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For submissions visit our website at: orchardspoetry.com
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.
Pushcart Nominations for Summer Issue 2020

“Ex-Husband, Old Dog,” by Lisa McCabe, page 75
“Twilight,” by Wendy Sloan, page 35
“Dharma’s Last Lesson on the illusion of self,”
by Erik Richardson, page 73
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Featured Poet

Molly Peacock
Molly Peacock is a poet, biographer, and memoirist, whose multi-genre literary life has taken her from New York City to Toronto, from poetry to prose, from words to words-and-pictures, and from lyric self-examination to curiosity about the lives of others. Her newest book of poems, The Analyst, tells the story of a decades-long patient-therapist relationship that reverses after the analyst’s stroke and continues to evolve. She is the author of the biography The Paper Garden: Mrs. Delany Begins Her Life’s Work at 72 named A Book of the Year by The Economist, The Globe and Mail, Booklist, The London Evening Standard, The Irish Times, and The Sunday Telegraph. Beginning her literary life as a poet, she has published six books of poetry, including The Second Blush and Cornucopia: New and Selected Poems.

Widely anthologized, her poems appear in The Oxford Book of American Poetry, The Best of the Best American Poetry, and A Formal Feeling Comes, as well as in leading literary journals such as Poetry, The Literary Review of Canada, The New Criterion, Canadian Notes and Queries, Contemporary Verse 2, The Southwest Review, and The Yale Review. Among her other works are a memoir, Paradise, Piece by Piece, and How to Read a Poem & Start a Poetry Circle. As well, she is the editor of a collection of creative nonfiction, The Private I: Privacy in a Public World, and the co-editor of Poetry in Motion: One Hundred Poems from the Subways and Buses.

Molly is from a blue-collar and farming family with roots both in Canada and the United States. She was born in Buffalo, New York, received a B.A. magna cum laude from Harpur College (Binghamton University), and an M.A. with honors from The Writing Seminars at The Johns Hopkins University. A dual
American-Canadian citizen, she now lives with her husband, James Joyce scholar Michael Groden, in Toronto, though she maintains contact with her former home by conducting a seminar at the Unterberg Poetry Center of the 92nd Street Y in New York City where she teaches about visual art and poetry.

Passionate about public service for literature, she helped create Poetry in Motion on New York City’s subways and buses, and, when she immigrated to Canada, inaugurated *The Best Canadian Poetry* series, bringing poetry to a wider public. Her literary papers are located at the Binghamton University Library, home of her latest project The Secret Poetry Room.

Molly Peacock’s first foray into fiction was *Alphabetique: 26 Characteristic Fictions* with illustrations by Kara Kosaka. Peacock also wrote a one-woman staged monologue in poems, *The Shimmering Verge*, performed in theatres throughout North America, including an off-Broadway showcase. She is one of the subjects of two documentary films, *A Life Outside Convention* and the doc-in-progress *My So-Called Selfish Life* by Therese Schechter of Trixie Films.

Among her honors are awards from The Leon Levy Center for Biography, the Canada Council for the Arts, Access Copyright Foundation, Danforth Foundation, Ingram Merrill Foundation, Woodrow Wilson Foundation, National Endowment for the Arts, and New York State Council on the Arts. Always fascinated by the creative process, Molly Peacock has privately mentored a generation of emerging writers, working one-to-one with poets and memoirists.
Molly Peacock
The Absolute Necessity of Gingerbread

On an evening in the Apocalypse
Five women attempt to frost gingerbread houses.
The streetlight shines in. The world clock blips.

Earth’s vast electrical grid now tips
9 billion houses toward the solstice—
so it is quite early in the Apocalypse.

Gummy fruits, candy canes, chocolate chips,
sugar, eggwhite, glitter on their blouses.
The streetlight shines in. The world clock blips.

Their families will take their spring break trips.
By the equinox they could be sick. Each hand pauses.
Still early evening in the Apocalypse.

A daughter of the Troubles bought the blank houses
for two granddaughters of the Holocaust (one dowses
snow in a sparkle spaz, the other flips
pastilles), one child of war and another who trounces
cancer caregiver chores with even silver pips
as the streetlight shines in while the world clock blips.
On five high stools they shift their hips. 
Their sticky digits make mind houses: 
the gingerbread effect lets them lift 
their jellybean ideas … The Apocalypse 
won’t be forestalled with small-scheme shifts. 
Yet thirty-two bags of glass candy strips 
release a foremother knowledge of causes 
the ancestor ghosts who know what to do next. 
They wield their sugar pistols with confectioners’ tips 
on an evening in the early Apocalypse, 
streetlight shining as the world clock blips.
Molly Peacock

Routines

Routines are our destiny.
Making it up as you go along
wastes the fireworks energy.
Routines are destiny,
a blanket below the night sky.
Lie down on routines. Look up. See?
A pyrotechnic possibility.
Routines are destiny—
making it up, you stumble along.
Molly Peacock

Why I Am Not a Buddhist

I love desire, the state of want and thought of how to get; building a kingdom in a soul requires desire. I love the things I’ve sought—you in your beltless bathrobe, tongues of cash that loll from my billfold—and love what I want: clothes, houses, redemption. Can a new mauve suit equal God? Oh no, desire is ranked. To lose a loved pen is not like losing faith. Acute desire for nut gateau is driven out by death, but the cake on its plate has meaning, even when love is endangered and nothing matters. For my mother, health; for my sister, bereft, wholeness. But why is desire suffering? Because want leaves a world in tatters? How else but in tatters should a world be? A columned porch set high above a lake. Here, take my money. A loved face in agony, the spirit gone. Here, use my rags of love.

What chases spring? Almost anything. 
Wind chases it into place, of course, every 
chance it gets. Pennies in a pocket, jingling
forgotten in a cotton jacket chase it. Shivery
afternoons chasing dusk chase spring. The yawns
of a million people each act as a million
miniature bellows blowing ninety downs
into bloom, and each dawn catches the loose pollen
of spring in its pastel cup. Winter chases
spring into place like an aging annoyed
Angora cuffs its offspring. It erases
anything cozy. Spring is a colder void,
actually, because of its light. Getting
ready, chasing things away by chasing
them into place, involves cold, light erasing.
Spring is a way of embracing forgetting.

Molly Peacock

The Shoulders of Women

The shoulders of women are shallow, narrow, and thin compared to the shoulders of men—surprisingly thin, like the young pharaohs whose shoulders in stick figures are written on stones, or bony as the short gold wings of cranes on Asian screens. Lord, how surprising to embrace the shortened stirrings of many bones in their sockets above breasts! Now what I expect, since I’ve long embraced men, is the flesh of the shoulder and the cave of the chest and I get neither—we’re so small. Unwittingly frail and unknowing and brave like cranes and young kings, the shoulders of women turn to surprise and surprise me again with all their gestures of renewal and recall.

New grass and shrubbery cover the floor.
The vaulted ceiling, ornate windowpanes,
tall columns shelter not those who adore
Christ and the Virgin and honor the names
of anchorite, confessor, hermit, saint.
The sacred hymn is not sung from the choir.
The stones, vaults, pulpit, marble, gold-leaf paint,
altar and rail behold a new desire
born out of earth itself. The creeping green
of summer, pushing up between the cracks
and fissures in the foundation is seen,
risen, alive, calling the building back
to the palatial verdure Eden knew—
God’s first design, returned and breaking through.
John Bartell

The Rain

I took a ride today
to escape all this talk
about chickens.
As if this talk could erase
the noise
of viral loads,
of self-isolating,
of people drowning in their own lungs.

I took a ride today because I could
see the rain coming,
drops bouncing off the windshield,
back to the earth,
where Indian blanket and evening primrose
thrive on their blessings.

I took a ride today
to escape my house
where the people I love
are driving me crazy,
always there.
In the kitchen.
In the bedroom.
In the living room.
I took a ride today
and I couldn’t stop thinking
about chickens.
About how roosters keep guard,
and when it’s time,
raise an alarm,
scattering hens to safety.

I took a ride today
pausing on the spine of the ridge
that splits Marcum Ranch,
where that lonely elm tree grows,
there since before anything much mattered.

I stood in that rain like a goddammed fool,
as it ran down my leg,
absorbing into my roots,
surging through outspread hands,
Indian blanket and evening primrose sprouting through skin,
holding their bloom through the summer sun,
through the crispness of autumn,
through the short Texas winter,
dropping their seeds
in the coming spring,

for the winds to disperse
to a young woman’s yard,
where hungry chickens,
scratching in the dirt,
will feast on their bounty
while a child
with clean lungs
and no thoughts at all
of staying six feet away from anybody,
chases after them,
hers laughter spiraling upward,
rolling into the winds.
Shannon Cuthbert
Combustion

You run past waves of corn so high
They melt into a woven thing,
A tapestry dancing in your peripherals,
A living breathing creature with its ravens,
Its jewel-throated rushes,
Tucked within like secrets to be told.
Past the old schoolhouse of a thousand small indignities,
Of gargoyled faces leering like dogs,
Waiting and watching from the brick exterior
And hallways that twist to darkness in your dreams.
Past the whole downtown, with its gap-toothed doors,
With its buildings shuttered, wooden teeth
Clenched tight over openings, blocking out light.
But still the kids have wound their ways in,
Have marked the windows with their palms,
Their greasy faces, greedy tongues,
Graffiti bodies dancing free.
At night they set fires within,
And let their souls alight, alive:
The power of flight in an empty town,
Till all they feel is wind on bone.
Maren O. Mitchell

My Friend Janice Said She Wouldn’t Write a Poem About the Prison Across the Meadows Within View of Her House, But Suggested I Could

*for Janice T. M.*

In winter, leaves down, trunks the only barriers, across the soothing slopes decorated with cows that roam and graze in slow-motion, the prisoners contentedly empathize with Janice, hard at work on her current poem. Day after day the panes of her study window blur with steam as she manipulates words to her will—the inmates need no imagination to embroider. In spring their restlessness grows with young leaves and buds in the rising heat of honeysuckle as they follow her feet pacing the perimeter of her back deck, in privacy, in thought, waiting for insights, while husband Carl waits for the success of his garden. Through summer, hampered by green, the prisoners resort to exchanging stories about Janice. One inmate is sure her voice is so sultry that audiences are spellbound if she reads a phonebook, each name an exotic country, each house number the answer to a mathematical enigma, each road name a way out of jail. Another weaves the fantasy that she is writing a post-execution elegy to him, one that will make
his death worthwhile, will mean something to others. Autumn is more of the same, and then the inmates begin to look toward winter when once again they can witness the passion of her devotion to poetry, to get them through the barren cold, to anticipate the next day.
Most visible,

yellow is the nightlight star
that burns heat and light all day;

is the primary color that completes
the power base of blue and red,

brings out the attributes of purple;
gamboge, cadmium yellow,

Naples yellow: the first roar of flowers
after winter’s rime;

the name and color of the only
wasp I run from;

attention-getting: Star of David upon black,
school bus, on board flag of quarantine.

Yellow is the flower of fear and shock—
cry of cruelty;

the stain of illness and age—
murmur of mortality;

pollen ships in flight—
proof of miracles;
and through our closed eyes of clear sight,  
the sun center of a blood orange sea:  

visions and prophesies—  
whispers, minus time.
Charlotte Innes

Pandemical

At this time, I am resisting cleaning closets filled with stuff I ought to junk, old clothes, old shoes that have no worth or meaning, unlike my neighbors who methodically plunk their relics curbside, with notes on shelves or gunky tables, saying “Free!” when it’s the owners who are trying to free themselves from fear or boredom, I suspect, with a blitz of order, ordering what they can, in this hell of a world turned topsy-turvy by inert invaders that come to life inside our cells, that can’t be cleaned away. For them, we’re pay dirt.

Dirt. Relics. I can live with cat litter strewn on rugs, old files and paper bugs call home. What gets me is this sly virus goon who stuffs my brain with blanks like packing foam.
Charlotte Innes

Like Me

for Christine Keeler (1942-2017)

Like me, you were a tomboy, climbing trees, riding your rusty bike by the river, knees muddy, playing with boys. One mum or dad captured in black and white a look you had—aside from plaits and overbite—the ease

of a child at home in herself, smiling to please no one. But your stepdad stifled days like these, with his look, his hands, his friends. And you were glad, like me,

to flee to London, where I thought books were keys to freedom but, like you at times, would seize the chance to make some foolish man mad for me. Adventuresome, we were, not bad, half wanting love, harboring half-felt pleas: like me.

Previously appeared in the catalogue for the U.K. art exhibit “Dear Christine: A Tribute to Christine Keeler” curated by Fionn Wilson
Charlotte Innes

Five Lessons on Space

1. The red frame around
the small mirror ignores
the creamy wall’s broad
reaches. See how the red
frame incarcerates the air?

2. Long after the rain,
they plastered the ceiling.
Later,
brown stains
appeared,
ribbons of coastline,
Shroud of Turin.
Look up.
Navigate.
Go in.

3. Forget
the eloquently spaced cedars,
burnt-yellow marigolds
at ease
in neat triangular plots.
Seek out
gaps between houses
weedy lots
patches of trailing thyme.

Watch
the dandelion parachutes
floating

4.
Crepe myrtle, redbud,
Australian willow,
natchez, muskogee,
the new trees
line up
along the street.
Remember the old ones,
the great shady carobs,
diseased, removed?
Their branches
still spread out for you
in shadows.

5.
Go out. Ignore
these ruined gardens.
Explore the deep roots
of a Joshua tree.
Put on your boots,
your fleece jacket.
Take only a small bag.
American Sonnet for Mary Oliver

The truth is, Mary, I will never be
a nature poet. Don’t spend long hours
walking in the woods cataloguing birds,
observing the snail. But I have loved you
for bringing me into the wildness of
things: grasshopper eating sugar in hand,
Black River, soft rope of water moccasin.
I have spent my life studying people.
Maybe you could say I too, understand
animal behavior—your wandering
deep thicket for meaning. Oh, how lonely,
lonely, I have been! How far I have walked
in desert trying to be good. You’re gone.
I’m falling on my knees. Your wild geese call.
Ken Craft
The Duck Blind

It’s a long November walk
to the reservoir before dawn
under a horn moon and specks of white
dry and cold against the night.

Over the rows of frozen furrows
across a Connecticut cornfield’s back:
razed stalks, torn roots,
hard clumps under heavy boots.

How pleasant the sky, dark and high,
as we gaze at our breaths’ rise,
like thinning smoke, slow and dense,
lifting toward stars and silence.

As we crest the hill, broken reflections
dance over the reservoir’s surface:
silvery winks from the watery black
while cork ducks rattle in my canvas sack.

Boots, decoys, tinkling of retriever’s tags—
life distilled to simplicities in three—till
the dog, anxious for the blind, begins to race
first far, then near, impatient with our pace.
The memory feels like only this morning: the itchy cold of fallen log permeating the seats of pants, the tender tendrils of thermos coffee’s steam, November morning waking from November dreams.

How tree line black-scrimmed the brightening east. How the cheerful cheep of chickadees flitted from tree to bush to branch hard behind the blind. How not thinking—just being—nourished the mind.
Wendy Sloan
Twilight

My love is like the bare November hills
fading to a hazy purple hue,
darkening as the coming winter fills
the ridge with shades. I’ve made my peace with you.

The you that’s present. Oh, but what I’d give
to have the old you back, if just a dream,
a haunt of night horizons. Still, you live,
struggling to clutch your dimming self-esteem.

I am the keeper of your flickering flame,
the bosun to your ever-sackening grip,
the prompter in the wings, cueing your name,
the nurse that holds you—tottering, as you slip

into the darkness. Darling, this slow death—
this thread your fate unwinds—pull tight that string.
Strike it, as every minute now must sing,
reverberating till the final breath
takes me from you, and you at last from me,
into the hollows of eternity.
Dear dead friends, I miss you.
It seems like you’re still here
Just moved to some far place
Like Lisbon or Tangier
And oddly, for years now
Neglected to phone me.
I could call and touch base.
Your numbers are somewhere.
Don’t worry. You’ll see me.
And soon now. So, take care.
James Croal Jackson

New Year Illusion

No tabula rasa. Don’t believe it when you hear

television celebration: happy / new / year. I ride a

continuous horse. Carrying suitcases holding everything

from one year to the next— Dad is still dead. Mom

will be soon. The dusk is tomorrow’s same landscape,

endlessly looping.
James Croal Jackson  

Forces

My friend once announced to a room of strangers my poems make them dip into pools of water I guess that’s a phobia my inability to swim for more than a minute and always on the shallow side last night my Uber driver told me she tells her kids be courageous be kind and went on to talk about her Ziggy and Shane like I was family On Tuesday I’ll let them go further than our back alley what liberation! but then the world five kids tugged at her jacket last week on the haunted hay ride I get it I feel invisible forces pulling me every cardinal direction at once yet clouds keep moving and I struggle to stay honest I don’t want you to know lust the long rope tight around my neck leashed to the wagon and I throw straw into brown grass to keep the chainsaw killers at bay though I know the monsters are actors wielding masks they sell me the part

~38~
of me I run from because I know anything
the world gives me lattes Lagunitas
love I return worse than when given
Janis Harrington
The Gift

All my life’s partings cumulate in this moment: Mom pulls away from the curb, parrot squawking on her shoulder, dog licking passenger window. Stricken, I queue for check-in, segueing from intimate to ordinary too quickly. Unwilling to pay for excess weight, I kneel and unzip my overstuffed suitcase, lift out her gift—Dad’s bomber jacket, leather supple from saddle soap and wear—releasing cologne, cigars and campfire smoke, scents which, madeleine-like, bring him back. Comforted by its bulky embrace, grateful for unexpected company, I board the flight, quit my native country.
in rental cars and yellow airport shuttles,
diverting me from catatonic muteness.
Beds filled, rooms swell with sound—not laments,
but clamor, vivacious as any Christmas.
The generations reminisce, gossip, revive
past triumphs and slights, rail over politics.
The soundtrack for our dialogue: ice cubes’ rattle,
competing playlists, television, rat-a-tat
from microwave popcorn, and a babel
of cell phone ring tones. The parrot riffs, mimics
our chatter and laughter. Active
as a late summer hive, the house thrums,
our worker bee frantic dance
denying the grave’s terrifying silence.
Janis Harrington

If Only

Searching long fluorescent-lit aisles,
I find my friend, tears falling unheeded,
hands gripping the grocery cart, frozen
in front of the community bulletin board’s
jumbled flyers for lectures, lost pets and yard sales,
transfixed by a thumb-tacked notice:
Is a family member depressed?
Be alert. Don’t delay. Call a hotline
if you observe … The preachy words,
proclaiming obvious suicide warning signs,
admonish like medieval gargoyles,
carved to depict the seven deadly sins,
shaming from cathedral lintels and downspouts—
so much you missed … you should have guessed.
Annie Finch

Perdita’s Song

We played by the water, ran barefoot,
Opened our eyes and grew brown.
When did we stop and start growing
Into the halls of tall stone?

Ophelia, Miranda, my sisters,
Motherless daughters of men,
When were we told our inheritance
Would be an untrodden silk hem?

Why did we turn from the water?
When did we find we had grown?
How did it turn out that water
Was only a place we could drown?
Annie Finch

The Emperor’s Card
Card 4 in the Rider Waite Tarot Deck

My body is still warm. My beard still rolls
in waves of sudden marks that feed the curves,
as time shifts cold,
as my left shoulder swerves
to tilt me from the mountains’ slowing folds.

The rams’ heads, carved throne, and these iron shoes—
and yes, my sceptor—and my treasured ball—
are nothing;
rock holds me
and rock is all.

In this green-hiding desert, I won’t lose
[though two bright spirals lurk above my crown,
smoothers than gems].
I have no up or down
[except the shadows’ truth under my throne,
the memories
as silent

as my bones].
Anthony J. Fuchs
Linguistic Silhouette

His hours upon the stage are at an end,
his spirited performances have ceased;
he’ll strut and fret no more, nor comprehend
that his last energies have been released.
Yet I remain: the final syllable
of his recorded time. I tell his tale
when he is heard no more, for I am full
of all his sound and fury that prevail.
I imitate his face, his baritone,
in brash defiance of his one regret:
to die, to sleep. Instead, I am his own
persistent and linguistic silhouette,
the fragment of himself he left behind,
a sliver of his never-dimming mind.
Allison Joseph

After Receiving an Unsolicited Mailer from a Monument Company

My husband’s monuments aren’t made of stone—
I’ve no need of your services today.
His words live on me. I am his home.

Don’t talk to me of financing, of loans,
of colors I’d prefer—rose or gray.
My husband’s monuments aren’t made of stone.

Your pamphlet has a website and a phone,
a number I can call to pay and pay.
His words live on in me. I am his home.

I’m sensitive, offended by your tone
of phony caring for my mourning ways.
My husband’s monuments aren’t made of stone.

Don’t trust you with his ashes or his bones.
Don’t need to hear the platitudes you say.
His words live on in me. I am his home.

You keep your rock of ages. I will moan
and cry for him, whether night or day.
My husband’s monuments aren’t made of stone.
His words live on. In me, they’ve found a home.
Allison Joseph

Still Waiting on the Death Certificates, One Month Later

I’d rather not be brave
I’m hating all this courage
I know what I couldn’t save
I know what I tried to encourage

I’m hating all this courage
much rather have him back
I know who I tried to encourage
but was it a heart attack

much rather have him back
I don’t know why he’s gone
So was it a heart attack
or blood sugars gone wrong

I don’t know why he’s gone
this damned autumnal wait
His blood sugar gone wrong?
Could be—I saw him faint

this damned autumnal wait
this weather growing colder
remember, I saw him faint
alone I’m growing older
this weather growing colder
leaves swirling round my feet
alone, alone, I’m older
defeated, incomplete

leaves swirling round my feet
these heavy heavy steps
defeated, incomplete
and way out of my depth

these heavy heavy steps
I know who I couldn’t save
and way out of my depth
I’d rather not be brave
Allison Joseph

Widow Wonders: A Rondeau

If I had died instead of him,
would people stop their greedy whims—
allowing him to sing or cry,
expecting him in suit and tie,
emotions pushed back to the brim?

Would they demand he be less grim,
salute him if he grew more slim,
permit him more than rueful sighs
if I had died?

How much support for heart or limbs?
How many duties could he trim?
Would people look him in the eye
or leave him be, afraid and shy?
Would people let him sink or swim
if I had died?
The Piper at the Gates of Dawn

We wept with Bilbo over Thorin’s death;  
Mourned Wilbur’s loss when Charlotte said Goodbye;  
Felt magic deep in risen Aslan’s breath,  
And in I love you, Charles! Meg’s potent cry.  
Redemption courses through our storied past,  
A river perilous in lands of play;  
Where Huck and Jim meet Tom upstream at last,  
But Terabithia is swept away.  
All night good Mole and Rat seek little Otter,  
Then find him sleeping in the Piper’s care;  
Dark swirls around that island, deadly water,  
But they find only help and healing there.  
Not every little one is saved in time;  
The Piper does not always sing in rhyme.
The Shore

Time passes, and the misty shore recedes.
I drift away, float helpless on the tide;
Between us only water intercedes;
Your face is fading as the space grows wide.
But now and then there dances on the air
A fleeting shadow of your voice or touch—
As light as hope, as hope is light, is prayer—
To make this world of sense not hurt so much.
Now in the senseless void where you should be
Alive, in all the moments that you lost,
I come to you on lines of poetry
Until at last this timeless sea is crossed.
Hear clearer than my echoes of goodbye:
Susanna, you shall live, and death shall die.
Sally Nacker

Steepletop Museum

for Edna St. Vincent Millay, 1892-1950

She took no typewriter into her bare-bones shack between white pines, but marked on paper with pencil only. She wrote to the bone against being lonely, saw blood-smeared snow near a killed buck,

sought to rise, her eyes inquisitive, bleary—
the eyes of the doe she described.
Later, she would type the poems up—she sighed—
they proved real—clearly;

maybe she cried, too, seeing they withstood the stain of death—there, on the second story
of her farmhouse. Beyond her windows, in all its glory, mountain laurel covered her mother’s deep grave. Pain

kept her up nights; poems seeped, pulsed in her brain.
The poet fell down her stairs and broke her neck, we were told.
Among her things—her typewriter. I cherish and hold a postcard of it. I visited Steepletop in the autumn rain.
Unwinding the Spool

for Eleanor Ecob Morse, my great great grandmother

I’m back in front of the old sewing machine, the heavy table model in the rounded wooden case, inherited from my mother, and she from her mother. Its long black cord ends in a two-pronged plug, and a curved metal lever hangs by my right knee.

I open the little sliding cubby meant for storing bobbins. Threading this machine, one has to place the spool just so, then run the thread through a maze of eyelets, loops and circles until it comes to rest in the eye of a needle which moves up and down through a slot in the silver foot.

On a chest in my bedroom, Eleanor’s portable paint chest sits, hardened stains of ancient oil paints lining the runnels in its four drawers. Now my sewing-box, she filled it with multi-colored tubes, then carried it out into the summer fields and wind-tossed woods to paint.

In a faded photo, hair coiled at her neck, she is wearing a polka dot dress and flowered painting smock. Sitting on a folding camp stool in a meadow, easel set up, canvas half done, she leans into the landscape and raises her brush to catch the sunlight crowning trees.
Now my spools fill the drawers of her paint chest. A taut thread stretches from the bottom drawer she painted violets on, around the bobbin holder of Nana’s sewing machine, through the eye of my mother’s needle, to me, sitting in spring sunlight, my fingers nimble with words.
Despy Boutris

Faith

I knew the dying was coming—
knew her heart struck twelve
because I couldn’t sleep,

could only gaze out at the hallway,
past my door as it creaked
on its hinges, the wind outside

the open window running
its hands over everything in sight.
If I closed my eyes, I could pretend

it was my grandmother, running
her fingers through my hair.
I knew my father would call soon,

stranded at the hospital with her,
not wanting me
or my brother to see death so young.

I knew the lawyer would stop by,
present us with her
will. I didn’t know she’d leave

~55~
my brother her rocking chair, and me: my favorite breakfast—her recipe for buttered biscuits.

Didn’t know my father’s face could glisten with tears or how hard I’d sob, or how my mother’s palm would smooth back my hair as we watched the coffin descend into the ground, my grandmother making her way into eternal life, as the priest promised. I wish I believed in eternal life.

It’s too much work to try to imagine a realm without darkness, no croaking toads, nothing with claws. It’s too hard to believe in her cheering for me up above.

But how tempting it is to have faith in her floating like pollen above us, the clouds blurring her angles, her body all tangled up with God’s.

Previously published in *Prairie Schooner*
Despy Boutris

On Overcoming Gamophobia

Since your silence scares me, be roadkill, be oil spill, be the elevator that stalled on its way down. Let me learn to love the quiet; let’s learn to speak without noise.

And since I despise tight spaces, locked doors, uncertainty: lock us in a room in the dark, or in a storm shelter—love, take me subterranean and then take me, let me take you. You know odd numbers make me nervous, so how about I ghost the five fingers of my left hand over all seven bones of your neck? If I’m bonnet, be breeze and blow me away. But take me with you. If I’m blind, be shuddering breath, be the sound you make when I touch your chest. If I’m oak, be Spanish moss so we can grow together, so I can grow rings to give you, so you can wrap yourself around me. If I’m weed, be gardener
and uproot me. If I’m week, be -end
so we can spend Sunday morning in bed,

so we can bake bread. If I’m night,
be nightlight so I can find you in the dark.

If I’m crocus, be rainfall, be honeybee
and, honey, come be with me.

Previously published in Byzantium
Robin Helweg-Larsen

Nymph

A mayfly nymph, in water for a year, transforms into a beauty of the air for just one day—one day to mate, breed, die. The essence then’s the nymph, and not the fly which we see only thronging in death throes, death throes of riotous sex. Everyone knows, though, that the fly’s the cycle’s pinnacle to artists, if not to the clinical. Though humans for long eons lived on land, at Science’s Nietzschean precipice we stand, transform to things that freely live in space, or formless Cloud-based online lives embrace … and may survive but briefly in that state, but, dying, will seed new worlds as we mate.
Where are the lightning bolts of poetry?
The rolls of thunder and the shattered oaks?
Where, beyond anger, is the ecstasy?
There must be more than parodies, kitsch, jokes—
Elvis-on-velvet, kittens in a room,
jibes at the Lords, the House, the Holy See,
unmetered waffling on a flower in bloom …
Come now, tap Earth’s potential energy!

Our planet on which tens of millions die
from some war, ’flu, government famine, plague—
we pillage land and sea, yet learn to fly
while stories, music, art, reshape the vague
into sublime, emotional or vatic …
Humans can’t last—so be brief, be ecstatic!
José Oseguera
The Milk of Your Blood

Evening sun pours its amber
into your eyes—fresh tea
that rickles into blue porcelain.
My fingers, plumes of steam,
bubblegum on the skin
around your nipple,
knit tightly as feather barbs—
turmeric and saffron in my throat.

In the eclipse of comforter and pillows,
my hums are shadows,
words, wind echoing in the quill
of what is left unsaid—
moths hide behind your earlobes
as the tarot of my lips dews the downy hairs
on the crucible nested between
your lower breast and false ribs—

it opens all the wounds
I collected like twine and twigs as a child
and ones you scattered over me
when I pecked your veins for seeds—
gooseflesh as scarred as rain thumbing the rubble,
ripping wings of tulip, poppy, and rose petals
strewn in your hair draped on the bed.
You penned a new gospel with my gasps—
the Holy Spirit dove crucified
with red plastic push pins
between your sinewy shoulder blades—
a Lord’s Prayer that banished
my air, my ghost, my empty bones to dust.
The birds I raised in cages on the roof—
from speckled egg to flecked plumage—
breathed through your dry clothes wet
as they sung the music in your nose wrinkles.

Their beaks mocked the hocket on my puckered nape—
a warm cardamom breeze
fluttered the linen-white sheets
of the child smile that hid in adult teeth:
a halo mourning a ground hallowed;
the hollow we filled with home.
John Grey
Sonnet of the Scars

Hussy bold, I show you my bed of scars,
Badges of honor, great hurts simplified,
Here’s trouble, here’s the time I nearly died,
Tributes to the insouciance of cars
When taking corners, knife fights in dive bars,
And look, along my zippered wrist, my pride,
That cry for help, attempted suicide.
All on my skin, like naming you the stars.

Better than ink, these are the real tattoos,
Life histories told in ridges, zigzags,
Operations, old knife etchings that cruise
From throat to rib to upper arms, in jags
Of crimson, speckled brown, all paid-up dues;
My body’s country flies such honest flags.
Shutta Crum
January Morning

We curl on the white bed, buffeted by billowing down. Cats purr, bowled in the swales. Your hand cups the top of my head. Outside at the bird feeder, my favorites—the juncos like little tufts of winter, dusk gray above and drift white below—retrieve grains of millet cast out by scrabbling jays. And on the suet a red-capped downy positions himself to pluck the fruit offered.

I sink my backside farther into the valley of your groin, naturally seeking the heat. We do not speak. Later, when coffee is made and the wood stove awakens in the kitchen, we will talk of aging parents and errands, and of who will layer on clothing against the skin-cracking cold to seek the Sunday paper—snowed upon again. Later still, we will surrender to the pinch of January’s cold fingers. You will search for the paper. I will fill the feeder.

For now, we lie abed and watch the chickadees and the cardinals. I think of the rough-legged hawk—yesterday’s surprise visitor. Banking past the roof, his wing tip brushed the snow, tagging our house. Then charcoal-feathered and smudge-headed, on a branch above the pond he sat with his back to the feeder.
We were not fooled. His yellow glance read the comings and goings of our winter lodgers; the field mice, the mink from the wetland beyond the pasture, the deer that sleep in the grass along the stream, and our juncos—gray babushkaed and so plump.
Thomas O. Davenport

A Streetcar Named Undesirable

My steel-wheeled ride to work is human dense
No ropes, but by our limbs we’re tightly bound
We’re hanging suits, we’re pickets in a fence
Too close to breathe, we whisper not a sound

We rub in ways that make us want to blush
I touch you up there, you nudge me below
We’re intimate within this human crush
In ways reserved most times for folks we know

But willingly we suffer in this box
And pay our fare, the reeking crowd abide
Resign ourselves to shakes and shoves and shocks
To save us from a more expensive ride

For our concern comes to this simple crux:
To park all day will run you forty bucks
Madison Zehmer

work song  
_after Hozier_

no grave can hold my body down / I'll crawl home to her, I sing, hand out the window, hair tangling in the wind like it’s dancing. I swear heaven is glancing at your smile; heaven is “eyes on the road” and laughter and my hand on your shoulder. the whistle of wind and dust melts the air. you whistle work song back to me; a ladybug crawls up your forearm. you leave it there, laughter filling the car, soaring out the window, painting the road dawn-yellow. we both smile as we sing of lowlands, drunken sin, dancing.

I ask if you still remember dancing together to classic rock, when whistles filled the room, when your sweetsharp honey smile pierced my ribcage, when I told you I’d crawl everywhere you’d want us to go, windows down, always. and the sound of your laughter
still rings in my ears. what joy, what laughter
you’ve brought me. I always feel like dancing.
and I know the door’s wide open, window
to my soul always ajar. I whistle
when I wake up and when I sleep. we crawl
to heaven as one. I’m lost in your smile.

when you’re gone, I’ll never forget your smile,
the feel of your palm on mine, our laughter.
maybe nothing good lasts forever. I’ll crawl
home to you either way, grinning, dancing.
love is the aubade you always whistle
to wake me up. love, an open window,

the sound of your breath swirling out windows,
blessing the sky with fresh rain. and we smile
when the song changes, love in your whistle.
my lover’s got humor, I sing, laughter
on my breath. you’re always singing, dancing,
and the music soars, reverberates, crawls.

nothing like your whistle out the window,
fingers that crawl up my forearm, your smile,
like our laughter as we keep on dancing.
Michael R. Burch

For All That I Remembered

For all that I remembered, I forgot her name, her face, the reason that we loved … and yet I hold her close within my thought:  
*I feel the burnished weight of auburn hair that fell across her face, the apricot clean scent of her shampoo, the way she glowed so palely in the moonlight, angel-wan.*

The memory of her gathers like a flood and bears me to that night, that only night, when she and I were one, and if I could … I’d reach to her this time and, smiling, brush the hair out of her eyes, and hold intact each feature, each impression. Love is such a threadbare sort of magic, it is gone before we recognize it. I would crush my lips to hers to hold their memory, if not more tightly, less elusively.
Edison Jennings
For Some That Go Forth with Youthful Spirits
Title taken from a line in the Anglo-Saxon poem
“The Fortunes of Men,” translated by Aaron K. Hostetter

They had come to shop and see a play,
Waiting for Godot, which both had read,
and after seeing, hoped to grasp—
that, at least, was their plan,
late October and the weather
cool and absolutely clear.

About their future, they were absolutely clear
and though still young and full of play,
they had no doubt whether
they would marry, as if both had read
their future and were assured the plan
was practical, clear, and easy to grasp:

to love and be loved, what every child can grasp;
nothing could be more simple or clear.
So a night of theatre followed by sex—that was the plan,
a play followed by foreplay,
she whispered under a tree festooned gold and red
with the glory of fall weather
while they sat on a bench considering whether
maybe they should skip *Godot* (too vague to grasp),
but no, since both had read
it and agreed its meaning was far from clear,
they owed it to themselves to see the play
and not revise their plan.

Having so much faith in their plan
(after all, it was fall and glorious weather),
how could they foresee the play
of chance, each in the other’s grasp,
sitting under a tree in weather so mild and clear,
its glorious leaves gold and red

though the imminent leaned, immense, unread?
And so, wedded to their plan,
they stood up just as it fell, clear
of her but killing him, leaving her to weather
a frigid solitude, unable to grasp
fortune’s wayward play.

Instead she read self-help books or watched the weather,
waiting with no plan, numbed in memory’s grasp
and never a clear day, poor player in a pointless play.
Erik Richardson

tangled in your fancy zen robes

sad hamlet on the edge of your white rock garden
never blooming or growing, through all the haiku
seasons, with your words tied in paradox knots
so they cannot wander off to explore the castle at night

cares are cut and childhood friends are set aside
like raggedy actors in a traveling play
here is the sound of my one hand clapping, stained with blood,
a smack on your bald head. perched on its pile of black robes

with your mind trying to suicide, to be but not-be,
trying to not-think of shiny polished tiles, your unborn face,
whether or not a dog has the buddha nature
your head filled by the idea of a mind empty as one of the rocks.

they do not learn to be larger inside than they were
never become kings, nor crack crashing their hearts too hard
against others’. in this duel are you the slayer or the slain
chasing each koan, its meaning hiding behind a curtain

do you lay awake sometimes and cry at unburied dreams
of a father who did not love you enough?
you have, yet, more to learn from poor yorick’s skull
than sitting with your head full of rocks, raked or not.
Erik Richardson

Dharma’s last lesson on the illusion of self

Dharma had her first seizure at 5:30 the night before last, as the late-winter sun dropped below the tree line. You hopped up from the table at the thump and muffled gargling sounds. We fell overboard and would flounder and swim, currents and winds, for fifteen sputtering, wave-tumbled hours and the rest of her life before we would be rescued. I’m not sure if I learned more about dogs or people or marriage or about looking past separations on the surface that night-morning. We stopped counting early in, as the seizures came faster—off and on with often only a quick calm breath for her and a lick of her tongue at her nose, while the minutes and hours came slower, the clock ticks mixed with occasional low howls of confusion. Each knobby bone in my spine bent wrong sitting on the floor holding her head up no shoreline or stars in sight but your voice and your touch cutting through the fog calming her each time the brain-circuit storm struck and finally guiding the sunlight ship of a new day through the old kitchen windows

~73~
gliding across our shallow sea of tears.
that soft brown girl with her speckled white trim
was a part of me, future and past,
moon and tides,
and in all the possible worlds your voice would work the same,
I know marrow deep, if I were laying there. I wonder
how many lifetimes a human has to live before
they, too, have a heart like a dog—a reverse black hole
absorbing darkness and giving off infinite light
I don’t know if that is because we are too smart
or too stupid
or both
or why each of those possibilities makes the cracks in my shell
of a smaller self bigger.
Lisa McCabe

Ex-Husband, Old Dog

You could not do it on your own—
put down the dog; the one you kept
in the divorce, and so you phone
to ask if I might come. Despite
entanglements of leash and love,
I told you that I would, of course.

How could I not? I loved her too
(which is no comment on the man).
It’s hardly a surprise that you
could not face this all alone. I understand
there was always someone in the wings
when you took to wandering.

At the end I was alone.
I watched you rise and leave the room,
before the shot, a final breath. I lied;
her dimming eye did not follow you
out the door before she died

and later in the parking lot,
as you heaved your tidal sobs,
and reached to take me in your arms,
when I stepped away and said,
‘Let’s keep this about the dog.’
The years add up, as do clichés; mid-life crisis, a dying pet, and now a poem—which it seems, is the only means I have to set the record straight, and ask of you what we could not ask that day:

Why again, could you not stay?
Lisa McCabe
Lost and Found

Trust a dog to find what has been lost.
All their senses acutely hone
to the missing; the casually tossed
toy, keys dropped last winter in the snow.

Mostly balls—tennis or golf (at a glance
what interests them) and you shake your head
how things appear as if by magic or by chance.
Spectre placed? More likely dug from the garden bed.

Trust a dog to find what has been lost
but never intended to be found;
illicit package, stolen good, love-crossed
letters cold-cased in the wall or ground.

But never you.
A femur, two small ankle bones, now mossed,
hollowed out—not yet born, the off-scent straying hound

who brings with joy to the hunter’s hand
what we lost (gone forty years) but can’t allay—
daughter, sister, best-loved friend, a strand,
your smile, some DNA.
Lisa McCabe
Mother and Child Reunion

There is no making up for this
now that I have seen your face;
the years apart, the life we missed.

The world you gained might eclipse
the loss of me, but won’t erase
that you cannot make up for this.

Nor can I, lost in the abyss
of never knowing your embrace;
our years apart, the life I missed.

Does your shamefulness persist?
Do my features double your disgrace?
Good intentions won’t make up for this;

no matter what the State insists,
other parents, children, can’t replace
our years apart, the life we missed.

The heart’s aligned, but the mind resists.
Let’s pretend we have a case
for trying to make up for this;
our years apart, the love we missed.
William Baer
Letter of Resignation

Dear [blank]: After much deliberation, without qualm, scruple, or further delay, I hereby tender my formal resignation as your lover and future fiancé. The job provides too little satisfaction: too many hours of unneeded duress, a paucity of productive interaction, uncertain working conditions, and endless stress. Pay-wise, I’m undervalued and disenchanted: advancement’s slow, the bonus is routine, my “on-call” overtime is taken for granted, and benefits are few and far between. This document, I’m hopeful, underscores my deep regret. I’m very truly yours …
Visiting All the Places We Once Made Love

I’m visiting all the places we once made love, thinking of what’s been lost, thinking of you, which everyone calls “pathetic” and “unheard of.” But I visit the places where we once made love: the beach, the lake, the garden, the balcony above, the baseball field, still wet with the morning dew. I’m visiting all the places we once made love, thinking of what’s been lost, and missing you.

Karen Paul Holmes

Mr. Divorce Jimmied the Back Door

Of course, he came to rob
to take my peace of mind.
But why did he stay?
My frantic calls to 911 failed.

I feel his eye
at the keyhole as I bathe.
Did the curtains just move?
Why is the fridge door open,
milk nearly gone?

At night
he becomes a cloaked figure,
breath blowing cold. Like a dementor
Mr. D attempts to suck hope
right out of me.

In daylight, he’s a nuisance
gloating over my shoulder
as I get up with the dogs at dawn
grill my own steak
plunge the toilet.
Rap rattles my cup and saucer
cigar ash smears mahogany, sooty
footprints mount the carpeted stairs.
And still, his shadow startles me
in every room.

Previously published in *Untying the Knot* (Aldrich Press, 2014)
Karen Paul Holmes

Poem that Begins with a Definition

A passive sentence is often composed by a passive person. It is written with a subject acted upon by a verb, sort of like being assaulted. A phantom subject is preferred by governments, corporations and scientists: *Written complaints will be read and answered in three days.*  
*It has been decided you are not eligible for benefits.*  
*The solution was heated to boiling.*

This idea was thought up by someone anonymous. The similes were excavated one by one, like grapefruit triangles with a serrated spoon. Then, edits came about through a red pencil.

This poem will be appreciated by people who don’t like action or responsibility. This poem will be satisfying to few because its conclusion was eaten by the dog.

A mesh of fourteen lines, ten syllables—
capacious as a spider’s web, precise
as mathematics, yet equivocal
when read—a supple, difficult device.
A sonnet is a room we choose to enter,
where choices we have made become constraints—
or do constraints advance the argument
we didn’t know we meant to make? It’s strange
to think that what can tie us down can lift
us up from line to line, octave to sestet,
or how the meanings that we make can shift
when the exigencies of form are met.
It is the sonnet’s sly and silken trick
to take mere words and make them whirr and click.


On moving to Canada in fifth grade, 1965

God Save the Queen, we sang each day in school and followed every British spelling rule. “It’s non-negotiable,” my teacher said. This meant that “realize” would lose its “zed” to the insinuations of the snake-like “s”, while hordes of “u’s” would infiltrate the pale and blameless “neighbors”, and “e” and “r” exchange positions at the “theater” door.

I learned there’s no fixed orthography for life. How could it be that spelling spelled out strife? Expatriate at ten, I thought it absurd that so much inhered in the letters of a word.

Why should things change depending where you stand on this or that side of some bit of land? Fences and border crossings made no sense until I came to learn impermanence.

In two years, we returned to the U.S. but “home” felt like an alien address. At once, the “s’s” went underground, the “u’s” deserted, the “e” and “r” abjured their views.

Again, orthography re-regulated, but it was I who’d been recalibrated.

These days I sometimes pause before I spell a word whose north and south run parallel.
Gail Goepfert

Lexicology at Panera

for Hanna

I want words, she says. The words my friends know and I don’t. She’s bilingual—

Japanese at home and English in school.
We fish words out of books, study roots, prefixes.

We make lists on her tablet, pronounce, repeat, scribble sentences on my yellow pads.

She carries a box of 500 words designed for ACT testing. A dry back-up.

Not much fun, you say.


Page by page. Word by word.
Link meaning and context. Link life.

She loves antithesis. Remembers it—its tart sounds. Pops it into conversation.

She devours devour. Even her mother now uses earworm at home. Songs on repeat.
We ignore funabulist, glockenspiel, hurdy-gurdy based on their future practicality.

_Indefatigable_, her interest. “Oh, let me put that one on my phone. I’ll use it on Michael.”

_Kalimba_. A thumb piano. She’s a musician. We both want to learn to play.

For every word she has a real-life story, though _Distraction_ may be her middle name.

In her mind, she _lionizes_ Lennie in Steinbeck’s _Of Mice and Men_. A soft spot for him.

Connection. What better way to remember. _Naysayers and nepotism_. In the news. She knows.

_Ophaloscopy_. Navel-gazing for some. _Quips_. She’s good at them and doesn’t guess.

_Tempestuous_. That’s _Macbeth_, she adds. Drama. Drama. Drama. And I’m all grins.

We skip _tulipomania_. A 1630’s thing. She’s _winsome_. Not _wily_ or a _wrangler_.

~87~
Panera’s not Xanadu. No paradise there. But spa-like, we bathe in words.

Not *humdrum* at all.
Jim Landwehr

Wordnapped

he kidnapped words and held them hostage with a steep ransom
kept them tied up hidden closeted

he tried to make the words talk to fess up to their true meaning or reveal their intent disclose divulge

he bribed them with chocolate, coffee, pastries, even whiskey hoping to brainwash them erase rewrite

but the words were a stubborn lot they knew their true worth was beyond his talents silence blocked
so he increased his demands
threatened the true owner of the words
gave them one last chance
final
ultimatum

while he was eating jelly toast
the words escaped his entrapment
and ran like hell
forever
lost
Terese Coe

Social Decorum

The mark of a true sophisticate is *au fond*, you need to be bored.
Be vague but comprehending as you strike a minor chord.

The tone may be ironic, the pitch both low and gravid, and if there’s laughter, it cannot be hysterical or avid.

Never forget the bourgeoisie is uncultured and uncouth, insufferable and stilted and mired in the truth,

while your sine qua non is majesty, an anomalous bravura, more than a little vanity, and a touch of sprezzatura.
She came back with seaweed in her arms.
She came back from ruins, Black Sea water,
from casting for a convent, she came back
when she was broke. She was still my daughter.

When she had done with Bratislava, when
she’d crashed in caves above a slate-roofed town,
when she had worked the stone and cracked it open,
then she came back one dawn to us, alone.

Either she’d been through one hellish night
or many. She came back without him.
The Aspen Wish

A child, she danced in aspens, loved the quake
Of yellow leaves in autumn, stamped and splashed
In shallow, pebbly streams with flecks of gold,
Never dreaming the aggregate of roots
Hidden under the moss and flower heads.
And the narrow trees of the aspen stand
Shivered their plumes in air, speaking to her
Of secrets tucked in crevices of earth.
When a woman, she was snared by tendrils,
Tugged and yanked into the tangle of the world,
The daily bruise and mar, the dragon hoard
Of what is handed down, the weight of the past.
But all she wanted—ever!—was to be
Like Colorado aspens in sunshine,
Glittering, shaken gold, confederate
With the least breeze to bring on loveliness,
No eye to see but the blue eye of sky.
Lisa DeSiro
Gender Envy

*Kiss your elbow and you’ll turn into a boy*
my mother warned me. But I wanted to
at age seven, longing to be Luke
after seeing Star Wars. Even though my toys
and games were girlish—dolls, tea parties, *Let’s play house*—in dreams I was the hero who
with a lightsaber bravely saved the day.
It seemed achievable, a deed that I could do—
if I could twist myself in just a certain way
my lips would touch my arm like magic, like
a charm or spell—I’d be transformed. I’d try
sometimes, wishful. Never any luck.
And so I stayed as female as my mother.
She’d been raised like a son by her father.
Annette Sisson

Wind and Wild Flowers, Edinburgh

She climbs Arthur’s Seat, photographs
the rocks, the harbor, the Medieval walls,

stills the rush of her solitude,
sharpens its telescopic lens.

A stolen day, its sweetness
as rare as rest, as winsome as Scottish

sunshine. Teetering on a shard
of granite, near the drop to meadows

of long grass swept horizontal,
she rides the cusp of summer,

basks in heather and gorse,
the next year a heart skip,

a sharp hollow breath. Tense
wind pushes her down, multiplying

gravity; she pictures not
the grey stones, but the dexterous

wild flowers, their purples, blues,
and whites cracking the sandy earth.
At the jagged stone fence pocked with lichen
and moss, the wild horse stood tall, speckled-grey
tinged silver like a beacon of moonlight,
ears perked. It stared at me
as I stood beside the car, waiting
for my husband and daughter to return
from hopping the rain-sieved limestone
down to the bristling sea and back
while I worried for their safety,
while I worried for my mother
across the Atlantic and fading fast
from lesions we did not know had spread.
I kept turning to the horse,
erect in stillness and gravity
and a strange promise of balm,
as if sentinel
on the border between worlds.

Previously published in Mothershell (Kelsay Books, 2019)
Larry Levy

Ode to the Melanzana

To conjugate to eggplant
note its purple present tense.

Royal at the bottom, crowned
with spikes in self-defense.

Sometimes white and rounded—hence
its name and oddball others.

Sometimes oval like a bean,
addressed in Europe aubergine.

Prepped by every nation’s mothers—
tomato, potato are its brothers—
grilled, pureed, or chopped and chewy,
or with squash in ratatouille,

parmagiana, spicy bhartha,
baba ghanoush, cold caponata—

with antioxidants! Which are good!
By picky eaters misunderstood.

I’ve tried to marinate and sear it.
My grandchildren won’t get near it.
Larry Levy

Come Live with Me and Be My Love

On a mountain once, I saw
giant birds, Great Green Macaw,
eating mountain almonds raw.

One of the most wondrous things I’ve seen.
Through the palms, twelve, no, thirteen,
morning blue, Caribbean green.

Strangest was one’s chiseled beak
but stranger still an electric shriek
she telegraphed from peak to peak

an oath to her monogamy:
Come to my mountain almond tree.
She seemed, I swear, to speak to me.

You know, I could not duplicate
any vow to be her mate.
But she was green, and she was great!
Chris O’Caroll

Arcadia’s Peacocks

Peacocks have settled and adapted themselves to the City of Arcadia, particularly in the vicinity of the Arboretum. Although beautiful to view, peacocks can be a nuisance as well.

– arcadia.gov website

These are luxurious, exotic birds, Showpieces of big-ticket decoration On great estates. Here, though, an infestation, Chewing through gardens, heaping lawns with turds,

Damaging roofs and ornamental trees By perching well above a sparrow’s weight, Shrieking all night when it comes time to mate – Loud, lusty, harem-seeking cocks, these peas.

They teach that even loveliest excess Dulls to mere overdose, that every thrill Can gag us with a cloying overkill, Brewing toxicity from gorgeousness.

Or do they? Have we drawn the wrong conclusion From spectacles we prize when they are rare But grimace at when they swarm everywhere, Lush beauties bloated to grotesque profusion?
Perhaps this bird turned commonplace invites
Attentiveness to mundane grace notes we
Routinely discount—silver energy
Whisking a supple squirrel’s tail, gold highlights

Where dandelion anarchy zaps spring
And summer green, serene or frenzied motes
Surfing a daylight shaft, the chirping notes
Night’s peacock-ordinary crickets sing.
Carla Martin-Wood

Wings

Oh, I was an anywinged child
woodland wonder
faery, hummingbird, butterfly
no matter
if it dipped or swooped or flew
swallow or sweat bee
I was one with it
riding skyward
into clouds flushed pink as other girls’ dresses

I’d climb Grandmother’s old sycamore
dangle precarious from its limbs
speak the strange language
of chipmunk and squirrel
as they darted in and out
the scatter of blossoms beneath me
and clothed in vines of honeysuckle
I’d pull stamens out
relish drops of golden nectar
convinced I could drink deep enough
to sustain myself
if I ran away
on the train that passed behind our house
I was a worrisome child
soulpawned to nature
before I could walk
nothing that flew or crawled made me flinch
not the hawk that sometimes perched beside me
nor the serpent Grandmother swore
slept beneath the fig
on the dark side of the garden
and sitting in my hiding place
I kept watch
over the only friends I had
shooed the cat
from the bluebird nest
moved ladybugs
from the spider’s path

When the sun fell
I’d climb down
to eat a supper
less than faery fare
then quickly to bed
before the stepmonster
trolled his way home
and tucked beneath blankets
of perpetual insecurity
I’d wrap my human arms
around my human self
in the only hug I trusted
Moon rose in glory
sycamore shadows soothed my brow
frogson and cricket once-upon-a-timed me
breeze said “there, there now”
and I fell to slumber
arms melting into my body
as secret pinions grew
luminous and strong enough
to carry me away.
Leslie Schultz

All Hallows

In the end, we bestow
t hat most precious gift:
o ur life. From all
ексperience there is this quietness
of final meek withdrawal.

In these dark trees, the heft
of soft feathers knows
night is mere caul
and cauldron where silence stirs.
Owls are uncanny birds.

They glide on silk hush, sift
sound, find our mouse hearts;
pierce fearfulness
with claws sharper than an apt word,
keener than the tongs of art,

carry us higher now
through our woundedness
up to moonlight
and beyond, allowing new sight
as we wink out, think Good night.
Heraldic shields. Golden salamanders, necks making liquid u-turns to the right, mouths emitting signals of auric flame above squat, compressed torsos and solid legs—more extinct stegosauri than the elegant, flickering lizards enlivening courtyard bricks.

What do they see over golden shoulders? Barges across centuries, sliding up the Loire like garbage scows? Can they hear leather boot heels, silken slippers (deliciously made as pastries, slippery as fog) treading this winding stair, this partially external octagonal helix ever-listening
to the heartbeat of hill and valley, an imagining of crowning & commanding, remembering
that encrusted harpsichord’s
long-stopped notes?
Silent escutcheons. Sentries:
if not guarding then watching
over the continual crumbling
of that oversweet

poisonous patisserie,
the glaze we deem history.
Elizabeth Spencer Spragins

What Trees Remember

A Rannaigheacht Ghairid

Knotted knees
Bend beneath the memories
Of so many guns and groans.
Stones that ring catalpa trees

Do not speak
Of shattered bones, strong men weak
With fever, fear, and despair.
No prayer strokes the bloodied cheek

Of the dead.
Horses, hounds, and flocks have fled.
No one tills the trampled clay—
Torched plantations yield no bread.

The fall breeze
Blankets earth with rusted seas.
Colors of the dawn unfold,
Kiss the cold from knotted knees.

~Chatham Manor, Fredericksburg, Virginia

Notes: The two catalpa trees standing at the front entrance of Chatham Manor were planted before the estate served as a Union hospital during the American Civil War.
Terrence Sykes

Chernobyl

Your name noble city
… translates as mugwort
dried & dispelling moths
from home & garden
where once corn pollen
scattered & danced
into Ukraine winds
haunting my name
radiated blood of
your ancestors surge
through my veins
in vain clouds
drizzle upon
forsaken earth
but will the mugwort
rise again amongst the ruins
A glance across the ages, from a man riding a trolley in 19th Century Brooklyn, toward the solid rump of a woman who steps up and into the car as the trolley stops (or slows at least), clutching the front of her skirt, pulling it taut. A shoe and stocking flirt, as they rise from a dirty sunlit street, with his eyes, and his hat’s dark, stiffened brim tilts slightly, sees her ample bonnet primly move away while smoke drifts from his mouth, all he could say to her before she disappeared behind, among more strangers. She lingered in his mind, perhaps, her face imagined (how might he dare to look around?), soft ringlets of her hair that beckoned him so briefly (casual glance?, as if he might be lost, or from a trance of travel drawn back to his place and time). But while he thought, his stop rushed up to him. He rose and nimbly descended to the street, and turned his head (so casual), just to meet her eyes, perhaps, that in the shadows stayed among the blur of other faces and shapes, and she, perhaps, glanced out into the light at such an interesting man, or so she thought, perhaps, as paths diverged among so many wheels and steps, so long ago that any
tombed in the amber of this photograph
have stepped off at the corner of Time and Death,
and gone your way and mine, and his and hers,
through possibilities lost, through what occurs.
Bill Fellenberg

Reunion Mirage

The pomp had been meager, the circumstance vague.
We assembled in the gym for the final time,
florescent lights sputtering in the rafters above.
Black gowns hung on us, cloaking our urgency.
We squirmed in skins we ached to shed.

Snatching our diplomas, we fled from town
stumbled to anywhere else, settled for a future
that fate would allow. We tied old letters
in bundles, stowed them in attics
left them to be gnawed by insects and time.

We reconvened on reunion day at a Holiday Inn to study
the remains, poked around old footprints left in the sand
by those once young, now old or dead. One wrinkled teenager
after another inquired of me, “What happened to you?”
—a trick question I couldn’t answer.

Meanwhile, the class clown cried in the lobby bar,
gurgling at the deep end of memory.
He hoisted an empty glass toward the exit door
and blurted, “Here’s to mirages!” air-kissed us all good-bye,
then disappeared into a desert sandstorm.
I’d like to raise a toast, too—how mirages shimmer in cool green sway. When the mirage fades, try this: Close your eyes and listen to sounds beyond the next dune. Children splash in a rain-pocked lake. Above, thunder wanders back and forth—like us—lost in the clouds.
Rimas Uzgiris
Lithuanian TV and the Man with the Blue Guitar

Oh, I’ve heard enough—I’m bored
Of mournful wooden pipes that blow
From ancient folk whose past is lore—
They drone with such faux-meaningful pose
As if our souls still flowed through groves
en-tombed with fairies, elves and boars.

Play a song on a blue guitar instead,
Play it gay, make hearts swell, fill the tune
With what gives heat, makes minds reel,
The body undulate. Fill it with the feel
Of buds in spring, dreams like tables tuned
To pomegranates, dates … not porkfat, dread.

Fill it too with needles’ bite, a last caress, a baby’s breath.
And play the instrument with all that makes life death.
My mom can’t stand this preacher guy. She’s mad at him for telling everyone she’s sinful to marry her husband’s brother. So she had him jailed. Then, when my stepdad had a skinful and ordered me to dance, she shook her head. I told him no. He swore he’d offer me whatever I asked. She nodded. “Done” I said. She draped me in sheer silks, embroidery, gauzes, and lace. I knew those didn’t matter. He wasn’t eyeing me for what I wore. So, dancing, I removed them, one by one, then called for my reward when I was done: the preacher’s head. She sent me with this platter. I’ve never seen a severed head before.
Today I’m taking off my face—
my mouth, my ears, my brows, my nose—
retaining nothing but my eyes.
Because I’m in a distant place
where nobody who knows me goes,
I’m silent as the butterflies.
I have no history to erase.
My outer margin ebbs and flows.
I’m no one that I recognize.

Today I’m taking off my name.
I’m blank. I could be anyone.
In unfamiliar light, I fade
like watercolors in a frame.
I turn transparent in the sun,
but coalesce again in shade—
exposed, unraveled, not the same,
uncertain, now I’ve come undone,
that I can ever be remade.
Immersed in water, I’m transparent. When a water strider skates across my dimpled skin, it makes me ticklish, almost incoherent.

When Jesus walks across me like the wind, I barely notice until he says, Be still. Then I know he’s God, and so strong willed that when he says, Be wine—my head just spins.

When I turn to ice, my thoughts congeal, and I can see that they amount to nothing, compared to what I come to know when I dissolve in water’s flow. Evaporated, I am next to nothing, as close to who I am as I can be.
David Stephenson

Combine

It wasn’t like the big ones they have now,
All self-propelled. You dragged this one behind
A tractor, and its three-row scissor head
Chopped the corn stalks, and its box frame shook,
And shelled corn trickled out of a side chute,
And mangled stalks and cobs out the back end.

It was a “combine” because it combined
Reaping and threshing, which are separate trades
In the Bible, plied with scythes and flails.
It was the flagship of a little fleet,
Escorted by a wagon as it went
About its fateful business in the fields.

As with anything, when it broke down
They dragged it to the barnyard and began
Disassembling it. My grandpa used
Pliers to loosen bolts, and Dad would say
That maybe he should try a normal wrench
Instead of chewing up the heads like that.
After they removed some sheet metal
One of them would crouch and reach inside,
Twisting and contorting as required,
While the other passed him different tools,
Until at length a greasy arm emerged
Holding something twisted, snapped, or seized.

Looking at its uncovered details,
The dense array of shafts and linkages,
I wondered how they knew how it all worked,
What could go wrong and where they should look,
How they always found the broken part
And how I’d ever learn to be that smart.
All day the rain on snow, fresh and old,
And all at once the ugliness of three
Long seasons shows. The clean asperity
Of winter drags in the plowed-up roadside folds
Of mud and piles of autumn disinterred.
Indecent, to be made to watch this slow
Unseemly change. The rot, before we know
It, should be covered over with a stir
Of violets. The ice should turn to shoots
Of glossy grasses as we sleep and roots
Recover their dominion, earth remove
This crumbled asphalt. Can’t we look away
Or close our eyes and let the world improve—
Turn up and out and vanish its decay.
Biographies

William Baer has been the recipient of a Guggenheim, a Fulbright (Portugal), and a creative writing fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts. He’s the author of thirty books, including Formal Salutations: New & Selected Poems, Love Sonnets, and The Unfortunates (recipient of the T.S. Eliot Award).

Lisa Barnett lives and writes in the Philadelphia area. Her poems have appeared in The Hudson Review, Poetry, Better than Starbucks, Measure Review, Think, the anthology Sonnets: 150 Contemporary Sonnets, and elsewhere. She is a three-time Howard Nemerov Sonnet Award finalist and the author of two chapbooks.

John Bartell is an east coast transplant trying to make it Texas. His poetry has been published in Canyon Voices and The Loch Raven Review. In addition, he has short stories published in various publications, including the Manhattanville Review, Sanitarium Magazine, and in A. Lee Martinez’s Strange Afterlives Anthology.

Despy Boutris is published or forthcoming in American Poetry Review, Copper Nickel, Colorado Review, The Adroit Journal, Prairie Schooner, Palette Poetry, Third Coast, Raleigh Review, Diode, The Indianapolis Review, and elsewhere. Currently, she teaches at the University of Houston and serves as Assistant Poetry Editor for Gulf Coast.
With over 5,000 publications, including *TIME, Reader’s Digest, BBC Radio 3, Writer’s Digest—The Year’s Best Writing,* and hundreds of literary journals, **Michael R. Burch** calls himself one of the world’s most-published “complete unknowns.” His poetry has been translated into fourteen languages and set to music by seven composers.


Shannon Cuthbert is a Brooklyn-based writer and artist. Her poems have appeared in Gingerbread House, Poetry Super Highway, Chronogram, and Beakful, among others.

Thomas O. Davenport is an independent writer and business advisor. His verse, much of it sardonic, has appeared in Defenestration, WORK Literary Magazine, Workers Write!, and in the anthology Love Affairs at the Villa Nelle (Kelsay Books, 2019). His book of humorous verse, Get the Hell to Work, was published by Kelsay Books in 2020. You can also read his writings (poetry and other) at www.worklodes.com.

Lisa DeSiro is the author of Labor (Nixes Mate, 2018) and Grief Dreams (White Knuckle Press, 2017). Her poetry has been widely published in anthologies and journals, as well as set to music by several composers. Lisa is also a professional accompanist. Read more about her at thepoetpianist.com.

Bill Fellenberg’s poems and short stories have appeared in Clementine Unbound, The Tower Journal, The Narrowsburg Literary Gazette, and other literary publications. Born in Yokohama, Japan, he immigrated to the United States with his parents when he was a young boy. He lives in Tyler Hill, Pennsylvania, under the spell of his wife, Donna, and two tuxedo cats, Bella and Carmine.

Anthony J. Fuchs is a Philadelphian by birth, a North Carolinian by choice, and a poet by nature. He frequently writes and rarely submits. He earned his Bachelor’s degree in English from Temple University and only ever uses it to compose eloquent emails in his career in the finance industry.


Terri Greco is a poet and psychotherapist. Her poems have appeared in various print and online journals and anthologies, including *Main Street Rag, Kakalak, Forage Poetry*, and forthcoming from Jacar Press. Awards include an honorable mention for her poem “Living” (*Kakalak, 2019*). She lives in Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

Janis Harrington won the North Carolina Poetry Society’s 2017 Lena Shull Book Award for Waiting for the Hurricane. Her work has been selected by journals and anthologies, including Tar River Poetry; Journal of the American Medical Association; and Beyond Forgetting: Poetry and Prose about Alzheimer’s Disease, Kent State University Press.

Penny Harter’s work has appeared in many journals and anthologies, and in twenty-two collections (including chapbooks). Her recent books and chapbooks include A Prayer the Body Makes (2020), The Resonance Around Us (2013), One Bowl (a prizewinning e-chapbook of haibun, 2012), Recycling Starlight (2010), and The Night Marsh (2008).

Robin Helweg-Larsen’s poetry is mostly published in the UK, US, and Canada. His chapbook Calling The Poem is downloadable from Snakeskin Poetry Webzine, issue 236. He is Series Editor for Sampson Low’s Potcake Chapbooks—Form in Formless Times, and he blogs on formalverse.com from his hometown of Governor’s Harbour, Bahamas.
Karen Paul Holmes has two poetry collections: No Such Thing as Distance (Terrapin, 2018) and Untying the Knot (Aldrich, 2014). Her poems have been featured on Garrison Keillor’s The Writer’s Almanac and Tracy K. Smith’s The Slowdown. Publications include Diode, Valparaiso Review, Lascaux Review, The Orchards Poetry Journal, and Prairie Schooner. To support fellow writers, she founded and hosts the Side Door Poets in Atlanta.

Charlotte Innes is the author of Descanso Drive, a book of poems published by Kelsay Books, and two chapbooks, Licking the Serpent and Reading Ruskin in Los Angeles, both published by Finishing Line Press. Her poems have appeared in many publications including The Hudson Review, Tampa Review, and Valparaiso Poetry Review.

James Croal Jackson is a Filipino-American poet. He has a chapbook, The Frayed Edge of Memory (Writing Knights Press, 2017), and recent poems in DASH, Sampsonia Way, and Jam & Sand. He edits The Mantle (themantlepoetry.com). Currently, he works in film production in Pittsburgh, PA. You can visit his site at jamescroaljackson.com.

Edison Jennings is a Head Start school bus driver living in the southern Appalachian region of Virginia. His poetry has appeared in a variety of journals and anthologies, including Boulevard, Kenyon Review, Rattle, River Styx, Poetry Daily, Slate, Southern Poetry Review, Southwest Review, TriQuarterly, and most recently, Innisfree. He is the author of two chapbooks, Reckoning (Jacar Press) and Small Measures (Wild Leek Press).
Allison Joseph lives in Carbondale, Illinois, where she teaches at Southern Illinois University. Her latest books include *Smart Pretender* (Finishing Line Press), *The Last Human Heart* (Diode Editions), and *Confessions of a Barefaced Woman* (Red Hen Press). She is the widow of the late poet and editor Jon Tribble.

David W. Landrum teaches literature at Grand Valley State University in Western Michigan. His poetry has appeared widely, most recently in *Better Than Starbucks, The Agonist, Three Drops from a Cauldron*, and *Algebra of Owls*.

Jim Landwehr has two published memoirs, *Dirty Shirt* and *The Portland House*. He also has five poetry collections, *Thoughts from a Line at the DMV, Genetically Speaking, On a Road, Written Life*, and *Reciting from Memory*. Jim is past Poet Laureate for the Village of Wales, WI. For more, visit: http://jimlandwehr.com.

Larry Levy’s books include *I Would Stay Forever If I Could* and *New Poems* (Mayapple Press), *All the Dead are Holy* (Atmosphere Press), and *What Outlives Us* (Atmosphere Press). Larry and his wife Cheryl live in Michigan where they direct plays for the Midland Center for the Arts.

Libby Maxey is a senior editor at *Literary Mama*. Her poems have appeared in *Emrys, Pirene’s Fountain, Stoneboat* and elsewhere, and her first poetry collection, *Kairos*, won Finishing Line Press’s 2018 New Women's Voices Chapbook Competition. Her nonliterary activities include singing classical repertoire and mothering two sons.
Lisa McCabe lives in Lahave, Nova Scotia. She studied Film at York University and English Literature at University of North Carolina, Greensboro. She has published poems in a variety of journals, including *The Sewanee Review, Limestone, HCE Review, Better Than Starbucks, The Wellington Street Review*, and *A3 Review*.


JBMulligan has had more than 1100 poems and stories published over the last 45 years, as well as two chapbooks, two e-books, and has appeared in more than a dozen anthologies.

Sally Nacker (MFA, 2013, Fairfield University) lives in Connecticut with her husband and their two cats. Her collections—*Vireo* (2015) and *Night Snow* (2017)—were published by Kelsay Books. She is quietly thrilled to have been awarded the Edwin Way Teale Residency at Trail Wood for the summer of 2020.
Chris O’Carroll is a *Light* magazine featured poet and author of *The Joke’s on Me* (White Violet Press, 2019). His work appears in *New York City Haiku, The Best of the Barefoot Muse, Love Affairs at the Villa Nelle,* and *The Great American Wise Ass Poetry Anthology,* among other collections.

José Oseguera is an LA-based writer of poetry, short fiction and literary nonfiction. His writing has been featured in *Emrys Journal, The Hiram Poetry Review, Inlandia,* and *The Literarian.* He was named one of the Sixty-Four Best Poets of 2019 by the Black Mountain Press and is the recipient of the Nancy Dew Taylor Poetry Award. His work has also been nominated for the Best of the Net award (2018 and twice in 2019) as well as the Pushcart (2018 and 2019) and Forward (2020) Prizes. He is the author of the poetry collection *The Milk of Your Blood* published by Kelsay Books.

Chris Pellizzari holds a B.A. in history with a Spanish minor from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and an M.A. in journalism from Columbia College Chicago. His poetry has appeared in numerous literary magazines including *Allegro, The Lake, Tipton Poetry Journal, Gone Lawn,* and *The Main Street Rag.* He is a member of The Society of Midland Authors.

Andrea Potos is the author of several poetry collections, most recently *Mothershell* (Kelsay Books) and *A Stone to Carry Home* (Salmon Poetry). You can find her poems widely in print and online, most recently in *Spirituality & Health Magazine, Peacock Journal,* and gratefulness.org.
Erik Richardson lives in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where he runs a small e-learning firm and teaches Zen. He is the author of a berserker stuck in traffic (Pebblebrook Press, 2014) and song of ourself (Aldrich Press, 2017). Some of his work has appeared in Nerve Cowboy, Chiron Review, and Stoneboat among others.

Tom Schmidt is a retired humanities professor whose poetry has appeared in numerous journals, including recent publication in The Aurorean, Pilcrow & Dagger, Northern New England Review, The Lyric, and Christian Century. Enough to Drink or Drown is his first chapbook.


Elizabeth Spencer Spragins is a poet and writer who taught in community colleges for more than a decade. Her collections of original poetry include The Language of Bones: American Journeys Through Bardic Verse (Kelsay Books) and With No Bridle for the Breeze (Shanti Arts Publishing).

John W. Steele is a psychologist, yoga teacher, assistant editor of Think: A Journal of Poetry, Fiction and Essays, and graduate of the MFA Poetry Program at Western Colorado University, where he studied with Julie Kane, Ernest Hilbert, and David Rothman. John lives in Boulder, Colorado and loves hiking in the mountains.

David Stephenson lives in Detroit, MI. His poems have appeared in The Lyric, Able Muse, Measure, Slant, Blue Unicorn, and other journals. His collection Rhythm and Blues won the 2007 Richard Wilbur Award and was published by the University of Evansville Press in 2008.
Terrence Sykes was born and raised in the rural coal mining area of Virginia. This isolation brings the theme of remembrance to his creations, whether real or imagined. His poetry, photography, and flash fiction have been published in Bangladesh, Canada, Ireland, India, Mauritius, Pakistan, Scotland, Spain, and the USA.

Rimas Uzgiris is the author of the poetry collection, North of Paradise, and translator of five poetry collections from Lithuanian, including Then What and Vagabond Sun. He holds a Ph.D. in philosophy and MFA in creative writing. Recipient of Fulbright and NEA Translation Grants, he teaches at Vilnius University.


Marly Youmans is the award-winning author of fifteen books. Her most recent collection of poetry is The Book of the Red King (Montreal: Phoenicia Publishing, 2019), a sequence of poems centering on the Fool and his transformations, the Red King, and the Fool’s beloved, Precious Wentletrap. Her most recent novel is Charis in the World of Wonders (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2020), a young woman’s adventurous story set in the Massachusetts’s Bay Colony in the 1690s. Find Marly on Twitter and Facebook, and at http://www.thepalaceat2.blogspot.com.
Madison Zehmer is a poet and wannabe historian from North Carolina, with published and forthcoming work in Déraciné Magazine, Drunk Monkeys, Gone Lawn, LandLocked Magazine, Kanstellation Magazine, and elsewhere. She is editor-in-chief of Mineral Lit Mag and a reader for Lily Poetry Review. Her first chapbook, Unhaunting, will be released by Kelsay Books in 2021.
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