

THE PRAIRIE REVIEW



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GRASSROOTS MAGAZINE OF POETRY, PROSE, ART AND CRITICISM



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THE PRAIRIE REVIEW



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POETRY ALBUM + CHAPBOOK | The Prairie Review



**POETRY EVENT
+ OPEN MIC**

THE HIDEOUT

JUNE 13 2026

3 PM—5:30 PM

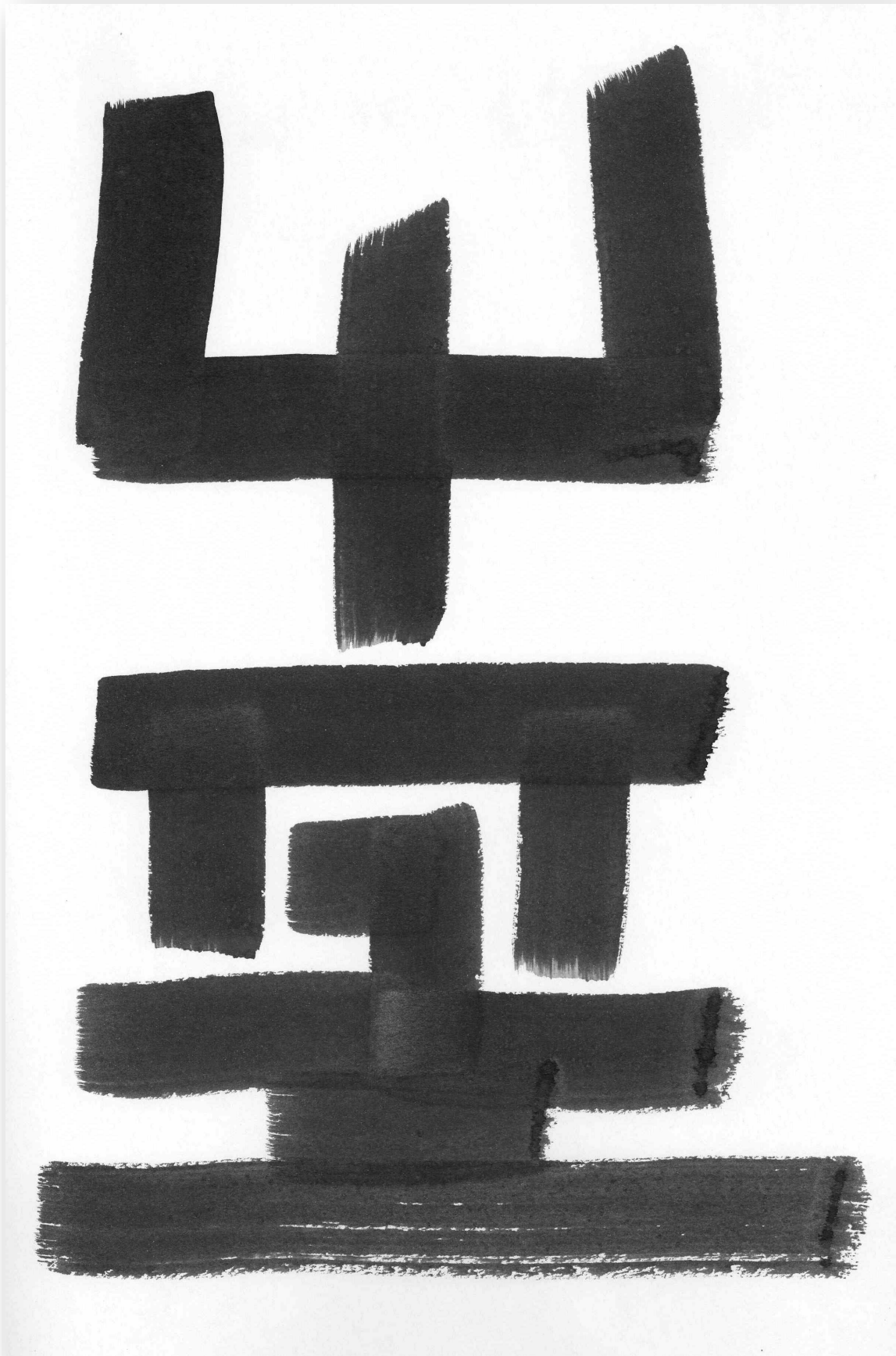
CHICAGO

**AYALA
GARZA
HARRELL
HARRIS
HEINE
KEYHANI
LIPINSKA
MARTIN
MAY
SENDI**

TICKETS

[Hideout Chicago](#)





Thomas Merton, Untitled, drawing on paper, 1960s.

Used with permission of the Merton Legacy Trust and the Thomas Merton Center at Bellarmine University.

Letter from the Editor

Welcome to the Spring issue of The Prairie Review!

Art will always be about what's singing in the grass; our life, creativity, and authentic cultural momentum happen at the level of slim green blades, at the fragile roots, and in the dark fertile soil of the human heart.

I invite you to engage and to linger with the plethora of new poetry, prose, and visual art of this Spring issue. I am thrilled by the diversity of writing, which includes screenplays, an experimental poetry project, flash fiction, and the featured essay "On Hybridity" by poet David Booth. David Booth and Sierra McCutchen have both generously agreed to contribute essays on writing and poetics to all four issues of TPR in 2026. I am also honored to share the remarkable paintings and sculptures of artist Agnes Grochulska who has curated a portfolio of her work inspired by the writings of Franz Kafka.

City News Anthology, a poetry album recorded by several writers from Chicago's Poetry Meetup open mic community, will be released on June 13. You are invited you to join us for a live poetry event celebrating this special occasion on the same day Saturday, June 13, at The Hideout. We hope to see you there!

Kinga Lipinska

Editor



"I AM SINGING NOW WHILE ROME BURNS.

WE ARE ALL JUST TRYING TO BE HOLY. MY APPLEJACK,

MY SILENT NIGHT, JUST MASH YOUR LIPS AGAINST ME.

WE ARE ALL GOING FORWARD. NONE OF US ARE GOING BACK."

– RICHARD SIKEN, "SNOW AND DIRTY RAIN"

Afro-mentioned

When you asked me—
Where are you from?

No—
not like that—

When you asked me,
Are you Nigerian?

I said—
no.

Politely.
Soft enough
to leave the door open.

Because maybe—
just maybe—
you would hear
the question
inside my answer.

Maybe you'd say,
Then what are you?

Maybe we'd build something
between us—
a bridge made of almosts.

But you didn't.

You gestured.
Quick. Sharp.
Like I missed a cue
I was never given.

And then—
you said something
in your language.

Not mine.

But close enough
to sting.

Something about *us*.

Something we call each other
every day—
like it doesn't cost anything.
Like it doesn't land anywhere.

But it landed.

Just like you hoped

I carried it with me
all day.

Turned it over.
Pulled it apart.
Replayed it—

Every conversation
we didn't have.

About music.
About food.
About mothers
who make miracles
out of nothing.

Because mine did.

Single mother—
on some *superwoman*
don't-sleep
don't-break
don't-ask-for-help
type shit.

She gave me pride.

Say it with me—
pride.

She gave me respect—
but only
if it comes back whole.

She gave me patience,
intuition,
creativity—

Things you don't see
when you're just
trying to place me.

It's 3 a.m. now.

And I'm still here—
awake.

Because sleep doesn't come easy
when you're busy
rewriting yourself
for strangers.

You threw shade—
and kept walking
like it was nothing.

Like I was nothing.

Like I didn't just stand there
holding the weight
of a whole continent
on my face.

Tomorrow—
it's my last day
at the park district.

I said I'd show up on time.
Bring mac and cheese—

(the good kind)

Because life keeps moving, right?

Even when something in you
gets stuck.

And I swear—
it wasn't even what you said.

It was the leaving.

The turning.

The way you walked away
like the conversation
was already finished—

like I had already
failed it.

And suddenly—
I'm drowning.

Not in water—

in doubt.

Swimming
in questions
I didn't know
I was supposed to answer.

Like—

How do I prove
I belong
to something
I was never taught
to name?

How do I carry
a history
you think you see
just by looking at me?

How do I not feel
like I betrayed
an entire continent—

just for
looking
like
us?

Control Burn

You preferred
the perimeter—

not absence,
just a careful refusal of center.

(distance as choreography)
(distance as etiquette)
(distance as a soft no)

and I—
(I shrug in rhythm)
I say: yes, yes—

I am cool with that
cool like a surface

that does not remember touch

after all

this is your ME day

your sanctioned orbit
your curated gravity

your plot (outlined in invisible ink)
your art (self-erasing)
your rules (spoken backward)

your edit—
cut / splice / mute / loop / delete

your playlist of almost-feelings
your charcuterie of fragments
your glow sticks humming in a minor key

your antique gesture—
a buggy whip cracking at nothing

It's the month of July

and somewhere—
offstage, under-lit—

Theo Huxtable dissolves into rerun static
Ozzie too, unbuttoning himself from memory

and Cassandra—my old friend

has become part of the weather too

you would have liked Sandy

she was excessive , light, energy
a practitioner of arms-around-the-world theory

a hugger—

(performer turns to audience)

meow
...meow
.....meow
.....meow

(cat as invocation / cat as refusal / cat as witness)

she insisted—
the world requires compression
pressure
contact

but the doctrine says:

cuddles are inefficient
cuddles are unserious
cuddles will not scale

cuddles—

(whispered, then revoked)

are unacceptable

The Poem (refuses containment)

Speaks—

not in metaphor
but in exit strategy

GET ME—

(no, louder)

GET ME DA'FUCK
OFF THIS PAGE

NOW

(paper trembles)
(ink considers mutiny)

no warning—
no dramaturgy of hesitation—

just—

leaving

a skedaddle

a holy disappearance into the feral margins

good ideas are like fugitives

they do not wait for your readiness
they do not RSVP

they bolt, jet'da fuck out

mid-sentence
mid-breath
mid-self-congratulation

I, too, once held one—

(a mean, a good idea,)

Savored over it like breast

I said:

I will unmake the ISMS
I will rinse the world of its tired violences

(but the algorithm blinked)

and I—

I turned

toward the soft applause of *likes*

tiny blue hearts
beating louder than purpose

and just like that—

POOF

(the sound of a promise evacuating the body)

enter:

the nonprofit industrial lullaby

(guilt as currency)

(grants as oxygen masks)

always a writer somewhere—

polishing the ask

but never the immediacy

never the hands-in-the-chaos knowing

never the hiring of the kick-azz sister

who understands:

that leadership is not ownership

that kinship is not a leash

that not all po' folk need steering

just the delivery of what was already promised

(rewind)

your poem—

yes

it has been spotted

(stage splits: street / rain / witness)

it is dodging traffic

(a choreography of near-death clarity)

it is baptizing itself in rain

it is refusing you

and also—

waiting

because good ideas—

listen—

they are resilient in a feral way

they reappear

unannounced
uninvited
unapologetic

POPUP

like a ghost with excellent timing

demanding:

see me
hold me
risk me

before you shrink me
before you edit me into something safe

(closer now)

because it knows—

you might choose brilliance

or you might

(again)

scroll past it

so when it returns—

and it will—

do not cage it in language that fears itself

do not flatten it into grant-speak

do not starve it with hesitation

treat it like water

(no—more than that)

treat it like something

that refuses to be held

and still

chooses

to come back

CLUB HOUSE (after the door, before the myth)

The sign was law

handwritten
loud in its quiet—

**NO NASTY BOYS
ALLOWED
—PERIOD—**

(a border is a spell
is a dare
is a door pretending to be a wall)

inside:

a republic of almosts
a parliament of girls becoming weather

and Stephene Rodgers—

First Sergeant of Soft Rebellions
Commander of Entry

she decided

who crossed
who hovered
who stayed outside learning longing

initiation was not force—

it was frequent

Could you hold a note
like Minnie Riperton holding sky in her throat

could you listen

(listening was the real test)

to stories stitched from almost-love
to dreams still damp with sleep
to recipes baked under a plastic sun

(EZ-bake theology)

you sat

ate everything they offered
even the invisible things—

heartbreak reheated
crushes half-seasoned

you became

spell-checker
spell-caster
witness

(and yes—
some spells lingered longer than intended)

Darnell—still reaching for signal
Andrea—still walking through the echo of it

because language, once sharpened,
remembers its target

On the day they made you

Show it—

MARVIN TATE

a day of too much laughter
a day when the room tilted

and Stephene Rodgers

laughed

loud enough
to fracture something unnamed

you kept that sound

like a stone in the mouth

rolled it forward through years

said:

one day

I will return here
with language as witness

not revenge—

but arrangement

not exposure—

but translation

because memory

is a clubhouse too

and you—

finally—

control

who enters

Marvin Tate is a Chicago-born multidisciplinary artist, poet, musician, educator, and community activist known for blending spoken word, funk, jazz, soul, visual art, and performance. Raised in the North Lawndale neighborhood, Tate emerged from Chicago's slam poetry and experimental music scenes in the 1990's .

He is best known as the frontman of Marvin Tate's D-Settlement, an avant-garde collective that fused poetry, theater, improvisation, and Black musical traditions. Over the years, he has collaborated with artists including Angel Olsen, Tim Kinsella, Mike Reed, Ben LaMar Gay, and Theaster Gates.

In addition to music and poetry, Tate creates assemblage-based visual art using found objects and recycled materials, often exploring themes of memory, race, community, and urban life. His work has been exhibited in Chicago galleries and museums, including the Intuit Art Museum.

Tate is also a longtime arts educator and mentor, especially for young people on Chicago's West Side. His work continues to influence Chicago's experimental arts scene through performance, theater collaborations, and community-based projects.

Listening to the Goo Goo Dolls on a Dirt Road Years Ago

Memories cascade

From the cusp

Of clean guitar notes

Floating

Through stereo speakers

As wheels turn

Pavement into gravel

Up & down

They lift & let fall

Moments, echoes of moments

Like debris billowing & gasping

On the crests of open waves—

But this country road is far,

Far from any ocean

Far from the framed seascape

That leaned dusty

On her basement wall

& rediscovery rare these days

When the road grows

Wrinkled & hazy

But the music—

An open door

& something knocks

As it enters

Against the hollow

Of my chest

Follows the streams up

Where they rest & thicken

& coming down the road

At some uncertain point

Is the rest

When the music fades to

The wish of a face

The last note a name

I Walk & See

I walk & see the shadow of a creek
trickling through the cairn's face
to sink the hollow deep

I walk & see the quail whirl & leap
while the box turtle proceeds apace
to where the earth's sprung a leak

I walk & see the roofless field
with meadowlarks muttering in its rooms
as they tend the stalks with their dark-necked guild

I walk & see the sated sky, filled
to the brim as the cloudbank looms
over where the grassy hill has kneeled

I walk & see the packrat & buck
& owl & fox & cat & hear
next house over the baying mutt

I walk & see antlers dance in frenzied rut
As dusk descends on the wings of a bat
& the hawk one more time tries its luck

I walk & see in a single hour
near the day's end & the final act
which through regarding resolves its power

Grain Elevators

The only thing that's worth remembering
Is how the elevators lounged beside
The tracks out west of town like drunks
On the stoop of a bar right after close
With hands in pockets wondering what's next

They looked across the lonely milo lots
Haggard faces, mouths ajar, shoulders stooped
Their eyes seeing nothing but the past

When I return these loiterers remain
Explaining in low & burning tones how the trains
Some fast, some slow, are never quite on time
Forgetting how it's been fifteen years
Since railcars ran this route

A long & vacant stretch that will not change

Grant Hodges is a lawyer and writer, originally from Central Kansas. His poetry interrogates the relationship of the past to the present, often through images and scenes from rural America. Grant holds BAs in English and History from the University of Notre Dame, and a JD from Duke University's School of Law. He lives in the Kansas City area with his wife and two children.

Murmurs, Murmurs, Heart

A human coughed to death on the cement
...diabetes, influenza, uneven breathing...
Heart murmurs. There is no quiet pause below
the hum of industrial lighting over the cage.

Voices of concern from detainees above him
He needs a doctor. Please take him to the hospital.
The medical team are not here at this time.
Others barking like dogs outside his head.

A sour weather no one can outrun
Fear floats around him, a colorless bruise on the air
Not gone yet, all bodies counted for tonight
Just a blue body, no one to tape for the records.

Conscious he is almost unconscious
Heart inside the rib casket of beaten flesh
Blue suit seeps a stream of self in fluids.
Agua? Murmur, murmur. Water, please.

As long as there is sound he knows he is alive.
Death in detention is a low fog in the lungs, mind.
The others can feel it creeping in, hands burning
Press onto chest, fingertips on swollen wrist.

Remembering home, papers in his home.
Then the fog overtakes all lives left behind.
A man is screaming. Get an ambulance.
Complaining to the guard to remove the body.

Get him out! There is no breath left to explain.
This man is not yet a corpse, take a pulse.
No one wants to witness death in detention.
Murmurs, murmurs, heart, then stillness.

Hollywood Beach Coyote

Coyote in between small doons
Barriers to the thrashing beach
Searching for a bed to make warm
Wary to lie down and burrow alone

Dry gold beach grass tickling fur
Oh, where is a mile of rats and trash
To steal a bite of egg or mouse
Eyes find an empty cafe floor scrap

Nose to the wind seeking relief
Rough back bitten by loneliness
Smells humankind shedding coats
Claiming new green spring grass

Hollywood Beach coyote sings
Low so no other creature knows
Ears wide and low to receive
Mating scents from down shore

Yip yap bark and screaming howl
Coyotes sing to their family coven
Petting one another in sound
Beach coyote joins to be found

Poetic History: A Conversation Across Generations

As humans came to know themselves, they also came to know others and to seek paths toward survival. During the late Paleolithic era, researchers such as Dr. Steven Mithen and Dr. Merlin Donald theorize that humans began to demonstrate the ability to process complex thoughts and form symbolic associations. Prior to this development, humans likely lacked the neurological capacity required for complex speech and abstract communication. As humans evolved the ability to connect real objects, spoken words, and mental imagery, they also began to understand the necessity of connection with others.

Humans are, by nature, social creatures. Survival depended not on isolated individuals, but on groups. Tribes shared resources, shelters, labor, and knowledge through increasingly sophisticated communication. Verbal language became one of humanity's most essential survival tools, contributing to stronger communities and longer lifespans. As groups survived longer and accumulated knowledge, they developed systems to preserve lessons about life, survival, and culture. In order to remember these lessons, communities gathered together while designated storytellers undertook the responsibility of preserving collective memory.

The oral tradition of poetry became one of the foundational beginnings of poetic history. To better recall long narratives and epics, poetic structures emerged not only for aesthetic purposes but also as mnemonic devices that enabled the retention and transmission of complex stories. The *Parry-Lord theory of Homeric composition argues that oral poets relied upon repeated verbal formulas to compose and memorize lengthy works. Because large portions of ancient populations were illiterate, these oral techniques became essential for preserving cultural narratives across generations.*

Milman Parry and Albert Lord studied this phenomenon through the metrical formulas found in Ancient Greek poetry. These formulas followed rhythmic patterns that fit within Greek hexameter, aiding both performance and memorization. Repeated phrases, epithets, and rhythmic structures allowed bards to construct narratives in real time while maintaining consistency within the poem's meter.

To understand this process, consider an orator in Ancient Rome attempting to recall a lengthy speech or epic. Rather than memorizing every word individually, the speaker relied upon structured rhythmic patterns. Roman poets commonly employed dactylic hexameter, a metrical form built from combinations of stressed and unstressed syllables. This formulaic structure acted almost like a framework upon which the narrative could be built. Once the rhythm and opening phrases were established, the poet could more easily reconstruct subsequent lines from memory.

For example, consider this line, from Virgil's *Aeneid* :

Arma virumque cano, Troiae qui primus ab oris

"I sing of arms, and of the man who first from the shores of Troy ..."

When broken down into the dactylic hexameter, you obtain the following:

— ∪ ∪ | — ∪ ∪ | — — | — — | — ∪ ∪ | — —
 ar ma vi | rum que ca | nō Troj | jae quī | prī mu sa | bō rīs

This baseline formula now allows the poet to construct the subsequent lines with this formula. When recalling the epic poem all the orator must do is recall the first line and with enough diligence they recall all the rest.

Parry and Lord observed similar techniques within Homer's *Iliad*. *They noted the importance of recurring phrases that were not unique inventions of Homer, but inherited formulas shared across generations of poets. These repeated epithets — such as "swift-footed Achilles" or "cunning Odysseus" — served multiple functions. They reinforced characterization, maintained the rhythm of dactylic hexameter, and assisted the poet in recalling essential details during oral performance.*

For Parry, the abundance of these formulas demonstrated that epic poetry was not the isolated creation of a single artist, but the product of a shared cultural inheritance. Humans inherit ways of thinking, storytelling, and understanding the world through social interaction, imitation, and teaching. Oral tradition functioned in much the same way: younger performers observed experienced storytellers, practiced these formulas, and eventually learned to reproduce and adapt the narratives themselves.

This tradition reveals an important truth: poetry has never been created without the need for communication. No poem appears without being affected by the world surrounding it. Every poem carries echoes of others ensnared in the rhythm and images passed down from generations prior. Think for a moment about the oral poets we have discussed. The bard standing before a crowd was not simply inventing a story from nothing. They were carrying something forward. The formulas, epithets, and rhythms they used belonged to an entire tradition shared by many people across many years. When Homer speaks of "swift-footed Achilles" or "cunning Odysseus," these phrases are not accidental decorations. They are anchors or pieces of memory that both the speaker and the audience recognize together. The poem survives because the community remembers it together.

Why do humans continue to turn toward rhythm or metaphor during moments of grief or celebration? Why do certain phrases ring in our ears long after they are unspoken? It is because the poem is not only speaking to the individual you but also the collective we carry within us. It reminds us that the singular is never truly singular.

beyond the shape of suffering

they stare down upon me
and claim
you've suffered and so you are made by suffering.

no—

i have suffered at the hands and words
of those who swore goodness
but brought me misery.

it was I
who reconstructed myself—
gentle
and kind
and willing to learn
and curious.

i saw the cracks
and holes
and molds.

i saw that I must be more
than they could ever make me.

no—

i am more,
for I can only make more of myself.

i wonder then—
do you even understand
the wrath laid upon me unjustly
to make me this gentle?

Pink, Baby,

pink, baby,
pink is for me
and also for joy yet to find me.

a vow
to give a smile,
a nod to another as I go out.
a comfort unspoken
yet needed.

pink, baby,
is for her, my grandma,
who told me I could
never go wrong with pink & grey.

"it softens you, Sierra
I think you need that
so they can see & know you," she guides.

she shows me
the pearl of her life—
nourished, polished, freshly harvested.

pink, baby
is her with me,
walking painless
and joy-filled once more,
just for me.

What Holds Me

You transform me

Rainfall --

Descending in slow surrender

Over silvery stone --

Purifying me,

With your sweeping caress

Breath sparks in my chest,

Finally,

I am reborn.

You move me --

Oceanic tides breaking upon pale shorelines

& I let myself be taken.

Spent --

I've been restless

Without the lingering certainty of our realness.

I speak our vow:

"I am here,

I am with you,

I am loving you"

Thank God,

Thank the breathless air.

We Coulda Been Somethin'

You: An aspiring comedian with a wry, sarcastic sense of humor

Me: Um, same

We coulda been somethin' you and I

You had a brush with the big time for a while

It would've been cool dating a celebrity

Now that you're not here, I can safely say that the big time probably sucks

But I know that's just a cope

I'm just jealous

I was never able to reach your heights

The illnesses that wracked my body stopped me before I could reach the starting line

But I bet I could make you laugh

And maybe that's enough

We coulda been somethin'

I can't tell you this now

In fact, I never could

But I can tell the world

And maybe that's enough

Yellow Sportscar and Scooter

The year: 2004

The place: My Polish date's yellow sportscar

The soundtrack: Scooter (loud Eurodance)

The mission: Driving to see The Machinist with Christian Bale

(Quite a good movie, dark, though a bit long)

Which Scooter song was playing?

I don't remember. They had so many hits:

"How much is the Fish", "Fuck the Millennium", "Maria (I like it Loud)"

All with pounding bass and incomprehensible lyrics

Yellow sportscar and Scooter

Somebody told me "That's the most aggressively Polish thing I've ever heard."

I think they were right. It's up there with our superpowered former Pope.

(I wonder if John Paul II liked Scooter?)

Was it a compliment or passive-aggressive diss?

Doesn't matter. All that matters is

Yellow sportscar and Scooter

This combination doesn't fit in but isn't that what makes it cool?

Who wants to listen to Bruno Mars in their Honda Civic when you could zoom by in a flash of yellow blasting "Faster Harder Scooter"?

Is that what I'd like to do?

Have I been running from Scooter for most of my life when they were there waiting for me all this time?

Everything is Fine

INT. SUBURBAN BEDROOM

Open on a teenage girl sitting in front of a dresser with an attached mirror. She is wearing a delicate night gown and brushing her long, jet-black hair.

She puts the hairbrush down and partly lifts up the night gown, revealing a pudgy stomach covered with stretch marks. She looks at her stomach in the mirror as a dejected expression develops on her face. She sharply covers her stomach with the night gown and picks up a hand-mirror from the dresser. She holds the mirror up to her face and turns her head from side to side. She looks at the prominent scar on her right cheek as well as the left eye which always lags behind the other. She sighs and puts down the hand- mirror.

The girl looks up at a crucifix hanging above the dresser. She looks down and quietly mouths a phrase.

GIRL

(close-up of girl's mouth)

In heaven, everything is fine.

Suddenly, she shoves a handgun barrel in her mouth and pulls the trigger. The gun fires and she falls off her seat onto the floor.

INT. SUBURBAN BEDROOM

We see the girl's body from the back as she lays on the carpeted floor. After a few seconds, her head moves and the rest of her body slowly follows. She shakily gets up from the floor and once again takes her place in front of the mirror. We do not see her face, as the back of her head and now-frazzled hair block our view. Drops of blood fall to the floor as she moves. Seconds after taking her place on the chair, she lets out an anguished scream.

CLOSE UP - CRUCIFIX

FADE OUT

Flora

INT. SUBURBAN BEDROOM - DAY

Open on nightstand next to a bed. The nightstand holds a tray containing numerous medicine bottles of various sizes. Slowly pan to the bed. A man in his twenties is laying under the covers. He is dripping with sweat and coughing violently, gripping the bed sheets as he does so. His hair is oily and matted down. There are dark splotches under his eyes.

The man slowly and weakly moves the bed sheets aside and climbs out of bed. As he stands up, he takes a few seconds to steady himself. He then walks to the other side of the bedroom until he reaches a painting hanging on the wall. The painting is of a beautiful, nude young woman standing in a field of chamomile flowers. She is holding one of the flowers and facing the viewer. Her long hair is covering the front of her breasts. The painting is made up of shades of green and yellow, the exception being her pupils and the outline of her eyes. These are solid black, making her eyes stand out from the rest of the image.

The man shakily stretches his hand up and gently moves his hand down the painting. He lets out a labored sigh and walks out of frame. The camera rests on the painting for several seconds.

FADE OUT

FADE IN

INT. SUBURBAN BEDROOM - NIGHT

Open on nightstand in the man's bedroom. There is a framed photograph of the man and a woman sitting on it. They are both smiling joyously.

MATTHEW NADBRZUCH

Slowly pan to the bed. The man is embracing the woman from the photograph as they lay in bed. He is running his fingers through her hair and lightly kisses her on the top of her head. She turns to face him. They stare at each other for a couple moments and come together with a passionate kiss. Cut to the painting of the beautiful woman. Zoom in to a close-up of her eyes. The camera rests on her eyes for several seconds

FADE OUT

FADE IN

INT. SUBURBAN BEDROOM - DAY

Open on night stand in the man's bedroom. The photograph of the man and the young woman is laying on it, ripped into pieces.

Slowly pan to the bed. The man is laying on the bed and crying. He glances over to the ripped photograph on the nightstand, then buries his face in his arms.

The man suddenly moves his head back up and towards the painting of the woman. A feminine hand holding a chamomile flower comes into frame. He looks up from the flower to its bearer with a look of disbelief. He slowly and hesitantly takes the flower, taking in a long, slow whiff of its fragrance. He looks up towards the flower's owner and smiles.

FADE OUT

Matthew Nadbrzuch was born in Warsaw, Poland and resides in the Chicagoland area. He received a degree in Creative Writing from the University of Illinois at Chicago and has been involved in a variety of creative endeavors. These include short films, sketch and stand-up comedy, and poetry. He can be reached on Instagram at @matthew.nadbrzuch

Water Elemental

One material thing that defines the present is water. "You never look at the same river. Even while you are looking at it".

Oh water, turbulent, dark and mysterious water. Oh water, dangerous, surging, dark and murderous water. Oh water, beautiful, transparent water. Oh water, life saving, life sustaining, healing water.

In great ocean swells and little village wells. Underground on mountain tops and in the skies you dwell.

Water waves, water seeps, water subdues, water seeks to level. Water turns Earth upon itself at the edge of the sea, and in rivers cuts deep wrinkles in stone.

Water reflects Earth in ice. Earth reflects Water in lava and quakes. Fire moves Water under Earth. Water quashes Fire in Air. Water reflects Air in steam.

Catalytic Blues

I sing the catalytic blues you hear? They can be found in Hank Aaron's autobiography, on pages in Ralph Ellison's Invisible man, in Dick Gregory's dare I repeat his own title "Nigger"? As a child I drank the catalytic blues, in vacant lots south of Roosevelt. Blues poured in open lots and on front porches. In the 60's, taken by my father to 14th and Peoria, 16th and Morgan, 13th and Union. And further south to hear the choir at the 1st. Church of Deliverance, and then to eat soul food at Gladys' Luncheonette. Raised in Chicago, we are not a race, we are a species. The Chicago blues coats like a warm blanket full of cold truth and hot emotions. I sing the catalytic blues, you hear me?

Red

I think Red has become my favorite color. It's not a prominent feature of my décor at home, nor is it featured much in my wardrobe. I only own one Red t-shirt. It's of the Turkish flag. I've never had a Red car nor a Red bicycle. My hair was Red. Some of my Dad's friends called me Red. At the time I hated it. It doesn't sound so bad to me now. Red's a special color. It really grabs you. It's telling, no it's yelling, you something, usually alarm. There's something devilishly intriguing and attractive about Red. Red is risky, a red flag on a beach, running a red light, the Red light district. The color of rust, of blood, of Mars. In life one must be very careful about Red as it too easily goes out of balance. Red can go out of control. War, violence, anger and rage are in its nature too. Much safer to stick with good old black. Not much to black except that it's dark. See, if black was my favorite color, it would get the same treatment from me as does Red. I'd have only one black t-shirt and as for dresses I'd only have a single little one. The problem with favorite colors and most people with them, is that they give in to the color too easily. Choosing it almost without thinking about what having too much of it is telling the rest of us. I thought green was my favorite. It's so pleasant, it's inescapable. Just go outside in summer and there it is. All over the place. You can't get any respite. But in and among all that insipid green are Red flowers. And why can we see them so easily? Because Red is clearly better for standing out in a sea of green. Red is expensive for a plant to produce, it takes a lot of its energy. When a plant makes the color Red it's saying one thing. "Hello sailor!" So if you have a favorite color too, I'd advise you to get rid of most of what you have of it. Treasure your favorite color for whatever reason, but don't let it take over.

Drowned Apple

I found an apple on the ground. I bit it, it was rotten, and I threw it down. As I crossed the river on my way into town, I saw that a man I knew had just then drowned. If I had been there two minutes before I'd have known just what to do. As fate would have it I was too late to save him and now his face is blue.

Harrison M. Fried is foreign born to American parents, and grew up in Chicago. The real city, not Naperville or some other god awful suburb. Have lived in the Middle East and Central America as well. Had a Union job and worked in a commercial products testing lab as trad jobs, but have been in the arts mostly. I received an arts degree from Columbia College Class of 1984, but I didn't let that stop me - lol. Dark room and studio photo, jewelry and apparel designer, stage and film actor, musician and songwriter. But also had a farm and can fix or repair almost anything. Lives in a nebulous conglomeration of vague togetherness in a house built in 1886 that is full of ghosts.

PROJECT CONTEXT: OBFUSCATING CABLES

The manuscript title of Thomas Merton's book of poems *Cables to the Ace* was "Edifying Cables." Published in 1968, the year Merton died in Thailand at 53, *Cables* was inspired by the "antipoetry" of Chilean poet Nicanor Parra. Antipoetry highlighted the breakdown and abuse of language through propaganda and commercial advertising by embracing an absurdist style. Merton, the Trappist monk, whose order was devoted to silence for the sake of communing with Christ, the Word made flesh, an incarnational truth that nullifies the noise of a world of falsehood. Merton's *Cables* are a challenge to read. In leading discussions of Merton poetry, not all have described this era of Merton's poetry as "edifying," but some are inspired to try to "crack the code" of Merton's obscure messages that seem prescient in the current climate of misinformation.

At the time Merton wrote *Cables*, he was living as a hermit on the property of his monastery. He was attuned to natural rhythms and decried environmental destruction. He criticized a technological positivism that placed profit over people and that fueled a destructive war machine. Yet, there is also a Merton who, while criticizing unhealthy attachment to technology, admits no protest in the electrification of his hermitage and the technological conveniences of the light and heat generation that it afforded him. He did not totally extricate himself from modern conveniences like Wendell Berry, his friend in correspondence and fellow Kentuckian. However, Merton lived simply and asked us to examine how we have become, as in a title of one of his books, "guilty bystanders" complicit in harmful systems endangering people and the planet.

In my role as an archivist at the Thomas Merton Center, I employed offline artificial intelligence (AI) tools to provide transcripts of over 450 hours of Merton's lectures to the novice monks at his monastery, Gethsemani Abbey, in the 1960s. Here follows what sprung from a strange sort of computer-generated "Pentecost," having started the automated transcription process shortly before Easter 2025 and finishing nearly 50 days later. What follows is my poetic rendering of selected instances where the AI transcription went haywire. I discovered surprising oracular utterances among the machine-rendered transcriptions of Latin prayers rapidly mumbled by Merton and the novices before and after the lectures. As we enter a technological age when we hear human creativity is threatened by artificial intelligence, I used my imaginative faculties to sift through 4.5 million words of computer-generated text to create these assemblages as my own form of poetic protest not to be reduced to a number, to use technology without being used by it.

Original prayer: DIVINUM AUXILIUM MANEAT SEMPER NOBISCUM. AMEN. BENEDICITE.
(**Translation:** *May the divine assistance remain always with us. Amen. Bless you.*)

Various renderings by artificial intelligence as selected and arranged by Mark Meade:

The Many Faces of the False Self

I'm Zinni Amani at Samprano Biskun.

I'm here at Sanford Nobis School.

Do you have any money at Stemper Nobiskum? There it is, Jay.

Hey, no, I'm getting the money. I said, how do you just go? Uh-huh.

I've been amongst any of many outside of the Nabisco.

Oh, yeah. I'm Benedictine.

My name is Daniel, my name is Sanford Holy Spirit.

Devina Martini, my name is Emperor Wiskam.

Devina Magzini, my name is Semper and I'm here to speak.

Divina Magsidium, Lani at St. Pernod Biscum,

Dovina manzunyamanyat semper nobispo.

Vanity chains.

To be honest with you, my name is Sampai Nobiskun, I'm Ben and Ishtey.

Living amongst the Nehemiah Semperate Obiscus?

Being a Muslim, you might have something to do this for me.

Oh, is it in your money at St. Louisville? Mm-hm.

Oh, something. I'm in a district.

I was in your mind, I sent for a novice school.

Our sister and amphibians are married.

We're about to ask you to look at the scope of the night.

Original prayer: ADJUTORIUM NOSTRUM IN NOMINE DOMINI.

(Translation: Our help is in the name of the Lord.)

Various renderings by artificial intelligence as selected and arranged by Mark Meade:

A Sincere Editorial on Nominee Donald

Editorium, Master of the Nominee, Donald.

Editorial loss to me, nominate on.

Editorial loss from the nominee Donald.

We've hardly lost to the nominee, darling.

I'm Cory and lest for my nominated dogma, please.

Jonathan, by God they have the way.

I'm sorry about serving all of their dollars.

I'm all for the Menominee dole.

Auditory monster and nominee dog.

Auditorium nostril, nominate all.

Editorial, master, monogamy, don't.

Auditorium Osterman, nominee donor. Equipulation, gentleman.

Are the pure and truth-seeker lost on the nominee code?



Photo by Keenan Barber via [Unsplash](#)

Gazing into the stars until the cosmos replies.

The Temple Without Hands

sacred seed
 touch brow
 open eye
 awaken perception

Roving Rabbit
 tunnel us through
 into your place
 of play and plenty
 to frolic underground

hop
 leap
 bound

kick
 chthonic energy
 in a-bun-dance

O Green Man
 awake and dance
 with our circling celebrants
 waterpot swaying
 on your leafy head
 sap dripping
 down along your sides

twist
 stamp
 twirl

turn dripping sap
 into water of life
 into vine's flowing wine

spirits of animals
 this world is ours
 not by deed
 or agreement
 but by silent scent
 and haunting howl

from a cloud
 the arm of might
 beats buffalo drum
 pounds hollow hammer
 rattles deepening canvas

within the tree
 branches turn to brass

horns sound skyward
 draw down the moon
 shake loose the stars
 weave visual patterns
 of vibrating sound

MICHAEL MAZOCK

stars lace together
along lines seen in a dream
constellating
into a jeweled necklace
wound 'round
Goddess's neck

O sacred seed
of tree of knowing
ripen into forbidden fruit

apple
plucked from branch
skewered on stick
flings
beyond the world
toward paradise

succulent sap
drips
from yearning mouths
necklace breaks

stars fall
like loose beads
to the ground
splashing footprints
one at a time
with each bead
each beat
each pound

didgeridoo drones
its wind whirring
sinking me too
through stars' prints

star people
stars with faces
one eye each
watch in huddled silence

didgeridoo conducts me
through breath's siren song
wooing me
toward the nearest star

through third eyes' gaze
faces touch
brow to brow
breath to breath
merging into shared center
then beyond
where neither exists

clouds sweep up footprints
everything on the ground

even clouds vanish
winds wind inward
swallowing their tails

darkness
emptiness
drain
into pulsing abyss



from depths
where hushed silence abides
drumming
hearing
conjuring
now return
invoking
further seeing

sea seats the sun

water
 sky
 meet
 at shore

altar floats atop stillness
 lifting sphere of crystal

full moon reflects the sun
 forming gentle ripples
 across sea's surface

heart's sun
 radiates waves
 melding
 in Luna's mirror

i glance into her mirror
 three seconds
 to part my wet hair

staring longer
 lost in meditation
 faces flow

one face
one mask
 merges into the next
 in waves

in the scrying glass
 image reflects image
 each leaning nearer
 entering the other



Janice Mazock, 2016

subtle current intermingles
indistinguishable faces
until neither side
remembers which
crossed first

this is our covenant
through the faces
in the mirror

it is only fair
Rabbit insists
pressing a paw to my heart

heart echoes agreement
through the imprint
of paw and stars
beneath the ground

Wild Berries

i breathing

gather wild berries

without first recognizing

my plucking companion

lies among buried dead

breath's brow bows low

loosening lucidity

waking insentience

melding molding matter

immersed in depth

without form to dive

or plane to cross

or arrow to split target

between breath and shadow

amid passing and permanence

psalms through palms

in stillness

bless below

grave's mouth

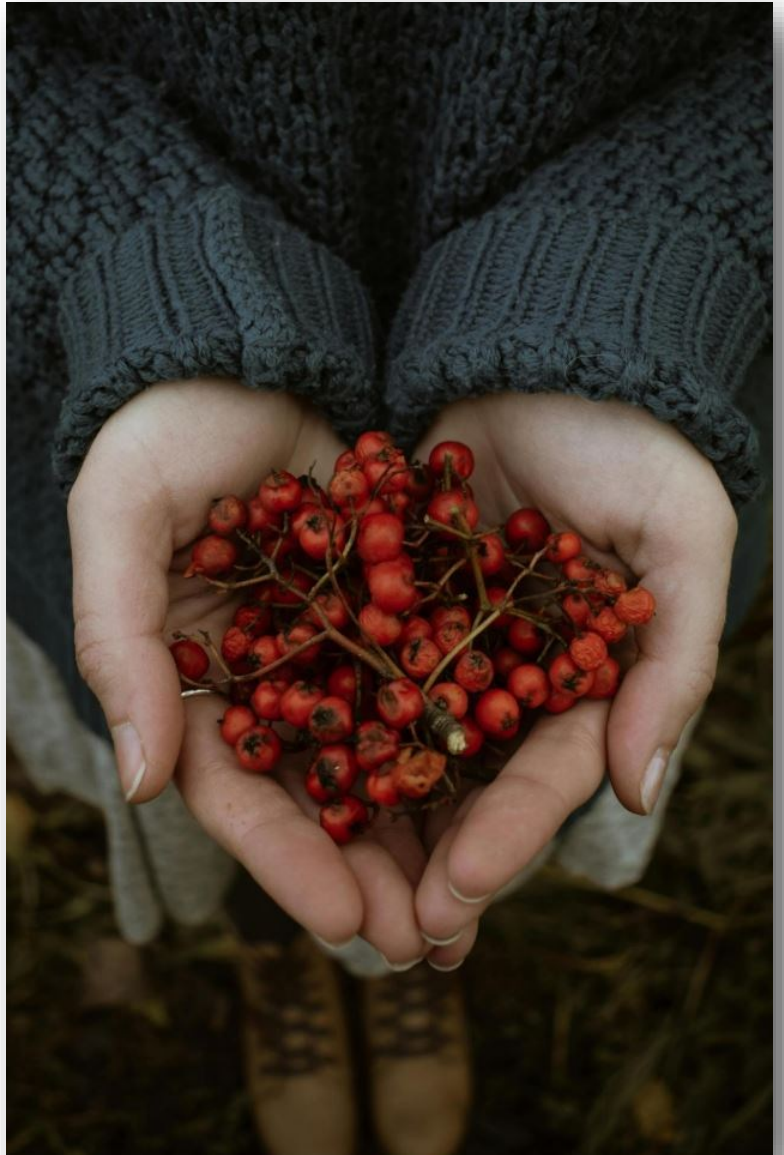
strains upward

through hands

wine tastes sweet

to living

and to dead



The Party

Leaving the party,
late hours of the night.

Standing outside the house,
exchanging final words.

Ambience of cars passing,
wind whistling around us.

A little drunk,
and a little lost.

Not lost in the sense
of where we are,

but in this life,
if that makes sense.

Aren't we all trying
to figure it out?

Wishing we were with
those on our minds,

hiding the sadness
behind our smiles.

God, is this how our twenties
are really supposed to go?

The Stars

Up on that hill,
under the night sky.

Seeing a little dot,
that was Mars.

There was the formation
of the Big Dipper.

Maybe it's just me romanticizing
every little thing like I do,

but I find some comfort in knowing
we're under the same night sky.

I wonder if you're thinking of me
in this infinite galaxy of stars.

Austin Graf is a super 8 & digital filmmaker, film photographer, and writer based in the Midwest. He spends his time writing poetry in coffee shops and in front of a typewriter, capturing the melancholic feelings of nostalgia, love, and the mundane. His goal is to capture the vulnerable emotions in my writings that readers will be able to connect and relate to. Austin is based in Milwaukee, WI.

Wound Up

Ulysses in a night
gown and Molly's white thighs
savagely Catholic

the skirts of Catholic
girls and the intentional flip
of a hem and of hair

a black forest of fur
in silhouette at twilight,
a blonde god descends

close to falling, a
clear teardrop suspended from
a small lash of black

a redhead all abloom
shipwrecked at a hide-a-way
gamine charms wound up

Penelope bound
broken cars and worse women
his cunning slipping

Namesake of Louis XIV

Le j-a-a-a-zzzz!!

The gothic Spanish mosses
and crocodile swamps,
that curve like a woman's hips through the mud lands
to lime washed crypts, the looming white stone

that rises like crowns
above this land
below sea level
regal

Namesake

of Louis XIV,
city of emigres from Nova Scotia
city of the Acadians
Acadian
Cadian
Cajun...

A chest of drawers
houses the family line,
bones and ashes
rest in the family caveau,
it is the feast of All Saints.

LYNN FITZGERALD

Bougalie dialect,
bogue talkin' folks
 of the marshy inlets
on the Mississippi
 bayou talkin' people,
 their music
 a honeycomb sound that swills
 like a pattern in the swamp-like silt.

A blind guitarist strums
to a full house,
Sazerac cocktails
of some distillation,
 clear as a raindrop
 absinthe,
 the Green Fairy
 an emerald glass.

The Old South
 with its ghosts of the landed gentry,
 shades that drift under drooping moss,
who still lay claim to this riverbank town
 where steamboats blow sound
 carry the legend up and down
 this city of the fleur de lis,
 flower of Mary.
in an era noy yet bygone, a noir city where Black men
 still tap dance
 for loose change.

jeu d'esprit

preparing to flutter her way through Paris,
she slips a dress over her head,
a flounce of hair she twirls
like ribbons on a maypole,
slides her feet into a pair
of black fairy tale slippers,
clutches her purse and keys
and drives to his shop--
to check her fluids,
all she wants

curled with sweat, his hair is moist
he opens valves, fingernails rimmed with grease,
hands black as a rubber rim, unscrews
a cap, tightens a bolt, his eyes measure damage,
she holds the glance, fumbles for a pen,
such an affair might demand an entire summer

she promises to send a postcard
has never known the address,
to twist that dress up over her head,
what he imagines, to cup the curve of her breast,
clasp the small of her waist
she's never tasted hands like his

under the hood, he reaches for tools
and a greasy rag, summer air thick
with sweat and perfume
the wrench on the floor, the rag idle
atop the engine, he swells like all the vapors in the shop
within his eyes her legs are
strands of precious pearls,
that make him ache, she could wrap him up for days--
he could show her the Eiffel Tower anytime.

Clockwork

We attend the same movie, thinking of another man, another woman,
yet we say nothing as we take our seats in this velvet darkness.
Instead, we watch the film's protagonist lie down with his donkey
because this has come to be his routine in a town that never changes
and with townspeople beyond hope
of sweeping the sea away from their doors
or of clearing a path to the gate,
except for one, that being his sister,
who jumps at the chance to move across the water,
enough of this Aran Isle
with shepherds herding sheep across a dirt road,
each single step taken hoping not to sink in the forsaken bogs of this terrain.
Unable to push a comb through her salt sprayed hair
matted and heavy as the wool shorn from the sheep
this morning, wooly clumps left on the footpath,
she washes the sea stains that mark her brogues—grim reminder--
while he unlatches the gate to make his way to listen to gossip
the same tales that go round at the pub
same time of day each day
pint after pint, soon a failed actor will hold forth
this his stage and only audience
his diminished life appears grand, if only to himself.
Why tolerate these familiar fellas, stories without end,
or womenfolk who cluck their tongues, their black capes
like sails in the wind, men who claim a past, no future? she queries.
His back rigid, his jaw set, eyes of doom,
wonders who would ever want him
except the donkey

LYNN FITZGERALD

well, she's warned him, hasn't she
that his inclination for the unadorned is nothing but artless.
And now his friend sits at the opposite end of the bar,
wants nothing to do with him, insists that he not say anything.
Yet like clockwork, he arrives
to take his afternoon pint at the other end in silence
the barkeeper gives a wary look.
Concedes he has listened to the old woman's shriek of a prophecy
and thinks, why listen to a banshee's wail but watches her arms slice the fog,
confesses, if only to himself, that her words haunt him
 and this movie gets at your life
 like staring at yourself watching
 and I feel like screaming
 sitting next to you
 in this dark palace of dreams

 for god's sake,
say something, talk to me.

I am Lightning

I am Lightning
I am lightning,
Spontaneous,
A powerful force of nature.

I split the sky open
With a voice of fire,
A flash that refuses silence.
I do not ask permission
From clouds or from earth—
I arrive, I strike, I am gone,
Yet never forgotten.

I dance between seconds,
A pulse of brilliance,
Fierce and un-contained.
I am chaos made visible,
Energy given shape,
A reminder that even the heavens Cannot always hold themselves together.

I am lightning—
Fleeting,
But impossible to ignore.

I am Lightning
I am lightning—
not quiet,
not careful,
not waiting my turn.

I don't arrive gently.
I don't knock.
I don't ask, "Is this a good time?"

a rupture in the sky's composure, a crack in the polite conversation of clouds.
I *take the moment*.
because I don't shrink
I am release.

So don't mistake my passing for weakness.

Every flash is a declaration: I was here.

I am here.

I will not be unseen.

And even when I disappear, I leave the sky different.

Then it was before I arrived

All in all when I shift between the Clouds I come alive.

Poem

Original Poetree is a poet and spoken word artist whose work is rooted in personal healing, self-reflection, and the transformative power of creative expression. From a young age, he was drawn to art and creativity, though he did not initially recognize how deeply these passions would shape his life.

Chris's (Original Poetree) work explores themes of healing, identity, emotional release, and personal transformation. Through both the written word and live performance, he seeks to create spaces where authenticity is honored and shared experiences are recognized. His poetry invites readers and audiences to reflect on their own journeys, encouraging self-liberation and emotional clarity.

ANNAMARIE LAFOREST

Picnic Love

Pale dewy
morning fruits
bubble at your lips,
dallying fingers
sweetly brush
the tip of your ear
to keep at bay a bee;
fat blue-eyed grass
yields slightly
as you sink
fully onto double-folded cloth.

Little blurring kisses
float
over pink lily-sighs
or the laughter
of a thrush
while
beyond the fence, lightly,
lazy Taurus, the old bull,
lifts an eye -
such silly human froth.



Honey Bee in Winter, marker on paper.

AnnaMarie Laforest

<https://annamarielaforest.wixsite.com/stories>

<https://www.amazon.com/author/annamarielaforest>

more of what

for Beverly Daniel Tatum

depending upon the situation, a number can be a mind-altering thing.

take thirty as a shoe size would be difficult to miss held hostage at the end
of a leg, or an IQ that even OZ would no doubt demote to court jester,

the thirtieth of the month, no job, phone dead, rent due, thirty or so settlers
swaggering

their way west bumping past Crazy Horse and thirty of his freedom fighter boys
doing their thing surrounding a campfire's waistline,

or thirty ninth grade girls—best their neighborhood had to offer on their way up to
high school, like a few pepper flakes merged into the stew of fifteen hundred
blond ones compelled to fold the other side of the railroad track ones kept at
arm's length into their ranks, to the day when these P&G fathers' daughters
like fall feathers into falling sweet talked by the wind came to the best their
community had to offer's lunchroom table to invite them to join their fair ranks.

was it all just a charade? surely it might have been. even so, best in the neighborhood
curtsied and went anyway, to the day when even the calendar choked in surprise,
in less than thirty days, everything went back to the way it had always been went back
to the way it had always been.

At the Cusp of Envy

Teasing the oven's hot breath,
a tip of meringue peaked,
off the top of a lemon custard pie,

as Mama kangaroo holds joey,

what else
but for life.

Born beneath two stars patch quilting dimples across the expanse of the sky,
trying to hold on to a mind's sanity weaving in and out a wasp's care to feel, pregnant
with feelings about who you are, who you could; it's for you to realize, will be,

while the folks that say they love you opt out, go Singing in the Rain, thinking anything
they don't understand, can't be right, prefer reaching yule tide high C's, denying giving
kudos to the Star that led three,

as you stand on the other side of the tennis net world, wondering how it is possible to be
so misunderstood just

because you can tempt the envy
of a Starry Night—

play poker with a pimp's pride
him knowing just how to love
a woman's innocence—

for all I know

for the Moores

*a few of my cousins were born
with six fingers—one extra hanging off
the side of their pinkie finger*

*they were like the tentacles of
an octopus making the miracle
off a newborn a carnival like apparition*

*which fell off sometime
before time to crawl
before others could cower gape ogle leer*

*about those piano advantaged mysteries
which thank God did ripen, did one day
bud forth promise to normalcy*

*and what might ask did it all mean
these dangling participles these mixed metaphors
perhaps, the same as baby wizards break dancing fire into snow.*

as this tale is just that, all I know!

El diablo And The Tempest

came defying sleep the doorway in,
came connected like dots connecting a picture together,

came like a musician's—black hat and black shades come together dropping notes,
came like a brook soothes stones worthless anew

came tipping the wind this away that—
came like a nutcracker at play cracking nuts open, opening the sky to assault,

came ignoring the weatherman's wrong again advice,
came like a madman mad at everybody beneath,

came boasting best take a solvable prey's chest pumps for what it could do—
came to us remembering grandma words—

the devil came beating his wife.
same sounds heard in some neighborhoods
every Friday and Saturday night.

Poetry is a bathtub filled with bubbling philosophical hooch!

Blanche Kabengele is the author of "Conjugal Relationships of Africans and African Americans," and "Quiet as it's Kept," "Me too," and other Poetic Expressions of Life. Blanche holds a doctorate In Educational Studies from the University of Cincinnati, College of Education, and has poems published in Neon & Smoke, The Prose Poem, The Woolf and the WAYE.

VISUAL ART FEATURE



**AGNES
GROCHULSKA**

METAMORPHOSIS

The process of transformation - Metamorphosis is the main theme in my recent work.

Metamorphosis, not only depicted but enacted, a metaphor of the art process itself. The series involves paintings and sculptures and how they relate to each other. The paintings' characters experience a transformation and the painting as a form is also being literally transformed, reborn into another medium.

This cyclical process—painting becoming object, object returning to haunt the painting - reflects the core of my art practice: transformation as both subject and method, an exploration of fragmentation and reconstruction, both in material and meaning. Built from cut-up oil paintings—once complete, now deconstructed—the sculptural pieces embody a process of unmaking and remaking, forming a new identity from pieces of a lost past.

Inspired often by literature and philosophy the work echoes the metaphysical world, where the boundaries between dream, memory, and reality are blurred yet connected. The objects are made by cutting up old oil paintings and weaving them into a new, three-dimensional form. What was once flat and finished is now transformed - reborn as something entirely different. It emerges from the interplay between destruction and transformation, between the flat image and the 3D form, between the outer and the inner self.

In doing so, it enacts a ritual of metamorphosis: the two-dimensional is not discarded, but woven into three-dimensional presence, refusing the finality of completion and instead embracing continuity.

The woven structures suggest fabrication, concealment, and reconstruction - metaphors for distorted truth and layered identity.



"Metamorphosis" is a conceptual response to Franz Kafka's iconic story of the same title. The painting depicts a human figure contorted under a glass table, seemingly mid-transformation - neither fully human nor fully creature. Their hands have morphed into elongated, insect-like limbs the same uncanny shape of the sculptural form perched atop the table. This creature, titled "Vermin", is both an observer and a prophecy - the physical embodiment of the figure's metamorphosis. The table is a symbolic threshold - a transparent surface that separates, reflects, and compresses under which the figure is simultaneously confined and exposed, trapped in a moment of becoming. The distortion caused by the glass heightens the unease, echoing themes of alienation, and estrangement deeply rooted in Kafka's narrative. The transformation process is a metaphor for the art process itself.



“Metamorphosis” 36” x 48” oil painting with **“Vermin”** sculpture (oil paint, canvas, wire)



"Caprifolium " 5' x 2' sculpture (oil paint, canvas, wire)

I read a short story once, I really liked, about a boy climbing a trellis covered in honeysuckle (*Caprifolium*) and slowly becoming one with the plant. He was hiding between the plant's foliage and started to transform into a plant himself, at least in his mind - feeling insects landing on his skin and thinking he can understand them, absorbing the energy of the sun, the wind, hearing the plant juices running through his veins. So the theme of transformation again, and how everything is connected. Metamorphosis.



"Silent Chaos, Rehearsed", 36 x 48 inches, oil painting.
Featuring the sculpture **"Cosmos in chaos "** following page (oil paint, canvas, wire)



"Cosmos in chaos " following page (oil paint, canvas, wire)

The sculpture is a woven form made entirely of deconstructed painting strips. Stripped of their original context, the painted fragments lose their narrative clarity but gain a new, dimensional presence. In this reweaving, chaos is not resolved, but rerouted into a cosmos of contradictions - fragile, deliberate, and alive. Presented alongside "Silent Chaos, Rehearsed," the sculpture becomes a tactile echo of the painting's psychological rhythm - multiple selves in repetition, each holding distorted, performative masks.

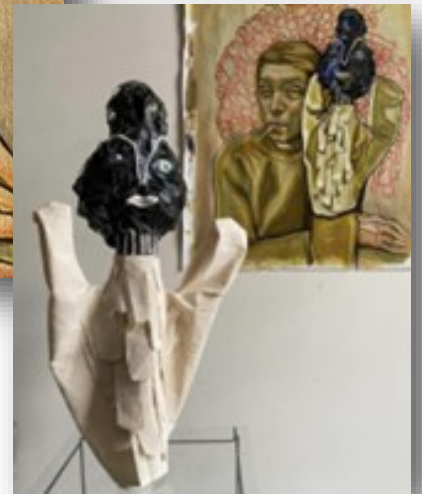


"The Search" 44 x 48 oil painting with **"The Bird"** sculpture (oil paint, canvas, wire)



"I am a cage in search of a bird" - Franz Kafka

Another metaphor for an art process - creation as an act both noble and absurd. The man is both an artist and a captive, creator and victim - trapped not by force, but by his own compulsion to make sense of existence through work. The background chair, vibrant in red, contrasts with the muted greens and browns of the rest of the painting, representing the tension between vitality and resignation, between the desire to act and the inability to escape one's own making.



“The Learned Fool and taste of licorice ” painting, 24 x 30”, oil on canvas featuring the sculpture/puppet
The Learned Fool puppet is constructed from canvas - both painted canvas and raw canvas fabric. The Learned Fool is a Moliere construct - “A learned fool is more a fool than an ignorant fool”. And a nod to the theater form. The painting pairs the puppet with a person. He is a learned fool. And loves the taste of black licorice (a licorice lollipop in his mouth and the black color of the puppet’s head).

Agnes Grochulska is a contemporary artist working in oils and drawing media. She works across a variety of subject matter, including portraits, figures, and landscapes, with the underlying themes centering around the interconnectedness of all things. Her hope is to create thought-provoking work that is inviting the viewer to reflect on their own place in the world. Agnes Grochulska studied at the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts in Poland, and lives and works in Richmond, Virginia. Her work has been exhibited in numerous solo and group shows, including a recent solo exhibition of her work "Archetypes" at the Virginia Museum of Contemporary Art, and a solo show "The Outline" at Pulpo Gallery in Germany. Her work has been published in several books and magazines (Juxtapoz, Colossal Magazine, Whitehot Magazine) Her drawings and paintings have been shown and privately collected throughout the US and around the world. Agnes Grochulska suggests themes and ideas in her work, but also leaves room for individual narrative, preferring to create works "in which not everything is fully realized. Art where the viewer can finish the story in their mind and in their own way." At the same time, the visible brush strokes, vivid colors and gestural character of her paintings offer their viewer an insight to the painting process itself. Her paintings express time spent looking and creating, an interest and a feeling for an irreplaceable time spent on creating. A feeling, not only for the portrayed person, but the person looking at the finished work as well. By highlighting the physical process of painting, Grochulska emphasizes the ever-shifting, intricate connection between the artist, the subject and the viewer.

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Untitled

We are all bigots and thieves for a world that hates joy. What we know is wrong, and what we need is forgotten. We abuse our bodies, memories, and sex in retribution. What could nourish us is ignored as granted, while hollow pursuits define our entire lives. Born in to a time and place that labels humanity worthless, we serve death merchants and their lies printed on dead paper. We are delusional. Our eyes do not absorb. They project hallucinations, fueled by years of torture and humiliation. Ostracism is woven in to our clothing, bones, and language. Gregarious cerebellums are kowtowed in to mechanical agreements of ego, isolation, and greed. We are robots. Refuse to believe this and you will die preforming it all. Show me you know this, and I will write you a song. Unless you need more. In that case, I will sidle my vector to your wake, and try to be capsized by your absurd displacement.

LANCE KRAFT

I have lived all along the Pacific Northwest, from Fairbanks, Alaska to Los Angeles. I currently reside on a little ranch in Oregon, where I am trying to get off the grid as much as possible by gardening and raising fowl. My goal is to pass a fully self-sustaining property to my wife and daughter when I die.

Barbies

I had a prodigious collection of Barbies as a kid—their pervasive presence made them impossible to ignore. I kept all of my Barbies in my six Barbie Dream Houses, and even more dolls everywhere in my room. The Dream Houses were pink and very detailed—so much so that they made my Barbies seem all the more mesmerizing. I had over a hundred outfits for them—from colorful dresses to Disney costumes. They had blonde hair, red hair, multicolored hair, rainbow hair, curled hair, braided hair, and even mermaid hair. They were ballerinas, babies, royal princesses, Disney characters, and more. Most were pristine, but a few were disheveled or covered in crayon scribbles.

Sometimes when I looked at the Barbies strewn around my room, I felt judged and ashamed. I believed that they were actual people, and I felt like they were staring at me and judging me based on my appearance. I cared about being seen, and I started comparing myself to others. I have a powerful negative voice in my head that I can't mute, and that voice was saying that I wasn't beautiful enough—that I would never look like the other girls who were skinnier than me.

My favorite thing to do with my Barbies was to feel the magic of turning them into bride and groom. I had a variety of Kens that I dressed up as grooms, or as a prom or homecoming king. I imagined Ken inviting Barbie to prom with roses and a funny sign asking her to be his girlfriend. I often felt so alone as a kid—excluded, like I was invisible. But when I dressed up Ken and Barbie to be the bride and groom, I felt accepted.

The truth is, I always dreamed of finding a genuine relationship with someone I love and being with them for life. I loved that with Ken, I couldn't get rejected and never had to face being let down—to feel your heart drop and pretend that you're okay even when you're not, and being scared of getting hurt again.

I spent my teenage years facing rejection after rejection. I told my best friend Caden that I had feelings for him and I asked him to be my boyfriend, but he dismissed my feelings and said no. I had multiple other crushes, but when I told them I was interested they all turned me down. Once, I almost kissed a guy when I was alone with him at my house underneath the mistletoe—but then he got embarrassed by my family and ruined the moment by turning me down and making it awkward.

SOPHIA ANTON

My baby cousin, my grandma, and my ex-boyfriend all left me behind. I was especially close to each of them in different ways, and believed I could do anything if I had them by my side, even when I didn't believe in myself. They all made me feel like I mattered to them, and when I lost them, I felt like I had no one else in the world.

The hardest rejection I had to face, though, was last year, when my ex-boyfriend rejected me in front of his other friends. He didn't even invite me to his birthday party—instead, he made his friend invite me. But once we were standing outside of his room, he decided to let his friend in the door and not me. I guess he wanted me to show up just so he could reject me. After that, I felt so alone that I wanted to be invisible.

There's a photo of me at age eight, wearing a black and white polka dot dress and dangling two of my many Barbies by their hair. One of the Barbies looks like Princess Ariel, and I'm holding her by her tangled mane of long, flaming red hair which totally obscures her face. The other Barbie is much less disheveled, wearing a blue top with a short white tutu. Sitting in the foreground of the photograph are three other Barbies watching on. When I look at this photo of myself playing with my Barbies, I remember feeling exhilarated by grasping their silky, styled hair in my hands. I can still almost feel it again now. Alone in the dark of my basement, this tangible sensation filling the void left by people I cannot control.

Sophia Anton is a 4.0 second-year student in Regis University's GLOBAL Inclusive College Certificate program. She is also a model for the Global Down Syndrome Foundation's "Be Beautiful, Be Yourself Fashion Show" and a certified scuba diver.

On Hybridity

1.

Future seemed further off than ever, and recurring illness nagged, but what a pilgrimage to far places calls for: willingness to let world go, its momentariness, to die on the road, human destiny, which lifted the spirit a little, finding foot again here and there...

—Matsuo Bashō

Written between 380 and 360 BCE, Plato's *Phaedo* integrates many genres, including Socratic dialogue; a deathbed biography of Socrates himself; elegy for him and his epoch; philosophical arguments like his Theory of Forms and its counterarguments; tragedy scripted as if performed on a stage in a choral atmosphere of men mourning the loss of their teacher; mythological cosmology of creation, underworld, and afterlife; fiction as we encounter it today in plot, setting, and characters motivated by their desires; history as an Athenian civic record and penal code (impiety and corrupting the youth, the trial and sentence, the thirty-day delay due to the sacred ship's voyage to Delos); animal stories of Aesop; and memoir, the grief in the dialogue feeling like Plato's own. By modern standards, this is an extraordinary literary experiment. But Plato doesn't seem to be performing genre-awareness. The form feels more natural to him than constructed for others. The Dialogue as his variegated form reads as his habit in a time before writing aspired to be literature. If there is a moment in which his writing feels nascent to him, may it be in his youth, when like an autodidact he is conceiving the *Meno* or *Apology* as debuts and drawing on the literacies of everyday life for form and lexicon, a past life's craft only beginning to be remembered?

Two thousand years after Plato, in 1689, and on the other side of the planet, the poet Matsuo Bashō sets out on a tour, mostly on foot but sometimes by boat and sometimes on horseback, of his home country of Japan. He is accompanied by his disciple Sora. Both men are Zen Buddhists. Both keep poetic diaries. Faithful to Bashō's own paratactic Japanese, Cid Corman and Kamaike Susumu translate Bashō's diary entries like they are written at the speed of observation, composition made free by not dwelling on it. Bashō writes at the start of the journey,

Friends, gathering since nightfall, came along by boat to see us off. Landed
at Senju, sense of three thousand li ahead of swelling the heart, world so
much a dream, tears at point of departure.

Departing from Edo (Tokyo), he punctuates his prose entry with haiku, as if the poet momentarily dissolves into his surroundings, making "world so much a dream":

1 From the 19th haibun in Matsuo Bashō's *Back Roads to Oku no Hosomichi* (The Narrow Road to the Deep North), translated by Cid Corman and Kamaike Susumu and published by Ecco Press in 1996

2 Plato's theory of anamnesis holds that the soul is immortal and has lived before, and that learning is the soul recollecting what it already knows. The hybrid writer doesn't discover form so much as recover it, as if mixing genres returns writing to something prior to its own codification.

3 I am using throughout Cid Corman and Kamaike Susumu's translation (along with their romanization of Japanese place names) of Matsuo Bashō's *Back Roads to Oku no Hosomichi*.

4 A "li" is a league, about 2.5 miles. The parataxis in the translation is faithful to Bashō's Japanese. The result can sound like a Beat syntax, recalling Ginsberg's dictum 'first thought, best thought.'

Departing spring (ya
Birds cry fishes'
Eyes tears (haibun #2)

And he and Sora are off, traveling northeast into the backwater regions of Honshu to Sue-no-Matsuyana, then west to Kisagata and down along the coast of the Sea of Japan, turning inland to Ogaki to complete a roughly fifteen-hundred-mile circuit. In its naturally hybridized writing, Bashō's diary *Oku no Hosomichi (The Narrow Road to the Deep North)* introduces for future readers the form of haibun. Developed by Bashō in as instinctual a manner as Plato and the Dialogue, haibun is a prose narrative interspersed with haiku poems, momentary perceptions of nature, to in a sense expand the consciousness of the writing beyond the utility of a singular prose genre. Haibun, with this infusion of haiku, reads as prose poetry.

Bashō sets out as a deeply religious man whose observations are often esoteric. At the start of his journey, he evokes a celestial gathering—sun, moon, passing year—as wanderers in their own right:

Moon & Sun are passing figures of countless generations, and years coming or going wanders too. Drifting life away on a boat or meeting age leading a horse by the mouth, each day is a journey and the journey itself home. Amongst those of old were many that perished upon the journey. (haibun #1)

He yearns to cross the Shirakawa Barrier, one of several administrative checkpoints on an island managed like a federation, as if the Barrier itself borders on an ethereal plane. He mythologizes his wanderlust as Dōsojin, a Hermes-like figure, calling him forth as a messenger of realms. But Bashō is flesh and blood. He is a mortal man and a character in his own spiritual narrative. As imposing a goal as crossing the Barrier sounds, he does cross it and subsequent Barriers as incidentally as pausing to take a breath before moving on. Late in the trip, upon passing the Uguisu Barrier, he writes,

...at Mt Kaeru heard first wild geese cry, and on evening of the fourteenth at Tsuruga harbor found lodging at Inn. That night the moon especially bright. "Think it'll be like this tomorrow night?" "Hard to tell about weather in Koshiji. Might be fine and then again might be overcast," and after some sake from innkeeper, paid night visit to the Kehi Myōjin. (haibun #51)

In contrast with Plato, in Bashō's depiction of himself, he is truly there. He has many encounters with strangers made familiar to him by a shared spirit of wandering when, for instance, a traveling companion named Hokushi becomes his disciple before returning home:

Visited the venerable elder of Tenryuji at Maruoka, renewing acquaintances. And Hokushi from Kanazawa also, who'd — as it happened— seen me this far and now reluctantly turned back. His way of noting what eyes see of various places often quite sensitive, now facing departure. (haibun #49)

And then Bashō's haiku noting how his compassionate acolyte sees:

what was composed
on the fan wrenched apart
subsides together (#49)

Two men parting ways who care for each other is as common as the grief it makes. Bashō's and Hokusai's separation is as mundane as it is moving. Plato's recusal is final. The span created by these two examples creates a universal mood consistent with human awareness of mortality growing as life progresses. A sadness pervades *Phaedo* and *Oku no Hosomichi* that implies infinite incidents of people coming and going in the making of the humanities.

The extent to which Plato and Bashō appear in their own narratives initiates a look into cross-genre writing. It helps distinguish the incidental hybridity of unbound imagination from hybrid writing as harnessed in later ages to enact literary, social, and political transgression. Readers of *Phaedo* and *Oku no Hosomichi* encounter the poet as a controlling presence. In terms of agency, what this presence allows into the writing, by its visibility or deliberate absence, shapes the world of the text. Plato appears nowhere physically in *Phaedo*. Against a more proper elegy, he doesn't attend his teacher's death by mandated suicide. Listing for Echecrates the names of those who do witness the philosopher's death, *Phaedo* reports in the mournful tone of a man not ready to break down, "Plato, if I'm not mistaken, was ill." This sets the tone of the Dialogue. Plato the man remains an impression, spectral, ever watching, as if *Phaedo* the document must transcend the author. Though this is an oversimplification, the more corporeally, vocally, psychologically, socially, and politically the poet appears, the less the written atmosphere echoes Bashō's phrase "world so much a dream." Plato's sadness is everywhere like the weather in Athens.

Bashō is here in the flesh. He's walking. He visits Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines. He sees old friends and people he has known only by reputation. Sometimes it's like a walking meditation, when he stops to write in his diary. Because the writing is more observational than confessional, *Oku no Hosomichi* operates like a travelogue transfigured by poetry. The prose of the diary is an informative and material account of what's happening to him. He adds haiku as a form and genre concerned not with personality but with natural objects and the moments when nature is deeply experienced. The peripatetic poet, lumbering on sore feet, sometimes feels ecstatic. Haibun alternates prose and haiku like the walker on his feet and in his head, and as a culturally specific example of prosimetrum.

Plato's physical absence in *Phaedo* is essential to his transmission. Bashō enacts momentary disappearing acts via the haiku of haibun, becoming the landscape he occupies. At one point, he reports (in prose) a man leading a horse by its halter. The man asks him for a poem, and he obliges:

Across the fields
Head the horse
Hototogisu (#11)

6 Bashō's spiritual life is itself hybridized, taking him between religious traditions the way his writing moves between prose and haiku.

7 Renga is a long collaborative poem made by groups of poets, often at parties, each contributor adding a linked verse in response to the last. It alternates between verses oriented toward nature and season (haiku) and verses turned toward human affairs (senryu). Haiku as a standalone form emerges from the hokku, the opening verse of a renga sequence.

8 "Prosimetrum" refers to a work that alternates prose and verse. See this form across cultures and centuries — in Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*, Dante's *La Vita Nuova*, and the Japanese haibun tradition.

The fields are distances made of stones and grass and whatever noises engender silence beneath ever-changing skies. A horse is glimpsed. "Hototogisu" is a cuckoo named for its song. As if waking up, Bashō returns to prose to describe noxious odors of hot springs and dead bugs rotting in sand as stink and not his own dissolution into environs. For all the haiku poems in the haibun of Oku no Hosomichi, and there are over fifty of them, a few composed by Sora, Bashō does occasionally write closely about his own body and his own emotions, and always in prose: fear of shooting some rapids (#35), undoing his neck bag (#27), sitting with diarrhea (#19), groping in darkness (#32), practicing the art of long-distance walking (#9), feeling time like distance in such expressions of loneliness and boredom as a single night feeling like a thousand li. And clothes are everywhere in the diary—paper clothes, cotton britches, straw raincoats, formal hats held in place with pins—not to mention the flora and fauna and other kinds of objects recorded in sober acts of prose.

A description of Plato as an impression, spectral, ever watching, does not fully match the quality of Bashō's presence in his diary. Nevertheless, there is an otherworldliness in both works, and in the case of Bashō, an all but unutterable, sensory interface with nature, requiring a hybrid approach for full expression. Plato is writing mythically and spiritually with his theory of anamnesis, with immortality for its base. Later in *Phaedo*, he moves from philosophical argument again to myth, when Socrates describes as knowable fact the geography of the afterlife.

A few days after writing the haiku for the man leading a horse, Bashō and Sora go looking for a landmark called Shinobu-mojizuri rock. Bashō describes in prose children from Shinobu village walking with them and pointing the way, while cautioning that their elders grow tired of tourists crowding around the mythical, granitic rock. Its magic reveals images of loved ones when pressed and rubbed with young plants. Given the crowds, the locals have pushed the rock to an out-of-the-way spot. In Bashō's search for it, he writes:

seedlings pluck
handroot old
Shinobuzuri (# 17)

"Shinobuzuri" connotes longing, stealth, and endurance. "Shinobu" means both "to endure" and "to conceal oneself." Where the haiku moves the poet outside memory into pure observation, the rock presses the past back into the present as an image of the beloved. The poet lapses from memory as the object of his haiku makes memory sacred. For Bashō, the phenomenon of recalling a vast cultural past into the present by way of a diary requires a hybridity that includes haibun, memoir, the epistolary, travelogue, odes to past poets and Zen practitioners and strangers, ecologue, ars poetica, and the picaresque. Plato feels present at the Shinobu-mojizuri rock with his own handful of grasses and flowers.

These ancient authors are less like change-makers to the modern reader and more like poets and writers of history. Much later, in the 20th and 21st centuries, hybrid form becomes explicitly political in the work of the postmodernist Kathy Acker, and later Claudia Rankine. What these writers share across centuries and continents is that personal and societal issues pressing down on their own lives—spiritual dissolution, trauma, bodily illness, and political rage—grow their subject matter beyond the scope of a single genre. Or the imagination grows as the author understands her subject. Questions arise. Why write this? Can a lot of prose lose its lyric intensity and poetry take away from essential documentary? What's fiction here? What needs to be real? The mixing of forms becomes not stylistic preference but an epistemological effort. The writer reaches for a second genre like reaching for a second language, to say more, differently. Then maybe hybridity becomes less a sign

that a subject has exceeded its form and something more like the lifting of personally-held artistic limitations.

Whereas Plato and Bashō project outward into a world freed by imagination, Margiad Evans (1909–1958), in her autobiography *A Ray of Darkness* (1952), offers her own body as the text itself, but without the urgency of feminism.

2.

Our health is a voyage: and every illness is an adventure story. — Margiad Evans

As a child, long before she is an epileptic, Evans is aware of the disease of epilepsy as something to address with quarantine. She recalls that her sister's house was near an Epileptic Colony that housed many men, women, and children and had its own farm. "I could remember it from my childhood," she writes, looking back, "but it seemed, contrary to the rest of the neighborhood, to have grown since the memory." (36) She is writing about epilepsy—her own—near the end of her life, a disease she had known as a child only from a distance: the Colony down the road, and the dogs she nursed through their fits. Given the vividness and strangeness (for only an epileptic knows) of her writing in *A Ray of Darkness* about the life of the epileptic, it's tempting to call her account the first of its kind. But the foundational medical description of epilepsy appears as the Hippocratic text *On Sacred Disease*, from around 400 BCE, in the lifetime of Plato. The "sacred" in the title is misleading because Hippocrates uses it only to refute it. But sacredness is crucial to understanding both the hybridity in Evans' book and her genuine acceptance of her own death. This acceptance is as much Socrates' willful drink of poison as it is Bashō's merging with a green world.

For Hippocrates, epilepsy isn't a spiritual thing. The epileptic is not a veritable Julius Caesar. They aren't communing with God. Strictly pathological, this is disease theory. Readers encounter his science in all the paragraphs of his tract:

The brain of man, as in all other animals, is double, and a thin membrane divides it through the middle...and veins run toward it from all parts of the body, many of which are small, but two are thick, the one from the liver, and the other from the spleen. A portion of it runs downward through the parts on the side, near the kidneys and the psoas muscles, to the inner part of the thigh, and extends to the foot. It is called vena cava.... Its thickest, largest, and most hollow part ends in the brain....

It's hard to know how anatomically precise this statement is by modern standards, but the effect of reading it is that it is both scientific and mysterious at once. Long before Evans, he is turning the apolitical body into a text. Or it is a landscape wanting haiku, the vena cava reading like back roads to far towns. Such places, for Hippocrates, are all in the body. It's as if the vena cava passes near the kidneys and psoas muscles and spleen as naturally as a wanderer visits Kanazawa "and is superficial so as to be seen." In contrast, Evans works to describe the experience of epilepsy in terms that are

9 Evans, Margiad. *A Ray of Darkness*. Arthur Barker Ltd., 1952.

10 As translated by Francis Adams (1796–1861).

spiritual but nonetheless present the sufferer as both an organism—plant, animal—and as a human being trying to get along with peers and strangers alike:

The epileptic seems to be in constant communion, dumb so far as memory is concerned, with a general and dark source of being. One might put it that an ordinary person's is animal life, an epileptic's plant life. The animal person (i.e. the normal) having no certain source of dismay in himself, turns to artificial and collective forms of it, insists upon 'facing up to things' which he has himself created, and accuses those who do not wish to probe, read, write, and talk about these things, of 'escapism.' The plant person (i.e. one who is afflicted with a mental, physical or nervous disease) has more of a tendency to be an 'escapist' or 'wishful thinker,' etc., and to search for: 'Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, and if there be any virtue and if there be any praise' to 'think on these things.' So that an epileptic, if he is not born religious, is likely to become so out of his unconscious and profound excursions into infinity.

The plant-animal distinction is Evans's own philosophical system, arrived at through illness rather than through reading or argument. Her written reflection reports on the body from within, based on inner experience alone. She is articulating theoretically what Bashō enacts formally when, by way of haiku, he becomes the fields and the cuckoo. She absorbs the quotation from Philippians (4:8) into her statement about animal and plant people as if it were her own thought, a hybrid move making the sacred text indistinguishable from personal reflection. At last, "profound excursions into infinity" ties epilepsy to the sacred in a counterargument to Hippocrates. She doesn't deny the neurological reality but locates in that reality a spiritual experience that rationalism doesn't address.

A Ray of Darkness needs its hybrid form but doesn't know it until the work is underway. In a sense, in what can feel like a false start, she begins this autobiography describing her desire to finally write a scholarly book about one of her literary heroes. She writes in her diary:

On May 22nd I had begun to write and re-write my book on Emily Brontë having rough drafted the headings many times. My hope was that through darkness which had befallen me I might see her more clearly. But it was not to be so... With the attempt at creative and critical writing the fatal voluminousness began again. I could no way control the ideas which streamed in upon me as if from the outmost circle of my universe. They came as if from all points and could not be focused upon the figure of the woman I was seeking to interpret, herself universal. (97–98)

She has already written four novels, a collection of short stories, and her first autobiography, all set in the countryside of the Welsh Marches. Her early works are self-illustrated. Now she experiences a "fatal voluminousness" as a flooding of the intellectual acuity needed to write a literary biography. "Objective writing," she states, "except of a very simple descriptive kind (trees, storms, woods,

bird-life), was impossible to me.” (14) A plant person at odds with a mercantile public, she struggles to distinguish Emily Brontë from her sisters, the distinctions fading into what she likens to the Oneness of manic depression. Outward collapse begs a hybrid form if she is going to communicate to readers the phenomenological and mystical experience of epilepsy. Here she describes a fit— blinking out, losing herself, returning—years before experiencing full-blown seizures:

The night was quiet and dark—I went to the door and looked out once or twice. It was about eleven o’clock when I put down my pen, feeling suddenly tired and saying to myself that I could do more that night, so I would make a cup of tea and go to bed. I made the tea, looked up at the clock—a strange chance—saw that it was ten minute past eleven. The next thing I was still looking up at the clock and the hands stood at five and twenty minutes past midnight. I had fallen through Time, Continuity and Being. (80)

Like Bashō alternating between a plainer prose and haiku, Evans reports these moments, without the physical rupture of seizure, as interruptions of her domestic life. As she suffers more fits, the anxiety she feels between each episode becomes her subject:

...I whose mental processes had been so uncannily accelerated for years, whose imagery was so urgent, overcrowded, like an orchestra choked with instruments, had to spin out thoughts as a curtain against fear and horror. Fear of the yet experienced cycle of the pits, the intervals between them, horror of myself. Every waking was a shock and an enigma: “is this myself? Is it a nightmare?” I was so sure I used to tell myself every morning as soon as I woke “You are an epileptic.” For the rest of the day I would protest and try to tell myself that I was not. (87)

The strangeness of these moments further integrates into her writing her fascination with the indescribable that she heretofore associates with nature and God. Though she will never quit the hard work of writing, a collaged form enables her to express something like God, like rapture in nature, like the burden and catharsis of chores, like marriage, like childbearing, in as many kinds of writing as she is passionate about and proficient in. Any shortcomings she has is, say, sustaining a long prose narrative, she compensates for by writing to her strengths as a kind of self-elegizing celebration of her creative life. What is particularly elegiac, she mixes her prose in *A Ray of Darkness* with sonnets and, addressing her own death, verse she calls requiems:

When voice no more can speak for me
and all my words are dead,
think how like the day across your face
my love is spread. (26)

Like *Phaedo*, which mourns Socrates while making a case for immortality, and like Bashō’s diary, framing the journey itself as a preparation for death, Evans’ requiems imagine her absence. Though she is a fiction writer, poet, memoirist, diarist, letter writer, and sketch artist, she may be best

remembered as a nature writer. Her earlier book *Autobiography* serves as testament to what Evans herself called ‘earth writing’—a Bashō-like desire to sink into wildernesses:

At home the lilac bush is in bud, and here the staff of the honeysuckle sprouts beads of green. Although the nettles are going down into earth, and the hardest weeds are yellowing and the air is empty of insect flight, it is the month of germination, the first era of growth. I can taste germination on my tongue and at the back of my throat. The fog and the rain are fertile. The seed-ball expands and the earth around will contract with frost until the tenderer matter bursts and the finite plant is born in the infinite earth.

In all of her writing, Evans makes it clear that in nature is where she feels most at home. What makes her hybridity distinct from Plato’s is that it grows in intentionality as her illness deepens—never identified as strategy but written in constant embrace of what is still possible. One possibility outside of her writing life, or overlapping it, she did not anticipate. When she becomes pregnant in her early forties, more than a decade into her marriage to Michael Williams, she writes,

Triumph I did feel, inseparable from the fulfillment of the purpose for which I am a woman: but I confess that it was a lesser one than I had already had in finding a child in the womb of my brain. Humanly it may be the supreme outlet for a woman’s passion—to bear a child; but artistically it is not; and I will never agree that it can lastingly influence a woman artist away from her greatest instinct. (123-24)

3.

The world is wrong. You can’t put the past behind you. It’s buried in you; it’s turned your flesh into its own cupboard.

—Claudia Rankine

The postmodern novelist Kathy Acker (1947–1997) writes in a hybrid form that explores the body and sexuality in such confrontational, abject ways as to make her narratives unmistakably feminist. Her 1996 novel *Pussy, King of the Pirates* reinterprets Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Treasure Island* (1883) by telling the story from girls’ perspectives, populating it with such colorful characters as O, Ange, Lulu, Pussy, and Antigone, and sending them on a wild adventure from an Alexandrian whorehouse to Pirate Island. In doing so, Acker deconstructs patriarchal culture from the inside out. Spanning centuries and continents, she chronicles the adventures of O and Ange, sex workers who leave the trade and hire a band of girl-pirates to help them find buried treasure. Often told through dreams and dream states—a chapter from the middle section is called “In a World Without Men, In A World Punctured By Dream”—the novel divides roughly into three sections: “Preface: Once Upon a

13 Evans, Margiad. *Autobiography*. Basil Blackwell, 1943.

14 *Autobiography* appeared in 1943. Her other published works include the novels *Country Dance* (1932), *The Wooden Doctor* (1933), *Turf or Stone* (1934), and *Creed* (1936), and the short story collection *The Old and the Young* (1948). Epilepsy prompted *A Ray of Darkness* (1952). Near the end of her life, she wrote *The Nightingale Silenced* (1954) about her diagnosis with a brain tumor, and a second volume of poetry, *A Candle Ahead* (1956).

15 Acker, K. and Gaiman, N. *Pussy, King of the Pirates*. Grove Press, 2021

Time, Not Long Ago, O...," "In the Days of Dreaming," and "The Days of the Pirates." To create the novel, Acker weaves autobiography, literary biography, pornography, poetry, and her own drawings into a formally restless work of fiction that refuses the boundaries of both genre and gender.

Whereas Evans establishes the body and illness as text without political urgency, Acker inherits this move and radicalizes it. For her, the body becomes not just a text but a contested political site. Given the labyrinthine quality of Acker's hybridization, the focus here is on the titular character Pussy, "king of the pirates," and her girlfriend MD, who is Marguerite. Green's Dictionary of Slang documents seventeen distinct meanings of "pussy," ranging from the vagina to cowardice to a gang of fur thieves. Other definitions from this entry include "a coward, a weakling, with an implication of homosexuality" and "a transgender woman who passes satisfactorily as cisgender," identifying a politically charged lexical instability that mirrors Acker's own hybrid method. Tracing the word 'pussy' through popular culture illuminates Acker's strategy of reclamation, seizing a debased term and crowning it sovereign.

The word as a name moves across registers from the playful to the obscene to the political. Charles Perrault writes the fairytale "Puss in Boots" in 1697 about an anthropomorphic cat outwitting a shape-shifting ogre to win a castle and a princess's hand in marriage. The original story and subsequent iterations are devoid of sexual connotations. These are stories for children, concerned with moral instruction rather than political intervention. In stark contrast, from the world of grownups, viewers encounter Pussy Galore as the antagonist to superspy James Bond, 007, in Ian Fleming's novel *Goldfinger* (1959). Published in the early years of second-wave feminism, Fleming's novel identifies Pussy Galore as a lesbian and as the leader of an all-female criminal gang called "The Cement Mixers," then unambiguously frames Bond's seduction of her as a correction of her sexuality. "Not in a gangster's voice, or a Lesbian's, but in a girl's voice," Fleming writes of Pussy's speech, equating lesbian identity with hardness and inauthenticity while heterosexual yielding becomes the "real," soft femininity underneath. "I never met a man before," she confesses to Bond. Fleming recasts lesbianism as deprivation rather than identity, trauma rather than desire. Sexuality and sovereignty are systematically dismantled by patriarchal force. Acker's protagonist, autonomous and lesbian in her relationship with MD, is the direct literary answer to a gendered zeitgeist demanding a radical feminist response. One such response appears at the start of the 21st century, only eight years after Acker's premature death from cancer. In 2005, Donald Trump is recorded on a hot microphone telling television host Billy Bush that his celebrity entitles him to "grab women by the pussy." The tape becomes public in October 2016, just weeks before the presidential election. Trump wins despite its release. In direct response, on January 21, 2017, the day after his inauguration, millions of women worldwide wear pink knitted pussy hats at Women's Marches across the globe. The hat reclaims Trump's puerile and degrading language as a collective declaration of female political solidarity. Like the king of pirates, the pussy hat transforms a term made dangerously commonplace by patriarchal power into an instrument of defiant self-naming.

16 Acker's hand-drawn map of Pirate Island, titled 'Pirate Island: Passang Rouge,' recalls by contrast Bashō's Oku no-Hosomichi, itself a kind of literary map tracing his itinerary through sacred Japanese landscapes. Acker's map is transgressive and invented, Bashō's devotional and ambulatory. Acker's destinations include The Repository of Dreams, the dead novel (indicating "James"), block of houses all in a row see how they grow, Abraham Lincoln's Home, The End of All Dreams, and "no dead girls." 17 Green, Jonathon. "pussy." Green's Dictionary of Slang, greensdictofslang.com. Accessed 9 May 2026.

18 Fleming's novel *Goldfinger* was published by Jonathan Cape in 1959.

19 The pussy hat was conceived by Krista Suh and Jayna Zweiman and knitted by volunteers worldwide. The pink color was chosen both for its association with femininity and as a direct reclamation of Trump's language.

DAVID BOOTH

The section “King Pussy’s Story,” from the chapter “The Pirate Girls,” introduces Pussy’s dilemma: “Childhood ended when Pussy learned that she was pregnant. It didn’t matter to her, at that point, who the man was. Or did.” Acker gives the child a naivete like sleepiness through which to understand her predicament. The back-and-forth — it matters, it doesn’t — is a defining quality of Pussy’s voice, enacting through iteration what is all but inarticulable: her dissociation from her own experience, a consequence of her hypersexuality and its aftermath. Over the course of this section of the novel, Pussy will know the identity of the father and not know. She will tell him she is pregnant with their child, and she will not tell. After much deliberation, she will have the abortion and not have it. She will abort the child only to find that she is still pregnant. Acker writes,

Before this time it hadn’t been possible for her to be pregnant, because she hadn’t wanted a child. She had no idea why she didn’t want a child, because all women want to bear children. (73)

Acker is writing in the 1990s about abortion and the taboo that a woman does not want to have children within wedlock. The syllogism “all women want to bear children, I am a woman, I want to bear children” grows perplexing as Pussy’s ambivalence about her own uses of her own body challenges, like society itself, her identity as a woman.

What’s beautiful about this stretch of pages, comprising subchapters with titles like “Naming;,” “Now I Tell This Story the Way I Say It,” “Turning Into a Criminal,” and “Now I Tell Everything In My Own Language: Ending the Memory of Childhood,” is that Acker creates an origin story of a realistic girl, and an iconoclastic one too, with a looming sense of alienation, a constant and perseverating need to contradict herself, and love in her heart.

During this period...her body became alien to whatever was her, because her breasts turned so painfully swollen that she could no longer sleep in her usual positions, because she was simultaneously and continuously hungry and nauseous, because she wanted to keep the child alive. (73)

Whatever is satirical and dreamlike about *Pussy, King of the Pirates*, the novel maintains a human dimension that mediates the transgressive force of Acker’s writing. She ponders how “to stop being pregnant naturally.” She calls the possibility that she would “murder” her daughter the final nightmare. She seems to say to the father, “You’re going to be a father,” in the same breath that she resolves to keep her secret from him. Acker writes about him, also young, “For the first time, he wanted one of his children to become alive. Perhaps this desire was a sign that, now, he was an adult.” And just as moving as Pussy wanting to keep the child alive, is Pussy taking down her qualifications to be a mother in the first place:

The question of responsibility’s complicated. I never knew my father and look how fucked-up I am. Not knowing my father fucked me up my whole life. Because I never let people get close to me. I don’t want to do that to a child; I won’t give my child my childhood. (75)

The absent father is one of Acker’s central and obsessive themes, running through her entire body of work. Her birth father left before she knew him, and she mythologizes that absence relentlessly. The story of the absent father is retold at least three times in *Great Expectations alone*. His disappearance

20 Kathy Acker’s *Great Expectations* (Grove Press, 1989) is a punk reimagining of Dickens set in 1980s New York. A protagonist deals with her mother’s suicide. Acker blends literary texts, plagiarized passages, and shifting perspectives into this hybrid form. The story of the disappeared father is retold at least three times within its 122 pages.

haunts *Pussy, King of the Pirates* directly: her narrator O states, "Since I never knew you, every man I fuck is you. Daddy." (15) The implication of incest in this statement suggests not only an ancient wound shared by children of narcissists, but also how Acker thinks about and uses her own biographical wounds to build her arguments. It serves as a basis for political agency as presented in her novels. Pussy's psyche and her body are a primary text. Pussy is pregnant, ambivalent, and legally and culturally imperiled. When she and MD step into the street, her body doesn't disappear. Acker doesn't let Pussy's body rest; she walks it into the street and into a wider argument.

In the midst of Pussy struggling to decide what to do about her pregnancy, she goes out with her girlfriend MD: "That night, because after I got pregnant it was always night, one of my girlfriends led me through whatever city I was living in." (75) They go first to an antique store where Pussy tries on sweater after sweater—"sexual ones" from a different era. Leaving the store, they encounter Pussy's boyfriend, who tells her what she had never known—that he was going to abandon her. At that moment, Pussy and MD find themselves on their own, on a trip through a forgotten city. They notice a poster for Maya Angelou, and many women dressed in black lining up for her presentation. Unable to explain the scene, Pussy asks MD, "Why are so many women wearing black waiting for Maya Angelou?" MD responds, "They're imitating Coffee." At this very moment, Pussy sees a novel by Chester Himes in her "mind's eye." (77) With allusions to Angelou and Himes, a surreality is creeping into the scene, when MD recalls that "when Angela Davis appeared downtown her audience was tiny." She adds: "There are far more women who want to be Coffee than there are Angela or Maya Angelou wannabes, but we don't know who Coffee is."

Green's Dictionary of Slang defines coffee as "a light complexioned black person." Acker is writing about race as provocation and not resolution. Angelou draws massive crowds. She is aspirational, triumphant. Some women want to be her. Davis draws only the smallest audiences because her politics are too radical for mass identification. The one identity lost in this setup is Acker's own, but Acker is everywhere in it.

In his introduction to the Twenty-fifth Anniversary Edition of *Pussy, King of the Pirates*, the novelist Neil Gaiman writes that he keeps forgetting Acker is dead, expecting to encounter her in the places he would run into her—Soho or SoHo or even Berkeley. (xxi) Gaiman's grief is instructive. He misses not only the woman but the presence he expects to encounter. This is precisely the confusion Wayne Booth's concept of the implied author is meant to clarify—the version of the writer constructed by the text, as distinct from the biographical person. In Acker's case, they are meant to seem indistinguishable. Her plagiarisms, her self-insertions, her use of her own wounds as political argument all collapse the distance Booth describes. That Gaiman keeps forgetting she is dead is, in a way, Acker's method working exactly as intended.

Where Acker's maximalism gives opponents an easy exit, the politics dismissible along with the obscenity, Claudia Rankine's *Citizen: An American Lyric* (2014) closes that exit. Rankine achieves disruption through precision and restraint rather than shock. Her hybridity—prose poetry, photography, essay, elegy, sports commentary—is too measured, too beautiful, too exact to be waved away as merely confrontational. She can meet negative suspicions of multiculturalism in a political moment eager to dismiss the project of inclusion, and she can meet them on their own terms, while seeking to empower those historically marginalized and find common cause with those who may be allies:

The world is wrong. You can't put the past behind you. It's buried in you; it's turned your flesh into its own cupboard. Not everything remembered is useful but it all comes from the world to be stored in you. You did what to whom on which day? Who said that? She said

what? What did he just do? Did I hear what I think I heard? Did that just come out of my mouth, his mouth, your mouth? Do you remember when you sighed? (63)

Rankine calls her book "An American Lyric." A lyric is generally thought of as a poem whose first-person speaker is understood to be the poet writing about her own experience. This applies to Rankine's lyric in everything but scale. She builds out her personal poem about society-at-large with the help of famous and lesser known voices from literature, art, philosophy, and popular culture. A pastiche quality emerges from written, spoken, and visual testimony from writers and artists devoted to social justice, including Zora Neale Hurston, Maurice Blanchot, Frantz Fanon, Frederick Douglass, James Baldwin, and others. Rankine's unnamed protagonist moves through a world in which the Black woman's body is never simply present but always being read. Turning to Serena Williams, Rankine asks:

What does a victorious or defeated black woman's body in a historically white space look like? Serena and her big sister Venus Williams brought to mind Zora Neale Hurston's 'I feel most colored when I am thrown against a sharp white background.' (25)

Rankine's answer to the question of whose experience counts, whose body deserves documentation, whose voice constitutes knowledge, is cumulative and precise. It arrives not as a single argument but as an accretion of moments. The headache won't lift. The neighbor calls the police. The woman reverses out of a parking space rather than sit across from a Black woman with a tennis racket. Against this accumulation, Rankine places Glenn Ligon's *Four Etchings* (1992) in the pages of her book. These etchings contain Hurston's line, stenciled repeatedly until the words bleed into blackness and become unreadable. Ligon's image is the visual argument the book has been making. To be hypervisible is not the opposite of disappearing; it is the mechanism of it. Acker's Coffee is desired because she cannot be read. Rankine's protagonist cannot stop being read. Acker wants to know the price of illegibility. Rankine wants to know the price of being read too well.

Remember

Upon the arrival of the next Spring storm

Remember,

That the lightning is yet another wrinkle on our skin.

Thunder but an ache in our bones.

Rain the washing of our spirits.

All of which is needed

So that we may walk together into Heaven.

Smallest of Rain Drops

Resting on green spring grass
the smallest of rain drops
began to fall
rinsing my Aura.

I began to feel warm
reminding me to thank God
for my journey.

Becoming sleepy,
I wondered what direction my dreams
would take me.

With my own assurance
I was comfortable
that it did not matter.

For where ever I do go
I'll bring enough Love
for myself
and all the living things I meet.

This **Steve** is new! Since his divorce from a 38 year old marriage, Steve has started a new life in the artistic community of Bay View, Milwaukee. Embracing a new love of writing poetry, along with renewing his relationship with his '73 black hard tail Strat, he has come alive.

The Exile

Across the screen, roll images:

Shadows in the dark flit and disappear,
Crumbling bodies crying incomprehensible rage.
Yellow crimson blazes on the horizon,
Alien people on fire with fury,
Fruit of unabated injustice and oppression.

Decades ago in a bucolic Midwest village
I schooled peacefully,
Napping over tomes of British Empire and Aristotle,
Serene and secure in my Ivory Tower.

Maison Francois dormitory:
Refuge for female students across the globe
Spoke undreamt glimmering vistas into my tame existence.

Journeyed from a land far East,
A graduate student landed ashore down the hall.
Long dark cascading lava hair,
Gold silver bangles jingling, unrestrained joyous laughter,
Aromas of clove cigarettes and incense.

I pass her sitting cross-legged in the hallway
immersed in rapid-fire conversation
Over a landline crossing thousands of miles away.
Later in the kitchenette, she wryly informs me of
Parents' *farman forbidding return*.

Hints of dawn nosing under pulled shades,
I rise, entering the minute study room.
Books plunked on a table, a faint yelp behind me –
I had roused her slumber from a nocturnal architectural project.
My profuse apologizing, she waves away with
Beringed hands lighting a cigarette.

My own exile came:
Sea crossing to the old country, longed for realities almost within grasp.
Upon my return, she had vanished.
Inquiries produced speculation and rumor:
Expired visa, destination Quebec or Paris.
Desperate plans of a faux betrothal.
Finally, silence: a bright shining candle extinguished.

Now, amidst visions of bomb crashed craters and posts of obliterating bombast,
this exotic nightingale reappears.
I have no answers for fraught geopolitical animosities, only memory:
Her name was Nooshi. Her home was Tehran.



Escape—Chicago



All is Vanity—Madrid



War and Peace—London

I have always found contemporary art the most intimidating of forms. A clever inside joke which I could never fathom. Graffiti not so. It is raw passion, devoid of intellectual conceit. The artist gives their soul gratis for any and all bystanders to observe, ignore, reject or rejoice in as they see fit. In these dark times, I use my camera as a reporter, a war correspondent if you will, to record these art forms silently shouting the anguish of modern humanity.

White Noise

Silence isn't silent anymore. Staring into darkness is drifting through space untethered. Sleep whispers from the brink of consciousness, convincing me it doesn't exist. The box fan's hum elicits a calming reflex, a primal memory of my mother's ever-present heartbeat, the gentle vibration of conversations on the other side of the skin, and the whoosh of blood pulsing around the womb.

Planned obsolescence claims my box fan's life. Again, my ears trip over themselves in the dark, and the black hole returns. In the unforgiving morning, while drifting through an electronics store, a sales associate insists that I upgrade my dream hardware. Why deprive myself of the best sleep science has to offer? The small black box claims to capture and relay the sounds of the natural world. Our reptilian brain still craves the hum of our environment. Anxiety, insomnia, and overstimulation dissipate in white noise, the box promises.

That night, before turning out the light, I press "play" on the box. A babbling brook washes over me. Water flows around smooth river rocks where frogs croak on the shore. Details blur as I drift off, serene as a golden leaf floating downstream. Every evening, the box emits a unique scene that soothes the jagged edges of my mind.

Once, in a meadow among the crickets, twigs snap as footsteps enter the scene. My drifting consciousness conjures a hiker with a colorful scarf in autumn. As the image blooms, their pace quickens until they are running. Maybe there is panicked breathing. Half awake, I detect men's voices following in the distance, and somewhere, dogs are barking, then unconsciousness swallows me down dark.

The nocturnal soundscapes shapeshift. The white noise evolves; it mutates like any living organism. In a dark corpse of trees, locusts sing in the summer night. The faint whistling is a breeze through the leaves at first, until it grows louder and louder, into a descending projectile that incinerates the forest. Something is soothing about the crackle and static of a conflagration. On another night, a rain shower swells into a deluge, sounding like thunderous applause. The celebration praises something wicked, like politicians cheering another state-sanctioned assassination. Sleeping like a baby and sleeping like the dead are surprisingly similar.

Thresholds

Throughout the performance at the Mirage Casino, Mantecore misses his cues and misbehaves. The white Bengal tiger bristles as the rhinestone-studded trainer plies him with treats and praise. Razor slash. The trainer collapses to the ground. Fluid motion of the beast, the tiger grasps the trainer by the jugular and drags his carcass offstage like any fresh kill. Thresholds all around us are threadbare. They disseminate in black smoke rising from a body engulfed in flames, screaming. Outside the embassy, the airman proclaims he cannot take part in the ongoing genocide. He douses accelerant over his head and ignites a Zippo lighter, live-streams his immolation across social media. Chaos detonates on the ice. A flurry of fists erupts as two hockey players rip off their gloves to deal out some real damage. Their fury feels deeper than a puck or penalty, as if they are lashing out at their lives. Violence is infectious. A small riot detonates between the teams. Blood splatters across the ice, not from cut faces or broken noses. Their knuckles are ravaged from whaling on each other's steel face guards. The crowded arena jumps to its feet as the fight breaks out. No one wants to miss the brawl of the season. Life-long hockey fans may never catch such a spectacle again.

For the rest of the week, SportsCenter highlights "The Massacre In Denver." Before going to commercial break, the newscaster lowers their voice to bring us a developing story. Outside of an embassy in Washington, a military serviceman has set himself on fire to protest the ongoing war in Gaza. The Ambassador and Prime Minister tune out the television's white noise. Applause dissipates to silence. The audience is unsure if that last trick is part of the show. The curtains draw to an urgent close. Then someone screams.

Shepherds of Chernobyl

Perfect cloudless blue, the air feels fragile, as if a single sound could shatter it. Unnatural silence stagnates without birdsong to pierce the stillness. Disaster tourists drift like ghosts, their cameras blinking, their mouths smiling, their feet planted above mass graves.

After the meltdown, liquidators, faceless in their hazmat suits, culled the animals they could capture and poured concrete over their toxic corpses.

During the evacuation, house pets were discarded. They would die soon enough. These abandoned companions have stewed in the belly of radiation, reproducing strange versions of themselves for generations.

Grown feral and mutating, their fur ripples in shades we can't name, their bodies bending back into wolves. Smaller breeds went extinct from sickness or the hunt, leaving only shepherd mongrels. They have existed in this irradiated wilderness for decades, as if time has curled into a loop and swallowed its tail.

Once scavengers, the dogs no longer seek scraps from workers or tourists at the exclusion zone's edge. Their distant figures dissolve, drifting between dying trees. They are echoes of a world undone. As the sun disappears behind the nuclear reactor's concrete sarcophagus, their shadows tangle with the sunset's orange light.

They forge a strange future, devolving into something more primitive, something preternatural, evolving into beasts of our making that we no longer comprehend.

JOSEPH KERSCHBAUM

Father Monster

I mold my cauliflower ear to the underside of the mattress, mirroring my ragged breath to hers, soft, steady, lost in dreaming. My appendage stretches toward the moon-pale foot dangling off the bed. As always, my twisted fingers hesitate, careful not to wake her.

When sleep won't come, she finds me in the dark. There's no fear in her eyes, only a soft focus, as if she can still find something good buried in monsters. She stitches my seams together with tiny hands and a junior sewing kit. She wraps me in gauze until I become visible again. "Funny mummy," she says. Her laughter makes the air bright.

Stilts for legs, brittle as matchsticks. Follow in her shadow down the hallway, wobbling like a novice circus performer. I've lost more than a few limbs, and rightfully so. I don't have the heart to tell her. Not what happened to me. Not what I've done. I'd borrow a heart if it didn't always make such a mess.

She has always existed, as far as she can remember. The world wasn't a kind place before her arrival, and I caused more damage then. My fangs were made of neglect, selfishness, and cruelty, hollowed out like a bird's bone. She doesn't know this yet. Monsters don't exist until someone screams or a mirror reflects a nightmare.

Her small hand settles on the threadbare edge of my bandage. "Tea?" she asks, presiding over a gathering of stuffed animals. Murder hornets for hands. I can't hold the plastic saucer, but she only laughs. She drapes a pink feather boa around my neck. "Handsome," she says, smiling. As if I've always been this way.

Joseph Kerschbaum's most recent publications include *Learning How to Drown* (Finishing Line Press, 2026), *Midnight Sunrise* (Main Street Rag Press, 2024), and *Mirror Box* (Main St Rag Press, 2020). His recent work has appeared in *Reunion: The Dallas Review*, *Hamilton Stone Review*, *The Inflectionist Review*. Joseph lives in Bloomington, Indiana with his family.

Tuatara Sidewalks

The first popularized dune buggy sizzles sausages & sings on the sidewalk. It is the sole survivor of an ancient species, features a unibody shell with fenders & frame fused with the chassis, a kind of electric utility terrain vehicle that is much like those originally used to pump water from the aquifers beneath the Great Plains. When aroused, be it by fighting or the prospect of sex, the soft spines that can be found along its back stiffen & raise up, proclaiming both its masculinity & the fact that it's a descendant of Punga, the ancestor of all deformed ugly things.

Cottage Cheese Is The Latest Dance Craze

It's unwilling to appear as a deflated rectangle but is still rooted in the Zoomers' quest to achieve

#fitlife. Yet, despite its derogatory usage to describe buttocks of visible cellulite, people have still taken to

TikTok to show how cottage cheese can quickly become the quiet MVP of your terpsichorean endeavors.

forlorn isosceles

The lack of counter attractions
is now available in a limited run
along with a collection of words
& phrases that rhyme with wild
geese. Official images of forgotten
personages, the shape of them
outlined in chalk & the whole per-
fumed with aniseed, are due out

a month later. Nothing is ever
mentioned about the rhombus in
the back room or when it might
be brought out into the light. Only
the weeping of the two triangles it
is composed of keeps it dust-free.

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What Lies Beneath the Surface

She was one of those who
believed a glass of lemon
cordial made the trains run
on time. & if they didn't,
it was down to some illicit
action elsewhere. She never
questioned her belief, found
it no more farfetched than

the idea of breaking the
carbon-fluorine bonds in
teflon & using the resulting
sodium fluoride as an added
ingredient for toothpaste
to assist in dental health.

Mark Young was born in Aotearoa / New Zealand but now lives in a small town in North Queensland in Australia. He has been publishing poetry for over sixty-five years, & is the author of around eighty books, primarily text poetry but also including speculative fiction, vispo, non-fiction, art history, & an artist's book. His most recent book of poetry is *synecdoche*, out from Sandy Press in mid-April. A collection of visual pieces, *In the Key of G*, will be published later this year.

Punk Heaven

Sharp teeth

Pumice your scaly feet

Spike your hair full of venom

Unzip your black leather jacket

Let your delicious tits peak out

Heaven is filled with punk rockers

Confidently dancing, strutting

Yet so endearing

They smoke cannabis of bliss

Pace the clouds, watch for storms

Strum guitars, compose lyrics

We are animals wearing clothes

Fat belly full of rage

Fuck misogyny and expectations

Mayhem is unscripted laughter

Burnt toast is the smell

Of thwarted desire

Rinse and spit

Kissing is a prelude

To more madness

Kindness is an expensive scent

Breakfast

See the runny eggs
Toast dripping with butter
You say to me *pass the ketchup*
Your meal is covered in red
Like a crime scene
Your bacon is sexy and fat
It pervades our bedroom
A greasy footprint on your lips
I eat the beans
The tiny children on the plate
Smoky and sweet
Watch your big hands use the toast
To mop up the egg's secretions
After the ketchup has danced with it
You grunt and groan a bit
Like the bear you are
My cigarette smoke
Is curling around my cup of Earl Grey tea
Your face gives me hope
In the morning sun
No one will shave my head
Or call me names
Tell me I don't belong
I belong at this table
Watching you chew and sigh deeply
When all your greasy fry-up is consumed



Venus Emerging From the Waves (acrylic on canvas 20" x 20")



Full English Breakfast (acrylic on canvas 14" x 11")

I allow

I allow you to mess up my quartzite countertop
leaving dirty scraps, peels wherever convenience claims for you
I allow you to ignore fruits I neatly cut
in my handmade heart-shaped bowl
I allow you to play my sewing machine
fumbling through your first tailor-made t-shirt
I allow you to scuff my dance floor
a long scratch like it scraped my heart

For my house is your playground
Safe to trip, to waste, to stress, to learn different postures of falling
not knowing how to catch yourself

In ten days, you will leave
for the city of the Mermaid,
my childhood fantasy land
Speaking a language whose alphabets
I don't know how to pronounce

So I choose to stay beside you
With you putting on earphone
busy chatting with your boyfriend
Your giggles from another world
disturb my pretentious reading of a thick book
I couldn't get past a single page
- I should have caved back to my own space
I know I would enjoy it immensely
I allow you to waste my time

I know the rule: always say goodbye first

So the sting doesn't hurt so much, but

I allow you to say goodbye first

leaving me an ache of being left behind

- I dare not risk you feeling lonely, even though

One day you'll learn

Solitude is the savior of your soul

I allow you to hurt me

Even that I know you have the gentlest heart

But pain

Is the only fathom of love

I allow you to play shitty, cursing songs repulsing my esoteric taste

I allow you picking up, dropping off hobbies that beckon your talents

I allow you to be radical, political, ideological, that's who I was at your age

I do not feel lost you leaving for a faraway land

For I have raised you well

To have the same wings of freedom

I see my image in you

I have been the mother for you that

I wish to have for myself

I allow you to be free

As my mother has allowed me

(Jan 6, 2026)

December (echoing Phoebe Bridgers' song "If We Make It Through December")

A month for Christmas lights
Colors dancing, whites biding

Cozy
Cuddling on our favorite couch
Comfy of childlike bonding

Smiles between yearning eyes
Kisses in late-night goodbyes
Chitchat, teases
Laughter of lovers
Flavors of steaming dishes
Magical spell

My vein of streaming blood
My dreaming nights and conscious calms
Adorned with gems collected from around the world
I hold them all to you
Moth to a fire

Silent rolling of remote city noise
Light breaths of my insomnia
Messages spoken or unspoken, lost
in this December night

An innocent breakup
A reminisce of a young boy
Sitting in front of my building
A rejecting door, gathered stares
for his fine fire love
burnt through the dark to dawn
Words
Sighed sadness of missing a matching soul
Lost in summers, remembered
in this December night

A wisp of smoke, a smoldering candle wick
It's a closure long due
It's December
that we didn't make it through

Things We Love

Me and my mother
Separated by ocean, trees, soil
- All the things we love

I try to say hello, ask how you are doing
through them
Without sound, without language

I hope we can tap a string
Its vibration trespasses in a mysterious way
signals to me your smile
So I can feel safe, knowing you're there
I can be brave
Facing a world unfamiliar, to you

Your shrunken hands so frail
I can't feel any of your strength
or any vibration of the string

Between us
The soil, the air, the rain, the snow
- All the things we love

(Jan 30, 2026)

Wound

Wound of rejection
camouflaged as a coupon
I wish it has an expiration date

It carries puffy marks around eyes
Stitches across nose
It whispers: you do not deserve to have
In winter bleaks

It comes from your abusive childhood
Your mother didn't care to protect
Lies and truths all buried
A son's bedroom still empty and gloomy
A trench so deep
The wisest blinds couldn't fumble across

Yet, you struggle
to survive, to thrive
You tease, you serve
You fix the helmet, tie the shoelaces
For a child
To a child
Like a child
Tears and glares
Sweat and joy
You love unconditionally
Like you want to be
Loved unconditionally

You numb your pain
Spin it into stories for
someone passing by
someone naïve enough to
look at you
listen to you
caress you
Ah, how dazzling your castle is
Flowers, giggles, perfumes
You even summon a wide grin

Would the wound ever expire?
When even the slightest doubt
Can thunder it back

I wish wound makes sounds
Like the wild dog barks warning the neighbors
But it already lifted its veil
- Too late to run

I hear it says:
I have warned you
In my hands spun you
In my sweetest messages
You didn't pay attention
Only the very intuitive souls
Detect and flee with entirety

Wounds
Thread through your
Breakups
So many
So loud
Clamoring beneath the laughter
So loud
Pounding through the thick windshield

I wanted to help
To make it even
To make it right
To make you a wing so you fear falling no more
Like you were my brother
Like once
You were the brother
You were the son

(Mar 5, 2026)

Sherrie Shao: "As a beginner, second language writer, I can be clumsy. But the truth is: I found freedom in poetry, even more than I do in dance and painting. I am thrilled and won't stop exploring and sharing."

Pushin' that Pen

New York City, 2026

They say just puttin' a pen to paper,
is therapeutic in nature

Scribbling sure trumps quibbling!

So here I am,

Pushin' that pen

...

I ain't sure of the science,

but I ain't gonna delve to define it

Just,

Pushin' that pen

Pushin' that pen

...

If the writing has no rhyme or reason—that's all good,

it's me I'm pleasin'!

...

So, if you don't mind,

and without further ado,

I'm just gonna go back to,

Pushin' that pen

Pushin' that pen

Pushin' that pen!

The Way to Limbo

"Excuse me, sir, is this the way to Limbo?"

"Yes, sir, straight ahead—just keep going the way your going—you can't miss it."

"Thanks—I appreciate it!"

Redpolls are Not Always Red

Nor are they common, which has been
my apologia for the last 70 years
of behavior

My brain is disdainful of order
as is nature, some
of the time

And yet, my life with others
works better in a semblance
of reasonable order

Although, who wants to live
in the perpetual numbness
of reasonable order?

Especially,
when there is such
unruliness

Rough as Dad's
cheek, with him
asleep on the couch



An Embarrassment of Debts

Hieroglyphic playgrounds
where swings draw glinting grins
strollers parked in a gossipy curbside hum

Shouting swimming pools dug in foreign soil
"Dad, Dad—watch this!"
prune fingertips in a Mondrian ocean

Softball poised on the daunting tee top
a stumble on the way to first
tears linger, I kneel in lime chalk, *"Honeybun... honeybun..."*

Piano crescendos in the Festival sauvage
music box goals beneath a halide sky
tiny dancers facing Montessori adjudication

Wisconsin Dells reckless greenery
Boreal lakeside Cézanne hues
fly-twitching legs curled, asleep with Mom

All these ever stirring in me
two solitudes never to surrender
children, mine—a lone traveler,
 unsung

Image: "Zen Pickerel"

Artist's Statement:

I live next to a freshwater lake. I imagined a fish at rest in its motionless world. Andy Warhol used a blotting method to create irregularity and unplanned texture and shapes. This technique, when used to paint simple objects like my neighbor the walleye, adds an element of visual tension and uncertainty.

To the Reader

Il en est un plus laid, plus méchant, plus immonde!

Baudelaire, Au Lecteur

The gravity of humankind, the constant that binds all,
regardless of beliefs; we are tourists to any truth
believing what fits neatly in our coffee cup of wisdom.
Let mathematicians make charts between intent and deeds,

calculate mistaken lies or those of innocent hurt—
you know this ancient beast, a two-faced Janus
to whom the politicians swarm, priests
perform their secret sex, where slavery thrives.

It is the god of fate, bringer of war and massacres,
from Eden where they ate from the Tree of Lies.
We accept it to shadow our thoughts, shield
us from the reality of *ennui and evil ways*:

It's Hypocrisy! We are actors in a hall of mirrors.
It is you and I. We must forgive to survive.

at the poetry lecture

then he said & i'm sure he was serious
you only get to use two exclamation points
for all your poetry

this symbol was painted on the caves
fifty thousand years ago
a warning sign to watch for mammoths
but there was no punctuation in latin or mandarin
or even in the bible

leave it to a poet coluccio salutati
to introduce it in 1339
btw centuries before the question mark

i grew up on the old typewriters
you had to hit the apostrophe key
backshift hit the period key to make it
or visa-versa a real commitment

but now by the number 1 on the computer keyboard
i have hundreds of them scattered around

therefore i have been serving several life sentences
at a poetry high security penitentiary
where I get to pace in the yard like a wild puma
twice a day alone
with a guard always watching me
to be sure i can't find a way to kill myself

i keep asking how can you write
let there be light
without an exclamation point

o great one who giveth us to name the universe
redeem me as i rot away
my inquisitor has condemned me for writing in sin

i won't repent my advice
fuck'em let there be light!!!!

The Dead

*...as long as I last and will keep on dying
till there isn't anything to remember with.*

David Wagoner, I was assigned your collection
by my book club which meets once a month,
After the Point of No Return, and, you know,
"so many poets, so little time;"
didn't know you from Adam and that was just fine.

So it was after reading it all, over several sittings,
many in the bathtub with the water steaming,
only then did I Google the Academy biographies
to see you died in 2021, at 95. This was your last book.
Now that changes things right off doesn't it, you being there,
wherever there is, and me now talking to you from here.

I dogeared *The Dead*. *There's a title my poetry workshop*
would despise. But I like it. It's to the point, sticks to the gut,
not sentimental. We are just another creature who can't stop dying.
I understand the poem now from the other side.

The title has been used before with different intents;
I am borrowing it, a promise to remember your words
that shiver in my voice on this side of somewhere.
I wanted to tell you there is something left.
Because I just said it. Because I am reading it.

du fu

i stand with you
 du fu
with your ten thousand sorrows

to say i feel any different than you
 with the spring about to mesmerize
 and the sound of birds and flutes

no
 our spring is looming

soon we will leave this room

 i will take my walking stick

my face is warmed
 by the breeze
 swollen in pollen
 and happily

i sneeze

and think of you du fu

Mark Fishbein got his BA in literature from CCNY in 1971, and after a career in the screen printing and dyeing industry returned for an MFA at Columbia College Chicago in 2025. He has four poetry collections, most recently *Reflections in the Time of Trumpius Maximus* (Atmosphere Press, 2021) and an ekphrastic collection, *Billboards of Chicago* (ShyHousePress, 2024), and has published in Rattle, Allium and many others. Mark is a founder of the UK based PGN-Poetry Global Network, which offers live and hybrid poetry events and festivals, workshops, and publications. www.poetwithguitar.com

About the poems: these are poems chosen for a literary community, which is the warm feeling I get from The Prairie Review. They are part of a collection For *Poets Only: Poetry on Poetry & Poets*.

When Art Looks Back at You

A reflection on art, mystery, and spiritual attention, drawn from a talk by Pádraig Ó Tuama at the Raclin Murphy Museum of Art at the University of Notre Dame on April 23, 2026.

At a keynote for *The Art of Encounter* at the Raclin Murphy Museum of Art, Pádraig Ó Tuama returned to a deceptively simple question: Why is art? His answer was not an argument so much as an invitation. Art, he suggested, does not exist to justify itself through usefulness. It happens before explanation. It exceeds our attempts to control it. And in that refusal to be reduced to purpose, art opens a mysterious encounter between maker, object, and viewer.

Ó Tuama resists the familiar claim that art must prove its value by healing communities, opening hearts, or bringing people together. Those things may happen alongside art, he says, but they are not its assigned function. Art simply is.

To make that point, he turns to what he imagines as an early human gesture: a hand pressed against a wall, leaving behind not the hand itself but the outline of its absence. The image is startling in its sophistication. It marks a human presence by showing where a person is not. Is it a declaration—*I am here?* A question—*Is there anyone like me?* A warning, a summons, a sign? Perhaps all of these at once. The deeper point is that art appears before certainty. Its meanings proliferate, but its existence comes first.

That is part of what makes art so difficult to master through intention. We cannot engineer a painting, poem, or performance to achieve exactly what we demand of it. And yet art does things to us. It moves, unsettles, gathers, disturbs, consoles. We encounter it not as a machine for outcomes but as a mystery we enter.

Ó Tuama links this mystery to a larger philosophical problem: we cannot fully stand outside Being in order to analyze it, because we are already inside it. Art works in a similar way. We do not hover above it with complete clarity; we are implicated in the experience of it.

He illustrates this through a friend named Jonathan, whose way of moving through galleries overturned his own assumptions about what a museum visit should look like. Rather than dutifully passing through every room, Jonathan follows his responses. He races through the spaces until something

stops him. Then he stays—sometimes for ten or fifteen minutes—absorbed in a single corner, texture, or field of feeling, before suddenly deciding it is time to leave. For him, a gallery is not quiet in any passive sense; it is charged with so much emotion that lingering everywhere would be unbearable.

The lesson is simple and profound: no one taught many of us how to be with art. We often behave as though good spectatorship means completeness, as though we must consume every room to avoid failing. But attention does not always work that way. Sometimes the truest encounter is selective, intuitive, and bodily. We do not only look at art; we feel our way toward it.

From there, Ó Tuama arrives at one of the talk's most arresting claims: we do not see art as it is; we see art as we are. The encounter between viewer and artwork is never neutral. Drawing on theological ways of reading ancient texts, he describes several modes of attention. Sometimes we look through a work, trying to understand the world that produced it. Sometimes we look at it, attending closely to its surfaces, forms, and inner composition. And sometimes, most uncannily, something in the work seems to look back at us.

That insight helps explain why sacred traditions so often turn to images, icons, and calligraphy. A true icon, in the Christian tradition he invokes, is not merely a painting but an invitation into a long practice of silence, study, and prayer. It becomes a window—not only for the viewer, but, in a daring reversal, a window through which God might look. The religious language here serves a broader point: art can become a site of mutual seeing, where perception is not one-directional but shared, searching, and transformative.

This is also why difficult reactions matter. Feeling confused, frightened, resistant, or even irritated in front of a work may not mean the encounter has failed. Those responses may be part of the event itself. Art communicates not only through explanatory labels or declared messages, but through what it stirs in us before we know how to name it. If a work makes us uneasy, bewildered, or unable to look away, that disturbance may be one of the most honest things it has given us.

Ó Tuama never resolves the question he begins with, nor does he try to. Instead, he leaves it open, and in doing so preserves the integrity of the experience. Why is art? We may never know. But we know that it appears in every human culture, that it accompanies our questions about presence and absence, and that, at its best, it asks us not merely to observe but to enter into relation. Art happens. And sometimes, if we are attentive enough, it happens to us.

The A-List

In the café by the river, all the tables are made from water, and the bar's made from swans' wings. The clientele are light and echo, brushing elegant shoulders as they air-kiss greetings, settling into chairs carved from sun-glitter and rocks from the Moon, ordering deep green drinks and brittle reminders of mountains. The talk is of granite clefts and peat flats, the slow meander of caught leaves. A piano made of tossed coins and fishing twine vamps blue blue blue note jazz, its quarter tones slipping off the scale and shoaling in the rippling rafters, drawing couples to flirt and dance, breath bubbles twinning their whispers as they sashay with shimmering hips, lips mirroring lips in teasing promises. It's not for the likes of you or me, only those in the know, but if you row a small boat at midnight to the point where all the lights on the bank blur into a single line that could almost be writing, there will be white feathers falling from the clear sky, and soft bright bodies tangled in the depth beneath your prow.

Pecking Order

Birds at bacon rind, we visit when we can, craving salt and making the most of our conception of flight. Some of us earned our wings, while others were born soft in silvery down. Then there are those who took myth at its own word and stole their bones and feathers from capricious gods, leaving nothing but ire and imprecations in the wake of their shaky trajectories. Hunger's a leveller but greed cedes to no kinship and a hooked beak rends friend as slick as foe. We all know the score and we all keep careful accounts. It's feeding time. You scratch my back and I'll tear the song right out of your throat.

Telekinesis Today

Glass breaks and, although you are far away, you feel the urge to apologize, the same as when aeroplanes sigh themselves from sky or trees split themselves into flame. It's your fault that shudders earthquakes, or at least it always seems that way, and it's your fault that mountains swallow climbers in a yawn of melting snow. So, when glass breaks, you feel it in your nerves: even now, on this surgeon's slab, under anaesthetic, under a Sun that's too damn close and lights up places that no one should ever see. I lean in close, the wrong kind of doctor but the only one left standing, and cut the threads that hold your face in place with a scalpel of broken glass. Beneath, of course, is my face, bruised and abraded by the impact of thousands of daily disasters. I tell you I'm sorry as I unplug the machines.

Sleeping with the Fishes

Now and then, she forgets pain and slips into the warm, milky sea. It's safe in there, safer than children's TV shows where there's always a last-minute saviour, and safer than the cupboard under the stairs with its glow-in-the-dark fish swimming along its walls. Which reminds her of the day her mother bit the cord to free her from all promise and expectation. It was January, it was February, it was every day of the year. It was now, it was then, and she hid in the cupboard which felt like the sea, until she thought she was going to drown. And then the pain comes back.

Oz Hardwick is a European poet, photographer, barely-competent bass guitarist, and accidental academic, who has been described as a "major proponent of the neo-surreal prose poem in Britain". His most recent full collection, *A Census of Preconceptions* (SurVision Books, 2022), was shortlisted for a number of international awards but didn't win any, though he feels pretty confident about the upcoming pin-the-tail-on-the-donkey competition. His latest publications are the chapbook *Retrofuturism for the Dispossessed* (Hedgehog Poetry Press, 2024) and tracks on albums by British space rockers Space Druids, Incubus Lovechild, and Otherworld. www.ozhardwick.co.uk

On Motherhood: O Sweet Barn

swallow, sleeping in fits & starts,
dreaming you're always on
the wing, rifling, flying from barn rafter
mud nest to corncrib, sweeping the
flyway clean, then flying
back to satisfy those gapping,
begging beaks screaming, screaming
incessant demands, crying as you once
cried out not so very long ago, but since then un-
learned those faraway sounds of life
worn thin, now only this forever drudgery
of endless day & night & day &...

Notes Beneath Ominous Clouds One Early June Morning

Earthworm, little no-legs, belly crawler, how
you love your dark quarters, but you do
emerge at times as you did this morning
for a bit of air after days of choking down-
pours drowning your home. Here you are inching
your way over walkways, even vast roads, searching
blindly for what? For the so-called Promised Land?

O, such an intrepid traveler, if you could speak,
would you clue us in on your final destination?

Other escapees, I see, are inching this way,
others that way, but each relinquishing tell-
tale squiggles from soaked backs as
they manage to get somewhere, relent-
lessly on the move, convinced that one
inch more will eventually prove to place
them at the pearly gates of Paradise,
what we all dream will be ours. Here
you are, gasping & breathless.

Now, we humans drive over or
mindlessly crush you as
we hurry to that place we, too,
seem convinced we absolutely
must be. My neighbor, bends over
with his dowager's sack on
his right shoulder, carefully
gathers several of your
brethren who are up here
for a breather also. He
plans on going fishing later
when the sky decides
to clear up. Yes, his
coffee tin must
be so close, so
very close
to full by now.
Let me
add you too
to his cache.

A Country Graveyard II

Doing fifty, we kick up loose
gravel, sending it flying be-

hind us as we roar down our farm lane
to town & past the local graveyard:

no yews, no Memorial Day plastic wreaths
& no wrought iron gates, none,

just a dilapidated maintenance shed
with a rusted mower leaning up to one

side at the far north end
with one defaced angel minus her right

shoulder wing to stand guard over
modest small flock of a hundred or so

gravestones in regimental rows. Beyond
the graves, weeds butting up

at the edges of a farmer's fenceline
& his bean field with jimson, pig-

weed & burdock crowding up against
the fence, all with no notion whatsoever

that this space is no place for any soul to
find any semblance of dignity or eternal peace.

Aspirations at Eighty

Something you shouldn't ask
me, "What do you want?"
I'm looking down in wonder,
wondering how long these knees
of mine will last, & then I stare into
a mirror with equally blinding questions
about the limitations of my mind that's
already going somewhat foggy.
And don't ask me what I aspire to
these days either, please. I'm walking
around the block, but venturing beyond
is questionable, if not risky. Will my
bladder hold, be able to hold out
that long, or will I need to scamper
back in a hurry? But those knees?
Now there's one very ambitious fellow,
you may say. Yes, perhaps. Yes, I am, I am.

Terry Savoie's poetry has been included in more than two hundred literary journals and anthologies over the past five decades, journals such as *American Poetry Review*, *Poetry (Chicago)*, *Ploughshares*, *North American Review*, *Sonora Review*, *American Journal of Poetry* and *The Iowa Review* as well as in recent numbers of *North Dakota Quarterly*, *One, America*, and *Tar River Poetry* among many others.



Review: Flea's Jazz Album *Honora*

Earlier this year, Flea released a full-length jazz album, *Honora*. Mr. Flea is universally celebrated as an explosive, energetic co-founder and bassist of the Red Hot Chili Peppers, and I was deeply intrigued to listen to an unusual kind of musical project coming from him.

Turns out that in addition to genre bending stadium size rock, Flea is also passionate about jazz. Before switching to electric bass in his teenage years, he was a jazz trumpet prodigy back in Australia, and so this new album is not so much a departure as a re-integration of his diverse musical interests and talents. With *Honora*, Flea takes up his original instrument, and I am glad he decided to reveal this lesser known part of his musical identity to the world at large.

On my initial listen to *Honora*, I was particularly attentive to two elements: the spoken word segments featuring Flea, and the album's overall production quality. Regarding the spoken word, which was an important component for me, the text is unaffected and direct. It is not meant to be poetic but is well tallied to the tenor of the album.

Despite the obvious strengths of production, it was really the trumpet playing that captured my attention for good. The quality of Flea's playing is outstanding and shows a beautiful capacity for expression: lyrical, masterful, and unconstrained. One listen to "Thinkin Bout You" or "Maggot Brain," and it becomes quite clear [Thinkin Bout You - Single by Flea | Spotify](#) - Flea has released a great solo album.

The thoughtful arrangements and vibrant energy of the material offer a genuine, heartfelt experience. Ultimately, *Honora* serves as a powerful reminder of the healing and restorative qualities of music done with conviction, genuine affection, and mastery. I truly admire Flea for releasing this project, and I am already looking for tour dates to see him perform the album material live.

On Munch's Painting "Summer Night's Dream"

for Tracy Emin

"We howl. He is a master of the unsaid" – Mark Stevens on Edvard Munch.

A girl stands among the trees,
trees are in the forest, forest by the sea.

Between the forest and the sea,
A stretch of sandy beach.

A girl stands among the trees.
Water at hand, sea at her back.

Bright night shines in the sky,
in the water, in her eyes.

A girl stands among the trees,
trees are in the forest, forest by the sea.

Her arms down, her dress white,
hair pinned back, brown.

Small boat floating on the sea.
Footpath trailing on the sand.

This girl is vertical like the trees.
She is erect like the midnight sun.

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