

# The Orchards Poetry Journal



Winter Issue 2018



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Inspired by the small plot of apple trees near Cambridge, England, where writers have gathered for years with their books and pens, we welcome you to pull up a chair and enjoy poetry in the orchard.





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*Jennifer O'Neill Pickering*

La Diosa del Rio Americano (The American River Goddess)







*Paul Hostovsky*

Late for the Gratitude Meeting

The guy in front of me in traffic  
is letting everyone in,  
waving at the cars like a policeman  
or a pope—  
and I really have no patience for all  
the indulgence  
and magnanimity at my expense

because I'm late for the gratitude meeting,  
which is only an hour long.  
And if I miss the first ten minutes  
of silent meditation I'm going to scream,  
because it's my favorite part and because  
it helps me remember to breathe.  
And I'm going to throttle this guy

if he doesn't stop deferring  
to all of the trundling humanity  
turning left onto Main  
at this intersection where I'm fuming,  
not feeling the love,  
not feeling the gratitude,  
feeling only resentment and disdain

because I have the right of way.  
*Would you rather be right  
or have peace? Let go,* I can hear them say  
at the gratitude meeting three blocks away,  
striking the rim of the Tibetan singing bowl,



which begins vibrating,  
and keeps on vibrating,  
like this steering wheel I can't stop clenching.



*Paul Hostovsky*

## Granted

You took it for granted because  
it was. All of it. Every single  
swallow required the work of more  
than thirty muscles you didn't know you had,  
much less that they have names,  
names you're learning now that you're learning  
to swallow all over again. And to speak—  
almost a hundred muscles involved in the act of speaking,  
says the speech therapist, who visits your hospital room  
daily since the stroke. And who knew?  
Every little thing the body did,  
every minute of your life, a friggin'  
miracle of engineering. Every breath, swallow,  
syllable. And now you're beating yourself up  
for taking it all for granted. But what's given  
is given. It remains given even if  
you lose it. Even if you never get it back.  
And if you do get it back—praise  
the doctors and nurses, praise the speech therapist,  
praise the unspeaking cashier in the hospital garage  
half smiling a little sadly on your way out—  
for God's sake, take it for granted  
now that you know that it is.



*Paul Hostovsky*

### Roll Over Bell

When I see Deaf people signing into their smartphones—  
singing into their smartphones—I can't help  
thinking of Alexander Graham Bell,  
enemy of sign language, oralist, teacher  
of the Deaf, and inventor of the telephone—  
the single greatest handicap  
to Deaf people's pursuit of jobs and happiness  
for a hundred and fifty years. I imagine him rolling over  
with Beethoven, whose own deafness was variously  
attributed to syphilis, lead poisoning, typhus,  
his habit of immersing his head in cold water  
to stay awake while composing. *Roll over  
Beethoven and tell Tchaikovsky the news,*  
the Deaf are singing into their cell phones, signing  
into their cell phones. *Signing is the most beautiful singing  
the world has ever seen,* I whisper to Bell, who doesn't  
see it. Though he can't stop staring. He grabs a fistful  
of his own beard, as if to pinch himself awake  
from this impossible dream he never dreamt because  
of a failure of his imagination. *Watson, come here, I want you...  
to see this.* The dream that any Deaf  
Tom Dick or Harry or John Paul George or Ringo  
or Ludwig with two thumbs could punch in a number  
and see the most beautiful singing the world has ever seen  
and understand what it means—that dream is coming true.



*Paul Hostovsky*

Your Wild

None of it is worth your wild.  
Your own feet, which are as good as  
dead, wrapped in the shrouds  
of your socks and lowered into the coffins  
of your shoes each morning,  
wouldn't know the earth if they were  
in it. Which soon enough you will be.  
You wouldn't know your wild if it was  
right under your nose—and your nose,  
which you have forgotten how to use  
after a whole lifetime of disuse,  
ought to be impeached, divested  
of its privileged position at the prow  
of your face, where it's been pointing  
blindly forward all your life like a travesty  
of navigation. Even your sex,  
which you can barely glimpse anymore  
for the portly promontory accreting  
grotesquely above your nether region—  
the region that is the very seat  
of your wild, the soul of your wild—  
has grown tepid, dispirited, tame.  
Ask yourself, was any of it worth  
your wild, now that your wild has flown  
and you wouldn't know your wild if it was  
your own face staring you in the face?



*David W. Landrum*  
Geometry

It was earth-measurement, Pythagoras wrote,  
brought up from Egypt and over to Greece,  
adopted by the rulers there in hope  
disputes and feuds about land might decrease  
and easements and divisions—where to place  
stone fences that defined farm property—  
would be settled with less blood and more grace.  
This was the advent of geometry.  
And then it tore itself away from soil,  
became a philosophic tool, abstract  
and rarified—so different from the toil  
of boundary setting when surveyors worked  
not dreaming Archimedes would move the globe,  
or Plato's ideal nation would evolve.





*David W. Landrum*

## Celebrity

*—In memory of Larry Norman, 1947-2008*

The whole thing is a castle made of air.  
Celebrities are people whom we think  
embody something—something our despair  
convinces us we'll never have—a link  
to objects out of reach—good looks or wealth  
or opportunity to have the thing  
we most desired and wanted for ourself;  
to grasp our vision and to live our dream.  
The vision dims. Performance grows routine.  
The songs we wrote and cherish soon grow old  
with repetition and no longer mean  
the same or tell the story they once told.  
Our spirits grow. We realize, in the end,  
it's only vanity and chasing wind.



*David W. Landrum*

## Companionship

And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man  
should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.  
—Genesis 2:18

A woman: God's first grace given to man—  
God's intervention offered in the cool  
foliage of Eden, back when things began.  
He put Adam to sleep beside a pool  
of water, took a rib, and fashioned her;  
created Eve, Mother of All Living,  
the man's helper; the proper one to share  
his joy and (later) sorrow; everything  
the current that flows deep in his heart feels.  
Thus Moses comments, This is why a man  
leaves father and mother and why he steals  
away from home, away from kin and clan,  
and joins his wife—grace God could not deny  
when something less than perfect caught his eye.



*Leslie Schultz*

Antique Absinthe Glasses, Inverted, on a Window Ledge

Deeper than evening, this dense blue  
can be both seen and seen clear through,  
though what shows through this bluest air  
both really is and is not there.

Absent the spirit's fairy green  
these glasses hold what's rarely seen:  
a mind-intoxicating hue  
mixing phantom old with new.

I yearn for beauty's truest joys,  
but tend to see what time destroys.  
This indigo makes me pause to ponder  
in luring memories to wander  
could absinthe make the heart grow fonder?



*Morgan Driscoll*

### Forms' Function

These days you have to wonder: why the hell,  
when even writing free verse is so hard,  
you'd ever choose to write a villanelle

and then, to dare to think you'd write it well?  
There isn't much ambition to be bards  
these days. You have to wonder why the hell

that is, when hip hop music seems to sell  
and rapper's decadence, the best reward  
you'd ever choose. To write a villanelle,

though, wouldn't help achieve that lavish lifestyle.  
I think Poesy's still compulsory at Harvard.  
These days you have to wonder why. The hell

of rhyme and counting every syllable.  
Mountebanking that you're using words  
you'd ever choose to write. A villanelle

just reads as something artificial.  
An archaic form that has to be endured  
these days. You have to wonder, why? The HELL  
I'd ever choose, to write a villanelle.



*M.J. Iuppa*

We Walked Along the Lake Today

with every intention ready  
to be offered up to the waxing  
wind and waves and gray sky  
full of gulls caught in cross-  
currents, rising slightly, then  
dipping down to rocks  
consumed by the collapse  
of water, where we stood  
too close, staring at cracks  
that held a deep sadness,  
a threshold of solitude  
we dared to cross.



*Gilbert Allen*

Take One

Zebras, xylophones at rest,  
graze green scores—bored, unimpressed.  
Lions laze like useless lyres,  
terminally uninspired.

Hippos float like grand pianos  
covered with whole notes of guano.  
Oxpeckers play hidebound keys  
chopsticking their ticks and fleas.

Cheetah's cello, scales ascending,  
bows his way toward an ending.  
Antelope's lame, hopeless solo  
flops—her futile to-and-fro, slows.

Hyenas harmonize their grins.  
Vultures soar like violins.



*Gilbert Allen*  
Organ Recitals

Sam's bunion doesn't even let him walk  
for long enough to get his dog to pee.

"My prostate seems to think *I* shouldn't pee,"  
Tim scowled, straight at his trousers.

"You should talk."  
Dee pulled a diaper from her purse. "Don't gawk.  
I wear these bad boys everywhere."

"Now, Dee,  
You call *that* trouble? What about my knee?  
I'm on my third, and all it does is ache,"  
Priscilla stuttered, lifting up her skirt  
to show her latest scar.

"Top this," Frank said,  
arthritic fingers fumbling with his shirt.  
"Quadruple bypass, after a Code Red!"

"Code Blue," their waitress smiled. "Frank's such a flirt."

Tim grimaced. "He should quit while he's ahead."



*Gilbert Allen*

Customer Assistance

*an automated villanelle*

We value every caller. Please stand by.  
Listen closely for menu directives. . . .  
I'm sorry. I don't understand. Let's try

to get a few things straight. Can you provide  
the full nine-digit zip code where you live?  
Thanks so much, Mr. Allen. Please stand by. . . .

Do you know you're our first priority?  
Say *yes* or press 1 for affirmative. . . .  
I'm sorry. I don't understand. Let's try

this one more time. . . . Okay. Now verify  
your primary account by pressing 5. . . .  
We value every caller. Please stand by.

Remember: It is a crime to falsify  
or fabricate the data that you give. . . .  
I'm sorry. I don't understand. Let's try

to maximize your user quality. . . .  
Please hold for our next representative.  
We value every caller. Please stand by.  
Please hold—





*Taylor Graham*

Wings at Rest

The borderland between past and unknown  
is embodied in a Chinese chest carved of teak,  
squatting at the threshold; on its face,  
a crane contemplating flight;  
inside, unsorted boxes of old photos, sepia  
to black & white, at last to color,  
filling breaches of memory  
as each generation lapses—  
small-fry in diapers, older boys in breeches,  
girls in shirtwaist and silk—through seasons  
of fashion falling from favor to waste,  
so many dead leaves, as an album leaves off  
its final pages, incomplete; the crane  
never lifting off, yearning to fly.



*Taylor Graham*

Still Meadow

*for Cindy (1952-2017)*

An old-time family in these parts,  
they settled that land below  
the overland route. Their hearts  
grew still and full on meadow,

settling that land below  
where horses grazed free grass,  
growing still and full on meadow;  
deaf to traffic headed for the pass.

Where horses grazed free grass  
she was born to horses and the land,  
deaf to traffic headed for the pass.  
Field and woods could understand

she was born to horses and the land,  
knowing the forest's every nook,  
field and woods. Understand,  
she read a horse better than a book,

and knew the forest's every nook.  
Weather and trails, the canyon deeps  
she read. A horse—better than a book—  
is land where a body's spirit keeps



weather and trails, the canyon deeps.  
There's an overland route to heart,  
the land where body's spirit keeps  
an old-time family in these parts.



*Taylor Graham*

Four in the Morning

*C.C. Peirce on his walks over the county*

The Reverend is ready to go, silently  
out the door so as not to wake—  
to inconvenience—any person of the house.  
If bread or fruit is on the table,  
he blesses, eats it,  
and is gone. In his carpet-bag,  
an extra suit of underwear, but mostly  
books and candles—a load  
that becomes him on the trail, balances  
him barefoot. “Why should I ride?  
My Master walked!” Innocent of creed  
and ritual, he leads each voice  
to echo Scripture. The benediction settles  
as if spoken from the skies, as day  
will end with stars. Four in the morning  
is a fitting time to rise.

*based on a biography by Charles Elmer Upton*



*Taylor Graham*  
Listening to Dark

The dog barking at one, two, three a.m.—  
by four it was clear as night before dawn  
some wild creature stirring beyond the lawn,  
the fence we put up, human stratagem  
for facing midnight. At first light I found  
in the fridge a bottle of soured milk;  
the kitchen webbed with silver spider silk;  
and just beside our garden, on the ground  
a large dark excrement—the scat of bear.  
I didn't know they lived here on our land.  
So much I walk on, and don't understand  
and think, not seeing, that it isn't there.  
Morning's fresh with secrets up and under;  
the frisson of something new to wonder.



*Sally Nacker*

The Bear

*for Henry, a poet*

You wrote you spotted a woolly bear  
just outside your front door, and you thought  
it a sure sign of spring in the air.

I like the image of a woolly bear,  
of your blue eyes widening in wonder  
at the big black paws on your front porch stair.

You might have thought, being the Henry, you are,  
an enormous poem had come for a visit.  
A poem, just up from a long sleep, there

at your door; hungry, with a desperate streak.  
Over your coffee, you might have thought  
Could it, finally, be the bear that you seek?



*Sally Nacker*

Wonder

*for Leslie Schultz*

Inside your own birdhouse,  
overlooking a snowy view  
unusual for late April, you  
whisper poems in pencil.

Bird footprints in new snow  
are like repeated stencils,  
you note with your swift pencil;  
a tale of a baffling passage

in search of seed and worm.  
You write of bird concern.  
In your heart, you burn  
a light so bright with song

the birds must be looking in  
to see what bird you are.  
Your arc of human form, there,  
bent, singing, must astound.



*Jean L. Kreiling*

### The Roaring

The wind pulled at his hair, the cold spray stung  
his brow, the sand blew in his eyes—and this  
felt just right for a fool like him, who'd flung  
his last chance past the breakers; an abyss  
as deep as any ocean soon would claim  
what future he had left. He heard derision  
in crashing waves that seemed to roar his name,  
condemning him and his reckless decision.  
Who knew the ocean would be so unkind,  
would salt regrets, leave rages newly stirred?  
Enough. He went home, left the sea behind,  
and poured himself the liquid he preferred.  
He drank some scotch, then stumbled off to bed,  
but he still heard the roaring in his head.





*Jean L. Kreiling*  
Memorial for Ben

*i.m. Benedict Quinn Underhill (1959-2018)*

Ben swam against the tide for many years,  
and wrestled currents that he knew would take  
his breath away. He spat out pain and fears,  
and made more of his life than most men make.  
And he made stalwart friends who now have come,  
as he'd requested, to this chilly shore  
where he grew up. They weep and hug, and some  
tell stories; there's a toast, then one thing more  
they do for Ben. They dive into the sea,  
most laughing, each one with a fist clenched tight—  
boys in their fifties, mourning, but with glee—  
illuminated by the slanting light  
of summer's end and braced against the cold  
by love for him whose ashes they all hold.



*Laurie Kolp*

### The Deep Alone

Since our engagement mess I sleep alone.  
No wheeze of ZZZs, I'm counting sheep alone.

My mother's wedding dress repacked away  
like Christmas gifts in May. I weep alone.

Beneath our bed: a box of pearls and lace  
amid stacks trashed, want ads, dust heaps alone.

I retrace my steps, careen down paths unseen  
into my manic mind I keep alone.

Am I a girl insane without you here?  
Will I now slip into the deep alone?



*Tobias Peterson*

Guernsey Beach (Batterie Mirus)

We were here in our trunks, straddling  
the muzzles whose salted mouths once posed  
as cottage doors, set to flash open, gasp  
in reverse at invaders on the green channel.  
Can you picture those voices of flame  
for years tucked into imagined homes, waiting  
to utter their terrible vowels and scatter inkdust?  
The hollows seemed so sad of purpose. Just  
yesterday we looked back to this rise from our place  
in the sea and sung out at the crest of the bracing  
waves, waving hello to the families that lived  
in their minds behind rows of blank windows.



*Randel McCraw Helms*

## The Wolf of Gubbio

*In 1872, during renovations of the Church of St. Francis of Peace, in Gubbio, the skeleton of a large wolf, apparently several centuries old, was found under a slab near the church wall.*

—Adrian House, Francis of Assisi

I have no name your kind would know;  
We go by scent, my name's a smell,  
But who I am one word will tell:  
I ate the sheep of Gubbio.

Soon I grew bold, first lambs, then men,  
For you were fat, and I was thin.  
To kill, to eat, my only good;  
I gnawed your tongues, I lapped your blood.

I knew no God, I murdered sheep:  
Fill my belly, go to sleep.  
Your children next, such easy prey  
When they came gaily out to play.

Then "Brother Wolf," he said to me,  
And all was changed, changed utterly.  
I wept ashamed, he stroked my head  
And promised me I would be fed.

Now I'm a lamb, and I am meek,  
They feed me richly every week.  
I live by what dear Francis said:  
It's meat and blood, but tastes like bread.



*Paul Fraleigh*

Winter

Majestic in invincibility,  
The winter brooks no deals, no middle ground.  
Ruling her realms with stark severity,  
She spurs the bleak December winds to sound  
Their wild laments; builds caves of ice, vast and  
Cathedral-like, glazed walls aglint like glass,  
While drifts, like shifting dunes of desert sand,  
Grow curved and crested as her storm winds pass.  
And when her empire turns to slush, she'll wait  
The summer's swelter out, high on a chain  
Of snowcapped mountain peaks, where throned in state,  
Majestic, sovereign, proud, untamed, she'll reign  
From lofty citadels with snowy sheen  
Outshining boastful summer's emerald green.



*Jake Sheff*

In Memory of Ursula K. Le Guin

*Whatever exists, he said. Whatever in creation exists without my knowledge exists without my consent.*  
The judge (Blood Meridian, Cormac McCarthy)

I.

Reprieve of sorts; a nice, sustained  
impression; proof that wisdom is  
the fruit of change: your nightingale's  
a suzerain  
the occiput has eyes for; kiss  
itself is jealous of applause

the angels bring. And what remained?  
Electrocardiography;  
the ocelot your nightingales  
refuse to gain  
a fiery, religious tree  
in verse-averse reality.

II.

If G-d is influenced by stone,  
if what He sees  
in memories  
before Day One  
is what you saw of Creation,  
then time's a clone



of you. If gravel's not the god  
of work, if loss  
is applesauce  
to where the light is  
seeking form on hepatitis-  
ravaged sod,

then fantasies are not just pumice.  
If life's mishaps  
should leave misshapen  
hours like aurochs,  
if truth should prove it's hyperbaric's  
field, then your blue mice

are love. If shadows scalp the sun,  
if suit yourself  
is shoot yourself  
to single-file  
time and time's a pedophile,  
your story's done

its job. If incest turns my eyes  
to nicest, bling bling  
turns my Sing Sing  
in its pelt  
to pelt like Teddy Roosevelt,  
then please advise.



*John Grey*

Valley Morning

The sun is of a honey gild  
On mauve and rock and vineyard green,  
The cockcrow light glows tangerine  
Through tinsel of bright dewdrops spilled  
On garland leaf and finch song trilled  
Across the shake of cobweb skein,  
While nascent breezes softly glean  
The dregs of dark, so clean, so skilled.

Across the livid bill and plain.  
Blow scattered threads of eiderdown,  
Enormous fields sip last night's rain,  
As morning slips a spangled crow  
Upon the pine-steeped day refrain  
From lake to red-roofed dazzling town





*Diane Elayne Dees*

Teatime in Lewes

Mrs. Woolf arrives for tea  
precisely at the stroke of three.  
Arrange the books that line the hall,  
erase that mark that's on the wall!  
(some things it's better she not see).

We know she likes to smoke and dance  
and engage in more than one romance;  
our minds are broad, our thinking free,  
but this is hardly Bloomsbury  
(and our thinking isn't that advanced).

Her intellect is, of course, superior;  
her thoughts could be a little cheerier.  
So please, no talk of war, decay—  
no dreary monologues today  
(though hers do tend to be interior).

We'll put a prize vase on the shelf—  
the German crystal or the delft.  
Sweet William shines in white and red,  
but leave it blooming in its bed  
(she prefers to buy the flowers herself).

(originally published in *The Raintown Review*)



*Diane Elayne Dees*

### Light Show

Outside my house on a cool June night,  
the fireflies put on a dazzling show.  
Unlike the stars, they twinkle low  
around my head in a lazy flight.

Each beetle gets its turn to light  
the way; the pace is measured, slow.  
Flashing colors soft yet bright,  
the fireflies put on a dazzling show.

In my childhood, this was a common sight,  
but now, it's rare to undergo  
the mysterious luciferin glow  
that still can stir childlike delight  
outside my house on a cool June night.



*Sally Thomas*

Memoir

If a photo's never labeled, then  
Did the people pictured not exist?  
Who would know the difference? All babies  
Look more or less alike. All bluebells are  
Identical. All late-night arguments:  
Equal in their dreary recitations,  
Their hissed responsories. If I say  
*We were happy*, what evidence of happiness  
Can I produce to show posterity?  
Here's a Christmas. Candles waver on the mantel.  
The darkness outside presses in upon  
Their little light. Still, we bothered lighting them.  
Or here's my body, risen in a dome,  
A new child confectioned on its altar.  
See: happy people do these things. We did  
These things. Therefore, you see, we were happy.  
But often, I was happiest alone.  
In the rain I walked along the towpath  
Where the narrowboats lay moored beneath the wind  
Combing the slow brown current with its fingers.  
I walked upstream against it. Or I walked down.  
In the company of the people I loved most,  
I was pierced with loneliness. In the spring,  
Bluebells opened their infinite small throats  
In all the woods and drank the molten air,  
Every year the same, only more.



*Sally Thomas*

My Father Drawing in an Upstairs Room

Outside, on a live stirring backdrop of broad-handed green,  
The black cat on her branch spreads her back toes and licks, licks, between.

He looks musingly at her, and through her, as if right now he  
Saw some mystery imposed on — or being born from — the tree.

On the table, five charcoal-drawn children roughhouse in a whiteness  
You might see as *empty*. You might discern in it the likeness

Of a person who waits and observes, is as happy to wait  
Forever for something to happen beyond these five straight

Black figures like capering trees in a cosmos of snow.  
In my mind the catalpa leaves roofing the morning still glow

Sun-heavy, alive. These five children he's caught in their white  
Fleet-foot moment perdure, as all shadows survive on daylight.

He's looking at them, as in this long instant I've seen him.  
Once more the cat spreads her black toes, once more licks between them.

*For E.H. 1930-2005*



*James Owens*

Prologue on St. Stephen's Day

Gray winter light makes plain things plain,  
as if the icy needle-rain  
has stripped every festive trace  
and restored the local truth, a place  
obvious, Midwest, matter-of-fact,  
this post-Yule noon. Shoppers backed  
into a doorway await a lull  
in the downpour, as minutes pass, null  
on null, like merging drops, and they shrug,  
surrender to being wet, and chug  
through ankle-drenching, muddy gutters.  
A roof-spout streams. A storm-grate mutters.  
Tossed butts unravel on the sidewalk.  
We hunch into coats and don't talk,  
the pact of goodwill laid aside,  
an act of faith we yearly abide  
to play a while, for the children's sake,  
until this rain reminds us to ache,  
as null on null the minutes merge  
with time, and how the years converge  
right here, this breaking "now," this wave  
of all we know and all we have.



*James Owens*

On the New Edition of W. H. Auden's Collected Poems (Mars City: 2150)

This ancient poet's lexicon perplexes.  
He waxes giddy over "God" and "art"  
in semantic ranges where we know "text" is  
the proper signifier. And that's just a start —  
he's stubbornly confused about the sexes,  
pines for finished "love" when partners part,  
and where he obviously means "complexes,"  
verses reference his damned and ragged "heart."



*Jennifer O'Neill Pickering*

Samsara, Paying respect to my Dad's ashes at Scott's Flat Lake, Nevada City, CA.

A cold warmth beneath sky  
grey as a cats' fur  
licks the air with salt shakers of snow.  
A Sierra February colors my cheeks  
like wild strawberries in summer.  
I look for you in the clear depths of the lake  
at the quartz pebbles and their obsidian sisters  
tumbled smooth by the current's cradled rock  
imagine a small bone they hold in place:  
that I might make a wish upon  
think I hear the aria of your laughter  
north wind carries up the ridge  
into the chantey of pines.  
I want to cry, but my eyes are stones  
skipping across the tin skin of lake.  
I hear you call out my name in a flat horned note  
the splash of a strong swimmer (as you'd been).  
Is this mud hen, this duck your samsara—eager for my bread crumbs?  
How easily she glides, shelters in the alders' crochet of twigs  
warm in her feathered bed.

The Hindus process of reincarnation is called samsara, a continuous cycle in which the soul is reborn over and over again according to the law of action and reaction. At death many Hindus believe the soul is carried by a subtle body into a new physical body which can be a human or non-human form (an animal or divine being).



*Jennifer O'Neill Pickering*

Aliso

What is called Aliso  
California sycamore  
*Platanus racemosa*  
is a mother who cradles shade  
a tailor of golden mantles  
fathering immense stillness  
moved by the strings of wind  
neighbor reaching across the road  
infructescence of spherical fruit  
autumns of selfless giving  
in transition smoothing rough layers  
shares the same roots with a twin  
befriends rivers and land that's low  
seeks wells of truth  
explores darkness  
to great depths.





*Jennifer O'Neill Pickering*  
Crann

*More trees than Paris  
shade of infinite joy  
marriage of earth and sky  
rungs to paradise*

The house was chosen for  
the old sycamore the city gave away  
branches grown yard to yard  
touching tentatively as new lovers.  
The house is simple in design  
made of bones of trees—a sacred place.

Her ancestors cradled apple saplings coming west  
purchased at nurseries in Missouri and Ohio  
precious as the heirlooms left behind.  
These they'd plant with raised barns  
for pressed cider potent as whiskey.

As a girl she lived on an island of yard  
surrounded by oceans of trees whose  
April blossoms spun dreams.  
The apricot, a favorite to climb  
flatten limb to limb  
match its shape.



When the developer uprooted  
the almond orchard across the road  
one linked with a swing,  
she wept for hideouts dug  
in leafy shade roofs of scrap wood  
wattle of mud and Johnson grass

refuge gone in a day.



*Robert Donohue*

Pagan, Baby

With Bacchus I would like to tipple  
And share a wine skin, not a glass,  
Then hear the words spoke by a Sybille  
Who's off her gourd on laughing gas.

The frenzied Maenads, they don't scare me  
(I savor rites of different kinds)  
Although from limb from limb they'll tear me  
When they flip out and lose their minds.

I'll twang a harp with lord Apollo,  
The Muses nine, they should be there,  
And where they go I'll surly follow  
With flowing robes, sans underwear.

Those gods of old, I won't renounce them,  
The truth is I'm within their thrall.  
Despite the fact I can't pronounce them,  
Those sacred names, I love them all.

I'd live with them if they would let me,  
Find peace beneath the pagan moon.  
I know the sun is out to get me  
And dawn will break on me too soon.



**D. R. James**

New Year's Resolution

A cliché of diamonds staccatos  
across this first verse of sun, across  
undisturbed snow as white and composed  
as Styrofoam—till you can't dismiss

what's winking, what truly is twinkling,  
or then the burly squirrel bounding through,  
a cartoon ball bouncing out its tune.  
Granted, this should finally do you good.

In fact, it should go on resounding  
against the discordant rounds without  
and within, against the monotoned news,  
the refrained and distasteful self-

revelations, against the flatted notes  
of familial failures, of aging and its kin,  
against the perennial drone toward ever more  
of the ho-hum. Yes, you'd think it should . . .

and it does: this New Year lyric—landscape  
writ bright with ice diamonds, wet confetti  
free-falling at will from still branches—sings,  
*albeit pianissimo*, against it all.

*first published in Psychological Clock, Pudding House Publications, 2007*



**Jane Blanchard**

Upon the Death of V. S. Naipaul

He really should have been more kind  
And bought his wife a wedding ring.  
Did he not know that she would mind

The lack of such? Though he could find  
Some prostitute who did not cling,  
He really should have been more kind

To one reliably inclined  
To do for him most anything.  
Did he not know how she would mind

A mistress, who herself would wind  
Up lonely after quite a fling?  
He really should have been more kind

To either woman left behind  
So he could take what life might bring.  
Did he not know that each would mind?

Or were these women both resigned  
To roles beyond embarrassing?  
He really should have been more kind.  
Did he not know? Did they not mind?



*Sue Crisp*

Beneath the Face of Winter

Once a gentle rain, offering the promise  
of spring to those in dormant slumber,  
waiting to bathe their faces in the sun,

now turned to sleet and hail, entombing  
what was a beautiful dream, before a full  
awakening. Winter's fickle sense of humor.



*Sue Crisp*

### Barn Yard

The leaning old barn sat grey and silent  
in the open overgrown pasture.  
A former home to farm animals,  
now filled with litter and a swirl of cobwebs.

Over the years, it has become home  
to a variety of rodents and birds.  
Scatterings of scrub-brush, perfect for nesting,  
surrounds its' partial foundation.

Raucous squawks from a vigilante murder of crows  
sends all into frozen hiding and stillness  
as the shadow of a Peregrine Falcon,  
passes silently overhead...



**David Spicer**

**Elegy for a Chanteuse**

for Amy Winehouse, 1983-2011

You never wanted that fame we all crave,  
wisely so: though your rare voice owned your soul,  
the power of Ella, Nina, and Billie, a brave  
different delivery that exacted a cruel toll  
on you in your celebrity-drunk crowd,  
and your look that told the world you had arrived—  
the demented beehive of black hair that swirled  
on your head and made us remember you lived—  
you only craved to play tunes or write songs,  
sing them to ones you loved and who loved you,  
but some who adored your music led you along  
roads darker than one of your dark tattoos,  
not caring about your deepest desperate desire:  
to sing, and just sing, with your heart on fire.





**David Spicer**

Sentinels of Love

Oh Delta Leo, queen of the violin,  
black-haired lover of Chaucer, commit  
to me: love isn't a gallows in the storm  
of life. Remember the time we viewed  
the moon as a round whale, or a crown  
on the night's stars? You ate that loaf  
of bread, including the crusts, didn't  
gain a gram, your bones shinier than my  
brand-new riding boots. You don't suffer  
much, Delta, but I do: sometimes you  
drive a bulldozer through my heart  
when you cling to me, and I crumble  
as you brood after we couple.  
Don't be a miser of affection  
when we can't decide  
whether to vacation in Jerusalem,  
Little Egypt, or a hay barn in Iowa.  
Remember when you played Bluebeard's  
Sonata for the hunter who shot an elk  
and I cradled my shotgun? Your eyes  
glazed, you said to him, *Your life  
is now an earthquake, buddy.*  
I didn't squeeze the trigger.  
He laughed at you, offered you  
a pastry and a kiss. You sneered.  
We walked backwards, away from him.  
Yes, you and I are sentinels of love, dazzling  
each other, dazzling that whale of a moon,  
that crown of thorns on the night stars.



*Chapman Hood Frazier*

Crow

You're the philosopher of funk, reading salvation in opossum entrails  
on the roadside with your cock-eyed musings and morning call.

Street smart, you see art in the fine stink of distinction as you two-step  
traffic in an awkward hump and flap to continue your close reading

of carcass. The ultimate deconstructionist, you pick at each text in the holy rite  
of dismemberment, gorging on the relativity of the body in its ooze of

after thought; calling into question the very word, "ruin." Oh, dark god  
of afterlife, you sense in decay the hidden apocrypha of salvation. Oh,

hawk chaser, you are the defender of the decomposed. You never forget a face,  
in your wink and nod, pricking it eyeless like a trinket. Each martyr bone

sold for your séance is spoken for in your strange morphology of tongue.  
Oh, confessor of the fetid, you caw into question each myth of resurrection

siting oblivion in your bone yard dance of redemption. You pick the locks  
of the body open in your split-tongued spell that curses impermanence.

For this is your baptism of stench. This, your holy rant for rain, death is  
just black catechism caught mid-croak that rises in your throat,

in your muttered promise of forever. Or, is it just more dark sarcasm in  
your blue-black stutter, a final, eulogized, holy joke.



*Chapman Hood Frazier*

## The Ghost Knife

(A type of loach often found in aquariums)

You swim back and forth before settling on white gravel.  
Almost blind by day, you remember a rock face and the scent of shrimp,  
and in each ripple of fin, feel  
    a body memory of release.

Whatever floats just above the green, pre-dawn light  
is moving its mouth as if saying your name  
    over and over again. It blurs like

the wings of a moth hovering against glass. It pushes through the light  
like something you could almost see  
    to believe in, like a god.

In each eclipse you sense its movement, a shimmer, perhaps,  
a presence appearing in a real world you can  
    only know by dying.

So, you swim back and forth, your eye ghosting in these ambiguities  
of sight, in a world that has collapsed into this familiar myth  
    of your own making.



*R. Gerry Fabian*

Minstrel Optics

I could have played you through the summer heat  
Your lips were wild wet and your pulse was mine.  
Like a skilled musician I knew its beat  
and blew hot passion notes on every line.

Still your innocent chant was far too pure  
with such a soft and simple style plus time.  
It seemed to offer me the total score  
Yet now it's just a simple stated rhyme.

And yes, I stole your song; tune, words and all  
and left you without signature or key.  
It's best to improvise before the fall  
thus so I leave this note to you from me.

You were the innocence and I, the pain  
what registers now as loss; is your gain.



## Biographies

**Gilbert Allen**'s most recent collection of poems is *Catma*, from Measure Press. His sequence of poems "The Assistant" received the Robert Penn Warren Prize from *The Southern Review* in 2007, and his work has been featured on *Poetry Daily*, *Verse Daily*, *The Writer's Almanac*, and *Your Daily Poem*. A longtime resident of upstate South Carolina, he was elected to the South Carolina Academy of Authors, the state's literary hall of fame, in 2014.

**Jane Blanchard** lives and writes in Georgia. Her work has recently appeared in *The Dead Mule*, *The Deronda Review*, *Lighten Up Online*, *Literary Matters*, *Mezzo Cammin*, and *Snakeskin*. Her collections—the shorter *Unloosed* and the longer *Tides & Currents*—are available from Kelsay Books.

**Sue Crisp** is a writer of poetry and children's books. She has had poems published in *Lummo Press 6 & 7*, *Voices of Lincoln*, *Medusa*, *Nicenet*, *Free Wheeling Towe Auto Museum Poetry*, *Housewife Writer's Forum*, and others. Sue enjoys writing all forms of poetry. She also has one published children's book.

**Diane Elayne Dees**'s poems have been published in many journals and anthologies. Diane, who lives in Covington, Louisiana, also publishes *Women Who Serve*, a blog that covers women's professional tennis throughout the world.

**Robert Donohue** is a poet and playwright. His poetry has appeared in *Measure*, *The Raintown Review*, *2 Bridges Review*, and the *Orchards*. His verse play, *In One Piece*, (about Vincent van Gogh) was given a staged reading by The Red Harlem Readers. He lives on Long Island, NY.

**Morgan Driscoll** is a long-time commercial artist, looking to express himself in some other way than selling Widgets. Poetry seemed the least commercial, and most under the radar way he could think of. So far it has been a satisfying, but obscure journey.



He has been published in *The Amethyst Review*, *Humanist Magazine*, *Mused*, *Califragile*, *Pure Slush*, *Caesura*, and *the Northwest Indiana Literary Journal*, among others.

**R. Gerry Fabian** is a retired English instructor. He has been publishing poetry since 1972 in various poetry magazines. His web page is: <https://rgerryfabian.wordpress.com>. He is the editor of Raw Dog Press <https://rawdogpress.wordpress.com>. His novels, *Memphis Masquerade*, *Getting Lucky (The Story)*, and published poetry book, *Parallels*, are available at Smashwords and all other eBook stores. *Seventh Sense*, his third novel, has been published by Smashwords. He is currently working on his second book of published poems.

**Paul Fraleigh**'s poems have appeared or are forthcoming in such journals as *The Raintown Review*, *The Barefoot Muse*, *Umbrella*, *Think*, *Blue Unicorn*, *The Lyric*, *Candelabrum*, and *Autumn Sky Poetry Daily*. He lives in Montreal.

**Chapman Hood Frazier** is currently the co-director of the Sunrise Learning Center, an innovative pre-school located in Farmville, VA and a Professor in Residence for James Madison University. Most of these poems are from a collection, *Books of the Bestiary*, that is just being completed. He was a co-poetry editor of the *Dos Passos Review* and guest editor for *the Hampden Sydney Poetry Review*, and his work has appeared in the *Virginia Quarterly Review*, *The Patterson Literary Review*, *The South Carolina Review*, *ARTimes2 Poetry Anthology*, and other small press publications.

**Taylor Graham** is a volunteer search-and-rescue dog handler in the Sierra Nevada, and she is El Dorado County's first poet laureate (2016-2018). In addition to *the Orchards*, her work has appeared in *The Iowa Review*, *New York Quarterly*, *Poet Lore*, *Southern Humanities Review*, and elsewhere. She's included in the anthologies *Villanelles (Everyman's Library)* and *California Poetry: From the Gold Rush to the*



*Present* (Santa Clara University/Heyday Books). Her latest book is *Uplift* (Cold River Press, 2016).

**John Grey** is an Australian poet, US resident. He has been recently published in the *Homestead Review*, *Poetry East*, and *Columbia Review* with work upcoming in *Harpur Palate*, *the Hawaii Review*, and *Visions International*.

**Paul Hostovsky's** tenth book of poetry, *Late for the Gratitude Meeting*, is forthcoming from Kelsay Books in 2019. His poems have won a Pushcart Prize, two Best of the Net awards, the FutureCycle Poetry Book Prize, the *Comstock Review's* Muriel Craft Bailey Award, and chapbook contests from Grayson Books, Split Oak Press, Frank Cat Press, Riverstone Press, and Sport Literate. He has also been featured on *Poetry Daily*, *Verse Daily*, *Your Daily Poem*, and 21 times on the *Writer's Almanac*. He makes his living in Boston as a sign language interpreter. Website: paulhostovsky.com

**D. R. James** has been teaching writing, literature, and peace-making at Hope College in Holland, Michigan, for 33 years and lives in the woods outside of Saugatuck. Poetry and prose have appeared in a variety of journals and anthologies, and his newest of seven poetry collections are *If god were gentle* (Dos Madres Press, 2017) and the chapbooks *Split-Level* and *Why War* (both Finishing Line Press, 2017 and 2014). [amazon.com/author/drjamesauthorpage](https://amazon.com/author/drjamesauthorpage)

**Laurie Kolp's** poems have recently appeared in the *Southern Poetry Anthology VIII: Texas, Stirring, Whale Road Review, concis, Up the Staircase*, and more. Her poetry books include the full-length *Upon the Blue Couch* and chapbook *Hello, It's Your Mother*. An avid runner and lover of nature, Laurie lives in Southeast Texas with her husband, three children, and two dogs.

**Jean L. Kreiling** is the author of two poetry collections, *Arts & Letters & Love* (2018) and *The Truth in Dissonance* (2014). Her work has earned the *Able Muse*



Write Prize, the Great Lakes Commonwealth of Letters Sonnet Contest, three New England Poetry Club prizes, and the *String Poet Prize*.

**David W. Landrum** teaches Literature at Grand Valley State University in Michigan. His poetry has appeared widely, most recently in *Measure*, *Raintown Review*, *Verse and Voice*, *Landlocked Lyres*, and *Three Drops from a Cauldron*

**M.J. Iuppa** is the Director of the Visual and Performing Arts Minor Program and Lecturer in Creative Writing at St. John Fisher College; and since 2000 to present, is a part time lecturer in Creative Writing at The College at Brockport. Since 1986, she has been a teaching artist, working with students, K-12, in Rochester, NY, and surrounding area. Most recently, she was awarded the New York State Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Adjunct Teaching, 2017. She has four full-length poetry collections, *This Thirst* (Kelsay Books, 2017), *Small Worlds Floating* (2016) as well as *Within Reach* (2010) both from Cherry Grove Collections; *Night Traveler* (Foothills Publishing, 2003); and 5 chapbooks. She lives on a small farm in Hamlin NY.

**Randel McCraw Helms** is retired from Arizona State University's English Department. Making poems is his lifelong vice, and his recent work has appeared in *the Orchards*, *Dappled Things*, and *DoveTales*.

**Sally Nacker** resides in New England, and works in flowers. Her two poetry collections are *Vireo* (2015) and *Night Snow* (2017), both from Kelsay Books. She publishes regularly in poetry journals, including *Mezzo Cammin: An Online Journal of Formalist Poetry by Women*, *the Orchards*, *Fourth River*, *Grey Sparrow Journal*, *The Wayfarer*, and *The Red Wheelbarrow*. Her forty-page paper on poet Amy Lowell was reviewed by Annie Finch on Poetry Foundation: *Wings and Windows*. She lives quietly with her husband and their two cats. Please visit her website at [www.sallynacker.com](http://www.sallynacker.com).

**James Owens's** most recent collection of poems is *Mortalia* (FutureCycle Press, 2015). His poems and translations appear widely in literary journals, including recent or upcoming publications in *Waxwing*, *Adirondack Review*, *Tule Review*, *The*





*American Journal of Poetry*, and *Southword*. A native of Virginia, he earned an MFA at the University of Alabama and lives in a small town in northern Ontario.

**Tobias Peterson** holds an MFA in Poetry from Texas State University. His work has appeared in *The Gulf Coast Review*, *Phantom Drift*, *Figroot Press*, *Coldnoon*, and elsewhere. He teaches at Clark College in Vancouver, Washington.

**Jennifer O'Neill Pickering** is a literary and visual artist. Her poetry appears in numerous publications, literary journals, and podcasts. Some of these include: *Sacramento Voices*, *Occupy Wall Street*, *Munyori Literary Journal*, *Tiger's Eye*, *Earth's Daughters*, *Yellow Silk*, *Heresies*, and *PoetryNow Online*. *I Am the Creek* is included in the Sacramento site-specific sculpture, *Open Circle*. A collection of her poetry, *Blooming In Winter* is illustrated with ten color plates of her visual art and available on Amazon. She's been a featured reader/performer on *Writer's on the Air*, KQED Capitol Public Radio the Sacramento Poetry Center, Sofia Tsakopoulos Center for the Arts, the University of New York at Buffalo, and the environmental website *Restore and Restory*. She is a recipient of grants from the Sacramento Metropolitan Arts Commission. A public art work of her public art also includes a poem. Her prose appears in *Harlequin publications*, *Dime Show Review* v.3, *Raven's Perch*, and elsewhere. You can learn more about her writing at the website: [shepaintsandwrites.com](http://shepaintsandwrites.com)

**Leslie Schultz** (Northfield, Minnesota) is the author of two collections of poetry, *Still Life with Poppies: Elegies* (Kelsay Books, 2016) and *Cloud Song* (Kelsay Books, 2018). Her poetry has appeared most recently in *Able Muse*, *Blue Unicorn Journal*, *Light*, *Mezzo Cammin*, *Swamp Lily Review*, *Poetic Strokes Anthology*, *Third Wednesday*, *The Madison Review*, *The Midwest Quarterly*, *the Orchards*, and *The Wayfarer*; in the sidewalks of Northfield; and in a chapbook, *Living Room* (Midwestern Writers' Publishing House). She received a Pushcart Prize nomination in 2017 and has twice had winning poems in the Maria W. Faust sonnet contest



(2013, 2016). Schultz posts poems, photographs, and essays on her website: [www.winsonamedia.net](http://www.winsonamedia.net).

**Jake Sheff** is a major and pediatrician in the US Air Force, married with a daughter and six pets. Currently home is the Mojave Desert. Poems of Jake's are in or forthcoming from *Radius*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *The Cossack Review*, and elsewhere. He won 1st place in the 2017 SFPA speculative poetry contest and was a finalist in the Rondeau Roundup's 2017 triolet contest. Two of his poems have been nominated for the *2018 Best of the Net Anthology*. His chapbook is *Looting Versailles* (Alabaster Leaves Publishing).

**David Spicer** has had poems in *Gargoyle*, *Synaeresis*, *Reed Magazine*, *The Literary Nest*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Tipton Poetry Journal*, *Chiron Review*, *Prime Number*, *The American Poetry Review*, *Ploughshares*, among others, and in the anthologies *Silent Voices: Recent American Poems on Nature* (Ally Press), *Perfect in Their Art: Poems on Boxing From Homer to Ali* (Southern Illinois University Press), and *A Galaxy of Starfish: An Anthology of Modern Surrealism* (Salo Press). He has been nominated for a Best of the Net three times and a Pushcart once, and he is the author of one full-length collection of poems, *Everybody Has a Story* (St. Luke's Press, 1987), and five chapbooks, with the latest, *From the Wings of a Pear Tree*, available from Flutter Press. He is also the former editor of *Raccoon*, *Outlaw*, and *Ion Books*.

**Sally Thomas** is the author of two poetry chapbooks, *Fallen Water* (2015) and *Richeldis of Walsingham* (2016), both from Finishing Line Press. Recent honors include citation for Honorable Mention in *Ruminant's* 2016 Janet McCabe Poetry Prize competition, the 2017 Editors' Choice Award in Fiction from *Relief: A Journal of Art and Faith*, and, for her sonnet "Daybreak," second place in *North Carolina Literary Review's* 2018 James Applewhite Poetry Prize. She lives with her family in North Carolina.



