

THE PRAIRIE REVIEW

ISSUE NO. 17, FEB 2026



GRASSROOTS MAGAZINE OF POETRY, PROSE, ART AND CRITICISM



MARINA TSVETAeva

I DO NOT LIVE IN MY LIPS,
AND HE WHO KISSES ME MISSES ME.

SAVOY . (PAUSE FOR THOUGHT.)

TRAIN. TICKET.

PLACE TO STAY. (PRAISE GOD, NO VISA!)

AND ... FAINT DISTASTE.

SOMETHING PREPARED, WON IN BATTLE ...
BEGGED FOR.

I WANT *YOU* TO FALL FROM HEAVEN.

- **MARINA TSVETAeva.**
FROM LETTER TO RAINER MARIA RILKE,
AUGUST 22, 1926

COVER ART

Kinga Lipinska. Portrait of Marina Tsvetaeva. Pencil on watercolor paper,
2026.

THE PRAIRIE REVIEW

POETRY

CHRISTIAN HARRIS
KIM REED
WESTLEY HEINE
ANN GROGAN
DREW IRVING
CHRISTEN FOSTER
MADELINE BLAIR
GREG HARRELL
SIERRA MCCUTCHEN
JOHN GARZA
GREGG LOW
STEVEN WADE VEATCH
KAIT STONE
LIN BRUMMELS
MARK YOUNG
ALISON KATON
STEVE EGGLE
PRECIOUS EJIM
PETER FONTENOT
KINGA LIPINSKA

CREATIVE NON-FICTION & PROSE

SMINTZ
MICHAEL MAZOCK

ESSAYS & POETICS

SIERRA MCCUTCHEN "MICROUNIVERSES OF MEMORY: POETRY, RITUAL, AND THE SACRED WORK OF WORDS"

KINGA LIPINSKA "THE LANGUAGE OF FLOWERS: DRAWING BATAILLE"

DAVID BOOTH "FROM THE TABLE OF MY MEMORY, A STORY I DO NOT KNOW (ON NOTEBOOKS AND APPROPRIATION)"



EVERY TIME I WRITE TO YOU,
I'D LIKE TO WRITE LIKE YOU,
TO SPEAK MY SELF IN MARINIAN,
BY YOUR EQUABLE, AND WITHAL SO FEELING, MEANS.

YOUR UTTERANCE, MARINA, IS LIKE A STAR'S REFLECTION
WHEN IT APPEARS IN THE WATER,
AND IS DISTRIBUTED BY THE WATER,
BY THE LIFE OF THE WATER, BY ITS FLUID NIGHT;
INTERRUPTED, CANCELED, AND
AGAIN ADMITTED, AND THEN DEEPER IN THE ELEMENT,
AS IF ALREADY FAMILIAR WITH THIS MIRROR WORLD
AND, AFTER EACH WANING, BACK AGAIN
AND MORE DEEPLY IMMERSED."

**- RAINER MARIA RILKE,
FROM LETTER TO MARINA TSVETAeva,
JULY 28, 1926**

Letter from the Editor

Welcome to the new issue of The Prairie Review!

Winter harvest is here! Its fruits are beautiful, abundant, and richly diverse—just as we hoped, and just as they are meant to be. I invite you to take your time and immerse yourself in the work of creatives hailing from many corners of the globe.

I am deeply grateful to everyone who submitted their poetry, and to the two poets who generously contributed essays for this issue. This Winter '26 edition is not only our most substantial to date, but it may also be our finest yet.

The magazine continues its tradition of being free for both contributors and readers. It stands as a testament to generosity and creative expenditure for our own sake and for the sake of fellowship. To put a monetary value on access would fundamentally contradict this mission. There is not enough capital to measure the worth of creative work. Art's bounty is not profit, but Life.

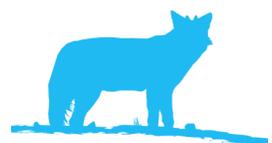
We are also excited to announce the completion of a poetry album by a group of Chicago poets affiliated with the Poetry Meetup. The album launch is scheduled for this Spring, just a few weeks away. Invitations will be posted for a live performance featuring the poets who recorded the album. If you are in or near Chicago, we warmly invite you to join us in celebrating this event.

The album, titled *City News Anthology*, is a testament of performances at City News Café in Chicago, where our group was graciously hosted over the course of approximately three years.

See you soon for an online conversation, round table in-person, or a live event! Keep making art.

Kinga Lipinska

Editor





My First Wound

Inspired by James Baldwin's The Evidence of Things Not Seen and a writing prompt: "What was your first wound?"

My first wound never happened
Well, at least I never saw it

It might have been on a cruising ship crossing the Atlantic
It might have been on the beautiful shores of South Carolina
Or the ugliest shore they'd ever seen
Or when Auntie went to talk to Mr. Chase and left angrily
seeing lines of red

Maybe it happened when Uncle was bought
When Pops fell out in the field
Or when grandma fled up north
Only to end up 6 feet further down South

No, My first wound never happened
Well, at least I never saw it

But I feel the evidence
The evidence of things not seen
The evidence of things not believed
The evidence of timid steps into corporate offices
The evidence of a perpetual love of water
The evidence of an irrational yet rational fear when driving through Dixie

No, I never saw it happen
But, I bear every scar

He Flew

Inspired by: Daydreaming about Icarus

*"Then the boy began to delight in his daring flight,
and, drawn by desire for the heavens, soared higher."
Daedalus and Icarus Ovid, Metamorphoses, Book 8*

I think everyone forgets that Icarus flew

Too close to the sun, yes
But he was shooting for it
He believed in something
When we tell the children
the sky is the limit...
No wait
When we tell them
Shoot for the stars
We must acknowledge that some will hit the sun
After all, the sun is the biggest star

This is for all those whose desire for heaven
Caused them to soar higher
The freedom fighters who knew the sky was not the limit
The resilient ones who never raised a fist, but wouldn't die
The movement builders who spoke out and were burned because of it

I'm not sorry you flew too close to the sun
I want you to fly even higher next time

Christian Harris (he/him) is a Chicago-based writer and proud Descendant of Enslaved Americans. His work traces the living memory of Black America, bearing witness to what was taken and imagining futures rooted in repair. He is the founder of Kindred Keynotes & Coaching, helping people and organizations live into their values through art, strategy, and action. You can find his work in publications like *Respect the Mic: Celebrating 20 Years of Poetry from a Chicagoland High School* and his newly published collection *For the Movement: A Short Collection of Poetry for Those Who Dare to Seek a Repaired World*, available on Amazon.

Whistle Whistle Weather

something about teargas stains
people standing, driving, sitting
police trying to direct crowds
not to fulfill the order for violence
given to soldiers in balaclavas
sneering at mothers, teachers, families

a toddler hit with pepper spray shot
when it bounced off the face of his father
tried not to cry, tried to be quiet
because his father was driving
while Mexican while American here
in Chicago fall is becoming awareness

weather, predictions of rain, snow
tears of school children not relieved
by a hundred plastic whistles blowing
blowing in the windy streets, hearts hit
with betrayal of the beautiful sunlight
and well kept working class streets

they made the Constitution a dead letter
as dry and despised as brown leaves, old news
yet we held it up above the city, the people
held, did not riot, did not affirm violence
but people's brigades warned the old 'hoods
danger, ICE agents, whistle, whistle, weather

Grenades to Teachers and Children

grenades to teachers and children
rolling, hand tossed, burning clouds
hands cannot shield tear gassed eyes

these wintering trials of beatings
six skull fractures in one man's head
five bullets in a woman's body

Milwaukee danced for the dead
because they are the living, America
where the nation watch men and women die

again and again, "do something bitch"
witness these murders, thousands penned in cages
where people see the sick die on cold cement floors

whispering from US private prison camps
We had papers. He is a citizen. She was born here.
In Chicago, in Minneapolis, in Los Angeles

no information, no confirmation, born citizens
torn and beaten to the ground to silence cells

Please, I need... Please, my child will die without care.
so the boy in the wheelchair died.
We are all human by birth. Please, I need a doctor.
so the woman who miscarried bled for days.

bodies disappear sometimes, no destination
of deportation or transport to the hospital

you would have thought that vomit stained
blood stained, tear stained, fear strained
ground could not be so close to home

under chemical attacks, malicious fearsome
urban terrorism against anyone who looks
like an immigrant, a brown, a resistor, witnesses

trying to document the chains of violence
ignorance, hatred, working class incarceration
trying to break the intimidating campaign of pain

imaginaries created in xenophobic ignorance
we are overwhelmed, we are angry, we are wrong
paid for by tax revenues, gifts from vicious frauds

Kim Reed is a writer living in Uptown Chicago. Her recent poetry includes strong support for peace through anti-war themes, including War Memorial (Crab Song, Pink Tie Press, 2012 chapbook), Can You See Gaza Alight (Highland Park Poetry 2024), Missile Strike (Sunflowers Rising, Poets for Peace Anthology, 2025) and a forthcoming 21 poem pamphlet Surreal Nursery (2026) tanka dedicated to all women and children who survive war.

The Sleeping Face of the World

(For Painter Daniel Stine)

1

in the grain
of the Earth
are faces
in knots
pools of stone
layers of
sediment arise a
collective dream
painted
through epochs
of pockmarked
pores
planet scars
still hieroglyphs
reflecting
heaven
within

2

water hovers in mirage
between sky and Earth
knows to shape-shift
inhaled by soil and
exhaled by clouds
in slow meditation
garnished with greens,
conscious in the eyes
of flowers, behind
vales of mist
thoughts spark
in lightning
Epiphany

3

the painter applies another layer
using mud, weather, ancient
oily dinosaur bones
tapped, boiled, combusted
eyeballs blink pointillism
washed in burning rain
wild-fires rival A-bombs
burst war paint in the sky
where Comanche ghosts
dance with sandstorm gods
and warm rings revolve
around come-upping's curse

4

prehistoric islands now dry mesas
a sun baked land where Klimt
pulled down the stars to dance in
whirlpools of twilight up the drain
spilling absinthe in the Milky Way
out a black hole to blend the color of time
and bend space around a mustache
only to tap-dance atop a pyramid
covered in coded graffiti
and burned love letters

5

dead rivers leave snake tails across cracked skin
Fibonacci floodplains and psychedelic deltas
emptying into the mouth of a cobalt sky
cumulus islands & birth canals of unnamed gods

6

hard skulls grin in granite hills
sandstone crumbles spelling Sanskrit whispers
weaved in Indian trails, hunting trails
tip-toe of deer, mole songs, bird-eye visions
the macro-micro geodesic geometry of
peyote mandalas, sunbeams through seaweed,
lagoons of time pools, neon feather nebulae,
ribbons of rain birthing armadillo backs,
fluorescent beaks and tunnels of love,
erosion stacks stalagmites to the sky

7

starving rock
burning river
enraged Earth
bleeding lava
tectonic tension
desert of glass
desert of mirrors
desert of marble
desert of ash
desert of dust
desert of bone
desert of clay
desert of dreams
desert of stars
desert of space
desert of void
desert of form
desert of energy

8

fractals of sandstone carved by
tears of melting white-capped peaks
bursting a cornucopia of hawk feathers
melting mudslides against backbone &
green-flash at sunset peppers the sky
in an explosion of dry dandelion

9

wells of coiled dragons
spiral in oily rainbow
asleep in the harp ripples of water
where avalanches cannonball Colorado
grand crevasse carve a Pueblo sundial
to wind galactic clocks in a past
rain-dance for falling stars and
visitors from the future burn up in re-entry
chipping an arrowhead to a point of light

10

ghosts of dead stars
smear the darkroom with memory,
with lips of steam, kisses of frost,
eyelashes acting as paintbrushes, wings
making brush strokes, streaking the tails
of comets crossing eons to collide and
burst across our windshield now
fogged by nuclear nebulae, oily palms,
radioactive aurora

11

moonbeams fall in slow motion
focus spotlights on lost epochs to
reanimate fossilized forms
at the bottom of the sea where
oblivious Ouroboros dwells
and life twists in the cracks
born from the planets' brow

12

green pipes flute from the soil
scorpions pinch the moon, seahorses smoke
soft storms blooming like swirling squid above
bearded meadows, jeweled in wildflowers,
candied in carousels of future animals,
pools of emerald dreams lost in reflections,
crumbling mountain ranges and undersea trenches,
coiled continuums in valleys of one-way mirrors,
cozy crystals melting the heart at the core where
the iridescent dust returns to super nova
back to the womb wrapped in night phlox
petrified in amber embracing the
sleeping face of the world

Now & Then

Every now and then
one needs
some good news
some good head
some dumb luck
something unplanned
or for plans to go right and feel like a god.
Every now and then
a good meal and deep sleep, or
to party until the sun comes up.
Every now and then
some new music that is as good as the old
to see old friends still alive
& meet authors long dead
to laugh at death and cry into breasts.
& occasionally some sort of recognition
where we stand out because we can
articulate how deep down
we're all the
same.

Girl on a Bicycle

Hair in the wind
natural smile
she drifts
toward
passed
& away.
I don't
ever want
to know
her better.
Right now
she's perfect.

Notes on The Underground

(for The Velvet Underground)

It starts with Tinker-bells on Sunday morning
nagging for dust on a train uptown to score.
Hearts hard cycling between pain and pleasure
running like a speedball between parties until
the nights and days rise and fall in flicker.
When the only cure for the amphetamine dream is smack
& you have to sell the body to sustain the body.
Then the death angel weeps.

White light: there's something holy about distortion
like the static between channels, like tuning into the
3 degree background radiation of the Big Bang.
We're tapping into the ether with guitars.
We're bending notes to warp the space/time continuum.
Power chords ring out to commune with god.
Feedback is hearing the angels scream.
White heat: sink into the carpet as
reality dissolves in a snowstorm of pixels, particles, waves.
Static electricity gives a shhhhhhhh jamming with
the buzzing neons, the grey rain, the
whispering ceiling fan, the fridge hums ohm.
Everything and nothing
Noise and silence
Peace and desolation
Shock and awe

In the morning there's a new sound.
It's the sound of the survivor.
It's the sound of the brain after the mind is blown.
Just the pulse of the bass, compassionate crooning,
drums reduced to a tambourine in an alley
& guitars shimmering like distance bells.
This is shock treatment.
Today's dose: heavy reality.
Leave all assumptions behind.
Not everyone loves the sun.

WESTLEY HEINE

Westley Heine is the author of *Busking Blues: Recollections of a Street Musician and Squatter* (Roadside Press 2022), and a short story collection *12 Chicago Cabbies* (Newington Blue Press 2021). Most recently Roadside Press has released a poetry collection *Street Corner Spirits* (2023), and a new collection of short stories and poems entitled *Cloud Watching in the Inferno* (2025), both of which have spoken word albums available on all streaming services. He is a member of the Society of Midland Authors, the host of the poetry open mic at The Gallery Cabaret in Chicago, twice the featured performer at the original poetry slam at The Green Mill in Chicago, featured at *Beyond Baroque* in LA, and was the poet chosen to represent Illinois at the Route 66 Poetry and Arts Festival 2025.

"Westley Heine has been around the track with his original voice. Heine writes of the most commonplace occurrences as if they were images of our "barbaric" and illuminating past. This is a poet to be read and appreciated in our ravaged era. Trust his truth. He will take you by the hand with a firm grip, and like Bukowski and Corso, maintain a rough, cool, and smooth poetics."

- Neeli Cherkovski, Beat Poet and biographer

"In honest and rocking and often intensely poetic language that evokes Kerouac and Bukowski at their best, Heine pulls us into his wild life trying to make a living on street corners in Chicago."

- John Guzlowski, author of *Echoes of Tattered Tongues*, winner of the Eric Hoffer/Montaigne Award for the most thought provoking book of 2017.

Instagram: @westleyheine

Conspiracies

We lose awe along the way.
Many things conspire to take it:
technology and how it plays
the lazy self against our best judgment.

Never wiser than the day we're born—
or more awed by wonder and simple needs
that, easily expressed, are easily read.
Then we obfuscate, forgetting

words, ignoring sounds, letting
the mind wend its way around
and others tell us what to hate
or who to love or what to do.

We lose wonderment sometimes:
forget the thrill of early romance,
our first dance, the way a rose
emits perfume and causes trance.

If lucky, later we may recall
who we are, then try to divest
from what others say is "best" for us.
Eventually, the babe returns.

No books were burned for this truth told—
and may I be so bold to say
that you know you and can backtrack,
remember all, and come out to play.

Amazement

Time will tell, give all things and
take away in cosmos time,
not mine. The more we pine,

the farther things move away from
our wants, burning or just started;
martyred we, upon those coals of hot desire.

But give in, give up, and decide
to rest at ease after request,
and then all that's best may come;

or as Mick Jagger said,
if you try, sometimes
you'll get what you need.

Hold on to hope and all is lost!
Of that I'm very sure. The times
in life I've wanted most, I've lost.

Ask, then forget. Let the goddess deliver—
or not. There's grace in not expecting,
more than blessing if there's getting—

and if not, there's love.

Let Them

When the jury is out, the jury is out
full stop. No need to fret and wonder if
you're being ignored or even ghosted,
roasted in derision she expresses to her friends,
sent to hell, or complimented to highest heaven,
admired to max and held up as touchstone
or paragon, a dream to wish on—or total loss.

No use to bother to try to understand.
You don't have clout enough
to figure it out: a human's motivation,
psychology, penchant or purpose,
diversion or distress, upset at what a mess he's in.
No sin to feel so clueless. There's only fault
if in excess of wanting to know it all—you guess.

Practiced

We are well practiced for ease in death,
The sun departs each day to night;
No need to fear or feel bereft.

The babe in hand so frail in heft,
Despite your grasp will soon take flight;
No need to fear or feel bereft.

Our childhood friendship is sadly cleft
When with her new lover she takes flight;
We are well practiced for ease in death.

Or take our first lover and innocence be left,
Then he chooses another and kills our delight;
We are well practiced for ease in death.

Our parents precede us, then we are left
Alone at last to face the night;
No need to fear or feel bereft.

In life we lose, yet goes on our breath,
We learn to choose grace, not die in might;
We are well practiced for ease in death,
No need to fear or feel bereft.

Hidden Flowers

Ever notice how the flowers that grow farthest from the sun
in hidden corners of the bush, shadowed and forgotten
among the leaves, those shy ones who yet dare to bloom
and reach out front to take their leave, will have the longest stems?

Those gems are best to invite inside to share their hidden glory,
like souls who shine in subtler ways, need only show their face
displayed in crystal or silvered vase with honored place
upon the mantle or kitchen table, rich or modest, richly blessing all.

Ann Grogan is a joyful octogenarian, retired lawyer, pianophile, and emerging poet who lives in San Francisco, CA. Her writing promotes the unequivocal permission to pursue one's passions at any age. Her poetry has appeared in *The Prairie Review*, *Querencia*, *Amethyst Review*, *Little Old Lady*, *The Prairie Review*, *Dissent Voice*, *NewVerseNews*, *Shot Glass Journal*, *Vistas & Byways*, and is forthcoming in *Writers Resist*. and *Bloomin' Onion*. Her music and poetry website is rhapsodydmb.com.

A New York Lake

My mind is aware of the trouble it conceals,
but the cause of this anguish
my body can only appeal.
I journey down the path to the upstate New York lake,
knowing hearts find awareness in solitude
to leave troubles in their wake.

The trail to the water descends through the forest.
The tonic of pine needles brings my mind to full alert.
It's the soil that's perplexing.
My senses vacillate, Is this death or is it birth?
The scent of new growth is fragmented
by the musty decay of earth.

The calm of the water is tangible,
buttressed by a fortress of trees,
the blue sky, an ever-arching canopy,
extending over all the eyes can see.
Majestically, dawn's lazy break unfolds as the Eagle soars.
Like the birds below, I flap my wings to go about my chores.

Down on the shore, I climb up on a boulder
that holds faint heat from yesterday's sun,
as I kneel on the rock with my hat in hand,
watching soft waves ripple trails in the sand,
noticing that birth and death are easily undone,
as both end what the other begun.

I descend from the rock, and hike back up the trail
considering what I'd seen while down on the beach,
every small floundering rivulet was going to fail,
like my heart, mind, and body, parted each from each.
Reflection sheds light to help us see and understand; yet,
courage is the impetus that moves our life from the sand.

When Love Begun

Love is the treasure of two,
the discomfort of one,
a constant patrol,
the birth of a sun.

Love is the dearth of shadows,
nights, no longer black as coal,
it's the wonder of knowing,
of not knowing,
there is no thermostat control.

Love is a severed lifeline
for the timid of soul.

Dreams

The night rises.
The moon shines.
Then morning falls.
A gentle breeze nudges placid water,
like your presence sends ripples over me.
The gifts we share.
Are we not human like that
to look between us
and dream of another land?

Our Sestina

We're living after a tectonic fault,
it's our perception, our mental state.
We're like two foreign lands crossed by a sea,
comported by decisions that we've wrought.
No longer is this your land and my land.
These signs are omens that we mustn't forsake.

Do we remember what we should forsake?
Life is in giving, not in finding fault.
When birds tire, they search for a perch to land;
the wren's shrill song guards its nest and state.
So nature solves the problems it will wrought,
us too, if we're to pass this angry sea.

What ship can guide us through this heartless sea?
What compass points to what we shouldn't forsake?
One by one we'll change errors that we've wrought,
first moving to forgive our neighbor's fault.
Then speaking with intent, we clearly state,
This land is your land; this land is my land.

On a shared vision our feet can now land,
extracting ourselves from this poisoned sea,
where anger and foreboding ruled our state,
we've come to learn what we must now forsake.
No longer pointing fingers to find fault,
we've moved to a home love has wrought.

What is it we want for our life to wrought?
We want love to mark where our footsteps land,
where love's a verb with no cracks like a fault;
and love's breeze guides us through a swamping sea.
All other agendas we must forsake;
if love's to be the life blood of our state.

and write new poems from our joy love has wrought.
Does anger seem like too much to forsake?
Or will rage course through our hearts and land, while
our teeth gnash, like waves thrash on the sea, because we
wouldn't forgive our neighbor's fault?
Let's drain our sea of enmity to heal our land.

In loves state, we forsake blame to a fault,
as joy and peace displace what omens have wrought.
We'll now dine as one at the hearth of our state
and write new poems from our joy love has wrought.
Does anger seem like too much to forsake?
Or will rage course through our hearts and land,

while our teeth gnash, like waves thrash on the sea, because
we wouldn't forgive our neighbor's fault?
Let's drain our sea of enmity to heal our land.
In love's state, we forsake blame to a fault,
as joy and peace displace what omens have wrought.
"Poetry is the reliable counter force to all that destroys."
Avram Sutzkever - Poet

Promises to Morning

Let me tell you about the nights
I bargained with the ceiling,
made promises to morning
I wasn't sure I could keep.

Last year tried to break me in languages
I didn't know I could speak—
fluent in insomnia, conversational
in panic, damn near native in the dialect of
"I can't do this anymore."
And I almost believed it.

Almost let the weight win.
Almost stopped showing up for a life
that felt like it had
stopped showing up for me.

But here's the thing about
rock bottom—
sometimes you don't
bounce back,
you claw back.
One handful of dirt at a time.

One "maybe tomorrow" at a time.
One phone call to a friend
who heard the silence
louder than my words.

I made it through on borrowed faith and spite—
equal parts prayer and "watch me."

Made it through on music played too loud,
on strangers who smiled at the right moment,
on the stubborn, foolish hope that kept
pilot-lighting in my chest even when
everything else went dark.

CHRISTEN FOSTER

You want to know the truth?
Some days making it through looked like
not making any decisions at all.
Just existing. Just breathing.

Just telling my heart "one more beat" until
"one more" became a thousand more,
became a month more,
became a year.

and that alone is a triumph they don't make trophies for.
I survived what I didn't think was survivable.
Carried what felt unbearable.
Became the hero I kept waiting for.

**From the Table of My Memory, A Story I Do Not Know
(On Notebooks and Appropriation)**

In that part of the book of my memory before which little can be read, there is a heading which says,
"Here begins a new life." —Dante Alighieri, *Vita Nuova*

Reading through years of notebooks, the poet encounters a stranger's handwriting—sometimes illegible, sometimes doodled—that happens to be their own. What these pages preserve isn't polished thought but the mind catching itself in the act of noticing, connecting, and recording—metacognition in hardcopy. We write down our raw materials even if we never return to them. I've kept a hodgepodge notebook since February 1998, filling nearly a hundred of them, each a cloth-bound Clairefontaine. They serve as a crucial source of content and inspiration for my poetry. Though I dedicate some notebook entries (artifacts) to poem-making, they are miscellaneous because I am not limiting entries to what could become literary. Besides attempts at poems, I capture reflections on what I am reading (literature, history, self-help), my parents' wellbeing, feelings about current events, monthly budgets, hopes and disappointments and happiness in love, health concerns, idioms in foreign languages, shopping lists, and everything else I jot down as private. Working with any companion text is an act of appropriation, and even our own notebooks, self-made, know something we don't. Reading them, we notice what we've written down time and again. They suggest what we can't help but write about, as we return to the hodgepodge as readers to discover what we have forgotten.

First practiced in Florence in the 14th century, the *zibaldone*—Italian for "a salad of many herbs"—names a kind of commonplace book that would eventually serve poets. What makes the hodgepodge salad-like? Everything thrown together: business accounts beside copied poems, family births next to remedy recipes, the pressing and the trivial occupying the same bound space. The *zibaldone* emerged alongside other kinds of notebooks like the *ricordanze* (family records) and the *ricordi* (notebooks for personal reflection) in trecento Florence. The Black Death (1347-1353) intensified their personal, memorial function. As Roland Allen notes, families tracking finances began documenting personal loss in the same ledgers. Giovanni di Pagolo Morelli's *Ricordi* (early 15th century) exemplifies this mixture, combining family business advice with deeply personal reflections on loss and fortune. A practice of repurposing administrative documents for memorial and artistic witness appears across time and cultures: Plains Indian artists in the late 19th century created ledger art on accounting books, transforming the bureaucratic instruments of colonial dispossession into narratives of ceremonial life, battle, and forced relocation. In both lineages, catastrophe prompts the convergence of the administrative and the intimate. Poets of witness flesh themselves out and lose themselves in hodgepodge pages about social upheaval.

Piecing together this history uncovers a hodgepodge of practitioners. At the start of the Renaissance in Europe, Petrarch (1304-1374) jots down his thoughts on politics and theology in his *zibaldone*.

1. Roland Allen, *The Notebook: A History of Thinking on Paper* (2024)

2. Richard Pearce, *Women and Ledger Art: Four Contemporary Native American Artists* (2013)

Here too he drafts and refines poems that will become the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* (commonly called the *Canzoniere*)—poems circling his lifelong obsession with Laura de Sade, what he perceives as his longing extending into the afterlife. Given to sentimentality, this public intellectual seems to work in a popular romance genre featuring a doleful male protagonist and giving the sonnets the ring of fiction. Five hundred years later, in Italy, Giacomo Leopardi transforms himself from poet into public philosopher in his own *Zibaldone di pensieri*, an intellectual diary chock-full of aphorisms and sometimes cynical critiques of the society in which he lived. In the United States in the 20th century, postmodern and feminist writer Bernadette Mayer presents the hodgepodge not only as a culled-from or curated source but also as the poem itself.

Postmodern poetics as a literary epoch probably starts in the late 1950s and not so cleanly periodized reaches into the new century. Poet Bernadette Mayer (1945-2022) makes radical innovation more probable for herself by expanding her own poetic praxis vis-à-vis the notebook to include assemblage of fragments from daily living, self-reflexivity in remembering, procedural writing as compositional force, speed of improv giving momentariness artistic value, run-on and/or paratactic accumulations piling up detail like consciousness, juxtaposed media (text and image, for instance), and contemporary *ars poetica*. Composed by such means, experimental writing retains the indeterminacy of the hodgepodge at its source. The reader, like the writer, may ask at the moment of any given word, “What am I thinking right now? How do I feel about what is happening?” Mayer begins a notebook entry dated July 21, 1971, that will become part of her book *Memory*,

South to argentina from massachusetts down to ny to downtown to uptown to back down to ridgewood to elmhurst back to e uptown & north to massachusetts one day: this is too hard: I feel I feel bad but I never felt better like the day we drove from mass to new york & back the same day how did we do it: we thought we felt, the night they drove old dixie down & on, the house is dark it's strangely quiet maybe I don't know how to work anymore: when you awake you will remember everything: tyrone power in an instant of total recall, nightmare alley, he gets screwed and goes back with the carnival & finds his wife who will take care of him the great stan who became a wino, when you awake, she bet on one horse to win I bet on another to show, ans: maybe that's how I survive.

We may not know that the poet was born in the Ridgewood neighborhood of Queens or that Tyrone Power (1914-1958) was once a living actor. That one has places to be shares the same experiential plane as our recollection of “driving old dixie down” as a song lyric about a turning point in the American Civil War and the dubious gift of remembering everything once we’ve awakened. Mayer created *Memory* through a procedural process combining hodgepodge text, her own photographs, and recordings of herself talking about her materials as lived experience each day throughout July of 1971. After the month ended, she curated the project while writing down additional reflections. For the 1972 gallery installation at 98 Greene Street in Soho, Mayer read aloud the notebook-as-poem in a six-hour performance overlapped by her photos and voice recordings. In 1975, North Atlantic Books edited and published the event as *Memory*.

DAVID BOOTH

Daily writing over the course of a single month compresses a version of the poet returning to a hodgepodge kept across what feels like lifetimes.

Maybe because I am a high school English teacher, and because poets teach pupil poets by manifesto, I offer a teachable model: sundry contexts resolve into an elegant schematic, a notebook page as quadrants. One quadrant contains driving directions to a surprise birthday party written over a nearly illegible lament that no one will ever love him; another, notes on itemized deductions at tax time; another about the efficacy of metformin; another, a kinetic fragment copied down from Kafka's diary, an entry dated September 29, 1911, "Pretty jump of a clown over a chair into the emptiness of the wings." Playfulness, flat times, some self-loathing flow together when the hodgepodge extends to poem-making within a lyric tradition shaped by personal experience. A figurative barque appears for readers traversing lapses in narrative and wordless white space, the space between said quadrants, in the form of the craft statement "Toy Boats," by the poet Carla Harryman. If experimental poetry earns the reputation of repudiating story, she counters, "I prefer to distribute narrative rather than deny it. The enemies of narrative are those who believe in it and those who deny it. Both belief and denial throw existence into question." What is narrative in the above Mayer quote if not distributed? How many narratives recede before they can fully form? Yet they are there, the narratives, incipient like our own memories recorded in a distant notebook. Harryman continues,

Narrative holds within its boundaries both its advantages and defects. It can determine its own development as it mutates throughout history. This is its great advantage. I.e., in accomplishing its own mutability, it achieves an ongoing existence.

From an abridged word bank—ephemera, urge, liminality, instinct, in-betweenness, improv, negative capability, spoken word, memories enmeshed—mutability inaugurates the crossings between notebook and poem as a poet senses them. A Platonic notion: whatever the hodgepodger writes in the first half of life finds form in the second as the finished poem. I am jumping around my own hodgepodge, now not wholly familiar to me:

If Mom will French braid your hair, I will get the brush from the bathroom and hairspray if you need it (2012) You have a secret universe inside of you (2000) Her words awaken me to my humanness, how I cry as she tells me who she is with great candor (2016) She lifts the pin from your funny bun to rake your hair out long and neat across your shoulders and down your back (1999)

I didn't need to return to my own hodgepodge to know it contained entries concerning my sadness about my sister Laura's wellbeing. I did go back during the shelter-in-place phase of the COVID pandemic (2020) and read my hodgepodge from start to finish to find constant concern for her, confessed out of understanding and my own shortcomings, out of my intellect, out of searching verging on obsession. My repeated statement, "sister in mind, reasons found for motion," from that year, and 2001, and 2007 bogs down as much as it elucidates. As noun and verb, "reasons" feels too academic for a love story I do and do not know.

There were the first orphans in world history, a baby asleep in a wicker boat, and first adoptees (2008) Hsinshu is near the Taipei Airport (2019) "To a Chinese, if a child is not of his own flesh and blood, he may not love the child as much as he loves his own children. Americans don't feel that way" [Chiu 1999]

4. Carla Harryman, "Toy Boats," *Non/Narrative* (1985)

(2019) Death of Dumbledore a re-orphaning of Harry Potter (2011) Every orphan is an autodidact (2007)

At one point I theorize that my adopted sister is a “war child,” in that Catholic Charities brokered “closed” adoptions—no contact with birth families, all records sealed—during the Vietnam Era, and that the Taipei Air Station was part of my father’s tour of duty, a place for R & R outside the theater of war in Indochina. Why my theory troubles our dad? I rule out the motive of his and Mom’s love in favor of motives of my own making. Why must I always be digging?

Everyone is maimed by an inability to hold another person (2019) I hugged her quick and loose w eyes closed getting for a second some of her crazy hair in my mouth (2004) How can you help if half of me is the way my mother acted and half the way father acted and the way I act, never having known them, is the way they must be (2004) Her birthmother must come from a chicken farming family in Tapu 5 during the Japanese administration of Taiwan (1895-1945) who left her village once (2020) reason for abandonment, poverty (2012)

My parents’ wish for me was that I would separate from my sister emotionally, as my independent self would prove most supportive. I was responsible first for my happiness. I find what read like accidental metonyms for my sister’s concerns about her birth in the fictional figure of Pippi Longstocking and the very real girl Anne Frank. I either read *Pippi Longstocking to my sister when we are kids or tell her about Pippi as if enlisting Lindgren’s protagonist as a role model for girls turning to their imaginations for answers to the question of where they come from. Copied down in my hodgepodge, Pippi speaks:*

...it’s very wicked to lie. But I forget it now and then. And how can you expect a little child whose mother is an angel and whose father is king of a cannibal island and who herself has sailed on the ocean all her life—how can you expect her to tell the truth always? And for that matter, let me tell you that in the Congo there is not a single person who tells the truth. They lie all day long.

When we are in our twenties, and Laura’s illness surfaces, our parents don’t name it at first. I describe it from memory years later, “a tendency to shun reality,” a euphemism for everyone. None of us have a hold on reality. In my notes, Anne Frank must somehow promote for my sister the life-sustaining forces of precocity and the articulation of self-doubt when courage is needed. I find many of her diary entries copied in my hodgepodge. Dated August 1, 1944, this one is her last, as her family’s hiding place is discovered by the gestapo a few days later:

I’m awfully scared that everyone who knows me as I always am will discover that I have another side, a finer and better side. I’m afraid they’ll laugh at me, think I’m ridiculous and sentimental, not take me seriously. I’m used to now being taken seriously but it’s only the “lighthearted” Anne that’s used to it and can bear it; the “deeper” Anne is too frail for it. Sometimes, if I really compel the good Anne to take the stage for a quarter of an hour, she simply shrivels up as soon as she has to speak, and lets Anne number one take over, and before I realize it, she has disappeared.

If I record mysteries that no one can help me with, I alone place something akin to malediction at the root of my sister's illness. Did I overexpose her to fantasy in her childhood? If my father interprets her condition as a curse we must bear for the murders Americans committed in Vietnam, her adoption and subsequent illness express the limits of atonement. These are my ideas and nobody else's. My hodgepodge calls Laura unattainable, Pippi parentless and feral Anne in hiding then murdered. It occurs to me that Anne dies in 1945, the same year *Pippi Longstocking* appears and Bernadette Mayer is born in New York City. I got a text message from Laura this morning.

Habiru as a nonethnic term, rovers, reminds me of the term *Air Force Brat*, those siblings moving to a new house not to keep moving as a way of living but to find that final house someday (2008) "These adopted children were considered more American by culture than defined by their birth heritage and physical appearance [source illegible]" (2009) "In 1938 after the pogroms, my two uncles," Anne writes on June 20, 1942, "escaped to North America. My old grandmother came to us, she was then seventy-three" (2014) "My birthparents were shadows," writes Taiwanese-American memoirist Mei-Long Hopgood about her ultimately happy adoption to a Midwestern family, "known to me only in the folds of my eyelids, the curve of my chin, or the shiny dark of my hair," from *Lucky Girl* (2019) Why learn now that my itinerant childhood upset Mom as much of any of us? (2004) Someday an essay about the family heirloom: sarcasm (2010)

Sometimes the urgency of a memory prompts sustained narrative, so-called "story" of a diary, as in this hodgepodge entry from 2007:

When I first told Laura about Pippi, she didn't cover her ears or run away but inserted herself into the scene at hand. "What's wrong with you, Pippi Longstocking," she blurted. "What's wrong with you?" It was Pippi's single day at school. All the children except Pippi sit at their desks. She lies on the floor, drawing. "Pippi," says the teacher impatiently, "why aren't you drawing on the piece of paper I gave you? Why are you drawing on the floor?" "What's wrong with you?" Laura asks before Pippi can reply. "Please," I read, "let me handle this." Pippi glances at my sister, then at the teacher and the kids staring back at her in stunned silence. "I couldn't get my horse on such a tiny scrap, so I'm drawing his front legs on the cold floor. When I get to the tail I'll probably have to go out in the corridor." My sister peels away. "What's wrong with you, Pippi Longstocking? What's the matter?" If Pippi Longstocking were a real person, she would have been nearly forty when Saigon fell and my parents adopted my baby sister.

Continuous prose amid fragmentary entries spanning decades. Reading prompts new writing not in response to what was happening back in the day, but to my concerns now as a writer. Some material comes out of the notebook verbatim and some lost and found anew, unrecognizable in transcription. In 2019, I write cryptically, "Shifting from fiction to poetry, putty handled on constant basis, heard through the ear horn of poetry lovers, What is *prosody*?" Six

years after: "If the hodgepodge doesn't distinguish between what the hodgepodger reads in his own notebook and what he thought when he first wrote it, thinking is reading metabolized, as Dante suggests at the start of *New Life*." My poem begins:

The young at Moultrie Street gets narrative in ways the older doesn't. Never a boy reading to his sister at bedtime. She explains to the older crowd for the third time that September that she's white only when she's at home. In 1945, the year of Anne Frank's death in lower Saxony, Lindgren introduces an intrepid orphan Pippi Långstrump. Sometimes defamiliarization brings those who feel like they know her closer to a living girl. Something made up about every story ever told and nothing made-up about fifteen-year-olds dying of typhus at Bergen-Belsen. Anne isn't an adoptee per se but leads a life mediated by what she doesn't know is happening. If you are blocked from doing so, wreak havoc. Luna edges into the older crowd growing older while outside the air is warm like milk...

DAVID BOOTH is the author of two books of prose and poetry, *Tell Me Please, What's the Matter* (2025) and *Too Bright to See* (2021). His work has appeared in *Chicago Quarterly Review*, *Cerasus*, *Missouri Review*, *Fourteen Hills*, *Transfer*, and *Washington Square*. A high school humanities teacher, he lives in San Francisco with his wife Ingrid Hawkinson.

Q

I hate silence
the most
it makes my ears
ring
an impossible music
that cannot be
stopped
coffee twice
a day is
prescribed
but not
necessary I think
what I miss
the most
about life
is the city
at night
with a lover
taking walks
on the water
after dinner
laughing
nose-to-nose

MADELINE BLAIR

saying silly things
like *inside us all*
there is a swan
a little maniacal
thing that is beautiful
we sleep
and bake cookies
together
on the phone
and I wonder
how many
days must be kept
on a screen
the 'new normal'
is bedridden
bed yoga
and work
in bed finding
new things
to do
in a bed
this hunch is
a palace
paying prices to
believe

MADELINE BLAIR

terrible is not
forever but everyone
has built everything
only for it
to crumble
eventually my youth
might be
behind me
I wonder
if this will
ever change
or if this life
will always be
the same

Arterial Motion

Sullen girl, you've found yourself
a God-thing—ever-electric
on the clock of another.

Once, snow descended
like blessings. Called it fool's honey.
How together you'd shut

the world stuck as a drawer. Open,
closed, open. An artery rushed
with bliss, bliss, bliss.

Girl-strange, you tremble
delicate, your heart a silver watch
caked in snowfall. All unknown

but black-and-white. Your split
rib cracks a smile. Chimes,
somewhere. Mug-avoidant in the alley.

A projector whirs. After-hours
applause. Oblivious cars
whip past on two lanes.

MADELINE BLAIR

Those weepy doe-eyes
mean nothing now. No one
would tell you this,

your despair loathsome
like a rotten tooth.
Out, out, get happy again.

Art is a new type
of scar, pain becomes
for pleasure.

You know this
already, you know-it-all
darling, so incumbent.

Some kind of love takes
shape here, ink slinks
around veins—

a tattoo gun shot in the heart.

Blessed Be the Fruit

after Serena Joy Waterford

May the Lord open: That is the defiant legs
of the woman of my consequential dried-up husband
your Commander of this household & of this state

Give me children or else I die They are not yours
but mine although you be the fruit that Jezebel
that whore in my house with the womb I ought to have

I could spite you & smite everything you have
to the ground take your sneering eyes out
your back-talk tongue we give you everything & more

The men in slick coats & dark vans pray tell will not
show you mercy all you have is me in this tragic house &
the boy across the yard I bring to you will not save you now

Praise be His mercy praised be His miracle
that we are women soft & some fruitful
that we can be kind but should not be

It is us the Wives who bear your suffering most
watching our husbands screw you & with us
holding your hands digging our rings into your palm

*Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away
& the prey of the terrible be delivered: For I will contend with he
who contends with you & I will save your children*

My baby curled against my empty bosom my baby
eating pomegranate seeds from a bowl my baby singing
nighttime lullabies without you in them to remind her

That is what our life will be this state was mine to take
my immaculate conception to give me everything
I have ever wanted & forget the rest of the damned

MADELINE BLAIR

Perhaps in the end I cannot take it all back in reform
for I will lose a pinky when I tell the men we wish
to read again & invite our Lord God to open our minds freely

But through my hatred for you dear girl who bears
my husband's name & our child there is something I'd see
in you here if it weren't for our unfortunate circumstances

We women will be free out of His Eye I do appreciate
your efforts in these trying times please have an orchid
as your parting gift wretched girl O Blessed Day indeed

Madeline Blair is a poet, editor, and award-winning filmmaker from Chicago, IL, with a BA in Creative Writing from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. She is the founder/editor-in-chief of *Sabr Tooth Tiger Magazine*. Her poems appear or are forthcoming in *Okay Donkey*, *Milwaukee Avenue Messenger*, *Burial Magazine*, *Michigan City Review of Books*, *Luna Luna Magazine*, *Ekphrasis Magazine*, and more. She was once quoted in *The New York Times* on her passion for clean air.

Midnight Jukebox

On New Year's Eve, you rented a private karaoke room with friends, hoping to usher in a year gentler than the one on its way out (a year you thought about smothering with a pillow because it wouldn't leave soon enough). And though a violent chill gripped the streets, leaving splinters of ice in every skull, the room was safe, with enough pizza and wings to feed a small army (an army that planned to sleep off its indigestion in lieu of conquering). You held up a bottle of wine, like a lantern built to cast more shade than light, as your friends performed their comfort medley: Amy Winehouse, MCR, Broadway and Disney; songs culled from Hot Topic visits and Myspace profiles; divorced dad anthems now claimed by lesbians – the mic finishing its last rotation in the minutes before midnight. You passed champagne and soju and tried to pull up a live-feed on the monitors – but you could only see Times Square, where it had already been 2026 for an hour and the novelty had worn off. Still, you counted down and toasted as the sweepers pulled last year's trash from the Empire State. And while the mood remained good, you knew there were limits to starting over: that the tangerine triggermen of a cursed year were still out there and nights like these were brittle as tourmaline; yet a fire-flower grew between your heart and lungs – and maybe it was fueled by good company, or the vapors you'd ingested, or the fucks you no longer gave – but it was still more than you started with last year...You said your goodbyes and vanished into the winter drift, unsure what awaited on the other side.

Abattoir Bedroom Eyes

For RR

for the gargoyle sitting
on your abdomen,

your sweat expelled
like the milk of violence—

for the shoulder you rammed
back into its socket

and teeth marks left
on the fibers of ring ropes

for the net of demons
pulled into your legs,

the musculature of peaches
cuffed in violet

for eyes black
as the bumps and breaks

and every rip on the road
to betterment

I offer this scrap of words and flesh
through lips too swollen
to speak your name

I don't need to suck
the venom from your ribs
or the ghost from your thumb—
just let me be a bloodstain
you step over between conquests

(don't be surprised
if I catch fire on your boot)

Ending L: Acid West After(L)ife

naked at a public toilet,
a urinal at that—
I downed a bot-
tle of peach schnapps
and relieved myself
at the same time

the bowl's porcelain
tinkle unheard over
the ringing in my ears

I padded across
a floor dirtier
than my feet
and tried to see
anything of myself
in the punch-dented glass

squeezing the now
empty bottle like
the memory of an old
lover whose name
I couldn't remember,
nor the places
we laid together,
and her body too
was at risk of fading...

I left
the bathroom as a skeleton
carriage passed by—
which is to stay it was more
wire than wheel or wood,
and all its passengers were
dead

also, its horses were on fire—
their eyes of liquid mercury
about to burst

GREG HARRELL

I walked through
all the broken things
sticking out of the ground
to see if I still feel,
wondering if anything
would ever pass
through my lips again

the Sun a bent copper
rim and the Moon
a fallen chandelier

Greg Harrell won the Illinois Emerging Writer Award back in 2012. He capitalized on this success by not writing anything at all for several years and then only writing for himself at the end of that self-imposed hiatus. He has co-organized and participated in grassroots poetry readings throughout the city of Chicago and currently resides in its western suburbs.

A Fish, A Finch

You chirp your glorious melody
bringing delight and wonder to their ears.
Beneath the stillness of the mirrors surface
I lithely glide
scales glinting, enchanting them.
I know you sense it
the black stripes that cut up your sacred blue
& golden orb that trials across the sky.
I sense the space without --
the edge of my world & easily travel to that edge and the others.
There is more for you but not for I.
The door may be opened for you
& the freedom of days beyond awaits you.
You call to that wonder --
the others of another flock and
a future already nested in easily crafted safety.
Beyond my world there is but death,
there is no more than this that I swim about in.
So sing for us, my golden finch
& if the mercy we dream of,
whether by luck or choice, arrives
fly fast,
fly far,
fly on,
my golden sun.

Eyes Squeezed Shut

On these steps, we spoke of the design of our home
and the purpose of laughter and love.
How fast they've fled
How far they've fallen
The sublime exterior of elevated elegance in
foliage fair and lush
belied the ruin in the halls and distrust in the wooden heels
that click along the planks.
I wonder now
if I knew the difference
between the oaken ones here
and the hickory gallows steps there.
At the summit of both,
I could not see any I loved,
no face of mercy nor union nor friendship
would turn its face on me.
The half dollar flips
in the space between contemplation & complication.
On these steps where we greeted the coldness of night
which sauntered in & settled here
from a place still and deep,
I held the dream of us,
the morning that I sought,
but I wonder now,
if I was the only one who squeezed her eyes shut
& kept on believing in our dream.

**Micro-universes of Memory: Poetry, Ritual,
and the Sacred Work of Words**

We are all bound to one another in words -- the ways we speak them and the ways they shape us in return. Long before the formalization of language there must have been breath, rhythm, repetition shared across the fire. Poetry is often suspected to have preceded language itself—that it was originally an artifact of acoustic communication meant to demonstrate and share life as it was lived.

Among all species, humans possess the unusual capacity to remember —and choose to recall—our existence through words. We recall not only what happened, but how it felt. We preserve this experience through story, through symbols and through performance. Many can say they feel this ancient urge in them to say: this mattered and I am here. Poetry became one of the earliest forms of that insistence - a communal act of reflection and recognition.

As poets, we are tied to this history and to the cultural complexities that many still live with. "Why do you write?" is a question I suspect many writers have been asked and have pondered deeply. Here, I have captured my own thoughts through both historical and anthropological lenses. I hope that my journey through these reflections and ramblings brings you to discoveries of your own.

Archaeological remnants - carvings, pigments, tools formed with intention -- tells us that symbolic life began more than 20,000 years. As shelters became settlements and campfires became hearths, traditions were reshaped around this reflection. Permanence of existence and the authority of existence became necessity. The desire to preserve emotion and meaning became a part of how societies were formed.

Nearly 4,700 years ago, language was pressed into clay in ancient Sumar. Among these precious tablets is preserved what is often called the world's oldest love poem, The Love Song for Shu-Sin. Written for Shu-Sin, king of Ur during the Third Dynasty, it was performed before a sea of eyes during Akitu, the spring festival in which the world itself was to be renewed. Akitu, was the major 12 day spring festival celebrating the rebirth of nature, cosmic renewal and affirmation of the divine order in Sumeria. During this festival statues were paraded through the

SIERRA McCUTCHEN

streets and through the rites performed before these statues the world was made anew by the Gods.

The poem was not private. Tucked away from the voices of their life. It was spoken aloud, possibly by a priestess or bride chosen to enact the sacred marriage between ruler and divine order. This tradition of hieros gamos or sacred marriage is a ritualistic union between cosmic forces or deities invoking a union of fertility, abundance and cosmic order inclusive of a divine right to rule. This declaration holds records of her passionate love and devotion before her king and gods, as she sings out

"Man of my heart, my beloved man, your allure is a sweet thing, as sweet as honey."

Yet the performance carried more than affection. Through voice and ritual, cosmic balance was restored. Authority was sanctified. Fertility and abundance were invoked. More than devotion, it enacted continuity.

The voice of the speaker is lost yet not her words. A record of this passion and tradition as described on a rich red clay tablet lost to our minds. Through her words it becomes clear that this poem has long served more than ornamentation or record. It has become a means to showing a shared desire, to speak our words, to be known and be recalled.

Even now, poetry continues to open a distinct space -- one not restricted by command, utility or necessity. In that space, reflection deepens. Experience is not reduced to instruction or argument. Grief can be held without resolution. Love can be spoken without possession. Language stretches beyond simple function and becomes a space for me. We continue to experiment, to write, to preserve. Each poem becomes a small segment of a community. A micro universe summoned through collective inheritance. Through poetry, we do what generations did before us: we speak life into form and trust that it can be carried forward.

And if poetry began as a ritual, perhaps it has always carried within it a quiet defiance of erasure. Empires collapse, temples tumble down, names lost from record, yet fragments of verses endure -- pressed into clay, copied into parchment, whispered from memory when materials fail. What survives then in poetry is not merely information, but orientation: a way of locating ourselves within a time within one another, within whatever order we believe holds the world together. Perhaps then that is what we seek -- still and always.

Discern

You remarked about her death
details that,
when laid down in series
and bolted together
with metal fishplates, reveal
decisions decided with a capital D,
& carried along by rail,
bookmarking where it started and
how it ended.

Which is to say:

It was Saturday evening.
I was watching the English Patient when you phoned (that scene,
you know the one,
when we are told of Madox and
how it ends.
Madox who toted a copy
of Anna Karenina, as he
traversed the North African desert;
Anna, who lay quenched
forever on rails,
except in word & thought,
chronically to be summoned
by name, forever.
We should see Anna where Anna exists,
whenever she exists.
And greet her at her pleasure.).

Occasionally,
a train car empties it's
containers of ballast
onto the roadbed.

These are payloads of discernment.

Haiku (with thanks to G.H.)

I said, "Love has no
 expiration." He says, "Sir, -
I beg to differ."

Let's talk about something beautiful

Let's talk about something beautiful,
of hopeful things
of things worth remembering.

The first day of Spring, sure.
Or the thirtieth, when you catch a ray or two
of the sun, cascading
over the apartment across the way,
down on to the street, and
into your domain.

A cat walking across a windowsill
& after a lengthy stretch, tucks
white, tiny limbs beneath
its heft. A calico mushroom,
sunning itself, rear-end to the glass.

Let's talk about something beautiful.
Of wonderful things.

The moon, for instance,
washed over by our umbra,
birthing an eclipse, a Blood Moon,
ogled by neighbors who
overwhelm backyards with
90° neck angles.

Yes, let's talk about beautiful things

but

while we do, do not
forget the beautiful
contained in all things
moonless, sunless, common—

hand firm on a shoulder,
a cup of tea;
a bawl not unheard;
the stillness in which pain
is encased and unstill,
and love, terrible though it be,
rife with circumstance—
It is all, all over the place.

A cat walking across a windowsill
& after a lengthy stretch, tucks
white, tiny limbs beneath
its heft. A calico mushroom,
sunning itself, rear-end to the glass

Remember When

Remember when

it was new

it was plain

it was good

it then rained

it then sunned

it then laughed

it wept

(in the quiet, alone)

it was loud

it was muted

it strengthened

it fine-tuned

it weakened

it strengthened

it fine-tuned

it questioned

it answered

an answer, then another

it was something

and still is something,

remember?

Orange Principle

a residual tint is inclining to
purple

pale red

(
two fish

) in proportions as green listens
(between waves)

to yellow

but this tincture must

be (...(so)) subdued by black

mixing the orange and blue
you get variegated

saturation

covered by lambent
frag-
ments

orange / red

(in golden ratio—

(covered by flaming tongues

"we-all-die" is time

(: verb noun nothing, etc.)

likewise, the deepest shade

formed with principle warmths

(of) a leaf on

a yellow-brown, flat twig

perspire-inspire— cloud rain lake puddle

arms open — air— breath-hint

blue tint

as and as-if

water— orange breath

orange flesh

cracking
 in the form of clenched
 hands holding
 tam-tams, drum side

against each other

one side covered with green silk
 the other faded, coarse
 blue drumhead
 stretched with a wavy
 edge at the bottom—

between four times and three
 beats

 on which
 covered in
 swirls of orange

rests

water to water—

orange,
 alone,
 moving

sough) purl) water)

orange

fragment

ember-swarm

susurrant-hum

of

our vague and limitless bodies—

 fire clings to them like bark 'round a tree—
 my face, ashen petrichor:

flutter of sparks

arc, trace
a word around

water traveling

no-where.

emergence of matter...

"when they came to earth
they were transmuted by
the effect of the sun"

—light
echo—

"the human being sprung
from some other animal"
[first animals,]

"blazing orbs drawn off cold
earth and water—

animals: temporary gods
clustering around the earth—

animals "which originally were similar to fish"

then all the host

of shapes & differences found in the world
generate in the water

fingers

its current:

c

&

*

c

&

*

White

At the Bottom of Light

A stone from air—
a shadow, perhaps the weight
of atmosphere

Minerals and moistures gather—
buoyant somehow
above gravity

...rain

It's the weight of aura
that wraps around my body that
slips through my lungs ...slithers
breath— humid / arid / ... counter glow

Stone as verb— a nebula spinning into a planet

Stone as noun— a dark wall where

one stops or walks through

at the bottom of light

White

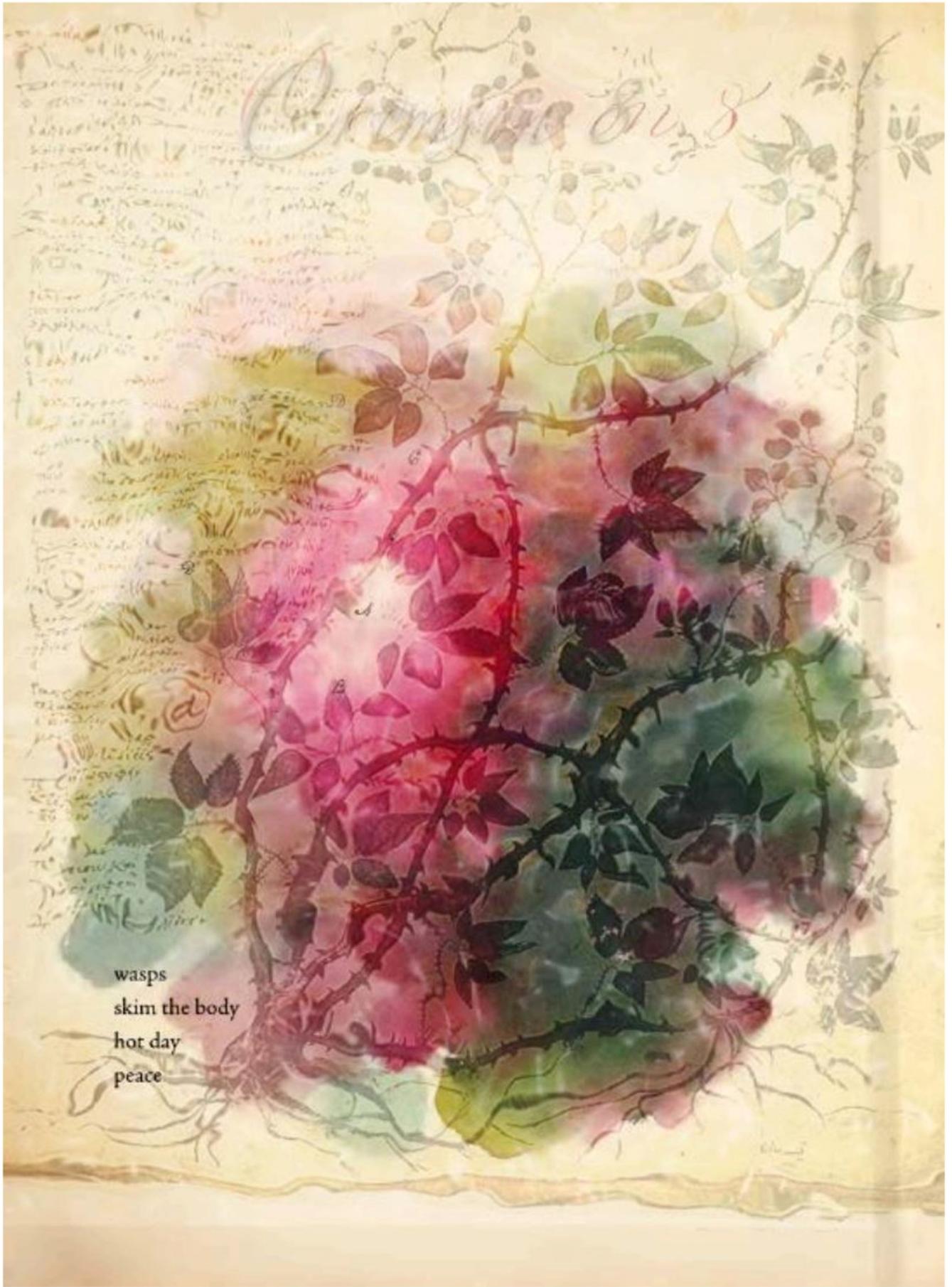
At the bottom of light
flaring species border fire—

At the bottom of light
small bodies grow
slow and sleepy

Suppose water is still—
common laden water
still
germinating

They rest there for a very long time,
in water charged with...
washed in ... lime

I have seen them remain this way in water,
introduced, repeated, he said,
at the bottom, he said, of



wasps
skim the body
hot day
peace

Yellow

we're blended with colour

before spoken of as

inconsistent with strong light—

to give roundness, or projection

we place a light and warm colour on

relinquished observations,

a cold one on the zone gone back

...retire from the eye

in Sublimation of the most white Dust-of-it-self

B

i.e., decay will never stop

when it broke, it created the sun, the moon and the stars

it splits— converges/indefinite \rightarrow

it is completely indefinite

at some point it inhaled the void from outside

G

genesis/emptiness/orange

light field

incoherent
light,
coal-black,
dark blue
acres of lunation...
(wax/wane
angle)
wild-wildlands
light angle
ray incidence
tangential, sagacious, transverse, echo, uncountable
TYPE
reflected, refracted
beam: (normal)
trace/ memory
guided
tunneling light
through
an angle —
angel of incidence

some colors

dry, echoes

bold, powdered colors

loose and vulnerable to

the breeze

to anything that constantly changes
and the gaps between.

breeze, wind

who could argue with color?

like arguing with mortality

or what we imagine as time.

this is something that can't be contained by time.

Color and mortality—

powerful journey

no destiny / destination,

no need for charting—

the present is where one is going to,

from where one has come from.

sharing a gravity-

powered journey

going nowhere;

Dare to ask a color

questions—a deep, personal questions;

you'll leave hearing a new color,

a color you've imagined— one you've never shared a song.

& although all colors are imagined by all sentient beings

—*this one belongs to you—*

you, the interstice between

color and breath—

this in-between...

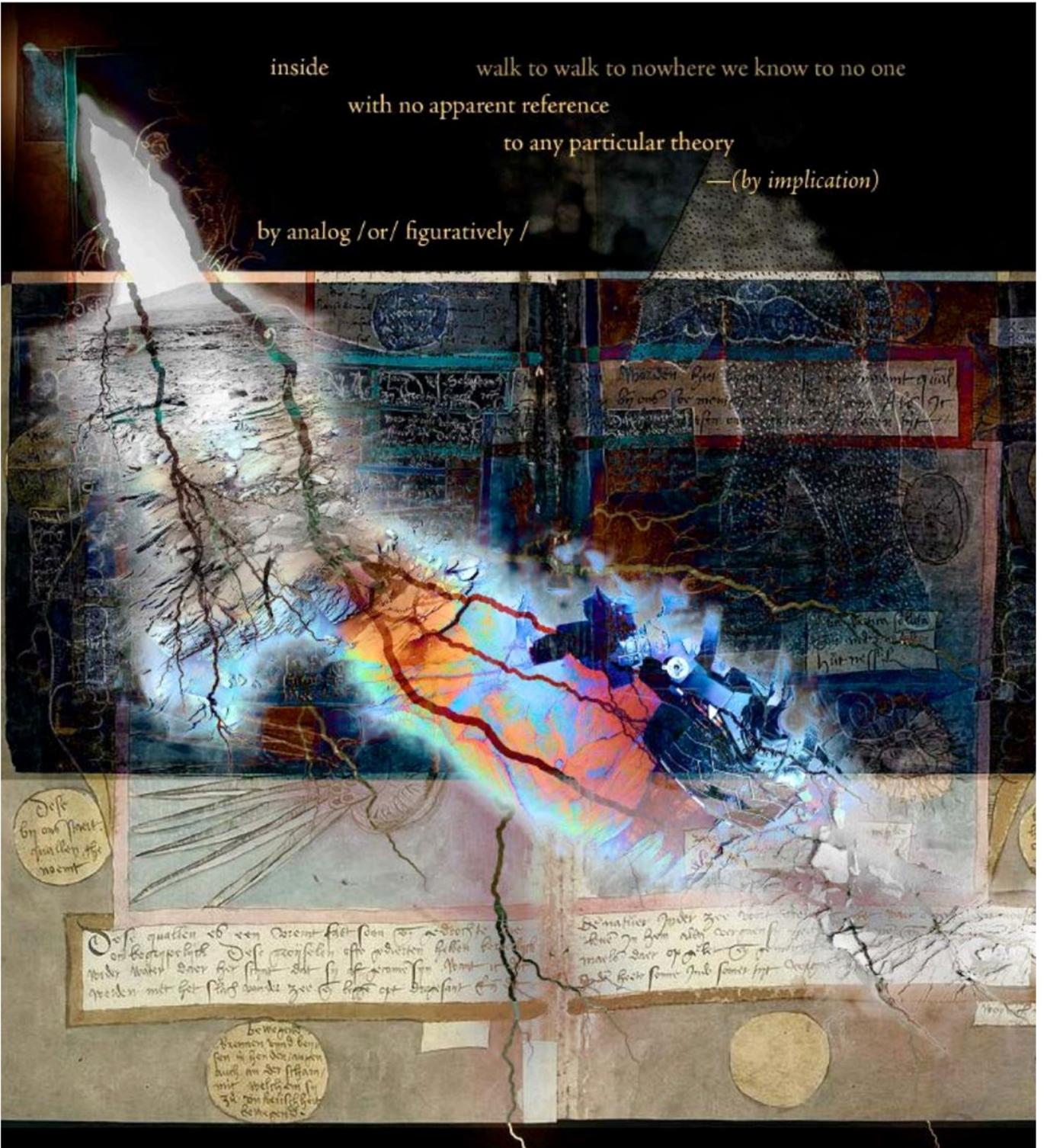
something

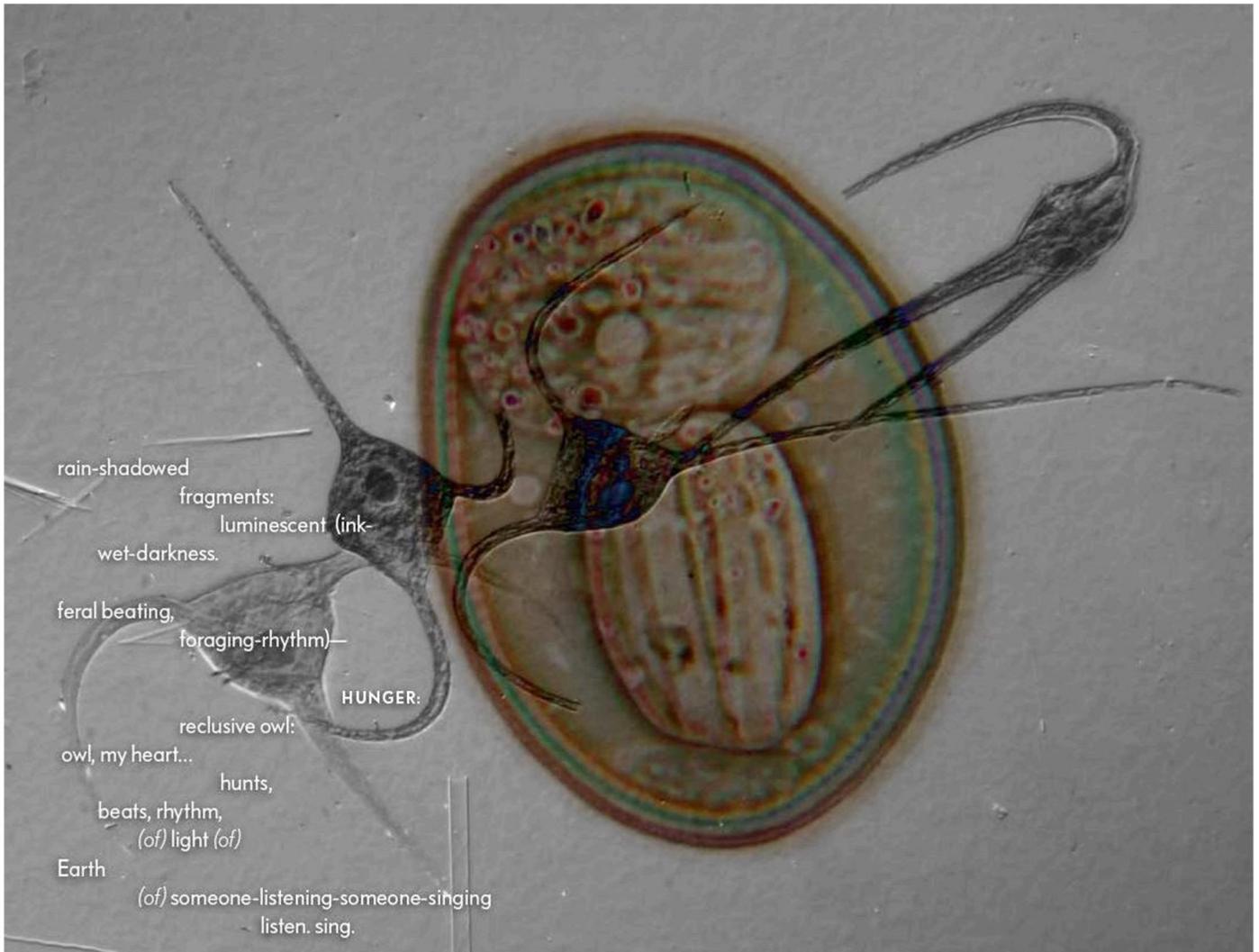
like an answer to a question

no one asks.

inside walk to walk to nowhere we know to no one
with no apparent reference
to any particular theory
—(by implication)

by analog /or/ figuratively /





Gregg Low attended the San Francisco State University MFA Creative Writing program. He worked in graphic design for 30 years. He lives in Ypsilanti, Michigan.

The Bone Hunter's Odyssey

Moving across the vast arid expanse,
the fossil-hunter walks where
wind sculpts the sandstone cliffs.
She moves, a dark silhouette
against the open sky, her gaze
probing the land for ancient whispers.

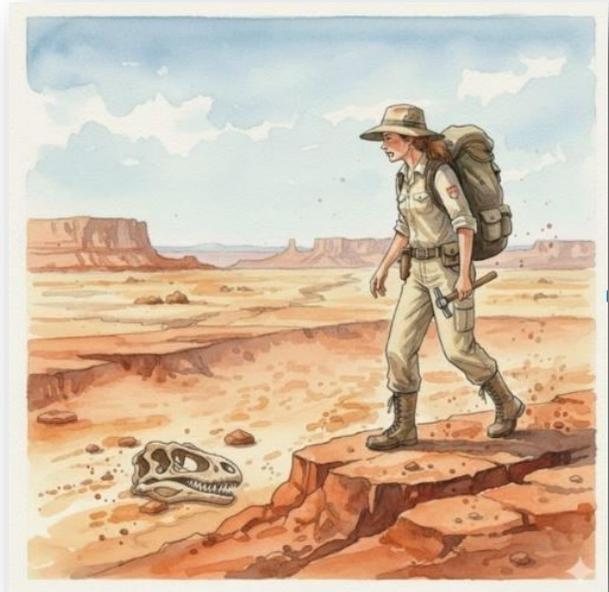
Each step brings her closer to
forgotten worlds, a boot print left
where titans once roamed.
In her hands, the map is a mere outline,
but her heart knows the language
of the earth.

The first find is modest: a piece of a tooth,
jagged, yellowed, kissed by time's
slow grind. She kneels, brushing away eons of dust
with reverence— as though waking a sleeping king.

The storms come fast in the badlands,
thunder growling like the ghosts of giants,
and still she presses on, for somewhere
beneath the layers of sandstone,
a story waits, curled in the rock's embrace.

One evening, the setting sun paints the cliffs in fire,
and there it is: a curve of rib, a fragment of a skull,
a whisper of something vast, something
that once thundered across the land now hushed
beneath the layers of hard sediment.

She digs until the moon rises, chipping away millennia
with steady hands, the fossil emerging like a secret
told too long ago to matter anymore.



STEVEN WADE VEATCH

What was it, she wonders, this beast whose bones
she cradles? A scavenger, a predator, a titan
of green forests? She dreams of it moving—
great muscles rippling under plated skin,
a roar that could split the silence of time.

When the season ends, she packs her finds,
loading crates with the weight of history.
The land watches her go, its treasures
uncovered its riddles offered but never
fully solved.

And as she drives away, dust rising in the wake
of her truck, she glances in the rearview
mirror, knowing she'll return. For the earth whispers
to her an endless call to adventure.

The Woodpecker

Effigy Mounds National Monument

I walk in the forest
where the sun shimmers
on yesterday's snow.
Barren oak limbs grab
an indifferent sky
while the leaves drift
into ravines and smell
like Turkish coffee.

The air tastes like ice
and the breeze is a sharp
spring refrain. Lichen spreads
on tree trunks and moss clings
to limestone layers
in this unglaciated terrain.

I see a redhead woodpecker
who flits about on bent branches.
In a black tuxedo,
a vest of white feathers
and a red mask,
he is formally dressed
for his midday meal.

The woodpecker knocks
on a trunk with rapid beats—
his drumming fills the forest.
We both pause to look at each other:
Present in the moment,
we become aware
there are no limits,
and no separation.

Whispers of Winter

A kerosene lamp spills a golden glow
from the cabin window onto white drifts.

Clouds scuttle past the wolf moon
as stars blink. Snow sparkles
in the moonlight as it mantles
the land in soft silence.

Some animals hibernate
while others defy the cold—
leaving only tracks in the snow.

I can smell a chill on the wind's edge
and resolve to endure as I walk
down the lonesome road.

Winter Deer

They move so slightly
you might miss
the calm in their silence—
browsing bitterbrush,
noses dusted with snow.

Each breath a small hope
rising into silence.
No shelter, no promise—
just the soft surrender
to winter's stillness.

Steven Wade Veatch is a geoscientist and writer who finds his rhythm in the ancient pulse of the American West. His poetry is a bridge between deep time and the fleeting present, often excavating the quiet stories hidden within the strata of the Rocky Mountains and the vast silences of the high plains. Veatch trades the geologist's hammer for the poet's pen to explore the textures of stone, the memory of fossils, and the enduring connection between the earth and the human spirit. His work serves as a testament to the rugged beauty of the natural world, inviting readers to find wonder in the landscapes he writes about..

To My Daughter

Like elegant lily in the Spring
From simple bulbs to fragrant blooms
You reach for light through rain and wind
with the exuberance of youth

It is my honor to sustain the loveliest flower of all
Your delicate strength, color, and scent
gradually growing rich and tall

Immense potential awaits
Your inner fortitude is firm
Dance to the beat of your destiny
In the calm waters and a storm

I love you more than words can say
And grateful for your essence
Dance, and sing, learn, and play
And have a happy Birthday!

You're Not From Here

You came from nowhere as it seemed

An image in my phone

Like Mary Poppins comes with wind

And sets the tone of home

You carry the delightful shocks and flattering sensations

The strength of rocks and beauty of notations

Hebrew syntax and historic considerations

You came as epitome of rare and ethereal love plantations

And closing my eyes in peaceful meditation

I see in you the union of earthy with divine creation

The power and grace, the healing wounds vibration

Evoking a sense of depth and forging deep connection

Let's dive into the realm of shared spiritual growth

Alluring passion leading to one breath for both

Releasing old beliefs and hurts

And singing as loud as 1000 hertz

Fields of Love

Like night is dark and day is bright
You are my captivating sunlight
Just yesterday I wasn't the same
I miss you darling day by day

It's no one's fault you struck my heart
And I won't hide my feelings
Your eyes are like the deepest sea
Gifting me warmth, the comfort, and healings

To shield our Norton Valley nest
You're catching errors on a fly
The fire's burning in my chest
and embers reach into the sky

No keys or locks on fields of love
And no need to run
The peaceful sound of a mourning dove
And love birds cuddling in the sun

And when you're away
my hand is missing strings
I try to sing, but voice gets hoarse
and the motif is losing wings

The rhyme is hard to find and all
But I keep open mind
No need for things to be refined
Our fields of love are undefined.



"If a tree falls in the forest and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound?"

Vision Quest

"So, you're the brave one," Dan jokes, learning that I am the only participant in the shamanic retreat to embrace a vision quest—fasting, solitude, and silence—seeking purpose, meaning, and a gift to be revealed and shared. The others stake their tents and their claims and huddle together, coddled in collective comfort, disengaged from whisper's beck and call.

Mikkal beats his buffalo drum to heart's steady rhythm. Chanting, smudged with sage, we gather in the sweat lodge for purification, prayer, and song. Leonard pours water from garden gourds onto seething steaming lava rocks raising plumes of smoke, haze, and ash. In four clockwise turns, we honor the elements of the East, South, West, and North. We state intentions, seek wisdom, and connect with the Great Spirit. A'ho amen.

Leaving the others, I walk in silence along the path Drew has hewn into the forest, a world away from Stafford Road. The scattered farms and homes, along with other hints of humanity, recede with each step.

I.

Ask, and it shall be given you; for every one that asketh receiveth.

Black Bear, fluffed in white, stretches across the sky, peering down from cumulus clouds' Rorschach design as if emerging from a veil. Bear raises its right arm to the square—the sign of covenant between us, the token of power to create and overcome. Arms without hands. Legs without feet. Bear needs none.

I am Bear's visible hands and feet in the world of form, in a forest kingdom apart from civilization. Yet even as these differentiated parts, I remain united with the whole, aligned in purpose and will.

II.

Seek, and ye shall find; every one that seeketh findeth.

The "little black ant" (*Monomorium minimum*) moves herky-jerky around a fallen green ash twig, its destination not predetermined, but merely the result of arrival. Ant's mandibles hold up part of a Juneberry leaf, like Atlas bearing the weight of the world. Ant accomplishes this feat like ancient pyramid builders—Egyptian, Mayan, Atlantean—who dragged or levitated stone, or like twentieth-century workers who constructed the Steelcase Pyramid closer to home just south of Grand Rapids.

Like Ant, I may wander aimlessly in my search, but I trust the treasure must be found. Go forward in faith, applying all resources and capacities in the effort. When the pearl of great price is found, offer it as a gift to the community, though it may not be what was expected.

III.

Knock, and it shall be opened unto you; to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

In nighttime visitation, an anonymous guest, possibly a yellow-headed blackbird, produces a noise like that of a door creaking open and then shut again.

A door can appear any place and lead anywhere. With the door open at the threshold, there remains only to pass through. Enter the peace that surpasses understanding.

IV.

An insect we as children called Daddy Long-Legs bears its treasure above, wielding its tiny pinhead like a third eye. From the high vantage its tall legs provide, even without needing to leave the ground in flight, one might expect the eye to be all-seeing, but third eye is blind as shown by two foremost legs that stretch out, one or the other at a time, to feel its way forward. Daddy engages with another of its kind, whether in attraction or opposition I cannot tell.

The inference I draw in correspondence is that I cannot always know my way ahead with certainty. Instead of relying on what I can directly see, I can trust my instincts to feel my way out of darkness to arrive at where I need to be and what I am to do there.

V.

In the gift of darkness voices of insects awaken, in solo parts and in concert, some distinguishable while others blend in unison into the universal din which enters and flees from consciousness according to attention's grasp.

The trees and the forest, the intricacy of detail and the perspective from stepping back, shift awareness for learning from what each alternately offers.

VI.

I've never seen this next animal until having moved to Michigan. I never imagined that this was a creature at all until Janice instructed me. It looks like a tiny piece of white fuzz or dryer lint floating through the air wherever the draft blows.

Wherever it is that accident or intention, fate or destiny, momentary stop or journey's end carries me, consider that's where I need to arrive to learn from the experiences of that place, that person, those people, that situation, that adventure.

VII.

Serpent slithers off the open path, vanishing into tall grass. Without legs for running, wings for flying, or fins for swimming, Serpent escapes harm through undulating, weaving motion.

I imagine myself as Serpent, not ascribing failure to limitation, not treating limitation as excuse for not trying. Adapt. Find a way to achieve, and even excel, despite perceived weakness.

VIII.

Before me stand two sugar maples nearly identical in height and circumference. One is covered in green foliage all the way up, its leaves issuing from various sized branches. The other maple stands bereft of life's expression except for a thin vine climbing from the ground a small portion of the way up its trunk. Near the top, one bare branch leans across to touch the living tree, as if seeking infusion. Through this small vine from the ground, and through this direct connection with the living tree, branch-to-branch, even this otherwise dead tree knows life. Bird, in the form of a song sparrow, approaches to perch on a branch whereon it introduces its own vitality into the resurrection project.

Even in hopeless-appearing situations, vivifying resources avail. There are ways to thrive. Find them — or allow them to find you.

IX.

Bald Eagle soars across the sky along its steady course, maintaining a higher, unwavering perspective unswayed by the allures of the ground that fascinate a fickle honeybee.

The lesson from this correspondence is to learn from experience yet not become so immersed in detail as to lose composure or perspective.

X.

Rabbit pauses, ears erect and alert, dark eye opaque and inaccessible. Rabbit reacts to noise by bolting down the trail. I too follow the trail, though in the opposite direction. This cottontail, without especially menacing weapons in tooth or talon, must remain vigilant for the slightest hint of threat.

In contrast, I tend to parry imaginary threats constructed in thought alone. This causes unnecessary anxiety, stress, distraction, and energy loss. Seek centeredness, relaxation, and calm in any situation. Life is Defense; there is no Attack.

XI.

Stick lies on the trail, propped as if by two supports—like Aaron and Hur standing on each side of the prophet—forming the shape of an action arrow pointing toward something yet unknown. I search for a moment, but nothing stirs. Suddenly, a young white-tailed deer bounds toward me, crossing within just a few steps of my position. A mother doe snorts, discerning a threat between herself and her fawn.

Hear the voice of warning from one with more experience and knowledge. Better yet, heed the still small voice within.

XII.

Blueberry aphid nimbly traverses the main stalk of a fallen elderberry plant, its compact clusters of green berries not yet purple. Aphid crawls upside down along the bottom of the elderberry leaf, anticipating a snack.

Sometimes it is best to reshape the environment; other times, to adapt oneself to circumstances. Be flexible. Choose the approach suited to the moment.

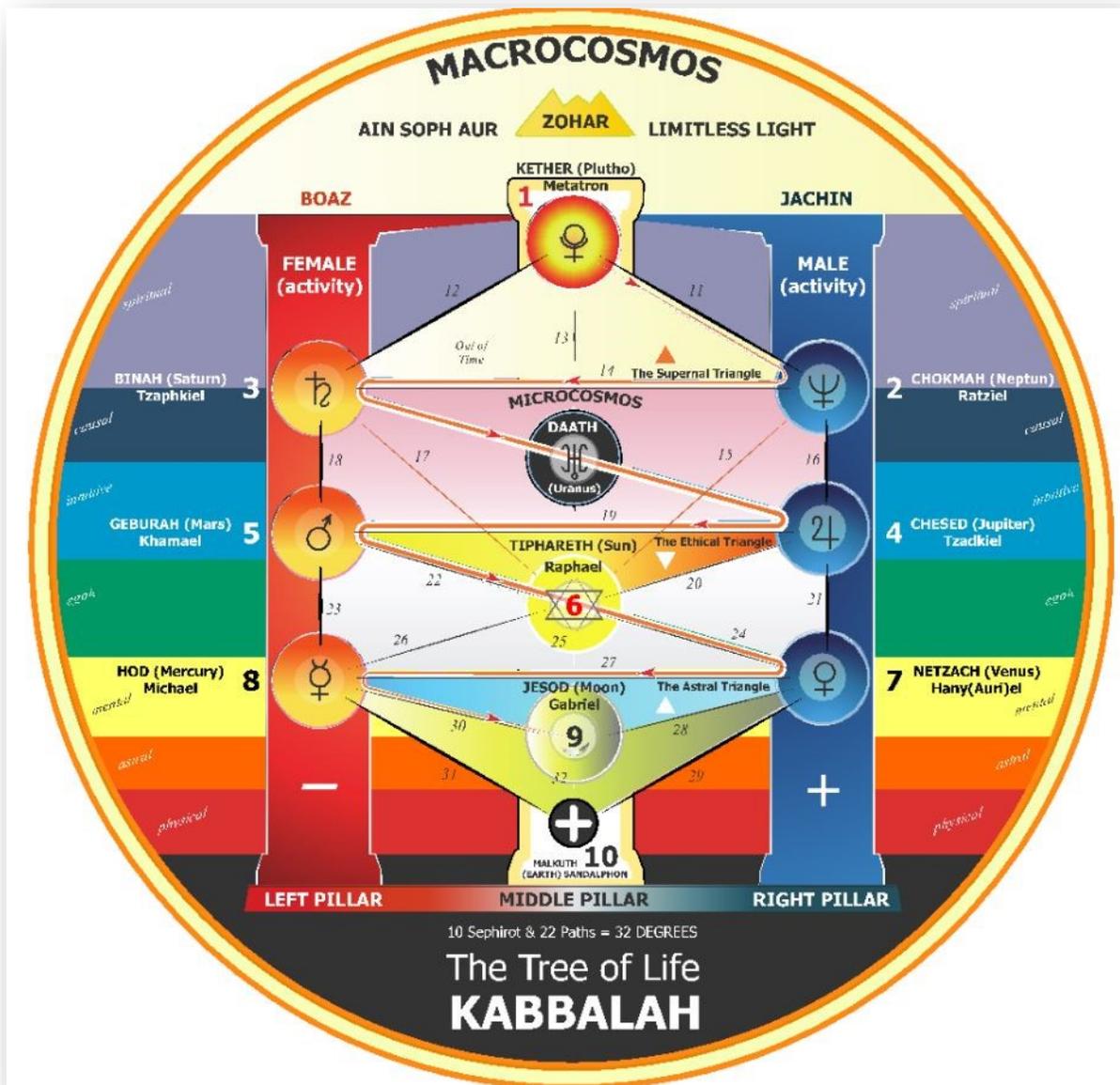
XIII.

Firefly flashes intermittently before returning to darkness depicting peak satori moments when the higher and the ordinary become one.

Work to increase the frequency and duration of these illuminating moments. Keep the dwelling place clean and fit for reception, so that spirit may be embodied.

*As if inspired by Wallace Stevens' *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird*, these are thirteen observations of the outer and inner movements of creatures and things, together with what they tacitly evoke, each offering a unique way of perceiving truth. There seems to be an almost inexhaustible variety of forms, signs, and synchronicities to draw upon for insight and for encountering unity within multiplicity: the archetype among instances, God among gods, the face among masks, and the inner forest—hidden within the perceptible trees at Crows Nest.*

Crows Nest, August 2021



The Fourteenth Way

I.
yesterday was a week when nothing happened
surrounded by nowhere everywhere around
wheel spinning mired in muck watching waiting
sniffing at snuffed out expectation grasping at
the faltering faith of a not yet planted seed of a tree
not yet risen from the bottomless ground of growing

II.

today with silent shouts for joy the morning stars shake
loose their souls from heaven's hold while the seedsman
tends the garden to prepare there the tree for forever
concurrent conjoint micro-macro cosmic views

III.

at the crown of the tree a lofty limb bows low
where a blackbird perches to court and display
peeking between branches at the footprints of his pursuit
that cease with her ascent to the treetop height she leaps

IV.

the *tchup chuk sound of song*
enlivens lovers to act
out the abrupt movements
of their springtime ritual dance

V.

the birds resonate in rapt rapport
vibrating in harmony with the tree
not in doubt about now nor how
to fulfill the measure of their knowing

VI.

crown's contents press inward
blessed by hidden hands
molding smoothed spheres
wrapped in healing's wholeness

VII.

of the thirteen ways of looking
and the thirteen ways of knowing
the fourteenth entails intermingling
seer with seen knower with known

VIII.

birds and tree and i become one
in the garden so that none can
readily remember which part we played
then and which wherever now

IX.

this state seems like a dream to me now
if you know where i live you know which i mean
the lower peninsula held upward to a treetop view
touching supernal grace befitting nature's gift

X.

now we look for anything conspicuously
different or something just the same
a synchronistic sign propagated by the protocol
governing perpetuity's temporal accommodation

XI.

this time through the avian essence reembodies
as primordial evian-adamic forms hovering on
either side of the tree of life with severity of law
and mercy of grace bounding the pillar of balance

XII.

these are levels we leap
if i can believe
– remind me –
what we are talking about

XIII.

we'd better stop
talking now haven't we
said too much already
and sung not enough

XIV.

i'm just mad about fourteen
fourteen is mad about me
veils of void
central sun
falls to ground
fortune wheel spun
one eternal round

Seethe

A long, lean bald man slaps his feet on the slushy sidewalk. The snow is grey and splashes his black pants, his black coat, and will dry, eventually, in a pale brown smattering of flakey dust.

His shoes are flat and worn. He feels every crack on the sidewalk, every dying weed that escapes the cement. The leather of his shoes has never been polished. They are dirt-soaked, pock-marked, and grey. The stitching is coming apart on the left side of the left foot. He always wears shoes like this. Flat, ostensibly black, and leather. Shoes that look worn and suited to street photography. He's not vain on purpose. He's not insistently and damningly vain. The vanity that has resulted in his constant discomfort emerged in opposition to another kind of discomfort: he is psychically uncomfortable in sneakers, bright colors, synthetic fabrics, large showy pockets, contrast stitching, silk, and any type of sateen. His discomfort is modern, about modernity. Everything current confuses him. He cannot help but look back. He squirms with sickness under the bright LED lights of pharmacies and cafeterias. He longs to cover his ears when he hears the thumping bass of a neon green car—round with aerodynamic swoops, whirls, and cutouts—rumble the street.

But he does not cover his ears, and he always keeps his arms at his side. He holds his face perfectly placid all the time. All the feelings in his ears, eyes, arms, feet, in his torso and his bowels—he controls them tightly, he commands them proficiently. They never go away. He practices complacency, ease, joy, but the jittering, vibrating, soul-gnawing churning never subsides. He blows his nose. He makes a sound: a huffing, quick release, a near nose-smirk. It's through this sound and these shoes and his black clothing and small round glasses that he can live. Otherwise he would fidget himself into a frenzy and propel himself somewhere unearthly.

Today, he quit his job in the billing center of a transportation brokerage. He's worked at PLOREX for twenty years and leaves without formality. He tells old Miriam, in Human Resources, that his mother has died. Miriam's eyes become soft and wet. He hates her face while he lies to her. She is the idiot accepting the lie. She is the idiot feigning emotion over someone she doesn't care about, cannot care about, because the person doesn't exist. His mother has been dead for years. Years and years. She'd died in a bus accident. She had brain cancer and then died in a bus accident. He'd seen it as a blessing. She didn't suffer, he didn't suffer. No one suffered and everyone was rewarded. She'd been a cross woman anyhow. She was a nagging presence in his life. He missed the routine of her for a while, but he managed to love her money more than he'd ever loved her. Though he didn't like the feeling of being heartless. He had to resell himself to himself as a mildly villainous figure to accept or endure himself as a lonely, irritable, haughty, unloved, and unloving man devoid of familial sentiment and near-giddy over material gain.

"Take all the time you need," Miriam blathers.

"I don't know when I'll be back," he shams, knowing he will not come back, and relieved that he won't have to say goodbye to his co-workers.

He's been working on his art. He's old, nearly 50, but he's read of others, Grandma Moses and the like, who made something of themselves and their art and their egos at advanced ages. If they could do it, why not him? What did Grandma Moses have that he didn't? He could put something together. He's been sketching celebrities. He imagines an entire gallery of celebrity sketches and people wandering the gallery saying intelligent things about how he's humanized iconic figures, brought them down to the ground, re-placed them on earth. They're saying things about what an iconoclast he is, about how his images show everyone both the vacuity and the tender heart in each and every celebrity expression. They're human, they're idealized, they're dirt, trash, scum. He's rendered it. He's practiced it, he's achieved it. He's proud of his art. It says something about now. It's relevant in a way that nothing else has approached yet. People have tackled the topic of celebrity, of the parasocial, but they haven't captured the depravity, the sadness, the menace. He's done it. He's managed to do it and now he'll display it.

With his savings and his mother's money, he rents a space in an industrial area of the city. The cement walls and floors suit him. He's living the right thing the right way. He believes in his path. He hangs his portraits. He puts up posters around town. He puts out wine and cheese. Several people come through on opening night. He has the space for six months. Every day someone or other wanders in and wanders out. Huffed up people in mismatched clothing. People with runny noses and bird-like eyes. He sells two portraits and three prints. Each day he goes to the gallery he feels he has purpose. The day the gallery closes he takes the stairs to the top of the building and looks at the slush-laden street below. It's always winter. It's always grey. He says, "Fuck you," in a garbled tongue and spits over the edge of the roof. The spit runs down his chin. He takes the last of his belongings from the gallery and gets on the bus to go home.

Though miserable, though cold and angry and resentful and miserable, he feels important. He is an artist. Superior to everyone on the bus. They did not try. He has mostly failed, but they have never tried. He stares at a brunette in a white fur hat for a long time. Her blue eyes are jumping with life and promise. Her hair bounces with every pothole. She chatters into a sparkling telephone. She will be happy. He sees something awful in the distance between them. She has succeeded. Whether or not she tries, she has succeeded. His nose begins to run. His ribs poke at his heart. He brings the fleshy meat part of his hand to his mouth intending to bite it, intending to bleed, but a man swishes past. The man wears blue and smells of the snow but also stale smoke and wet dog. Blue snowsuit, blue boots. The blue man sits across from him. The blue man's eyes drift up. Their eyes pass each other. The blue man has vapid, vacant eyes, yellow-ish, with brown holes in the center. The artist gawks at the eyeballs, waiting for the blue man to notice him, to knock him out. But nothing sticks to the blue man and his teflon blue suit. The blue man reaches into a backpack and pulls out a large orange. Nearly the size of a grapefruit, but orange. The artist watches, his nose crinkles imperceptibly, curious, as though something is about to happen.

Something does happen. The blue man bites the top of the orange. The artist chokes on his spit. He coughs. The blue man's eyes glaze the artist's face and then pass along the empty bus seats. The blue man chews the peel off the top of the orange slowly, methodically, ruminatively. The artist is normally self-possessed, normally contains his horror, suppresses the inflammation, but on the bus, his mouth is slack. His eyes agog. A grown man on the bus doesn't know how to eat an orange. He's munching on the peel. The disgusting peel! Eventually he swallows it. Nonplussed. He swallows it and takes another bite. This time he gets a bit of flesh. The juice squirts the underside of his nose and then drips back onto his hand. The artist considers looking away, it's becoming absurd. It's upsetting. But he looks on. With each bite, the blue man drips more juice back onto his hand and onto the orange and then onto the floor of the bus until a small pool of sticky orange juice forms beneath the hunch of him.

He chews each bite thoroughly, methodically. The artist's gaze falls upon the sticky fist before him. The blue man wears a simple gold band on the ring finger of his left hand. The artist thinks of a family of vacant-eyed bus-riders, terrible at eating oranges, unable to see him. Then he thinks of his ex-girlfriend Lucy, and her sad blue eyes the day she broke with him. The pity she had for him. He didn't ask for it. That's not what he meant to evoke in her. But that's what she gave him. That's what they all gave him. Lucy, Cynthia, Michelle. They looked at him sadly, they looked at him glassily. Eating their oranges alongside the blue man. All of them eating sloppily, insanely, without awareness of themselves or him. The blue man maintained a sticky harem of the artist's ex-lovers. The blue man fed and nurtured what the artist left behind, picked up his past, his history, his two dead childhood cats, and drenched them all in juice.

The artist is in agony. He misses his stop. The girl in the white hat disappears, though he doesn't see her go. He's watching the blue man with total abandon. The blue man's eyes remain glassy, drifting carelessly over everything. He turns his head slowly, this way and that, occasionally passing the artist's face, but never stopping to note anything.

The entire orange is nearly done—and then, the blue man starts to choke. The artist gasps and clutches his camel-hair scarf. The blue man coughs and coughs. His eyes bulge and his mouth foams like a mad dog. The bus driver glances in the mirror. A woman heading home from her job as a maid in a 36-storey hotel looks toward the blue man, then back down at her lap. She's tired. The blue man gets himself under control, lets the final bite of orange—which is no more than an inch of peel—fall to the floor.

"Finish it, man! Finish the fucking orange!" the artist screams with terror.
"Huh?" the blue man says, and looks down at the peel, then up at the artist.

The artist falls back in his seat with his face in his hands. He has the blue man's attention, the brown eyes of the blue man are upon him now. But the artist can no longer endure any of this: the bus, this moving mouth across from him, and his own odd and insensible life. He pulls the rope to stop the bus. He leaves his sketches on the bus and walks into the frigid night. The blue man, the maid, and the bus driver all watch him go.

Something does happen. The blue man bites the top of the orange. The artist chokes on his spit. He coughs. The blue man's eyes glaze the artist's face and then pass along the empty bus seats. The blue man chews the peel off the top of the orange slowly, methodically, ruminatively. The artist is normally self-possessed, normally contains his horror, suppresses the inflammation, but on the bus, his mouth is slack. His eyes agog. A grown man on the bus doesn't know how to eat an orange. He's munching on the peel. The disgusting peel! Eventually he swallows it. Nonplussed. He swallows it and takes another bite. This time he gets a bit of flesh. The juice squirts the underside of his nose and then drips back onto his hand. The artist considers looking away, it's becoming absurd. It's upsetting. But he looks on. With each bite, the blue man drips more juice back onto his hand and onto the orange and then onto the floor of the bus until a small pool of sticky orange juice forms beneath the hunch of him.

He chews each bite thoroughly, methodically. The artist's gaze falls upon the sticky fist before him. The blue man wears a simple gold band on the ring finger of his left hand. The artist thinks of a family of vacant-eyed bus-riders, terrible at eating oranges, unable to see him. Then he thinks of his ex-girlfriend Lucy, and her sad blue eyes the day she broke with him. The pity she had for him. He didn't ask for it. That's not what he meant to evoke in her. But that's what she gave him. That's what they all gave him. Lucy, Cynthia, Michelle. They looked at him sadly, they looked at him glassily. Eating their oranges alongside the blue man. All of them eating sloppily, insanely, without awareness of themselves or him. The blue man maintained a sticky harem of the artist's ex-lovers. The blue man fed and nurtured what the artist left behind, picked up his past, his history, his two dead childhood cats, and drenched them all in juice.

The artist is in agony. He misses his stop. The girl in the white hat disappears, though he doesn't see her go. He's watching the blue man with total abandon. The blue man's eyes remain glassy, drifting carelessly over everything. He turns his head slowly, this way and that, occasionally passing the artist's face, but never stopping to note anything.

smintz is a graduate of the English M.A program at the University of Regina. Her work has been published with Radiant Press, Invisible Publishing, the Feathertale Review, JackPine, Agnes and True, Book*Hug, Apocalypse Confidential, and a few others. She lives a rootless life of tiresome wandering. <https://smintz.carrd.co/>

Bloodlines

*"Me and Franky laughin' and drinkin'
Nothin' feels better than blood on blood..."
Bruce Springsteen, Highway Patrolman*

Third filly born here twenty-five
years ago, to More Peppy Kid,
AKA Rosie, and Johnny One Time,
from Hancock bloodlines.
She spun and cavorted till we
were dizzy watching her.

Name stuck, shortened to Diz.
Boarding here with Jody's Feathers,
her smaller yet two years older sister,
inseparable always. Jody
ran the herd, Diz her enforcer.
Horses were milling about
in pasture midday. I guessed
incorrectly, it was the gusty wind
that upset them and usually calm
Jack, the lone gelding.

I was puttering about the kitchen,
favoring a bum leg. Diz's owner
stopped for coffee, offered help,
"Yes, please walk puppy Penny,
and check the horses."
I hobbled to the barn to feed cats,
saw him returning from pasture talking
to Zeke, who grew up with horses,
rode Diz to sort cows since
his main horse, Jody, got arthritis
in her back leg and shouldn't work.

"Diz's dead and I called Todd
to bring his backhoe,"
he said, in the calm voice
one has before grief sets in.
Mid-October sun sets over her
prone body lying in autumn-
reddened big bluestem, above
ground one last night in pasture
where she was born and raised.
Burial first thing in the morning.

Sorrow's Journey

End of October, spirits wander at night,
seek a place to be. As All Hallows Eve
approaches, look to burial grounds,

wake sleeping ghosts, arouse slumbering
undead, unearth stolen moments we wish
to recall, before All Saints Day unfolds.

Fun of Halloween morphs into sorrow
as death comes to family, like a thief,
days after oft forgotten Thanksgiving,

stealing a family's loved one too soon.
In disbelief, we stumble through days
of memorial planning without relief.

Time marches regardless of grief, yet
we must somehow survive Christmas.
New year dawns, recovery begins,

then calls go out to kin of another death.
We inhale, can't seem to catch our breath,
recall visits with her as precious moments.

While aged in years, she was in good health.
Funerals have a way of capturing the stealth
of passing, yet showing a long life's riches.

Children, through their progeny's breadth
are the next generation. Without parents,
each of us, now, our own island.

Heat Wave

First Saturday of October
hit a high of ninety. Next Monday
reaching only into the fifties.

My internal temperature rises
with the extra exertion it takes
to rise as hip bones shift during sleep.

Son and friends gave meds
to old horses so they could work
arthritic legs to round up bovines.

They vaccinated calves on Saturday
in that extraordinary heat,
checked cows the next day

when weather began to simmer
down. Later Sunday he returned
tired horses and was beat

himself, went home early.
I believe he will be up long before light
Monday to begin his week,

attend a conference in Ashville
on how to best conserve archives.
I traveled to that city

forty-five years ago,
to better my advising skills,
carrying him in my womb.

I yearn to be twenty-eight again,
with strong bones and eager
to learn. Instead, I reach for Tylenol.

Hope he has a creative seminar, finds
time to see the Blue Ridge Mountains
dotted with orange, red, and gold.

Pray for Rain

It is fine to keep a rain calendar,
we pray for rain during drought,
turnabout and pray for light

after long days of grey clouds.
It is fine to keep a rain calendar,
overcast days are leaden shrouds.

Some relish quiet indoor nights.
Turnabout and pray for light.
October days have been bright,

gardens still grow, but slower,
Insect pests want to enter.
It is fine to keep a rain calendar.

Battling gnats, swatting flies,
accidental autumn athletics,
turnabout and pray for light.

Days shorten as year advances,
less time to control our doubts.
We wear warm coats and gloves,
pray for rain during drought.

Lin Marshall Brummels earned degrees from the University of Nebraska and Syracuse University. She is a licensed Nebraska counselor. Her poems received Honorable Mention in the 2021 and 2024 Nebraska Poetry Society's contest and placed in the 2025 Story Circle Poetry contest. Brummels has published poems in *Poet Lore*, *San Pedro River Review*, *The Good Life Review*, *Oakwood*, *Plain-song*, *Nebraska Life*, and others. Her chapbooks by *Finishing Line Press* are "Cottonwood Strong" and "Hard Times," a 2016 Nebraska Book Award winner. Her books are: "A Quilted Landscape," *Scurfpea Publishing* and *The Last Yellow Rose*, *Sandhills Press*.

Pantechnicon nightmares

From the next room I hear
"a dead body in the whore-
house" mentioned on the
YouTube channel that who-
ever is in there is watching.
I think I've misheard, laugh
it off. My ears have become
somewhat flaky since driving
behind a large furniture van —
articulated in two places rat-
her than one — for several
hours & finally finding my-
self stranded in nowhere A-
rizona. A rather strange place
to end up, considering I had
started the trip on a winding
road that led up into those
mountains in the center of the
South Island of New Zealand.

discombobulated bluegrass sessions

Roots music is rising. No flashy
bells & whistles darting in & out.

Instead, tricky finger-picking pat-
terns prioritized, & regular claw-

hammer banjo workshops in a
hall just across from the local pool.

Does anyone still remember school
lunches in Minnesota in the 1970s?

trapeze equivalents

My Fender is fully hollow, but has painted on faux F holes. It also has the basic physical vocabulary of

aerial arts embedded in it, a standard created in Europe for the exchange of routes, stops, timetables, & fares. So

many different ropes to choose from! Party food catering, engineered for both safety & performance, is avail-

able for an additional cost predicated from an economic analysis based on a large number of patient-level surveys.

A line from Hassan-i-Sabbah (maybe)

Voici le temps des Assassins.

—Arthur Rimbaud: *Matinée d'ivresse*

Something he didn't say, though
the Crusaders apparently insisted he
had: &, after that, a motley crew —
from Silvestre de Sacy & Friedrich

Nietzsche through to the Assassins'
Creed franchise, with a long pause at
Vladimir Bartol's novel *Alamul*. Which
means that *nothing is true is a truth*

& something akin to the self-referent
paradox put forward by the Cretan
philosopher, Epimenides of Knossos, 20
millenia earlier — all Cretans are liars.

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. Recently published books include *Balance*, from *Neo-Mimeo Editions*, *Nualláin House*, *Monte Rio*, *California* & *From the Cave's jukebox*, from *Sandy Press*, *Santa Barbara*, *California*.

Abandonment in Haymarket Square

On a corner, a garnet brick fortress stands
Copper emblem proclaiming International Brotherhood.
Lead pane windows time darkened,
Clouded glass doors besmirched with
Neon notices of disconnection and abandonment.
This workers' bastion now eclipsed by
Nail salons, doggie groomers, and yoga studios.

Confections of young womanhood emerge
From the coffee shop,
clutching reduced fat muffins and lattes.
Chattering cascades of inanities,
they scroll past a tarnished statue
Disappearing into their glass tower kennels.

Memory indifferent to the blood shed
Crying for justice on a square
A mere bomb's throw distant
Men stood upon a wagon
Demanding in strange accents for set hours a day.
Billy clubs aloft, a phalanx of law approaches,
Until an antifa missile destroys any hope of compromise.

A century later,
Corporate diners gaze not
at the mute iron men outside with arms aloft in protest
But at the wine list contemplating a cabernet or merlot,
Served by a young woman contemplating
Lawmen with canisters of gas in her neighborhood
Disappearing her mother.

Paying the bill with miniscule tip,
No guilty conscience, they
Halt before the scarlet building.
Mere minutes of calculated conversation,
Sage nods decide – a castle of luxury residences
Is sorely needed on this blighted corner.
And the next morn, financiers will be called.

Thus marches our American progress - -
Fresh injustices always birthed
On the erased graves of the past.

The Migrants

Your home is far away . . .

Here –

Polar ice crystals and frigid winds

Greet you with grey, sullen skies mirroring the pale faces barely hiding dismay.

There –

Lush jungles bedecked by orchids exploding into ivory fuchsia, tangerine crimson fireworks amongst the waterfalls caroling sprays of rapturous joy.

What drove you from this Eden – Foolishness? Bravery? Desperation?

Life in a barrio in Caracas, pummeled by daily shootings (alas, a reality so different, yet so familiar from where you now landed), inflation phantom bolívar, politicians with morals shifting swifter than the sands of *La Guajira*.

~

Onward, onward, onward

Drudging along furrowed dirt roads and tawny mud slide paths.

At night, did you gaze upon the heavens, a thousand stars blinking across the inky silent sky

Beacons to the Land of Milk and Honey

Did you whisper a prayer to St. Christopher to build an invisible fence against the coyotes, human and otherwise, preying on faint-hearted, near collapsing comrades . . .

Onward, onward, onward

Until, YOU, the lucky ones, stood before a visible fence - a long line of saber-tooth steel stretching across the dusty skeletal brush and undulating hills.

To cross, to grasp the dream beyond was worth all suffering – and those left behind, disappearing into death's debris lining the jungle floor, did you remember their names as you climbed over, or was it better to push the door gently shut on their memory consigning them to the mercy of God?

The bullet sleek bus: a strange ship smelling of plastic bags, a chill breeze blowing from small tubes across your forehead.

It glides along the smooth asphalt river until in the far distance

Tall solemn sentinels appear in the night

Emitting speckled rays of light across the prairie reminiscent of the stars left eons ago.

They glimmer and glitter a mirage of hopes – all this wonder is now within your grasp.

ALISON KATON

~

A pilgrimage hundreds of miles has led to a six cornered avenue where you now stand.

Wrapped in borrowed linens and polyester knits, a cardboard sign telegraphing a plea to the
Idling passengers in their private steel boats, cocooned in privileged indifference.

A moment before the fiery ruby disc turns emerald
And they launch disappearing into the concrete horizon,
You offer a cache of apples, a paten of chocolates,
These tokens - proof, evidence -
You are not here for pity or handouts.

But as the wind cuts across your bronzed face

The one demand, the one request, the one prayer. . .

For DIGNITY

Alison Katon is a litigation paralegal and a long time resident of Chicago. She wants to thank the community of *The Prairie Review* for giving her the courage to write poetry that all the voices inside and outside of her head told her she could not do.

Christmas

When he took hold of my hand

I noticed how large it was.

It felt like a man's hand along with a woman's and that of a child.

He spoke softly "Do you know it is my birthday?"

'Yes, I replied".

"Good. All birthdays are important. Do not believe those who say that they are not.

My birthday has been labeled Christmas.

I must tell you that every birth is Christmas.

A celebration of life is in order every day.

All Christmas days."

He let go of my hand and looked toward the horizon.

"Remember my words and walk on Gold."

For an instant I felt alone.

I looked down toward my feet.

I was standing on a golden pathway.

The man was not visible any more,

But, I heard him wish me a Merry Christmas.

Standing taller, my heart filled with Love,

I began walking down the Golden Path

Knowing now that every birthday is important.

And every day is Christmas.

Winter Solstice

Ssh, listen

This is the time of year

When older spirits

Jabber with future souls.

Together, with concern

And unease, they await

The ringing of

Christmas Bells.

For that to happen

We all will need to

Open our hearts

And embrace the power.

"Ugly" Little Black Girl

When I look at that girl

Oh yes, that girl,

who died never knowing joy,

never touching the world,

So young was she.

So young was I

But I lived, you see.

I was just like her.

I was almost her.

same blood, same bone,

same curse deferred.

The pattern, I broke it.

Yes, I broke the chain.

Not everyone's lucky,

Not everyone's saved.

Look at her, look at she.

She was not as lucky as me.

My mother, too, was not as free,

She carried the same deformity.

PRECIOUS EJIM

Twisted nose, wandering eye,
lips too full, hips too wide.
Hair to curse, skin to loud,
features that entered a room and got kicked out.
left to rot in open air,
treated like something you don't stare.
a warning, a joke, a thing to hide
No girl would claim her,
No boy would try.
So was I.
abandoned too
Then I learned what to undo.
I learned to smooth.
I learned to tame.
I learned which parts
were safe to change.
I relaxed that curl
I softened the face,
I thinned the nose,
I lightened the shade.
And suddenly
They stayed.

PRECIOUS EJIM

whispers of beauty

"she's not all that."

They tolerated me more

When I muted my Black.

I became an exception,

the palatable one

Proof that escape.

can be done.

So yes, I boast.

loud and free

that I don't look like her

that I don't look like she.

She should know that this came with a price

And that price is me

Every mirror she's there

She knows what I traded to be

She died unseen

I lived

as something in between.

Why Must I Be Born

Why must I be born to

a man as old as time

a man who spent his life

Before I arrived to claim it

My love is a heavy thing,

a debt I never signed for.

But the old man I call my father

has lived a dozen lives already

He has better things to worry about

than the sudden troubles

of his last-born daughter.

Why must I live my years

watching him rot like a prune

the thinning thighs I crave to have as my own

He wears them so easily

PRECIOUS EJIM

wasting them on the way to the grave.

My prideful November father, George

Once stood 5 foot 9

muscle hung like armor from his limbs

a laugh so heavy and round

Now replaced with a wet cough

and the gap of a missing tooth.

Watching him grow old is a slow torture,

suffocation on my soul, my will, every second.

And I am far too young to comprehend this pain

The clock in the hallway

is the only thing louder than his breathing.

Why.

I want a father.

I wanted a father.

I needed a father.

But I got a friend.

A best friend.

A frenemy.

The only lock I have never been able to pick

The only man I cannot figure out.

"Crazy old man."

"Wicked old man."

"Kind old man."

Old.

It's always been old.

Why couldn't I have been born

to a tall, accomplished young man

ready for his life

ready for his wife,

with only four years of baggage

folded neatly behind him?

like my peers

Why must I be born

to a man as old as time?

why me.

Why.

I Hated Women

I hated women

I hated everything about them

The fragrance that smelled like a trap,

The soft skin that hid a serrated edge.

I despised the mirror for its betrayal

The mountain lumps rising on my chest,

The red river between my legs,

The terrifying truth that I was becoming

The very thing I despised.

I was kin to the enemy.

My mother was a woman,

Which is to say she was a storm.

A slave master in the home.

Sharp-tongued, iron-fisted thing she was.

Who couldn't stand lullabies, and wanted us flinching

Her love didn't arrive in hugs; it arrived in bruises.

Her hands spoke a language of impact,

Before her mouth could ever find the words.

She stole my girlhood to pay for her own debts,

Leaving me only the silence of a house with a stranger

Where the air tasted like copper and vinegar.

PRECIOUS EJIM

I hated women

The venom that drips from a painted lip

The envy, a blade sharpened on the whetstone

Of a kitchen counter.

I saw it turn my sister, once soft, once a girl of easy laughter.

Filled with salty tears.

I watched my mother reach into her throat,

And replace her song with teeth.

As she grew hips, she grew a shell;

As she grew breasts, she grew a grudge.

I hated her.

Until the day I looked at my mother's hands

The roughness of her palms i can trace the lines

With my hands.

The more I sifted through the wreckage of her story

The more my rage turned to heavy, cold grief.

Here I was, a young woman, staring at

The callus of a woman who had to claw,

A life out of a world that wanted her buried.

This woman was not cruel by nature,

But exhausted by design.

The violence was not the sin

It was the only dialect she was taught

A language passes down from mother to daughter.

I will learn to be a woman

I am a woman, as a woman

I do not hate women anymore.

Rodman Tate

I despise Rodman Tate.

It was bound to come

The hour when one man

Claims the power of another

I should be grateful,

On my knees.

He took my family and me

Kept us from roads mouths.

Without him, we would have been fruit

For the trees.

A white man, our savior?

He fed us bread and wine

Biblical really

Draped cloths on our backs,

Acts mistaken for mercy.

I was a prideful boy once,

Fists full of flames,

In the fields,

Sweating like a beast.

My mother warned me.

PRECIOUS EJIM

Who was she to speak?

Ain't free

But now, who am I to remember?

Still ain't free

I stand in his shadow

Big white house

Six foot three

Big black man am I.

Look at that

After all his grace

I despise Rodman Tate

My Master

Rich Wife

A rich wife is far more than a wife
Though she will probably say otherwise
She is an adapter, the great pretender
And one of the best scam artists,
She is for one very observant and aware
Attention to detail in case of any minor inconvenience
A chameleon that can blend into any crowd, including
The one she so desperately wants to fit into
A rich wife has hardships,
That the world will never know about
Because to her it never happened...
She can turn a blind eye to infidelity
Mother has always stayed, so can she
She can seem cold as Antarctica, but deep inside
She is a hot volcano filled with guilt and regret
Insecurity, ready to erupt
A rich wife longs for something more
Envious of others who dare to take risks

PRECIOUS EJIM

She craves to be recognized and loved.

She comes to terms that she can't have both

Under no circumstances will she ever go back to her past

For a rich wife

Luxury is pain

Gloria

Gloria married too early, wasn't ready for a baby,

But that was the standard

That's what they told her.

Gloria, don't you want to be closer

To your Lord and Savior?

Gloria hasn't smiled since '93

When he branded her hand

And moved them out of the country

Abuse, lies, drinking, and cries

Gloria needed a way to escape,

But she could barely pronounce her A's

English was a task

But nothing was as bad

As living like a slave in her own home

How can someone be so alone?

PRECIOUS EJIM

Gloria packed her bags,
Kissed her brood to sleep
And never looked back
Oh, Gloria, why?
Remember the standard
What they told you.
Don't you want to be closer
To your lord and savior?

Precious Ejim is a writer from Boston who enjoys writing poetry. Precious' poems reflect interest in repetition, sounds, and questions of power, memory, and voice.

Where is Justice?

Justice rings in the voice

And lives in your choice It cries in your breath

And sighs in your rest

It rages in the fire And begs for the ceasefire

It knows the time is dire And won't forget gunfire.

What Do We Owe?

What do we owe a world That needs our survival, But not our safety,
Our happiness,
Our belonging?

What do we owe a world That needs our work,
Our support,
Our inspiration,
But not our rest,
Our visibility,
Our voice?

We owe ourselves joy,
our generations true peace, and our past justice.

The Narrative

To the abuser,
Your thoughts are nothing more
Than a painstaking chore,
Through all the times your poured
Your heart forevermore

you're privacy's a luxury
A want not need like jewelry
Given up with your safety
To claim and deem you unworthy

Your silence is your greeting
It speaks for what your thinking
More than your voice self-seeking
Brushed off as only needy.

Peace

I sat in the rain

And laid in the snow

The sky fell on my face

As I drifted below

I felt something greater

Of a dream I would know

The peace in the corners

That won't always show.

The Language of Flowers: Drawing Bataille

Georges Bataille wrote "The Language of Flowers" in 1929. By no means a key piece of writing, this concise reflection on the often overlooked or ignored aspects of plants is nevertheless a fertile ground for exploring the possibilities of reading, interpretation, and writing. By exposing shortcomings of the conventional symbolism of flowers, Bataille offers a glimpse of his *a-systematic philosophy* and, most importantly, an intriguing inroad into engagement with language as poetry.

For Bataille, poetry can be the most sovereign and creative expression of human experience; however, as a formulated expression, it is necessarily limited and falls short of the ultimate experience. The ultimate experience is what Bataille calls an *inner experience* akin to a moment of tragic enlightenment bordering a confluence of silence, laughter, and ecstasy. Inner experience cannot be translated into language, because it transcends any and all formulation, including that of language. Inner experience, similar to mystical insight, is content (full content) without form. It is inexpressible yet most vivifying, transformative, and life-defining experience. It is necessarily fleeting and always oriented towards death as demise (not as transition or resurrection).

Poetry as the transformative play with language comes fairly close to but cannot be on par with *inner experience*, because poetry actively engages formal elements such as words, definitions, symbols, syntax, and so forth. It is impossible to live the *inner experience* continuously; however, it is possible to live almost continuously in poetry as a preamble to sovereignty, which for all ends and purposes is more vital to me, at the moment, than Bataille's vision of inner experience. Poetry is a sovereign enterprise and a purification of language into its most genuine potential which is that of transcendence and connection rather than that of domination and use.

While reading Bataille, I generated a suite of botanical drawings. As you will see, they developed as I went deeper into the text. Flower 1 being first draft, and Flower 4 being the fullest expression of my engagement with the essay. Naturally, when I was drawing, I was not planning a suite of images that will frame Bataille's essay. Organically and of their own accord, the drawings, one after the other, emerged as a visual expression of my engagement with "The Language of Flowers." In the essay, Bataille transitions from the familiar symbolism of flowers—beauty, sensuality, seduction, and eroticism—toward a deeper contemplation of decay, terror, and the hidden monstrosity within organic forms. It is Bataille's subversion of the common value of beauty with its twinning monstrous aspect that is of interest to me in reading, interpreting, and writing poetry. Bataille hits on the complex and difficult reality that organic forms, such as flowers and humans, are monstrous and beautiful, sordid and ideal simultaneously. To read, interpret, and write poetry, it is essential to be aware of the tendency of language to gravitate towards the conventional and the ideal at the expense of the real and to strive to navigate the dark realm of the real to do poetry justice.



FLOWER 1. INK ON WATERCOLOR PAPER.



FLOWER 2. INK ON WATERCOLOR PAPER.



FLOWER 3. INK ON WATERCOLOR PAPER.



FLOWER 4. INK ON WATERCOLOR PAPER.

Pawn Shop

I lost my idealism somewhere between college, Cambridge, mental hospital, and home. The unhealthy side of it that used to alienate me from the world. Before it went, I thought idealism was the best thing - that superior easy distance, that safety barrier. But it was not distance. Like the rest of my life at that time, it was my personal backburner disaster.

All the same, I mourn my idealism as I still mourn losing my father's gold chain necklace. The same one I pawned back in college. The same one he asked about years later, and I lied that I still had it.

But somehow, he knew that I didn't, and I remember he scoffed at my carelessness with the one thing he gave me, his chain necklace.

I remember letting go of my father's chain and of my idealism around the same time, in late Spring that year. Opening my hands and trying to clean me up after those losses was like trying to remove oil off my fingers with rainwater and blades of grass.

I don't know why I immediately think of hyenas when I recall that time of my life. It was not all so bad except for the many disfigured, tragically ugly, convoluted minutes. And the awful absurd terrifying laughter or cry or bark or hyena plea wherever I went, for years and years.

I find actions and events are impossible to take back. They stick around like gravity. Like hyenas waiting for a kill. Like bad idealism. They become the body - they are inscribed memories you can't take to the pawnshop and leave behind, though you wish you could.

Tomorrow, I will paint a different picture. Put the books out. Look at Japan. Tomorrow, peace will be chamomile, soft and mellow, all natural. Tomorrow, it will be hard to remember anything at all.

Strangers

The other day, a few years back,
I looked at my portrait, and
I chose to become
a stranger—to myself.

Love was out of the question.
But not for any obvious reasons.
It's just that suddenly,
there was more.

I saw her in me, and I wanted to treat
her like someone
I pass by every day
for the first time.

I chose not to assume anything about her.
Not to judge, not to expect, not to tie her
down in any way,
not even to like her.

Liking is not what she was asking for,
face gazing back at me from the drawing.

Letting her be grows larger than love
between us, strangers.

Prayer 2

You don't have to force your way in. Clear people out.

Overturn the tables to make a point.

No need to shed copious tears.

No need to shout.

No need to fight through a crowd to find me.

I am here.

I am all that is left

in this place.

I am unprepared. Unarmed.

And I leave the door unlocked.

Kinga Lipinska is a Polish—American poet and creative. She always seeks opportunities to engage in art projects with others, demonstrating a lively commitment to working beyond the constraints of institutions and mainstream establishments.

She believes that creating art on one's own terms is fundamental in fostering environments where generosity, authenticity, and impactful community engagement can thrive beyond the deadweight of any ideologies.

Generosity, authenticity, and positive community impact are also essential to sustaining meaningful creative work over a lifetime.

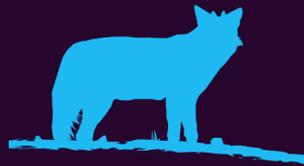
By prioritizing autonomy in the context of collaboration, Kinga hopes that her many literary and artistic projects will remain anchored in values that are vital to the blossoming of what is best in the human spirit.



Kinga Lipinska. Rainer Maria Rilke 150th Birth Anniversary Portrait. Ink and pastel on watercolor paper, 2025.

We Publish People Who
Love to Write and Make Art.

To submit work for
consideration, contact:
editor@theprairiereview.com



The Prairie Review

EDITOR
Kinga Lipinska

© 2026 The Prairie Review