

Issue 5



PENSIVE

A Global Journal
of Spirituality & the Arts

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

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of Spirituality & the Arts*

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November 16th, 2022

Dear Readers,

As we release this fifth issue of *Pensive*, we reflect on all that has brought us to this point. A few short weeks after we first gathered to create this journal in January 2020, we found ourselves scattered across the country, navigating a global pandemic and an uncertain future. Over the past two and a half years, our creative community has sought to respond to COVID-heightened economic inequities, racial reckonings, global warfare, the climate crisis, and political polarization in the US and abroad. A diverse yet united *Pensive* community has emerged, even as external forces conspired to divide people across barriers of religion, race, class, gender, sexuality, politics, and national origin. As artists, readers, and editors, we have come together to uplift underrepresented voices, embrace both commonalities and differences, and foster a safe space for continued growth through the healing and liberative power of the arts. For all this - and for your part in this ongoing adventure- we are profoundly grateful.

At the outset we had hoped that *Pensive* would represent the good faith interests of communities of faith, conscience, and creative expression across the planet. With each issue, we have further defined how we might best exemplify and embrace the core values of *Pensive*: spiritual imagination, solidarity, community, compassion, justice, peace, and sustainability. Even in the design of each issue, we sought to reflect these values. For example, we are working to build a more inclusive community through accessible design and reflection on representation. We also strive to inspire meaningful conversation and interaction by creating a dialogue within the collection of works. If you read each piece in succession, and absorb each individual work of art, you will undoubtedly detect a serendipitous “call and response” or “point and counterpoint” as the works echo and engage each other. The whole is truly a chorus of voices, rather than a series of solos.

Our cover art poses the question, “Where is Our Hope?” In the artistic offerings in the pages that follow, we trust you too will find wellsprings of hope rising in the voices of healing and resistance; the power of memory, family, and roots; the peace that abides in nature and faith; and the courage of writers and artists to cross boundaries and make beautiful art in troubled times. Most of all, we as editors find hope in you, dear readers, and your care for your own communities - and for one other.

- The *Pensive* Editorial Board

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Alfonso Sasieta

Parable of the Sower

To the right of the clementine box
that my mother brought here
six hundred
Sundays back,
& somewhere between
the stapler & the plastic-wrapped
pile of curricula, between
the Clorox
wipes & the stack of brown
NIVs, beside the pastel
colored map of Paul's Journeys,
between that & the white
board & in the space between
the all-capped

MOSES

EXODUS

GOLDEN CALF

somewhere above the flood
of crosses, stickers & attendance sheets
there is yet air
for the poem to stretch its leaves,
to savor the nutrients, dwelling
richly in the roots
beneath my feet, though, to be clear
I am not the rose that squeezed
through the cracks
in the proverbial concrete.
I am more like a seed
that grew below the singing
& screeching of pastors,
smitten by love
but also tempted by the thorny
doctrine of utter depravity.
Too many piled on this rocky & stoic
terrain. Too many dried up the land
but this poem
is exceedingly bored
by contempt for the soil. The poem longs
to stretch out its limbs in praise
of the farmer
& say
my god, how she watered her seeds.

Julie L. Moore

Mystic Failure

What mystic can come from south Jersey
where I was born in the 1960s
the same day a circus clown was slain?
Concrete realities have always intervened between me

& prophecy. I spent my summers
at the shore buying trinkets on the boardwalk,
eating my mother's pancakes & scrapple
when we'd arrive home encrusted in sand,

smoldering from too much time in the sun.
I've tried to be a mystic, believe me.
When we were in the midst of a move,
my sister, brother, & I slept at our grandmom's

Delran apartment where one night I dreamt
I saw a man at her sliding glass door, ready
to rob the place, & I awoke to find
yes, a man with forehead on the glass,

peering in. I claimed ESP but my family,
scientists all, refused to believe. I tried
some more in the Poconos where we'd go
to see my greats, Uncle Herb & Granddad George,

& I'd wander off to the meadow's edge,
stroll into the hollow where milkweed & white asters,
Jack-in-the-Pulpit & Solomon's seal,
broomsedge & bee balm & black-eyed Susans

congregated before my eyes, & my first poems
rose in my throat. But I spoke no predictions,
contacted no spirit inhabiting the woods
beyond the bite of burs.

I kept trying later on to extract
ecstasies from my senses during prayer
or perceive the face of Jesus in our garden-
state but instead had to discover

ways to survive three hours of preaching
on Good Fridays. Every now & then,
a hymn or psalm could inspire me
to reach for something beyond

pew or podium, but then my friend
would pinch me, her fingernails
reminders to be practical.
Like the choice of a career.

Mystic just never entered into it.
Such were the suburbs I grew up in,
with my stay-at-home Mom, who read me
an illustrated Bible & marched

with my father in D.C. demanding
not peace but Victory in Vietnam.
O, my political father, Bircher who took me
to canvas neighborhoods for Schmitz in '72.

(Everyone was a communist to him,
including Nixon, & when everything's
a harbinger of dangers yet to come,
nothing is prophetic.) That day, no signal

warned that a German Shepherd would
lunge at me, barking madly behind its fence,
scaring every leaflet from my clasp, my scream
spurring my Dad to tear across the road

to comfort me. What room was there for mystery
amid such certainty powered by the long-
drawn-out red scare & its gory corpses?
What room for ethereal signs when my body began

its betrayals, my first surgery at 10, followed again
by more & more? I was just trying to stay alive.
Besides, I worshipped my Dad who held
my hand through all the pain & vomit,

all the fear, who told me without hesitation
that he loved me. He was enough back then,
& so was Mom, who taught Sunday School
to kids with flannel graphs about Moses & Noah,

men who took their orders straight from God,
whose voice—was it too much to ask?—
I wished I also could hear
with the Philly accents echoing in the air.

Andrew Shattuck McBride

Kohala

1.

We traveled for hours to a small Kohala town
for the Bon dance to honor ancestors.
I suppose, now, a gesture for my education,
to learn another way of being in the world.
Dad, Charlotte, and I may have been
the only haoles there. Despite the crush
of the crowd, I wasn't anxious. Curious.
Red—propitious—dominated. Everywhere,
the choreographed colorful swirl of movement.
Unfamiliar sounds resounded with respect.
Not sorrow for ancestors who have passed,
but an atmosphere of celebration, of noisy joy.
We used scrip for plates of Japanese food:
teriyaki chicken on skewers, sushi,
heaps of white rice, ume, mochi, sweets.
None unknown to me. The portions, generous.
This teenage haole boy, struggling to find
a place in the world, accepted for once
without reservations, made to feel welcome.
I was in heaven.

2.

Dad believed in heaven and hell, claimed hell for him would be hallways of tilted picture frames he would be forever adjusting.

He and Charlotte attended the Hawaiian church in Puna. Dad carried his Hawaiian Bible, lifted his voice in readings and hymns.

I think hell for him was burning pain within the frames of his lungs from breathing; heaven a day without exhaust, smoke or fumes.

This I believe: hell is man-made, here on Earth. I read and hear the headlines; what more evidence do we need?

Heaven could be here on Earth—if we loved the land and water and air, if we loved other animals, if we loved each other.

3.

Along with Dad, I flirted with belief
in reincarnation. I found it intriguing,
a comfort.

One program night we rushed home
to watch *The Reincarnation of Peter Proud*.

Revelatory, to see a place for the first time,
yet know it.

Long before any TV show we watched,
to his bedroom wall Dad pinned a photograph
of a littoral cone somewhere in Kohala.

Dad believed he had been there in a past life.
I believed him.

Still, might love—aloha—for the land
and its people grant this familiarity?

4.

In south Kohala
near an ancient littoral cone
a Hawaiian man, ageless,
in a malo, sits on a lauhala mat.
Taking the sun, breathing easily,
watching waves roll in and out.
Thin, arms corded,
the bulk of his days behind him.
Perhaps a master carver
or other craftsman. Perhaps
a kahuna specializing in geology.
Perhaps a storyteller
with his pāhoa dagger.
Now a kupuna, an elder.
Brilliant, aware
of blessings from his gods,
wearing breadth of knowledge
and power lightly
as a kīhei on a chilly day.
I can't quite make out
the landscape of his face.
I'm comforted anyway.



VENDULA KALINOVA
Golden Whispers 3



D. DINA
FRIEDMAN

CONCERT

They're local kids—Jews, Muslims
who've played together for years
in the mountain plazas of the Galilee;

tonight they've got special guests—
a Bedouin boy soprano, and a rapper rabbi.

The moon's full, but we have to wait
for three stars in the sky
signaling the end of *Shabbat*

so the religious Jews can arrive.
Meanwhile, an Arab family stands at the grill

buying falafel for their hungry boys,
while teens arrange embroidered pillows
for perfect snogging under the stars.

They'll sing in five languages, play the saz,
bansuri flute, exotic drums, camanché,

dark strings pulsing in the stagnant air. The boy's songs
will incite a riot of dancing; the rabbi will ask
permission to sing a Jewish prayer that heralds

the coming of Elijah, precursor to the Messiah. Peace
for *k'ol ha'olam*. The starry world.

DIANNE DUGAW

Material Calling

As a Franciscan nun, you've hardly any earthly complications to distract you from your immaterial calling. No clothes to speak of, just a couple of identical brown habits. No books of your own beyond your breviary and maybe a bible and a missal for Mass. No knick-knacks or mementos or shelves to put them on. Standard-issue everything, and not much of that. In addition, a blanket of silence wraps this spare world from morning till night—almost no talking anywhere most of the time.

The entrance door to any convent opens onto floor polish—lustrous wood or tile and that not at all faint scent of soap and polish. Mount Alverno Provincial Motherhouse for the Franciscan Sisters of Penance and Christian Charity fits the pattern perfectly—really exceeds it in olfactory pungency, what with Sister Delfine's masterful Theater of Motherhouse Cleaning Operations. The seemingly endless corridors whisk into gleaming and pungent circles of shine, their surface reflecting the surroundings like a mirroring stream anytime a window is near. Walking the corridors brings to your nose a brisk olio of cleaning and polishing agents—piney soaps, florally-inflected cleansers, oily resins, and sundry waxy whiffs of floor-coats.

The Provincial Motherhouse is a recent addition to the top of this mountain. Bright white and up-to-date, this multi-leveled construction with California tile roofs sprawls at the center of the rocky hilltop, housing more than 100 nuns and would-be-nuns. Beyond the convent

and its parking lots, the mountain remains wild out to the cliffs at its edges, with dusty acres of dry grasses, hardy succulents, and aridly undersized junipers and mini-pines. The rangy complex extends out from a vaulting high-roofed chapel and bell tower. At the front of this large central building are offices, classrooms, parlors, patios, visiting halls and guest rooms. At the back side on the main floor are two refectories on opposite sides of an industrially equipped kitchen. Beneath, on the floor below, are extensive laundry facilities next to a big garage, delivery loading docks, and, a short distance away, a few small storage sheds. From the chapel and the center of the main building, long and narrow extensions reach in opposite directions: one to the south lined with cells for the professed sisters, and another to the north for the novitiate. Unadorned, ascetically white, and starkly angular, the whole place says: lift your eyes aloft to the heavens; keep your mind in the clouds and off the details. But such a clean-sweep can—paradoxically—make every little thing pop with tangible energy. Take smells for example.

If you didn't come in the front to the parlors and offices of Mount Alverno, but rather walked the circular drive around to the back side, it's not so much corridors and piney floor polish. This morning, I've finished the digging and weeding that Sister Noella assigned me on garden duty. I'm out back putting away my shovels and hoes, with a nice stretch of time to myself before chapel and the chanted procession of Psalm 50 down the halls to the refectory for lunch. A stone's throw from the shed where I stow my tools, Sister Regina's giant, infernally hot open-air laundry-room sends out billows of steam. Where I stand, the air sizzles with laundering. Smells of spicy-soaping, steamy-rinsing, bleached and burnt-baking cottons, wools, denims, nylons, and linens fly through the air, as laundering stuff makes its way from one gleaming and grinding machine to the next. Along with varieties of cleansing and searing cloth, the air circulates a medley of smells from the hot, roiling metals that are bouncing, rinsing, spinning, tossing, clamping, and pressing item after item, from dirty and rumpled to clean, smashed, and smooth.

Careful to remain below the radar to enjoy my meandering free time, I turn the back corner by the laundry, past the loading docks

where trucks full of furniture, food, soaps, office supplies, or who knows what periodically pull in and deliver their requisitioned wares—along with stinging smoke and carbon monoxide chugging from their idling engines.

In the convent garage around to the side, with its door panels open for the day, the provincial autos line up ready for use if needed: the magisterially silver Buick sedan, two nondescript greenish Chevy station wagons, two smaller Ford two-doors—one blue and one brown—and at the far end, the tiny gray Fiat—a little mushroom alongside a row of stately garden shrubs. Slimy spots on the cement floor emit tickles of gasoline and other petrol and car-wax products that bring to mind service stations. Last month I was on garage duty and worked on the fleet of cars, checking their oil and gas, washing them inside and out, sweeping and tidying the whole place. Open any car door here and out floats an almost-sweet scent of vinyl seats and plastic knobs and buttons that hovers aromatically with the petrol. Or, if it happens to be a door of the Buick, a smoother, dusky whiff of leather, even a hint of small handles made of actual wood.

One floor above the garage, Sister Wilma's kitchen bangs and whirrs with busy sounds of lunch preparation. Whiffs drift out the windows and doors of that kitchen almost any time of day. A huge slow fan from the high ceiling wafts out billowing smells of yeasty bread, tasty beef bits crackling in giant pans, sizzling onions and peppers spitting in grease, along with the smooth salty sniff of potatoes. Rising to the ceiling and high windows and back, random floating hints of cooking can flit their way down otherwise odorless hallways—to one side, past the somber provincial business offices; to the other, toward the novitiate classrooms, maybe even ascending pristine stairs toward the chapel.

A sliding door down along one hallway, when shut tight, effectively bars kitchen smells from the enclosed patio. Opened, the door leads to where Sister Noella's prize roses fill the air with aromatic esters above their garden beds. At the near end, the petals of huge pinkish-white blooms, big as oranges, let off an almost-citrus scent that whispers for a moment and then disappears. Further on, crimson clusters throw off something deeper and sweeter, a juicy ripe apple or red wine. At the far end, draping from their trellis, pale Cecile Brunner buds quiver

in the slightest wind and blow their savory cinnamon under the eaves of the alcove at the far side. The tangy sweetness sometimes even trails out the patio's far door to drift down the staid hallway past the provincial offices of business, accounting, and administration.

Each hallway eventually reaches a stairway to the chapel. I go up the novitiate stairs and enter from the side. Clouds of frankincense from the six a.m. High Mass still hang below the vaulted ceiling these many morning hours later. Smoky wisps catch sunbeams above the pews. I inhale a heavy dose of the leftover sacred smoke. Sneeze a few times. Cough. Then head to the tall back door of the chapel that opens onto the high part of the mountain top.

The south end of the San Francisco Bay shimmers below distant peaks of snowless mountains. I breathe deeply. Leaving the wide outdoor entranceway to the chapel, I stroll down to the eucalyptus grove along the cliff at the edge of the property. Look out over urban California humming below. Breathe again. Sniff the gentle menthol in the air beneath the young trees after last night's rain.

JOHN BACKMAN

I've Never Told Anyone This

God lives in a red metal box and emits a tiny pulse. It took me a long time to discover this. There was nothing miraculous about the discovery itself: I just stepped into the chapel I'd visited and loved for ten years, and there was the box, in a side nook I'd somehow missed. The nook had two red chairs flanking the box, so I walked over and sat down.

Religion gives obscure names to everyday objects, and Catholicism is no exception. The red metal box is a *tabernacle*. What's inside is *the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ*, not the pressed wafers and wine you'd see if you opened the box. The tiny pulse is—well, I don't know.

I must have sat with the box/tabernacle for an hour, and somewhere in there the pulse began: subterranean, sensed rather than heard, on a frequency that vibrates the solar plexus. I was startled but not surprised. If you've got God's body and blood in a box, you'd think it would pulse or shimmer or glow or exude warmth or something. You'd be rapt, spirit rising to Spirit, as I was.

* * *

Rapt has happened before. The first time, five of us best friends were talking on the green in our small town, with an intensity of passion I've only experienced at thirteen. Passion was a problem back then: I'd somehow learned to follow wherever it led me, and it had led me into dating three girls at once. The girls exchanged notes one

night at a party a few evenings before, whispering in the candlelit den of someone's house and flicking glances at me. The shame that haunted me at the party darkened into judgment as I sat on the green. *Hypocrite*, it thundered. *What have you done to them?*

The judgment sent me stumbling across the grass. Halfway to the road I looked up toward the leaden clouds and asked, "Am I a hypocrite?"

I knew no god, so I expected no answer. An answer came anyway. *No. You're just mixed up. That's OK.*

Divine messages inspired the mystics of old to prostrate themselves in public places, levitate across rooms, go still for hours. I spun in spirals, bowed down to an approaching friend, looked up again and felt myself exhale—utterly, from the belly—as though all day long I'd been holding my breath.

* * *

A friend of mine is certain that ghosts are stealing her gardening supplies. She'll get up from her knees in the dirt and go for a trowel—the trowel she puts in the same toolbox every single time—and it's gone. Three days later it appears in the next patch to dig up.

Other friends seek me out, once they discover I'm connected with Spirit somehow. They tell me how they talk with dead people, or believe we live in a massive simulation, or hear roses sing.

The one thing they all say: *I've never told anyone this.*

Of course they haven't. They know what people will say. They'll say what my friends on the green must have felt and thought when I prostrated myself in front of them: a flash of bewilderment, a furtive glance at one another, then dismissal. *Crazy*. If I'd done it again, they might have started to keep their distance. But I quickly returned to myself, the self they knew, the self that let them believe nothing about me had changed.

* * *

Many people know my nothing-has-changed self. It holds together well, conventional when viewed in the right light: the wife, the daughter, the house, the cats, the committees I sit on, the conferences I attend. Some people have heard about my connections with Spirit,

though not the whole story. But I know what I'd see if I tried to explain my friendship with a dead French nun or my visits to the Virgin Mary shrine near the Berkshires: the facial expression of stone, the bewilderment just behind it, the mental filing of what I just said in a folder with my name on it and the word *avoid*.

So the voices and red metal boxes and whatnot coexist in the background, playing roles in my life when and how they see fit. It could be worse. The loneliness of *I've never told anyone this* is worse.

* * *

Each time my friends tell me what they've never told anyone, they flick me a furtive glance: poised to recoil from shame, hopeful for something else, even welcome. Welcome is what they read on my face—it glows or exudes warmth or something—and they exhale. We become members of a clandestine society, those who raise their children and mow their lawns and hold a secret. A society of safety and camaraderie, you'd think.

Even so, I've never told them about the pulse.

Instead I let them talk, which they do in a rush. Out come the inner workings of the massive simulation, the roses' song, the uncle who died thirty years ago and now shows up in dreams. Every now and then my friends happen on one particular mark of Spirit that enraptures them, like how the whole world glows as a butterfly flits into their field of view. In those moments they show me what *rapt* is: it makes them bright, it makes them who they are, and who they are, in that moment, takes my breath away.

* * *

This is how it is with me too. The echoes of these marks of Spirit resound even now, changing me to this day. Decades after the green and my bowing and the bewilderment of my friends, the voice remains my first-ever encounter with something I call God, in a life that's been full of such encounters. The voice lives in my deep self next to the pulse and the red metal box, which form an image of Mystery at the times I need it most. I at thirteen and I now are two entirely different people, and these treasures are part of the reason why.

They make *I've never told anyone this* worth bearing. They emit the glow that memory bestows on watersheds, guiding my way to where spirit rises to Spirit and *rapt* takes hold.



KELLY DUMAR
Earth from Far Brook

The image features a minimalist abstract design. A large, solid green rectangle occupies the upper left portion of the frame. A thin, light green vertical line runs down the left side of this rectangle, and a thin, light green horizontal line runs across its top. A thicker, medium green horizontal line extends from the right edge of the green rectangle across the top of the page. Below the green rectangle, the name 'Charlene Langfur' is printed in a dark green, serif font. The background is a solid cream color. At the bottom of the page, there is another large green rectangle, with a thin, light green vertical line running down its left side.

Charlene Langfur

Full Moon At Easter

I watch the full moon rising up between the fan palm trees.
The night sky glowing onto the desert ground around me.
This has been a quiet year full of old troubles unresolved.
I plan to throw a cup of flowers on the wild grass today,
throw them up into the air for good fortune and respect,
for Buddha's birthday and as a prayer for peace.
It's a year since my best friend died during the pandemic.
Each day now I'm trying to ignore the bombs over the Ukraine,
indiscriminate, killing everyone in the path of the missiles
as if human life has no value for any of us any where we are.
I watch my honey-colored dog's dancer's leap on our walk,
the lizards racing across the rocks in a bed of wildflowers,
flowers popping out of the sand, defying logic,
coaxing thoughts of love and poems fat with life, and I find
my way because of them, onward, all the way, as far as I mean to go

GURLEEN GREWAL

Gurus of Sound

The Singing Sage

1969. Neil Armstrong had landed on the moon with Dvorak's New World Symphony. And there was a girl who was transported beyond the moon for seven days by songs of the Guru. Songs of the mother tongue.

A cold, pre-dawn November morning of Calcutta. It is Guru Nanak's 500th birth anniversary. Voices in the room saying *wake up, wake up*, hands nudging gently but persistently. Getting dressed in a daze of sleep, I join my sister and mother and neighbors; we go down the stairs and across the road to the shamiana in the park where singers intoxicate the air with their melodious renderings of the Guru's hymns, the founding Guru beloved of Sindhis and Sikhs. *Woh sukhe moko sant batavo, trishna bujhe, mana triptavo...*

Sages, speak to me of that happiness which quenches desire and appeases the mind...

For seven dawns, men and women with harmoniums and tablas sang the Guru's ecstatic poems and praises of the divine with a sweet and soulful clarity, sending a tremor through my young bones. Each day for a week I woke to the rapture of song in the early morning hours.

Since those dawns I have a profound regard for Guru Nanak, who heard the music of the spheres, and the great silence, all pervasive and unutterable, at the heart of all things. Who taught, like all the great Hindu sages who came before and after, that suffering and lack lay only in the mind separated from its source.

But after such vision, what creed? What idols? What name? What form?

Neither the temple nor the mosque for Nanak: the polemics of orthodoxy had nothing to do with his devotion. Only the stringed lute in the shade of a tree, only the heartsong of praise in Punjabi and Persian, only the resounding silence of the sky and the stars...

Denouncing both the tyranny of violent conquest of the Sultans and the bigotry of casteism, he was able to affirm:

*aval allah noor upae-aa, kudrat ke sab bandey
ek noor te sab jag upja, kaun bhale ko mande...*

In the beginning God created Light, then were all beings created. From one light sprang the whole universe: so, who is virtuous, who corrupt?

Inevitably, this universal vision would inspire another creed, the Sikh faith, one that yoked in welcoming simplicity the essence of the Vedas and the wisdom of Sufi sages. In a cleansing spirit appropriate for the times, the new creed abolished caste and banished the Brahminic rituals. *Sikh* meant 'disciple', one dedicated to the remembrance of *Sat Naam*, the True Name.

The singers praising Nanak at dawn in the park near our home would leave with my father the small low table upon which they placed the sacred text. On the seventh day they simply left it behind, to my great delight. The fragrance of devotion seemed to linger in the wood. I took custody of the small wooden table along with the slim brown paperback of the English translation of Nanak's hymns, the *Japji Saheb*.

For weeks after, every evening I lit sandalwood incense. I sat before the little wooden table, my head covered with orange silk from Ma's wardrobe, and chanted verses from the book, ending with the lilting repetition of the one true name *sat naam, sat naam, sat naam ji*...in the manner of the singers. I lost myself in the cadence. I lost sense of time. Sometimes I would open my eyes to find Ma sitting there, and sometimes Bapuji, who had stepped in from his home

next door, in his white dhoti and kurta, sitting with his eyes closed. I would close mine too, for then the sweetness intensified, and nothing mattered except *sat naam*, the true and eternal name. As a nine-year old I could not have told anyone what that meant, except that I was being sung by a sweet joy that knew no bounds.

After a month the charge diffused, the inner pulsion ebbed. The charmed table slid under the bed. It was soon swathed in cobwebs, its crevices host to mites and invisible life, and I went back to forgetfulness. Back to reading Enid Blyton and other books. A year later, emulating the O'Sullivan twins I would be clamoring for English scones and boarding school.

But not before Ma sat me down in the summer holidays and taught me to read and write the Punjabi script, Gurmukhi, meaning 'spoken by the Guru' – perhaps she intuited that someday I would want to return to the songs of Nanak that enchanted me for seven dawns.

Song of the Threshold

Sometimes I think that you cannot know dusk till you have seen it from the old flat rooftops of Calcutta, and you cannot know those rooftops unless you have seen them at dusk. At any other time of the day, what you see is a creeping, jumbled thrust towards corrosion and dilapidation. The smart new nine- and ten-story buildings of the neighborhood have already relinquished their fresh pastel and settled amid the peeling Doric columns and rusted water tanks.

At sunset, all this is burnished an ethereal gold, enhanced by sulphates, carbonates, dioxides. The orange dust of the gulmohar floats and mingles with the strains of Rabindra *sangeet* from a neighboring window, a song composed by Rabindranath Tagore, “*Aji kaun sure bandhibo?*” “In what melody shall I compose you?” The palm leaves stir in the southern breeze.

I cleaned my paint brushes, washed up, climbed to the terrace. Bapuji, our next-door neighbor—whom, after his children, I also called father—was sitting on the center ledge, fenced in solitude, wrapped in a thin grey shawl that accented his silver hair and ashen, wasted cheeks. Five months ago, he had been diagnosed with cancer. We all knew he was dying.

It was difficult to reconcile this rasping whisper and shriveled frame with the confident patriarch who walked so very upright in his starched white *dhoti* and *kurta*, who till recently ate his meals sitting on the floor, his back straight, his legs locked in padmasana, the perfect lotus position. Unlike my parents’ choice of the best English-medium schools for us, he had sent his children to the local Gujarati school, convinced that it was crucial that they inhabit their mother tongue.

I hesitated by the parapet. I sensed he had been uneasy since the visit of an old friend the previous day. “You’re a stubborn man, you always were!” the agitated friend rebuked him. “If you had agreed to the surgery, you might have lived for another five years or more.” Bapuji had smiled and whispered that there was no compromising with death. “Living five more years – that is wisdom, *bhai*, it is not a compromise!”

Was Bapuji now considering that his friend was right? Living simply, he had never felt the need to accumulate, for possessions did not contribute to the truth of one's life. But his relatives had disagreed, "the standard of living..." they had argued. He had tried to make his children live by the same stoic rules he followed, but now the game itself had changed. How would they fare with him gone?

I stood by the railing, hesitating. His solitude was an intimate space I did not know how to enter. I was about to slip away when he noticed me. With a tilt of his head, he summoned me, pulling the loose end of his shawl around his neck. I sat down cross-legged in front of him, on the ledge.

"Beta... Gao."

The barely audible request for me to sing shocked me into silence. He was a connoisseur of Indian classical music, and I had often heard him say there was no raga like Darbaari. But I did not know it. What could I sing?

What could I sing?

Who knows how long we sat on the ledge in that light between day and night, but in that silence I sensed rather than knew a cadence that was centuries old, meant for gathering the dust motes in the aching heart; patterns of ascent and descent for the voice to scale gradually, steadily, until time itself was rendered irrelevant. I could feel its presence, hovering in the dusk. A melody wanting to pour itself out, a melody not so much sad as steady in its twilit intimations of *that which does not die*.

I cleared my throat, and closed my eyes, but no sound came. I did not know how to voice what had infiltrated my skin. I knew then what it meant to be mute.

I looked up in despair. Bapuji's anticipation nudged me into the first lines that flashed through, from a song I often heard on Yuva Vani, the Calcutta Youth radio station:

Goodbye Michelle, it's hard to die

When all the birds are singing in the sky...

We had joy, we had fun, we had seasons in the sun...

I bit my lips closed, forcing back the tears.

I had wanted to summon a tonic of sound that made it alright for the body to scatter its dust motes. I had wanted to pay homage to the fragment of cosmic fire sinking below our horizon and rising at that

very instant over some other part of the world. I had wanted to sing of something eternal. Instead, what had I offered this man at the edge of time? *Fun* rhyming with *sun*!

Bapuji was looking at the now enflamed sky, his legs crossed, his arms resting beneath his shawl. A deep quiet enveloped him. A breeze stirred strands of his silver white hair.

Of course, it didn't matter, the *words* that were sung.

Bapuji had begun a listening of his own. Perhaps he heard the twilight *raga* the sixteen years old girl had tried to sing for him in the language she knew best.

After my voice had choked and trailed into silence, and the sun was almost gone, after the palm fronds had scattered in the summer breeze the last streaks of light, he had continued to gaze, hollowed eyes dark and shining. Only the breeze ruffled his hair.

Pole Star

Whatever music I had once found in English literature seemed to have receded under the rigors of literary criticism. Back in Calcutta for the summer holidays, I decided to learn to sing.

I walked down a quiet lane strewn with orange petals and saffron dust from gulmohur trees. I was on my way to the house of the Muslim guru who along with his elder brother had succeeded in reviving what was accepted as the oldest tradition of Hindustani vocal music. Said to originate in the Sanskrit chants of the Sama Veda, dhrupad was named after Dhruva, the pole star, that light which does not move, and performed in medieval Hindu temples to the ecstatic beat of the *pakhawaj drums*. By the eighteenth century it had been eclipsed by less demanding, more flexible classical genres, and by the twentieth was in danger of extinction. Vocal dhrupad was renowned for its majestic exposition of the raga, the gravity of the *alaap* sung without percussion: consonants yoked to vowels: *re ne na, te re ne na, ni re re ne na... a na ta tara* rooted in the mantra *ananta hari om antara tarana...* a slow, deep, profoundly contemplative recitation of syllables evoking the *ananta* (infinity) that is their source.

As I approached the house, I mused over the story that when the French ethnomusicologist Alain Danielou, an early champion of dhrupad, scheduled the two senior brothers for their first performances outside India in 1960, his invitation stated something to this effect: *You are the first Indian artists to have ever been invited to the premier international festivals at Venice, Berlin, and Paris; of these the biggest one is at Venice with invitees from all over the world. Therefore, please devote all your energy to that festival. If that festival is successful, then the fame of dhrupad will spread all over the world...*

He received this reply:

Thank you for your advice. But we sing dhrupad only in our devotion to the Divine, not to please the masses. When our Divinity is pleased, then all are pleased too. At no price shall I dilute the originality of Hindustani music in order to suit the taste of European ears. If your people do not like dhrupad, then let me return to India after the three concerts. I have no desire to travel all over Europe... ¹

When I entered his small bungalow in Calcutta, I found the maestro had retired from singing and withdrawn into silence. His face was impassive, his eyes were coals with the spark retracted. Sitting on his bed, he gave me his blessing, holding his hand over my head as I bent to touch his feet and offer the ritual flowers and fruit.

Didi, a kind Bengali woman one who had dedicated her life to serving her guru, auditioned me in the next room. For two months, once a week at 4 pm, I walked down the gulmohur-canopied lane to practice for an hour to the steady drone of the *tanpura*. Acutely self-conscious, I was unable to project my voice the way Didi commanded.

From a branch outside the window, a cuckoo called with effortless passion.

“Ah, the koel does not hesitate! Try to sing like that! You are to open your mouth wide and sing as freely as the birds.”

She restricted me to three notes of the octave, *sa-pa-sa*, the lower tonic, the dominant fifth and the upper tonic. *Sa* and *pa* were fixed notes, sonic rungs in ether. I struggled to ascend and descend the *swaras* in this simple yet difficult fundamental exercise. Slipping, stumbling, wavering, hurrying. Didi listened dispassionately.

“Why the shaking in the voice? Make it firm!”

After our final session, Didi looked at me and smiled. “Now until we meet again next year, you must practice only these three notes.”

“*Sa-pa-sa...?*”

“*Sa-pa-sa*,” she confirmed patiently, adding, “Whatever happens, do not neglect your *riyaaz*!”

Alas, the mandated daily practice in its ruthless austerity proved too complex for my harried schedule in graduate school. After a few weeks I gave up. Some other time, perhaps... through art, or anything else, to take hold of the mind till it becomes, as the scriptures recommend, steady as the flame of a lamp in a windless place, steady as the pivot of the potter’s wheel.

¹ “A Conversation with Ustad Nasir Aminuddin Dagar,” by Jagannnath Seth. Brochure in celebration of the ninth anniversary of Ustad Nasir Moinuddin Dagar Sangeet Ashram, Calcutta. 1984. Translated from the original Hindi by the author

Singing Gurus

I am sitting cross-legged in a small room of an ashram in south India. This single room is the home of Shyama, whose voice singing the Sanskrit names of the Divine Feminine has captured my heart. For an hour each day of my stay in that ashram, she sings for me ancient Vedic prayers. Most of all she teaches me to listen.

“This *tanpura* is my mother!” she smiles as she lovingly dusts off imaginary specks from the heavy instrument.

She positions the round polished gourd of the big *tanpura* in my lap and placing my left hand on the stem of the instrument, she has me pluck one string, then another, with my right hand.

“Listen to the vibrations!”

Shyama tells me to stop plucking the string and simply listen to the sound in complete silence.

The *tanpura* resonates through my hands into my whole body. My body, too, is the instrument. I close my eyes. Listening, the body’s boundaries are rendered porous, the body becoming a single ear whose inner whorls are circles of sound rippling from a deep silence. After the ripples disappear, the stillness remains. I open my eyes.

Shyama is beaming at me.

“*This* is music. Do you understand?”

I nod my head in gratitude.

Shyama is one of those completely ordinary-looking Indian women. The sari-clad women with spectacles, their long hair streaked with grey, oiled, coiled and pinned in buns. Ordinary until, forehead shining with a calm concentration, they enter the trance of a sustained note.

*

I am attending a concert in New Delhi by one such ordinary-looking woman artist. She is in no hurry. Introducing the raga, the opening *alaap* is slow, intimate, building note upon note. Rising in the belly, cadencing through the heart, and vibrating through the larynx, the singing voice is slowly constructing a geometry of sound, ordering an inchoate ocean of feelings. Each raga has its own mood, with its

own emotional grammar of notes. The raga dyes us in its own feeling tones before the words have been sung.

Bit by bit, the plaint emerges: Radha is singing of her beloved, the dark-hued Krishna who is nowhere to be seen, and she makes of that absence, that dark night, a temple of sound in which the soul's passion can be housed.

The singer's right hand curled into a loose fist moves in front from left to right as if slowly parting a curtain. The pleading, gliding notes escalate and fill the listener with all the wanting the human heart has ever known.

You see her in mid-performance, one hand poised to the ear, as if protecting it from the extremity of sound, while the other extends in front, summoning what the human frame cannot but must bear. The human voice silken and ripened, vibrating the void with yearning. Her closed fingers unfurl like a blossom.

In the communion of song, listening in the deep intimacy of our own solitude—we are transported, propelled into inner space, intimate, exquisite. Somewhere an alignment occurs. Swifter than iron filings changing direction before a magnet, something gathers in the heart of the listener. The voice insinuates what the heart has always intimated: the one who plays hide and seek, his peacock feathers vanishing into the forest.

The voice ringing out of the larynx of the night arrives at the point where the note is held stationary before it descends toward silence. In the listener there is an oscillation in the cells, as a message is transmuted from nerve to nerve the way wood catches fire. The horizontal and the vertical intersect in the silent hearing until time vanishes and, with it, space. It is for this those listeners often touch the feet of these gurus of sound.

Swaramala, Garland of Notes

It was that Malkauns, again. That pentatonic midnight raga with its three flat notes of torment, *komal*, tender, exquisite. It was a live performance. Live, meaning that the singer blazed on stage, burnished upon the narrow bed of longing that he sang of.

He had spent many solo winters perfecting each note, invoking, and resonating the solar deity within the syllable of each Swara, so that when he sang each note rang in the night like an arrow shot from the bow of silence. An arrow gone straight to the heart, searing it with wordless intimations.

He is weaving for the listener a *swaramala*, a garland of swaras, each swara annihilating... bit by bit, the heart singed in tender flames

...

seja sada jare
chandra manda sameera sheetala
kahan karu kihu bhati mero
mana na dheera dhare

The bed forever burns—
a cooling breeze in the moonlight.

What shall I do? My mind holds no forbearance.

Which ardent heart has not known such provocation? The pallet smolders, the frame burns, the elements dissolving, burning, vaporizing. ~~The moon light pure and fluid, like the strains of a tanpura.~~ O the sublime trick of Malkauns! What is left of that garland of notes, of that consumed heart is only the serene consummating silence.

I finally understand the meaning of *swara*, the sounding voice:

Swa: one's own

Ra: energy shining forth!

Charles Kesler

“God is growing.”

--Rainer Maria Rilke

God is growing
right out of a
20 year old box.
He was supposed to fit
snugly and securely there
where He could provide
those always faithful
and always fitting answers,
but He is growing,
and I barely know
what the questions were,
much less any answers,
and I love it,
mostly.

Valerie Wohlfeld

ANGELS

This angel is made of star dust and fire.
This one has a dove in its ribcage.
This angel is made of fig trees, olive groves, and wine.
This one's heart opens like the gates of Judah.
This one is clay, is earthenware and porcelain.
This angel's innards are balanced on the edge of a sword.
This one smells like burning spices.
This angel who was in bondage is set free.
This angel is made of thistles and thorns.
Of coal and sapphire.
Of bronze and silver, iron and stone.
Of plaster and whitewash.
Of hail and winds.
An angel of linen, an angel of silk.
This angel eats only manna.
This angel holds up the morning star.
This angel is blind and naked.
This angel is thunder and lightning, sun's rainbowed aftermath.
This angel has no face but is a thousand mirrors reflecting
the face of God to God.



JOSEPH HARDY

Among the Things I Do Not Understand

if God is the mighty engine of Newton
or perfect embrace of Saint Teresa

the wellspring of compassion
in Gautama Buddha

or endless reproducing of life
from smallest viral urge.

All I know about most anything
comes from you, good mothers,

such as, *one chooses where to cut a sandwich,
the other chooses which half.*

But, for the rest of truth,
I only feel a yearning toward it

an obscure steady pull
like an emptiness needing to be filled.

DOES THE NUMBER OF RUNGS COUNT AND IF SO IS THE INTENTION'S
RANGE: FORGIVENESS, OR THE TREE OF LIFE, WELLSPRING EARTH-VEI



KEYWARD OR PRECARIOUS?
N, BEDROCK, CORE? AND WHO



IS THERE ACCESS TO ALL THAT'S OUT OF
WHO WILL HOLD THE LADDER WHEN I CLIMB?



GREY HELD
Ladder

Leslie Ryan

Celtic Cross

The sign of the cross
on the body makes a circle
on the body, an earth
with mind of north and heart of south

the origin point of hands,
each shoulder ball, at east
and west, as the work
of hands, God's work

originates at a distance
from them, light from a sun
that rises and sets, we pray,
along one ecliptic— God's will.

The sign of the cross
makes a wheel upon the heart,
mind, and origin of hands
on each crossed body

in the world, that each disparate
person might be carried through
the day on the same unchanging
center, the dove of peace,

God's love, whose forms
recklessly, carnevalesquely,
evolutionarily extend from and
converge in

that love's rest and that love's
turning... a clock of hours in which
midnight falls to dawn,
and the works of hands

rise and fall in the quadrants
of the gentle hours. At night
the sign of the cross on the body
sinks, a mineral deepening of hours,

into the body— forehead, skull-line,
spine, clavicle—and comes to rest
inside the body, slowly
turning on the sternum's crux,

not shadow but shafts of bone
moonlight being thrown from a gnomon
of being, at rest in the body's heart.
At night the body recomposes itself

along its skeletal legend
of direction, as sleep rounds
the center— which was given—
in its northings and southings of night.

ERICA APPLETON

To Be the Greenery

I want to be the small frond of a fern,
to feel the hushed prayer of the rolling wind,
to curl to the sky in lapsing drought,
to be green with life for a while, to be

blind and dead too. To have time enough
at last to do all the sweet nothings,
to be a home to many stories,
to listen and not speak so much.
I want to exhale life like oxygen.

I want to hide above the ground
in plain sight, reprieve for cardinals and
robins- to be a softness, admired.
And I want to feel with my
feathery fingers for moisture,

for the blessing of rain, to grow into
myself again and again. I want to taste
of dirt- of the ground up high.
To be unconcerned and unrelenting.
The greenery. The good of the earth.

THOMAS RIONS-MAEHREN

SILKEN BLUE

the merciful silken blue was sky,
and the sweet and floral flavors of gold and rust were leaves
scattered on the sidewalk. someone making cider with cinnamon
and fresh apples perfumed the entire world with the scent of
life-affirming air. simple rhymes sang
of tiny bodhisattvas with chalk and jump ropes while south
reeled in geese, their enthusiasm honking acute triangles above,
below, all around. nude oaks and plump squirrels
like plush children's toys bled tranquility
into those that passed them by. the cartoonish
lines separating egos and the people they owned from
being dissolved, and existing, they stopped. they melted
the cool fall breeze into a flood of loving dirt, living
wood, breathing atmosphere, sleeping grass, beings
indistinguishable from one another. and in that timeless, endless
moment, All Things witnessed All Things as One,
and in a single voice, sighed a great and lasting peace.

Nitza Hernández-López

Journey to the Heart of Gaia

Inside the Earth, I feel my spirit palpitate,
ancestors of other eras welcome me with
 outcries of stars falling from the sky and
 echoes of drums pounded on the stones.
Ancestral dances vibrate on my bare feet
covered with Caribbean roots.

Inside the Earth, my soul pours into mourning
for the blood spilled in fierce millennial wars.
 The homo sapiens, maddened,
 leaped into their greatest folly,
 extermination!

Bloodied sap drips from within the Earth;
it is from trees in pain.
The cry of oceans, birds, and forests
gets confused with mine.

My Greater Antilles arms unfold
and comfort tiny beings under the Earth.
Their microscopic eyes gaze at me, but I can't draw them.
 Science falls short of explaining my feelings.

Inside the Earth, its core is reflected
in trillions of transparent mirrors.
A glowing underground rainbow whispers a great secret:
infinite forms of life and colors are whirling sad,
agonizing in a kaleidoscope
their beauty and grandeur, totally disturbed.

Is it virtual reality, science fiction, mythology, fantasy?
Perhaps, a planetary revelation?

I managed to see Gaia / Pachamama, hidden
behind an opaque cloak never seen before.
Could it be her light diminishing?
Could it be that she is sowing her last seeds of hope?

I hear a desperate scream from within the Earth,
one million species at risk of extinction.
A climate catastrophe in the anthropocentric era!

Yet human consciousness expands to reverse extermination:
let's think like a mountain, feel like the planet,
vindicate the poor of the Earth,
take a quantum leap into an infinite cosmic era.



Allison Douglas- Turner

River is Full of Himself Today

River is full of himself today
Dragonlord under a china blue sky
resplendent in lapis and cedar green scales
shining like the sun
swollen with self-importance

He runs his tongue
along the silt-smooth banks
nibbles on the embedded stones
sucks, rolls them around in his mouth
and spits them out
like cherry pits

We Cedars and Broadleaf Maples
standing close to the edge
risk being pulled in feet first
as he sucks the soil from our roots
and grabs at our low hanging limbs

He is a rebellious teenager now
disrespecting and bullying
the neighborhood ancients
But we old ones have seen this many times before

He is young and
full of restless energy
always in a rush
But he brings us needed water for which we are thankful

And come the summer drought
River will not be so puffed up
Puny, slow moving, and weak from the heat
he will be grateful for our shade

Katy Shedlock

Morning Prayer in Spokane

I sit still in the glider rocker, mug perched on the narrow
ledge of the sill. Dawn comes first to the boarded-up

house to the east, then to my neighbors, sweet
people with a slum lord. The house I grew up in is

just across the falls from here. We went
to Niagara once and my father said ours

was bigger, just less famous. I did not believe
him then, when *far away* always meant *better*.

As a child I'd watch the sky to the south
darken from my bedroom window, pine tree silhouettes black

against the midnight blue. Now I wonder about the names
of the trees in front of my house, as morning settles

in their bare branches. An invasive species
probably planted by the Victorians who built my clapboard house

across from their church 120 years ago. In their chapel
by miracles of time, grace, and ecclesial cooperation

I preach and preside on Sundays, talk to the children
and help them blow out the candles when we're done.

Later I'll walk down to the falls and watch the water churn
and thunder under the bridge, mist and spray rising to kiss my cheeks.

So much richness in things I never thought I'd want.
The sky alight now in winter gray, I pour more coffee

and remember the words *my cup runneth over*. I stop
at the brim of my mug. It is enough. It is good.



DIANE KENDIG

REBUTTAL

Oh no: do, do be dismayed at the brokenness of the world.
I mean verily, weep for its brokenness,
Walk in steel-toed boots, stalk across the heaps of shards,
The stacks of glass, even the records broken,
The sharp ends of all that has come undone,
The edginess of it all, leaving us sleepless or if sleeping,
Dreaming of police and the waves wearing
At our foundations, whole chunks of cliffs
Taking their dives. Be dismayed deeply.

But don't stay dismayed: stay the dismay.
Rise up and piece, sew, glue, do whatever you
Must to make whole what you can. This world
Has always been broken in places and healers
Have always worked in the spaces.

Eliana Franklin

Inhalation

*More than half of Earth's oxygen
comes from the ocean.*

In each breath, I inhale
salt air, risen from waves
that climb to the sky,
wash down in a web
of white foam. Millions
of minnows swim
through meadows,
where seagrass dances
in the light. Whales,
sharks, dolphins echo
across the open ocean. Reefs
of pink, green, blue corals,
cool taste of ripples
on my tongue, golden
sun seeps down in streams.
When I breathe, seas
speak. Language
I let flow into my lungs,
into my veins.
In my sleep, I dream
of starfish singing
in the deep. I cycle
like the tides; hide
at night, while in morning,
I rise. Waters whisper,
listen to the melting ice,
hear the sea, its sacrifice.

Susan Johnson

So She Sets Off

A woman dies but keeps it a secret.
She doesn't want all the commotion,
cancelled plans, last minute flights.

She just wants to slip away like a leaf
into the river, into the current that will
take her to the sea. She wants to keep

her back roads hidden, those unmarked
trails through steep ravines, for when
people try to map her. They draw only

what they see and see only what they draw.
Never coming close—only closer to what
they want to believe. So she sets off.

Ice out on the river, snow out in the field,
red-winged blackbirds out roadside,
green shoots poking out of brown.

When she gets to the summit her boots
are full of mountain, tree bark under
her nails, a pileated's swooping fills

her ears. She has an unobstructed view
of the ridge, but she likes obstructions.
Even dead she wants to feel the world

rush against her. Especially dead she
wants to feel the ache of it pushing back.

Gloria Heffernan

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-- A Prose Poem in the Age of the App

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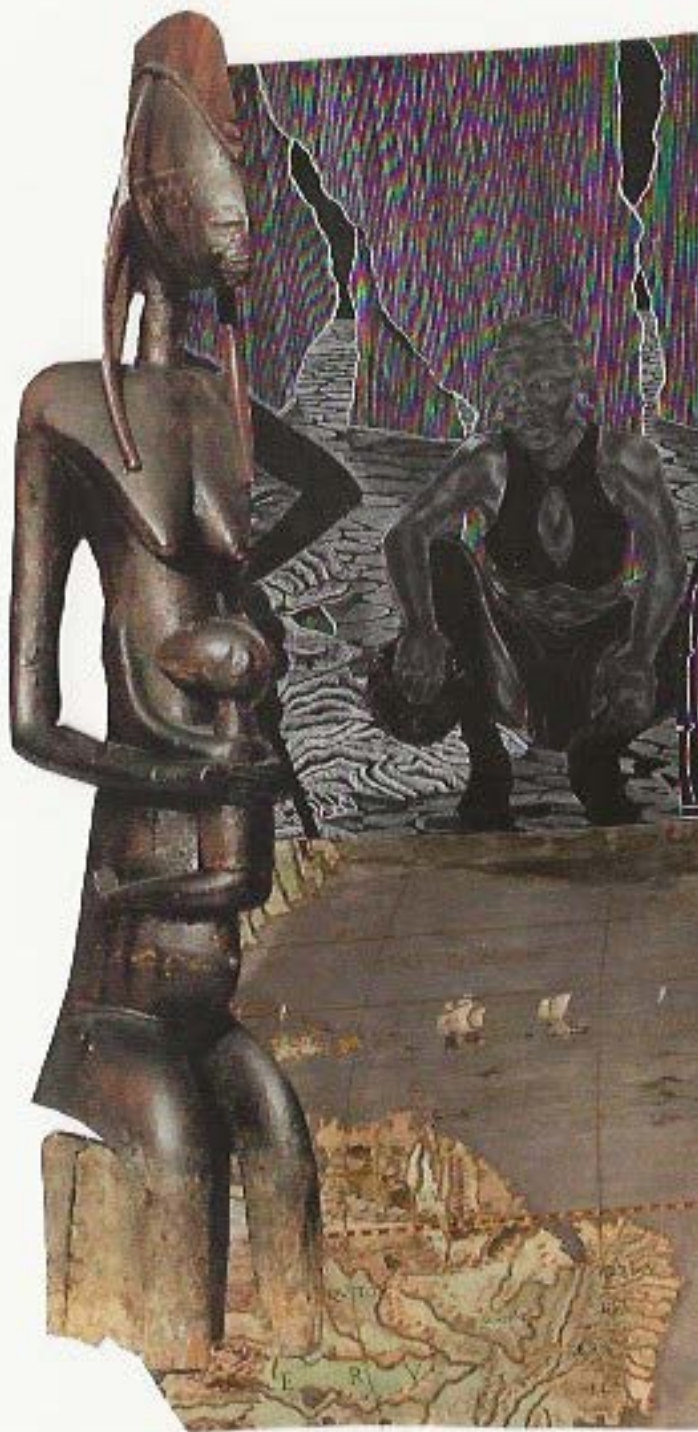
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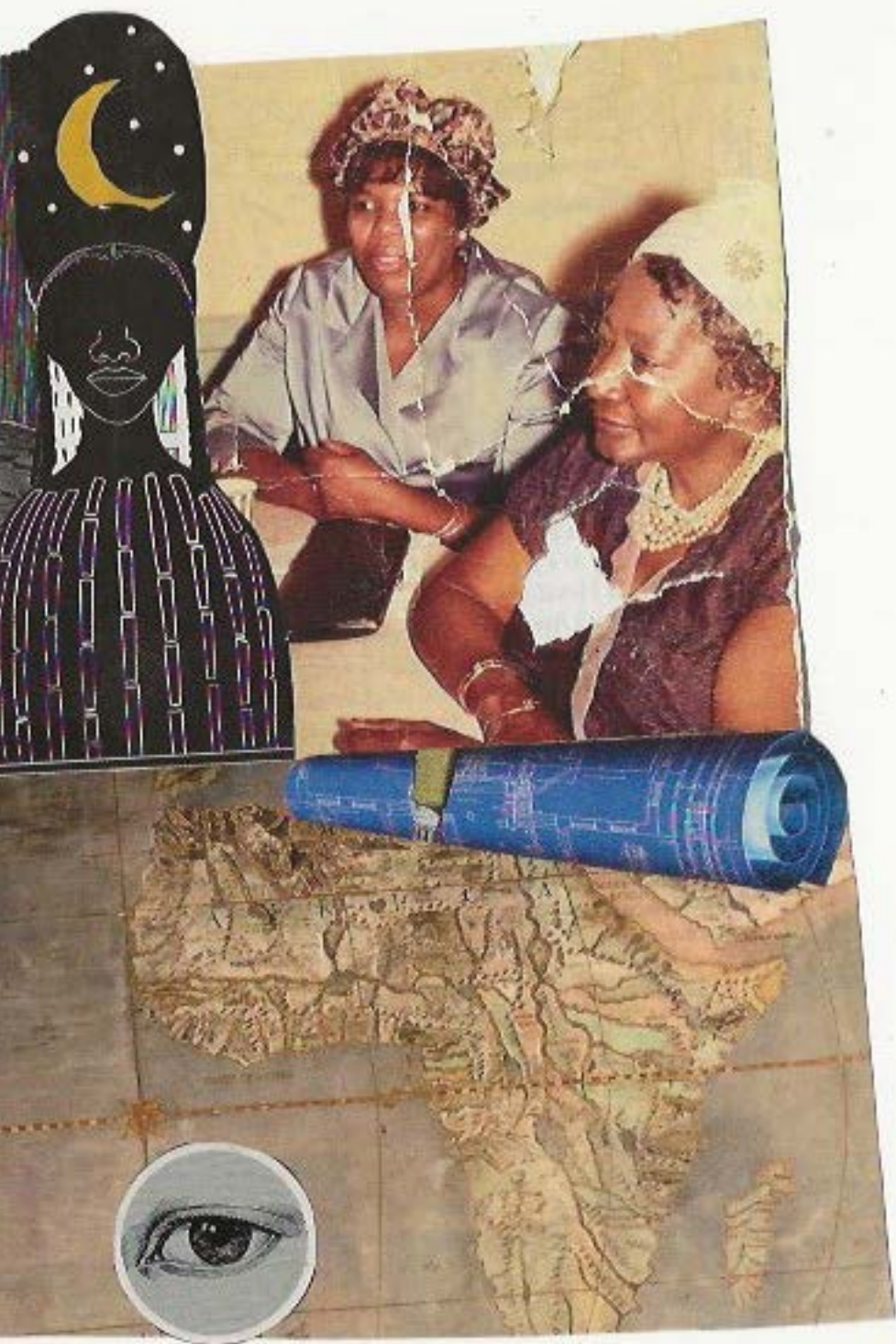
The window that offers the best view of the sky.

Open it...Breathe.

Begin.



MARILYN WHITEHORSE
Trade Route





Laura
Foley

Watching the News From Afghanistan

Did I once travel in a rickety van to the north,
with my husband, two little children,

to the snowy peaks where Alexander crossed,
those high, far-off plains of Tibet?

Did it grow cold, did the electricity go out,
snow falling on the budding almond trees?

Did my mother arrive by bus,
the night of the eclipse?

Did we hear men testing weapons in the market,
blasting Russian Kalashnikovs, American guns into the air?

Did I walk through crowds, head and shoulders covered
with an acquiescent scarf?

Did we sit at cafés on unpaved streets,
sip sweet mint tea, among hungry, roving dogs?

Did my son trace circles in the dust,
as I nursed the baby, in the shadows of the Hindu Kush?

Do I hold my son's son
even closer, today,

as I watch Afghan children seeking refuge
from mountains of guns,

dangling from landing gear,
falling from an escaping plane?

MADRONNA HOLDEN

The Future of the Sun

Take it from the ducks
scrambling for the crusts of bread
we toss into the Vltava River –

this is a place with real hungers.

The people of Prague were still
dismantling sandbags
from the face of their city
twenty years after the
the bombs and tanks
of World War II tore
though her.

There is burned in my memory
the image of my grandfather
falling to his knees
and sweeping off his hat
to bend his head
toward the ground
that received the blood
of the villagers of Lidice

slaughtered by Hitler
just to show the Czech people
what they were in for
as he entered their lands
after Great Britain,
France and Italy gave them
to him at Munich.

(He left two villagers alive
to spread his word.)

I don't know how many heads
bent in homage to the dead
it takes to heal their
arbitrary murder--

how many years it takes
for the victims of brutality
to come back into the sun
of history.

Yet there is a certain time of day
(a certain time of life)

when the sun strikes the river
in just such a way that its waters
are our perfect reflection

and we forget all sorrow.

It was such a day my grandfather walked me
over the Karlovy Bridge in Prague,
relating the stories sculpted in its statues--

telling me of the ancient competition
between Prague and Istanbul
to become the most beautiful city
in Europe

as both cities rose up under the sun

waiting to shine on a future
when soldiers crossed their
beautiful bridges

only to feed the ducks.

Wendi White

Sounding at Sea

Kīpuka

Location

‘Ili

Here
in the

Neighborhood of

Kalaepōhaku (the brow of rock)
St. Louis Heights
where my papaya grows

Ahupua’a

Here
in the

Section of

Waikīkī (spouting water)
a surf rider’s dream

Moku

Here
in the

District of

Kona (the leeward side)
where many live and die in tents
along the streets

Mokupuni	<p>Here on the</p> <p>O'ahu (the gathering place) where what was once sacred is all for sale</p>	Island of
Pae'aina	<p>Here on the</p> <p>Hawai'i Nei (the 50th State) where US Marines secured a Queen's abdication over sugar and a harbor's shapely form</p>	Archipelago of
Moana	<p>Here in the</p> <p>Moananuiākea (the Pacific) as far from any other land as you can be and still be subject to the nations' power games.</p>	Ocean
Hōkūhele	<p>Here on the</p> <p>Honua (Earth). Where we paddle a small canoe across a cold, dark sea so vast we cannot hope that help will reach us from beyond.</p>	Planet

PRABU VASAN

East River, After a Long Absence

A drunk vet—*1st Marine Regiment,*
Persian Gulf—homeless by the smell,
Has shuffled up to me. He says his dad died
Killing gooks, so he went over to kill
Sand rats. *We stuff pork balls in their*
Mouths. Keeps them outta heaven.

East River is metallic this morning,
The breeze makes meshes on its skin.
The early ferry is making its way across
And a speedboat rips the river a new spine.
I watch his face—and mine—get blown
To pieces in the churn and froth.
I was here once, half of me

Leaning out over the guard rail. I knew (or
Hoped, or feared) I could simply tip into
That silver, roiling body and be freed
Of all struggle, with only a few seconds
Of regret. *Yo, you want proof? Look,*

I'm still carrying shrapnel. He rolls up
His pant leg and shows me his dark scar.
He asks for cash. I hand him a pair of tens.
He digs into his shabby jacket, pulls out
A pack of smokes and shakes out two.

We lean on the rail and smoke. A flock
Of squawking schoolboys flies off the ferry.
The M14 arrives with a groan
And jackhammers start pounding the street.
I watch a cormorant stab the river's belly
For a fish. My friend has forgotten me.
His eyes are shut tight, he mumbles
To someone only he can see.

I think back to a short-sleeved shirt
I once saw floating here, how the river
Handled it with such care, turning it
Over and inside out, endlessly washing
The checkered cloth with its grey hands.

Xiaoly Li

You are a Mountain

— Blessing for my father on his 93rd birthday

The mountain is looming, indelible peaks and ridges—
you took me to swim across the Yu Yuan Tan River,
my hands held on to your shoulders.

I rested by your side on the grass on summer nights,
listened to you tell the story of the Cowherd and the Weaver Girl.
I looked up at you, looked up at the stars.

The mountain seemed far away—
you were once absorbed in work, then later I was taking root in a new land,
we missed and watched each other through the fog.

The mountain endured the thunder gusts—
when Mother was forced to the labor farm by the Anti-Right Movement,
for love, you refused to renounce her.

The mountain kept silent,
when they targeted you, for our sake, you alone shouldered
the upside down Cultural Revolution.

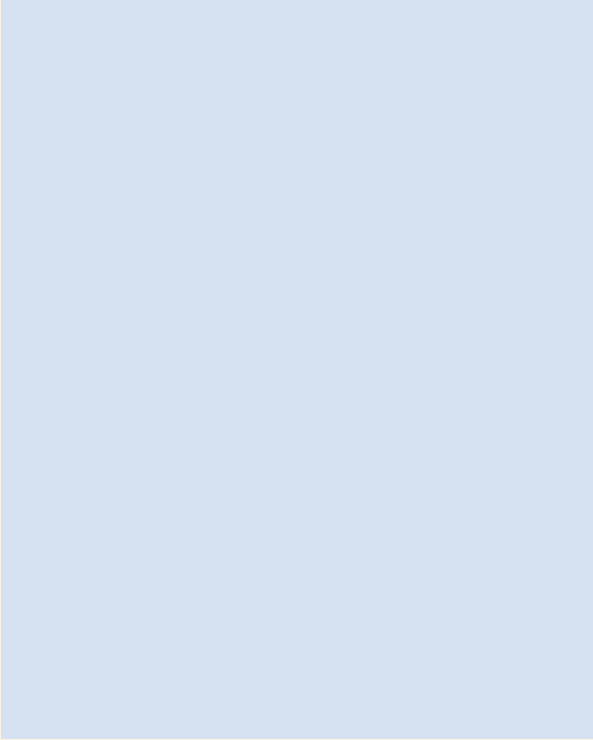
The mountain spoke no words—
your heroism, your medals of honor,
how many vicissitudes of history you have witnessed.

Now I have walked into the depths of the mountain,
your calmness and firmness,
your abundance and broadness.


On our video chats, you are wise and keen
just like your favorite writers, Cao Xue Qin and Lu Xun,
you take me to the forest of art, philosophy, and life.

I linger with the mountain, listen to your heart echoing.
remember that year you walked with a cane?
Hand-in-hand we talked until dusk.

The mountain stands strong, lasts long and long—
the sun shines through the clouds and halos you,
full of morning blessings, my eyes, pearls of dew.



Amanda Coleman White



Transmigration

My name awakens me,
a mantra I feel my way toward;
the pulling ears and clinging pajamas,
damp forehead of a child angered
I cannot mend an entire world.
His chills leave me sweating as I Mother.

I've been here before as my own mother,
my mother's mother and further back.
All of us with hair streaked red
from some unknown matriarch.
Concocting remedies, nursing
with both herbs and science,
intuition and Googled facts.

One soul migrating through memory
yet each time relearning the rote motions
of rocking and whispered prayers
up to the listening ear.

The lullaby applied as balm,
a salve allowing sleep to gain victory.
Must we repeat a life in full?
Maybe the one loving act
performed in darkness can suffice.



CAROL
ALEXANDER

For a Young Friend Giving Birth

The unforgettable hours
white light, a thumbprint on the eyelids
when the pain brings doubt, what is at the root
of the worst suffering. In a seasonless place the humming ward
you drink in algal bloom, the origins of everything;
in night's long attenuation you grasp at iridescent ripples. Offstage, a siren.
Despite painted toenails, you are prehistoric, traces of oud clinging to hair
the body swimming away, the pulse jumping with crazed currents.
Upon inquiry, you possess no mother, no living female kin
but the nurse who pulls you once & again into consciousness
skiff/ anchor /sundial/staticky hymn. Who will suture you?
There is no time, only rough hours to oar.
A ghost aunt lies beside you as the center tips, mouthing underwater
kisses—a hurricane has buried the slant turquoise house.
The baby comes so slowly: high & stubborn
beneath your heart, she will always cleave to you. This is said.
The racket in my blood quiets, you stroke the dark head, the yes.

Edward Gunawan

[A Home of Our Own]

In my mother's tongue

painter

is a combination
of

画 (huà):
painting or picture
and 家 (jiā):
home or family

in fact

almost all
creative professions
from author to potter
artist and lyricist

are constructed
in the same way

a painter is a painter

not because of
some qualification
or validation
from another

but simply
by virtue
of having made
a home
in the form

so let's not ask
anymore:
what are you, or who?

instead,
where are you
most at home?

and
have you
made it your own?

Translations:

作家 (zuò jiā) - *author*; 陶艺家 (táoyì jiā) - *potter*;
艺术家 (yìshù jiā) - *artist*;
作词家 (zuòcí jiā) - *lyricist*.

Marisa Lin

To My Daycare Teacher

not another word from you
could make me feel
apt for another chance

at redemption, to prove myself worthy
of the paper before me;
how do I position my hands for

a holiday that thanks your privilege—
when you asked me how
I wanted this fat stupid bird,

& I said *rainbow*
& you said *no*

five-year-old marisa marveled
at how you missed it
the fabulous menagerie of hues

exploding chromatic clapping prismatic across the sky, fireworks tearing
through white-washed cornfields of sameness,
scribbled hand turkeys morphing into beastly brights—

dear teacher, little did you know that the shy
chinese girl scrunched in shame before you
augured a world

in which her imagination in due time
would conceive of gorgeous lingual melodies
transmogrifying creatures with power

to roar mountains into being,
granite colossi combustive quartz
blooming kaleidoscopes

across the landscape—too bad
they would blind your glaucomic orbs,
squinting spheres which mistook *other* for *wrong*

all she was asking of you, dear teacher,
was to permit herself to unfurl
her wings damp with life's tender newness,

a baby's scalp of yawning sinews moaning
past bones in ecstatic friction, fanning
into a rainbow the colored headdress

of the bird you love so much—

yet the clipping of feathers

made no sound,

sawed the nucleus of her voice

&—

silence:

the skeleton

from which

all

genocidal

tendencies

hang

in other words:

the reason why I have waited
two decades for my memories to divulge
a reality other than your monopoly

on meaning, your claim on
arrangements of fake avian cartoons,
emblems of apparent interethnic harmony

to this day your impertinence was prophecy
of my ascension, a world
that would gorge itself on the crisped

foothills of northern california, palms nodding
to the pilgrimage that reared a child whose forehead
sleeps smooth from the bowing down

dear teacher: one day you may discover that homage
is a different beast than what you've always fed
because on this thanksgiving day twenty-two years ago

my mother nursed an infant at her breast gave grace
to another god for a daughter whose fullest feathered self
would sail treacherous into the maw of your white beginnings

now sick of saving face,
dear teacher, all I mean, is that

today I live
& that turkey
is me.



HANNA WRIGHT
Abstract Portrait

Yuna Kang

Preterite Mother

i. (you)

Murky murders of a mother preoccupy our surfaces
of pain, they hold the watery yolk of our hearts
in hands encrusted with carefully-tended callouses, bob up
a surface of a premonition murmurs, coming
towards me in musky mirrors, approaching, asking me
why did i have to go.

ii. (me)

It was my birthday, and it seems
Our traditions wrought from guilt are coming
to a close. It wasn't the first time you forgot my birthday,
or didn't speak to me on my birthday, but that is where the money
comes in,
always weeks later, no note attached.
A tangible apology of sorts, to your most forgettable child. The first time
I tasted somebody else's spit, you smeared it haphazardly against my lips,
and told me not to go outside anymore.

I'm twenty-one. I think I have been old forever,
having grown up in dimming skies, in a world that is coming to a close.

And wisdom
at my age is not an achievement, but a mark of incurred pain,
I should be stupid and dumb
and reckless. I should learn these things later. But I have learned
to greet dawn when
the moon is full, and lilies are waning in the yard.

I think you cannot love me
anymore, really. I think your love is an emergency,
an immediacy that you unpack only when it is petulantly demanded.
That is why sometimes you wake up and find yourself surrounded by
monsters, and then you like to say that this isn't your fault. Sometimes
your consequences make you cry.

I'm doing fine. I was made to do fine I think,
I'll do worse without you, but
I always have.

iii. (us)

In a way, this is our ballad,
twin dances of absence that spiral away and away. The
farther we spin from each other, the more palpable we become
to each other.

We are the gaps between our hearts, and our relationship
is tangible air.

It always has been, when you wouldn't hold
my hand in the grocery store line when I was seven,
 when you'd refuse to say
my name for six days because you almost forgot it,
 because I was reading too quietly
and I was eleven. I couldn't be real when I was next to you,
and I am not real when I am without you,
but you still miss me.

I love you, but it isn't enough.

Like a ship moored by distance, we see each other fully only as
the last of winking twilight.

of nineteen years, you got nineteen years, of nineteen years
of doing nothing.
of sitting in rooms and saying nothing and expecting me
to never go.

Ron Welburn

Conditions

There are things
better thought of by the fire
as log voices pop
and air circulating through them
can breathe around a story.

Flame is thought's reservoir,
a white-gold dancer
trimmed with evening's sky who
leaves burnt-orange footprints.
Cinders rest mysterious as owls
but noisier, and as the fire wanes
a glorious blue dancer steps forth
with its own quiet song.

We read memory in the fire
and see in the yellow dancers
what fleets ahead of words.
In a mystery of flames the blue dancer snaps
for its other spirits.
No nuance of thought follows this flame.
No dancing in expected lines.

When just the embers remain,
the story and belief come back to us,
coming for rest, perhaps shelter,
and to live in our silent place,
their tongues eager dancers from the flame.

Margaret Lloyd

Soul Leaves the Body

And it is very hard. No more
lying on the floor with the phone
listening to a nocturne—that intimacy.
Soul escapes like a figure
walking quickly, almost but not quite
running, into the woods, wanting
to get away fast from the pain.
And the solitariness of it all—
no one knowing, nothing
to be seen, no sound.
If we could really know
that moment, that silent movement,
we might live our lives differently.
Ask the body what it wants.
Give it to the body. Sing each morning
the way only our voice can
of a cloud of white butterflies,
the river with three holy wells.
Let us meet in the room of our lives,
the room of grieving desire,
while there is time,
before the soul is called back
from the frail crafts of our bodies.



Katharyn Howd Machan

To Summon His Spirit Back from the Dead

She fills a bag with chicken and cheese,
spring water, red wine, strong brandy,
then pulls on boots and sets out fast,
hoping his ghost can keep on calling
to help her find the way. She follows
snow, she follows the sheen of his
ashes between shadow and light
singing *Brother o brother where art thou*
to the tune of his favorite jazzy song.
At last there he is with winter eyes
in the middle of time's muddled world,
that glimmer of his old twisted smile
humming *Maybe, baby, I loved you once*
but it's sure been quite awhile.

KIM HORNER

THE LEAST OF THESE

“...inasmuch as you did *it* to one of the least of these My brethren, you did *it* to Me.”

Matt. 37

Rusty, the managing editor of the paper, called me into his office one morning.

“I need you to set up an interview with Brother Benno.”

Brother Benno Garrity was a Benedictine monk revered for his work to feed the hungry and homeless in northern San Diego County over 30 years. Brother Benno, who inspired a center named after him that provided meals and other services to people who were homeless, lived at the Prince of Peace Abbey in Oceanside, Calif. At 81, he was gravely ill with Parkinson’s Disease, a brain disorder that leads to shaking, stiffness, and difficulty with walking, balance and coordination. He wasn’t expected to live much longer.

“They’ve administered his last rites several times over the past year,” Rusty said. Brother Benno would not be ready to go until later that year.

It was February 1992 and I was a reporter for the *Blade-Citizen*. I loved my job, which involved covering a local city hall and homelessness. I was 24 and was just starting my journalism career. Having moved from Texas the year before, I fell in love with the milder temperatures, the Pacific Ocean, and writing about issues that

mattered. The newspaper offices were a quick walk to the beach. My business card featured a blue ocean wave. I wanted to ride it as far as possible.

I had never seen anyone experiencing homelessness until I went to college in Austin. There, I regularly saw people who panhandled on the strip of shops and restaurants next to campus. Most of us just walked by. Homelessness became a major issue at that time, in the late 1980s despite a thriving economy. The number of homeless people with serious mental illnesses reached a critical mass. Many used to live in state psychiatric institutions, but those facilities were scaling down. Because of civil rights legislation, thousands of people with disabling mental illnesses no longer could be held against their will in institutions. Even those who wanted to stay were sent to live independently, without the level of help needed. In Southern California, you couldn't not see homelessness. It was everywhere -- on the beaches, along the riverbeds and creeks, in the canyons below affluent neighborhoods filled with Spanish-tiled roofs. Oceanside, like many southern California cities, had thousands of people who were homeless.

With homelessness comes complaints about homeless people's presence. Brother Benno, on the other hand, was the embodiment of unconditional love. Born in Kentucky in 1910 as Thomas Garrity, Brother Benno came of age at a drastically different time, the beginning of the Great Depression. He worked on his father's farm, a steel mill and for a debt collection agency before entering monastic life in 1933. In 1962, he was sent to Oceanside, which had a new abbey. There, he cooked for his fellow monks and invented his "wonder" bread touched with a drop of holy water. Brother Benno eventually was baking 350 loaves of bread every week, which he delivered to the poor or bartered for other things they needed. I'd seen Brother Benno's photo at Brother Benno's Center. He was bald, wore wire-framed glasses, his long monk's robe, and had a kind, genuine smile. Brother Benno's Center's mission is "to carry on the ministry of Brother Benno by living out the gospel according to Matthew 25:31-45

with love and compassion.” Matthew 25:31-45 examines how we treat those in need, “the least of these.”

On the day of my interview with Brother Benno, I drove to the Abbey, which was on a hill two miles inland and had a panoramic view that includes the ocean to the west and Camp Pendleton to the north. Inside, an assistant led me to a room where I waited for Brother Benno. I remember high ceilings and spare furnishings. A few minutes later, the door opened. Brother Benno sat in wheelchair, and another monk, Brother Raphael, pushed the wheelchair into the room and brought him next to me. Brother Benno spoke in a soft, quiet voice that was difficult to understand at times. He took a sip from a glass of water, his hands shaking, a symptom of Parkinson’s Disease. In people with Parkinson’s, the nerve cells in the basal ganglia, an area of the brain that controls movement, become impaired or die. Some days, all Brother Benno could do was lie in bed. Fortunately that day was one of his better days.

As Brother Benno took a sip of his coffee, some dribbled down his chin.

“I have a drinking problem,” he joked.

At first, I thought I had misunderstood. Then I saw his smile and the twinkle in his eyes. In addition to his generosity, Brother Benno was known for his sense of humor. He made the photographer and me laugh as he posed for photos.

“Is my slip showing?” he said. “Is my hair straight?”

I still keep a small book of Brother Benno’s jokes. They were silly but had a common thread of acknowledging our shared humanity.

A man fell off of a cliff, but caught hold of a tree limb on the way down. He was pretty frightened, and he began to pray.

“Lord, if you help me, I’ll be your man. I’ll go to church. I’ll pray. I’ll do anything you want...just save me!” A voice said in the reply, “OK, I’ll help you, but first let go of the branch.” The man thought about it and said, “Is there anyone else I can talk to up there?”

The previous year, Brother Benno’s Center had moved to a larger facility in an industrial park. Neighboring business owners were complaining about homeless people urinating, panhandling, loitering and scaring employees in the area. Brother Benno’s officials worked to resolve the issue but said the real problem was that the government

was not providing adequate treatment for people with serious mental illnesses.

As I wrote my article about Brother Benno, how he coped with his illness, how he had inspired so many, I struggled to understand how the concept of unconditional love could play out in real life. There's a story about the time Brother Benno was robbed. Three men had come to the abbey, asking for work. The monk offered to pay each of them \$5 to hoe weeds for an hour. When they finished, Brother Benno opened his wallet to pay them. The men grabbed his wallet, which included his license and phone numbers, and ran away. However, as the story goes, the monk was not angry, saying: "The money in my wallet was given to me to help the poor and they were certainly poor people who needed help." I had no idea how to incorporate those values without getting crushed. I had a boyfriend I thought I loved unconditionally, despite concerns about his drinking, which I played down because I drank too. I loved him despite him being so irresponsible that his car was repossessed. I loved him, even when he gave little in return. One night, after we'd been together about a year, my boyfriend called and said he needed to tell me something. I could tell from his voice that something was seriously wrong. I drove to his house, stomach in knots, heart ready to implode. His roommate answered the door and greeted me with that strange heavy air of someone straining to sound casual, like the awkward stillness before a tornado rips a neighborhood inside out. My boyfriend and I went into his room and sat on his bed as he told me that he had had sex with a woman at his work and that she was pregnant. That he didn't want to be with her; that he wanted us to stay together. All I remember was how much it hurt, how I had been robbed.

I drove back to my apartment, got in bed, tears dripping on my notebooks as I wrote about what happened. I ripped up the pages in journal many years ago, knowing that I would never want to relive that pain. If they could be pieced back together, those pages were drenched in hurt, humiliation, shame. They would show someone who hated themselves for not being worth a boyfriend who would treat her better and for getting involved with someone who would treat them that way. They would show someone who felt like this was proof indeed, of what they had suspected all along, that they were unlovable

as they felt. Later that night, my friend and roommate , Tina, came home and found me in tears. I told her what had happened and cried until there were no tears left as she tried to comfort me. That night, I couldn't sleep as my mind replayed what had happened. I hated myself for getting into a relationship with someone who would treat me so poorly. I hated myself for being so unworthy of the happy relationships other people seemed to have. I hated myself for feeling sorry for myself.

The next morning, I went to work, not sure how I was going to get through the day. I felt shaky, unable to concentrate, and on the verge of crying. As soon as I got to the office, I found out that Brother Benno had died. I needed to write a story for the next day's paper. I headed to Brother Benno's Center to interview people who knew the monk and those who benefitted from his kind spirit. As I tried to focus on my story, I thought about how covering Brother Benno's death forced me to focus on something besides my own pain, something outside myself. All that day, people I interviewed talked about Brother Benno's message of unconditional love. I could only feel hate, for my ex, for myself. Writing about Brother Benno's legacy, hearing stories all day about his goodness, somehow brought comfort. I remember telling a friend at work that I felt that writing about Brother Benno's death was meaningful to me in that moment. I'm sure my point was confusing because I barely understood it. All I knew was that writing about Brother Benno's legacy brought me out of my misery for a short time when I needed it and reminded me that, although it was hard to find, unconditional love existed, at least in Brother Benno.

The next week, I went to Brother Benno's funeral and graveside burial. In his eulogy, Harold Kutler, who founded Brother Benno's Center with his wife, Kaye, called Brother Benno "the personification of unconditional love." Kutler said "unconditional love is the impossible dream, the unreachable star because it is the gift that sets us free, the gift that empowers us to become the person God has created us to be." Kutler told the story of a homeless man who defiantly told Brother Benno "Are you here to change me?" and Brother Benno said. "No, I'm here to love you."

After the memorial, we walked to the Abbey's cemetery, where Brother Benno was buried. After the Abbott Claude took a shovel full of dirt and released it into the grave. Then, everyone took turns doing

the same. I drove back to the office to write my story for the next morning's paper. As the weeks and months passed, I became more and more depressed. Finally, after a nudge from my roommate, I made a long-overdue appointment to see a therapist. It was the beginning of a long journey that taught me that my depression wasn't just about the breakup. The pain I felt forced me to confront a problem that went much deeper. I had never thought about giving unconditional love to the person who needed it most. I had never considered giving it to myself.



TOMISLAV SILIPETAR
beard art 1

Mark Jodon

You Say You Are Lost

Maybe that's not so bad.

Maybe lost is a time or space
for holding what you don't understand
or what you don't yet know.

Maybe it is the moment
before surprise, or unexpected joy,
or finding what makes you

whole.

Paul Jaskunas

Come to the Table

I've been given too much—haven't I?
I've taken too much—of course.

How many cups of coffee?
How many gallons of gasoline?
How many cows and chickens and trees?

Flights to the other side of the earth.
Feasts on every occasion.
Warmth in every room.

Dante says, "You, although free, are subject."

I pretend not to know it.
I sleep in the habits of comfort.
It is past time to wake up.

Past time to abstain,
to be a little hungry,
a little cold and grateful
for the modest gifts of the hour.

You are not a god, you American.
You are not special, human of the new century.
One of billions here now,
of more billions behind you
and more billions ahead, all traipsing
under the same delicate atmosphere,
subject to the same finitudes.

Submit graciously to the limits of the earth.
Come to the table of brotherhood.
Look into the eyes of your ancestors,
and the eyes of your countless descendants.

Celebrate with them,
break bread with them,
drink the cold water of wisdom
from the underground rivers of time.

You need less than you think.
A portion of soup,
a portion of laughter,
a song to sing.

Come to the table.
Here there is joy to be had, and nourishment
to remind you of your earliest days,
when your mother provided all in abundance.

Yes, come to the table now.
There is no time to waste.
Everyone is waiting for you.

Priscilla Frake

The Dangers of Lower Rebirth

As a spider. *Do spiders suffer?*
May they be free from suffering.

As a mole. A crow.
A hungry ghost—
something that has to eat
and is forced to reproduce
its sad desires.

As a wolf.
Do wolves suffer? May they
be free from suffering.

As a fly. Some buzzing
soul that never rests.
A hornet. A horned
frog. *Do frogs suffer?*
May they be free from
suffering.

As a creature
in hell. Lucifer.
A feral boar. A senator.
Do senators suffer?
May they be free from suffering.

Yesterday I was a charging
bull. A bear. A fretful notion
of rage. Today, I am briefly
human, and while I have hands
I write this wish for you
to be happy. For you to be free
from suffering. For you to find,
in confusions of words & lies,
your own human hands and mind.

Alex Blum

Nurturing

After my first year away
I came home to find a charm
of hummingbirds living
in my bedroom. They liked
the purple bougainvillea on the porch
and the fuchsia in the garden
my mother explained
admiring the birds' good taste.
As if the flowers weren't enough
she brought them insects every morning.
I slept in the guest room down the hall
and kept my distance
sensing something fragile.
But the night before I left
I stood in my old doorway
smelling the cold air drifting in
and surveyed the streaks of semi-solid waste
a desk of notebooks, lanyards, pens
faded posters of faded bands
the violin I rarely practiced
a stack of out of favor sweaters
a pair of shoes so cool I couldn't wear them
and there in the top shelf of the closet
next to where I'd kept my weed
a nest of twigs and leaves and spider silk.
Out buzzed a long-billed protector
to hover at me with a wet black eye
for one long moment of bird vibrato.
I shut the door as gently as I could
and you already know I never opened it again.

An abstract geometric design featuring a large blue square on a yellow background. A white vertical line and a white horizontal line intersect at the top left of the blue square. The name 'MICHAEL GLASER' is written in white serif font inside the blue square.

MICHAEL GLASER

Wanting It All

[at the Old Depot Restaurant, the menu
offers a “You Get It All” garden salad]

How can I not want that, I wonder,
recalling how my first wife
would warn, “you can’t have it all,
you’re chasing rainbows, you know,
nobody can have it all.”

And now this menu--
only, as I read the description,
I wonder if perhaps I *could* get it all,
but without the anchovies
and jalapeno peppers, and then
I begin to wonder what that might mean:

Wanting it all, I think,
wanting it all--
that’s one thing, but aren’t there always
anchovies and jalapeno peppers?
And, I think, if I really understood that
I might have an answer for my first wife,

though we’re long since parted,
and I still want it all

like Adam and Eve, there in the garden,
naked and hungry before the fall.

LYDIA GWYN

The Self I am Today

Shares half an opening line with Kaveh Akbar's "Pilgrim Bell"

The self I am today is quiet. She stirs a pot of soup. Smells a bar of sandalwood soap kept on her desk. She folds the bath towels. Puts the bath towels away on their shelves. She worries over an infected tooth, and tries to control her tongue. She knits one side of a cropped summer sweater. She makes ribs and little knots, a seersucker stitch, and wraps the work around the bar of sandalwood soap to imbue it with fragrance for the next time she picks up her knitting. But it is as though her tongue has a self of its own. A curious self that yearns to see what newness has come into its room. It pokes and prods the tooth before she can stop it.

The self I am today sits for meditation and loses all trains of thought. Goes in and out of dreams. In and out of kneecaps and wrists, the vertebra of the spine. The cradle of the pelvis. The brain in its chamber. She tries to lose the self, to let the big and small anchors of her life fade and be forgotten, to enter silence. But the self I am today cannot forget the self. She runs from silence. She can't stick with the breath. Her skin itches all over. The self knows these things—the itches, the running are messages. Notice, the self says.

The self I am today buys three types of bird feeders and socks of seed and cakes of seed and bags of seed from the home improvement store. She spends forty dollars on a small wastebasket for her bathroom. She takes her daughter with her to buy these things, and

the daughter disappears down aisles, sits in a display chair in the outdoor living section and spins and spins. But the self I am today doesn't panic or call out. She finds her daughter every time and holds her hand. She buys her daughter a Venus flytrap and a packet of pink cosmos seeds.

The self I am today cleans the house. It is her day off from a job that slowly drains away all joy, a job with so many to-dos, she has to make lists, keep calendars, send herself reminders to keep up. It is not the job she imagined she would have as an adult. The self I am today vacuums and wipes down sinks and mirrors, cleans toilets, makes beds, loads the dishwasher, puts away dishes. She smells the sandalwood soap wrapped still in its box and wrapped deeper in her knitting. She eats an entire sleeve of Thin Mint cookies and waves away her promise to consume only nourishing foods this weekend.

The self I am today writes this story out long hand in black ink pen. It is one promise she keeps—to write something today. Her handwriting yawns and loops across the pages. Her tongue finds the tooth again, and this too is a message. Notice, the self says. Notice the information pain and itches and running bring. There is no control.

The self I am today goes gentle on me, the way rain goes gentle into a flower. The way sunlight from a window floats across a floor.



Tristan Franz

Touched by a Curve

this river curves like comma
slowing for the sake of clarity
bending to be understood
we are at one such point
right on the tip of the comma
deciphering meaning
in a sunlit sentence
gurgling its speech

why must I resort to metaphor
there is no grammar to be found here
why can't I express this in clay or mud or massage
all i want to tell you is that the river is running
and it shows no signs of stopping
and I wish you could feel that
I wish you could be touched by a curve

REBECCA VINCENT

Slowing Down to the Speed of Wonder

I set out today on my hike with the specific intent to be slow. Sure I've hiked to the Butte and back in two hours countless times. But today I set out with the intention to *saunter*, in the spirit of Thoreau who, in his famous essay, "Walking," traces the etymology of *saunter* from the Middle Ages as "idle people who roved about the country..." I wanted to be "idle" out in nature and to abandon the quest for speed and linear transit from Point A to Point B and back again in a set period of time. I wanted to open myself to wonder. And so I left home with my binoculars, thermos of tea, note pad and pen and prepared to slow down.

The day was warm and bright with dappled sunlight streaming translucent green through the new spring leaves. Soft petaled pink and white trilliums blanketed wide pockets of earth amidst giant clumps of sword ferns. As I meandered, the melodies of the Pacific Wren fluted through the air. I stopped occasionally to look for the singer, but as always, he eluded me, flitting invisibly amidst the towering evergreens.

People passed me, as those who don't saunter do, on a schedule, on a mission to the Butte, one and a half or so miles up from here, at 2058 feet, the highest point in Eugene, Oregon. Meanwhile I continued my wander. After walking a ways on the trail, I followed a small deer path up a hill to a downed tree bathed in light to sit for a spell. There, hidden from the trail, I enjoyed a few small cups of tea

while gazing out into the woods. I let my mind wander and watched the birds and tree branches riffling in the slight breeze. I witnessed the light breaking through the towering fir trees and spilling like liquid upon the leaves. There is so much to see when we slow down that we miss when going too fast or when gazing into our screens.

I've never felt I belong in this era. My nervous system isn't up to the job of fending off the relentless barrage of noise from the modern urban world; the decibels of machines and power tools, cars and planes, endless traffic. I'm jangled by the flashing neon lights, the unrelenting stimuli and never ceasing motion. Unwillingly I'm swept into its interminable pace. My real rhythm is that of turtle. If I lived in a society oriented around totems or spirit animals, mine would be turtle.

I must go, from time to time, to a listening chamber, a temple or oracle shrouded in stillness. Visit the waves or a shore, a river or mountain. I have to go listen, hear voices, have visions. Shed what I no longer need, burn what I no longer want to carry, revisit my dreams and visions, listen for instructions.

The ancient Greeks perceived two sorts of time: *kronos* time which is linear or sequential in nature; a task-oriented time which governs our mechanically-oriented modern world, and *kairos* time, a boundless holy time thought to be between the lines; a time in which one savors, lingers, dreams, and meanders.

I'm greedy for *kairos* time. Greedy to disappear from the junk of our everyday world—the screens, bills, lists, noise, and relentless tide of news and social media. I long to purge all the clutter of everyday life, what's mundane, used up, washed out; the tasks to be done with technology, the dry, empty details of mind. I long to clear myself of all this and anything without the imprint of the divine and to slip wordlessly into the otherworldly realm of *kairos* time, dreamtime, vision time. There an inner tabernacle opens to spirit and spirit's messages come seeping, flowing, flooding in. I'm fed with earth medicine and insights wash through me. I swim far from shore.

What is the holy? Is it not to have time stand still and be broken open by the ineffable? To come in to the moment and leave our electronics (and elections) behind? To understand suddenly, see,

become aware of our connections with all life, with the universe, with the Spirit that runs through all things? The great Oglala Sioux warrior and Holy Man, Black Elk, said: “The first peace, which is the most important, is that which comes within the souls of men when they realize their relationship, their one-ness, with the universe and all its powers, and when they realize that at the center of the universe dwells Wakan-Tanka, and that this center is really everywhere, it is within each of us. This is the real peace and the others are but reflections of this.”

Black Elk describes the place I consistently need to get to from my busy, modern life. The place I can only reach in nature. Nature is my tabernacle, my temple, my church. Time in nature nourishes me like milk, like starlight, like dance. It shakes me up and scatters out all the dust that has settled. What’s dead gets flung away. I descend to deeper layers of the psyche and know my connections with all life.

Some spiritual adepts can sit in meditation in a drab, soulless room with cars pounding pavement on the other side of the wall, voices screeching, horns blaring, and reach the divine there. My mind just isn’t that trained. I need natural spaces. They are my salvation; what allows my thirst for the ineffable to be sated. Without them I’d drown in a meaningless empty abyss where my soul would simply die.

Doesn’t everyone need a Listening Spot? A place for stillness or a chamber set apart to hear the speech of the Divine? Where we stop our bustle and commune with the divinity of creation; where we watch the light streaming through the forest and witness sunshine-soaked leaves draping trees. A pause. Caesura. *Uti Seta*, the ancient Norwegians called it, or sitting with the land. Terry Tempest Williams says: “I am learning to pray in all the ways the desert has taught me to listen.” I need, as a habit, to strip myself of world and open to the voices of the land, descend into service of awe and become a transcriber of the divine.

But our world isn’t set up for communion time with nature. Or maybe it’s that we as a species have built our world in such a way that our doors are shut to it, as in our physical doors to the natural world are shut. As a species we’re lost behind our electronic screens, inside our buildings, homes, and cars, largely oblivious to the natural

world on the other side of that door and the havoc we've unleashed there. Because our physical doors are shut, our inner psychological or spiritual doors are also shut to the spirit in the natural realm.

In the same way that we've shut our doors to the natural world, we've shut our inner doors to wonder. The world holds no place for daydreamers, awe or wonder. Schools don't allow children to daydream. Our schedules don't allow us to dream or wonder. We are slaves to our waking minds and to kronos time. Rabbi Heschel said: "Forfeit your sense of awe and the universe becomes a marketplace for you." Clearly our world is a global marketplace, while the vast destruction of the natural world is symptomatic of humanity's collective loss of awe for it.

In our hectic urban lives, we modern humans rarely get to commune with nature. Or when we finally get out there, we're surrounded on all sides by hoards of other people. I think of John Muir Redwood Park near the Bay Area which, while gorgeous, is, like so many other natural areas, always so crowded that one cannot linger in any particular place, but rather must keep moving so those behind can have a turn to see too. It's as if we're kindergartners out on a walk holding a rope to stay connected to each other. Don't go too fast or you'll be on the heels of those before you. But don't go too slowly or you'll block those behind. Give me wild spaces free of crowds!

Yes, it's great, crucial even, that all these people go to natural places. We'll never save natural areas without a human recognition of their intrinsic value. And we won't be able to recognize their value without going out into them. We simply need more protected natural areas. Less space for cars and buildings, homes, factories and industrial facilities. More space for people and animals, trees and plants, birds and butterflies, turtles and frogs.

Human beings have a deep-seated need to wonder. To experience moments of time wrapped in awe. We must as a world make space for this basic human activity by setting aside enough natural lands for us all to have the freedom of this primal human experience. Not where we must continuously keep moving as a group, conforming to the group's needs and pace, but rather where we can sit, commune and simply be in the presence of the natural world and bask in its grandeur. Where

we can slow down to the speed of wonder and take in the glory of a bird or butterfly, insect or plant. Where we can hear the unceasing rhythm of the world outside our species, let awe slip under our skin and permeate our bones, blood, and beings.

When paddling, I invoke the sense of sauntering Thoreau espouses. I like to slow down, abandon an agenda and simply come in to the presence of reeds on shoreline and light reflected off water. Cedar Waxwings scattered in the dead tree on shore and plants swaying in the current. The river gives me the chance to see things, be quiet; to fill with an other-than-human-silence, which isn't silence at all, but ripples of blue water churning downstream, Red-Winged Blackbirds rustling in bushes along the shore, the light veneer of insect wings brushing air . . . and on and on.

I cast off from the shore of troubles, phones, bills, lists, logos and take refuge from the hungry world with its claws of machines and screens, plastic and ads. I slow down to the speed of wonder and drift in the current beyond words and language, only the slight whisk of water as my kayak moves effortlessly downstream. Or maybe it's not always a *slowing down* to the speed of wonder. Aren't we *struck* by wonder sometimes, as in a jolt of insight strikes like lightening and immediately transforms our insight or understanding? In each case—slowing down or being struck—the gates of wonder open, and we enter the trance, the spell of wonder.

Old stories predating the advent of the Industrial Era describe how people can be transported to the fairy realm by stepping on a particular place on earth. One steps inadvertently onto the magical spot, falls through space and lands in an enchanted land outside time. There, s/he is bewitched and time passes differently than in the mortal world. Often, when returning to the human sphere above, months or even years have passed during what s/he thought were mere days.

Sometimes when I've spent the day at the river, I return home and feel as if I've left another world, an enchanted realm far from the modern everyday world of linear time and technology. It's as if I've sloughed off a snake skin of burdens I carried from the world and didn't need.

My mom asked me once why I insist on paddling alone. "To soul search," I said. But I realized the true reason is the exact opposite

of soul searching. I go alone not to search my own soul, but instead to connect to all the other souls out in the world beyond my species. In those connections to the more-than-human dimension, I'm fed, my psyche and spirit are nourished. I bathe in a sea of awe, slip past the gates of wonder, listen to the sounds of earth, and am changed, transformed.

Endnotes

Thoreau on sauntering from John Elder and Robert Finch, *Nature Writing* (NY: Norton, 2002) p. 180.

Black Elk passage from Phil Cousineau, *The Soul Aflame* (Berkeley: Conari Press, 2000) p. 78.

Terry Tempest Williams, *Erosion*, (NY: Picador, 2020) p.6.

Rabbi Heschel quote in Mathew Fox, *Meister Eckhart* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2014) p. 15.

Kat Hart

Three Dreams

I began dreaming in
Karamazov in the
spring of '08. Those were
cloudy and wine-dark days.
Shades of brotherhood
defining, divining
and staining my
sheets with the
darkness and brightness of
my three minds.

The nights came
on like horses, black
with rage and fearing
nothing, neither devil nor
angel. I fed them of
Tolstoy, of
Gogol, of
Chekhov, of
Saint Augustine, of
Heidegger and Sartre, of

philosophies golden, beloved,
haggard, rusted, of
wherever the
horses dragged my
three minds. Thoughts that
crept from the
sea and
smeared the walls with
their slime. Thoughts that
pummeled me with
stones and fists. Thoughts that
rocked me in their arms,
to sleep, to
dream again.

And so I
slept on, riding
each one. Mind by
mind. Horse by
horse. Untamed by
religion or by
men, I
rode them all.

The dreams were
sleeping giants,
hideous and
kind and
brothers all. I have
remained silent until
now, fearful to
wake them.

I walked
alone at the
same time each
afternoon, turning and
learning the dreams,
awed by the
ragged sublime. Each
one destroyed and
built me again. I
was ruined and
elated, Camus'
Sisyphus.

After that
Siberian spring the
earth was never
green again, but
only Dostoevsky,
blinding and
harsh and
true as ice and
veiling my
three minds with
its blood-red
rains.

Awake at
last, still I
made sleep my
religion, desiring
only the truth, whether
purest white or
the color
Karamazov.

ALISON DAVIS

A Passion

i.

the be held and to behold / are an initiation / this is how it begins / if
we are / at a beginning / something must also be / ending / this is the
end of eyes / this is the start / of sight //

ii.

i wept alone in the garden / beside the guava tree / the olives of
gethsemane / were far from me now / but the dark night was the same
/ the others caviled / just beyond the hedge / trading pleasantries and
judgments / i could see their bodies / moving but they were deep / in
sleep / i prayed i prayed i / prayed / i prayed into the black bowl of
stars overhead / what is it to be on this earth? //

iii.

i could have walked / the whole journey on my knees / spilling blood
no longer alarms me / haven't i been conditioned / to fall down /
before the mighty? haven't i been taught to call myself weak? / the
earth-bound enthusiasm of the crowds has died / down and the streets
are empty now / and i go lovingly into such doom / as only i can /
must shoulder //

iv.

in the bed in outer sunset / no one saw / his eyes were closed / my
eyes were closed / neither of us knew the color / of the monstrosity
until later / i was laid / out torn / through / abandoned / on the hill
/ i rushed into a tomb of my own making / for years my body / made
appearances / on the other side / but always went back to the grave /
no one saw / not even me // i'm getting another chance / now to make
the ascent / to embrace the execution / this time out of love / out of
free surrender / to place a placard above my battered body that reads
/ *this suffering is not - who i am - but who - i am - is someone who
accepts - this suffering* //

v.

that one tried to wash his hands of me / that one kept pouring fresh
water in the basin / that one tried to mount the case against me /
that one tried to trap me with floral-scented questions and flaunted
the protocols / my preaching my teaching my message my love /
unreceivable / that one wonders whether to believe me / that one is
still trying to rile the crowd / assemble the rabble / break my bastion-
body / that one is telling everyone to go home / that one can't be
convinced to walk away / those ones will one day / have to reckon
with / their misplaced desires / for now they have done their job / well
because i no longer / want to go to sleep / and now those ones watch
me fall / to my knees / and remind me that my legs aren't / broken / i
decline the terms of the game / and play until / i decide / it is finished
//

vi.

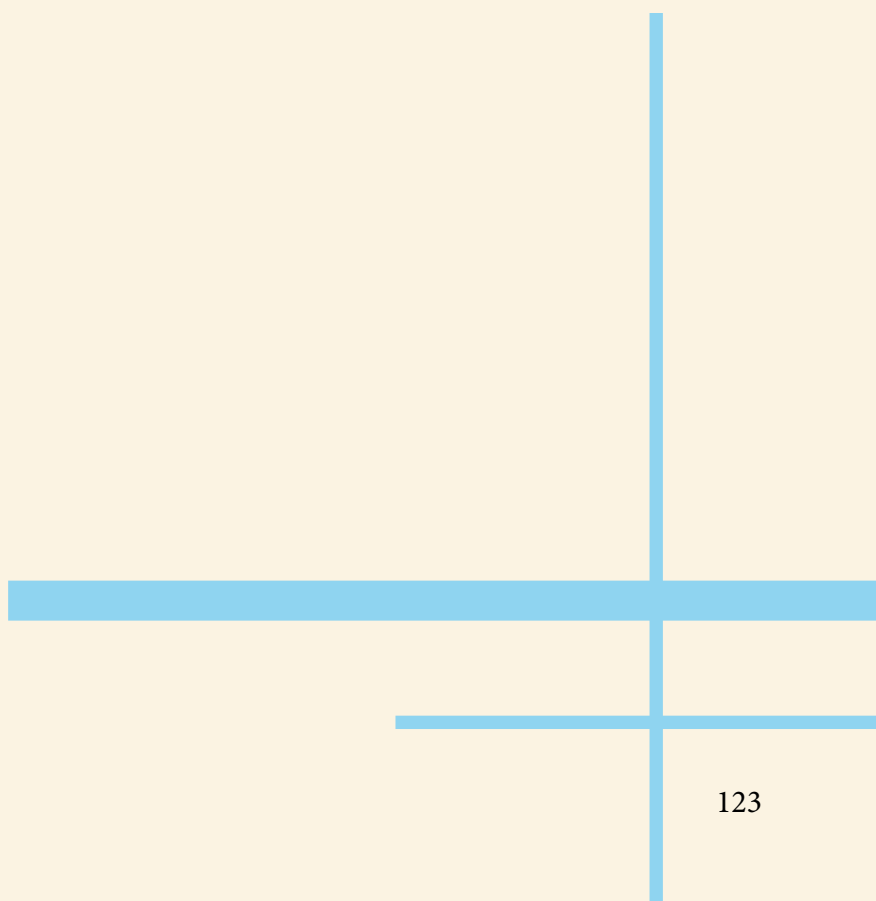
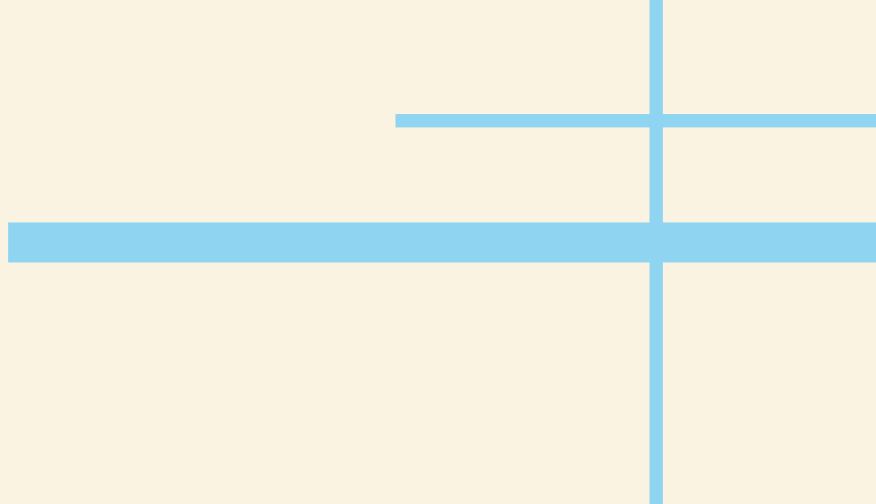
you've never seen / love like this before / you've never seen power
/ refuse to dominate / you've never had to look into the well / the
chalice / the jug / the fountain / and find such latent evil / where living
water / should be / you've never dared believe that nothing / was the
answer / that emptiness was the solution / that getting it right could
hurt / you've never been asked to raise you eyes beyond the dust / but
here / i am / on the hill / and you can't look away / listen to me refuse
/ those small consolations / agonize / pray a prayer you / can hardly
imagine / *forgive them* // only the sleep-walking malice missionaries /
and soul-shattered beloveds / remain which one / are you //

vii.

for the stories / he was willing to tell / about the least / among us the
woman / at the well / the overlooked outcast / for the hands / he laid
on this blistered breasts / and blood-forsaken feet / and corrupt but
contrite souls / for the wounds he was willing to kiss / for the love
made visible in his eyes / they have come to kill him / he wept / and
then said yes // for the stories / i am willing to tell / about the great
chain of being / and the seeds that belong to rocks / for the hearts i
have gathered / at the gate of enchantment / for the hate i refuse / to
ingest for the battle i fight / without a single weapon / for the dreams
/ in which we say yes / and mean it / they have come / to kill me / so i
weep too / and then say yes //

viii.

if someone must be blamed / blame me / if someone must be mocked
/ mock me / if someone must be eliminated / eliminate me / this is
how / i prayed my prayer / is being answered / i choose / this death /
for what it is / the end of a lie / the birth of my first / freedom //





AARON FU
untitled





Matilda Rose Cantwell



Gratitude Works: A Post Pandemic Poem

Gratitude works they say,
but that has sounded to me like
count your blessings
in 21st century clothes,
and didn't we try
to end all that,
didn't we see
that we are all half empty cups
sipping on what there is of our lives
with its grit and aftertaste,
isn't it just what we swallow
to quench the thirst of our compromises,
again, and again?

I thought maybe
they don't know anything about
the tragic collision
of the *already* and the *not yet*
that happens
at every single intersection
of every single hour
these days now that
my children are young men
and time has stamped righteously
on those days they admonish us
to savor.

I thought maybe
they don't know anything about
what happened that summer
which was that some of us had the same
bad dream over and over
and others of us changed our Facebook logos
and went out to be among others
marching masked in the streets
to that same mournful drum
not all of us had ever
heard before.

I thought maybe they don't know
how Myra's mother died from Covid not after
she got to the hospital,
but because she did,
or about all the workers
in the meat factories for whom
there was no remote work but the same commute
on rutted roads
their tiny funerals
their bewildered children already
home from school.

But now, ever since this season turned
and we let our November campfires
-where we had tried to enjoy our blanketed company
from far away
but instead had fretted about politics in the dark-
burn down,
and we returned to these old rooms,
with the windows open,
ever since several
came back from
the virus despite that
so many,
so many,
did not, ever since
we realized we didn't
have to live by lies alone

I began to try it.

And I decided I would not bow down
to those Gods of erasure and their tricky
amnesia-inducing schemes
their monetizing memes,
and it worked.

And I decided I would not forget
the baking and the card games
of our lonely winter
or community care
or decarceration
or mutual aid

I decided I wouldn't go back
To the normal I had been waiting for.

Since then I have been saying thank you.
Thank you.
Thank you.

MICHAEL OAKES

Transcendance through Divine Storytelling

Each consciousness is a personal universe. It's the telling of a story that far exceeds the best movie or the most captivating novel, for each moment is filled with the complete richness of experience. It's a story whose main character isn't an imaginary construct, but is real flesh and blood, perfectly emersed in the trials and joys of their life. It's a story of everything. It's a story of you.

Yet why was such a story written, and by whom?

Let's imaging this author for a moment. Before they put pen to paper – before they release the words that bring you into existence – first they must decide. Will this be a character driven story, or will this be a plot driven story?

This is the eternal writer's dilemma. On the one hand, the writer knows how the story should progress. The temptation is difficult. If we don't force our characters to perform the necessary actions, how will we get them to the twist before the surprise ending? Every good writer knows that logic leads to a story where the characters become boxed in by plot – where the writer sacrifices the characters' essence to create the desired universe. It's a utopia where all walk destiny's path with dead eyes.

So, the writer chooses the harder path. They sacrifice their desired plot. They take a risk, and they let the story go where it may. Instead, they imagine their characters – as vivid and interesting as they can make them – with their struggles, and their faults, and all the back stories that define them. Then the writer steps back and watches. They become a transcriber, recording what happens as the characters create their own story. The story starts to take on a life of its own, going in unexpected directions that surprise and delight even the author. Such stories seem rich, pulling us in with characters that feel real and alive.

So, the cosmic author, being a wise author, ponders briefly ... and then hands the pen to you.

How can that be? How can the character write the story, for they themselves have yet to be written?

Well, is that not what you are doing at this very moment – with every movement and breath – with every thought and choice you make?

It's a strange dance between writer and character, because every character is drawn from the essence of the writer's experience. Every character is the writer. How could it be any other way? To tell the story, the writer doesn't ascertain character's actions based on some decision rubric using character traits and backstory. The creative process is not scientific but experiential. The writer puts themselves into the character's shoes, and then decides what they'd do if they were that character. A person that truly loves writing forgets themselves in the process, and they become immersed in their characters and their universe. The creative spirit that brings joy to the artistic process happens when the writer becomes the character.

So, when the cosmic author hands the pen to you, they are really handing the pen to themselves.

It's a strange duality, I know. I cannot prove it, but it feels right. Each of us is both the creator and the creation.

Does it not feel that way each moment of your life? Are you not telling your story with each action, with each choice?

Sure, there are unexpected twists and turns. How could there not be? There are close to eight billion other main characters running around at this very moment, each choosing their own story – and that's only if you count the humans. Yet even when the unexpected arises – and I've yet to find a day when it does not – do we not choose how we perceive and react to it?

We are each the creator.

You can take that metaphorically if you'd like. Yes, we all have a hand in the outcomes and perceptions of our life. We are, in a sense, moment by moment creating our personal stories.

I prefer to take it literally.

There is an actual, divine creator who sprung this universe into being from their cosmic consciousness. And what was such a creator to do? Sit around bored and watch the clockwork play itself out? That's just...boring. Why not instead create you, and create me, and all the rest of us, and in that moment of creation forget you're the creator. Instead, go into the universe you've made – but go in with real stakes – with love, life, and hope, all on the line.

That sounds much more interesting to me.

Perhaps that's why I created it that way.

I'm kidding though. It was you who created it.

I know. I know. It's all too crazy to believe. We designed it that way, remember? Otherwise, we'd get smart to it, then the whole game would be up. It's dreadfully boring to know you're G-d in disguise. It takes all the stakes out of it.

So, for now, forget I said anything about you being the creator. Instead, flip back to that other duality, the one where there's still a creator, but it isn't you.

What can we say about that creator?

Well, it must be a benevolent creator, because it decided to give you freewill.

Admit it. The universe is more interesting that way.

For a moment, allow yourself to feel the magnitude of that idea – that the creator didn't create your future, but only you. It was you that took the detailed work – that magical spark of consciousness somehow integrated with your body and brain. It took some serious tinkering to get that just right – to tuck the freewill beneath the seams of reality, never quite visible.

Anchor yourself to that idea. The divine creator is not just popping in occasionally to see what you're up to. Why would the creator go to such trouble to create freewill if they didn't intend to be right there with you the whole time, watching what you might do with amazed fascination? And why would the creator only watch? Why wouldn't they experience the story with you – or even as you? Afterall, isn't that the best way to read a good story – to let yourself be fully absorbed in the characters?

Pause for a moment and allow yourself to feel that divine presence within you – that inner awareness watching – experiencing ... you. That's how interesting you are. That's how amazing.

Try to feel it as you move through life – that divine, aware presence within yourself. Know that each moment you are defining your story to the creator, and that whatever you do, however bad you mess up or let things go astray, it's still an amazing story. Afterall, you're still here, aren't you? No one's changed the channel yet.

It's like mediation. At first the experience may only last a few seconds, then life will jump in and seize you, and you'll forget. Maybe a day or two later you'll remember again and stop to feel that presence within – still there, still aware and with you. Then, life takes hold again.

There's no rush. There's no frustration in forgetting. Sometimes it's more interesting to forget, after all.

Just know it's there, present and loving your story.

It's always there.

Because it's you.



Laura Budofsky Wisniewski



The Stink Bug

Sweetness, here he is again,
with his buzz of reincarnation,
hanging from the edge
of the white gauze curtain
the color of sick bark.
I gather him
in the torn blue rag
carry him, a thing of no weight,
down the long unlit flight of stairs
to the toilet, flick him in
before he can spew his stink
of rot and bitter cucumber.

But here he is again.
And he is speaking.
Look at me, he says.
The hump on my back,
my knobbed eyes.
I know I crawl as if maimed
somewhere inside my body,
my legs pointing
to all the unblessed directions.
Led by nothing
but these flimsy antenna
I find my way back
from the underworld to you.
Yes, back through shit to you.

Sweetness, he says,
Look at me.
Look at me until I'm beautiful.

Kristy Snedden

soft girl, sharp edges

*New NASA Visualization Probes the Light-bending Dance of
Binary Black Holes*

—Frances Reddy, NASA, 2021

*Shocking New Observation: Merging Black Holes Really Can
Emit Light*

—Ethan Siegel, Forbes, 2020

I want to tell you something
from the hole at the back of my heart,
except I'm not sure I can speak and if I could
what words would come?

The smallest tremor
the slightest breath,
(yours? mine?)
becomes an invitation to curiosity.

99% oxygen, hydrogen, nitrogen,
carbon; hydrogen the biggest in us,
that element of uncertainty,
we are 62.9% surprise.

Tenderness tiptoes around this simplest molecule,
past its subatomic particles and into the star culture
as it folds on itself. It doesn't fade or become smaller,
but folded, you no longer see it.

Like that hole at the back of my heart,
when you close your eyes, colors
wash through and atoms dance in and out.

If you could describe it aloud,
people passing by would fall
down in the street.

Instead, they stroll on sidewalks
and check their reflections in windows
where the light glints.

An abstract geometric design featuring a dark red square in the upper left quadrant. A thick, light red horizontal line crosses the square and extends to the right edge of the page. A thin, light red vertical line crosses the square and extends downwards. The text 'ANESA MILLER' is written in a white, serif font, centered within the dark red square.

ANESA
MILLER

Aphorisms on the Origins of Love

*For the stranded refugees
of Nogales, Sonora*

Ours is a wet planet, red in tooth and claw.
Here, we came before the science of names.

Turn where we may, windows of souls
glow from the dawn of longing.

We made homes on a plain of river oxbows,
seat of sorcery for slow childhoods,

shadows of mountain, nooks of cliff,
table-land strewn with every geology,

where swans' wings defy gravity in rampant play
over marsh dusted with down, cradled in clay.

In years of daylong
mornings, newborn light
in a striking of
blue glass on wooden ledges,
rising hoodoo-spindles
born of caressing wind,
ages of lesser heartache
passed like our chosen pain.

Horizons span the mind's canvas,
we rose to stake this claim.

Each child knows we loved
in every lifetime,
perhaps the only way
love could crack a pupa
of sullen instinct —
fully, in a single beam,
whomsoever the other
may have been
— brows, mouth, glance,
immortal words
or chance anecdote,
through lost epochs,
or winged moments.

Off we set on journeys, before slow-walkers noticed.
Quick or endless, none can promise.

Who among us could get far alone?
What has our species, single-minded, yet initiated?

Can we stride upright, an unseen path, at unique points in time?
Have we translated passions into a true design?

Yet on every tith, a way runs out before us
as mesas, eye-dry, proffer laden riches.

This is the riddle
wrapped in song
we learned
not to try
too hard to solve.
For don't we all,
one day pause,
parched and lonesome,
footsore, loathsome,
at a dusty crossroads,
a rocky ford,
or by the ruin
of some mythic church?

And if our days
are anywhere recorded,
that book must affirm
in plainest statement
that we spawned
what bears the name
of love
in spite of onslaught,
drought and twister,
migration and disaster,
in spite of mob rule
that scatters every sect,
shatters every tool,
spreads the epidemic
of fresh obsession,
fever, travesty,
and puts the lie
to kinder history.

So we loved us,
whensoever,
as at this moment
water fills its many forms
and seeks its every level.

How can it be more or less than what is fated,
matter or energy, within our knowing, never once negated?

If two or more may be annealed as one,
what miracles await, yet to be done?

Across these earthly plains and shining spaces,
lush freshets and ebbing tides,

wise persons seek it still:
our deity of many faces.

Lucia Cherciu

Somebody Thought of You and Reached Out

There is a river of generosity in that house,
a fountain for lonely travelers every night.

In the village where I was born, there is a well
with a pole thirty feet high, balancing a bucket

where thirsty travelers can rest and quench their thirst
even across the ocean at night, on another continent.

There is a well of kindness in that house,
that sends its light to the moon,

gathers secrets and mysteries, stays up till dawn
to shine its diamonds. Around the table

in that house, friends are gathering to tell stories
to remember the joy, enthusiasm, and faith.

Create your own table. Use the good teacups;
don't save them. Put away the ugly chipped plates

nobody picks; resist the pressure of useless things on sale.
In the village where I was born, on the top of the hill

you'll find a *troița*, a cross where you pray.
Sometimes the well and the cross are together.

Somebody thought of you and reached out,
so you can enjoy the respite of the minute

when somebody prayed for you, somebody
sent you gifts from a hundred years ago.

Michael McCormick

Solstice

An ice-rimed pine
turns the starry wheel

Saturn in the treetops
Venus in the house of bread

At the last minute
on the darkest night of all

Earth tilts toward love

J.M.R. Harrison

Angel with One Scorched Wing

He could have blamed the damage—
one piebald wing—sooty burnt black
and singed gray feathers marring

glossy white—on soaring like Icarus
too close to sun's fierce lens. The truth
was more mundane. He did not fall

but merely drifted half-heartedly
into rebellion, sidled close to the sins
of pride and anger, but repented

and retreated before eternally trapped
in a fiery hell. Unhealed and placed
on probation, he found his glory as guide

and guardian to those missing the mark,
patron to sinners, the lost, those astray
and confused. He whispered questions

that infiltrated dreams and altered lives:
did that choice serve the deep desire of the soul?
what is hidden that needs to be brought forth?

what change, what amends, would restore,
re-story, sow harmony, peace, and joy?
He was favored of the Paraclete, honored

among angels, called Liberator by his peers.
Offered pardon with purified, unsullied wing,
he clung to his charred state, rising, one wing

still blackened, the other radiant as newfound love.
Remembrance and redemption, his witness that only
one who stumbles and falls short, can rise in splendor.



Mahyar
Afshar

Coincidings: A Ghazal

I tap, tap on the phone, a fly buzzing on a window, wanting out.

I want into—coinciding.

The baby born, the baby toddles. Feels the totter of a rolling world,
her every step a coinciding.

The lovers feel not a body, his or hers, but a blood-corridor
crossing in between.

A passage made kaleidoscopic. Mirrors with mirrors, coinciding.

The aging know it. Bound in a dense contract are mind and body.
One stroke, and it's burst asunder, as if mind and body:
but a passing coinciding.

In a burst of chaos, all the universe came to be. A cosmic tide
leaving enclaves
Of the orderly: a sun, planets, whirling in their living rockpools.
Order and Chaos coinciding.

From a bus window, the widower sees an ugly sweep of suburb passing.
In the distance,
The line of mountains falls and rises, with the knell of a belfry coinciding.

I too, the Moon's Friend, am incidental. In the diamond of a fence,
a sparrow perching.
A harried mind that holds fast by twig-feet—with all the world,
narrowly coinciding.

David Sheskin

The Rebirth of Emmett Till
in the Garden of Eden



DASHIELSON

CONTRIBUTOR BIOS

Mahyar Afshar lives in Chicago and has worked in the (mostly unpoetical) fields of insurance and logistics. Born in Iran, he grew up in sunny Southern California, leaving him grossly unprepared for his later life on the cold steppes of the Midwest. His interests include poetry, cooking, hiking and putting on airs with his shaky knowledge of foreign languages.

Carol Alexander's most recent collection is *Fever and Bone* (Dos Madres Press, 2021). Her work has been widely published in anthologies and journals such as *About Place Journal*, *The American Journal of Poetry*, *Caesura*, *The Common*, *Cumberland River Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Matter*, *Mobius*, *Numinous*, *One*, *Pif*, *Potomac Review*, *Ruminate*, *San Pedro River Review*, *Southern Humanities Review*, *Stonecoast Review*, *Sweet Tree Review*, [Terrain.org](https://terrain.org), *Third Wednesday*, *Verdad*, and *The Westchester Review*. Additional work is forthcoming in *Delmarva Review*, *Free State Review*, and *RHINO*. With Stephen Massimilla, Alexander is co-editor of *Stronger Than Fear: Poems of Empowerment, Compassion, and Social Justice* (Cave Moon Press, 2022).

Erica Appleton was born and raised along the Cumberland River in Tennessee. She currently resides in Charleston, South Carolina where she is an MFA candidate at the College of Charleston. She works in prose, poetry, and photography. In her free time, Erica hikes the eastern coastal trails and tries to catch sunsets on Isle of Palms with her dog, Toby.

A spiritual director, bigender person, and quasi-hermit, **John Backman** (she/her) writes about gender identity, ancient spirituality, encounters with place, and how they collide from time to time. This includes personal essays in *Catapult*, *Typehouse Literary Magazine*, *Tiferet Journal*, *Amethyst Review*, and *Sufi Journal*, among other places. John has twice been named a top 10 creative nonfiction finalist in the Wild Atlantic Writing Awards.

Alex Blum is a writer and fundraiser from San Diego, CA. His stories and poems have appeared or are forthcoming in the *Texas Review*, *Santa Clara Review*, *Midwest Quarterly*, *Sequestrum*, *Litro*, *Hobart*, *Necessary Fiction*, *Glass Mountain*, and *Open Ceilings*. Please visit www.alexblum.org to read more of his work.

Matilda Rose Cantwell is serves as chaplain and director of Religious and Spiritual Life at Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts, where she lives with her spouse, two sons, and small dog. She has also worked as a clinical social worker, community organizer, and youth pastor in a diverse rural church. She has been writing for as long as she can remember, and currently composes sermons, pastoral letters, poems and lists of things to do. Her interests include transformative justice, interfaith dialogue, religious pluralism, and transporting her sons to soccer and track practices. She is an avid cyclist, an aspiring gardener, and an outdoors woman though she cannot read a map.

Lucia Cherciu writes both in English and in Romanian and is the author of five books of poetry, including *Train Ride to Bucharest* (Sheep Meadow Press, 2017), a winner of the Eugene Paul Nassar Poetry Prize. She is the 2021 Dutchess County Poet Laureate, and her work was nominated three times for a Pushcart Prize and twice for Best of the Net. She teaches English at SUNY/Dutchess Community College. Her web page is <http://luciacherciu.webs.com>. @CherciuLucia

Alison Davis is an educator, author, and activist in Northern California. She holds degrees in literary studies from Very Prestigious Universities but sees her willingness to be like Rumi and gamble everything for love as her greatest credential. Her work has appeared

in numerous literary and scholarly publications, including *The Sun* and *SAUTI: Stanford Journal of African Studies*.

Allison Douglas-Tourner lives in Victoria, BC, Canada. Her poetry has been published in *The Antigoni Review* and *Island Writer Magazine*, and received honorable mention in the *Writers Digest* Annual Writing Competition. She believes in the importance of quiet everyday moments.

Dianne Dugaw has published scholarly articles and books in addition to creative stories in magazines including *BlueLine*, *Soundings*, *Slippery Elm*, and *Mount Hope*. Professor of English and Folklore at the University of Oregon, she lectures and performs in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico. Her recording, “Dangerous Examples—Fighting & Sailing Women in Song” (www.cdbaby.com) presents ballads from her book, *Warrior Women and Popular Balladry, 1650–1850* (UChicagoP, 1996). Her childhood on a Pacific Northwest ranch with a musical and religious family and her early convent experience inform her interest in women heroes and her storytelling.

Kelly DuMar is a poet, playwright and workshop facilitator from Boston. She’s author of three poetry chapbooks, and her fourth is upcoming from Lily Press, 2023. Kelly’s poems, prose and photos are published in *Bellevue Literary Review*, *Tupelo Quarterly*, *Thrush*, *Glassworks* and more. Kelly serves on the Board of the Transformative Language Arts Network, and produces the Open Mic Writer Series for the *Journal of Expressive Writing*. She blogs daily at kellydumar.com/blog.

Laura Foley is the author of eight poetry collections. *Everything We Need: Poems from El Camino* was released, in winter 2022. *Why I Never Finished My Dissertation* received a starred Kirkus Review, was among their top poetry books of 2019, and won an Eric Hoffer Award. Her collection *It’s This* is forthcoming from Fernwood Press. Her poems have won numerous awards and national recognition—read frequently by Garrison Keillor on *The Writers Almanac*; appearing in Ted Kooser’s *American Life in Poetry*. Laura lives with her wife, Clara Gimenez, among the hills of Vermont.

Priscilla Frake is the author of *Correspondence*, a book of epistolary poems. She has work in *Verse Daily*, *Nimrod*, *The Midwest Quarterly*, *Medical Literary Messenger*, *Carbon Culture Review*, *Spoon River Poetry Review*, and *The New Welsh Review*, among others. Anthology publications include *Weaving the Terrain: 100 Word Southwestern Poems*, *Enchantment of the Ordinary*, and *Women. Period*. She lives in Asheville, NC, where she is a studio jeweler.

Eliana Franklin is a recent graduate from the University of North Carolina at Asheville in creative writing and environmental studies. She has previously been published in *Lucky Jefferson*, *The Great Smokies Review*, and *Applause Magazine*. She enjoys exploring nature and writing about her experiences in the outdoors.

Tristan Franz is a writer and educator from Brooklyn, New York. He writes mainly poetry and essays and is interested in topics such as decolonial thought, cultural ecology, and spirituality. He holds an interdisciplinary master's degree in the study of the Americas from The City College of New York. You can find more of his work at <https://linktr.ee/tristanfranz>.

D. Dina Friedman has published fiction and poetry in many literary journals and received two Pushcart Prize nominations for poetry and fiction. She is the author of two YA novels, *Escaping Into the Night* (Simon and Schuster) and *Playing Dad's Song* (Farrar Straus Giroux) and one chapbook of poetry, *Wolf in the Suitcase* (Finishing Line Press). Her short story collection, *Immigrants*, is forthcoming from creators press in 2023. Originally from New York City, Dina now lives in western Massachusetts next door to a farm with 500 cows. Dina has an MFA from Lesley University and teaches at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Visit her website at <http://www.ddinafriedman.com>.

Aaron Fu (they/them) is a Asian American artist who has been practicing studio art for 14 years. They are experienced in oil paint, acrylic, watercolor, gouache, ink, graphite, marker, pastel, charcoal, sculpture, canvas stretching, and multi-media art. Over the pandemic,

they've started transitioning from traditional into digital art using the free mobile app Ibis PaintX, their finger, and cracked phone. Aaron is currently a second year majoring in bioengineering and biochemistry and on co-op, working two jobs as a EMT and medical scribe. They are looking for undergrad research opportunities and preparing to apply to medical school.

Michael S. Glaser, Professor Emeritus at St. Mary's College of Maryland, served as Poet Laureate of Maryland from 2004 – 2009. He now co-leads retreats which embrace poetry as a means of self-reflection. He is the co-editor of *The Collected Poems of Lucille Clifton* (BOA 2012) ([more at http://www.michaelsglaser.com](http://www.michaelsglaser.com)).

Gurleen Grewal is Associate Professor in English at the University of South Florida, Tampa. She has authored a book on Toni Morrison and published various essays of literary criticism on contemporary women writers. She is currently querying publishers for her completed memoir, *The Oxbow and the River*.

Edward Gunawan is the author of two chapbooks — *The Way Back* (winner of Start a Riot! Prize, forthcoming from Foglifter Press) and *Press Play* (Sweet Lit). His work has also appeared in *TriQuarterly*, *Aquifer: Florida Review Online*, and *Intimate Strangers* anthology. A queer Indonesian-born Chinese immigrant, he now resides on Ohlone land in Oakland, CA. Visit addword.com for more.

Lydia Gwyn's stories, poems, and essays have appeared or are forthcoming in *F(r)iction*, *Poetry Salzburg Review*, *Elm Leaves Journal*, *the Journal of Compressed Creative Arts*, *Kaleidoscoped Mag*, and others. She is the author of the flash fiction collections *Tiny Doors* (2018, Another New Calligraphy) and *You'll Never Find Another* (2021, Matter Press). She lives in East Tennessee with her family and works at East Tennessee State University as an instruction librarian. Find her online at lydiagwyn.wordpress.com.

Joseph Hardy, a reformed human resource consultant, lives in Nashville, Tennessee. His work has been published in: *Appalachian*

Review, *Cold Mountain Review*, *Inlandia*, *Plainsongs*, and *Poet Lore* among others. He is the author of a book of poetry, *The Only Light Coming In* (Bambaz Press, Los Angeles, 2020).

J.M.R. Harrison has created and led workshops in fear, faith, poetry, play, and creativity. She studied poetry at the independent Writers' Center in Bethesda MD for over a dozen years and is a 2016 graduate from the low residency MFA program of Spalding University in Louisville KY. Her poems have been published in *Antietam Review*, *Spillway Magazine*, *Pensive Journal* and featured in *Fluent Magazine* and *The Good Newspaper*.

Kat Hart (she/her) is a writer living and working in Kansas City. Her poetry and flash fiction have appeared in the *Feathertale Review* and *Offbeat Pulp*.

Gloria Heffernan is the author of the poetry collection, *What the Gratitude List Said to the Bucket List* (New York Quarterly Books) and *Exploring Poetry of Presence: A Companion Guide for Readers, Writers, and Workshop Facilitators*. She has written two chapbooks: *Hail to the Symptom* (Moonstone Press) and *Some of Our Parts* (Finishing Line Press). Her work has appeared in over one hundred journals including *Dappled Things*, *Presence*, *Braided Way*, and the anthology, *Without a Doubt: Poems Illuminating Faith*, forthcoming from New York Quarterly Books.

Grey Held is a recipient of an NEA Fellowship in Creative Writing and the winner of the 2019 Future Cycle Poetry Book Prize. Three books of his poetry have been published: *Two-Star General* (BrickRoad Poetry Press, 2012), *Spilled Milk* (WordPress, 2013), and *WORKaDAY* (FutureCycle Press, 2019). He offers a weekly online poetry workshop (Poetry Round Table) for professional poets. He is also a literary activist, who through civic involvement connects contemporary poets with wider audiences (www.poetryinplace.com).

Nitza Hernández-López is a bilingual Puerto Rican poet and visual artist living in Salem, Oregon. Her poetry has appeared in several

printed and online anthologies such as */pān |dé |mīk /2020: An Anthology of Pandemic Poems*, *Antologías de Poesía Oregoniana*, *Terra Incognita* (Oregon Poets), *Verseweavers*, lalibreta.online, hojanegra.com, and *vozdevoces*. She has won poetry awards from the Oregon Poetry Association (OPA) and the Instituto de Cultura Oregoniana. With a PhD in Communication Arts from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, she published numerous papers throughout her academic career. Nitza practices yoga and meditation, and volunteers as a radio producer for the Latinx community radio station.

Madronna Holden has taken the opportunity of her recent retirement from university teaching to concentrate on her first love—poetry. Over 60 of her poems have appeared in *Verse Daily* (as poem of the day), *The Bitter Oleander*, *Equinox Poetry and Prose*, *The Clackamas Literary Review*, *The Timberline Review*, *Fireweed*, and elsewhere. Her poems written in concert with the watercolors of David Wolfersberger painted on his 3500 solo bicycle tour of the West Coast, have appeared in *Cold Mountain Review*, *Puerto del Sol*, *The Slippery Elm Literary Journal*, *The Chestnut Review*, *The Santa Clara Review*, and elsewhere. Her chapbook, *Goddess of Glass Mountains* was published by Finishing Line in 2021.

Kim Horner is author of *Probably Someday Cancer: Genetic Risk and Preventative Mastectomy* (The University of North Texas Press, 2019). Her work has appeared in *The Dallas Morning News*, *Seventeen*, *Minnow Literary Magazine*, *805*, and *Parhelion*. She has an MFA in creative writing from The University of Arkansas at Monticello.

Katharyn Howd Machan is a professor in the Department of Writing at Ithaca College. She has served as coordinator of the Ithaca Community Poets and director of the Feminist Women's Writing Workshops, Inc. Her poems have appeared in numerous magazines, anthologies, textbooks, and collections (most recently *Dark Side of the Spoon* from Moonstone Press in 2022 and *A Slow Bottle of Wine*, winner of the Comstock Writers' Jessie Bryce Niles Chapbook Competition, in 2020), and she has edited three thematic works, including *Adrienne Rich: A Tribute Anthology* with Split Oak Press.

Paul Jaskunas is the author of the novel *Hidden* (Free Press) and a novella forthcoming from Stillhouse Press. Since 2008 he has been on the faculty of the Maryland Institute College of Art, where he teaches courses in literature and creative writing, and where for the past five years he has edited the art journal *Full Bleed*. His fiction, poetry, and journalism have appeared in numerous periodicals, including *The New York Times*, *America*, *Tab*, *Fare Forward*, and *The Comstock Review*. He lives in Maryland outside Washington D.C.

Mark Jodon is the author of *Day of the Speckled Trout* (Transcendent Zero Press). His poetry shows up in unexpected places - in a doctoral dissertation, read in contemplative worship services, exhibited with a photography exhibit in a city hall. Mark lives in Houston, Texas and is an Iconoclast Artist.

Susan Johnson received her MFA and PhD from the University of Massachusetts Amherst where she teaches writing. Poems of hers have recently appeared in *Rhino*, *Into The Void*, *Trampoline*, *Steam Ticket*, *Front Range Review*, and *SLAB*. She lives in South Hadley, MA.

Vendula Kalinova is a Visual Artist, Designer, and Author originating from the roots of Czech Republic. She has created a multidimensional body of published work in Fashion, Visual Arts & Home Decor. While her focus for the past several years has been Intuitive Art combined with Spirituality, Meditation, and Poetry; her narrative has naturally expanded into the world of literary work. Her inspiration has served as a unique derivative offering visual & written expression through spiritual perspective and led to her latest project *Color Your Soul - Outside the lines - Meditative Mandala Collection Poetry Coloring Book*, published in January of 2022.

Yuna Kang is a queer, Korean-American writer based in Northern California who is currently attending UC Berkeley. She has been published in journals such as *Strange Horizons*, *Rising Phoenix Press*, and more. Their website link is: <https://kangyunak.wixsite.com/website>.

Diane Kendig's most recent poetry collection is *Woman with a Fan: On Maria Blanchard*, and the chapbook, *Prison Terms*

(finalist for the Cathy Smith Bowers award). A recipient of awards from the Ohio Arts and National Humanities Councils, as well as the Fulbright Foundation and Yaddo, she has published poetry and prose in journals such as *The Ekphrastic Review*, *Under the Sun*, and *Valparaiso Review*. For 20 years, Kendig directed creative writing at the University of Findlay, including a prison writing program. Currently she curates, “Read + Write: 30 Days of Poetry,” with 7,000 subscribers.

Charles Kesler is the author of *The Book of Willie*, a short comedy of poems and prose poems about a Vietnam War Veteran. His poems have been published in *Consequence*, *Veterans’ Voices*, *The Texas Observer*, *Illya’s Honey*, *Red River Review*, and others. He is a three time Pushcart Prize Nominee. He is a Writing Aide with The Veterans Voices Writing Project.

Charlene Langfur is an LGTBTQ and green writer, a Syracuse University Graduate Writing fellowship holder. She is an organic gardener and lives in the Sonoran Desert of southern California. Her many publications include most recently essays in *Smart Set Magazine* and *Still Point Arts Quarterly* and poems in *Weber-The Contemporary West*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *About Place*, and *Helix Magazine*.

Xiaoly Li is a poet and photographer in MA. She is a 2022 recipient of the Massachusetts Cultural Council Artist Fellowship Grant in Poetry. Prior to writing poetry, she published stories in a selection of Chinese newspapers. Her photography, which has been shown and sold in galleries in Boston, often accompanies her poems. Her poetry has recently appeared in *Spillway*, *American Journal of Poetry*, *PANK*, *Atlanta Review*, *Chautauqua*, *Rhino*, *Cold Mountain Review*, *J Journal* and elsewhere; and in several anthologies. She has been nominated for Best of the Net, Best New Poets, and a Pushcart Prize. Xiaoly received her Ph.D. in EE from WPI and her Masters in CS from Tsinghua University in China.

Marisa Lin (she/her) was born in Fujian, China and grew up in Rochester, Minnesota. She is an alumna of the Community of Writers, VONA, and Kenyon Review workshops, with work published or

forthcoming in *Lucky Jefferson*, *Porter House Review*, *Poetry South*, and *Cottonwood Magazine*. She is currently pursuing a Master's Degree of Public Policy at UC Berkeley.

Margaret Lloyd was born in Liverpool, England, of Welsh parents and grew up in a Welsh immigrant community in central New York State. She has published a book on William Carlos Williams's poem *Paterson* (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press) and four poetry collections, most recently *Travelling on Her Own Errands: Voices of Women from The Mabinogi* (Gwasg Carreg Gwalch). Lloyd has also published in journals such as *AGNI*, *Poetry East*, *Planet: The Welsh Internationalist* and *Poetry Wales*. www.margaretlloyd.net.

Andrew Shattuck McBride grew up in Volcano, Hawai'i, six miles from the summit of Kilauea volcano. Based now in Washington State, he is co-editor of *For Love of Orcas* (Wandering Aengus, 2019). His work appears in *Black Horse Review*, *The Cabinet of Heed*, *Crab Creek Review*, *Empty Mirror*, *Pontoon Poetry*, and *Passager Journal*.

Michael McCormick writes stories in his Batman pajamas. Mike's work has appeared in *Braided Way*, *Fickle Muses*, *Flash Fiction Magazine*, *Loud Coffee*, *Roaring Muse*, *Talking Stick*, *Whispering Shade* and elsewhere. Find out more at www.mikemccormick.org.

Anesa Miller is a native of Wichita, Kansas, who currently divides the year between southern Arizona and northwest Ohio. She has taught Russian literature, studied forensic linguistics, and publishes her poetry as widely as possible. Her life partner was the late neuroscientist, Jaak Panksepp, renowned for his discovery of laughter in laboratory rats.

A Best of the Net and seven-time Pushcart Prize nominee, **Julie L. Moore** is the author of four poetry collections, including, most recently, *Full Worm Moon*, which won a 2018 Woodrow Hall Top Shelf Award and received honorable mention for the Conference on Christianity and Literature's 2018 Book of the Year Award. Her poetry has appeared in *African American Review*, *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *Image*, *New Ohio Review*, *Poetry Daily*, *Prairie Schooner*,

The Southern Review, *Verse Daily*, and previously in *Pensive*. She is the Writing Center Director at Taylor University, where she is also the poetry editor for *Relief Journal*. Learn more about her work at juliemoore.com.

Michael Oakes currently enjoys life in Tampa, Florida with his wife and eleven-year-old son. He finds it impossible to watch his son grow and experience the world without seeing everything anew himself.

Thomas Rions-Maehren (Minneapolis, MN, 1993) is a bilingual poet and novelist living in Guayaquil, Ecuador with his wife and puppy. His time volunteering and traveling in countries like India, Mozambique, and Ecuador, along with his studies of philosophy and chemistry at the University of Minnesota, influence his work. When he's not writing, he's probably either trying a new vegan recipe or training for a marathon. His scientific research has been published in ACS Nano, an example of his Spanish-language stories can be found in *Revista Necroscriptum*, and more of his poetry can be found in *The Elevation Review* and at his website: tommaehrenpoetry.blogspot.com. He's on Twitter @MaehrenTom.

Leslie Ryan is a housekeeper in the greenstone hills of Virginia and the sandstone canyons of Utah. For many years she worked in the backcountry of the American West as a wilderness guide and, more recently, helped design and maintain a forest place for contemplation alongside the Southwest Mountains of Virginia. She is the recipient of a Rona Jaffe Award.

Alfonso "Sito" Sasieta is a caregiver, poet, dancer, and father. He works in a L'Arche community near Washington DC, where adults with & without intellectual disabilities share their lives together. He has recently had poems published or forthcoming in *South Florida Poetry Journal*, *The Acentos Review*, *Cold Mountain Review*, *Presence*, *Vita Poetica* and *Sojourners*.

Rev. Katy Shedlock is a United Methodist pastor and poet in Spokane, WA, where she is also an MFA candidate in poetry at Eastern Washington University. She competed for Spokane Poetry Slam at the

National Poetry Slam in 2018, and her poems have been published locally in *The Inlander* and *The Spokesman-Review*. She makes her home with her husband Ben and her dog Salem.

David Sheskin is both a writer and artist whose work has appeared in *Art Portfolio Magazine*, *Puerto del Sol*, *Notre Dame Review*, and *The Florida Review*. His art has also been published within the format of calendars, note cards and prints. His most recent book is *David Sheskin's Cabinet of Curiosities*.

In 2014 **Tomislav Silipetar** graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Zagreb in the class of Igor Rončević-Painting Department. In 2015 he becomes a member of HDLU. In addition to many group exhibitions, he had number of solo exhibitions in Croatia as well as in the other countries. He is the winner of the Rector's Award for Excellence in 2013. The paintings are mostly made in acrylic, and the themes vary from solitude and isolation to the very existence of human existence in the society that condemns. It favors the simple colors, and the line that goes perfectly with the total preoccupation of getting out of the 'boxes' of academy. In 2016 he gained the status of an independent artist.

Kristy Snedden has been a trauma psychotherapist for thirty-plus years. She began writing poetry in June 2020. Her poem "Dementia," was awarded an Honorable Mention in the 90th Annual Writer's Digest Writing Competition. Her work appears or is forthcoming in various journals and anthologies, most recently Snapdragon, Open Minds Quarterly, The Power Of The Pause Anthology, The Examined Life and Anti-Heroine Chic. She is a student at Phillip Schultz's Writers Studio. She writes to stay alive and connected to this turbulent world. In her free time, she hikes in the Appalachian Mountains near her home or hangs out with her husband listening to their dogs tell tall tales.

Prabu Vasan lives in New York State's Hudson Valley. He is a clinical social worker, most recently working in the area of suicide prevention. His work has been published in *6x6*, *Tarpaulin Sky*, *Tricycle*, and the anthology, *I Go to the Ruined Place: Contemporary Poems in Defense*

of *Global Human Rights*. He is working on a first collection of poems titled, *To Find One Another*.

Rebeca Vincent is a writer, editor, and environmental educator with a Ph.D. in Mythological Studies. Her writing centers on water, nature, myth, and the intersection between myth and the environment. Her writing has appeared in various publications, anthologies, literary reviews, and blogs. <https://www.rebecca-vincent.com>.

Ron Welburn, from southeastern Pennsylvania, is of Accomac Cherokee and Lenape descent. His poems have recently appeared in *The Common* (print and online), *Last Stanza*, and *Brilliant Corners*, and his seventh collection of poems is *Council Decisions: Revised and Expanded Edition* (Bowman Books/Greenfield Review Press, 2012). In 2017 he was a returning participant at the 25th Anniversary of the Returning the Gift Native and Indigenous Literary Festival at Oklahoma University. He is now an emeritus professor in the English department at UMass Amherst where he taught American literatures, American studies, Native American studies, and critical writing.

Amanda Coleman White is a poet and storyteller currently residing in Nashville, Tennessee in the US. After focusing her Master's research on a poetic exploration of the persecuted women in her lineage, she decided to embark on a PhD that combines creative writing and Celtic myth. She has been a featured poet with Indolent Press, and has poems published in literary magazines *Obsessed with Pipework*, *The Dawntreader*, and *Ffraid*. Along with this she will have five poems in an upcoming anthology by Sarasvati Press.

Wendi White is a poet and educator now musing among the geckoes and ginger scented ridges of O'ahu after a recent relocation from the continental US. She earned her MFA from Old Dominion University's Creative writing program where she was awarded the Graduate Academy of American Poets Prize at Old Dominion. When not at her writing desk, she can be found shooing African Snails from her garden.

In the topside world, **Ms. Marilyn Whitehorse** teaches academic writing at Kapiolani Community College in Honolulu, HI. In the river

that flows beneath, she is a writer, photographer, and collage artist. Recently one of her collages was nominated for Best of the Web. She has been published in *Trivia*, *Voices of the Feminine*, *Helix*, and *Orange Blossom Review*, to name a few.

Laura Budofsky Wisniewski is the author of the collection, *Sanctuary, Vermont* (Orison Books) which won the 2020 Orison Poetry Prize and the New England Poetry Club's 2022 Sheila Margaret Motton Book Prize. She is also author of the chapbook, *How to Prepare Bear* (Redbird Chapbooks). She was a finalist in the 2022 Narrative Poetry Prize, runner up in the 2021 Missouri Review Miller Audio Prize, and winner of *Ruminate Magazine's* 2020 Janet B. McCabe Poetry Prize, the 2019 Poetry International Prize, and the 2014 Passager Poetry Prize. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Poetry International*, *The Missouri Review*, *The Chicago Quarterly Review*, *Image*, *Hunger Mountain Review*, *Pilgrimage*, *The Examined Life* and other journals. Laura lives quietly in a small town in Vermont.

Valerie Wohlfeld's poems have appeared in *Sewanee Theological Review*, *The Christian Century*, *Image*, *Tikkun*, *Best Jewish Writing 2003 Anthology*, as well as *New England Review*, *Ploughshares*, and elsewhere. Her first collection of poetry, *Thinking the World Visible*, won the Yale Series of Younger Poets Prize. She received an MFA from Vermont College of Fine Arts.

Hanna Marie Dean Wright is a self-taught folk artist residing in Keavy, Kentucky. She uses her experiences from growing up in rural southeastern Kentucky, teaching special education classes, and living with obsessive compulsive disorder to inspire her unique works of art. Hanna Wright uses bold lines and bright colors to create abstract figures with relatable and at times deeply emotional expressions. Hanna was born in Barbourville, Kentucky on April 15th, 1993. Hanna graduated from the University of the Cumberlands in 2015 with degrees in Special Education Behavioral Disabilities and Elementary Education.