecca Katz** began writing poetry at Knox College in Galesburg, Illinois. She obtained a BA in chemistry with a minor in religious studies. She currently lives in Pennsylvania where she is a graduate research assistant in chemistry. Rebecca still writes poetry to interact with the world and give meaning to experience.

**Jennifer Kavanagh** is a British Quaker writer, speaker and teacher on the Spirit-led life. She worked in publishing for nearly thirty years and is now an associate tutor at Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre. She has published nine books of non-fiction and two novels. The balance between an active life and a pull towards contemplation is a continuing and fruitful challenge. Her website is [www.jenniferkavanagh.co.uk](http://www.jenniferkavanagh.co.uk).

**Lawrence Kessenich** won the 2010 Strokestown International Poetry prize in Ireland and has had three poems nominated for Pushcart Prizes. His poetry has appeared in the *Sewanee Review*, *Atlanta Review*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, and many other magazines. He has published four books of poetry and is the co-managing editor of *Ibbetson Street*. He had an essay featured on NPR's "This I Believe" and in their anthology *This I Believe: On Love*. His plays have been produced in New York, Boston, and in Colorado, where he won an award in a national drama competition. His first novel, *Cinnamon Girl*, was published in 2016.

**luke kurtis** is an interdisciplinary writer and artist. His books include *Angkor Wat: poetry and photography* and *the immeasurable fold: selected poems 2000–2015*. [bd-studios.com](http://bd-studios.com) is his long-term art and publishing-as-practice project where he helms all aspects of the studio and press, including creative, editorial, and operational, while collaborating with a range of artists and writers to realize their projects. He lives and works in New York City.

**Sydney Lea**, former Pulitzer finalist and Vermont poet laureate, founded and for thirteen years edited *New England Review*. His latest publication is a mock-epic graphic poem, *The Exquisite Triumph of Wormboy*, produced in collaboration with former Vermont Cartoonist Laureate James Kochalka, available from Able Muse. His thirteenth collection of poems, *Here*, appeared from Four Way Books in late 2019.

The stories, poetry, and humor of **Larry Lefkowitz** have been widely published. His collection of Jewish stories *Enigmatic Tales* is published by Fomite Press.

**Deborah Leipziger** is an award-winning poet, author, and a co-founder of *Soul-Lit*, a literary magazine devoted to spiritual poetry. Born in Brazil, Deborah advises companies, governments, and civil society on issues relating to sustainability and human rights. She is the author of several books on human rights and business. Her poetry chapbook, *Flower Map*, was published in 2013. She is the founder and curator of the New England Jewish Poetry Festival, now in its 11th year.

**Frannie Lindsay's** sixth volume of poetry, *The Snow's Wife*, was just released by Cavankerry Press. Her awards include the May Swenson Award, the Perugia Prize, the Benjamin Saltman Award, the Washington Prize, The Missouri Review Prize, as well as fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Massachusetts Cultural Council. Her work has appeared in *Best American Poetry*, and countless periodicals. She teaches workshops on the poetry of grief and trauma. She is also a classical pianist.

**Valerie Lute** is a writer whose short stories have appeared in *Arts & Letters*, *Literary Orphans*, and *Contrary Magazine*, among others. She holds an MFA in Fiction Writing from Chatham University. You can find her kayaking on the Charles River, attending Shakespeare productions in Greater Boston, or online at [www.valerielute.com](http://www.valerielute.com).

Winner of *America Magazine's* 2019 Foley Poetry Prize, Lock Haven University English Professor **Marjorie Maddox** has published 11 collections of poetry—including *Transplant*, *Transport*, *Transubstantiation—What She Was Saying* (prose); 4 books for children and teens, including *Inside Out: Poems on Writing and Reading Poems with Insider Exercises*; *Common Wealth: Contemporary Poets on Pennsylvania* (co-editor); and *Presence* (assistant editor). See [www.marjoriemaddox.com](http://www.marjoriemaddox.com) for more.

**Sara Maitland** is a UK writer who lives as a solitary in Scotland. She has published both fiction and non-fiction extensively over 40 years, including *A Book of Silence* (Granta 2008). She is a columnist for *The Tablet* and was the 2019 Frank O'Connor International Fellow in the Short Story in Cork, Ireland.

Self-proclaimed lover of people, words, and wild, **Kiri Manookin**, M.Ed., is an English instructor who has worked around the world, including Taiwan, Ecuador, Utah, Switzerland, Turkey, and — until the pandemic hit — Nepal. She has been published in a variety of forums, including literary and mindfulness journals, and international education journals. At Utah Valley University, Kiri taught academic writing in an ecopedagogical English language program that took international students to Capitol Reef National Park every semester. During the Wilderness Writing Workshop she led each trip, she marveled at how visibly the wild impacted her, her students, and their writing. Adventurous, determined, happy, funky, fun, and soul-deep, Kiri is sure never to underestimate the depth or width of her capabilities — she has surprised herself one too many times to let that happen.

**Fred Marchant** is the author of five books of poetry, the most recent of which is *Said Not Said* (Graywolf Press), recently designated as an Honored Book by the Massachusetts Book Awards. Founding Director of the Suffolk University Poetry Center in Boston, he has co-translated, with Nguyễn Bá Chung, work by several Vietnamese poets. He is also editor of *Another World Instead* (Graywolf Press), a selection of the early poetry of William Stafford.

**Nikki Marrone** is a spoken word performer, published poet, photographer, and coffee addict. She is motivated through feelings, of which she has plenty. Nikki is the winner of multiple poetry slams and has featured at various spoken word nights and festivals internationally but is based in the UK. Author of *Lost & Found: A Poetry Passport*, *Psychogenic Fugue* and *Honey & Lemon*. When she's not wandering around the world or documenting her adventures, she splits her time between motherhood, performing, creating, and starving as an artist.

From associate professor of English to management trainer to retiree, **Carolyn Martin** is a lover of gardening and snorkeling, writing and photography. Her fourth poetry collection, *A Penchant for Masquerades*, was released by Unsolicited Press in 2019. She is currently the poetry editor of *Kosmos Quarterly: journal for global transformation*. Find out more about Carolyn at [www.carolynmartinpoet.com](http://www.carolynmartinpoet.com).

**D.S. Martin** is the author of four poetry collections, including *Ampersand* (2018), and *Conspiracy of Light: Poems Inspired by the Legacy of C.S. Lewis* (2013) — both from Cascade Books. He is Poet-in-Residence at McMaster Divinity College, the Series Editor for the Poiema Poetry Series, and has edited three anthologies — *The Turning Aside* (2016), *Adam, Eve, & the Riders of the Apocalypse* (2017), and *In A Strange Land* (2019). He and his wife live in Brampton, Ontario; they have two adult sons.

**Erin McAtee** utilizes the processes of printmaking, drawing, and painting in her work to focus on the beautiful and grotesque in humanity, relationships, and the innate dignity found within all of us. Erin has found creative opportunities to incorporate community art outreach in her work with the poor, particularly those she has volunteered and served with in places such as Muncie & Indianapolis (IN), Connecticut, Haiti, and Italy. She currently serves as a missionary associate with LAMP (Lay Apostolic Ministries with the Poor) in Manhattan and the Bronx, and continues to find ways to combine her studio art practice and art education background with volunteer work alongside the Missionaries of Charity, the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal, and the Sisters of Life. Learn more at [erinkmcatee.com](http://erinkmcatee.com).

**Janet McCann** taught creative writing at Texas A&M from 1969 until 2015 and is now Professor Emerita there. Journals publishing her work include *Kansas Quarterly*, *Parnassus*, *Nimrod*, *Sou'wester*, *Christian Century*, *Christianity and Literature*, *New York Quarterly*, *Tendrils*, *Poetry Australia*, and more. Her most recent book-length poetry collection is *The Crone at the Casino*, Lamar Univ. Press, 2015.

**M.B. McLatchey** is the author of two books of poems, *The Lame God*, for which she won the 2013 May Swenson Award (Utah State Univ. Press) and *Advantages of Believing* (Finishing Line Press). She is also the author of a recently-completed educational memoir, *Beginner's Mind*, forthcoming with Regal House Publishing (2021). She is the recipient of several literary awards, including the American Poet Prize from the American Poetry Journal and the Annie Finch Prize from the National Poetry Review. Currently serving as Florida's Poet Laureate for Volusia County, she is Associate Professor of Humanities at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University. Visit her at [www.mbmclatchey.com](http://www.mbmclatchey.com).

**R.S. Mengert** completed his MFA in poetry at Syracuse University. He has won the Joyce Carol Oates award for poetry, and was a 2011 Summer Fellow at The Collegeville Institute. His poems have appeared, or are forthcoming in *Gargoyle*, *Maintenant*, *Zymbol*, *Poetry is Dead*, *ABZ*, *Fjords*,

*San Pedro River Review*, *Four Chambers*, *Enizagam*, and *The Café Review*. He teaches creative writing at Scottsdale Community College.

Born in Madrid in 1955, **Julio Martínez Mesanza** is among the most prominent of the generation of Spanish poets who began publishing in the 1980s. He is the author of several books of poetry, including four editions of a single, expanding collection, *Europa*, and a selected poems in 2016. The poems included in this issue are from his most recent book *Gloria*, which won the Spanish National Prize for Poetry in 2017.

**Philip Metres** is the author of ten books, including *Shrapnel Maps* (2020), *The Sound of Listening: Poetry as Refuge and Resistance* (2018), *Pictures at an Exhibition* (2016), and *Sand Opera* (2015). His work has garnered the Guggenheim Fellowship, the Lannan Fellowship, two NEAs, six Ohio Arts Council Grants, the Hunt Prize, the Adrienne Rich Award, three Arab American Book Awards, the Watson Fellowship, the Lyric Poetry Prize, Creative Workforce Fellowship, and the Cleveland Arts Prize. He is professor of English and director of the Peace, Justice, and Human Rights program at John Carroll University.

Poet, essayist, & educator **Ann E. Michael** is the author of the newly-released collection *Barefoot Girls*, as well as *Water-Rites* and four other books of poetry. She directs the writing center at DeSales University in Pennsylvania. Her website and blog (on poetry, nature, and speculative philosophical musing) can be found at [www.annemichael.wordpress.com](http://www.annemichael.wordpress.com).

**Rhonda Miska** is a seeker of truth whose journey has taken her to France, Nicaragua, and around the USA. She has worked extensively as an interpreter for immigrants, an educator for students, a spiritual director for seekers, a caregiver for elders, and a companion for people with intellectual disabilities. Her poems and articles have been published in *Presence: A Journal of Catholic Poetry*, *US Catholic*, and *America*; she also contributed essays to *Catholic Women Speak: Bringing Our Gifts to the Table* (Paulist Press, 2015) and *A Pope Francis Lexicon* (Liturgical Press, 2017). Rhonda is an itinerant preacher in the Dominican tradition.

**Guna Moran** is an assamese poet and critic. He lives in Assam, India.

**Nguyen Ba Chung** is a writer, poet and translator. He is the co-translator of *A Time Far Past*; *Mountain River: Vietnamese Poetry from The Wars 1948-1993*; *Distant Road - Selected Poems of Nguyen Duy*; *Six Vietnamese Poets*; *Zen Poems from Early Vietnam*, and others. He served for many years as Research Associate at the William Joiner Institute at U.Mass.-Boston.

**Alex Nodopaka** is an artist that keeps up with technology and the latest art. He follows in the footsteps of the French Art Philosopher, Jean Baudrillard, who in one word says all art is made by copycats that produce simulacra art.

**Yehoshua November** is the author of two poetry collections, *God's Optimism* (a finalist for the Los Angeles Times Book Prize in Poetry) and *Two Worlds Exist* (a finalist for the National Jewish Book Award and the Paterson Poetry Prize). His work has been featured in *The New York Times Magazine*, *Harvard Divinity Bulletin*, *The Sun*, *Virginia Quarterly Review*, and on National Public Radio. November teaches writing at Rutgers University and Touro College.

**Vanessa Okoyeh** is a 22-year-old Nigerian-American who studies law. She spends her free time writing, erasing, and rewriting poetry, stand-up sets, and songs.

**Ji Hyang Padma** has combined an academic career with her vocation as a spiritual teacher. She directs the Comparative Religion and Philosophy Program at the California Institute for Human Science. She has been teaching Zen for twenty-five years and currently serves Open Gate Zen Collective in San Diego. Her work as an interfaith leader at Wellesley College and in her local communities has given her a passion for intercultural dialogue.

Born and raised in Mumbai, India, **Sunayna Pal** moved to the US after her marriage. She devotes her free time to writing and heartfulness meditation. She is part of an anthology that is about to break the Guinness world records. Know more at [sunaynapal.com](http://sunaynapal.com).

**Marge Piercy** has published 20 poetry collections, her latest, *On the way out, turn off the light*, has just been published (September 30, 2020, by Knopf), and 17 novels including *Sex Wars*. PM Press reissued *Vida* and *Dance the Eagle to Sleep*; they brought out short stories, "The Cost of Lunch, Etc." and "My Body, My Life." She has read at over 500 venues here in the US and abroad.

**Jeannine M. Pitas** is a writer, teacher and Spanish-English literary translator. Her first full-length book, *Things Seen and Unseen*, was published by Mosaic Press in 2019. Her newest translation of Uruguayan poet Selva Casal's *We Do Not Live in Vain* was published by Veliz Books in 2020. She lives in Iowa and teaches at the University of Dubuque.

**Fabrice Poussin** teaches French and English at Shorter University. Author of novels and poetry, his work has appeared in *Kestrel*, *Symposium*, *The Chimes*, and many other magazines. His photography has been published in *The Front Porch Review*, *The San Pedro River Review*, as well as other publications.

**Ipung Purnomo** is an Indonesian artist born in 1974. He's had a passion for painting since he was very young. He had his first solo painting exhibition when he was in a college. He has participated in national and international exhibition including a few collective exhibitions that were held in Indonesia and some collective exhibitions which were held in Japan, the USA, Italy, the Netherlands, Vietnam, Columbia, the UK, France, Poland, Germany, Spain, Rome and Austria. His works have been included in international publications including *International Contemporary Artists*, *International Contemporary Masters*, and *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies Journal*. He has received a Museum Award

from Musée de Peinture de Saint-Frajou, France. He wrote a book *The Artistic Glimpse Of The East*, published by The Scholar's Press, which recently has been translated to eight languages. He was selected for an artist's residency program at Kersan Art Foundation, Yogyakarta, in June 2019.

Author of *Salty Liquor* (2014) and *Liner Notes* (2017), **Gary Rainford** lives year-round on Swan's Island with his wife and daughter. Gary's third book in progress is a verse novel that tells the story of his mother's dementia and Alzheimer's disease.

**Elaine Reardon** is a writer and herbalist. Her first chapbook, *The Heart is a Nursery For Hope*, won first honors from Flutter Press in 2016. Her newest poetry book, *Look Behind You*, was published by Flutter Press in September 2019. Most recently Elaine's poetry has been published by *UCLA Journal*, *Naugatuck Review*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Henniker Review*, and similar journals. Elaine has been a feature on Dublin Ireland radio and local television, and she was recently nominated for the Push Cart Prize. Visit her website at [www.elainereardon.wordpress.com](http://www.elainereardon.wordpress.com).

**Jendi Reiter** is the author of the story collection *An Incomplete List of My Wishes* (Sunshot Press), the Rainbow Award winning novel *Two Natures* (Saddle Road Press), and four poetry books and chapbooks, most recently *Bullies in Love* (Little Red Tree). They are the editor of [www.WinningWriters.com](http://www.WinningWriters.com), a resource site for creative writers.

**C. R. Resetarits** is a writer and collagist. She has had writing recently featured in *December*, *Southern Humanities Review*, and *Native Voices: Indigenous American Poetry, Craft and Conversations* (Tupelo Press). Her collage art has appeared in dozens of magazines and will be featured in the next *The Journal from Ohio State University*. She lives in Faulkner-riddled Oxford, Mississippi.

**James Miller Robinson** has three chapbooks of poetry: *The Caterpillars at Saint Bernard* (Mule on a Ferris Wheel Press), *Boca del Río in the Afternoon* (Finishing Line Press), and *The Empty Chair* (Finishing Line Press). He is a legal/court interpreter of Spanish registered with the Alabama Administrative Office of Courts. His poems have appeared in *Southern Humanities Review*, *Kansas Quarterly*, *Chattahoochee Review*, and others.

**Maisha Tahsin Rubai** is an 18-year-old student from Dhaka, Bangladesh. She is an artist who also dabbles in dancing.

**Nicholas Samaras** is from Patmos, Greece (the "Island of the Apocalypse") and, at the time of the Greek Junta ("Coup of the Generals"), was brought in exile to be raised further in Woburn, Massachusetts. He's lived in Greece, England, Wales, Brussels, Switzerland, Italy, Austria, Germany, Yugoslavia, Jerusalem, thirteen states in America, and he writes from a place of permanent exile. His first book, *Hands of the Saddlemaker*, won The Yale Series of Younger Poets Award. His current book is *American Psalm, World Psalm* (Ashland Poetry Press, 2014). He is completing a new manuscript of poetry and a memoir of his childhood years lived underground.

**Scott Russell Sanders** is the author of more than twenty books of fiction and nonfiction, including *Hunting for Hope*, *A Conservationist Manifesto*, and *A Private History of Awe*. His recent books include *Earth Works: Selected Essays* and *Divine Animal: A Novel*. In August 2020, Counterpoint Press published his new collection of essays, *The Way of Imagination*, a reflection on healing and renewal in a time of social and environmental upheaval. He is a Distinguished Professor Emeritus of English at Indiana University, and a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. He and his wife, Ruth, a biochemist, have reared two children in their hometown of Bloomington, Indiana.

**John Savoie** teaches great books, Homer to Basho, at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. His poems have appeared in *Poetry*, *Best New Poets*, and *Poetry in Motion*.

**Zvi A. Sesling** is the Poet Laureate of Brookline, Mass. He edits *Muddy River Poetry Review*. He is author of *War Zones*, *The Lynching of Leo Frank*, *Fire Tongue*, and *King of the Jungle*. He has also written three chapbooks: *Simple Game*, *Baseball Poems; Love Poems From Hell* and *Across Stones of Bad Dreams*. He has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize four times and his books have been nominated for national and local awards.

**Betsy Sholl's** ninth collection of poetry is *House of Sparrows: New and Selected Poems* (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.

A 2019 Pushcart Prize nominee, **Ndaba Sibanda's** poems have been widely anthologised. Sibanda is the author of *The Gushungo Way*, *Sleeping Rivers*, *Love O'clock*, *The Dead Must Be Sobbing*, *Football of Fools*, *Cutting-edge Cache: Unsympathetic Untruth*, *Of the Saliva and the Tongue*, *When Inspiration Sings In Silence*, and *Poetry Pharmacy*. His work is featured in *The Anthology House*, *The New Shoots Anthology*, *The Van Gogh Anthology*, and *A Worldwide Anthology of One Hundred Poetic Intersections*. Some of Ndaba's works are found or forthcoming in *Page & Spine*, *Peeking Cat*, *Piker Press*, *Scarlet Leaf Review*, *Universidad Complutense de Madrid*, *the Pangolin Review*, *Kalahari Review*, *Botsotso*, *The Ofi Press Magazine*, *Hawaii Pacific Review*, *Deltona Howl*, *The song is*, *Indian Review*, *Eunoia Review*, *JONAH magazine*, *Saraba Magazine*, *Poetry Potion*, *The Borfski Press*, *Snippets*, *East Coast Literary Review*, and *Random Poem Tree*.

**J.R. Solonche** is the author of nineteen books of poetry and coauthor of another. He lives in the Hudson Valley.

**Sofia M. Starnes**, Virginia Poet Laureate (2012-2014), is the author of six poetry collections, most recently *The Consequence of Moonlight* (Paraclete Press, 2018). She is also the recipient of a Poetry Fellowship from the Virginia Commission for the Arts, among other commendations, including five Pushcart Prize nominations and an honorary D. of Letters degree from Union College (KY). For

information about her work as poet, editor, and literary translator, please visit [www.sofiamstarnes.com](http://www.sofiamstarnes.com).

**Shelby Stephenson** was poet laureate of North Carolina, 2015-2018. His recent book of poems is *Slavery and Freedom on Paul's Hill*.

**Tim Suermondt** is the author of five full-length collections of poems, the latest *Josephine Baker Swimming Pool* from MadHat Press, 2019. He has published in *Poetry*, *Ploughshares*, *Prairie Schooner*, *The Georgia Review*, *Bellevue Literary Review*, *Stand Magazine*, *december magazine*, and *Plume*, among many others. He lives in Cambridge, Mass. with his wife, the poet Pui Ying Wong.

**Marc Swan's** latest collection, *all it would take*, will be published in 2020 by tall-lighthouse (<https://tall-lighthouse.co.uk/>). His poems are forthcoming in *Gargoyle*, *The Broadkill Review*, *Channel Magazine*, among others. He lives in coastal Maine with his wife Dd.

**Mathew P. Taylor** is a queer, pro-black, Unitarian Universalist Pagan Seminararian. He writes about the great what-ifs and the paths to liberation for all people. He previously self-published a collection of poetry called *A Collection of Treacherous Thoughts and Ramblings*. He says, "He is called to a heart-led mystical ministry that highlights the intersection of Earth-based magickal practices and Unitarian Universalism."

**Ayşe Tekşen** lives in Ankara, Turkey where she works as a research assistant at the Department of Foreign Language Education, Middle East Technical University. Her work has been included in *Gravel*, *After the Pause*, *The Write Launch*, *Uut Poetry*, *The Fiction Pool*, *What Rough Beast*, *Scarlet Leaf Review*, *Seshat*, *Neologism Poetry Journal*, *Anapest*, *Red Weather*, *Ohio Edit*, *SWWIM Every Day*, *The Paragon Journal*, *Arcturus*, *Constellations*, *The Same*, *The Mystic Blue Review*, *Jaffat El Aqlam*, *Brickplight*, *Willow*, *Fearsome Critters*, *Susan*, *The Broke Bohemian*, *The Remembered Arts Journal*, *Terror House Magazine*, *Havik: Las Positas College Anthology*, *Deep Overstock*, *Lavender Review*, *The Courtship of Winds*, *Mojave Heart Review*, *Foliage Oak Literary Magazine*, *Tipton Poetry Journal*, *the Thieving Magpie*, and *Headway Quarterly*. Her work has also appeared or is forthcoming in *Straylight*, *The Roadrunner Review*, and *Helen Literary Magazine*.

**t.m. thomson** has been writing poetry since she was fourteen years old. She is the co-author of *Frame* and *Mount the Sky* (2017) and author of *Strum and Lull* (2019) and *The Profusion* (2019). Most recently, her work has appeared in *mutiny! magazine* and *Redheaded Stepchild*. When she isn't writing and reading poetry, she can be found feeding birds and stray cats and playing in the rain and mud under the guise of "gardening."

**Jayla Tillison** is currently pursuing a degree in Civil Engineering and Architectural Studies at Northeastern University. She enjoys spoken word poetry and occasionally performs at open mics.

**Leslie Smith Townsend** is a poet, essayist, and memoirist whose work has been published in *LEO*, *Journeys*, *The Louisville Review*, *Courier-Journal*, *Arable*, *Literary Mama*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *Friends Journal*, *Gyroscope Review*, *Metafore*, and in the anthologies, *Voices of Alcoholism*, *Show Me All Your Scars*, and *The Boom Project: Voices of a Generation*. She is a graduate of Spalding University's MFA in writing program. Townsend has a Ph.D. in the psychology of religion and works as a licensed marriage and family therapist.

Born Pham Van Thuong on Feb 15, 1943 in Pakse, Laos, **Tue Sy** became a monk at a very early age. A well-known dissident in Vietnam, he was imprisoned for fourteen years, and remains one of the foremost scholars of Buddhism in the country. English translations of his poems by Nguyen Ba Chung and Martha Collins have appeared in *Gulf Coast*, *Two Lines*, *Consequence*, *Salamander*, and elsewhere.

**Emily Uduwana** is a poet based in Southern California. Her literary publications include work in *Specter Literary Magazine* and *Straylight Literary Arts Magazine*, along with upcoming pieces in *Miracle Monocle*, *Eclectica Magazine*, and the *Owen Wister Review*. Uduwana is currently working towards her Ph.D. in history at the University of California, Riverside.

**Vivian Wagner** lives in New Concord, Ohio, where she's an associate professor of English at Muskingum University. Her work has appeared in *Slice Magazine*, *Muse/A Journal*, *Forage Poetry Journal*, *Pittsburgh Poetry Review*, *McSweeney's Internet Tendency*, *Gone Lawn*, *The Atlantic*, *Narratively*, *The Ilanot Review*, *Silk Road Review*, *Zone 3*, *Bending Genres*, and other publications. She's the author of a memoir, *Fiddle: One Woman, Four Strings*, and *8,000 Miles of Music* (Citadel-Kensington); a full-length poetry collection, *Raising* (Clare Songbirds Publishing House); and four poetry chapbooks: *The Village* (Aldrich Press-Kelsay Books), *Making* (Origami Poems Project), *Curiosities* (Unsolicited Press), and *Spells of the Apocalypse* (Thirty West Publishing House) which came out this past summer.

**Laura Grace Weldon** is the author of poetry collections *Blackbird* (Grayson Books, 2019) and *Tending* (Aldrich Press, 2013), and as well as a handbook of alternative education titled *Free Range Learning* (Hohm Press, 2010). She was named 2019 Ohio Poet of the Year. Her background includes teaching nonviolence workshops, writing collaborative poetry with nursing home residents, and facilitating support groups for abuse survivors. She works as a book editor and teaches community writing classes. Connect with her at [www.lauragraceweldon.com](http://www.lauragraceweldon.com).

**Maya Williams** (she/they) is a Black Mixed Race religious queer suicide survivor currently residing in Portland, ME. She has been published in venues such as *The Portland Press Herald*, *Black Table Arts*, *Occulum*, *glitterMOB*, and more. Follow them @emmdubb16 on Instagram and Twitter, and connect with them at [mayawilliamspoet.com](http://mayawilliamspoet.com).

**Martin Willitts Jr.** has 24 chapbooks including the Turtle Island Quarterly Editor's Choice Award, *The Wire Fence Holding Back the World* (Flowstone Press, 2017), plus 16 full-length collections including the Blue Light Award 2019 winner, *The Temporary World*. His recent book is *Unfolding Towards Love* (Wipf and Stock, 2020).

**Dwight L. Wilson** is a Quaker who has held many jobs: educator, administrator, chaplain. In each role, he worked to advance equality, opportunity and understanding. He continues this work in his carefully researched historical fiction series *Esi Was My Mother*, which follows the lives of an enslaved black family from 18th century Africa to the American Civil War. He strives to portray triumphant examples of black stories that will make history come alive for readers. He is also author of the historical fiction books, *The Kidnapped and The Resistors* as well as *Modern Psalms: In Search of Peace and Justice*.

**Erin Wilson's** poems have appeared in or are forthcoming in *Salamander Magazine*, *Pembroke Magazine*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, *Under a Warm Green Linden*, *Natural Bridge*, *About Place Journal*, *The Literary Review of Canada*, and elsewhere. Her first collection, *At Home with Disquiet*, has been newly released this year with Circling Rivers Press. She lives and writes in a small town in northern Ontario, Canada.

**Pui Ying Wong** was born in Hong Kong. She is the author of two full-length books of poetry: *An Emigrant's Winter* (Glass Lyre Press, 2016) and *Yellow Plum Season* (New York Quarterly Books, 2010)—along with two chapbooks. She has won a Pushcart Prize. Her poems have appeared in *Ploughshares*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Plume Poetry Journal*, *New Letters*, *The New York Times*, and *The Southampton Review*, among others. She lives in Cambridge, Mass. with her husband, the poet Tim Suermondt.

**Diana Woodcock** is the author of seven chapbooks and three poetry collections, most recently *Tread Softly* (FutureCycle Press, 2018) and *Near the Arctic Circle* (Tiger's Eye Press, 2018). She has two books forthcoming in 2021: *Facing Aridity* (a finalist for the 2020 Prism Prize for Climate Literature, Homebound Publications) and *Holy Sparks* (Paraclete Press). She is currently teaching in Qatar at Virginia Commonwealth University's branch campus and previously worked in Tibet, Macau and on the Thai/Cambodian border.

**Christopher Woods** is a writer and photographer who lives in Chappell Hill, TX. He has published a novel, *The Dream Patch*, a prose collection, *Under A Riverbed Sky*, and a book of stage monologues for actors, *Heart Speak*. His photographs can be seen in his gallery at <http://christopherwoods.zenfolio.com/>. His photography prompt book for writers, *From Vision To Text*, is forthcoming from Propertius Press. His novella, *Hearts In The Dark*, is forthcoming from Running Wild Press.

# Acknowled

dgements

## Previously Published Works

Donna Baier Stein: "Fishing with My Father" was previously published in *Life and Legend* (2015) and *Letting Rain Have Its Say* (Kelsay Books 2018)

Carlos Carrio: "i always," was previously published in *The Bangalore Review* (June 2020)

Rosie Prohías Driscoll: "La Clave" was previously published in *The Acentos Review* (August 2012) and "Breaking Open the Word" in *Mas Tequila Review #7* (August 2013)

David Ebenbach: "Dwelling" and "Passover This Year" were previously published in *Some Unimaginable Animal*, copyright 2019 by David Ebenbach. Reprinted by permission of Orison Books. [www.orisonbooks.com](http://www.orisonbooks.com).

Melanie Figg: "Preparing the Sacraments" and "Weighing the Dead" were previously published in *Trace* (New Rivers Press, 2019).

Eric Forsbergh: "Medical Mission" was previously published in his first book of poetry, *Imagine Morning*

Cynthia Gallaher: "The Coin-Op Church" was previously published in *eMerge* and "Bloodlines" in *Drenched*

Robbie Gamble: "John Leary" was previously published in the *Muddy River Poetry Review* and "Dorothy Day" in *Soul-Lit*.

Luke Hankins: "I said to God" and "The Body" copyright © 2020 by Luke Hankins. Reprinted from *Radiant Obstacles* by permission of Wipf & Stock Publishers.

MEH: "...and who is my neighbor?" was previously published in *Poemeleon The Truth/y Issue: VOL. XI* (Spring 2020) <https://poemeleon.me/matthew-e-henry> and "say prayer" in *The Amethyst Review* <https://amethystmagazine.org/2020/04/23/say-prayers-correctly-rubbing-gods-back-a-poem-by-meh/>

Jessica Jacobs: "Sleepwalkers in the Garden" was previously published in *Parabola*, "Nevertheless" in *Take Me with You, Wherever You're Going*, and "Letter to Matthew Olzmann Requesting Discernment" in *Talking River*.

Jennifer Kavanagh: "The Silence of Solitude" was previously published in *Shoreline Conversations* (2015)

Frannie Lindsay: "morning," "The End of the Walk to Bethlehem," "Clear Summer Night," and "February 6 a.m." were previously published in *The Snow's Wife*

Marjorie Maddox: "Extra" was previously published in *Windhover*

Carolyn Martin: "Step by Step" was previously published in *Thin Places* (CA: Kelsay Books, 2017) and "You do not have to be good." in *Gyroscope Review*

The Spanish poems by Julio Martínez Mesanza "Madonna de Bellini," "Mar Saba," "Gino," and "Ghar El Melh" were previously published in *Gloria* (Ediciones RIALP, 2016).

Philip Metres: "The Trees in My Chest" first appeared as a Broadside for Broad-sided Press

Elaine Reardon: "November" and "Moss Brook Meditation" were previously published in *Look Behind You*, a chapbook, published 2019 by Flutter Press, CA.

Scott Russell Sanders: "Silence" (c) 1997 was first published in *Witness*, Vol. XI, No. 2 (1997); collected in the author's *The Force of Spirit* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000).

Zvi A. Sesling: "Picnic c. 1950," "Prayer," and "A Beautiful Thing" appeared in the book, *The Lynching of Leo Frank*

Sofia M. Starnes: "Shadowcraft", previously published in *The Consequence of Moonlight* (Paraclete Press, 2018).

Tim Suermondt: "WHEN THE BULL STOPS FIGHTING" was previously published in *The Southeast Review*

Laura Grace Weldon: "Redwood Dharma" first appeared in *The Moon Magazine* and "Ostranenie" first appeared in *Sisyphus*

Pui Ying Wong: "A SHOUT FROM THE DARK" was previously published in *Plume Poetry Journal* and "THE NIGHT MOVES" in *Cargo Literary Journal*

