



THE PRAIRIE REVIEW

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GRASSROOTS MAGAZINE OF POETRY, PROSE, ART AND CRITICISM



FRIDA KAHLO

I USED TO THINK I WAS THE STRANGEST PERSON IN THE
WORLD, BUT THEN I THOUGHT THERE ARE SO MANY PEO-
PLE IN THE WORLD, THERE MUST BE SOMEONE JUST
LIKE ME WHO FEELS BIZARRE AND FLAWED IN THE
SAME WAYS I DO. I WOULD IMAGINE HER, AND IMAGINE
THAT SHE MUST BE OUT THERE THINKING OF ME TOO.
WELL, I HOPE THAT IF YOU ARE OUT THERE AND READ
THIS AND KNOW THAT, YES, IT'S TRUE I'M HERE, AND I'M
JUST AS STRANGE AS YOU."

- FRIDA KAHLO

COVER ART

Kinga Lipinska. Portrait of Frida. Acrylic on canvas, 2024.

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KINGA LIPINSKA MARY SHELLEY AND GUILLERMO DEL TORO:
THE TALE OF TWO MONSTERS



I AM A HUMAN: I LAST ONLY FOR A SHORT WHILE
& THE NIGHT IS ENORMOUS.

I LOOK UP:
THE STARS ARE WRITING.

WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING, I GET IT:
I AM ALSO A WRITING,

AND AT THIS VERY MOMENT,
SOMEONE SPELLS ME OUT.

- OCTAVIO PAZ

TRANSLATED FROM SPANISH BY KINGA LIPINSKA

Letter from the Editor

Welcome to the Autumn issue of The Prairie Review!

We are in the fifth year of publication, and I am deeply grateful to everyone who contributed to the literary and artistic enrichment of the magazine over the years. We started as an experiment, and I hope that we continue in the experimental mindset, ever open to new creative ideas and initiatives for more years to come.

As always, I would like to acknowledge and thank every contributor to this issue of The Prairie Review. I am always edified by the diversity and inventiveness of grassroots work. And the correspondence I receive after every published issue confirms that others are inspired as well.

Readers, please take your time with the poetry and art. Enjoy appreciating work of your peers and friends. Know that you too are a part of this creative fellowship, whether we met in person at one of the events or online for a zoom conversation about art and poetry.

The poetry album recorded by several members of the poetry group will be available to download in the early Spring of next year. We are also going to publish a chapbook with the poems that appear on the album. As for The Prairie Review, I approached a couple of writers to contribute series about their poetics research to the upcoming 4 issues—so for the entire 2026. This means expanded prose and critical content which I hope everyone will enjoy reading.

Kinga Lipinska

Editor





I Dream

I dream the sea mist's caress and the cool morning air
And the orange rays of dawn piercing parting clouds.
Atop white cliffs, where sea and sky meet, I sit and I stare.
Hearing the soft lapping waves lifts my heavy heart's shroud.

I dream the bitter-cold gale and the thrashing of waves
And the pallid gray sky hanging heavy above my core;
I kneel on rock, cold and wet, at the mouth of a blood-red cave.
Heeding the distant siren's cry, I turn seaward beyond the door.

I dream my flesh rent by the cold, hard blade;
Shape given to a vague, limpid form.
Oh, I dream and I dream of that day,
But dreams, that they are, exist to be scorned.

An Aviator

An iron bird soars and climbs,
Thrust beyond soot-stained skies;
Machine absent its own mind,
Higher and higher – it flies.

Peering down at scattered flames
And gazing skyward past the clouds,
Enemies countless of no name
A nameless pilot swift surround.

The iron bird dips and dives,
Shaking off a scant few foes;
Molten lead claims their lives.
Higher and higher still – it flies.

But fallen foes so soon replaced
Pursue the pilot in
Relentless chase.
They play a soundless din.

The milky white canopy,
Straddling the wine-dark sea
Are specks beneath his fingers
That desperate, grasp infinity.

Infinity comes in a moment's flash;
Breathless in the stratosphere
He floats and soars – then, a crash;
Infinity divests him of any fear.

An iron bird soars, but he has no face.
The nameless pilot vanishes
Without a trace.

The Rifle and the Rose

My blood harkens to bygone times
Beneath that hoary autumnal sky
Whereon cobbled pave strolled they side
By side, banners strewn and black
Among the crimson cries.

The wind ferrying revolution's song
Recounts a derelict tale
Still breathing nigh amidst
The throng
And to ardent acts men impels,
Though it be perchance
To no avail.

Mother of Eros, sea tide's beauty –
Your ivory limbs had sprawled about
The war God's intrepid virile fury;
Thence was Concordia engendered
By thine union's hallowed ecstasy
And heeds the lively
Triumphant shouts.

But no sooner than she departs
The womb, decay soon mars
Her placid face.
Rejuvenation now seems so far
And all strain to hear that ephemeral
Song.

Now the sun droops below the eaves
Of weathered white –
Below the paled lilies hanging
O'er a blood-run rill
And a timid silver flits among the leaves
As the nightingale's shrill
Pierces the night.

Śūnyatā

Behold Alba's soft sheen
And the bluebird reposeful
On a gold-tinged bough.

See the honeybees emerge
Gleeful
From the sunflower's seams.

An interminable perplexity
Is this
That is but Nothing's
Ceaseless gleam.



John William Whitehouse (1849-1917), *Echo and Narcissus*, 1903.

"Echo is the voice of a reflection in a mirror."
— Nathaniel Hawthorne

Echo and Narcissus

An Intuitive Journey Between Sound and Vision

We must have passed through here already,
whether from foresight or in retrospect
I cannot tell.

We are mirrored twins
emerging from silent stillness,
Echo and Reflection
swept in a synesthetic stream
pulsing through cosmic currents
stirred by the hand of Fate
in an alchemical mixing plot
of déjà vu and synchronicity
immersed in the Pool of Always.

Stars constellate worlds reflected in souls;
hearts' breath, hearts' beat
draw the spring of feeling
into depths unknowing.

Within the mirror without corners
the Angel awaits.
Souls tremble in sanctified light.
The house of God glows.

MICHAEL MAZOCK

My sister once said
if I closed my eyes
I could see God's house.
My closed eyes adjust to the dark
revealing a wall of stone
concealing a door through bone.

No one told me
whether I should enter.

Tell you what:
I'll knock,
you talk.
Together, Angel,
we'll journey without feet
and fly without wings
into the house within.

What if, after I wander in vision
through purple heather and coral bell,
you, Angel, creep up behind me,

MICHAEL MAZOCK

now seated cross-legged
in lotus meditation,
and turn my head
to where my heart feels is right:
rooted in earth,
reflected in water,
spine through ground
emerging united as cross?

Ash rises —
the World Tree's trunk
supports my back and head
pressed together in unspoken exchange,
outstretching my arms to form the branch
from which your apple and I hang.

Apple drops — its fall
crackling through leaves and branches,
louder than meant in silence.

Candle flickers —
Dove flutters,
stunned mid-flight
against the unseen wall
between beyond and within.

Am I asleep?
Awake?
Or in the house between?

A silver-bristled dandelion
gently stirred by breeze
drifts downward
signaling my descent.

I trace Tree's trunk and roots
twisting through the labyrinth,
stretching to the deepest place
where waters of fate gather,
where sacred fire magnifies
candle's faint glow above.

MICHAEL MAZOCK

At fire's edge, a pot simmers.
I lift the wooden ladle
and sip the broth,
its flavor earthy with wild morel.

Across the fire,
on the other side of closed eyes,
Angel mirrors my lotus pose, levitating
an inch above the underground.

Through flame's scry,
tendrils of silver light
stream from Angel's crown,
embodying the archetype
of silver-bristled dandelion.

Vision shifts.
Angel rises, light radiating
from eyes and crown.
"Follow me."

Setting aside familiar things,
I, behind her, follow.

She leads me to the mouth
of Oracle's cave,
rolls away the sealing stone,
and vanishes into the dark within.

The cave echoes her note,
reverberating through stone,
as Angel plucks the string
of the lyre of memory,
drawing me back
into time's ouroboros
through childhood,
when my brother John and I
step through the first door of a department store —
he, calling out:
o-di-o-di-o —
letting the echo answer back.

In the cavern's echo
I hear his voice again:
o-di-o-di-o —
resounding through
hallowed hollow stone,
transforming sound into vision,
childhood memory into revelation.

The roots of *o-di-o-di-o* twist
through a labyrinth of lost language
like a dream I cannot recall —
a quasi-Latin call from God,
lengthening the *dies*-day
toward the threshold of tomorrow.

This childhood echo
becomes a summons
to dream while awake in the light,
not only when asleep in the cave.

Dreams impersonate symbols,
yet through the dreamer's eyes
life is the masquerade.

Buried deep — within stone, within life —
lies gnosis of the end.
Yet hands, feet, heart, and head
plod along,
guided by distant, invisible stars.

MICHAEL MAZOCK

The trickster-dreamer holds open sanctum's door
but not wide enough for me to enter
in full physical form.

There's a tiny temple in my brain,
Where none goes out when Dove flies in,
where horns are blown,
and walls come tumbling down.

Dove descends —
together we journey
into the inner temple,
immersed in meditation
within Whitehouse's painting
and Hawthorne's revelation:
"Echo is the voice of a reflection in a mirror."

Echo transforms into sight;
sound leaps into light.
Image and word with poem converge —
three in confluence as one.
Seeing and hearing abandon
containment and restraint
and through water's glass,
leap into the eyes of Narcissus,
ascend to kiss the mouth of Echo.

Sycamore

The day I proved invisible

I parachuted from the bathroom window, calculating landing

Dropped like a newborn into stinging shrubs of evergreen

The door, I locked, the earth, tilted

I stumbled between time zones

Discovering on the brink of rumble and rage

A whisper then

a soft hide

soothing my eyes

I gazed upward to where your legs stretched into ominous cerulean

I stood beside the crevice that distinguished your thighs

torso, firmly planted in soft umber, hardening for winter,

reached beneath the level of sight

all bandwidth collided with your stationed body

grasping all at once communion and solitude

Avoidance

When your mother ruminates its hard to have friends
You must mitigate their emotions like you do hers
Your joy is contingent on her abbreviated sorrow
their sorrow terminates with you as the source
In this negotiated affair, being a clown round the clock takes a toll
You must choose between tending friends
And searching for your ambition
And friendship is a noble pursuit
So, you nearly drop out of school and
Try to trick fate, collect all assumptions that ride the back of innocence
And your ambition, it turns out, has merely been mitigating disaster

Untitled

As the lightning bugs dance

Along the too green grass

And the sad little dandelions

So do my confused thoughts

Dancing a dance

It doesn't

Quite

Know

How

To

And so the lightning bugs

Go dim and leave my sweaty and confused

Thoughts

All by themselves

With only the old dew to quench them

And the city lights far in the distance

To now light the way

Untitled

Grass so green

Heart so dark

As the pale blooms

Sway above

My swirling home of a mind

I bask in the shade

From the tree

That will know

More than I

Could ever hope

As my tired back

Rests against

Its forever sturdy trunk

I feel it thanking me

For spending some moments

Honoring its roots

For God knows I have none

As the teardrops

Fall from my

Once full lashes

They soak into

The cracked chocolate soil

The tall tree's

Only friend

Until now

I hope I gave it a memory

Sad as I or it might be

Untitled

I talk fast with a southern drawl

Everything in my life

Feeling like it lasts forever

But really it's only been

A few seconds

My brain always on a race

With the flesh around it

My teenage days

Feel like an eternity ago

Everything is fast and so slow

How can it be both

I saw sparkles in my eyes

Just yesterday

So please

Tell me

How

It's been

18 years

Cling

Who is he who defined new beings by birthstone?
The dusk's last sun shines bright on house siding.
The light sings sharper than a birthstone.

For how small is a diamond, emerald, or pearl
when first grasp of fingers
clings with strength primordial?
To first touches of fabric
small fingers grasp, small nails scratch
open skin.
In trust, we grab to the whatever touches, certain
touch will lead to milk and care.

At the start and in the middles of our days
here we cling to many things in many ways
body and spirit.

At evening's ebb,
lying on a bed of feathers or dirt,
we reach to the last rays of sun's hands pressed against the siding of a
home,
not quite ready to leave
that which we know,
more precious than all the birthstones in a world.

Icebreaker

The old gods birthed from lava
weigh heavy as a coconut.
The wolves of fire and rock grin wide.
Their teeth sparkle white in the blue and tan.
Time and human hands each carve out
the shadows, the lines, the space that makes us
animal, makes us human.

Between all this heaviness
you and I
coil close together, talking
like a kiss.

Storms may pass,
ships may tip.
One day, you and I
will not swing together, but break apart.
Our small, fragile time
formed fine, spun sugar.
Our cotton candy clouds collected tickets
at the carnival at dusk.

Here, we stand, laced together
between the old gods and the even older earth.
Beyond us, past the glass,
trees preen in the winds,
spread leaves like fingers to the sun.

War

See three yellow mallow bushes ripped.
Their fuzzy leaves curl in,
like newborns, sleeping in a womb.

What was the beast that tore
this family by the roots?
Underneath, more mallow shoots
spring up, take on the silver velvet coat:
ancestor.

What provoked such violence?
See that flash of white-green flesh.
See the burst of soil-skinned roots.
See the bits of soil ripped to where
the mallow tried to cling
to that which it called home.
What is the pestilence that left such beauty
lying here, in conditions so exposed?

A root needs dark.
A root needs cool.
A root needs a tight embrace of minerals and soil,
to plan expansion in a fertile land.
Now all I see are the bulging veins of drying leaves
Popped up, amidst cicada's shrieks.
Here and there the sunlight touches leaves
as if to ask, "what happened here?"

Inauguration

Please, hold hands with volcano.
Behold its gurgling fields of lava,
its vomit clouds of sulfur.
In haze of heat, sometimes it erupts and elects to destroy
everything in its path
in the name of new growth, new forest, new land.

Please, waltz with this hurricane.
It loves a good spin.
Dizzy with water,
drunk on a moisture that cools and condenses,
it sings with big thunder.
Don't take its surge personally, its barreling in
(not touching your neighbor).
Tear your pictures and toilets apart.
Please, peace be upon you.

Don't flinch in tsunamis.
Embrace the tornado.
Stay for the wildfires.
There is something about devastation.
Its worth viewing till credits
roll fast down the screen.
If you leave
now
you'll miss the field's transformation to wildflowers;
The piles of wood, broken china and pampers
assemble again into charming small hamlets.

You will miss the old ladies tell tales of disasters,
*"I remember, long ago, when I was young, like you,
I remember holding hands with Xiutechuhtli.
I remember the burning.
I recall the surviving.
Here have some of the coffee Pele brought to my gardens.
Come wrestle with catfish.
Come bathe in the waves the Namazu once brought us.
I am born of destruction.
I thought I was dead,
but turns out I'm a tornado, and I'm just getting started."*

What makes the scum of the Earth?

What builds up?

Where does it gather?

Does it breathe? Does it want? Does it need?

Why do I feel it's walking?

Why do I feel it's alive?

Why do I feel it has a 9-to-5?

How is its family doing?

How does it eat dinner? At the dinner table or TV dinners on the couch?

What do they play on family game night?

What does it whisper into its wife's ear at night?

When it's just them after a good day.

After the kids are put to sleep and bedtime stories are wrapped up.

What does it love about its wife?

What does its wife love about it?

Is it okay with the fact that its wife brings home more money?

Is it proud of her?

Where does it meet its friends?

Do they drink together or smoke?

Does it comfort its friend when their partner cheats on them?

Does it help key its friend's ex-partner's car?

How long has it known its friends?

Was there any period of time they lost contact?

When they met again, was it like nothing ever changed?

Is it the boss at work?

Is it good at its job?

Does it have dreams?

Does it have goals?

Did it skip classes in college to take drugs?

Does it come into work on the weekends?

What makes the scum of the Earth?

Poem #7

Standstill as time still stands testament to time from time stands. Still going as one after another layers over another thought that comes and goes. Snapshots of a once was then; a picture captures the things as is but not what it was. And that makes me sad, but sad more. Sad stands strong and "distills" moment into snapshot of what? Was it one thing or more? More thing than one.

I am watching my shadow extend out through the ray of the streetlamp behind me. She has asked me to wait as she grabs my present from upstairs. This shadow mirrors me as the perfect improv partner. Everything I think is 'yes, and why also?' in return. Any moment is never what it is next to it; these moments are now a game. Deconstruction by taking the most basic version of me (silhouette) and asking me to fill in the blackcanvas in front of me. Light projects my visage in front of me, it's as if I'm attempting to understand the expression of someone from the back of their head. I don't know anymore, but perhaps I never did.

Enormity processed in moment and not in time, but time process enormity not in definition. Standstill in the blur, multitudes piece by piece. I try to explain in depth, I cannot. I walk at night and think, "This could be a movie." The walking? It's just walking. I don't live cinematically, but it's a narrative I maintain.

Faster Than Cars

On my bike, I'm determined I should be faster than cars. I'm sweating and sore. Legs pump and push. Increased resistance makes me determined. And, yet, I'm still not faster than cars. Do I deserve to be, am I working hard enough? I'm beyond myself but stuck in this frame. How do I expect to find strength after my lashings? Stand firm, clenched.

And push. I should be faster than cars. Sweating sore. Pump and push. Increased resistance, increased speed. I'm not faster than cars. Am I deserving of this tool? Have I proven myself beyond? Past these aching muscles. I'm clenched. Faster than cars. I should be faster than cars, but I'm sweating and sore. While I pump, increase resistance, and increase speed, I realize my bike is not faster than cars. What do I have to prove? How do I show, I'm past aching muscles in my mind, clenched.

I know it's muscle memory at this point because I push out sentences with ease. At this point, it's beyond sense and it's a matter of push. To test it all to the ends of my ability and make it mean to me. But because there are a million ways to go about it, I'm mean to me. Repetitive tasks make me question if I'm doing something wrong. After doing it for years, I assume there's a better way to do. Yet, that's the operative word: "Do". The obvious is that I'm going about it in the only way, but I know something's wrong. Maybe I'm not pushing down at the wrong time. Maybe my resistance is too low. Maybe I have the wrong seat. Through thought, through criticism, I convince myself that I should be faster than cars. As if my goal isn't to get to my own destination. As if I'm not using different machinery to achieve my own goals. I look at my tool and assume it should make me faster than cars. I look at my legs and question why I'm not a V8 engine. My legs pump like two cylinders to move the wheels that move me. We're the same system, but I'm not faster than cars.

What sort of fucked up way to self-actualize have I chosen?

A and/or B

everything in comparison to another. to be something else, it must be in opposition of the subject. a true individual, blessed with freedoms and complexities, cannot ascertain this notion without the permission of the dominant. yet, there are those that seek. But why would one aim for goals so lofty away from a culture birthright. a damned morality play cast for few with roles filled by many. narratives clear as hero and villain assert truths felt and seen. or thoughts felt in scene. truth is not what the individual seeks, but honest dissections of facts received. for what is said is not true, purely deemed.

and your heroes are dead.

and you feel alone.

and you feel misunderstood.

and you feel loved.

so, they craft a life ever-new point of view. selfish concepts, self-aware conceits. remember: accept oneself, itself unknown as you're never molded alone. then, how? intents as unknown as the ones in power; a game played by puppets and strings tangled around the necks of ones you love. it's impossible. it was said in the beginning, but you're no longer aware of anything but yourself. or how she feels about you as you read translations of her love for another. with translator notes reminding you of scaffolding in your New York mind-palace. it's never kawaii-te as it seems and more anger builds within.

as you see the ones you love through her. you learn to understand her through scans interpreted by others. passion is utility and love is responsibility. as my man, godfrey, waits on his beloved irene and irene picks him up to his feet. if sovereignty isn't real, I might as well learn to tell you i love you.

ANNA MARIE LAFOREST
VISUAL ART FEATURE



SEASIDE

ANNA MARIE LAFOREST

ABOUT HER ART

I've always been interested in the intersection of color and psychology, so in my art and stories I have gravitated toward saturated paint and deep fairy tale archetypes. I dream of characters in colors not seen in everyday life, and wonder how to represent them in art. I take extremely close photos of flowers to feel enveloped in their colors and messages. When I discovered intuitive painting with water crayons last year in a class with transformative artist and doll-maker Erika Cleveland, the process felt like "home."

I begin with light pencil lines scribbled without thinking or looking, ignoring my logic-brain for a moment, while listening to music. Then I study the scribbles and mark the lines that create figures, much the same way we find giants and sheep when looking at clouds. I erase the extra pencil lines, trying not to let eraser crumbs bounce into my iced tea or cocoa. Then, I color with Caran d'Ache Neocolor II Aquarelle. I love the moment when the water brush ignites the wax pastel into a spread of illuminated color!

"Magenta Walk," is a good example of how the figures spring up naturally co-existing in a sort of chimera, moving together and carrying each other, just as the pieces of our psyches fuse into a whole to "create" each of us. I love that I can go back to these paintings any time and find new healing or feelings evoked, and I hope they serve you in the same way. "Green Egg" and "Family" perhaps best show that I have been influenced (possibly through shared ancestral DNA) by Norval Morrisseau, Anishinaabe Artist, 1932-2007, whose bright colors and shamanic characters make satisfying sense to me.

ANNA MARIE LAFOREST

ABOUT HER ART

There's a moment between waking and sleeping, or between pulling the stopper and the water gushing down, or finding yourself slipping through the bands that have stapled your life together, when reality re-composes itself into a new perspective. My art intends to capture that process through intuition and rich color. In future, I hope to marry my paintings with the archetypal tales I am writing. Meanwhile, may we all saturate our new worlds with reimagined shapes and colors.

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ANNA MARIE LAFOREST



GREEN EGG

ANNA MARIE LAFOREST



CHOICE

ANNA MARIE LAFOREST



MAKE-UP

ANNA MARIE LAFOREST



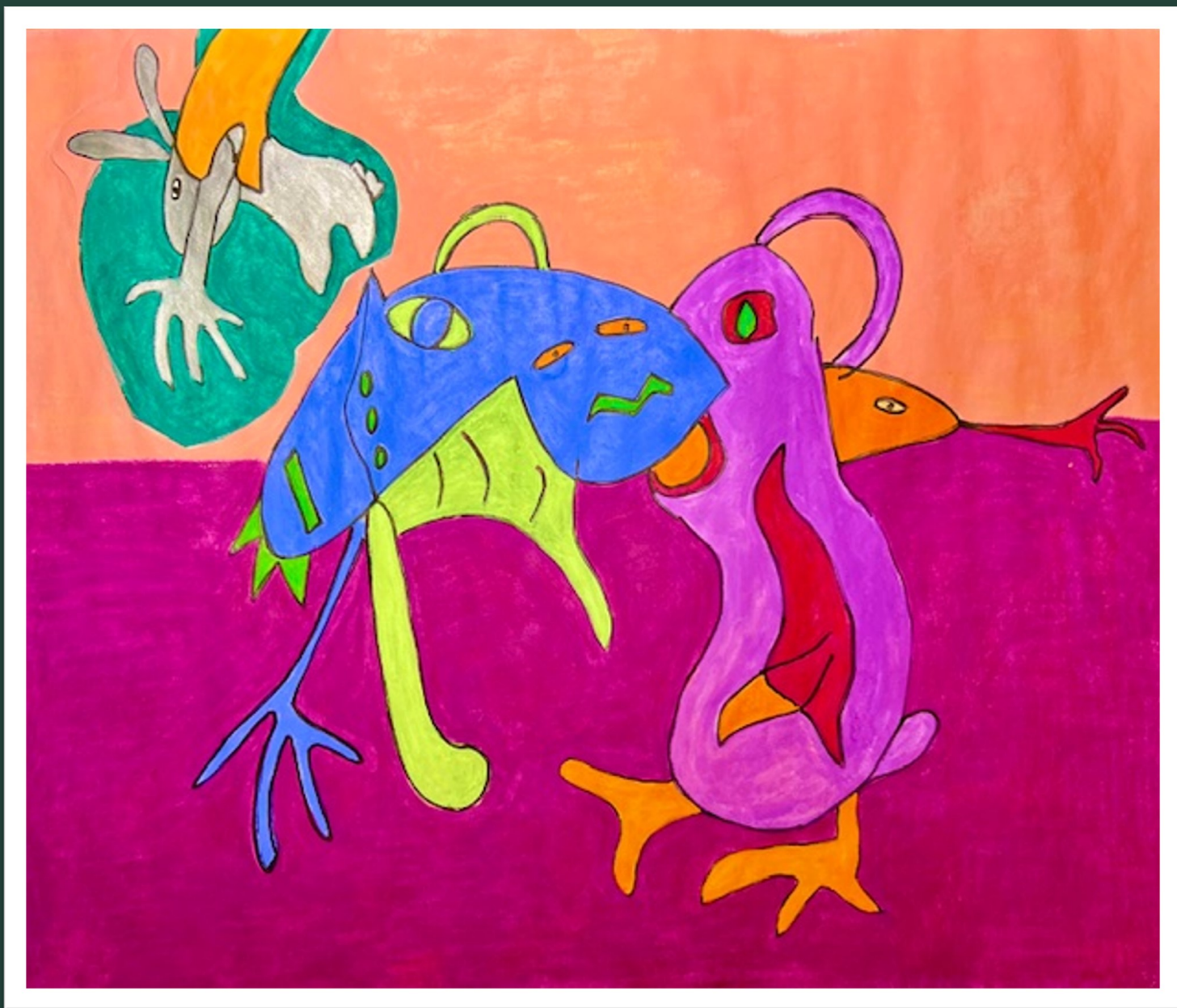
FAMILY

ANNA MARIE LAFOREST



MADONNA

ANNA MARIE LAFOREST



MAGICIAN'S ASSISTANT

ANNA MARIE LAFOREST



MAGICIAN IN BLUE

ANNA MARIE LAFOREST



MAGENTA WALK

ANNA MARIE LAFOREST



HEADSTRONG

Home Was Gone

The hot summer day

Made my feet burn

As I hurried over the dry brown leaves.

I arrived Home,

And noticed it was spelled wrong.

Laying down my breaths were short.

A door opened, Night rushed in and rolled over

Touching my face with both hands.

A different door shut.

Sitting up in bed,

Home was gone.

Halloween Poem

Wing tips and tongues
Are a bat's delight,
Be careful who you're with
On a Halloween Night.

Arrows and crosses
Fill the sky
The pumpkin just shrugs,
He doesn't know why.

A cat's sister chirrup
And crawls over the dirt
Fallen apples
Can get someone hurt.

The Scarlet Gathering

Death's birthday party was held in a scarlet field – not the most inspired locale, but it was hard to surprise people at his age

the hundred candles in his sheet cake measuring AEONS – not years...

He arrived in pink sugar skull makeup and a black trucker's jacket – his cornflower scythe another bone in his body.

People arrived from all over – Death didn't believe in exclusivity – though few wanted to eat from his table.

(One of the bolder guests died after choking on a piece of cornbread, though Death insisted it wasn't part of his plan.)

Instead of bringing gifts for a man who already owned everything, the guests all brought copies of *Cracked Rear View* by Hootie and the Blowfish – an inside joke that nobody remembered the story to (not even the guest of honor), but they all laughed anyway as jewel cases piled by the untouched food.

A clown made balloon animals for all the little ones attending, each devoured by worms after leaving his hands. The clown would also die by cornbread before the end of the party.)

A newspaper phoenix watched the festivities from a weeping birch, as the little ones swiped past its beak – believing its fire feathers were loaded with sweets.

On the subject of piñatas: beneath all the Hootie memorabilia, someone left a Papier-mâché effigy of one of the partygoers—

a man with a passing resemblance to a mud salamander, dressed in the colors of his nation's flag;

a piece of toilet paper trailed behind him, containing the names of everyone he planned to kill in the next year

his forebears all ended their lives upside down under a trial of stones; yet here HE was, still right side up, digging his fingers into a cauldron of potato leek soup...

GREG HARRELL

A different guest, who had spent the last three weeks somewhere metallic and still had bruises from the experience, suggested Death take a swing at the effigy, as the scarlet field quivered in approval—

Not wanting to disappoint his adoring public, Death pulled the storm blue scythe from his breastbone –

what the ocean waves aspired to be at their most turbulent; had what was left of the phoenix pulled down from the weeping birch.

President Mud Salamander was too busy dragging his bum across old federal documents to notice all the people clamoring for his decapitation – even if it was just a miniature.

Death didn't need eyes to see, but wore a blindfold out of respect for tradition, letting the bruised man spin him around.

(Touching Death would cost him his hands, not that he had much feeling in them left after his time away.)

Death took his first swing at the new piñata and MISSED, splitting the bruised man's wife into thirds, his spectral hands closing into fists as her head landed in Death's punch bowl.

He had a lone teardrop's worth of time to grieve, before Death whiffed a second time, finishing what the hollow men had started three weeks earlier...

MOST of the couple was buried along with the clown, as Death continued hitting everything but the target.

World leaders took it upon themselves to end the game, President Mud Salamander noticeably absent,

but the negotiations ended as most of their peace talks did – with exploding limbs.

The shareholders attending thought their market sway could succeed where the leaders had failed, only to have the intestines pulled from their bodies like accounting tape.

GREG HARRELL

The newspaper phoenix was reborn as a cloud of angry bats, biting all the little ones who'd swiped its last form. They fled straight into the path of dismemberment – all fingers and face gristle in a black rainbow mist.

Death swung with such fervor that even those who'd declined his invitation were cut down.

A legendary filmmaker with a head of petrified silver left as wildfires inhaled all the blooming jasmine.

An exile who wore the night sky braided between her shoulder blades departed as sirens floated over the Caribbean.

A reclusive soul music auteur was taken only months after the mother of his child (Death was never a good bookkeeper).

Another man died giving a speech on a college campus – and though he looked more like a thief than a Messiah, he was still mourned as Christ's shadow.

Even the Crown Prince of Darkness was called back to inherit his kingdom.

President Mud Salamander appeared to be the only one immune to the tempest of gore – the tallest ant on a vanishing hill.

Everyone else ran for nonexistent cover, or tried to force vital organs back into wounds that wouldn't accept them – like a baby spitting up its dinner.

(Some hid beneath copies of Cracked Rear View, only to die with shards of Hootie embedded in their faces.)

And just as it seemed that Death would put himself out of work, his fang struck true—a clean beheading that silenced everyone left...

As nightcrawlers erupted from the piñata's neck, the survivors all turned to face President Mud Salamander (the REAL one), dipping his ladle into a punch bowl stained with blood and hair strands.

He took a sip, frowned—

Nocturne for Paulina

you scribbled into a Field
Note years ago that Roscoe
was a place for lovers,
and still feel that way now—
even without the woman
who inspired you...

returning to a fuzziness
somewhere between nostalgia
and the memory of a severed
limb falling asleep

the squished communion
of homes and apartments
is decorated for Halloween—
skeletons in every yard
camped out for the big day

the leaves happy to fall here,
compared to the boutique store-
fronts with hand-painted ghouls
where you live now

(if Conor Oberst saw fate in the fallen leaves,
then you see it in a crone mask sealed with plastic:
a public suffocation at a reduced price)

you felt done with people
after the train ride up—
their sweaty afterwork contortions
and blind supplication to technology

but you can hear the silence
of the streets through your headphones
and almost miss them now...

you remember the photo taken
of the welcome bridge at sunset,
how the sky appeared to be folded
across a line of jet fuel

not that it brings you much
comfort as your blood thins out
with a lonely night's indigo,

not that it brings you much
comfort as your blood thins out
with a lonely night's indigo,

the buildings having long forgotten
that you were ever here

you're on your way to another
concert where the only
women are bartenders,
wives and girlfriends

in a violet pit
attached to a dive bar,
where the stars fall
like sweatdrops

but you make a detour
to the place where she invited
you into her lair on a winter night—

the complex more fenced
off than you remember,
two jack-o-lanterns guarding
the door that led to her kitchen,

where her roommates kept frozen
fish waiting for a scaler to run
through them like a comb—
and you turned a pan
of bacon into a black lung

you remember her tending
charcoal in a backless white dress
untouched by soot or sweat,
the picnic table full of smoked
meats and summer romances

she left all of this behind
well before she left YOU—
and it's hard not to feel pathetic,
standing in the cobwebs of old memories
as she makes new ones somewhere else.

but it's good to know this place is still here:
you hope the people inside make glimmers
worth returning to years later,
even if things don't end like they want
(or wanted)

you're pretty sure this cornball lyricism
will kill you in ways that she didn't,
so you continue in the direction of music

every Belmont Street apartment resembles
the set of a Joe Swanberg film,
where life is a splash of cream
floating in the strongest cup of Dark Matter

(you think of dancing to Burial in the street,
but a barking dog discourages you from trying)

beneath a fluorescent red hood,
Tony's presses moonlight into tortilla shells—
horchata fountains bubbling
like the thoughts in your head

GREG HARRELL

sweating through aviator

leather and dark denim,

Chicago finds the strangest places

to declare that You Are Beautiful

No scene has a meaning, no scene moves toward an enlightenment or a transformation. The scene is neither practical nor dialectical; it is a luxury—and idle: as inconsequential as a perverse orgasm: it does not leave a mark, it does not sully.

—Roland Barthes, “Making Scenes”

On the word *go*, players bring to life what's inherently dramatic in a prompt their audience has devised for them: You're in a job interview but forget what you've applied for [Go]. You're a door-to-door salesman sprung from midcentury America to sell enough perfume samples to win a Caribbean cruise from Central Manager [Go]. You're a spy spying on your ideal nation for one you abhor while an *artificial intelligence churns out second-person prompts and matching performances to replace what we mean by seeking cartharsis* [Go]:

An understudy playing Simple Simon in tonight's performance of *The Cherry Orchard*, try growing up up with no one to talk to [Go]. Tolerating hungry faces whose mouths ache to explain something, thespians listen to you past midnight. If they're sleeping together why not join them [Go]? Your date to the Sadie Hawkins dance will teach you French kissing if you let her. She will explain the mechanics of dry humping when someone interjects: “Let's see the brilliant move, if you have one” [Go]. Your companion lies next to you gently snoring while you look into darkness. Whether you are amounting to anything by yourself, the two of you combined form the mind of an inventor [Go]. Ask your significant other over breakfast if certain positions determine the gender of the child you are trying to conceive together. Enumerating ways of trying, doggie, butterfly, modern missionary, lazy grind, rocking horse, reverse slither, you never mean to objectify her. You've known her since the ninth grade. You're thinking about her thighs this morning [Go]:

A high school English teacher new to the profession finds his classroom adorned with images of those once living: Anne Frank, Cesar Chavez, Black Elk, James Baldwin, Hellen Keller, Emily Dickinson. Ophelia floats in shallow water in the heavy raiment of the period. Rachel Carson spots a brown pelican through birding binoculars. The North marches to war and, from the South, civilian soldiers brandish new weapons in old photos, when suddenly you must field the question of a student asking what brand of glasses bridges the nose of Keith Haring, his splotchy face a picture of an illness, a self-portrait [Go]. Accompany other people's children into scenes from civilizations soon wiped clean—Mayan, Minoan, Mississippian Mound Builders, Petra, Easter Island, Khmer, you name it [Go]. In an age of anger, when everyone looks to see who's coming, someone says to you, “I'm aware of your concerns, you want to be respected” [Go]. The principal

Joan Riley

1 from Roland Barthes's 1977 book *A Lover's Discourse*: fragments

2 John Everett Millais (1829–1896) painted *Ophelia* between 1851 and 1852. He depicts a young woman floating on her back, singing on her back, with water lapping around her mouth before she sinks to the bottom. The activist painter Keith Haring (1959–1990) wears glasses in his painting *Untitled (Self-Portrait)*, 1985. The red spots on his face denote lesions born from Kaposi's sarcoma, a form of cancer that often accompanies AIDS.

3 In her 2006 book *Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom* Lisa Delpit argues that the academic struggles faced by children of color in public schools are the result of miscommunication along racial and cultural lines between those students and their white teachers.

approves improvising scenes about all things not personally experienced except the dead and dying in Palestine without first understanding who in the audience is grieving [Go]:

You are one of two missing mountaineers to reach basecamp midmorning and have yet to receive an official welcome. Gesture snow falling on your outstretched tongue, exhaustion, laughter. Wait on stage for a second climber to appear clear into the afternoon while a stage crew with a granite peak for a backdrop packs away a sagging doorframe, snowshoes, pale blue weather balloon, transceiver, winter wren (nightfall), Venus, night clouds, forgotten knapsack, the Leonids to animate what older folks call the *heavens*.

Dip of Bell ladles earthly light
late in a nuclear age,
such lively details ensemble mates,
generous imagination,
the theatergoers. [Go]:

4. Every thirty-three years, hundreds of thousands of meteors whip across the sky emanating bright colors. Find the phrase "Dip of Bell" in Emily Dickinson's poem #378. Combining the smallness of a poet's life in isolation (entity without extension managing within herself bound forces) with the low ceilings she encounters (trying to lift off into space from where she sits) gives her sense of Self in the universe a quality of hemmed-in-ness.

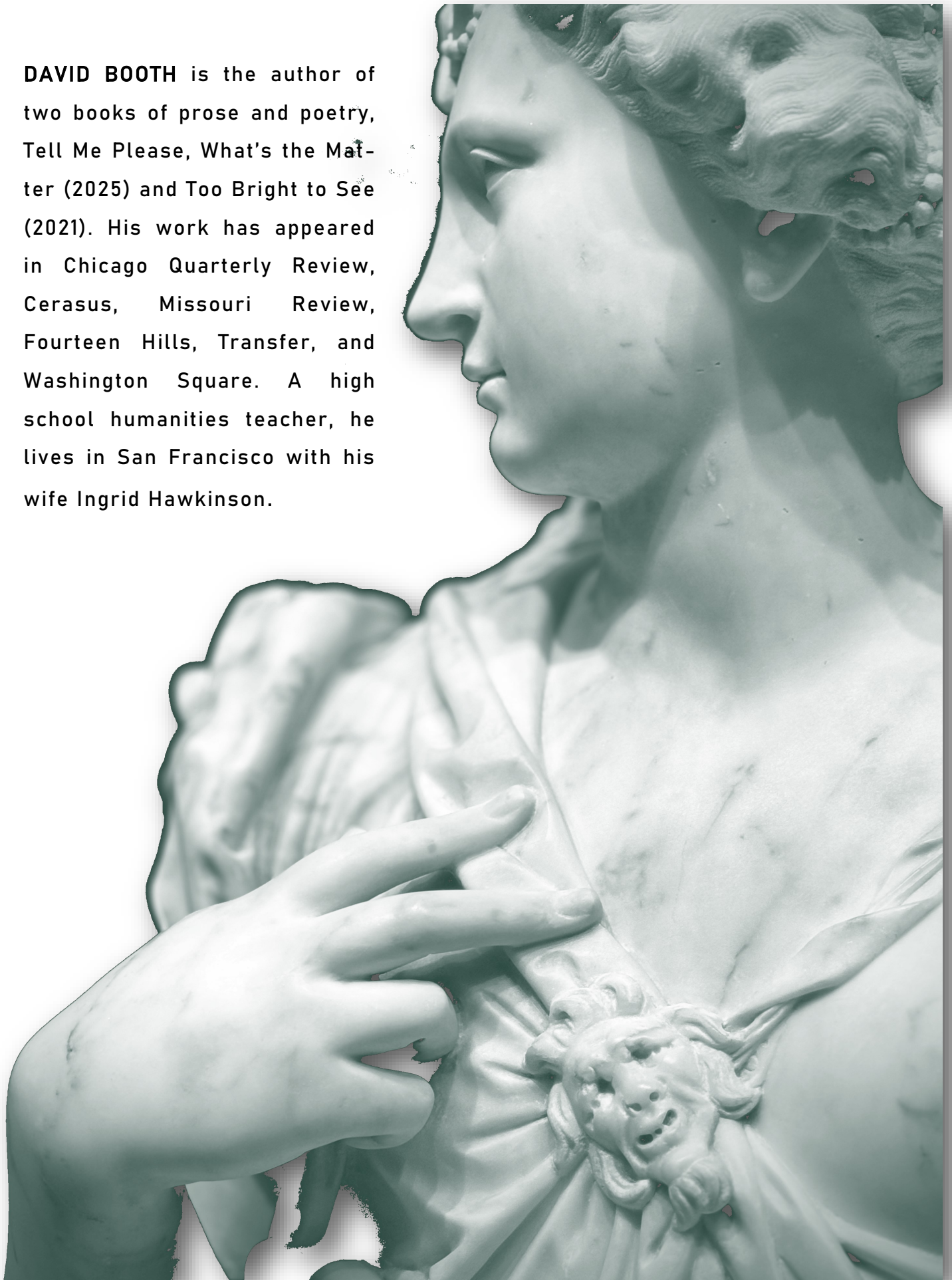
A man tells everyone he knows that the woman he's with is a lousy lover for *what?* A woman tells anyone who listens that the man she's with is a lousy lover for (tell me) *what?* A woman tells some women she should have known better but the woman she's with is a lousy lover for reasons—who can remember? A man steps up to tell men and women alike that the man he's with has been lousy at love since the beginning.

"Will you come back soon? Will I be the first to see you coming?" says a man of a woman who was once the weather of conscience. "Will you come back soon? Will I recognize your form breaching the horizon?" says a woman of the man marking past, present, and future. "Let me be the first to welcome you back to a familiar country," says a woman (surprised by the sound of her own voice) of a woman whose voice always echoes. "If you come back soon," says a man of a man when no one's listening, "I will be myself with you, no acting."

A man says to a woman accustomed to the two of them lost in a universal scheme of coexistence, "Has it really been so long since I saw you?" A woman whose brother once took a man rowing one foggy morning says of that man, "How long has it been since we had a conversation?" A woman says to the woman she once knew like the flesh of her palm, "It's been too long." A man says to a man with whom he used to shower, "You look older."

A man
 implied by
 dialogue,
 a cherry grower
 in the San Joaquin Valley
 does not bear a grudge
 against a lover
 (now that he has Cheryl)
 but against the linnet
 who some men implied
 by dialogue and
 some implied women
 call Redhead,
 others call House Finch
 and one worldly child
 and one fey, inseparable,
 call Little Sparrow.
 Sensitive to a child's perspective,
 the grower sends birds' stomachs
 to Biological Survey
 to confirm his suspicion
 that linnets are
 the devourers of his cherries
 but gets back no fruit
 from the laboratory
 only woolly plant lice
 weed seed
 and some gravel
 in a rolling back up,
 damn it all,
 of mystery

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.



Mr. Everyman

He's never happy

He's never sad

He's everyman

Hands smell like oil and tar

Rough skin, rough working skin

Chip on his shoulder

Something to prove

Legacies to leave

You must be the everyman!

The cigarette smoke

Wets his eyes just a little

Enough to remind

But never to confront

He's never sad

But he's never happy

He is every man.



I would like to name this file, "Poetry, Perhaps."

My goal has always been to write poetry that doesn't suck. Even so, I believe that to be more than a little pretentious.

Once a poem is in the "air," whether it lives or dies, walks or flies, is the decision of others.

My hope is that you will enjoy reading my offering and perhaps come back to re-read it again.

- DREW IRVING

Poetry & Friendship

Poetry is the province of our imagination;
it's nature is the expression of those discoveries.

Friendships are the meaning of life;
they are an elixir to every heart.

Poetry is the morning sun
filtering into the dozing recesses
of our sleepy consciousness.

Friendship is the alchemy
that changes our desire
into contentment.

Poetry and friendship,
they both discover things
of which we were previously unaware.

Friendship and poetry,
from differing angles of repose,
intertwine seamlessly like petals on a rose.

The Noble Truth

The ocean wind blows and heads to the shore.
My body shivers as wind slaps my face.
The sting from the sand my eyes can't ignore,
and smells of brine I seem to faintly taste.
The sun is shrouded as the fog unfurls,
and clouded thoughts seem further than my reach.
My senses stagger from cold mists that swirl.
My voice is lost too when waves crash the beach.
Shrill seagulls screech as they drift in midair.
They watch while the tide works to sweep my feet.
A lighthouse beacon shines through my despair.
Its light is the hope my eyes shun to greet.

As cold mist swirls I make do as I can,
a scuttling crab, remorseless on the sand.

The Rising Tide

The rising tide is always close at hand.
We see the rolling waves that ebb and flow,
and pounding surf our legs feel through the sand.

Things fall apart. As those poor try to stand,
our giving should help them get up and go.
The rising tide is always close at hand.

When sometimes life gets beyond our command, then
hope's the blessing welfare needs to sow.
This pounding surf our legs feel through the sand.

These trials of our young we all understand,
yet lessons we've learned we need to bestow.
The rising tide is always close at hand.

We rage against the strong man's heartless plan, and
guard wide-eyed youth from the undertow.
This pounding surf our legs feel through the sand.

Our wise choice weathers the wave's strong demand,
and wisdom sails where the winds of courage blow.
The rising tide is always close at hand,
and pounding surf our legs feel through the sand.

Heartbreak

When grief cries out within my savaged heart,
when eyes and ears fail me to comprehend,
when senses cannot find a place to start,
it's then I wonder how my grief will end.
A life lost, I too soon had to release,
a life I still love, ever to esteem.
The mem'ry of that life will never cease,
for mem'ries love afford stay in my dreams.
And friends who care with me will circle round.
We'll share those tales that heal and build our strength. These fruits of love
are mem'ries I shall crown.
As love supplants grief, grief moves to arm's length.

When death comes knocking, grief does too;
but mem'ries we love uproot what grief can't undo.

Going Home / Fred Meyer Poem

If I could measure my life in grocery store trips,
It might appear that I lived too long.
The fridge is missing my staples.
I thought I'd be relieved of that errand for a while
But that day has arrived, already, and again, like Sisyphus.
Nietzsche's eternal recurrence, re-engineered but still poorly planned.

The grim thought of that same drive
I've endured too many times on the way to the giant grey monstrosity.
Parking lots begin the ritual.
The slow slog to handle touched carts covered in covid,
Sliding doors that hide that there is no way out.

The aisles hurt my heart with memories of other aisles,
At other grocery stores in all different parts of the country throughout the years.
Towering and loveless, they stand guard for the cardboard castle.
Everything I need is outside of them, but the bright signs and packaging tell me I've
won a prize.

Fluorescent lights flicker, propagating small seizures and trances that feel regular.
It's a battle to stay on task.
These chemical ingredients don't register in the Crystal Kingdom.

The quick check-out guy with the sideways slouch like me,
He is a saint with a smile every time.
He makes me conscious again.
I give my played out regards,
And feel like a repeated plebeian proletariat
Assimilated and in line.
Will I still have to go to Fred Meyer when I'm in heaven?
I'm waiting for Godot, there is no exit, postictal, going home.

Subversive Art

All the words that have spilled on these pages

Legacy, at least of this era

The last era, or the first of the last

The last? Maybe the last?

Am I a fatalist?

Before I go, let's get them in a musky leather volume

A unity of thought, like the American voices of old

Poe

Whitman

Dickinson

Hughes

Kerouac

Of course, Papa Hemingway

And a thousand others

A unity of thought, art that will be deemed dangerous

To the fat, hubris-infected leaders of an enslaved land

They'll make my words a felony offense

Like the bulging, black spray-painted outlines

Filled with crimson and turquoise

On once-regal overpasses

In the city of heathen

Or so the Evangelicals say

One stands up for his art

I shall stand firm under penalty of law

But raise my arms to the sky atop the overpass

Machine Logic

Reduce poverty by eliminating the impoverished

Balance the economy by eliminating the lazy

Improve healthcare by eliminating the sick and the old

Drive data by eliminating the thinkers and dreamers

It's machine logic

If/then

Saving humanity will come down to

Eliminating the machine

And enslaving those who hide behind it

Those who might enslave the world

A New Technological Order

Humanity's final act is unfurling like Columbus's cross pattée
On the pink sands of San Salvador in the year of our Lord 1492

Humanity salivated with the opportunity
To impose order on these dark, restless shores
Political, religious, commercial

Novus ordo saeculorum

Which became

The eventual end for millions

Now humanity faces another beginning
Not of a nation-state but of a techno-ideal
Designed to impose order on restive humanity
Political, religious, commercial

Novus ordo technologiae

Which will become

The eventual end for millions

Papa's House/Where The Journey Ended

Papa's arms are crossed across his barrel chest this time
But the personalized grin is still present
Left lip a bit upturned under this thatch of a moustache

"So what did you learn on your journey, son?"

Son? Not the colloquial Sonny? Or even kid?
Am I his spiritual child?
It's almost too much to bear

"I saw every step, by the way. I can do that from my vantage point."

I take a breath, then proffer my only response:

"You never know when a situation will devolve into the great,
grand something that will define us all and make us heroes."

The Clock Eats Its Hands

The hands of the clock
slid off the face
and nibbled each other
while numbers dissolved into puddles—
6 is now a puddle,
3 is somewhere behind the curtain,
12 yawns and stretches itself into infinity.
I watch them,
the hourglass laughs without sand,
its spine crooked like a bow
ready to shoot a moment
that never arrives.
Time tastes of metal,
or is it nothing?
Tick-tock, tick-tock—
I blink. The hands have eaten themselves twice,
yet the clock still ticks.
My shadow folds itself
over the window,
folds again,
folds into a question mark.
If I move, will time move?
If I stay, will time sleep?
The hands chew quietly,
their teeth dripping silence.
I pour tea into the second hand,
sip the hour,
and find that 7 has become a ladder
leading nowhere—
perfectly still.
The clock looks at me.
I shrug.
Time shrugs back.
We both leave empty-handed.

Zen & The Art of Paper Airplanes

Fold corner to corner
then again, then
pause—listen: the paper exhales.
Do not crease too hard.
Edges must whisper.
Step three: insert tab A into slot B.
But what is a tab? What is a slot?
Launch from the edge of nothing.
Wind interrupts intention.
A flight path appears like a question mark.
Fold along dashed lines
and the mind folds itself.
Repeat step five if unsure.
What is unsure but the shape of thought?
Each crash is a satori—
a table receives impact
without judgment.
Paper flutters in slow motion,
then stillness.
Ink dreams of flight.
The ceiling watches.
Do not pick it up.

Observe the landing,
then fold again.

Step seven: optional—adjust angle.

A child might laugh,
or a ghost,
or the air itself,
which does not care.

Fold, unfold,
fold, unfold—
nothing breaks,
nothing remains.

Zen is this crease,
this slight imperfection,
this quiet whirr of wings.

Rice Bowl Gravity

The rice rises.
No, it floats.
Between the spoon and the sky,
the ceramic bowl blinks.
A teapot yawns
steam folding itself into questions
the salt shakers hesitate—
do they exist if no hand holds them?
The knife leans sideways
toward enlightenment
and the fork sighs.
Gravity is tired today.
A single grain
climbs the ceiling
as if ceilings were floors.
The refrigerator hums a koan
too quiet to understand.
Chopsticks meditate in midair
their shadow is longer than yesterday
the cupboard whispers
in consonants only a ghost could taste.
Rice falls upward.
Or maybe it doesn't fall at all.
Objects do not speak.
Objects know nothing.
Objects float.
The bowl blinks again.
A spoon drifts past it,
then back to the shelf,
smiling,
or pretending.

The Silent Dictator of Tea Leaves

The tea leaves sit
in their porcelain council,
silent as empty streets
at three in the morning.

A spoon nudges them forward,
but they refuse.
A nation of steam rises,
folding itself into banners
no eye can read.

The kettle whistles,
an anthem for the undecided,
while a single leaf
rolls itself into the shape of a crown.

No ministers, no laws,
only the gentle tyranny
of leaf and cup.
They govern the teaspoons
with patience and indifference,
issuing decrees
that dissolve into hot water.

Outside, the world insists
on gravity and consequence,
but here, the leaves float
like thoughts you forget
before the sentence ends.

A sugar cube protests,
crumbling under existential weight.
The teapot remains impassive,
its handle pointed like a finger
toward the ceiling,
toward enlightenment,
toward nothing at all.

ISMAEL S. RODRIGUEZ JR.

The cup trembles
with the audacity of reflection.
You pour yourself a portion
of their quiet dominion
and sip the obedience
that tastes like paradox.

The leaves do not speak.
They never speak.
Yet the world listens,
bending its rules around their silence,
as if reality itself were a teaspoon
stirring in hot water.

Poetic Cauldron

Listen—

There's a cauldron bubbling
in the basement of my soul,
black as midnight,
black like my melanin
blacker than coal.

Where syllables melt
into molten gold.

Into this cauldron I throw:

fragments of overheard conversations
on subway platforms at 2 AM,
the way light fractures through
broken storefront windows,

Steam rises the ghosts of every poem
I've swallowed instead of spoken,
every truth I've buried
beneath polite small talk
and careful smiles.

**The heat is unbearable
sometimes.**

This alchemy of anguish
threatens to crack me open,
spill my insides across the page
like an accident scene
Most magnificent and terrible.

CHRISTEN FOSTER

But I keep stirring,
because somebody has to
transform the materials
of this messy, magnificent life
into something that might
make another soul feel
less alone in the dark.

against a world that tells us
our voices don't matter,
from a fermented fabrication
Of societal freedom.
The recipe is ancient:
one part rage at injustice,

When the brew is ready,
it glows from within, open hearts,
serve it steaming
to anyone brave enough
to drink poetry
straight, no chaser.

This is my offering:
words that have been boiled down
to their essential truth,
distilled to their purest power,
ready to burn clean
through the pretense
and kindle something wild
in the chest of anyone
who's forgotten
they have fire inside them.

CHRISTEN FOSTER

So come Bring your broken pieces,
your beautiful disasters,
your questions with no answers.

Let's make magic
from the mess of being human.

Let's remember:
we are all poets
waiting to explode
into meaning.

Let's brew rebellion
in a world that craves conformity.

For, steam still rises.
The cauldron of words keep coming,
Poetry hungry and alive,
demanding to be born.

"In a world obsessed with categories and definitions, this collection refuses to be boxed in. These poems don't ask for permission to exist—they demand to be felt. Each verse strips away pretense to reveal the messy, beautiful truth of human experience: love that doesn't follow scripts, pain that has no neat ending, joy that erupts in unexpected moments." - Christen Foster

Chicago River and I.C.E.

I head toward the water
East
Lake Michigan adjacent
In the early morning
Languages split into dozens of tongues

Little fishes jump like
It's raining backwards
The way the world is working
The way it is run

The running of our families
Our women
Our babies
Strapped to their chests
Hope chests on their backs

The backwards are armed
In the rain
Dangerously hidden
And masked

Walking I wait
Whisper
I hide
Behind the milkweed
The sunflowers
The city rabbits say,
"Good morning! Mira!
The hijabs!

ELIZABETH VIVION

They flow like petals in the wind
Purples and pinks..."

African continents
Represented like freshly painted
Staccatos
On Chicago curbside
Elementary school drop
offs

Dismissal bell and we all pour out
Into the neighborhood
Roger's Park is shrouded with worry
And the Sharp screeches of happy children
Are the Undertones
Teachers and parents armed on corners with whistles, red and yellow
Human chains like armor linked forming the
Safety school bus transportation of families
Walking through a promise made by
These teachers
This city

riffles on the river

#1

I crossed the creek at the
back of my property. Two
weeks passed before he

realized it was not he who
had avoided her. The day had
cooled, & the meadows were

bright with flowers & spring
grass. Against the late sun his
skin looked bathed in iodine.

#2

The copper wire had been un-
wrapped from the head of a

broom. A motorcycle turned
into my drive. People were

swimming laps in the pool,
stroking through the electric

columns of light. The wind
was still warm & I could smell

the water that had just been re-
leased from the irrigation ditch.

#3

It rained hard, blowing in sheets
across the fields & against the
side of the house. It was quiet
for a long time, then I heard his

engine start up. An image regis-
tered in the corner of my eye, one
that connected somehow with
memory & dreams. The sidewalk

was marbled with the green &
pink neon of the marquee. I put on
my pinstriped beige suit. He wore
a blue suit & tie & white shirt.

#4

He reached behind him &
closed the front door. The sun

was almost down & the square
seemed filled with a soft blue

glow. I could see the iron tethe-
ring rings that bled rust out of

the old elevated sidewalks. The
courtroom was almost empty.

#5

Under an empty dome of yellow
sky, the wind popped in his ears

as though it was filled with distant
pistol reports. Inside the small

stucco church, on the walls by the
Stations of the Cross, electric fans

oscillated. They all seemed to function
with an orderly purpose from

which he was excluded. Fifteen
minutes later, a power failure dark-

ened the building for three hours.







[Source text *Cimarron Rose* by James Lee Burke]

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. 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.

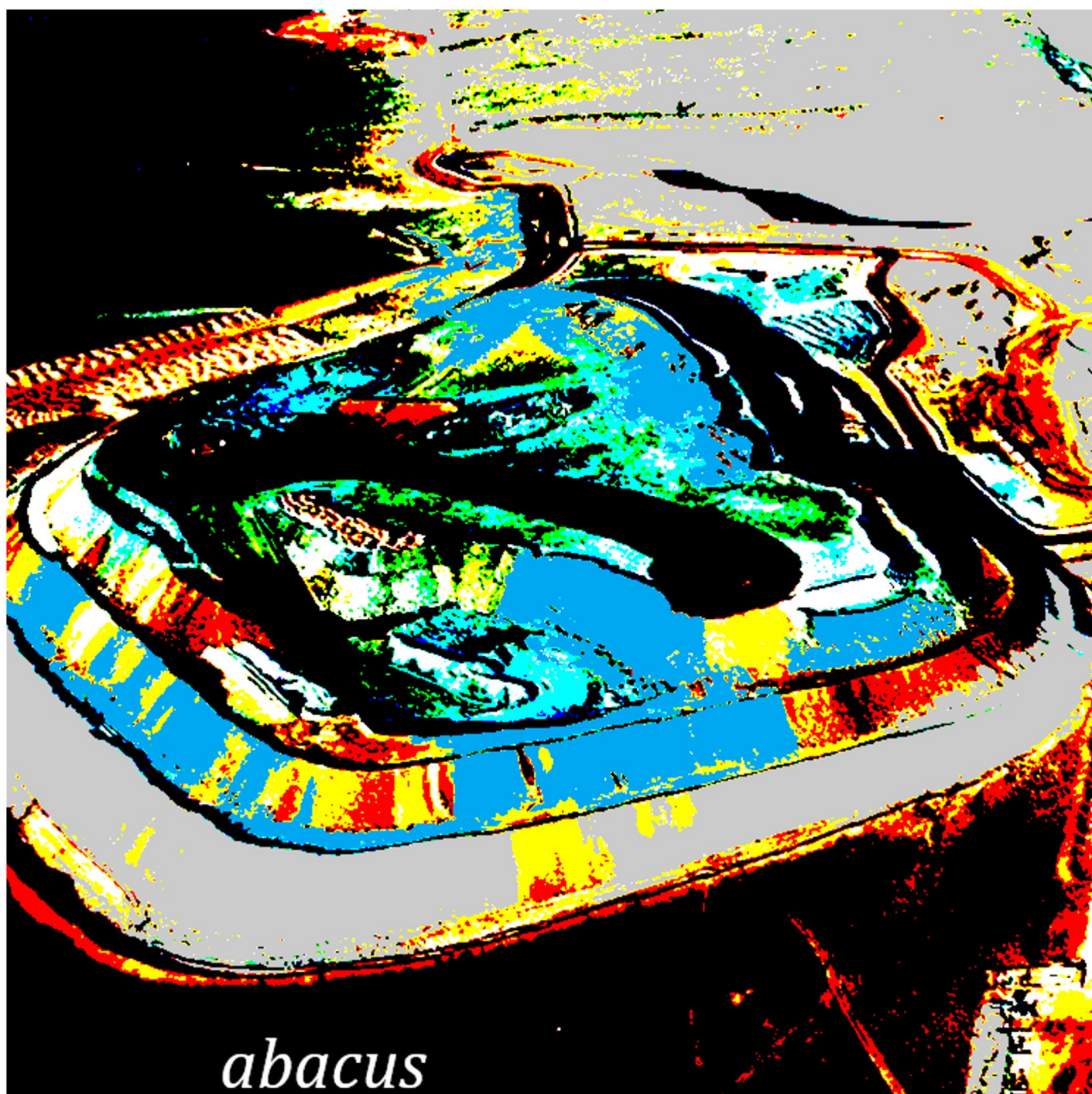
ℵ	shaman	amoeba	align	ossuary	policy	nuance	quincunx
the dawn	tangent	sub-genre	tripod	whether	Roy Orbison	albeit	glare
susurrus	...	errant	borrow	hole	fə'netiks	deny	piano forte
efficacy	palace	femme triste	an alphabet	titanium	gamut	!	the
oligarch	総角	brocade	catalyst	lite nite	flaw	plethora	goQl
apples or pears?	content	&	effulgent	her tribe	tabula rasa	endive	latchkey
trellis	descant	heat exchange	motley	ficcione	nested	in manga	jetsam
seraph	grain	fulcrum	aerial	cañón	besides	rhumba	п

Flaw

[illegible]

tempus	asemic	hologram	saliva	vacancy	columnar	Louisiana Purchase	absinthe
python	nematodes	zydeco	hydraulic	claqueurs	finicky		crustacean
pennant	hydrology		blueberry	strip mining	SCROTUS	tribal or tribade?	buffet
hiatal hernia	vacuous	sediment	tropical	dendritic	codicils	retinue	sorority
boiling point	Silk Road	précis	conquest		mutate	hermetic	
conserve	toothpaste		ensemble	aubergine	test tube	lantana	rom-com
sandwich	conceptual	octagon	kraken	hypnosis	pollyanna	dictator	quena
The Right Foot of the Giant	Kaffee Klatsch		catacombs	detritus	indolent	therapist	fugit

MARK YOUNG



abacus

Breaking News

Someone pulls a gun.

An active shooter.

Hands curl as shots fire

And blood splatters.

Smoke fills the air.

People run as fast as they can.

Some crawl on the floor,

Several drop and die.

Call 911.

A media frenzy.

Set up a victims' hotline.

So frequent now, so common,

So deadly, so tragic.

A national shame.

Why?

Mystery of the Rain

Her eyes gazed at dark clouds
as she listened to the wind's overtures
and watched birds that invented
the horizon by their flight
during the unsolvable
riddle of the rain.

MARY SHELLEY AND DEL TORO: THE TALE OF TWO MONSTERS

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, subtitled "The Modern Prometheus," stands as a central text in the history of the novel, feminist studies, psychoanalytical criticism, and the impact of science and technology on literature. And I was delighted to discover a few months ago that the re-telling of the story was undertaken by the monster master of cinema Guillermo del Toro.

Del Toro's adaptation of *Frankenstein* has captivated audiences by weaving a visually remarkable Gothic banquet with Christian themes of sin, forgiveness, and redemption. Many viewers have found themselves emotionally stirred by the film's intensity, drawn to Del Toro's artistic vision and actors' compelling and well cast *dramatis personae*. Nonetheless, despite some obvious parallels between the novel and the film, it is crucial to acknowledge that Shelley's story drastically differs from del Toro's interpretation in its philosophical orientation and emotional undertones.

Del Toro's adaptation evokes a sense of emotional fulfillment and closure as the story unfolds. Shelley's *Frankenstein* resists any such resolutions, and as the book progresses, the story continues to unravel—without end. The novel operates from a place of existential delirium and nihilism quickened by a sense of impending, actual, and endless series of losses. Del Toro's is a deeply felt Christian retelling that reorients and even erases these energies. His film is animated by a search for connection, the power of Eros and affirmation of life. Shelley's book is all about something akin to death drive, several decades before Freud formulated the notion. Del Toro's Creature is innocent, beautiful in its deformity, and vulnerable despite its super-human strength. Mary Shelley's Creature is at core murderous and self-destructive. In Del Toro, man made something beautiful even if forbidden. In Shelley, man makes monsters within and without.

Creature's education in the form of a reading list, is one of the key tells of the difference between the novel and the adaptation. Del Toro's monster reads the Bible and learns from the stories therein. Only later, he picks-up Milton's *Paradise Lost*, for some confounding reason figured as a small and slender volume (quite misleading). Shelley's Creature's reading lists starts with Goethe's *Sorrows of the Young Werther* (suicide), Milton's *Paradise Lost* (rebellion), and Plutarch's *Lives* (biographies). This list is diverse (genres alone), Romantic (high emotions), and has its roots in Antiquity (myth of Prometheus being just one indication of this, Goethe is more of Classicist than a Romantic too). This Creature is apparently as well-read as he is murderous. If there ever was an idea that went entirely against the grain of European sensibility of Shelley's time, Creature's merciless killing spree, despite its erudition, is surely one.

It is not my intention to try and establish any kind of intellectual or artistic hierarchy between the two projects. Although, if evaluated on the basis of sheer artistic nerve, Mary Shelley's work remains undeniably peerless. *Frankenstein* is eerily prescient in its terror and irony, boldly anticipating European wars of later decades as well as modernist philosophical concerns that would become prominent only in the later nineteenth century and beyond. Among numerous ways in which Shelley's work can count as pioneering, her deep dive into transgression, loss, nihilism, anxiety, and death is on par with a philosophical acuity and literary vigor reminiscent of (the great) Georges Bataille, who lived and wrote nearly a century later. Her engagement of science and technology against a high ground moral spectrum is another important contribution. As is my usual practice, I recommend reading the book. Bravely meet for yourself the kind of terror Shelley has made.

Hunting Season

What if violence is the order of life, but the landslide
in my heart cannot be stopped by an idea.
Or an explanation.
Instead, I sink.

I sink and find that the measure of my heart
is the measure of reality.
It needs no further
explanation.

The sower of terrors walks free.
He strangles daily
And every day, he cries out: I'm a winner.
I sink. Which is above and beyond an argument.

The beast shrieks in the background.
I am stepping out of the spider's web. I rise.
I sing the ode to Life. I squash the gnat. I let me be root.
I call myself a prophet, a seer, a god.

New Toy

"The only time we are fully human is when we are at play."

Friedrich Schiller

The little frog is helpless, but strangely enough - winning.
Hiding on a tree branch talking to herself about the faeries.

Unburdened and alive, she lost a shoe in the creek.
Finds herself again in a middle of her breasts.

A small space opens on her forehead, right in the center.
She's a baby-cyclop growing into a laughing Medusa.

A child not yet burdened
by accusations, consequences.

She is free flying

Softly

Suspended above the ground
A lithe young body

Fearie girl.
For now, consumed

With a brand new ping pong ball, and
a brand new rocket.

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