



**ATLANTA
REVIEW**

POETRY 2020

Grand Prize Winner

Tina Mai

with Contest Judge

Khalisa Rae

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WELCOME

As the global pandemic continues, poetry continues to offer us many things: comfort, inspiration, motivation, reflection, provocation—but above all, hope. As many of you know, *Atlanta Review* “resides” in a university, and the challenges that face us as we work to continue providing the best possible education for our students are daunting. Yet, I continue to be amazed by the resilience of these young people. They are determined to thrive, no matter the obstacles. This issue is a testament to what these creative young people can accomplish, and we are particularly excited to share poems by two extraordinary young women.

As has become our tradition, we are thrilled to feature the winner of the Dan Veach Prize for Younger Poets. Our managing editor, JC Reilly, selected work by Sarah Uheida, a student at Stellenbosch University in South Africa. We are delighted to add another woman from Africa to our family of poets. Uheida’s poem, “Ribs of Satin, Mouth of Dusk,” is a haunting depiction of the evolution of a relationship between a father and daughter—exquisitely wrought within the cloak of myth.

For our annual international poetry prize, we are grateful for the work of our judge: poet, educator, and activist, Khalisa Rae, whose excellent new book, *Ghost In A Black Girl’s Throat* is forthcoming from Red Hen Press in 2021. Rae was given the task of selecting a winner from our twenty-six finalists—a task I never envy because we always have such a fine collection of poems in the finalist group. Now is a good time to remind everyone that we read submissions blind, and so does our final judge. Imagine our giddiness when we realized that this year’s winner, Tina Mai, also the runner-up in the final 26, is still a high school student! Here is a young poet you need to take note of because we predict great things from her. Of Mai’s work, Rae says: “Caricatures won me over with the eloquence in which it speaks about the loss of culture and a last-ditch effort to remember the beauty and sacredness of one’s vibrant heritage.”

As we steady ourselves for a socially-distanced, pandemic winter, our hope is that these poems remind you that none of us are alone. These are difficult times, but we must believe that patience will bring us to a better place and time. As Rebecca Morton writes for this issue:

Before you lead with anger: remember:
Each October we prune the hardy fuchsia to the ground
for overwintering, clean our shears and wait.
Eight months of deadwood and faith.

Our spring/summer issue will feature poetry from Serbian poets. So, get ready for some travel, if only by way of reading. And, remember, if you love what we do, please tell a friend.

Sending you all much love,
Karen

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Commonwealth

The magnolia blooms its brains
out, the only way it can, denying
any reason I might give not
to. Concentrating on useless
white leaves shading to pink,
which curl over and wave, enticing
bees and what-not with the faint
scent of its sex, mad
with want and want in every branch,
every finger of that branch:
I could argue until the sun
set, it makes no difference—

the magnolia knows only this
and I don't know any better.

Jonathan Aibel

Prayer

Roll the irregular pearl
between thumb and forefinger,
feel the lurch of unruly orbits,
smell the residue
of moon and salt sea,
of spittle and afterbirth.
See the celestial swirl
of epithelial cells,
the iridescent nacre
grown from grief,
the buried irritant.
Place the planet
on the palm's pantomime
where wisdom crosses fate,
see through the scrim
to the teeming world below
lit by the steady heat and glow
of an ancient random wrench,
a stubborn accidental nub,
just enough fin to swerve
and avoid the predator
in the vast pangean sea.
Let slivers of sun
slip into synapses,
let perpetual light
shine upon us.

Lawrence Arancio

My Aunt

She married him when she was forty-six
And he was over sixty, failing fast
From something that the doctors couldn't fix.
Already, several years had hurried past
With gentle pleadings filled and gentler 'no's:
How could she leave her papa in the lurch
Who'd never learned to cook or wash his clothes
And show, again, her countenance in church?

At ninety, he consented to expire.
She mourned him for a year, as was his right
Then wedded what was left of her esquire
As blissful as a blushing acolyte,
Though all the wifely duties still extant
A nurse could do as fitly as my aunt.

Peter Austin

Reflections on a Map Before Going Out

My fingers retrieve the long day
our hands imagined—to Mount Royal,
through McGill, down the Golden Mile
and Ville-Marie back to the hotel—
across water spots and over creases
on the yellowed paper framed on the wall.

I know the time; still I find myself
drawn to these streets— mullions
that make this city into panes, invitations
to lives laid out block by block.

Walk a little with me
again from Hellgate High down Higgins
and on along University, shaded from the heat
that afternoon by leafy maples and oaks
stretching from the verge toward porches
waiting for an approach, then across campus
and up Mount Sentinel to the M. Below us
spread our neighborhoods and grade schools,
downtown, the Clark Fork flowing west.

We can never trace every line of love
and loneliness to its end. One day
meets the next and we turn, corner
after corner . . . yet who else are we?

We will always go up
Mount Vernon past Louisburg Square
and down Walnut, that December evening
edged by gas lamps and brick and clapboard
parting here and there to reveal grand living
rooms. In the Common skaters slide
and scrape across the ice. The cold finds
our bones and arm-in-arm we hurry on.

We may be late but stand with me
here for just a minute. In this light
you can see every route wind through
our lips and eyes and fingerprints.

Michael Barrett

Threshold

Peru is a country transfixed by doors,
beautifully constructed entry-ways crafted
from rectangular blocks of wood, even
in temperament and stature. Doors of pale yellow ocre,
sage or burgundy, carved in intricate block patterns;
simple slats running perpendicular to the floor;
or whole towns with cerulean blue doors
—an ancient relic inherited from the conquistadors—
always affixed with a wrought iron bolt,
almost always never open.

The Incas never utilised doors, only doorways.
Mammoth hexagonal structures of interlocking
masonry with no mortar, a duality of aperture
allowing light in and a daring view out—
trapezoid portals blending geometry
and the natural landscape, embracing the solstices,
the moon, the sun and stars, and in holy places,
wooden poles wedged in doorways to denote
no entry—removed only when nobles
or the sacred stepped over the threshold.

Michèle Betty

Butanding

In Torfino Bay, I swim with a whale shark,
gigantic creature, previously birthed
in my consciousness thanks to National Geographic,
now, an arm's length from my anima.

Its wide flat head and two small eyes watch me curiously,
brown and cream-speckled, its luminous weight weighs on me.
I lick salt and kelp rind from my lips, my goggles fog,
a cool humming radiates from ear canals into clumsy limbs.

Buddists say, when we die, deep attachments and memories
are obstructions. But I'm like a sea horse, tethered by sea grass
to the ocean floor, and hastily, kick my fins, back away,
to halt this striking vision of the life after this one.

Michèle Betty

Note:

Butanding is the Philippine word for whale shark.

Gullah Words

I liked real words,
Craved them really,
Wanted, and desired them,
As if they were morsels of rich oysters
Roasting on the rusted piece of old tin
Lying right on the fire out by the work tables
Where we cleaned fish
And worked on cars
And hung the gutted carcasses
Of hogs and deer.

In the long evenings there
I watched the new fire burn,
Oak, and pine fatwood,
Inky black smoke,
Silent,
Smoke as thick as water
Seeping everywhere
And pouring up and over the oysters
That the old men raked
All over the tin.

From that silence the words
I learned to love,
The only words I trusted,
Were those full of Gullah smoke and black gutterals,
Turning and twisting in the evenings
like snakes sliding up live oak trees.
I never knew which limb
Their heads might appear around next.

The oysters rested voiceless on the fire
Until saltwater sizzled gradually from their shells,
Their whispers now ready for utterance.

I learned to crave words,
True words, real words,

That can only be borne in silence,
So that I might have someone
To share them with.

Sam Candler

Weightless

On the last stop of our last day of vacation,
we check our final box: Poipu Beach,

where, waist-deep in the South Pacific,
ankles neoprened, we kneel, we fin.

Mask clips secured, we swim,
but not too far from shore, freedive

but not too deep—after all, despite
the guard stationed to reel us in, to watch for rips,

tourist flyers all remind us safety lies
in our own hands, which open, fingers-wide,

for paddling. Yet, in this quest for the rarest
tropical fish, iridescence overload,

call me reckless; I kick
with abandon, and as usual, when we share water

bodies, lead. But every sometime-snorkeler knows
heaven's entrance is no snap. Ask Poseidon:

between flippers not made for sand,
waves breaking, body blows when you stand

to steady, and rental gear, always falling apart—
you may not believe you'll ever float

with ease, but if you'll follow me farther
past the tromolo, I'll show you

how I breathe, let go of all we grasp
and question, make my way

from warm predictability, to cooler currents,
down-gazing at the radiant reef.

Sarah Carey

Tomorrow's Forecast

...when there is no forest/ that will be our forest.

—*W.S. Merwin*

The cat's paw waves on the lake make
little exclamation points to remind us that,
although it's beautiful, this water is overheated poison
but we don't pay attention. We know Don't swim.
Don't eat the fish. We know it's Armageddon coming
when we survey the shriveled morning glory,
strangled cedar, thistle run amok. The maples
are not sugar; the Monarchs and fireflies diminish.

We should be crying in our teardrop campers,
but vain, wasted, we wait stupidly, denying the earth
may come undone. We watch as March blows
serious summer into town. I heat up
but I still can't admit what scant flowerings remain
in the waning forest, on our tenement of sun.

Wendy Taylor Carlisle

Elizabeth Bishop and Marianne Moore at the Circus

April 25, 1934

The motivation for your being there among the crowd
is probably not the balance of the high-wire artists,
and surely not the antics of the hapless clowns,
but the animals!—the feathery silk manes
of horses, flaring ears of lumbering
elephants, the fixing gaze of the even stealthier
creature that reminds you of your beloved cats. I imagine
one of you, probably Miss Moore to younger Elizabeth,
at the animals' first parading entrance, saying "Behold!"
The performance is, of course, a matinee,
and no child's eyes are busier than your eyes.

David Curry

Snow's Memory

*Facing wine, I missed night coming on
and falling blossoms filling my robes.*

—Li Po

Fires spring up in intolerable heat while air tankers pick-pocket
the reservoir for rain. For the past three summers July flamed

and burned until the end of October. Most mountains have nothing left
to blister. Hair curls and air shimmers in waves like a shook sheet.

What little water trickles down swims up from springs fifty feet
beneath the scorched surface. Ursus plods, small ash-clouds rising

from the dust of cremated bones: trees who couldn't run; deer and fox,
who despite a final sprint, flickered out. Bear possess no sweat glands,

and Ursus pants like a golden retriever, fur singed from a flaring pine.
The water gap remains green in drought, as rhododendron send straw roots

into the same cup the creek sips. White and pink flowers appear above
leaves where Ursus slips and rubs the branch maze. With back petaled

like a silk robe, he splashes scalded feet in the streambed where a fallen
tulip tree serves as a dam, digging a pool three-feet deep. The bear plunges

belly-first, dunks head, then rolls, as if water were his true bed: floating,
drunk on a blue sky, speckled flowers the color of snow's memory.

Todd Davis

Faremo il Limoncello

Profesoressa brings us down
to the lemon orchard where the trees
form *un cielo*, a roof over
our heads. Lemon angels
fall, rolling in the dirt. I think
they must have angered the citrus
gods. Only some will be chosen
to fertilize the new. Once

inside, yellow-sweet pores slide into place
among my tastebuds, puzzle
pieces recently rejoined. My fog

breath releases onto the window
pane and I stare into
the factory, watching the *angeli
caduti* being squeezed until
popping. *Loro succo*, their insides, will erode
the machine's rotors like they stick
to the corners of my mouth.

Chelsea N. Fabian

The Girl by the Window

The sense of mystery is deepened and complicated by the fact that we cannot see the expression on the girl's face, nor do we know what she covertly observes.

—*The Girl by the Window*, Art Institute Chicago

You had just come home from a movie downtown and were in the kitchen making tea. This was years ago, when you still lived down the street with your ex-husband. The kitchen window facing Sheridan was open, and cutting through the constant rush of cars and buses came the sound of a woman screaming like no screaming you've ever heard. Then sirens and shouting from across the street, from one of the two high rises there. You kept making tea, your hands shaking, your ex updating you from the window though you don't join him, don't want to see who is making that noise or why. Eventually, after what seems a very long time, it is silent. You learn that the woman hanging off her balcony some 30 floors up was rescued. What you later learn is that when this happens again on a night you aren't home, she is not. You have been waiting to put Edvard Munch's *The Girl by the Window* into a poem, but you don't know if she is you or if she is the woman who was temporarily saved. You couldn't look out the window that night in your kitchen, but now you would make yourself bear witness to what is happening around you, will acknowledge that all such moments of salvation are temporary.

Jennifer Finstrom

My Father

like the cat we took in
from the cold—scarred, half blind,
quick skitter and claw—
suddenly on the counter when my back is turned,
stealing Thanksgiving turkey,
then beneath my heel
as I step from the stove. Warm gravy splatters
the floor, my clothes.

I want to scream. I want to
put him out, or lock him in an upstairs room.

And yet
he cannot help what he does
not understand.

I scratch his broken ears, stroke his spine.

I am afraid
of how hard it grows to forgive

his wiry hiss,
his purr as he fattens on all I have dropped.

Jennifer L. Freed

Rhinthon to a Traveler at His Grave

(based on an epigram by Nossis the Epizephyrian, A.P. VII.414)

Stranger, I, a servant of the Muses,
here removed my heavy mortal yoke.
No other gift for me has any uses,
so sit beside my grave, and tell a joke.
My name was Rhinthon. I came from Syracuse,
a nightingale of theater. My song
was high and low, like life. I served a Muse
who wept and smiled. Neither lasts for long.
The ivy wreath I wore, I made. The masks
of Thalia and Melpomene graced
my face together. If a stranger asks
whose tomb this is, say in this earth is placed
a man whose labor was to make men laugh,
and let your joke serve as my epitaph.

Daniel Galef

Cannot

Near the Imperial Palace in Tokyo
a map indicates, among other civic sites,
a homeless shelter, rendered in English as
Shelter For Persons Who Cannot Go Home,
and later that afternoon, in Ginza crowds
we see one meandering homeless woman
parting streams of shoppers and salarymen.
The space they give her aimlessness does not
seem borne from some reflex of revulsion;
could it be respect for her particular *cannot*,
a reverence for the gulf between this fine
spring day, and what no longer exists for her?
We cannot understand what pressures—is it
shame?—are defining her solitude, as we cannot
decipher the pulsing neon characters all above us,
or her trailing mumblings, or the nuances
that spill the gaps between our cultures.
We are caught in fumbblings of I and Thou,
like magnets charged with ambiguous polarity—
circling, feinting, bouncing off unseen forces,
and though we travel through a foreign bustle
for a time, soon we will be going home,
to that consequential place, where we cannot
imagine, really, how transient we might be.

Robbie Gamble

Dispatch from the Hotel Pool

In between days at the Magic Kingdom and Universal Studios, we take a break from the crowds and lines

to lounge by the hotel pool: two sisters, a boy apiece, hers from her belly and pale as our DNA, mine

too golden to have anything to do with me. Above and below, the sky and water are the same

perfect shade of maybe-I-can-catch-my-breath-between-water-basketball-and-mama-lookits, maybe my son

won't need me to wade in and attend to him if another kid will splash in the shallow end with him. Thank you,

little blond girl, whose mother five minutes later calls her over, says something sternly, then sends

her off to the opposite end of the pool. Thank you, little blond girl, for glancing back at my Black son

and slowly over time floating back over, jumping with him again and again into water clearer than any mirror

her mother has ever looked into before she calls her daughter over and scolds her, sends her elsewhere.

I put down my book and consider strolling over to that other mother, all smiles, asking is there

a problem, introducing myself and my son, but then I think of the moms who can't stroll over in way-too-much white skin

to convince a white lady their son's okay, how just the act of walking over sells out women whose great-grandmothers

were sold too many times. So I sit tight, simmer, watch that other mother's assumptions swirl my son like clouds still

too far out from shore to signal danger. For now, just
two children crouched side by side on the ledge

of the shallow end, when another girl runs up, bumps my son,
sends him dominoing into the blond girl who topples in

and comes up crying. I'm up, finding my flip flops, but already
the other mother is clearing a storm path, picking up my son

under the armpits and flinging him—without looking where
or how he'll land—across the concrete. And now I know

I could touch a stranger with both hands—will—but halfway
across the cement I see my son has landed on his bottom,

surprised but unhurt, as I reach the woman who yells
back above my screaming, "I'm sorry, I misunderstood!"

You misunderstood? 1) That my child is worth something?
2) That your daughter's brand of golden isn't worth more?

3) That if you hover like a harpy for hours waiting for something
bad to happen at the hands of my son that eventually anything

bad that happens will be (you think) at the hands of my son?
He is safe, I am shaking and he is laughing—not sure why

that lady touched him or why I'm whiter than usual. And I see
how I'll do things differently from now on: for his sake

I'll step in, flash my too-white smile and send up a silent
apology to all the Black mothers of Black sons I'm betraying

as I try to convince another white woman, this one, my son,
he's alright. (Also this one. And this one. This one. That.)

Megan Gannon

Stand up Paddle Board

We stand on a clear nothing above
a swarm of marble-size jellyfish,
almost water-coloured monads, senseless
and fissile, and then see the larger ones,
severed hands spreading nerve-trails as we learn
balance with the small surges and wakes.
A loose-leaf tea of fish swills at the bottom.

Colour is fig trees, is beach's
demilune, further away than I'd like,
above all, the sky, huge but undermined
by these near-nothings massing
beneath us, until I fall without a splash
through the surface's sealed lips
and for a few moments it's
like touching trodden grapes, or
between grape and wine, only
feelable with fingertip and ear,
not the palm or the foot. I collect
myself back on the board shipwreck-
fashion, to see my children
are almost dissolving, almost gone.

Nature is green and badly lit, or the sea is.
No one knows days as a whole
only as spirals of weather, holders for
events, steps on a progress towards
haze. It's the last day of the holidays.

The swimmers are melting
my offspring have rounded the bay
but here I am again, walking on water.

Giles Goodland

Hunting, with Text

Useless? All happiness all joy that jumps over the line, in line:
ants on the polished rock. Useless joy the word joy
and happiness, something else. In that space in that polishing of
curving time they said while against the ropes, or against the
wire, she said I'm waiting for my husband. And arriving late
he said, I'm a doctor. Rocking ruminating hips improvising.
Like entertainment like part of nothing within the pale evening
like nothing in the loud swaying ropes. While she
laughed in the halls she laughed and held back her head, long hair
asleep in the pond in the mud at the bottom and with
flat pink shoes. She remembers her childhood "the smell of
water from there" on the planks, the wet wood. She remembers
the mother of being the mother of broken dolls. She remembers the
smell of the mother of being the mother of broken dolls.
Cutting into equal parts over planks ropes rinds leaves of
honeysuckle herbs the stone flowers of the stone flowerbeds live bodies
of insects of worms of birds, with that same part of
a knife tattooing the nasal septum the invisible pain it hurts to hear and
tattoo
to smell and chew, hear and tattoo yourself. Something flies it flew away,
it knows.
Something with shoes, terribly flat. The mother to make of
a mother tattooed dolls, their bodies inscribed with ink,
their fingers stained with ink stained with blood, just
her rocking her rounded pelvis against the wires
she says it's not there, and she gathers her hair, and she ties it in a bow.

Silvia Guerra
Trans. from the Spanish by
Jesse Lee Kercheval & Jeannine Pitas

The Catch

Night game at Candlestick toward the end of its days.
June Rockwell, season ticketholder of the so-so Giants,
has lured me out to see the wretched Cubs. First date.
When I pick her up, she asks if I've brought my glove
and I tell her I'm from the Bronx where we do everything
with our bare hands.

Thin crowd, uneventful innings, until two out in the seventh,
when Chicago's lumbering, chaw-spitting right fielder
nicks a rising heater that sails backward several sections
from our box seats into a circular gale like the twister
from *Wizard of Oz*, the ball at its apex still no real concern
twenty rows away.

And yet, in its final moments, the object of common regard
begins to beam intently, inevitably, for my patron's unarmed lap.
I? Bud-Light in one hand, fully adorned bratwurst in the other,
no kidding, I refuse to panic, so the hot dog becomes at last
the missing glove, explodes like a grenade as the seamed orb
makes exceptional contact.

When, after a decent interval, I look up, June, standing now,
a Jackson Pollock of ballpark cuisine—tinsels of pork rind and
sauerkraut in her startled hair, glitter of mustard and relish from
brow to chin—says not a word, does not go to wash up, just lowers
her lightly quaking body. The wind dies down. The home team fails.
We do not speak on the drive back.

Ah, what might have been. But not for me. I'm romantic in that
other way. This way. For this night, no if-only will ever rival what
happened. Watch as we reach June's flat, she turns, caked still
with the spectacle I have made of gallantry and kisses me.
Softly, briefly, decisively. Watch the fog rise to claim her
for the perfect past.

Ken Haas

Rootstock

The walnut tree's gray bark, deeply crenellated,
the accordion pleats where bugs can hide,
skirts around a trunk almost three feet wide.

The fruits with their black staining juice
smell like they look: hulls green and black,
a little tacky, earth and wood and acrid sap.

With no neighbors, it grows wide and lush,
fern leaves overhead ruffling and twinkling,
its deep roots still feeding through the drought.

It is a black walnut tree, just a trash nut,
here in farmland used for rootstock.
So many southeastern plants are used thus.

After the French and Italian grapes fell to Phylloxera,
Vitis vinifera married riparia and rupestris,
thriving as pairs of kissing cousins, fruiting and rooting.

The larger valley seethes with white-painted trunks,
the fused trees making orchards of culinary nuts,
English walnuts among the native almonds.

But Aunt Margaret's chocolate chip cookies
will never be the same with these other nuts;
they need to linger with sharp, dry strength in the mouth,

cold cookies kept fresh on a service porch,
nuts foraged in childhood, then in gourmet stores,
for people who still remember them.

So I know homesickness is a disease that grips your tongue,
the resonance of tannins dictating what you want,
and tricks your brain into thinking: I will make this work,

even if I have to breed and graft the vines and trees,
teach the desired varieties to grow only up,
while the unwanted ones they depend on reach down.

Sallie Hess

Celebration

I once let a pig, pink and gleaming, into my bed to sleep.
I heard it chuffing in the grass outside and went to fetch it

It was a full moon. Blades of grass stood rigid
like snowflake spindles. I offered the pig crisp leeks

and a ripe tomato. She looked in my eyes. She sniffed
my palms, sucked citrus and skin into her snout.

I lived alone when this happened. I never told anyone
how her fat-padded back curled into me like a question,

or that I woke to her wet snout on mine. I named her,
took her to the door in the morning, never saw her again.

The night we slept together, she waited until I arrived
in that gentle, mossy place between worlds and whispered

one inch from my ear. Her voice sounded deep and whole;
I pictured my mother thumping her palm against cantaloupes

at the grocery store, listening for a note that would tell her
the shade of orange inside. The pig murmured that her mother's

milk could have dripped straight from the moon. I don't know why
she told me; perhaps loneliness had settled in her belly, bubbling

deep and slow. Mine started in the elbows, swinging
from bone to bone: humerus to clavicle, down the scapula.

It zipped along each rib like electricity. Maybe the pig
was simply wading through her own half-dream.

But the endlessly dense hooves of her, the verdant
garden breath of her, the water-smooth armpits and

left glistening ear of her, moon-christened, told me
this night was a celebration of having someone to miss.

Hannah Horn

A Precursor to Neurosurgery

Trepanning is to drill into the skull—
or crack it open—to release disembodied
spirits or voices, due to whatever crazy
notion or vision our ancestors had—copious
as they were once—back when wind blowing
was enough to cause universal dread.

Should malicious spirits trespass on kindred—
even though their soul is askew in their skull—
sympathy sometimes drove those to hold blows
and the misguided and formerly disembodied
ghost gained not only corporeality, but copious
powers—the strength that drives one crazy.

Not ordinary crazy, but, a special evil-Crazy.
The crazy behind the eyes that elicits dread
from villagers no matter how assuredly pious.
Larger settlements had some with skill
who performed the ritual and left few bodies
unresponsive after the draining and blows.

His village was small. He knew the blows
would come not from shamans but stir-crazy
hunters looking to leave their angst disembodied,
and a kinless man would find a hundred
holes making a broken canopy of his skull.
For the first time he longed for copious

amounts of kin to protect him. The pious
hurried by him with locked elbows.
He studied the liquid reflection of skull
at the lake all day. Nothing new cried crazy,
but something was causing intense dread
so he stared until his lake self was disembodied.

Everybody
felt pious
dread

Tea House

Please oil the door that creaking sound wellbeing
at one or both ends bolt shape hole
piercing silver nor gold neither help the palmistry
science at parlor's shop where we went after *chaikhana*
asking to hang our bleeding jackets humid
shorr rus shorr rus baran
second by second I counted beats praying for
bodies that remained infinite water
lemon tea honey please

Hajar Hussaini

University of Feelings

I nurse my thesis about Area 51 as you wade into bed—
my eyes are untraceable, two roadrunners

in love in the desert, off to deliver the truth: human progress
making love with the shadow of institution. Secrets can be true

if they don't have clothes on—their power is my impossibility
to reckon with. Looking at a ceiling for too long can be reckless.

There's a sad wren who keeps getting trapped in our porch,
and the memory it keeps blooming is another thing entirely.

My head is full of rain. Many men's are made of lightning.
I want to remember an impossible distance,

want the water before it tumbles over the first set of falls,
to see from the edge of our one injured blind a reassuring smile.

If the neighbor is a fanatical taxidermist, I'll dream his eyeball
nodding through that window like a wild moon.

I'll try to make love with you for the third night in a row,
crazy as a disease. It's possible

we'll never stop wondering how it's possible. A fine life
to betray something as real as the story

our head never gets right, the conspiracy of other times.
Your head is full of rain too, so it's like we've been crying.

Kenneth Jakubas

Winter Barley

When I make beer, soaking
pounds of sprouted grain
to pull out sweetness, tossing

wads of flowered hops
into the boil, our whole house
filling with a tang of bitter steam—

I always think of Jesus,
who might have loved a beer
with his disciples, some last night

drinking and discussing awe, easily,
since beer is wine and bread in one body.
Here in Oregon the wheat grows in winter,

barley too, slowly and greenly rising
through the spring. And summer nights
with friends, hours when our words soak

in unremembered conversation,
joy clattering like empty bottles—
it's easier to be the last one up,

to walk alone some bridge or field,
leave your phone awake beside you,
like that year I knew a friend

troubled even unto death,
who might want to call. Her silence
on the line like a parable of bourbon.

Then late November, when no-one
answers the long dial tone—
god might just be outside, in the rain,
planting next year's wheat.

Erik Jonah

Tomales Bay

*Nymph, in thy orisons, be
all thy sins remembered.*

—William Shakespeare

Last night the moon drizzled mercury
on black water. Orion leaned over
Tomales Bay. I dreamt an animal,
stranded on the shore, slipping nearly
under, eyes reaching human-like
into my core. Huddled in blanket
on the torn-up pier, I try to pray.

Dimmest dawn breathes frail light.
Water, wooded ridge, three moored sloops,
invisibly suspended in grey-soft mist.
The loon glides by, scoring her silent music;
dips her bill twice, then dives, leaving no trace.

Kathryn Jordan

The Invited

Those undead things that suck our mental blood,
what crucifix can merely keep at bay,
they must be tracked to their beds, dug from the mud,
their hearts impaled in the dormancy of day.

We know the story well and need no gloss
to read its allegory right. And yet
our fascination with the fangsome kiss,
the mastering embrace—that, we tend to forget.

The Count could live next door and never bite,
the perfect neighbor, quiet as a tomb,
but for our need to gad about at night,
our tomcat tendency to be bored at home,

and our sickly-social vampire-like unrest
that craves the entrance of the charming guest.

Garret Keizer

The Constellations of Other Countries

Look up at earth's oldest knowledge,
direction to freedom, timing of planting seeds,
start of the hunt, casting of rope from this island
to that planet, the rope lifting good wishes to the dead.

I must go to Australia, soon. There constellations
sprawl in the negative, dark nebulae on milky way,
shapes of flightless birds. My modern children don't know
the shapes we've made from stars: dipper, beehive, plough,

leech, limpet. Look around when everyone's asleep
and bask in death's anthracite light, light of dry cold,
light of newsprint, light without breeze. Can the word
galaxy really come from milk, a warm intimate mouthful?

Tina Kelley

What the Undertaker Said at the Party

Well a box of bones and ashes
weighs about seven pounds
and some days when I'm taking one
to the post office to mail it home,
the neighbors know what I have
and they clear out of the way.
Excuse us, I say. We rake
them out with a special rake,
it's too hot to put your hand
in there. None of it bothers
me now, but early on I had
a body on a table and bent
down to pick something off
the floor, and the arm fell
off the edge onto my head.
I lost it that time, now I never
get spooked. But I know they
have souls and I can feel
them watching me sometimes
to see what I'm going to do
with them. I'll tell you something,
I can tell you this. I couldn't
tell just anybody. I leave
the room, and when I come
back they've changed, they're
not the way I left them. It's
a thing that happens. This thing
that happens to me all the time.

Laurinda Lind

Passé

Cerulean to start.

My gripe is its tryingness,
its too many syllables.

Joined by the tired likes of
liminal, luminous
and numinous, meditative did
and godawful thereafter
overdone.

These here the words
devoid of poem. These here
the haughty list.

All the new talk is about habits.
My oldest one is walking.
Here I've gone and stirred up the flies
attending to a flattened robin on E 350 N.

None of it is blue,
or of spiritual proportions,
until the flies' well-timed return,
one to my calf, the rest to the carcass.
Their compact bodies gleam

a couple colors I won't name here,
given the predominant gray wash
of this country road,
not unrecently paved

and all the same its pieces lodged
in my sandals,
digging into the space
between the balls and heels of my feet
I've got not name for.

Me is typing...
My phone alerts me to the truth.

When I pause, the gray dialogue box
up and disappears.

It's the second
or so lag that captures me,

then the cottonwood,
these all over the freaking place
puffballs, flurried spores creating
a satisfying depth of field
over this asphalt stretch of LaPrairie, Indiana,

the inching of
multifarious shrubs and grasses
toward me, an effort
exceedingly and imaginably green.

Lauren Mallett

Crabapples

Had they been Granny Smiths greener
than the neighbor's Ford with its kicked-in fender
or Honeycrisps rotting under the weight
of their own sweet juice,
had they been Fuji or Gala or Red Delicious,
their ruby skins spackled like lipstick smeared
on a once-loved neck, had they even been Winesaps
too proud and tangy to dream of anything
but their soft bodies mashed into cider,
we would have eaten them,
would have forgotten the mud-churned backyard
where they fell and slept like drunks.
Instead, *crabapples* dropped
in my grandparents' backyard like baseballs hammered
off the bat of Chipper Jones, crabapples
hard as moon rocks, blackening
like medallion steaks fallen into the coals
of an unwatched fire, their meat tougher
than the country ham sizzling
in my grandmother's kitchen, the stench
of sulfur baked into the floorboards. For a time
we hurled them against fence posts and garage doors,
pretended we were pitchers wobbling knuckleballs
into a catcher's weathered mitt,
pretended they were grenades tossed
into those concrete bunkers dotting
the bloody beaches of Normandy.
But come October they rotted too far beyond use,
their skins caving like the muscled chests
of the war wounded corroded by sepsis,
their cores brittle like the bones
of the nearly-dying, and looking into them
was like looking into bashed-in skulls,
maggots wriggling out of the collapsed eye sockets,
their skin shredded as if flayed by barbarians,
and holding them was to feel the weakness
of this place where my grandfather's heart

was clogging and spoiling from the inside out,
where my grandmother refused to see anything
but her crabapple tree blooming
in carmine each spring in that tepid
season of living—though by then it was late fall,
season of the hundred black rains slicking
the smokestacks of West Virginia, season
of pinto beans and fatback and five opaque
pill bottles rattling in my grandfather's hands
as he watched my brother and I smash
the crabapples in the cold rain, his eyes
looking past our bony ankles into the rotted
sweetness of this Eden crammed with coal.

Joshua Martin

Wolfram, my Valentine

Wolfram is an ore white as larvae curled underground,
attached to a root. It flashes fangs and sets off slagging

that devours the cliffs *like a wolf devours sheep*. It snakes
through the Alps, and needs heat rivaling the sun's

blazing surface, to come to a boil. Stir in carbon, and it
percolates, writhes in ovens and is spun like sugar

into strands that lace an electric grid, light up a skyline
ragged as spikes on a lizard's back, my apartment

embedded in clouds. I am deep in a gold leather chair,
my Valentine's Day throne. Beside it, my lover

is kneeling elegant as a priest, a woman who wields
her height like a boat wields its sail, a woman in wolf's

clothing, holding out a small red box, a tungsten ring
inlaid with blue carbon fiber, lighting my hand

with its teeth.

Lynn McGee

Speaking to the Shadows

It's an October dusk in the foothills
of San Diego, and Santa Anas blow the aromas
of buckwheat and sage into my house. Outside
my window, the neighbor's cat splashes
through the Sycamore leaves.

The sound of the calico's steps reminds me
of being fifteen and walking through damp fields.
I remember the muskrat's ghost-like shadow
in the cattails. Here, the wind drives
the leaves against the screen.

Opening the door, I step onto the porch.
I see the clear sky as well as the rim of the horizon.
Stepping inside, a gust of wind bangs
the door bolt against the latch, and
it's like someone shutting the screen.

Then, I remember my brother, John,
who died at 33, and my wife, Patsy, who lived to 57.
As a dust devil swirls across the living-room,
the spinning slows, and the dead appear as
shadow puppets. John, Dad, Mom, and Janet spin to a stop.

Ramon, Vicente, and Patsy step around
a lamp, and I long to become transparent and join them.
Caught between worlds, I see the pulse
of the afterlife can't rekindle the life within me.
Still, I wish to be among these spirits.

Unable to move, I know if I refuse to speak,
I can claim the shadows. If I call, they'll
realize that I know they're dead and leave.
Because I long to keep them, I hold my tongue.
Never-the-less it's like holding my breath.

Blurting out the words I imprisoned in my heart,
I speak, and the ghosts disappear. Did they hear me
when I said: I miss you?

Joseph Milosch

You Ask Why, Exactly, Your Birth Mom Left You (and What That Means About Love)

A sudden updraft plucks your kite from the grass,
string unspools until just one staple holds everything
in place. I don't know how to explain her mistakes.
I can tell you there's no competing with what
rushes in the vein. That's biology: a quick-patched
and porous breakwater. Once I watched
a red fox sprint across a freeway's six lanes.
Once I watched a square-jawed dog on a chain
make it halfway into the shade. You arrived in oversized
Spiderman tennis shoes. I've saved them in my closet
with files from the State. You can see how she tried.
And also, didn't try. Before you lead with anger: remember:
Each October we prune the hardy fuchsia to the ground
for overwintering, clean our shears and wait.
Eight months of deadwood and faith.

Rebecca Morton

I'm Not Any of the Things I Used to Be

LI

Dear Husband,

Do tomatoes green and flush on the vine
in autumn regret
they never ripened? Will I
regret not picking them making jam
filling shelves in the pantry?
What is regret other than a wish
to have been better?

I didn't think I'd keep
getting to know you
after you died.

The guide in Nepal told me repeatedly
itinerary subject to reality.
Kept me moving even the morning
the snow flecked into our tea cups.
The refugee on the radio said the rich
and the poor are the same
only the rich are more comfortable.

Julie Murphy

I'm Not Any of the Things I Used to Be

LII

Was it perverse
to light the woodstove
while the power was cut
for fire danger?
I could take dark, but not
cold and dark. Maybe

that's why I like to burn
the candle by your urn.
I remember how cold
your feet were in bed.
I remember something
each time I strike
the match, bring it
to the wick. Like the night

I raced you home, stripped
my clothes as I drove,
flipped the top of the hot tub,
slipped in as you pulled up.
The moon shining from
the surface of the water.

Julie Murphy

Moon of Faith

An apricot looks like a setting sun,
quenches thirsts during Ramadan.

Soldiers returned from the Middle East
speak hungrily of feasting.

I did not think to ask
if they partook in the hexed fruit

known to cause artillery attacks.
Superstition still seems to permeate

as does the saying *the only thing better
than this is an apricot in Damascus.*

Michele Reese

Three African Prayers

Sun, water, children's laughter.
Dreaming of the past.
A deity's footprints disappearing into the lake
Your meticulous taste of bitterness

Sniffing the sea like a marigold
Unbuckling gingerly like pain,
you hummed a tone gleefully
You grasped the day in handfuls

*

Forgetting my duty, chaotically azure
Maybe abridged childhood
Your mirrored stare, my avalanche
A highway to my city closed with traffic.

Years are icebergs, the smell
of an experience muttered.
Who lies under an umbrella on the shore?
You knew unfulfillment.

*

Grandmother wears a wide brimmed hat
without need for rhyme; plantation songs
cool enflamed mantra. Blond sands separate
in a gale, blinding the future.

Ancient drums for my great-great grandfather's
grandfather in cassava fields of Ghana
Dusty Georgian roads of hooves are images words create;
lean back pensively into drumbeat.

Rochelle Robinson-Dukes

Nursing the Books

I have some who eat to live, others who live to eat. My job is to feed both appetites, not let one get in the way of the other, and when time dismisses the last ambiguity, to try to help them die.

Those who want to get to the end refuse to eat. Their families object, don't get why we can't, won't, do anything. Do what? Paint me a picture of "what." See how it looks, imagine what it would sound like in the room with your mother strapped down, tubed up, spent with struggle. Want to sign her up for that? Want me to run this show? For whom? For how long?

This curve of marks on my left arm, rather faded since the scabs fell off. Where Mr. Thelson bit me. When I was trying to button his shirt. He was angry, didn't want to go for a walk. But did he know what he was doing? Who knows? I guess I'm asking you what does it mean to know when you're like him? Ask a philosopher. Like Professor Wolander over in the memory care unit. She's got a booming voice and personality, doesn't know her own name most days, but can quote Cicero at length in Latin, and address everyone and no one with a mind-twister like: Consider that the same three letters make up the words 'now,' 'own,' 'won.' What does that tell us, she wants to know, and asks for your help. Maybe tomorrow she'll have an answer, what she calls a theory of knowledge, just like the day she laughed trying to teach me how to spell and say her favorite hundred-dollar word, epistemology. Meanwhile, knowing what I don't know, I wear the scars of uncertainty. For sure. As sure as I do the scars made by the sharp edge of Thelson's incisors.

At the end of most shifts, I don't tally up the indignities of that day or night, the injuries or the insults or assaults,

those deliveries from residents or their relatives needing to administer blame for their own pain or helpless witness. Uncounted, I bundle them in my gym bag, take the bus, push the door of my small house open, and drop my load by the cat's litter box. I go to the low bookcase near the couch, grab a pulpy, no-longer-readable paperback, one of what I call my deranged books, and throw it against the wall. Then another. Maybe two more. Until my shoulders drop and breath eases down to shallow. I let the novels lie where they fall. After dinner I will put them back, try to smooth the bent-over pages, which have turned as yellow and as brittle as old skin.

Joel Savishinsky

Etika Downstream

Say it's a workman who stops
at Pier 16 on his way home
for a smoke, a moment alone,
a chance to check his texts—
there's one from someone he loves,
it's bad news, the kind
he's seen coming, and as he lets his gaze
roam the river, thinking of what he will say,
he sees the body floating,
stuck on a pier leg, torso curled and limbs limp.
He drops his phone on the wood,
the cigarette falls from his lips
and hits the deck in a splash of hot ash
as he clambers down,
lugs the body out.

No breath
from the parted lips that
do not smile, do not frown,
no beat from the chest he holds now to his ear.

*

Or say it's a soon-to-be mother
out with her dog this evening for a walk.
These walks are getting harder as she grows—
she knows another month will lay her down
and someone else will walk the dog.

Suddenly

he dashes, yanks the leash from her hand
and heads for the pier, she calls and calls,
chasing as fast as she can manage—
his bark is a panic bark,
as when she first lay faint in morning sickness,
and when she catches up she sees
the skin glistening,
the muscles that don't move.
Her body will not let her get to him
so she dials 911, describes the scene

and waits, staring from skyline
to horizon, from distant bridge
to boy again, this river's stillborn,
fetal,

reaching out his arms.

*

Etika, say it's me that night
walking the riverbank,
my own Switch dead in my bag,
my dumb fingers jingling
rosary beads—at each Hail Mary
I whisper the name of someone
who hates me and why,
Our Father a secret
I'm too afraid to fork or fake or fracture,
Glory Be to all the times I die.
Hail Holy Queen I find you,
pull you out and cradle your body—

Desmond,
no one called you that, they called you
Iceman, called you *Etika*, just weeks ago
you called yourself the Antichrist
& now you're heavy, penitential
in my arms, urban pietà.

In your video suicide note you started
to cry, then laughed it off, but I
can't help it tonight Etika, they say *cry
me a river*, fuck this river dawg,
cut the act and cry on camera,
It was a fun life you said—fun
—dude—fun? Etika,
wake the fuck up man—

Desmond—
your death unmakes me.

*world without end,
us sinners now,
save us from the—*

and the life everlasting
Etika—

for you I'll walk a little farther.

T. Dallas Saylor

Autumn, New Mexico

Not a comfortable autumn of mild days,
but a season fiery as chili, hot enough to melt
our resolve, shorten hikes, flatten us in the afternoon—
yellow cottonwood and red cliffs ablaze,
deep blue sky hazy with smoke from distant fires.

In Chaco Canyon, no water, no shelter
from burning sun as we walk among ruins
a thousand years old, a pueblo driven out
by long drought. In the slender shadow
of adobe walls, we sip warm water,
think of the current drought.

Death is present here, and flowers—
where rain in distant mountains ran down
into the canyon, brought purple asters,
apricot mallow to life.

Ruth Smullin

When You Ask Me Why I have to Walk So Long, So Far Away

Message to My Husband in Georgia from Camino de Santiago, Spain

It's as though I unzipped my skin and found it grinding
like mortar and pestle against my sternum,
this fear or grief, not sure what to call it,
though it might've lived inside me forever,
wilted through the soft half-moons of infant fingernails.
Maybe I sipped its essence in a vial of absinthe
that milky-green night in Madrid so long ago—remember?
Truth is, you might agree, it started the year Dr. X
laid hands on me. How he growled in my face,
the stench of cheap cigar smoke on him, on me.
My love, we've tried to go on living in spite
of that evil groping, but you know how grief
(or is it fury?) has choked me from the inside,
days only broth could slide down my throat,
how, sleepless, I'd watch the moon rise and set,
the silhouette of pine branches, the blue-black fan
of needles on hard snow. You want to know when
I'm coming home, but it's still too soon to tell.
My last best remedy, each step I take eases grief's hold.
I crave sunlight, wide open spaces, endless paths
that spiral in widening circles to the sea.

Christine Swint

After the Curandera Told Me About the Spirits

Diary Entry, Shelter at Garden of Murazábal, Camino de Santiago, after Alto del Pardon

Leaving Pamplona, stunned in the moon-blue dawn, I lost my way. A street cleaner stood sentinel, pointed in silence

to bronze shells marking the path, and then, small miracle—scallop shells glittered each cobbled sidewalk that led to the city's edge.

Like the mysteries the priest told us to listen for—God's voice—what Carolina calls secrets between wind and grass,

moss and stone. In the countryside, water intoned under bridges. Cairns, rows of tiny watchmen, stared at me

faltering over rock shards, as if I weren't meant to be there, unabsolved as I am, descending the Mountain of Forgiveness.

Now, in the Garden of Murazábal, I'm at rest in a molded plastic chair, my knees swollen from the decline. Swallows dart

from eaves of a crumbling chapel. The spirits are everywhere, Carolina told me. We can hear them if we know how to sense

their translucent articulations. All of us on this path, cloaked in strange feathers, apparitions on the way.

Christine Swint

Now, Somehow

Feather at the bottom of the cage:
light grey with whiff of white. His
head dips to one side—eye meets plume.
He squawks. No appeasing the bird now.

Light grey with whiff of white, like
my eyebrows before. They're half-gone now.
He squawks, no appeasing him, like
when my eyelashes disappeared somehow.

Eyebrows—they are mostly gone now.
Bird dander drifting down the cage,
eyelashes slipping into my eyes somehow.
Hair floating all around the house.

Dander floating around the cage, the room.
Scant white threads clinging to my scalp,
somehow. Hair drifting around the house.
On hardwood, the inside of berets, caps.

Stark wiry threads hanging to my scalp.
I envy female anchors, stare at TV hair.
Hair on pillows, collars now, somehow.
Look at the geography of part, flip, wave.

Look at female anchors, stare at their hair.
Headbands camouflage the scant somehow.
Look at the rendezvous of brunette with dress.
Blue eye shadow masks no eyelashes now.

Scarves around my head conceal the scant.
Another feather at the bottom of the cage.
Eye shadow masking no eyelashes now. Bird—
restore me with your fallen plumes. Somehow.

Judith Terzi

Hen

At Ron and Joan's on a bursting spring day.
They have a few muddy fields, some fresh lambs,
a handful of chickens, less than a gaggle of geese.

Here's one of the hens, stepping by the kitchen.
The warm corn-puff fluff of her, through the open door,
head-jerk, strutting in. This is something she does.

My mum thinks it's brilliant, unbelievable:
just imagine that, a hen coming in
like a person, treading a cold-toe floor.

I wonder why this has tickled her.
It's not so strange, after all, a hen in a house,
just another animal on the earth.

The hen cluck-clucks. Then it clicks: I forget
it's as if she's seeing this for the first time,
like a child, when she read me the word, the world;

forget it's less where it is than the thing itself,
the sense that everything is miracle.
I forget that wherever she goes now,

even if the impression could settle,
dementia is already there, at night,
a fox crept in to the roosts of the head,

ready to tear the memory apart.

Iain Twiddy

Visiting

For Wendell

From steady rain we step to sheltered ground
in the dark cathedral of the barn,
breathe in scents of damp wood and hay,
assume a reverent stillness.

The dog, with the sudden confidence
of one engaged, at last, in good work,
trots through the barn's far doorway
heading seven white-faced ewe lambs.

Not knowing me, they halt, uncertain,
until you smoothly bucket corn
from storage to trough, and they—
as sheep will—follow where hunger leads.

Hard teeth crack dry kernels
in percussive counterpoint,
a muted consort mimicking the fall
of winter rain on wooden shingles.

In entiring darkness, we stand, until
from your post beneath the hayloft beams,
you turn to me, grinning, and say,
That's a good sound. And it is.

Brian Volck

Chvrches

. . . *water your plants, love your roses.*
—Fernando Pessoa

1.

Below the Miradouro de Santa Catarina
Lisbon's lights glint like candles
the night sky a vaulted ceiling.

*Is it only the tourist couples
that hold one another so closely
as if they might lose their love
once they leave?*

~~

A wooden sculpture of Jesus sleeping
on his side behind glass.
His shoulder rises as he breathes
as if he'd had company.
Bowls of delicate white flowers
gathered beyond the pews' edge:
soft and cool as a bedsheet.

~~

The panhandler approaching our table
outside the bar
peddling roses instead of sunglasses
big as bread loafs
marks me. Now the rose behind
K's ear suits her pomegranate dye
which I thought was amber.

*No: amber's what you've got
going on in your beard she tells me.
Her eyes a green glass
lit by the breadth of her grinning.*

2.

The French the women speak one tram seat in front
is as light as their dresses.

The blonde's new diamond spins
shards of light onto the ceiling
shadows cool as they pass
over the passengers.

When she leaps back on
to cry in English: *my jacket* I've already
met her halfway to hand it over.

~

*When trams stammer: Fathers
lean into the hair of their daughters.
When lights above aisles flicker on:
windows will always darken.*

Under the tram stop rain reaches for my arm.

~

Across the dome of the basilica
through the high window
(the only port for the late day's light):
a dusty shaft of sun
like a ray at the limen to a forest
or the bronze arm of a treefall
that made a woman a widow
some random afternoon.

3.

The brown river sloshes bushes
as cars thrash by underneath.
An older couple at the overlook

holding hands lingers a little longer
bewitched by the Ohio: overcast and wide
as the sky. They lean into river winds
many other lovers might abandon.

*Give us all your artificial stars
candles without their flames.
Give us fonts with or without water:
Each other another year maybe two.*

B.J. Wilson

Becoming a Raccoon

My mother wore the mask
and her mother before that:
a memory of washing meat,
of black mitts pressed into mud,
leaving behind a dance of scratch-marks and tracks,
paw-pad pictographs pre-word, prehensile.
The sparkle of night-seeing eyes.
Nosing the sky's delicious underbelly.
Crunch of fish bones in my jaw.
Persimmon-gorge after first frost.
The garbage can's sticky offal.
Cunning fingers, oily fur: I come right up
to your window and peer in—
drawn by bread-scent and hoarded, half-licked suckers,
Halloween chocolates stuffed into drawers,
the cup of strawberry milk you spilled
under the bed and still on your lips, human child.
You sense my shuffle but can't see out.
I press my claws against the screen
between me and your darkened room
and they look like hands.

Annie Woodford

DAN VEACH PRIZE FOR YOUNGER POETS

2020 Winner

SARAH UHEIDA

“For after all/ What is a daughter but a splinter, a hereditary haemorrhage?” Sarah Uheida asks, in her winning poem “Ribbs of Satin, Mouth of Dusk.” Is that a question most daughters ask their fathers? Maybe not in so many words, but children *do* wonder how they come to be, and what individual parts of their parents appear in their makeup and character. Uheida makes you think that’s what this poem will be about, a daughter questioning her origins and her conflicted relationship with her father. But this poem does more than that; this poem weaves together Greek myth, God and Islam, and raw feminine power. What Uheida shows us is a portrait of a young woman who, like a Maenad, or “a wild thing” is not “sorry for [herself]” but instead is questioning, fierce, and, at points, ironic.

I chose this poem because it spoke to me on a few levels—I’m always attracted to father-daughter poems (especially because my own father-daughter relationship is often fraught). But more than that, I like its voice, the way the speaker both seeks separation from her father, yet clings to him as well. The voice is mystical *and* grounded—pomegranates fall out her mouth, yet the “nouveau literariness of English” sits “on [her] tongue.” I also really appreciate its form. It’s hard to see the long lines printed here on a small journal page, but several lines are expansive and stretch to the right margin on a regular 8.5x11” page. Long lines make me think of Whitman, and there is a bit of expansiveness about Uheida’s poem too.

Join me in congratulating Sarah Uheida on writing a wonderful poem.

JC Reilly

Ribs of Satin, Mouth of Dusk

- I. Father, Persephone's pomegranates fell out of my mouth
as I came to you asking for the equivalent of ease
and you said the music that played then paralyses now
- II. I, too, have turned feral, turned teeth on teeth,
you, too, have sipped Dionysus's wine straight outta dusk's collarbone
- III. At the entrance of what was once my birthplace, you sat threadbare
and mourned the quietness of quitted beds and
you said to resent only the acts of kindness
that sound like D.H. Lawrence's Self-Pity.
- IV. Needled my way through the days
bones bearing a famine yet to come,
O how Father's hand glistened when I spoke of sin
- V. The sheer injustice of pen on paper
The nouveaux literariness of English on my tongue
"I never saw a wild thing sorry for itself."
- VI. Father's mosaiced litanies, the way he raised me, like hands to
the sky,
Undo all my attempts at non-repentance
- VII. An oasis of *oh no*, of father is no longer Father, just another man
who could not love my fading out
- VIII. For after all,
What is a daughter but a splinter, a hereditary haemorrhage?
- IX. God as coaxer of crude confessions; God as the distance between
me and the first time I excused myself, drank & drank in
the absences of Jannah
- X. There was that one time, though, when you taught me how
to spell Mediterranean and I asked whether inheriting
your religion meant I could no longer languish the myths
of the Greek

- XI. You said I still could.
- XII. Father,
How could you not have noticed the teething
- XIII. How there was that other time, when I placed an offering at
your feet, whisper-yelled:
let me be
your debutante
and I'll let you hold my body like a grudge.
- XIV. Be still, you said, the prayer that played then paralyses now.

Sarah Uheida

POETRY 2020

International Poetry Competition

GRAND PRIZE \$1000

TINA MAI

International Publication Prizes

Craig Beaven * Caleb Braun * Anne Casey
Christian Collier * Michael Dechane * Aaron Deutsch
Laurel Faye * Thalia Geiger * Renny Golden
Paula Goldman * Saúl Hernández * AE Hines
Anna Leahy * Tina Mai * Michael Malan
Emma Miao * Amy Miller * Tony Morris
Damen O'Brien * Adele Ne Jame * Esther Ra
Claire Scott * Elena Unger * Kelly Vande Plasse

International Merit Awards

Partridge Boswell * Peter Bruckner * Elena Croitoru
Aaron Deutsch * Jessica Dionne * Katie Elconin-Donoho
Laurel Faye * Mary Dingee Filmore * Renny Golden
Eve Hoffman * P M F Johnson * Maxima Khan
Katherine Kincer * Karen Kovacic * Toby Langen
Naomi Lowinsky * Daniel Maguire * Hannah Marshall
Karyna McGlynn * Emma Miao * Janice Northerns
Lawrence Paulson * Wanda Praisner * Clela Reed
Holly Roland * Rachel Smith * Diane Thiel * J.C. Todd
Emlyn Williams

Welcome to Poetry 2020!

This was an incredibly tough decision. After narrowing down to four stellar pieces, “Caricatures” and “In Which We Bleed the Moon” stood out as pieces that were not only beautifully written, but cut to the heart of the matter with precision. As runner up, “In Which We Bleed the Moon” perfectly pinpointed the strife and strain of othering and alienation of being a first generation citizen. The author exemplifies this through the line:

*here we were told to leave, we were told
this wasn't our land, that the eclipse of
our skin bled too foreign and our words
dipped in all the wrong places.*

As the winner, “Caricatures” is a heart-breaking meditation on the pain and grief of assimilation and double consciousness. Both poems speak to the othering and isolation of oppression in America.

“Caricatures” won me over with the eloquence in which it speaks about the loss of culture and a last-ditch effort to remember the beauty and sacredness of one's vibrant heritage.

*six-syllable crescents, yet acts
puppeteer with my strings whisking
away the pearls and identity in its harvest*

The last lines left me breathless, as I could feel the feeling of sorrow and pain in the desire to connect with the heritage that was stolen and the cultural ties that were lost. In the same breath, I felt the warring battle to be considered American, but also fighting against the stereotypes and “caricatures” that try so hard to force marginalized people against the poles- either we are caricatures of ourselves or we are white-washed and toned down. The last lines of the piece beautifully paints the feeling of longing and a desire to cling to one's culture, while still calling America home.

*that one day I will be plaited between si and sz four bowls of
congee against death's bitter melon so that the mirror doesn't
feed me a caricature, wordless and home-starved,
to return American*

Khalisa Rae

Caricatures

i. congee

I confess:

I want a voice the texture of liquid cavalry and lemon alcove
play baby's cradle in the arms of syllables, the alphabet,
things in orbit around an english rotational inertia
as syllables breathe poreless smooth down my neck,
the way it's meant to be.

I want the girlhood, the *xiao long bao* basked in steam bath,
the four's *sì* and death's *sǐ* tangle harmony against my tongue
so my body is an axis as silky as *jiao zi* skin in my grandmother's palm

ii. conulariida

grandmother calls me *juju*,
pearl,
and we dance against the lips of *zhu jiang*
in a tangle of heat and impermanence.
but in no world does my body feel like jewel,
only hollow mollusk shell dissolved into
calcium carbonate
spread tissue-thin against fossil conulariids
as the words
play *jian zi* with my tongue

iii. concentric

synesthesia paints America bubbly,
like sparking water or setting powder
or other things tasteless
odd, that ephemerality dazes me with its
six-syllable crescents, yet acts puppeteer with my strings
whisking away the pearls and identity in its harvest
I play fishing wire with my lips in hopes
that one day I will be plaited between *sì* and *sǐ*
four bowls of congee against death's bitter melon
so that the mirror doesn't feed me a caricature,

wordless and home-starved,
to return American

*footnotes // xiao long bao – soft steamed bun filled with warm broth.
// sì and sǐ – four and death, known for the similarity in pronunciation
with a curve of the tongue. // jiao zi – dumplings; my grandmother
taught me to knead from scratch in a spice-filled kitchen // zhu jiang
– the Pearl River in Guangzhou // jian zi – a game that involves keep
ing a weighted shuttlecock in the air with one's body.*

Tina Mai

Body Scan Meditation

1.

A man sinks the traps
he will return to in the dark. Monday
and only fishermen,
a stillness so vibrant I expect

God to reveal himself. Hawks
turning their circuits. Blue heron on a buoy
peering in. Tonight
but mostly tomorrow

studying, reading, my chest will ache
from this rowing, the movement there
with all other movements.
It takes so long

for the stars to come out,
they're halfway over
the axis by the time they shine,
and then morning's low kindle.

The land is silent, and the air
burns. Rock cliff
here at the shore,
brown stones stacked

and pine roots fingering
for crevice. The rocks pile up
50 feet. If you were going to build a church
this is the spot. If you were going

to dive in, this is the place, climbing with ease
at all the footholds and turning to see
this boat drifting away. If you
are never coming back then here is where

you get out. No last glance.
The aluminum boat is burning. It shines
in the sun like glass. It drifts away
among clouds.

2.

Because this isn't my body
I can't feel its pain.
Because my body
is not mine for keeps
I say
I can't feel this pain. With each out-breath
it leaves you
one burning fiber
at a time. Because this isn't
my body, I can't be bothered
by its failures.
Since nothing
can be owned
this house
can't disturb me, its weakness
against rain and cold. I'm reading
again, this time about pain
and how to solve it. You separate
yourself from the aching. You stop
the struggle to be rid, stop
treatment. It's a way
of thinking. We are just a room
the wind blows through. We left
the window open in the night
and cold rain came in
on the floorboards. This isn't
my body. I don't live here. And
if I did, I wouldn't feel a thing.

Craig Beaven

Self Portrait as Star Gazer

The telescope was so loud
I couldn't hear birds
twittering in the winter
trees and the light
was too quiet, delicate,
evasive as a silver fish
tiny in his busy creek.
The light's reluctance
made the telescope
cast feverishly
into the distance:
farther than the age
of man, farther than Pangaea
splitting across the Earth,
farther than the wisdom
of the followers
of Bethlehem's star,
who gathered themselves before
entering, who looked into
one another's eyes
and saw no longer
sleep, no longer themselves,
but light swaddled
and babbling and
worthy of praise.

Caleb Braun

Night traps

At twelve, he's too old to believe in monsters I think as we huddle,
faces swarming with swirling colours from his bedside lamp,
medusas undulating in watery obscurity, fear clouding
his ordinary radiance and my heart

a snared hummingbird: the unanswered question my bright-eyed
boy flounders around always in darkness—shut down
to his daylight wonder: rushing to greet the leaf-tailed gecko (long-time
resident behind our outdoor couch) which recently produced a tiny replica

the brush turkey tightrope-strutting the length of the fence; wide-eyed
possums
glinting from dusky branches as his teenage brother grumbles past to sort
trash
and practice his cynicism *What's the point? My teacher says they don't
get recycled anyway...* trust crumbling like the dust of so many cicada skins

so eagerly plucked from nearby she-oaks—spectral sentinels, those
exoskeleton twins left to witness the fading *Please don't bulldoze this*
appeals falling
on deaf ears—a whole forest nobody hears destined to be carted off in
mulching trucks
under orders of our neighbour, the State Premier, who visited his school
to shake hands

before writing off our precious bushland—where once he bobbed bound
to my heart, cooing
as we ducked a troupe of black cockatoos swooping through; toddled to
the counting
of water dragons; ran to track that elusive rock wallaby; raced to chase
white tiger
moths; stopped to probe bandicoot droppings (with a stick); chewed over

the albino galah, anaemic anomaly amidst its pink flock—all signed off
to make way for a new tunnel with its undercover proviso: a thirty-year no
public transport clause—artificial sweetener for behind-the-scenes dealers,
while it seems around us the whole world is burning or drowning as

we flail against federal plans pledging certain
destruction to Earth's largest living structure—where at three
he paddled off, lost in wonder and each year
since, we've gurgled together through butterfly

shoals, skirting bug-eyed reef sharks, jump-scaring
at feinting parrotfish, gaping through fogging goggles at giant clams and
brain
corals where we swam shoulder-to-shoulder with an ancient turtle, before
bubbling back up to the surface like his unanswerable question:

Where will they go Mum, when all the trees are gone? And the reef?
A thousand tiny wings skip a beat as I bend
to kiss his pillowed cheek wanting so much to lie
to him that the monsters scratching at his windows

aren't real.

Anne Casey

Beloved

We were riding
the back-end of a Charlotte thunderstorm,
sailing through
a small galaxy of black & ash
with lightning briefly blooming around us
when it struck me –

there isn't much difference
between the ominous & the beautiful

& then, as the five-year-old children behind me chanted about their hunger,
it occurred to me –

if God, in His millennial pink Heaven above us, wished it so,
one of those dancing bolts could
cleave through the metal belly of the plane & chuck us
from the sky.

If that were to happen, you would have sent me off
into the unknown all souls someday arrive in, knowing
without question

I was loved. Wholly.
The way a famished fire washes over the flesh & marrow of a building.

You baptized me even before I boarded.

You gave me
five white envelopes
I folded & placed into the dark pond of my jacket pocket, each containing
a letter
you penned
to remind me no matter where I went,
no matter even if the plane plowed into some simple marvel of the earth,
killing all of us aboard

in one deafening stroke,
I was divined by you. Made angel already
before the flames or the bending shards of the plane's bones could
take me.

Christian Collier

Jake's Parade

The best fire we had in those days was the night at Jake and Donna's place. It was bitter cold but we built the bonfire up high, then higher. Jake was a little drunk when he came laughing mostly falling down the stairs of the deck with the Papasan chair from their living room. *Let's burn it*, Jake roared, and we roared back with the flames when he threw it on and raised a three-story column of wild, perishing ash against the darkness still expanding between the flares of diminishing stars. *I always hated that chair*, Jake announced as we laughed with relish, in disbelief as Donna nodded, for once agreed. Everyone stood up and backed away a bit and in the multiplying heat, we began to see what he'd done, what he'd started. It turned out there were other things in the house Jake hated so he became his own parade and we the town that cheered him on. Letters he found and a half-finished painting. There were books that no longer worked for him, then the wobbly bookcase tumbled in. The more he found to burn, the better our fire seemed to like it and lick its quickening lips. There were things between most of us and inside every one of us already vanishing smoke. What I remember most is how our faces flickered in the shared, inexplicable goodness of that night and the guitar—how quick and soft the sound its strings made as they unmoored from the burning bridge.

Michael Dechane

The Only Way We Know How

The sex change operation is most of the time forced on trans people by the culture and by the government...in some cases, gay people in Iran decide to undergo the surgery because the alternative is death.

—Saghi Ghahreman

I sing Lahore in the flowered night,
sing *gurdwara* and *masjid* and deepest
sun swelling in the body.

Sing Isfahan, sing wound in the city
walls, all our people unbirthed.
They called me a saint—after—

what else is there to say. Around my waist,
law and wanting,
carried in the synthetic womb,

the shape they gave me,
because the fatwah says your birth is wrong,
but we can make you whole, because my body—

ineluctable as it is—holy before
it's been touched, holy after, even when
taken apart by unmerciful hands—

can only remember these men
interpreting, concluding, forced
conversion until my queer aligns—

*Astagfirullah—*forgive me, until
removal becomes divine. Glory then
to the new self, admissible,

palatable to both border
and stone of language in my mouth.
To the men, permitted now

to lust for the after of a sin
made over. The only way we know
to survive, new bodied, unbodied.

Laurel Faye

On the Bowerbird

I am in debt to Maggie Nelson
for teaching me about satin bowerbirds,
the blue birds that collect blue things
to mate. Nests like museums,
each artifact is carefully placed to stimulate
the female enough for the couple to have sex
for two to three seconds, after which
they will never meet again.
In the wild, this is true love: how
a bird, how a human can love
such a thing, a color. I try
to love like that. I am not a princess
of blue, but try to be. Blue nails, navy
sweater, I eat nothing but the moons
from Lucky Charms for three days
to see what she sees. But the sugar,
each quick chomp, chew and swallow
doesn't make me feel what she feels.
It's a crime I've never heard Joni Mitchell's
Blue, so I never tell people.
That's like going your whole life without
ever hearing some white guy with a guitar
wailing Wonderwall. I'd rather listen to Blue
Christmas in February, sit in my azure
socks and bra against my walls reflecting
fishbowl blue for hours until I feel
my insides coloring, each organ and muscle
flushing indigo right before
I realize just how much red
I lack in my life.

Thalia Geiger

Receiving the Veil

Lumen Christi Chapel, Adrian Michigan

So much of the past. That day of the white veil.
My auburn hair shorn; our families in light-flicked pews.
Outside, wind-rattled cornfields bowed and rose.

How to account for the longing, one's untested courage.
The beginning of a path that cannot be known, only trod..
I see myself walk down the aisle with a crown of flowers.

Thirty of us prostrate on a marble floor, dead to what
we knew of the world which wasn't much.
Ours, a kind of grave innocence that accepts sacrifice,

cannot know its deep claims, doesn't care.
A candle trembled in my hand; the choir sang
Veni Sponsa Christi, Come Bride of Christ.

We processed out through slats of light and shadow
singing St. Francis's Canticle to the Sun. Vowed. Joyous.
Walked onto the Motherhouse lawn where ordinary

daylight was luminous because we saw it that day as ours.
Beauty, as if some depth of spirit opens us to the world.
Because we all want this, to give ourselves over.

If we renounce anything, it's hesitation.
Who doesn't walk into sunlight on a wedding day,
a day holding a newborn—radiant.

Renny Golden

Sacrilege

For Rudy Donaldo Martinez Arias

*Nor did I deem that you, a mortal man,
Could by a breath annul and override
The immutable unwritten laws of Heaven
—Antigone*

You will not beg for what is sacred—
your brother's unburied body beneath
a floating wreath of dark birds .

Your lone voice as Theban soldiers advance,
their shields small suns gathering fire.
Are you mad? This one body in a slaughterhouse?

We can't muster such rage. In our country, thousands
of the unburied in the vast dry-bed of Brooks County TX.
Their bones brittle, white as starched vestments.

Los invisibles that mercy did not reach.
Should a savior leave water at a station,
bold as you, Antigone, they will face Creon's heirs.

Rudy Donaldo Martinez Arias steps forward
hands away his weeping child, takes up a pack,
plastic water bottles. He is young and grave;

he will burn through canyons, chamisa, arroyos,
rocks like burning coals. Thirty miles from the Rio Bravo,
coyote shouts *Rapido!* Rudy stumbles past goatbush,

pricklypear, paloverde as if into a circle of fire, throat
closing, he falls beneath creosote, hears his two-year-old
sing-song a lullaby. On the branch above, a mottled gray owl.

Renny Golden

Bundle of Asparagus, 1880

after Edouard Manet, Oil on Canvas

What I remember is the *Bundle of Asparagus, 1880* by Edouard Manet, not the flowers, nor the portraits, nor the floral bouquets, placed casually in whatever vase was handy, nor the last house, closed off as he was: The white asparagus on a bed of greens which sold for 1,000 francs when he was asking 800, throwing in a painting of a single sprig to the buyer. He was suffering with his legs from a side effect of syphilis, painting what was near and dear around him. I think of the bundles of asparagus in the super large markets with no character at all, thrown on the counter for the purchaser to take one, wrap it in plastic, and toss it into her cart. These look like slender fish with two bands securing them together. I think of the other night when you said I'd eaten all the grilled vegetables, but the asparagus.

Paula Goldman

13 Reasons Why My Mexican Father Fears Water

1.

Father's body floats on weekend mornings. His belly rises with each breath, one hand extends next to his face, the other hangs on the side of the bed.

2.

Father dreams of drowning: his body immersed in dark waters, his hands reach for dryness. At dawn, he floods his room with his brother's name. His voice breaks in mid-sleep, I can hear his body fighting for air.

3.

Father works his fifth night shift this week. He reaches back to the floor wax machine, leans his chest on the handles, and flips the on switch. He watches the sponge rotate as a streams flow out.

4.

Father chugs beer, throws it back like water. I ask him if he wants another, he nods. He cracks it open, brings it to his lips, and downs the liquid. He crushes the can with one hand and belches out all the air inside him.

5.

Father's arms push against the current of the Rio Grande, legs tread water, he searches the surface for his brother. Father listens to the shift of the waves, they tell him what his next move should be, water crashes into his face; a current takes him under, too.

6.

He scratches his head, looks away from my eyes; I know he doesn't want to see me fight against water when I ask him to go to my swim meet. It's okay, I tell him, you don't have to come. He smiles and says, *I'm tired today, but I'll go next time.*

7.

He takes us to the beach, watches our bodies break tides. The waves crash into us and the ocean's hands drag my brother into its mouth. Father's eyes follow my brother from the shore. He bites his lip, sinks his feet deeper into the sand, shouts: *Carlos!*

8.

A geyser of hot water shoots from the car radiator, father burns his hand. He curses into the air: *pinche agua, hija de su puta madre.*

9.

At a drive-thru car wash, water leaks in through the window. Father takes a napkin from the dashboard but water softens it apart. He looks around the car, nothing can prevent water from coming in. As the sponge roller presses on the windshield he closes his eyes and sighs.

10.

Water falls from the sky, father drives us through a storm, I hold on to the arm rest. Rain beats on the windshield, wipers whoosh water away. Father smirks, lowers my window. I flinch at the touch of the cold wetness, he says, *it's just water.*

11.

Every March 31st my father takes white roses to the San Antonio River. He drops all fourteen, the age of his brother, Carlos, who

drowned at the Rio Grande. He watches each flower bob up and down as the calm current takes them South. Their bodies don't drown.

12.

We watch my mother water the plants outside, the summer breeze carries the smell of wet dirt. Father stares out into the distance. Mother wets him with the hose, his eyes widen, his breathing locks, but he laughs it off.

13.

After father's heart attack, the doctor sends him to water therapy. Father refuses: *water doesn't heal everything*. I convince him to go by joining him. In the pool, his body struggles to move. I tell him to walk toward me; he says he can't. I swim to him, I ask him if he trusts me, he nods his head, and I lean his body slowly onto the water. As he lets go of his body his feet rise up to the surface.

Saúl Hernández

Hoyt Arboretum Under Spring Rain

March 2020

The tiny woodpecker
in his little red cap
and black feather cape
might as well be a bishop,
shifting through the cedar colonnade.
Head turning left and right,
he hops trunk to trunk,
ringing the bell of every tree.

Here in this city forest,
I am the young boy
at high church, sitting dead center
of the cross-shaped nave,
staring up, dumbstruck
by the misty limbed vaults,
the dripping pine cones
like beatified faces
of saints looking down
from stained glass.

Last summer, every day, rabbits
crossed our path, red-tailed hawks
circled the sky. We thought
we might all be saved. Then
came fall, and winter. Now
life returns but we sit at a distance,
turn our heads, cover our faces,
cough into our sleeves.

What to make of this moment
beneath the arc of living things
when the sun, at last, breaks
the eastern gate of this wide ravine,
the rustle of needles singing
in the breeze, the trickling creek,
the insistent swaying

of pine branches and leaves,
what else but to think of a church
packed full for Easter, packed full
with pine boxes, with bishops and bells,
the wails of old women
raining down.

AE Hines

Purgatory : Pandemic

That is the way we are one and indivisible.

—after Gertrude Stein’s “Sacred Emily”

You’ve discovered that a day can be a place
between all you’ve done and all you expected to do, to be, to occur.

Each day becomes a lengthening instant between
breathing in and breathing out. You’d like to think this is meditation.

This pause has nothing to do with holding your breath
and everything to do with what you’re doing and not doing and repeat-
ing.

A day is a day is a day is a day.
You’re hoarding eggs, then rationing them out to yourself. You hear
yourself humming.

You’re looking for a little loveliness and cauliflower.
You’re listing names of friends, loved ones, in the space between
memory and prayer.

You’re wiping things down because that’s what purgatory means.
You’re worried about everyone because that’s what pandemic means.

You trust that neatness will count for something and bleach for
everything.
You recognize a face from six feet away and don’t know what to say.

And they told two people and they told two people and they told two
people
and now everyone knows. That’s not exactly what exponential means

but it’s the way it begins. Everyone’s anxious for half lives of inevitable
exhaustion
and whatever’s around the next corner we’d like to reach.

The berries are unreasonable. Slippers and weeds are as necessary as
anything else.
As necessary as keeping something from each other,

as necessary as keeping something from oneself.
You back away because that's the opposite of what necessary means.

You long for after-this-life. You think, If I can trust distance, I must
trust time.

When you hear that someone can't breathe,

your heart aches with hope-fors and might-have-beens.
You're sobbing over peaches and apples. You're not alone.

Anna Leahy

In Which We Bleed the Moon of the Orient

in the beginning we peeled loquats
against the jittering of june bugs, sacred.
blue faces plastered against a latticework of bodies,
the urbanscape, where everything burned into orbit
and the earth breathed regolith between our toes.
here we were told to leave, we were told this wasn't
our land, that the eclipse of our skin bled too foreign
and our words dipped in all the wrong places.
tell me, Chang'e, about flight, about escape—
maybe then we will be adopted into the
womb of a satellite where we are not immigrants but
something terrestrial, something perihelion warm
and waxing crescent. maybe then we can souse our bodies
in elixirs, life-sodden to make gods of us all.
what axis, then, could swallow us?
alas, dear goddess, we have still to ripen,
to fold equinox in our bones,
and we still peel loquats as strangers.
I can only yearn to fly stagnant
into the overskies,
moon-carved.

Tina Mai

Note:

Chang'e: the chinese lunar goddess who flew to the moon; her hare pounds the elixir of immortality in the hollows of its surface

The Forest Beyond the Trees

It is April and the stones have not stopping singing.
I place two photographs on the floor,
watch as the flowers of the sun turn to ash.
At first light, the pines are a river too deep to ford,
clouds like seams in the cloth of a new day.
What I saw before is suddenly invisible in a sea of trees.
My neighbor says she will return to dust soon.
Through a window at night, I see her brushing
her long silver hair. Her mourning or betrayal
cannot change what she will soon discover
in her astonishment. What wanders in the forest
is the body of ageless being. After a long sleep,
darkness is like the moon crawling across the plains.
Let the snow gather itself as a door on the universe.

Michael Malan

Nanjing

an exocarp

1. Realize

all skins are temporary.

The white splotches on my hands
spillage from history. I swallow moons,

nuzzle photographs slashed in
gin, breathe half-tones to hold
the dawn. I hold her now:
residue of a life displaced

2. When

the Japanese
arrived in '37, Nanjing was
a lotus blossom

pureed in
December light. That year,
the butterflies dusted
the lifeless with colour

3. Jackets

streaked red, stained with
gunpowder, glimmering gold in
an icy sun. That is

to say:

the bodies are timeless, preserved in
ink & snow—fate supplified their skins
with grace; bequeathed them in glory

4. *it's 1924 &*

my fingertips skim the December rails,
metal salient in flesh. How it's always been—
metal shielding land, clouds bracing sky.

Mother was
born nameless, raised on railway stories;
on Chinatown riots, 1907. The fire charred
her hands. Her tongue. Her pride.

6. I cannot
speak Mandarin anymore.
My Chinese hides in the crevices
of my mind,

only showing itself when it wants.
When it does, it comes broken—
pieces of a machine long worn,
cracked at the edges.

7. What is
the difference between
rain and tears? when the sky is
grey and will continue to be

grey, for as long as I
stand in this photograph.
Rain drops silently on the
railway of 1924.

8. *epilogue.*
snow is an ending.
Railway, smothered under cutting flakes,
covering all in sight. It melts on my flesh

but if I stand still enough
it piles on me like a blanket.
Until I can disappear under the flurries, idle in descent.
Nothing left but crumpled film & a dusty moon.

Emma Miao

Baby

This ship needs a mascot, my sister says, so we take one in—a six-pound stray that a hairdresser found in an alley. Beautiful beacon—Siamese Burmese cross, blue eyes brimmed with light. Afraid of every large object and us. When I bring her home, she won't leave the hammock of my skirt, same gray as her face, a camouflage of wool. My sister wants a baby. Little starseed. The cat won't come to her, won't go near her cigarettes, her beer. But she wanted the baby. But it's safe in my skirt and now I start to feel a warm valley in my legs, a gravity melt. My sister asked for this baby, but it only wants me—my lap, my bed. My sister and I are still comrades—this was long before the war—so it's always a sweet joke, how she prayed for a baby to land and it landed on me. Later she would say that I took everything. Did I say I had her baby? No, aborted it years later. And never told her, all her life. For what she would say. But stop it, the cat was not a baby. She stayed with me. The cat. Another sixteen years. Became an old sure-footed dancer. Never questioned who wanted her. Sat in a rocking chair next to me and watched mice commute along the baseboards. Her blue eyes wide. At this marvel, our life.

Amy Miller

Appalachia Aubade

The great hills roll on. Cold, blue ridges. Dust
 in the slight tilt of winter shifting light—
 black anthracite shimmering on the white
 early hours. Up the slope, a russet
brown eight-point bounds over cross-thatched deadwood
 felled in early season's storms, brittle cold
 sending beasts and fowl to shelter in, old
 blood surging, the ancient pull, *wo wir werden*
nichts: nothing we can tongue with words beyond
 the new day's mountain light, where all the mists
 are burned away and sunlight's slant insists
 we turn, unburdened, to the age-old song
and dance of love, your head upon my shoulder
 as the hearth's fire burns to cinders, glowing older.

Tony Morris

Delirium, Day Sixteen after Surgery, Walking with Whitman

The surgeon looks into the cave of your eyes—
after sitting, his head in his hands,
outside your hospital room, they tell you,
for twenty minutes—thinking who knows what.
He leans in close, says quietly, *I've been praying
all night for you*—the light pouring in
though the tall windows from the Palo Alto hills,
a stark winter light, *and my mother has been
praying for you*. His voice is mesmerizing,
this healer you have come to adore,
his Persian accent, melodious cadence—
such music, you think,
though your throat tightens, black birds balancing
on a wire in the wind,
while a heavy stone of fear lodges deep in your body,
the morphine haze notwithstanding.
Still, though, you revel in the streaming light,
the stark winter light—
a Whitman light you would call it:
every atom of it belonging to you,
to all before and after you.

I don't know what more to do for you,
your failing star of a surgeon says,
as if he might shake some life force
from the shoulders of his night vigil
into your room this fleeting January day.

Then all too soon a new routine begins:
every hour for fourteen hours
each day, his nurses force you from your bed,
a pillow girded around your middle,

IVs in tow, they command you
to circle the unit, this gleaming new epilepsy unit,
three times around it—every hour, they say,
no matter each step an intractable razor of pain.
Every room you pass, you see a child
propped up in bed, tall cone-head bandages
with tubes cascading down, their eyes glazed.
Then suddenly in a delirium of unaccountable
love, your friend Walt appears,
smart in his billowing white shirt—
He is walking with you—and the crowds he loved too
frantically rushing into their lives,
those multitudes from everywhere
on the ferry-boat who, like him,
saw the marvelous light pouring down
from the sky's ocean, saw the East River's
flood-tide, the ebb-tide. They congregate
around you so that you are no longer alone,
those beyond death, those before and after you—
across time, the stranger and the beloved.
Then all at once you hear the tide-song rising,
not unlike the song you were born hearing,
your mother's lullaby—in Arabic she would sing
babbori rayeh, reyeh—babbori rayeh:
my boat is going, going, my boat is going—
or perhaps it's the persistent nudge of a fugue,
not unlike Pachelbel's in minor chords,
haunting but fresh,
that deep register repeating, rising—
O how it swells from their heart halls—
surrounding us all, consoling us all,
that mellifluous song
you always knew, one day, you would hear.

Adele Ne Jame

All The Colours of The Sky

The present life of man upon earth, O King, seems to me...like the swift flight of a sparrow through the mead-hall where you sit at supper in winter...The sparrow, flying in at one door and immediately out at another, whilst he is within, is safe from the wintry tempest...So this life of man appears for a little while, but of what is to follow or what went before we know nothing at all.

—Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*

Today it was a wash, a rinse of colour, a faded cloth,
a linen cleansed of dye.

Yesterday it was a sanded grain of bamboo, steady density of wood.
Husks and whisks of charcoal cloud,
a caramel swirl of smoke bruming and baking.

The master's oils smeared the sky with clouds:
Constable's spears of light and Van Goh's blues
foam and boil at the horizon's break.
Suncream soothed in sheets and
fish scales and thin bones stirred.

When we got there, the sky was a clear milk
souping at the edges.
The roadies were tooling up the stage.
The sleeve of the sky was wearing its heart.
A curd, a smear, a tincture of cloud
grumbling and threatening
crawled over its cataract heading for the northern suburbs.
We settled into a shag of grass, light-blinded
and felt the crowd loom around us,
pouring and levelling the amphitheatre with
loud smiles and expressive hands,
until it became an organism breaking and
frothing on the barriers, drumming with cheers.

The dark clasp of sky
strummed with the notes pouring from the stage.
Thick beats and jagged guitars.
High on something wisping from

the bank of sixties nostalgia victims in their tour shirts,
we watched the notes drain into the futile ink
of the cold air,
the bitter well of silence.

Then a clumsy fruit bat
skimming through the sky like
a net stirring water.
For a moment it was an avatar torn
from the unknown dark, it was
a bearded star at the perigee of heaven,
it was a prophet
climbing out of the quiet palm of darkness,
falling back into the long well of darkness,
to some fruiting fig,
ripe and heavy beyond the searchlights
of this poem.
But for a moment it flew
through the notes of music
where we lived.

Damen O'Brien

What's In a Name

*When I called her name
she approached me
and became a flower.*

—Kim Chunsu

You said that my poems reinvented the sky. But I was only trying to witness. I believe in two things as infinite: the blue of the sky and God's heart. But pollution has damaged the one, our violence shrouded the other. You said leave God to take care of Himself. But even dogs lick the hands of their masters. What is worship but laying my tongue on the soft palm of mystery. What is love but kneeling at a name. My name is a clear, empty globe, glacial and glinting at once. *Less fear; ash star; glass fester; terror and gesture and whisper. Esther, Esther.* I will gladly sit down to play marbles with death, entertain every ghost without name. The first time you learned I was other than Esther, surprise, almost hurt, crossed your face. You pronounced my name in Korean, two syllables in the shocked air. But my name is an open secret; what is hidden lies under its door. What I meant to say is, I miss the warm sound of God's laughter; I would plunder to hear it again. Do dogs recognize what's in a name. Do some raindrops remember the sea. My God, don't forget to remember. Call me flower, I'll turn to your name.

Esther Ra

Thirteen for Supper

I tell you it was bloody hot in that kitchen
with its open fires
great pots of bean stew steaming, unleavened bread
baking over hot coals, the pungent scent of roasting lamb
sweat dripped between my breasts, my arms exhausted
from chopping and stirring, up since five
they said thirteen for supper that night
an unlucky number I whispered to no one
later I poured wine and passed bread
put out more olives and dates
but there is no sign of me in the famous painting
only a walk on part, a bitter footnote
sometimes I look again to be sure, maybe
I missed it on the lower left, on hands and knees
sweeping crumbs under the table
no, not even there

Claire Scott

Illustrating an Angel

When I picture you,
you are always dressed
in turmeric.
You rest in a bed
of blossoming
carnations,
and you eat everything
with two bare hands.
You stare into the sun
without fear
of losing sight;
I envy you for that.
You are usually
accompanied
by a marbled sky,
boasting soft wisps
of cotton clouds,
and you spend your days
cutting stars out of paper
so you can hang them up
for the world
to see.

Elena Unger

Thank You for the Tiger Lilies

I want to say thank you to my neighbor one block away who thinned out his tiger lilies this fall and left the pulled past-flowering plants on the sidewalk in front of his garden with a sign posted on the wrought iron fence: *free tiger lilies* and thank you for thinking to hang plastic grocery bags off the fence so I could carry them home with your garden's damp soil still clinging to the pale bulbs, their green fronds dangling out the top like wind-swept hair to transplant to my seventh-floor balcony garden. We spoke once when I was walking my dog and stopped to ask about the purple globe flowers and you told me *allium* and I got some from Lowe's and they have proved hardy and beautiful and friends to bees. Still you could not have known how tiger lilies welcomed us at the turn off to the bed and breakfast in Vermont we visited for twenty-odd years, first with one dog, then with one and two kids and a second dog and how tiger lilies blew back and forth in the breeze on the patio outside the open window where our infant daughter lay watching them and wriggling her bare pink feet to the movement of tiger lilies waving in the summer breeze.

Kelly Vande Plasse

Contributors

Jonathan Aibel is a poet who spends his days wrestling software to the ground as an engineer specializing in quality and testing. His poems have been published, or will soon appear, in *Rogue Agent*, *Main Street Rag*, *Constellations*, *Nixes Mate*, *Lily Poetry Review*, and elsewhere.

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Peter Austin's poetry has been published in *Blue Unicorn*, *Iambos @ Trochees*, *The Raintown Review*, *The Barefoot Muse*, *The New Formalist*, *The Hypertexts*, *Fourteen by Fourteen*, and *The Pennsylvania Review*, as well as in journals/magazines in Canada, the UK, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and Israel. He's a retired Professor of English.

Michael Barrett grew up in Montana and, after stops along the East Coast, now lives in Seattle with his wife Kathryn. They have two daughters. A retired lawyer, Mike works on pro bono projects and poetry. His poems have appeared in *Avalon Literary Review*, *Lowestoft Chronicle*, and *Passager*.

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Michèle Betty is the founder of Dryad Press (Pty) Ltd, an independent press dedicated to the promotion and publication of poetry in South Africa. Her poems have appeared in various journals, both in South Africa and abroad. Her debut collection, *Metaphysical Balm* was published in March 2017.

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Wendy Taylor Carlisle lives and writes with both feet in the Arkansas Ozarks. She is the author of five chapbooks and three books, most recently *The Mercy of Traffic* (Unlikely Books, 2019.) Find her poems in print and on line. For more information, her website is www.wendytaylorcarlisle.com.

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David Curry's second collection of poetry, *Contending to Be the Dream* (New Rivers Press), received "Special Distinction" in the Elliston Book Awards. He has been a writing fellow of the National Endowment for the Arts. For 10 years, he edited and published the poetry magazine, *Apple*.

Todd Davis is the author of six collections of poetry, most recently *Native Species* and *Winterkill*, both published by Michigan State University Press. His writing has won the Foreword INDIES Book of the Year Award and the Gwendolyn Brooks Poetry Prize. He teaches environmental studies at Pennsylvania State University's Altoona College.

Michael Dechane is a graduate of Seattle Pacific University's MFA program and a former carpenter, videographer, and speechwriter. His poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *Image*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *Cumberland River Review*, and *Saint Katherine Review*. A native of Odessa, Florida, he currently lives in Zürich, Switzerland.

Aaron Deutsch received his MFA with distinction from Texas State University and continues to develop a homo-normative voice played against a classically romantic backdrop. His work appears in *Night Train*, the *Ilanot Review*, and *Scalawag Magazine*. He splits his time developing courses at the Defense Language Institute-English Language Center and teaching creative writing classes in San Antonio.

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Jennifer L Freed lives in Massachusetts. Her work appears or is forthcoming in *Atticus Review*, *Comstock Review*, *Rust + Moth*, *The Worcester Review*, and others. A chapbook, *These Hands Still Holding*, was a finalist in the 2013 New Women's Voices Chapbook competition. Please visit jfreed.weebly.com.

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Robbie Gamble's works have appeared in *Scoundrel Time*, *Solstice*, *RHINO*, *Forklift Ohio*, and *Poet Lore*. He was the winner of the 2017 Carve Poetry prize, and has been nominated for Best of the Net. He works as a nurse practitioner caring for homeless people in Boston.

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Renny Golden's *Blood Desert: Witnesses 1820-1880* (University of New Mexico Press) won the WILLA Literary Award for poetry, was named a Southwest Notable Book of the Year 2012 and was a Finalist for the New Mexico Book Award. Her latest book *The Music of Her Rivers*, was published by University of New Mexico Press in 2019.

Paula Goldman's book, *The Great Canopy*, won the Gival Press Poetry award, and was honorable mention for the Independent Booksellers' Award. She was first prize winner in INKWELL's (Manhattanville College) poetry competition and the Louisiana Literature Award for poetry. Her second book *Late Love* has been published by Kelsay Books.

Giles Goodland was born in Taunton, took a D. Phil at Oxford, and has published a several books of poetry including *A Spy in the House of Years*, *Capital*, *Dumb Messengers*, and *The Masses*. He teaches classes on poetry for Oxford University's department of continuing education, and lives in West London.

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Garret Keizer is the author of *The World Pushes Back*, winner of the 2018 X. J. Kennedy Poetry Prize, and eight books of prose, including *Privacy* and *The Unwanted Sound of Everything We Want*. He is also a contributing editor of *Harper's Magazine* and *Virginia Quarterly Review*. His website is <https://garretkeizer.com>.

Tina Kelley's *Rise Wildly* was published by CavanKerry Press in November. Her earlier books include *Abloom & Awry* (CavanKerry Press, 2017), *Ardor*, which won the Jacar Press 2017 chapbook competition, *Precise* (Word Press, 2013), and *The Gospel of Galore* (Word Press), winner of a 2003 Washington State Book Award.

Anna Leahy is the author of *Aperture* and *Constituents of Matter*, three poetry chapbooks, and the nonfiction book *Tumor*. Her essays have won top awards from the *Los Angeles Review*, *Ninth Letter*, and *Dogwood*. She edits *TAB: The Journal of Poetry & Poetics*. See more at www.amleahy.com.

Laurinda Lind lives in New York's North Country. Some publications/ acceptances are in *Blue Earth Review*, *Comstock Review*, *Midwest Quarterly*, *Paterson Literary Review*, and *Spillway*; also anthologies *Visiting Bob: Poems Inspired by the Life and*

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Tina Mai is a high school student from California. Her writing has received recognition from organizations such as the Library of Congress, the Poetry Society of the UK, the Alliance for Young Artists & Writers, the CSLA, and the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities, among others. Her work is anchored in history and heritage and is currently in translation; it can be found in several journals and her family's group chat.

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Lynn McGee is the author of *Tracks*, a collection of poems that originated on the NYC subway (Broadstone Books, 2019). She is also the author of *Sober Cooking* and two award-winning poetry chapbooks: *Heirloom Bulldog*, which examines extinction and validates the tenacity of invasive species, and *Bonanza*.

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Amy Miller's writing has appeared in *Barrow Street*, *Gulf Coast*, *Tupelo Quarterly*, *Willow Springs*, and *ZYZZYVA*. Her full-length poetry collection *The Trouble with New England Girls* won the Louis Award from Concrete Wolf Press, and most recent chapbook is *I Am on a River and Cannot Answer* (BOAAT Press). She lives in Oregon.

Joe Milosch graduated from San Diego State University. His book *Homeplate Was the Heart & Other Stories* was nominated for an American Book Award. He has received multiple nominations for the Pushcart and has two books of poetry: *The Lost Pilgrimage Poems* and *Landscape of a Woman and a Hummingbird*.

Tony Morris has been published in *Spoon River Review*, *Hawai'i Review*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *River Styx*, *Meridian*, *The Sewanee Theological Review*, *South Dakota Review*, *Connecticut Review*, and many others.

Rebecca Morton received an MFA in poetry from Eastern Washington University. Her work has recently appeared or is forthcoming in *RHINO*, *Storm Cellar*, *The Cincinnati Review*, *Pacifica Literary Review*, *Crab Creek Review*, *Tupelo Quarterly*, *DMQ Review*, and elsewhere. She lives in Seattle with her wife and children.

Julie Murphy's poems appear in *The Massachusetts Review*, *CALYX Journal*, *Common Ground Review*, *The Red Wheelbarrow*, *The Louisville Review*, and *The Alembic*, among

other journals. A licensed psychotherapist, Julie developed Embodied Writing™. She teaches poetry, as a volunteer, at the Salinas Valley State Prison. Julie lives in Santa Cruz, California.

Adele Ne Jame has four books of poems published. She has received a National Endowment for the Arts in Poetry and served as Poet-in-Residence at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Her poems have also been published in many international journals, including *Ploughshares*, *Nimrod*, and the *Denver Quarterly*.

Damen O'Brien is an Australian poet. Damen recently won the Moth Poetry Prize amongst his many wins in Australian and international competitions. In 2019, he was published in *Cordite*, *Text*, *Overland*, and *StylusLit* amongst many others. (www.dameno.org)

Esther Ra is the author of *book of untranslatable things* and the founder of *The Underwater Railroad*, a literary unification project. Her work has received various awards, including the Pushcart and the 49th Parallel Award for Poetry. She finds joy in ordinary wonders, such as mochi icecream, glass art, and beautiful words.

Michele Reese is an English professor at USC Sumter and the author of *Following Phia*. Her poems have also appeared in journals and anthologies including *Poetry Midwest*, *The Paris Review*, *Hand in Hand: Poets Respond to Race*, and *Home is Where: An Anthology of African American Poets from the Carolinas*.

For the past twenty-four years, **Rochelle Robinson-Dukes** has been an Associate English Professor at the City Colleges of Chicago where she teaches literature and composition courses. She has been published in *African-American Review*, *Another Chicago Magazine*, *Poetry Hall Bilingual Journal*, *The Ravens Perch*, *The Temz Review*, and the anthology *In Other Words*.

Joel Savishinsky is an anthropologist, gerontologist, recovering academic and unrepentant activist. His book *Breaking The Watch: The Meanings of Retirement in America*, won the Gerontology Society's book of the year prize. Recent poetry has appeared in *California Quarterly*, *Devour*, *Metafore*, *Passager*, *Soul-Lit*, and *Windfall*. He can be reached at savishin@hotmail.com.

T. Dallas Saylor is a PhD student in poetry at Florida State University, and he holds an MFA from the University of Houston. His work meditates on the body, especially gender and sexuality, against physical, spiritual, and digital landscapes. He currently lives in Tallahassee, FL.

Claire Scott is an award winning poet who has received multiple Pushcart Prize nominations. Her work has been accepted by the Atlanta Review, Bellevue Literary Review, New Ohio Review, Enizagam and Healing Muse among others. Claire is the author of *Waiting to be Called and Until I Couldn't*. She is the co-author of *Unfolding in Light: A Sisters' Journey in Photography and Poetry*.

Ruth Smullin lives in the Boston area. Her poems have appeared in *Common Ground Review*, *Constellations*, *Crucible* (winner of the Sam Ragan Prize), *Ibbetson Street*, *Naugatuck River Review*, *Plainsongs*, *Sow's Ear Poetry Review*, and *The Aurorean*. In 2019, one of her poems was nominated for the Pushcart Prize.

Christine Swint's first poetry collection, *Swimming This*, was published in 2015 with FutureCycle Press. Her poems have appeared in *Calyx*, *Birmingham Poetry Review*,

Pilgrimage, Slant, a Journal of Poetry, Tampa Review, and others. She holds an M.F.A. from Georgia State University and an M.A. in Spanish from Middlebury College.

Author of *Museum of Rearranged Objects* (Kelsay) as well as of five chapbooks, **Judith Terzi** has received nominations for Best of the Net and Web and has been read on Radio 3 of the BBC. She taught high school French for many years as well as English at California State University, Los Angeles, and in Algiers, Algeria.

Iain Twiddy studied literature at university and lived for several years in northern Japan. His poetry has appeared in *Harvard Review, Salamander, The Stinging Fly, The London Magazine*, and elsewhere. He has written two critical studies, *Pastoral Elegy in Contemporary British and Irish Poetry* (2012) and *Cancer Poetry* (2015).

Sarah Uheida is 22 years old and was born in Tripoli, Libya. She is a poet and experimental memoirist currently completing her undergraduate degree in English Studies and Psychology at Stellenbosch University, South Africa. Her work features in the literary journals *New Contrast, Blindeye, Eunoia Review, The Shore, fresh.ink., Plume, the South African, Sonder Midwest, Stone Thursday, Everyday Fiction, Wend,* and *Flock*.

Elena Unger is an aspiring poet from Connecticut. Over the past few years, she has fallen in love with the authenticity and raw emotion that a poem can portray. She relies on poetry to navigate the delectable chaos and brutal love our world has to offer.

Kelly Vande Plasse is a poet who earns her living in the healthcare design and construction industry. She thinks of words, like drywall and metal studs, as physical things. She believes that well-assembled words, like a well-planned and constructed building, can create spaces for healing.

Brian Volck is a pediatrician who received his undergraduate degree in English Literature and his MD from Washington University in St. Louis and his MFA in creative writing from Seattle Pacific University. He is the author of a poetry collection, *Flesh Becomes Word*, and a memoir, *Attending Others: A Doctor's Education in Bodies and Words*.

B.J. Wilson holds an MFA from Eastern Kentucky University, a writing fellowship from The Hambidge Center for Creative Arts and Sciences, and a Pushcart Prize Nomination for his poetry. His first collection of poems, the chapbook, *Tuckasee*, is forthcoming from Finishing Line Press in 2020.

Annie Woodford is the author *Bootleg* (Groundhog Poetry Press, 2019). Her poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Anthology of Appalachian Writers, Epoch, Southern Humanities Review, Blackbird, The Southern Review, The Sewanee Review,* and *Prairie Schooner*, among others. She teaches community college English in Wilkesboro, North Carolina.



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