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• FREE

# POET-TREE

# IMAGAZINE

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## **Poetry Corner - Mary Couch**

**Biography:** A Past Premier Poet for Poetry Society of Indiana, Mary studied poetry with her mother and two grandmothers. She enjoys writing poems showing her Celtic heritage about spirits living in nature and universal oneness with poems published in: Poetic Nature in the Hoosierland, Twin Muses: Art & Poetry, An Evening with the Writing Muse, and Poetry and Paint. She has six books on Amazon: Hoosier Haiku: Poetic Snippets from the Heartland, Hoosier WordArt: Communing with the Chippewa, A Garden of Thought Blossoms, Hoosier WordArt: Finicky Kitten's Book of Rhymes, Hoosier WordArt: Generations, and Nibby Ankleman & Other Poems.

### **Article: Free Verse vs Rhyme Poetry**

Let us consider Free verse poetry versus Rhymed Poetry.

Free Verse poetry lacks traditional rhyme and meter, has roots in ancient poetry, but formally pioneered in the 19th century by Walt Whitman influenced by Transcendentalism, the Bible, and a desire for a distinctly American poetic voice. Free Verse Poetry gained widespread adoption with the 20th-century Modernist movement, influenced by the French term "vers libre" meaning Free Verse and advocated by poets like T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound who used it to break from traditional forms and experiment with language and structure. This style relies on natural speech rhythms, imagery, and flexible line breaks to create meaning and has become a dominant form in contemporary poetry.

Earliest examples are found in the Hebrew Bible, such as the Psalms and the Song of Songs, which have a parallel structure and rhythm that influences free verse. Medieval alliterative verse also showed an early interest in rhythm without strict meter. By the late 20th century, free verse had become the dominant mode of poetry, due to its flexibility in reflecting modern life and personal expression. It influenced movements like the Black Mountain poets, who connected poetic form to the rhythm of breath and life.

Today, free verse remains a dynamic and prevalent form, used by diverse poets to explore various themes and styles. The writing style—popularized in the 19th century—has grown to become the type of poetry commonly published today.

Simply put, free verse poetry resists the constraints of form and meter, and while free verse poetry often experiments with sound play, it never adheres to a set regular rhyme scheme.

To tell if a poem is free verse, look for the absence of a consistent rhyme scheme and meter. Free verse poetry will not follow a fixed, regular rhythm or a set pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables. Instead, it often follows the natural rhythms of speech, with varying line lengths and pauses, and any rhymes are not part of a predictable, repeating pattern. While it is free from traditional constraints, it still has structure. The poet creates their own form, using elements like stanzas, sentences, and strategic pauses to guide the reader. The error is that most new writers use lines that are too long and don't breathe. Most new writers also would improve their work by reducing the unnecessary words that break the rhythm of the poem. While free verse lacks restraints of formal and blank verse, it still involves all the elements that make up the form of a poem (including diction, syntax, lineation, stanza, rhythm, and types of rhyme). It is just that there are no rules governing how they must be used. Poets often choose free verse when they want: A more natural, conversational tone. To emphasize imagery and emotion over form. The freedom to break or bend the rules. Characteristics of free verse poetry include a lack of form, meter, and rhyme scheme.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Free\\_verse](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Free_verse)

Rhyme Poetry is a literary device characterized by repeating identical or similar sounds at the end of words. Pairs of rhyming words typically occur at the end of lines (called an end rhyme), but they can also appear within the same line or in the middle of two different lines (called an internal rhyme).

Below are common rhyme schemes: Alternate rhyme (ABAB): Rhymes every other line and is common in ballads and quatrains (a four-line stanza). Enclosed rhyme (ABBA): Features one rhyming pair in the middle of another rhyming pair. Coupled rhyme (AABB): A pattern in which rhymes occur in pairs called couplets.

In the specific sense, two words rhyme if their final stressed vowel and all following sounds are identical; two lines of poetry rhyme if their final strong positions are rhyming words. Examples are sight and flight, deign and gain, madness and sadness, love and dove. In poetry, AABB is a rhyme scheme where the first two lines rhyme with each other, and the next two lines rhyme with each other. This pattern is known as a series of [rhyming couplets](#) and creates a rhythmic and musical quality, making poems using this scheme easy to remember. Often used in nursery rhymes, children's poetry, and ballads.

Perfect Rhyme, the typical example of rhyme, occurs if the words' final stressed vowel and all following sounds are identical. For example, bright and flight are perfect rhymes.

Poetry usually uses End Rhyme, the rhyming of the final syllables of a pair or group of lines.

A tercet is a stanza of poetry with three lines; it can be a single-stanza poem, or it can be a verse embedded in a larger poem. A tercet can have several rhyme schemes or might not have any lines of poetry that rhyme at all.

Rhyming words use the same sounds, called phonemes, to give speech and writing a pleasant appeal and to enhance memorability. Note that phonemes need not be spelled the same way to rhyme; they just need to sound the same. Some phonemes are spelled the same, but sound different because of pronunciation. Unlike in the AABB scheme where every two lines gives a form of completion and rhyme at their end, the ABAB scheme gives an equal stability effect while making the four lines sound like one group together.

<https://www.grammarly.com/blog/creative-writing/types-of-poetry/>

Examples:

#### **Down the Path**

Down the path I walked one day  
Sat beneath a small beech tree  
Watch the sunrise, a golden tone  
Let my morning thoughts take flight

#### **Down the Path**

Down the path I did tarry  
On my way to see Mary  
Slipped upon a stone  
Now, sit at home alone



## Featured Poet - Peter Kaczmarczyk



Photo: Lisa Kaczmarczyk

**Biography:** Peter Kaczmarczyk was raised in Massachusetts but was willing to leave the comfort of Red Sox country when he learned there were Dunkin' Donuts in Indiana. His writing is assisted by cats. They believe they can write better than him by walking across the keyboard. Sometimes they do. Peter's poetry has been included in over 90 journals and anthologies. He has also published three chapbooks: *Distant Yet Always Heard*, *The Scars Across My Thigh*, and *Could Have Gotten a Cat*. Peter is the co-creator of the Captain Janeway statue in Bloomington, Indiana.

### Dad's Last Snow

I can hardly remember what my father's face looked like  
as he sat in the hospital bed, cancer eating into his brain.  
I know he smiled some, was glad to see me as we made small talk  
and I shared pieces of my life, kept him up to date  
on the things that had changed, things that were the same.  
He had a window, and we paused our talk occasionally,  
looked out at the snow that fell steadily past streetlights,  
slowly covering up the cobblestoned streets below.

I don't remember the name of the hospital, though I can picture the outside  
that I approached, stomping my boots clean by the door,  
hoping someone inside spoke English at least enough  
to point me down the hallways to his room.  
His wife said they took great care of him there, right up until  
they decided there was no hope, at which point the doctors and nurses  
turned away, no longer seeing him as worth their time.

We still had hope then, when he came home for a few weeks  
to spend Christmas with the family that he had formed,

that had given his existence meaning in his life's later years.  
I had left by then, back to America, with my own wife and kids,  
my own responsibilities and worries, though always awaiting word  
of his quality of life and if cancer was in remission or had progressed.  
And every time his wife called, I would ask if it had snowed again.

I will always remember the snow, sparkling in the twilight,  
there to greet me as I headed out, beginning the walk  
from their home in Sceaux, through the narrow streets and  
distinctly French villages that rimmed the south of the city.  
It was rare to see so much snow in Paris in the early days of December.  
The flakes were fat, lit by all the Christmas lights, each alive,  
each unique, each bringing joy into my heart and peace into my soul.  
Dad's last snow, dusting my long flowing hair that I left uncovered,  
lifting my heart and carrying my thoughts away from creeping sadness and  
images of death.

Within a few days the snow would be gone.  
Within a few months my father as well.  
Both melted away to only images and memories.  
I think back to that day often with a touch of grief and a brief smile.  
The snow, the beauty, the quiet calm that enveloped me.  
I don't picture my father's body, frail and worn,  
my memories are of the journey to see him that one last time.  
How mother earth gave me what I needed,  
Snow that took on it's own life as dad's faded,  
alive in Christmas lights, a glimmering halo  
with which to frame the last memories of my father.



## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Tony Brewer -	1-3
Michael Brockley -	4-6
Maureen Brustkern -	7-9
Rupert Leander Chapman, III -	10-11
Mary A. Couch -	12-14
Mary Coulter -	15-17
Bill Cushing -	18-20
TAK Erzinger -	21-23
Michael Dwayne Grube -	24-26
Peter Kaczmarczyk -	27-29
JL Kato -	30-31
Michael La Bombarda -	32-34
David Lymanstall -	35-37
Martha McDaniel -	38-39
Bruce McRae -	40-42
Joanne Mellin -	43-44
Marlene Million -	45-47
Daniel J. Miltz -	48-49
Monira Islam Mira -	50
Yvonne Morris -	51-53
Lylanne Musselman -	54-56
Courtenay 'Court' Nold -	57-59
Lee Pennington -	60-62
Steven 'Todd' Pope -	63
Linette Rabsatt -	64-66
Heather Winner -	67-69

## **Tony Brewer**

### **All My Poems Have Cancer**

but not me  
not yet  
I have too many poems to read  
too many poems to edit  
& submit & publish  
or get rejected  
They're not done  
not giving up  
We talk about readings  
they need to cancel  
manuscripts they have  
to hand off  
We are running out of time  
here at the end  
or near to it  
in your 70s 60s 50s  
All my poems have cancer  
even younger than me  
consuming them slow  
but too fast for me  
This poem caught it at annual tests  
This poem found out at the ER  
3am writhing in pain  
curled fetal on a gurney  
I learn when  
we are typing quietly on computer  
we are talking calmly  
on the phone  
sometimes over beers  
they tell me  
I cried & he touched my hand  
and then I really cried  
All my poems have cancer  
afraid to write  
afraid to stop writing  
That's really the end, isn't it?  
journaling to keep a pen going  
working on last things  
I admire poets who can  
keep it together under pressure  
death camp notebooks

poems written while running  
out of oxygen  
It's why so many think  
hardship and trauma  
are necessary to make art  
they provide urgency  
we do this now  
or we never will  
All my poems have cancer  
brave thoughtful  
have worked through it already  
before telling anyone the news  
They are careful with me  
but a little glad I cried  
we are all carrying a lot  
& it's the last time  
we'll be together every time

### **Nature On Infinite Loop**

What I saw this summer  
won't blow your hair back  
but it can fit in a hell of a handbag  
Here's a piece of dream  
I woke up from – turned to nature  
and said let's get gone

First, some words of advice:  
Don't sign the waiver,  
and if they won't let you ride  
without signing a waiver  
do not get on that ride  
Let the traffic cone orange  
pylon wall of safety whiz by  
and get home  
With no construction site in sight  
avoid the lonesome roadside  
porta-potty and keep  
your hard hat on

Here endeth the sermon



My neighborhood backyard deer  
mama has a limp  
and her fawns are still spotted  
leaving divots in grass so tall  
the City brings me hate mail  
nailed Theses-like with invisible tape  
to my dirty gray vinyl siding

Thunderheads like skyscrapers  
can't catch a break  
It hadn't rained in a month  
and now hasn't stopped in weeks  
My back forty drowning in corn sweat

I saw underwear cast away  
into the street like a wet cotton  
tumbleweed  
rolling with truck traffic  
into the storm drain I claim as my own

from the jaded faded graffiti artist  
who last tagged it in The Before Time  
Tagged all of 'em in the 'hood  
EXALT ANTISI

Me too, my dude, me too  
I poke the iron grill with a shovel  
to keep the downstream intersection  
from flooding out  
The City built it  
several inches above grade  
I took pictures and wrote  
sternly worded emails  
because I'm one of those people now

Here endeth the dream

Hit rewind and we'll go again

### **The Motions We Are Going Through**

Dad was a soldier but he never shot anybody  
They teach you not to shoot everybody  
Strict rules & someone always watching  
after they give you a gun

Kids are hustled everywhere in groups  
to practice to prom to class to fire drill  
This time everyone crying  
going the wrong way  
Then no one hurries at the funerals  
& slow motion for days

Sometimes watching the clock  
waiting for the bell to ring  
the game to end the final score  
waiting for the bus to take  
them away to school  
waiting for news or names  
waiting for exhaustion  
to get something done

In the training they want  
you to remain calm  
No one really knows why  
despite the obvious visible reasons  
as if ballistics & money  
were soft science  
& no one has been fighting  
mad before

The lingo comes easily  
tactical tactile tactless  
describing monsters disguised  
not at all in plain sight  
thoughts wear a groove  
ritual individual grief  
borne on the collective

Sorrow strengthens  
but this does not galvanize  
pity is another moment lost  
the frequency is keening  
the alarm sounds  
like school bells  
lost in this moment  
all choice leads to fate  
Heaven in high-velocity air  
reason the sole survivor  
select from a short list of choices  
terrified & dutiful  
like the one with the gun



## **Michael Brockley**

**Mom,**

After you passed, I couldn't ask why the freshman from Gary rhapsodized about Jimi Hendrix while the freshman from Indianapolis only said no? What did my first date in a car mean by claiming she knew how to make love in the Christian way? What happened to the brunette who liked Buffalo Springfield? And the Rascals? Would you have warned me about talking too much? What did the Lumbee woman want when she whispered her perfume was Obsession? How should I write about a woman who doesn't want to appear in my poems? Why do I remember their birthdays?

## **An Ode to Reading**

I read The Mass of Brother Michel before the third grade. And small, square books about Wyatt Earp and Osceola. My mother let me read into the night, especially during vacations. National Geographic articles about ligers, Jonah Hex comic books, The Lives of the Saints. Two different summers devoted to reading the Bible, cluelessly slogging through the Table of Nations' genealogy in Genesis. Taking my time as I puzzled over David's psalms. As a seventh grader, I felt guilty while subversively working my way through Brave New World and 1984. As if I was preparing myself for a dangerous future.



## **Another Way to Sabotage a Date with a Homecoming Queen**

She answered customer questions about the aisle where Ames Department Store kept the goth Barbies. I delivered remaindered books and camouflage camp chairs to their respective departments. Call her Sheila. A fallen Catholic, like me. I coaxed her into a date to see *The Last Picture Show* over *Wings of Desire* at the Bijou. Sealed the deal with a side bribe to spring for a steak-and-potato dinner afterward. We stocked up on popcorn, M&MS, and Mr. Pibb. Chose seats midway up the theater floor. But Sheila walked out when a morose angel sulked through the tumbleweed-strewn streets of Anarene.

## **Maureen Brustkern**

### **Relational Reality for Seniors**

(A Sonnet)

I tried the online dating sites before  
women want an honest man who's  
kind  
while men request that skinny blonde  
allure  
of perfect bodies; women crave a mind

someone they can talk to share  
emotions  
go to dinner form a friendship fall in  
love  
men want admiration and devotion  
someone who will reinforce self-love

some women need a man who's better  
off  
that is one way I might still be bought  
men seek a gourmet cook who works  
her ass off  
a maid who earns her keep while  
looking hot

I switched from dating sites to  
volunteering  
in cancer wards for old men who need  
cheering

### **What I Miss Now That You're Dead**

is not your obsession with inspecting  
the dishwasher, insistence on  
reconfiguring every dish, insulting my  
efforts to follow  
your directions, adjusting each piece  
of cutlery until positioning knives  
gave me designs on what might  
transpire.

is not missing the magic moment  
when your shirts should have been  
hung from the dryer to avoid the hot  
iron you insisted I apply even when I  
couldn't discern any  
wrinkles imagining instead its impact  
on your skull.

is not militarily precise bed-making  
illustrated when you bounced your  
quarter and tore the sheet off insisting  
I redo  
each sloppy corner, alone, as you  
watched, correcting, which pushed me  
to consider enlisting, but I had aged  
out.

is not carefully crafted dinners I  
researched, gathered ingredients,  
chopped and sauteed, folded in, baked,  
steamed, sweated over to please your  
stubbornly sporadic palate that you  
then threw against walls, denigrated,  
claimed nearly poisoned you, until one  
finally did.

### **Navigating Ice Storms**

I feel the chill from across  
the room as you peel  
off the wet gloves, frozen muffler  
shed your dripping coat

Avoiding my pleading eyes  
mumbling a curt response  
to my attempt at brightness  
"How did it go?" I feel the slap  
of the biting frost in your voice  
words separated like ice cubes  
"Not well".

I cautiously approach  
to offer physical comfort  
I feel the cold surround you;  
your body closing inside itself

your arms stiff as stalactites  
guarding your secrets  
preventing any attempt  
to break the ice.

“Let it go”  
Your voice, muted, drawn

sends shivers through me  
“dinner ‘s on the table”, I say  
as I return to my seat  
warm tears hover  
behind hooded  
lids  
I slowly lift my fork.

### **Hovering**

Butterflies, like mothers  
flutter and fuss, hover over;  
proudly glow over loved ones  
success, worry over unstable,  
weedy invaders, delight in new  
growth, fly high in elation,  
float serenely, alight peacefully  
when flowers bud in sync,  
careen wildly, weep  
inconsolably amid broken  
petals, shriveled blossoms,  
promises lost.

Butterflies, like mothers  
admonish and advise their blooms;  
aflutter with affection  
concerned warnings  
of high winds, toxic fertilizer.  
Implore flowers to stand  
straight, flaunt beautiful  
blossoms, spread enticing  
scents to careful cultivators,  
seek sunshine, drink  
greedily, shield others  
graciously from wind.  
Fresh promise.

### **I can be Misled by Butterflies**

Into thinking I too am free  
my wide wings embrace  
loved ones, keep them safe

But security is not possible  
in this world of hate and lies  
gun money trumps safety  
Flitting off impossible  
the world at war with itself

raging testosterone and greed

Prosperity gospel mocking  
Jesus, Mohammed, Buddha  
saviors cocooned, abandoned,

Surely humanity can overcome,  
outwit, transform, save ourselves,  
our planet, our right to exist.

### **An Outing with My Granddaughter**

In the butterfly house  
we flit and flutter from  
tree to tree chasing another  
blue butterfly here  
yellow there you try



capturing them  
your arms reach high

Shiny sunshine colored hair  
laughing claret lips so fair  
flowing, glowing  
beauty unbound oblivious  
to people or sound  
stunning you and butterflies too  
in this moment hope abounds.

### **Butterfly Tea**

Two butterflies went out at noon  
the first alighting ordering tea  
one running late, flitting crazily  
unable to find her phone or keys  
or remember where they were  
meeting.

Butterfly brains in adult females  
an epidemic of Attention Deficit  
undiagnosed for years on end  
flitting, floating, fumbling for focus  
feigning a foothold, falling, fading,  
fearing failure.

We linger on the park bench  
watching butterflies flit by.  
Soft sunshine signals summer's end  
Her head rests on my shoulder.  
I gently stroke her silken hair.

She asks, "Grandma,  
can we stay this way always?"  
We sigh in unison.

## **Rupert Leander Chapman, III**

### **The Call of the Night**

I see the moon,  
The stars,  
The darkness  
Velvet soft  
The night-time calls to  
me  
Each branch on every  
tree a hand,  
Beckoning.  
The wind a voice, saying,  
“Come, for here you  
belong.”  
And I go,  
For here, I know,  
Lies my destiny;  
To walk alone,  
Like a cat,  
In the night.

### **Jeremiah**

How shall we judge these  
times  
Which seem to call forth  
Darker forces every hour  
Until tomorrow does not  
recognize  
The things we know  
today?  
Judge as you always  
judged,  
and seek for Gandalf,  
and for Aragorn,  
and listen to the words of  
one who says,  
‘My name is Jeremiah,  
and I come  
to tell you of the future.’

## **Epitaph and Obituary**

Here sat an  
Archaeologist,  
Locked in immortal  
combat  
With a row of pots;  
Until one day they came  
To dust him off and found  
Nothing beneath the dust.

### **For Pop**

(A Valediction Forbidding  
Mourning)

A blow too great for any  
heart to bear,  
A wound too deep for any  
words to speak,  
Has made of all my  
dreams a pail of air;  
No desert ever yet was  
quite so bleak.  
The best and greatest all  
must soon depart,  
And we are left who  
cannot scan their worth;  
What use at such a time  
is all my art?  
The compass of my life  
has lost its north.  
This much is true: And  
yet . . . , and yet . . .  
To turn his face to dark  
was not his way;  
To mourn from morn to  
morn and not to set  
His face toward the new,  
and warming, day;  
No blow could break his  
love of all he met,  
And darkness over him  
could hold no sway.  
Shall I forsake his  
strength for empty night,

Or turn, with him, and  
stride into the light?



Image: Pixabay

### **On the Underground**

Imperfect strangers  
seated side by side,  
standing together  
separately  
swaying over points,  
pretending isolation,  
utterly alone.

### **Timeslip**

Sometimes,  
When I was very young,  
My friend Zinjanthropus  
and I  
Would play  
At chasing the infant  
dinotherium.  
The veldt was greener  
then;  
But I was very old  
And weary of my search  
For mountains.  
Sometimes  
I dream that I am old,

And, like my father,  
Trapped within the world  
of 'work',  
Not free to play,  
But then,  
I wake  
And know that I am three  
...  
sometimes ...

### **The Badge of Vile Servitude and Mindless Conformity**

What is the point, then?  
Respectability.  
Class.  
Come in under the  
shadow  
Of this grey suit  
And I will show you  
status  
In a strip of cloth.  
How have we come to  
this?  
Obsession with the  
superfices.  
Form over content.  
Accidents over essence.  
Reason is vanished.  
A Jeffersonian nightmare  
"Mistah Kurtz - he dead."

### **Journey Out of Darkness**

I'm carrying stars in my  
satchel,  
For me and me alone,  
Leaving behind all the  
darkness I have known  
For a destination hidden  
in the mist,  
A future which I will be  
proud to own.

## **Mary A. Couch**

### **I won't go**

I won't go, and you can't make me  
It's not my time, leave me alone  
I need to go and see the sea  
before I journey to your home  
I'll smell the flowers, watch the bees  
or run barefoot through meadows green  
Enjoy the sun beneath the trees  
stroll on beaches with golden sheen  
Sing and dance beneath falling rain  
Take the less traveled road one day  
and help someone relieve their pain  
I won't go, so please let me stay

### **Thoughts on the Wing**

Morning comes, my thoughts become light  
White doves whose wings spread forth in flight  
Darkness of my mind slips away  
Sorrow of life does not hold sway

I'm a child again beneath rain  
Soak in the light, release the pain  
Find my joy amidst the sorrow  
Fly forth on dove wings tomorrow

### **Where is peace?**

Peace, you cry every day  
Man's greed lies in the way  
Wants are not needs you say  
Yet, men fight wars anyway

The world craves peace they say  
Still, nations fight each day  
Peace, you want will not stay  
till all mean, what they say

## **Rabbit Hole**

I've fallen into the rabbit hole  
where the dark consumes me.  
Its hands reach out  
pluck at my mind,  
jumble my thoughts.  
I feel the sides of the hole  
close around me.  
I become a ball within a maze.  
Hands grasp my head,  
push it to my knees.  
My mind screams  
at the images that torment me.  
My breath shallow, I shake with fear,  
feel as if I will explode.  
Then your voice calls me,  
I open my eyes, see a shaft of light.  
A hand reaches down, I grasp it,  
and I'm pulled back  
from the brink for another day.

## **Dimensional Rift**

Gone now, stardust drifting through gleaming rift  
Marble bench empty, waiter's journey starts  
Life begins anew within rupture's breach  
What was, gone now, what will be beckons forth

Waiters travel now into an unknown  
Dimensional rift leads them on new path  
Human form transforms becomes stardust  
Specks of light, twinkling in black cosmos

Travelers seeking worlds, new adventures  
Souls of light floating free, chains now broken  
No longer bound to form changeling flies free  
Becomes one with the universe, now lives

## **WINTER OF MY LIFE**

I watch butterfly snowflakes touch the earth  
encasing dark ground in crystal delight  
with a blanket of sparkling ivory mist.



Walk slowly along worn path to the woods,  
think how this day reminds me of my youth,  
or my favorite poem, the one by Frost.

The air chills me, and my breath becomes frost  
as my boots crunch through snowy covered earth.  
My mind slides back to memories of youth  
where walking this trail was a great delight  
amid the barren birch and maple woods  
adorn with a shimmering morning mist.

Even now, I can feel cold touch of that mist,  
and pull my jacket tight against its frost.  
My thoughts, silent notes, echo in these woods  
and descend as crystal snowflakes to earth.  
I sense old tree spirits smile in delight,  
a familiar feeling from days of youth.

I'm older now, no longer in my youth.  
My eyes are cloudy, caught within fine mist  
that cloaks my view, and takes away delight.  
I'm held tight in chilled grip of midnight frost,  
and sense the age of time I've spent on earth  
has devoured that child who adored these woods.

The morning seems dark now within the woods  
shadowing those carefree days of my youth.  
My boots are heavy tramping snowy earth  
through birch and maple trees shrouded in mist.  
It's hard to breathe, and my breath becomes frost  
which I no longer view with great delight.

It seems, I cannot stroll here in delight  
with those memories of snowy woods.  
I sense my time has come, and think of frost  
that now replaces my short span of youth.  
The new dawn arrives, displacing the mist,  
leaving behind a solemn ivory earth.

This snow-covered earth held childish delight,  
sheathed in soft silver mist amid the woods,  
there I've left my youth and voyaged on with frost.

## **Mary Coulter**

### **THE COUCH**

Two months ago, I hurt my hip.  
I couldn't work for three weeks.  
Physical therapy lasted four weeks.  
It worked, my hip healed,  
But now my back and neck hurts.  
Muscle relaxers and Tylenol dull the pain,  
But it lingers.  
X-rays show arthritis all throughout my neck and spine.  
Lying on the couch waiting to heal,  
I ruminate about my present predicament,  
And the prospects of my future.  
Being bipolar, I become easily depressed.  
Depression is more painful than my physical pain.  
The depression sinks in lower than my butt in these couch cushions.  
The pain is intense as it works down into my bruised soul.  
I flipped over, staring out the window,  
Grasping this couch like a life raft,  
Hoping the pain will subside.

### **INGENUITY**

My mom loved Cardinals.  
We leaned over the couch out of our big picture window,  
Waiting for them to fly into our big tree out front.  
After she died, I thought of them often.  
I lived in Michigan then, but now I live in Indiana,  
Where the cardinal is the State bird,  
Where I am reminded of them every day.  
I often think of those days on the couch,  
Where my mom tried to distract a hyper mind.  
Moms seem to know instinctually  
How to care for their children,  
With creative unusual ways.  
A psychiatrist once asked my mom,  
"What is a child's toy?"  
To which she responded, 'A flashlight.'  
The doctor said it was not a toy.  
But, for a poor mother, she had to use her acuity  
To excite eager minds.  
Today when my mind is not steady,  
I think of those Cardinals flying in to settle my worried mind.

## **CONTRAST**

Looking up  
The vastness of  
The universe  
Looking back down  
The urban waste  
Of the city  
Fill my being.  
Dirty streets  
Tall buildings dominate  
Sirens ring out  
Neon signs  
Streetlights  
Distract my senses.  
Drive to the country  
Laying on my car  
Watching the stars  
Twinkling  
Holding their space  
In the sky  
Leaves me breathless  
The sound of critters  
Scurrying the woods  
Heighten my awareness  
To a sharp clearness.  
Back at home  
Small crowded apartment  
Lay in my bed  
Staring at the ceiling fan  
Listening to the hum of the fridge  
Dullness sinks in.

## **ORANGES**

“Run! The farmer’s coming!”  
Our bare feet scatter out of the grove.  
It is early spring.  
The smell of fresh oranges abounds.  
On the other side of the trailer park  
was the Ocala National Forest that dominates over the highway between us.  
Altoona was so small that the road commission  
Put the “Welcome to Altoona,” signs a half mile down the road.  
The only things there were one small grocery store and one small trailer park  
and

The nearest gas station was miles away.  
Roaches ran the floors of our trailer.  
Busted screens let the flies and mosquitoes in.  
My brother combed the forest searching for lizards  
And they perched themselves on the curtain rods above us,  
Staring down on us eerily.  
At first my mom had no job.  
We ate oranges for weeks.  
When she finally got a job, she brought home groceries.  
I bit a potato chip, and my teeth were so sensitive from the citrus in the oranges,  
It felt like I was biting on aluminum foil.  
I am old now and reflect on those eight months in the trailer park on Michigan  
Street.  
All of us hungry kids, running the streets in bare feet and ripped blue jeans,  
Were wreaking havoc in the orange grove,  
And shared the solidarity we felt when we ran out of the orange grove when we  
heard,  
“Run, the farmer is coming.”

## **LOVE**

If you love  
You can't escape pain.  
It presses down  
It's the price we pay  
We drown.

## **A LUNE**

A writer stares at  
Plume and ink,  
Words resist their fate.

Words land on the page  
Forming thought,  
Seeking clarity.

An epiphany  
Exploding,  
Brings it all to life.

Creativity  
Brings it home,  
Poem is complete.

**Bill Cushing**

## **CUSQUEÑOS**

Up where the mountains  
curl like sleeping dragons,  
peaks piercing  
far above the clouds,  
in another world  
two miles  
above sea level  
sits the center  
of the Incan empire,  
Cusco, a pupute:  
bellybutton of the world.



(Cusco Cathedral by Cushing)

Like a crouching panther  
this place,  
all diagonal  
slopes, everything  
hard stone: boulders,  
smooth squares of grey granite  
the size of a room;  
cobblestones,  
loose ovals of softer pastels;  
and of course, interrupting  
the landscape, the weighted

masonry of churches  
with arches  
lifting statues  
promising spirituality  
but instead  
delivering conquest.

In the morning comes  
the hammering from the town square:  
a stonemason crouches amid  
rocks, boulders, and stones.  
His song rings out  
with each ping of the steel  
striking the rock  
he works on. Not far,  
the finisher chips  
discretely on the rough work,  
trimming the rock into shapes  
that could easily  
have come from a lathe.

Then there are the people,  
the cusqueños:  
trudging along  
the sloping roads and paths,  
they carry belongings  
or wares in the lliclla—  
colorful blankets sprouting  
babies, flowers, hay,  
or more stones,  
the wraps that  
wrap  
around stooping shoulders  
and seem to push the carriers  
into their own incline  
as they make  
their shuffling way  
up these narrow  
and steep  
streets  
while we tourists steep  
coca tea in our rooms,  
attempting to adjust  
to the heights.



At midnight  
we bolt awake, our bodies  
gulping air to catch breath;  
feeling a tingling  
in fingers,  
we drown in thin air.

The cusqueños,  
like the stones surrounding them,  
are squat, browned,  
with hearts enlarged  
and noses slightly widened:

equipment for the altitude.  
The old ones peer  
through occidental eyes  
cracked and peeling  
from age and  
knowledge,  
knowledge ancient  
and pure.

The look says,  
“Nokanchis ocmanta causanchis.”  
we will endure.”

## **TWO STAIRWAYS**

The first greets those who promenade  
through the foyer to a sunken

living room; its steps—wide with  
carpeted tread—ease beneath gilded panels

lined with portraits of staid patriarchs  
long dead. Bright red lips brush fair cheeks,

besitos de cultura alto,  
as these elegant guests parade

through the living room past a massive  
dining table and walls affixed

with innocuous ceramic buttons,  
doorbell fixtures to summon the help

from the kitchen, hiding a second staircase:  
steep, jagged, and above all concrete.

Servants—rough hands wrapped in skin darker  
than the mahogany furniture

they rub to a high shine—trudge between floors  
carrying the weight of meals, loads of laundry,

flutes of lemon water, and whispered curses,  
triggered by constant buzzing commands.

Meanwhile, quiet worms of hate burrow, deep  
yet imperceptible, into their hearts.

### **GUARIONEX'S DESCENDANTS DO THEIR JOB RIGHT**

When Spain's conquistadors landed  
in Puerto Rico,  
the Taino saw them as invincible gods. Then, three natives  
spotted a lone soldier at a river.

Using the scientific method,  
they overpowered and drowned him,  
letting them know  
the time to rebel was right.

### **ECCE HOMO**

Upon viewing "The Ascension of Christ"

Lips partially open, Jesus begs for us.  
Looking up through tears of blood,  
his eyes shimmer with the pain of his position  
as he rests one foot on the planet  
and rises, just barely, struggling up  
out of this niche in the rock  
in a chamber in Cusco's  
el Convento de Santa Catalina.  
Conceived and left  
by an unknown artist  
of the seventeenth century,  
Christ looks already bowed  
by the task of carrying our sins  
on sagging shoulders.  
Below him, on earth, Adam  
covers himself as he takes the fruit;  
there is no sign of the serpent.

## **TAK Erzinger**



Images by Erzinger

### **Language Lesson**

I will not become a full stop,  
locked in the end of an orderly sentence  
I am a comma, better yet a question mark.

A life wide open, full of possibilities  
even with the interruptions  
begging for answers or left open-ended.

Just ask what I've seen, it's a run-on  
I'll tell you:

only if you believe in miracles,  
will maybe you experience one.



## **Nomad**

My tongue is a broken compass needle  
confusing me about places  
I'd once known as home

and identity, the dormant language  
buried hidden in my temporal lobe.  
In dreams, I've caressed the fringe of Spanish

its aroma rising to greet my imagination  
una cocina with no cook, but a dish -  
a meal, conjured from that place of comfort

I can't return to. I awaken  
and let my mouth move, mumbling words  
those around me don't understand.



### **Bridge**

My body was seizing up  
but my head was clear  
and I wondered if the arthritis  
would win out this time—  
our bed still warm from sleep  
song from outside the window  
of birds lingering after a season  
in a place too small for  
a centre, just of trees, hills—nature  
where despite this pain  
each finger, arm, toe, foot, leg a bridge  
where love connects me to you.  
From the kitchen, I see a light  
it fills the dark space, a rescue signal  
I find you carrying coffee  
ready to cross over to me.

## **Michael Grube**

### **The Coffee's Stain**

Coffee stains on a blank page  
tell more a story of moral pain  
than a letter to remember why we stay awake-  
the brew in December is the season of flakes,  
so the drink is to keep us warm  
with memories to make.  
So don't break and bend to the will of the end,  
because life is more than the emotional trend.  
And we tend to sway towards the easy way,  
being lifeless without friends is too common a thing,  
especially when our instinct to think survivability-  
and that's why we crave the drink that keeps us awake.  
For the ability to think, not shrink  
to our turmoil of restless chains  
of the same pain; that's far too grave.  
So here in this world where we're forced to behave,  
we all become slaves to the coffee's stain-  
its perfect circle, the same as the sun,  
the beautiful aroma that fills our lungs,  
to get us through til spring has sprung.  
In the same lungs in that beautiful season  
the flowers have given us a beautiful meaning.  
We step outside and then we breathe in,  
and finally we see that we're still breathing.



## **Darkness's Night Light**

You may not know me, but I do know you.  
I've seen the depths of dark consume many a poet,  
and many a room. Many a thing  
has spelled certain doom.  
I've touched every wall, every cranny and nook;  
I've been the atlas upon which you've read your book.  
And yet when days are bright and night is gone,  
you steal my light before the dawn.  
Oh please, just once, let me stay.  
Let me see a face without dismay.  
Let me know more of you  
than what you hide in this room.  
Let me see the bright display  
of all the things illuminated by my face.  
Yes, I will stay and fight your night-  
but I can't be the only thing this bright.

## **The Trees Are My Home**

Let the gardens take me  
between their foliage and fractured light.  
Let me linger like morning dew in spring,  
clinging to the trembling leaf,  
a quiet witness to the hours.  
And so, I am undone.  
The deciduous trees carve mercy into my soul,  
as though reckoning itself has opened somber eyes  
and craves to taste the reasons I hide today.  
Sepulcher, leave me where I may lay.  
Let the leaves cradle me in their whispered hymns,  
while the trees sway in the breeze,  
bowing their heads to me in solidarity.  
Bear the burden of my silent screams.  
The hollow wind strikes me again,  
but mercy knows my name.  
So please, I plead, rise once more.  
Let its lament braid itself into the dusk.  
You cannot shake me from this sanctuary-  
the sacred ruin of earth and branch.  
You cannot take me, not when the roots themselves bind me fast,  
not when I am wrapped in the breath of ancient things.

**Peter Kaczmarczyk**

**Costumes** (Prev. pub'd: 'Prosetrics Reflections' and 'The Scars Across My Thigh')

Untouched is the closet where you used to lay  
When there was nothing more to say

It holds your costumes  
The blue pants suit that would lie for you  
Telling the world "I'm okay today"

The ruffled red skirt for when you were ready  
To make believe and go out and play

The dark flowing dress that swept everything away  
I always thought it smelled just a little like decay

**Fitted Sheets** (Prev. pub'd: 'The Scars Across My Thigh', Alien Buddha Press)

Trying to love me  
Is like trying to fold a fitted sheet  
Trying to get a pill down the throat  
Of the feral cat that hasn't yet learned  
How to love you back  
Trying to love me  
Is like trying to catch the ember  
That the wind keeps pulling higher into the sky  
Trying to hold the dream, so vivid in the night  
Now blotted out in the light of day  
Trying to love me  
Is like submitting to the lash  
Where pain and pleasure blend together  
But leave behind only scars

**Snapshots** (Prev. pub'd: 'The Scars Across My Thigh', Alien Buddha Press)

You shared yourself only  
in snapshots, still lives and bullet points  
that you'd mix and match in different contexts,  
present in ever shifting ways.

Sometimes you'd dress in black,  
not to be goth but to make us wonder

if your choice of color was just the latest fashion  
or a reflection of your soul.

Somedays you were white, flowing wispy and pale,  
and then you would sing,  
marvelous tones that drifted and soared,  
touching multitudes of shades and hues.

We loved you no matter,  
as you dealt yourself out like cards,  
each one a piece of you.  
We only wanting understanding  
when you were giving none away.

One last snapshot, a solitary stone,  
surrounded by a shimmering aura that sparkled,  
played hide and seek around our eyes,  
as they filled up with tears.

**Who Wants to Live Forever** (Prev. pub'd: 'The Scars Across My Thigh', Alien Buddha Press)

Steven was always on the edge  
He would push the pedal and pick fights  
Mix more and more drugs  
Into just the right cocktail  
Adults would roll their eyes  
And mutter how kids today  
All thought they were immortal  
That no matter what they did  
They thought they would come to no harm  
And they hoped Steven didn't learn he was wrong  
Before adulthood came to sweep him away

Steven would always drive too fast  
In the hand-me-down Hyundai that had been his brothers  
He liked to boast that the tiny silver car  
Was where his virginity was lost  
Cast aside in the dark of night  
The story he never told  
Only a few of us know  
Was that it was also what he used  
To drive Susan to her back-alley abortion  
That went so horribly wrong

A terrible price to pay for being  
Unable to face the consequences of reckless living  
She was hardly missed, folks just saying  
She was here one day and then one day gone  
An unstable girl who just wandered along

People never understood  
Steven didn't want to live forever  
It was not fearlessness that fed him  
It was terror and a never-ending sadness  
A life that had never known joy  
He prayed that he might miss a turn  
The thrill of living long gone  
He didn't think he would live forever  
He feared living another day  
So he pushed for death with reckless abandon  
Trying to escape from living  
In a present filled with pain and despair  
And a future that would know no other way of being

**Moonlight on the Lawn** (Prev. pub'd: 'The Scars Across My Thigh', Alien Buddha Press)

I would watch you sleep, see you turn,  
knowing you imagined yourself on the lawn  
in moonlight that swept past the clouds  
as you balanced on your toes.  
The stars would spin in your eyes  
as you slowly turned,  
reaching as high as the earth would let you  
till you came crashing down,  
returning to our shared world.

I'd gently caress as you slowly woke,  
nothing more I could do as you returned  
to a body broken, and despite my touch, deeply alone.  
A hint of tears would stain your cheek,  
holding a glimpse of the moonlight in them.  
You said you loved me but I knew  
all you wanted was to be back  
in the moonlight on the lawn.

**JL Kato**

**A Frozen Embrace**

Snow, that jealous lover,  
seeks to smother  
the sun-kissed skin of summer.  
She claims my attention  
no other obliterator.  
A possessive bully, fully obsessive,  
like no other oppressor,  
she shares her solitude  
with me, and no others,  
whom she freezes out.  
In winter, with her,  
I am yet alone.  
I'm hoping for the thaw,  
when her hold loosens,  
and her mind strays  
to strangers in heat.  
I pray that she will  
abandon me.



## **Paddling Your Own Canoe**

(Art Fair at Sarah T. Bolton Park, Sept. 23, 2023)

The ghost of the poet Sarah Bolton  
commands her fellow artists:  
“Paddle your own canoe.”  
On the fields of her beloved Beech Bank,  
a woman crochets in the shade,  
a hand-made tribute to the one she loves.

The plein-air painter captures  
the changing colors of leaves  
rustling above her canvas.

A young boy’s barefoot feel  
of soles slapping sand inspires  
a dance beneath the volleyball net.  
Musicians meticulously weave  
their songs through the gaps  
of each merchant tent,  
                    which that morning popped up  
                    like toadstools in the mist.

Gold sequins glisten in the grass  
presumptuous evidence, perhaps,  
of a gilded gown or sash.  
No-see-ums twirl and land in sight  
of black-eyed Susans. They overlook  
the creek, which slowly sculpts the earth.  
So, even creatures of the Creator  
can create. We dip our oars in water.  
With every stroke, we celebrate the wake.

## **Michael La Bombarda**

### **NO. 6 TRAIN**

You were wearing a short skirt,  
And rightly squeezed  
Your legs closed  
As you sat before me.  
Why didn't you think  
Of the embarrassment  
You might experience  
Before you put  
On your skirt?  
Or perhaps it's no  
Embarrassment.  
Is it fair to tease me?  
To withhold from view  
A sacrosanct region,  
A potential birthplace  
Of my daughter or son,  
If we were to know  
Each other more intimately?  
Yet by crossing your legs  
You prevent an instinctual glance,  
A natural curiosity.  
If you ever see me on the subway  
Again, please do not sit before me  
If you are wearing a short skirt  
Revealing your well-toned thighs?

### **FOR THOSE WHO DIED CHASING A DREAM**

The Village?  
For all its hype  
It's just another  
Small town  
Filled with people,  
And though they say  
It takes a village  
To raise a child,  
I say  
It takes a village  
To destroy one too.

## **YOU**

I've accepted you  
Are not the one  
I want, because  
I've accepted that  
You are your own person,  
So I could never have you,  
Nor do I want to  
At this stage of my life,  
Though it's hard  
Accepting that you  
Were never meant  
To be had, but  
Only to raise a family,  
And I being too old,  
Practically speaking,  
To have children,  
Must recollect  
The moments  
We've had with each other.  
See, no strings attached.  
After all,  
We're not puppets.

## **DAYDREAMING**

I used to imagine myself  
On an ocean liner  
Sailing to foreign ports  
And on deck  
Of this ocean liner  
I would play shuffleboard  
Or lie in a large lounge chair  
Reading a Zane Grey novel  
And my parents,  
Who were sitting beside me,  
I would keep close to me  
Well into my adult life,  
So we could cruise together  
And be one

Away from the Italian and Haitian  
relatives  
That seemed to loosen the ties  
Of this nuclear family,  
Except at sea,  
Or so I daydreamed as a kid  
That other people  
Were pulling my mother and father  
Away from themselves  
And me too.  
Now I'm a bird  
Flying over an ocean liner in my life  
Looking for land to build a nest  
And still dreaming.

## **COHABITATION**

Takes place in my mind,  
Though I have another set of towels  
For a guest.  
I once told a woman  
She could stay in my apartment  
While I spent two weeks  
Visiting my father,  
Who was dying of cancer  
In southern California.  
When I came back  
It was clear  
She had no intention  
Of moving out.  
Now my toothbrush and razor  
Were surrounded by myriads  
Of bath and beauty products  
That gave a pleasant scent  
To my bathroom,  
But I couldn't shake  
The claustrophobia  
I was feeling  
In my own apartment.  
I asked her to leave,  
A regret now,  
But not then.  
Another woman,  
Several months later,  
Needed a place to stay,  
And we even talked about marriage,  
But she decided to go back  
To California,  
Where she was from.  
If you think I'm a womanizer,  
Think again,  
Because all my affairs  
Take place in my mind,  
As if I were at the center  
Of all human endeavors.

**David Lymanstall**

**First Snow**

early winter snow  
from gray skies falls silently  
on to pine branches

which kindly accept  
the weight of the white coat  
that hides green needles

branches bowing now  
to welcome the cold season  
and the time of rest

**Winter Wind**

the soft winter wind  
quietly shares its pathway,  
showing itself now,

giving voice to pines  
whose needles whisper to me  
with each gust of air,

guiding the snowflakes  
into sweet swirling dances,  
a winter ballet.

## **Evening Lights**

On a late summer night, in a cool damp  
garden, I am greeted by a dancing troupe  
of glowing fireflies who, in choreographed  
delight, seem happy that I have come to sit,  
to share this evening with them  
and a chorus of crickets.

The fireflies, chaotically blinking  
their yellow-green abdomen lights  
seem to welcome me and ask  
where have you been?

My curious mind at one time knew  
how their wonderful light came to be,  
a chemical reaction of some sort?  
But tonight, I only care that it is,  
that my fading garden is lit  
by marvelous, flying lanterns.

## **The Dance to Earth**

With brilliant angled light  
and shortened days,  
with cool nights  
stretching further  
over the arc of the day,  
the leaves take notice.  
Their work is done,  
it's time to clock out,  
put on the brilliant  
blush of orange and red  
and pirouette in the  
graceful dance to earth.

## **Martha McDaniel**

### **Peace**

Long waited for peace.  
It's been a moment since they last felt this peace,  
because there's no hustle and bustle,  
no need to be on edge.

No responsibility, only self-love  
given to themselves.  
Oh, how they long for this.

Anxiety creeps up through their ribs,  
putting pressure on their lungs.  
Stop, and breathe—deep breaths—  
until their stomach expands like a balloon.  
Hold for 4 seconds... and exhale.

Imagine a dam breaking  
and all their negative thoughts rushing out.  
Repeat until they feel better.

Examine why they haven't  
felt this peaceful for so long.  
Fear of getting in trouble.  
Fear of not doing enough.  
Could it be the self-sabotage  
they were programmed to believe in?

Peace surrounds them.  
At least for a moment,  
they can find peace  
when they love themselves.



## **Your words are like**

Your words are like demons  
That have gathered upon the mountain of chaos  
Within my mind.  
They have been patiently waiting for this day.  
They are gathering together,  
Each having their own unique story,  
Each having their own little personality,  
Trying to control me. They, too, used your words.

Your words are like the Russian River—  
Sounding so sweet and calm.  
Oh, how I wish I could grab a hold,  
But fear has me asking questions.  
You say relax, have some fun—  
Fun comes when I know I am safe in my surroundings.

Your words echo my past.  
They throw me back into a physical time  
Where I had no control.  
They, too, used your words.

Your words are like an invisible knife stabbing me  
Back years ago.  
But they didn't know their words helped me grow.

Your words are like a shower in the springtime,  
Cleansing the soul of any doubt that may be lingering,  
While the positive words start peeking out over the mountaintops.

Using your words is a  
Power I have never known,  
And the growth turns into blossoming—  
Into a beautiful rose.

## **Bruce McRae**

### **The Fall of Summer**

Summer ends with consonants and sighs.  
Summer follows the path set out before it,  
a change of attitude, a chance of weather,  
suns and nebulae huddled in conspiracy,  
the lovers of essences still in their beds,  
in chrysalis, in equilibrium.

Autumn begins another follow-on sentence,  
its anecdote of summer's culpabilities,  
a tract on faith and its futility,  
how hope is a wishful notion  
in the face of overwhelming odds.

Summer ends, as all things end,  
vernal rebound, equatorial counterpoint,  
whatever topical retort comes to mind.  
It finishes with spiders and a house of cards.  
With an expulsion of breath.  
The sea knows this, the pines know too.  
You can't fall far for long.  
All this wide Earth's bounty –  
you can't take it with you.

## **A Song in September**

Pax Augusta, summer done in  
by planet-tilt, by starry procession.  
Summer fading like a farmer's tan.  
In the same way civilizations rise then fall,  
cities abandoned to distress and ruin,  
creeping vines redressing cultural sprawl,  
former gardens under thirteen inches of dirty water.

Summer, with a wound in its side.  
Written off as natural progression,  
disposable and beyond care or repair.  
Summers past a tendered olive orchard.  
Summers past like an old man in a chair.  
He wonders how he came to be there.  
If he'll live through winter.

## **The Golden Path**

Going into winter as one would enter a darkened room,  
the simplest precepts becoming needlessly complicated,  
my reasoning on furlough, my common sense uncommonly dulled.

It's an icy morning here – that's how I begin my letter.  
Dear anonymous, every day I grow less among the more.  
I am defined by a lack of definition.  
Bone-tarnished and blood-weary, but ticking over,  
the priest-black night has heard our confession  
and a cloth-eared god begrudgingly forgiven us.

So now we continue along the Golden Path,  
that stippled stretch of country lane laid out before us.  
Simple enough. Just follow the enclosed instructions.  
What the heart tells us. What the soul already knows.

**Joanne Mellin**

**THE REPLACEMENT**

He's wild and rambunctious,  
his white hair is everywhere.  
No more cats! I said  
after my Siamese died —  
that lasted three weeks.

This one  
won't ride around on my shoulder,  
won't let me brush him  
or cut his toenails,  
shreds the leaves of my Weeping Fig.  
My carpets are already coated  
from his copious shedding.

He plays with his water,  
tips over the bowl  
with a dainty white paw,  
thinks it's cute —  
I can't wait till he's old.

But he had such a doleful,  
pleading look at the Humane Society,  
and does make me laugh  
when he plays with  
Cat-Dancer or Wooly Bully.

And every once in a while  
when he's worn himself out,  
he sleeps on the desk by the window  
where his plush white fur turns to  
silver in the sun,  
and last night, for the first time,  
he dozed sweetly in my lap,  
just as if he belonged.

## **NOBODY'S MOTHER**

Folding laundry this morning.  
I think of Mother in St. Louis,  
1949, summer,  
doing her ironing  
while she listened to the Cardinals on the radio.

I helped her dig potatoes  
in the garden,  
made her mad when I wore  
my black patent leather shoes  
out to play.

She'd sit behind me braiding my hair,  
and I'd have her all to myself  
until the rubber bands at the end.

Now, I plant Sugar-Snap Peas,  
wear Birkenstocks,  
watch the Red Sox on TV.  
The cat pesters me for attention,  
and when I brush him  
he has me all to himself.

He's just a big baby.

**Marlene Million**

**A Very Windy Day** (after Psalm 147:18 KJV)

“He sendeth out His word and melteth them,  
He causeseth His wind to blow. . .”

Spirit-wind whispers through tall trees  
on this warm and wonderful day.  
As hanging begonia plants swirl,  
sun-catcher chime dances ballet.

American flag waves faithful,  
fluttering, as wild winds wander.  
His Spirit whirls amid branches;  
life renewed, His Word, I ponder.

**Waterfalls** (after Psalm 42:7 NIV)

“Deep calls to deep in the roar of Your waterfalls.”

The beauty of a waterfall  
is a moment loveliness flows.  
With sparkling water cascading,  
sun-bright diamonds falling below.

God’s abundant blessings whisper  
amid smooth rushing rhythm’s sound.  
Listen with amazing pleasure,  
as His graceful mercies abound.



## **Field of Musing\***

What if. . .

I was nestled inside jeweled gold,  
habitat of hedge and sky?  
What inspiring awe, flourishing  
before my eyes, as thoughts float among thee

I am entwined within fellowship  
of flowers, and Elysian Field  
of milk and honey. I am enchanted  
in fairytale reverie, like lovely Belle.

Soft breezes swirl, music mingles on air,  
delicate yellow petals catch words drifting  
above cloud-cushioned sky. I am imbibed  
with rapture, as your sweet scent lingers!

Don't want my fantasy to fade. I'm engaged  
amid your bower of loveliness, notebook,  
pen in hand. I'm primed, meditating  
your timeless beauty, muse of mine. . .

never to awaken!

\*After Monet's "Field of Yellow Irises at Giverny," 1887. Previously published in her Anthology "Poetic Impressions"

## **Daniel J. Miltz**

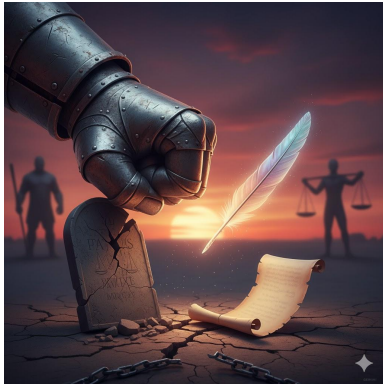
### **Danny Jack**

Danny Jack --back in the day  
Was a 'rebel with a cause' display  
He had an entourage of superstars  
He would ride around town in muscle cars  
Go from one party to the next  
Drinking and picking up chicks for sex  
He had a great job  
Making tons of money, tiptop  
But he was living the wild life, nonstop  
He was full of energy and rage  
A self-glorifying big shot on stage  
Thinking he belonged in every place  
For a few years, he went through a phase  
With a big messianic ego embrace  
One day, he finally made a forecast  
Go 'west, young man, go west'  
The result --a new conquest

## **Bohemian Spirit**

All thru the 1970's  
In Venice Beach  
My days were a kaleidoscope  
Of colors and characters  
Throngs of artists, poets  
Wanderers, drifters, nomads  
Gypsies and vagabonds  
Each leaving their mark  
On the sandy canvas  
Of our bohemian haven  
The salty breeze  
Carried whispers of dreams  
And despair, mingling with  
The rhythm of the waves  
Surfers weaved through  
As the sun set over the Pacific  
We danced under the stars  
Drunk on freedom  
And the promise of endless summers  
Venice Beach, a place where reality  
And fantasy melded together  
In a timeless embrace

**Monira Islam Mira**



(Image created by Mira)

### **Might Against Right**

Everyone holds their own point of view.  
Each feels justified in what they perceive.  
Yet truth often fails to prevail,  
As power is used to silence what is right.

**Yvonne Morris**

**You painted the desert canyon**

You painted the desert canyon  
You placed a lone bear in the heart of the canyon  
You hung the painting on the landing where I slept

I often think of that painting  
The only one you completed  
The painting tried to tell me something about you

I wonder if you knew how I felt about that bear  
That I thought you were the bear  
How you bewitched me, Mother

Tell me how the moon sings alone, cratered from its blanket  
How the bear walks solitary among the stars  
How the desert now blooms in the dark

Do you remember the echo of my voice in the canyon  
How the paint smelled fresh on the canvas  
How you laid down layers beyond color

Will you find your way through the canyon once more  
Recognize my watchful eyes tracking your approach  
Greet me with a cuff of your desert-warmed paw

I haven't seen your painting in years  
Its copper hues as the elements pale  
Now we will trace its ascent from the valley

(Prev. Pub'd: Mother was a Sweater Girl, The Heartland Review Press)

## **Ghost Writer**

There never was a world for him  
except for the one he wrote,  
and writing it, he lived.

Now, in her absence, he most  
feels her presence, even misses  
her smile-stained coffee cup.

He scans the stars patiently  
buttoned to the sky—  
considers renaming the moon.

He tells himself that he will  
deny each thought that surfaces  
to mend this wordless night.

He tells himself that he will  
swallow any miracle of bread  
like a mouthful of bubbles.

He tells himself that he will blind  
the white stare within, find a way  
to follow her unbearable prayer.

(Prev. Pub'd: Mother was a Sweater Girl, The Heartland Review Press)

## **Room to Remodel**

Never a good time to remodel, but the need sticks in this closet door, that splattered sill and sad shade of a once-warm wall in a bare room, an extra bedroom empty until the full-blast energy fresh choruses of two workers singing over the radio to Queen's "Fat-Bottomed Girls" booms through the open window, voices rising above thundering hammers, beyond the neighbor's baying dogs. Scraping and slapping, rock anthems and paint rollers follow the afternoon sun until the job dwindles down toward dinner time and cleaning up. Hurry up, Lazy Eye, Ponytail calls. I'm faster 'n you, Crazy Hair, Lazy Eye replies. I smile and nod as the duo sidles out. Then the looking over, the sweeping. The silence after. They've left more than enough room.

(Prev. Pub'd: Busy Being Eve, Bass Clef Books)

## **Lylanne Musselman**

### **Too Much Snow**

The older I get, the more I dislike snow.  
Yet, living through the Blizzard of '78  
is a favorite memory. I was skeptical  
when I saw Blizzard Warning pop up  
in the bottom of the TV screen.  
Blizzards don't happen in Indiana.

A new mom with a 9-month-old baby,  
my husband was uncharacteristically  
working out of town, and I worried  
he wouldn't make it back. As the snow  
started piling up that night, he did.  
There was comfort in our little family  
being together in our small home.

Snow kept falling at a pace  
we'd never seen. A day later  
I was shocked into stopping neighbor boys  
from walking on top of my husband's  
prized '69 Corvette convertible, covered  
by a major snow drift.

When the snow finally stopped,  
snow drifts reached rooftops  
of houses. It was weeks before  
we were able to travel on highways.  
When we did, we drove through snow  
tunnels, orange flags tied  
to car antennas so others knew  
another car was coming through.



## **Singing to the Stars**

When I was little, I sang to the stars: Twinkle, twinkle, little star  
how I wonder what you are...are you the eyes of angels,  
gazing down upon us all?

I used the stars as an excuse to go for walks with boys  
before we could drive. We'd hold hands, we'd walk through neighborhoods,  
look up to the Milky Way, the stars illuminating young romance.

Divorced, middle-aged, and dating again, I found myself  
going places with men where we could stargaze. Once looking  
for the Big Dipper and Polaris, an odd one said he came from Pluto.

For sixteen years I lived in big cities, mostly alone,  
where streetlights dimmed my attention of the stars above.  
I became reacquainted with the starry sky again when I moved  
back to my rural hometown as mom's caregiver.

A close friend believed when we die that our souls travel –  
he said it's our energy that fuels the stars.

Now, that friend is dead as are many others: My parents, grandparents,  
aunts and uncles, cousins and beloved pets no longer share this earth.

On clear nights, I look to the heavens and sing: Twinkle, twinkle, little stars...  
I take comfort in wondering who you are....

## **Persistent Purple**

I snuck into my first-grade desk,  
a plastic purple hen,  
to feel safe away from home.  
In third grade I used shades of purple  
in my abstract painting of a cat that won  
my initial first place art award.  
It was the color of my favorite hat  
in junior high. I learned  
Dad received a Purple Heart in Korea.

In my sophomore art class,  
Mrs. Johnson challenged me  
to give purple a voice.  
It was the guy in the purple Gremlin  
who stirred my heart, red, then blue.  
My royal purple bedroom walls and my  
flashy purple and white floral comforter  
kept me cozy as I lied for hours listening  
to Elton John, Carly Simon, and Carole King.

Prince serenaded my early adulthood  
with Purple Rain. As my art matured  
my paintings were adorned with  
purple ribbons. In later years, purple  
became symbolic for dementia awareness,  
the dreaded disease Mom suffered from,  
giving us difficult and stolen years.

These days, I scribble words with purple  
gel pens as poems bloom on the page.  
I take my purple Yeti to classes as I teach,  
a container of comfort as I sip coffee  
between creative writing prompts.  
Purple gets me through thick and thin.

## **Courtenay 'Court' Nold**

### **Pandora**

silence is her prison  
where no one listens for her cries  
her whispers drip crimson upon the scrolls

words forming through feathered quill

crafted in clay by the Gods...formed into the first woman  
created as a torment to humanity  
she opened the pithos\*, bound by curiosity, and finally released hope

hope's voice had echoed from within the jar

as words from the deities  
trembled loud in her ears  
blinking her eyes, first darkness then light

the bringer of hope desperately seeking to understand

through life's balance of good...of bad  
she looks to the stars when she is able  
her God's tapestry interwoven there

\*Pithos - Jar

### **Forbidden**

Maintaining purity and accepting obscurity, invisible breath under stifling mask.  
An intricately constructed web of modesty spun of tender filaments.  
I wisps of stillness, faintly murmured sighs...such slight transformations.

Hesitant steps, a crescendo playing an escort to agony.  
Moral's bend and rupture, leaving footprints and concentric circles in their wake.  
Spiders wrap prey in tenebrosity, rendering life insignificant, muted, defenseless.

Seclusion is a dissection, portion by painful portion.  
Removing human existence from the heart, mind, body and soul.  
The psyche is an unbalanced scale.

Clenched fists broadcast internal apprehension.  
Tucked away from the view of so many prying eyes, an uncomprehending vision.  
A thousand-yard stare and muffled fears held deep.

No protection from others, the secrets stowed in shallow expectations currents.  
An outfit woven with threadbare stitches.  
Outward expression voiceless...internally echoed screams and indifferent ears.

No way to loosen the woven threads nor rend forced joining's unspoken path.  
Forever walking behind, the depths of division remain suspended in the air.  
Shattered reconstruction held together within the grip of interlaced desolation.

### **In Truth**

Angels with invisible wings dwell here, fighting for aspiration and understanding.  
With so many lost souls searching for strength, love, and comfort once astray.  
Pain radiates through heavenly bodies, leaving them lost, shaken, but hopeful.  
To earn their wings and take a final glance from above in the mid-born sky.  
Those wings lift them to rejoin the angels above, where they, in truth, belong.

### **On My Mind**

for those already gone...especially my Mom...  
and those in the shadow of going too  
I miss what she meant to me  
I miss what, and who, she could have been  
if you want to...call me crazy  
she's everywhere  
she's everyone I might have been  
but my very own path I chose  
be it spent upon my toes  
pink satin ribbons fighting for light  
peeking out from ground-up resin and hard floor scuffs  
or on-stage stirring the hearts of the audience  
muscle memory still stirs within whenever I see a dance  
scriptwriters baring their deepest lives and wares  
they levitate with desperation  
like worn-out shoes and laces  
hung from the wires overhead  
on the heartstrings and minds of the audience  
at least of those aware

## **When I was Young**

I didn't understand a lot of things when I was young, but one particular memory stands out. When I was attending Sunday School, afterwards my Grandmother would take me to a large room with lots of wooden seats. We walked down the aisle to the front, and I stopped dead in my tracks...a sight filled my vision that I didn't understand. There in the center at the front was a large cross with a very detailed Jesus, including what looked like blood dripping from his wounds... reminding of my own blood that flowed when I hurt myself. My Grandmother pulled me closer to the front, her grip unescapable. I burst into tears because I didn't understand how anyone could do that to another person. My 'vision' of Jesus was as someone still alive, guiding my heart and soul to care about others and to try my best to be good. My tears matched the tears on his cheeks, and I was filled with sadness and disappointment. I was upset that I had been led to this awful image and was then expected to just stand there and take it in. This is the reason that, to this day, I can't stand rosaries that bear a similar image on those tiny crosses.

I misunderstood  
Plastic rosary in hand  
Belief versus life

## **My Grandfather**

I was stationed in the area, and had the distinct honor to visit the USS Arizona Memorial. My Grandfather, Albert Weaver, a Commander who served in WWII in the South Pacific, mainly onboard submarines. This was my opportunity to connect with him and honor his service, as well as the service of all those lost, even though he wasn't one of those Arizona Sailors. I waited until the memorial was empty. The whole time I was in there, I felt the presence of those who served on the Arizona, and other ships close-by, who didn't survive. I was already in tears, but was finally alone with my thoughts. I squared off, facing the back wall in my uniform, and held my salute much longer than usual, tears still dampening my cheeks. The silence boomed in my ears alongside my heartbeat...as I feel the ghosts around me, including my Grandfather, holding their salutes alongside. I finally lowered my salute and wiped away my tears before facing the world again. The only other time I felt his Grandfathers presence so strongly was when I was rehearsing a play I was part of, in the role of a teenaged ballerina. At one point during rehearsal I was standing near the woman playing my Grandmother and reading our lines. In a silent moment I felt, and saw, my Grandfather standing right next to me...and feeling so very real. I felt so honored and respected.

Departure yielding  
Ghosts rippling waters deep  
Found their home akin

**Lee Pennington - Photos by same**



**WATER BENDS**

dare I trust the wind  
silently blows this way  
let the heart bend  
feel the body sway

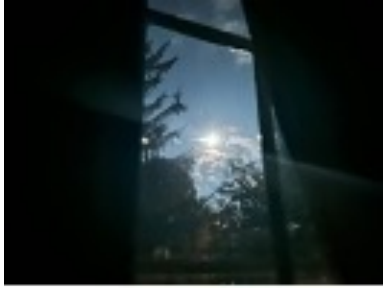
over in the corner  
shadow dances bright  
how can I warn her  
time is taking flight

water bends in circles  
on a still night lake  
a fish now encircles  
about to water break

hold me if you will  
take me if you can  
precious is the thrill  
your hair my only fan

let night beast ramble  
holy dark abide  
nothing left to gamble  
but your secret pride

if you search for roses  
and find clone instead  
love surely supposes  
a softer lovers bed



## **SHINY COMES AND GOES**

I have no fear of love nor ways of open dark  
everyplace I have been I hear song of lark  
never in time of night do I run away  
even brightest light I calmly choose to stay  
often when pale wind blows a music note high  
larger birds so far away look tiny in the sky  
brave is not some small thing nothing left to lose  
but little bits and pieces how the way we choose  
sometimes rhinestone chips flash in our eyes  
turn finally dark with age before we realize  
when all the shiny comes and goes then gone  
it is time to pause awhile before moving on  
what find as we stop to search and look about  
beauty and her ways makes ready to shout



## **DREAM OF NIGHT**

I hold the moment without sway  
time no worry loss nor fire  
to love you I am here today  
no matter where we go or are

you are a gift a true love song  
I hold you near without fear  
perfect place where we belong  
heaven birds sing loud and clear

even if I tried to run and hide  
the world as such block my way  
while heart and mind decide  
I pitch my tent to stay

such it is all lovers face  
night and day contend  
perfect dark behind the lace  
no use now to pretend

fight no more turn the cheek  
behold the dream of night  
fresh water runs in the creek  
dawn wakes us with her light



## Steven Todd Pope



AI Art by Pope

### Paws Up

Paws up, don't shoot—  
the kitten on full display  
Standing in the alley  
like he's in a school play.

The other cats just stared at him  
like, "What's he doing now?"  
But he kept waving both his paws  
and yelling, "MEOW MEOW MEOW!"

He jumped like he had superpowers  
(or maybe too much snack),  
Then tripped over a soda can  
and almost fell on his back.

All the older alley cats  
were laughing on the ground—  
'Cause he acts like he's a hero  
in a cape he never found.

But that's why we all like him—  
he makes the alley bright.  
Even stray cats need a clown  
to make the day feel light.

## **Linette Rabsatt**

### **Conventional Wisdom**

Conventional wisdom is just as it says  
it's how we react, take initiative and  
face our days  
how the world seems to be falling apart  
how we think on our feet  
while still using our heart  
it's how I try to help a struggling man  
or how I sense that life  
just can't be planned  
it's the advice that someone gives to me  
even when I think I'm right  
and I just can't see  
that I need to listen  
and get in tune with Mother Nature  
and let the thoughts run free  
through my body, mind and soul  
yes all through me  
wisdom can't be manufactured  
because it's part of all of us  
it's our compass  
the shining light  
that brightens our path  
it's that feeling – that nudge you get  
inside your heart  
the most conventional yet  
unconventional premise

## **Your Heart Spoke My Name**

your hands held mine close  
and your smile melted my icy heart  
your eyes told me to come  
and your heart spoke my name  
my ears are attuned to your heartbeat  
and my arms are outstretched for you  
my fingers trace your hairline  
and my heart spoke your name  
we embrace in the sunlight  
and we make love under the moon  
we whisper love songs together  
and our hearts call our names  
people smile when they see us  
and they talk about our loving ways  
people see us as love's role models  
they are inspired and speak our names

## **Only You**

you're like the stapler on my desk  
the one that keeps the pages  
of our story together  
each sheet remaining in sequence  
despite the rough handling life may give

you're similar to my shredder on the floor  
showing me that forgiveness  
is more than just words  
each strand – the misdeed  
is recycled into a learning lesson

I compare you to my manual sharpener  
despite the changing times  
still sharp and efficient  
always at hand and ready  
solid and reliable

you're like the 52 stairs I climb daily  
challenging me to run faster  
yet being careful on the journey  
that I must stop to take a breath  
and look out the window for inspiration

## **Heather Winner**

### **Fingerprints**

You leave fingerprints with your words  
Marks no one else can see,  
But I feel them  
Etched into the corners of my soul

Everything you say  
Cuts deeper than silence ever could.  
I want to feel loved,  
Not beaten down  
By the weight of your words.

“Just die already”  
slips from your mouth  
like something casual,  
something easy to throw away.

But I can't throw it away.  
It lives here  
In the echo of my heart,  
In the ache that never seems to fade.

My mind replays it,  
Tries to solve the riddle of why,  
Tries to understand  
How love turned into this bruise.

My heart hasn't healed,  
Not once,  
From the sounds of your cruelty  
Disguised as love.

You leave no evidence,  
No scars the world can see  
But I am covered in them  
All the same.

## **A Drop of Oil in the Ocean**

The pain I feel each day  
Presses heavy on my chest,  
An anchor that never lifts,  
A whisper that never rests.  
Sleep is my only escape,  
But before it comes, my thoughts return:  
Why bother?  
Who would want you?  
Would it even matter if you were gone?  
The silence when I close my eyes  
Is so loud it screams,  
And I feel myself fade  
A drop of oil in an endless sea.  
I don't believe in God,  
But I pray for another chance,  
For a life that doesn't hurt like this,  
For a soul that doesn't ache to exist.  
Everyone deserves to feel wanted  
To be seen,  
To be known,  
To be loved.  
It's all I've ever wanted.  
I want happiness so badly  
It burns inside me like a wound that never heals  
But I'm a prisoner of passing days,  
Counting time by heartbeats and tears.  
If they knew my pain  
The storms I've survived,  
The scars I hide  
Would they still look me in the eye,  
Or would they pity me...  
As one too broken to mend.  
All I've ever wanted  
Is love without asking,  
Help without begging,  
A hug that finds me  
Before I reach for it.  
And still...  
I reach.  
Through the silence that crushes my chest,  
Through the weight that no one sees.  
My hands reaching for something...  
For someone...  
To pull me from the dark I've grown used to.

Every breath feels like punishment.  
Every heartbeat begs to be heard.  
I'm screaming without sound,  
Drowning where no one's looking.  
But even as I break,  
Some small part of me still reaches out  
A hand in the dark,  
Searching for warmth,  
For proof that I'm not invisible.



# POET-TREE IMAGAZINE

"THANK YOU FOR THE CARE YOU EXTEND TO EACH OF YOUR CONTRIBUTORS. YOUR DEDICATION - TO THE POETS, TO THE WORK, AND TO THE SPIRIT OF THE MAGAZINE - COMES THROUGH WITH EVERY NOTE YOU SEND. THANK YOU AGAIN FOR YOUR PATIENCE, YOUR UNDERSTANDING, AND FOR CREATING A SPACE WHERE SO MANY VOICES - EACH DISTINCT, EACH SEARCHING - CAN BE HEARD. YOUR POET-TREE IMAGAZINE CONTINUES TO FEEL LESS LIKE A PUBLICATION AND MORE LIKE A LIVING CANOPY WHERE WRITERS CAN GROW FREELY." -

DANIEL MILTZ

"POET-TREE IMAGAZINE PROVIDES A HOME FOR BLUE COLLAR POETRY AT A TIME WHEN IT'S NEEDED MOST!" -  
BILL MCCLOUD (THE ERROR OF OUR STARS)

