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FOSTERING PEACE THROUGH LITERATURE & ART

SPRING/SUMMER 2020

"Mother of the Universe"
by Stephenie Bushra Khan

Tiferet

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COVER ART
"Mother of the Universe" by Stephenie Bushra Khan

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STEPHENIE BUSHRA KHAN

Mother of the Universe

Stephenie Bushra Khan is originally from Winchendon, Massachusetts and a graduate of the School of the Worcester Art Museum, Worcester Massachusetts, 1980. She is inspired by the Massachusetts woods and finding the Oneness of God there, the subcontinent culture, Sufism and Transcendentalism.

Stephenie belongs to Interfaith Council and Dorland Mountain Art Colony. She is a professional artist and writer, who has exhibited and published in magazines and newspapers internationally. She lives in Temecula, California.

"Mother of the Universe" is about the feminine aspect of God... taking care of all of us like children and protecting us from evil. The peonies represent the flowers of her home in Massachusetts.

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"Thank you for this journal which combines spiritual issues, imaginative issues, esthetic issues. All of those, I think, need to be in the mix for the richly lived life, the richly observed life."

– MOLLY PEACOCK, *former President of the Poetry Society of America*

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POETRY

Sacred

Lisa López Smith

When the sun drenches the harrowed soil and will it ever produce what we desire? Also, the sun on the crops of my neighbour, who stole the fields from his brothers and probably had a gun. Fallow. Rushing to pack the lunch bags, one of my children is missing a shoe, the six year old's sweater is unzipped and they wave goodbye. When I found the hawk—its body speckled like reddish sand—it was still limp as if she were just asleep on the side of the road: her eyes closed grey, the talons so curved and sharp they could take off my hand. The rust on the '69 Galaxie changes colour by season, the grass growing through the dashboard. When the daddy long-legs cluster for warmth—a leggy, black ball of fuzz the size of my hand. Silence. When my dogs collide with the front gate, with each other, with my legs, and their enthusiastic frustration that my two hands can't greet all six of them at the same time. When the monarch lifts and lowers her wings like the lungs of a Zen master. When Martín paints broad brushstrokes of sauces and oils across skewered chickens, fanning the coals volcanic red with a hairdryer, he works until he sells out every day. Padre Manuel recommended the homebrew mezcal from the third house on the left before town, just bang on the gate and the guy will get you a bottle; we shared it and everyone agreed it was bien suave. In cartel lingo, hawks are what the look-outs are called. Opportunities, like food and gasoline, aren't evenly distributed, that's for sure. Look. When the spiny paddles of nopal are transformed into narrow slices of grey-green in the salsa with onions and ruby tomatoes. Somewhere, a mother watches her sons get lookout jobs because the kids are hungry and there are bills to pay. The lamb, sleeping now beneath the turned soil and my children, who recited a Padre Nuestro for her. I tell them, look out for the good—there's probably something holy in noticing. When I stop to observe the huizaches, and the cilantro in the garden, see the notebook with every page filled, the sweater with threads of dog hair stuck to it. When nothing is left. When there's nothing more to ask for.

POETRY

After Babel

Jessica de Koninck

There is a common language
I cannot master; though it was
my first. English came second.
I do not know the nouns of this
language or its syntax. I cannot
conjugate its verbs. But rivers speak it,
as do bones and bottles left
for recycling, the geese in the lake,
screen doors, peach trees,
ambulances, trolley cars and kettles.
It is there in the static of stars.
But I remain dumb.
If I could speak this tongue,
if I had its vocabulary, if I knew
its tune, I could tell you,
and you would understand

NONFICTION

Ghosts on the Landing

George Blecher

The following is an excerpt from a manuscript called HOW TO BE ALONE IN DENMARK, which centers around a 300-year-old peasant's cottage where I live during the summers. It's also about other houses in my life, including the house where I grew up, and about the concept of home itself: what constitutes a home? Does one ever really feel *at home*? Is there such a thing as an ideal home?

Shortly before he died, my father told me through gritted teeth that he'd bought the biggest house in our neighborhood to show the Christians that he was as good as they were. This was not something that he said easily; it must have been grinding inside him for decades.

Not that Jews had never lived in our house. One of my camp counselors had grown up in the same house 20 years before. But not our kind of Jews—first and second generation immigrants who'd lived in cramped apartments until World War II, then made money in the post-war years and put all their cash on the line and the future. As the years went on, more and more of us moved into the neighborhood, sending the Christians out to the Northern suburbs and Connecticut. But the feeling of trespassing, of stealing someone else's treasure, hovered over all our years.

A wide, three-story faux-Tudor house, it had a weathered slate roof with a pitch as steep as a ski jump. It *was* big for its time—11 or 12 rooms, depending on how you counted—but what it didn't have was land: it sat squeezed between other houses on a minuscule piece of earth, spreading itself like a portly dowager from one side of the property to the other. Two- hundred-year-old oak trees in the backyard made it impossible to grow anything there but pachysandra and ivy—after a few years, my father covered much of the backyard with a concrete slab—and walking in the backyard always felt like tiptoeing through a dank, high-ceilinged church, the oak boughs crisscrossing the sky like the ribs of a nave. But the front yard was bright and unthreatening, and sloped down to an ersatz country road—ersatz because our house was part of a subdivision, a Development, built in the 1920s on estate land once owned by moneyed WASP families.

The mood of the house was as divided as its yards. The rooms were spacious, and the builders had taken great care to make them tight and secure; but it was also a lonely, brooding house. Or maybe it was just us.

My mother filled the house with auction-bought furniture. She had excellent taste, but for a boy with no taste at all, every oversized, overpolished, overstuffed piece seemed hazardous, mined with pitfalls. Everything existed to be spilled on, broken, scratched, ruffled. Pillows had to be puffed hard as alabaster; glass and porcelain had to chime. Years later, when my mother covered the hallways with palace red carpets, it reminded me of the Queen of Hearts—formidable, unforgiving.

There was an *inner* house that gave us some of the security and dream-space that we secretly longed for. Each of us had his pocket of calm. For my father, it was the tile-floored Alhambra of a sun parlor with its fish-head fountain that my mother dammed up for fear that it would overflow and stain the rugs. He would lie reading on a garden lounger, his head next to a futuristic hard-plastic globe of a radio perched on a chrome pedestal whose stations changed merely by rotating it. My mother's haven was the kitchen, untouched and unrenovated, with an ancient sink and brown Formica-topped table; my mother read her newspaper every evening from cover to cover, turning the pages with slow, sensual delight.

On the house's far borders and under its skin were spaces that my parents hardly noticed: these were my refuges. Neglected, unexplored, these places scared me at first. But gradually the terror wore off, making room for imagination and longing.

Mr. Zambetti was the keeper of the house, its *genius loci.* Bald, with knotty muscles, rivers of veins and a swirl of wooly gray chest hair that made him look like a King of the Apes, he had been on the crew that built the house and most of the others in the Development—the Moorish, the Colonial, the Southern Plantation Gothic. His English was a transparent film over the Neapolitan that kept pushing through, making him sound like an organ grinder in the movies: "This is da best-a house I eva build. I know it betta than this-a hand." He was the one we called on when the house sprang a leak or dropped some stucco, when its wiring had to be traced down passageways or pipes had to be replaced. Whatever the weather, he never seemed to be wearing a shirt, and I followed close behind him, smelling his pungent, comforting sweat as his shoes left Plaster of Paris imprints on the immaculate carpeting.

He showed me the laundry chute. "Ever seen sometin' like this?"

At the foot of the attic stairs was a trap door that you could pull up with a brass ring. I peered down into an angled, galvanized zinc tunnel that looked like it ended miles below the cellar. "You just drop-a your socks." I took a ball of fresh socks and watched it carom down the metal cloaca. "This is so Mama no have to work."

The laundry chute was the first glimpse of the house's insides: going up the attic stairs was traveling farther into its guts. The staircase was as steep as a bell tower. My shoes echoed woodenly, but the sound wasn't scary—it was the sound of the house itself—and the narrow, tunnel-like space fit around me snugly.

At the top of the landing were two rooms. My parents called the one on the right the playroom, but since they didn't know how to play, they used it as a storeroom. Really it was a ballroom, a spreading, light-filled space maybe 40 feet long—half as long as the house's width. It was huge but not cavernous, with finished walls and sconces, a chandelier, pitched ceiling and hardwood floors whose floorboards ran lengthwise, making it look truly vast. What was most wonderful was the air itself. It felt almost solid, a magical block of air that never changed; the windows were never opened. You could feel this most in the summer when the sun heated the air so you could almost drink it or mold it into shapes, but it was like that during the other seasons, too. And always the same scent—mostly camphor but other, fainter smells, the same scents as my aunts' apartments in Washington Heights: soap, clean linen, salmon croquettes.

Zambetti showed me the room's secret. Once when he had to track down some cables, he opened a square panel fastened with wing nuts to the wall facing the backyard. "Ever seen sometin' like this?"

Inside the wall was the house's skeleton: a crawl-space as long as the room. The passageway smelled of cedar and dust; you had to stretch your whole body across from beam to beam, and above the beams the space quickly vanished into blackness. Sometimes I went there with a flashlight, but mostly without; I wanted to *feel* the darkness. And I never showed my friends. This was *my* tunnel, and I crawled through swamps and under barbed wire, picking balls of insulation out of my mouth, until I heard my mother's voice running dustily along the beams, now transformed into musical dream notes.

In the attic on the other side of the landing, the only light came from a dangling light bulb with a chain pull cord; after you pulled it, the bulb wobbled, sending flickering drifts of light onto the naked beams. In the attic there was nothing between me and the sky except the roof itself, and even that wasn't completely sealed: there were holes in the gable and birdhouses set into the wall so that I always heard strange, otherworldly shuffling of bird-families in the darkness above my head.

We were afraid of the attic. I don't remember my mother ever going there. Filled with dark corners that the light bulb couldn't find, it was more for my father and me, and for the naked pieces of the past that belong in attics: old trunks, bamboo fishing rods, leather jackets, photos, baseball mitts with cracked leather fingers, sneakers, boots, suits in airtight bags hanging like dead men with camphor amulets

around their necks. I could feel my father's discomfort: in the attic, the past was too present. He'd bought the house to escape from the past, but here it was virile and unrepentant. The hurt and humiliation that he'd felt at the hands of the Christians were still as raw as a wound; he was trying to bury them in every bit of mortar of a house that had cost him all his money and, in a sense, his freedom. But the past couldn't be buried; the attic was proof of that. So when I brought down photos and old clothes from the attic, my parents were hesitant and close-mouthed—not exactly angry, willing to talk about them a little, but they'd already turned experiences into anecdotes, memories into clichés. When I emerged from the attic onto the landing, the civilized space at the top of the stairs welcomed me back with warmth and relief. But the attic was still clammy and mocking: the past was bones, bits of hair, dead men's suits and jackets hanging from rafters.

If the attic had the power to terrify and to witness, the basement's power was to reassure. I was never frightened there, and neither were my parents; in their last years in the house they dropped any pretense of living upstairs, and sprawled on old garden furniture that would have embarrassed the upstairs rooms, and they drifted off to sleep before an old black/white TV. Even on summer afternoons my father and I watched the Yankees in basement darkness; and at night, when my parents climbed bleary-eyed up the steps to put themselves to bed, they smiled embarrassed little smiles, as if they'd been caught making love.

They never fully renovated the basement—just slapped up pressed wooden panels, painted it gray and white, and let it be what it was: a catacomb of small cells, each with a personality. The best was the boiler room. The furnace took up almost the whole room—huge, 8 feet long and 6 feet high, the house's silver locomotive, complete with doors for stoking coal. Even though the coal had been replaced with oil, you could open the cast-iron doors and watch the oil jets kick in with fountains of fire. Whenever it came on, the furnace surged with a giant's thunderous belch, and the whole house tingled with pleasure. I stood next to it in the dark, letting the heat coat my body, tickle the roots of my hair: it was like an uncle I never knew—stronger than anyone, more dependable than humans can ever be, stunning in its silver coat, godlike in its constancy.

There was my father's workshop in perpetual twilight from the slit of a window just above ground level: wooden shelves with plastic boxes full of nails and nuts and washers, piles of hammers and saws and screwdrivers and chisels and rasps, everything rusted into archeological treasures. Screws so long that you couldn't imagine anything thick enough for them to penetrate; pieces of old radios and magnetos and meat grinders and typewriters and fishing reels; trays of things, metal

things, that had no apparent use except to be fingered, weighed in the hand, turned over and over, caressed because they belonged to my father, whose shyness made him jump if you touched him too intimately. There was the wine cellar, the coldest room in the house with the thickest walls, the *sanctum sanctorum*; we knew nothing about wines but liked the name and kept it. It was where Dad stored his old files but also solitary objects that for some reason hadn't made it to the attic—a smoke-green vase, stuff boxes made of shells, porcelain miniatures of Pekineses and smooth-faced shepherds asleep against tree stumps. What was most special was the window. Recessed high in a corner of a wall that looked a yard thick, musty with cobwebs and banded shut, it was a dungeon window made for suffering noblemen writing with quill pens by candlelight. When I roamed around the basement, I saved the wine cellar till last: surrounded by walls dripping with petrified, butter-thick layers of paint, I felt something erotic and yearning inside me, like missing a girl I didn't yet know.

But there was an even better place. Under the basement stairs was a space big enough to crawl into and hunch up in: concrete walls on two sides, a wood partition on the third, the accordion underside of the stairs above me. A cave big enough for a boy to explore with a flashlight, to study the bulges in the walls and the pink translucence of his fingertips. If I made a sound, the walls of the house would crack. If I tried to stand up—there was only room enough to squat—and spread my arms, the house would collapse. Nothing could be broken or spilled on—or, rather, everything could be destroyed if I willed it. The world had conflated and expanded to a little pocket of air that was mine alone; in it, I was omnipotent.

Whenever there was a bad rainstorm, blizzard or hurricane, when the electricity went out with a pop or the oil man couldn't get his truck through the snow and we had to take away the brass fire screen that my mother had burnished so lovingly and fill the living room fireplace with logs that had been quietly rotting in the boiler room—*then* the house changed. I remember hurricanes splattering leaves and branches over the roof, limbs crashing down from the oak trees, snow billowing up to my chest and heaping into drifts over my head. In those times, the house became vulnerable, and we rallied to protect it—unclogging the drainpipes, wading with rubber boots in the flooded basement. Standing in snow crusted over with fused diamonds, I held the ladder as my father jammed a broom handle between the snow rails and pulled down snow in iceberg-sized chunks. As the night gathered, we collected candles and firewood and huddled together, listening to the wind rattle the windowpanes. Not that we were in any danger—even if the telephone lines were down, the portable radio's chatter was our lifeline—but during those times the

house became the whole world, the essential world, and if it was vulnerable, we were too.

We sat in the living room by the fireplace. The fire and candlelight defined a circle of protection, outside of which was everything my parents struggled so hard to keep away. We tried to read, but the flickering light forced us to shut our books. Strangely, because the unknown was so close, it didn't seem quite as threatening, and my parents let themselves drift into the past, speaking in small, cautious voices that grew louder, braver, gayer as the night went on: stories of my father growing up on a New Jersey chicken farm, the first car Grandpa bought, the time Mom and Dad met by accident in a subway station. Firelight sparkled on their corneas; they were happy. Their voices touched each other, and it wasn't that they made the fear go away, but that they made it acceptable—an unexplored part of our lives.

Outside the pocket of light, the living room was a hundred feet long, large enough to seat fifty knights. When it was time to go upstairs to bed, I clung close to my father. Bare-shouldered women in satin dresses swished along the landing. Tall men in high collars stood talking quietly, the tips of their cigars glowing red in the darkness. Boys my age with pomaded hair laughed silvery laughs as they flicked their cuffs out of their sleeves. Even though the darkness threatened to follow me into my room, the fear was a good fear, a legitimate fear, instead of the fear I usually felt—that I'd be alone forever.

These emergencies happened only 5 or 6 times in all the years we lived in the house. But there were other moments, much harder to hold onto because they were just part of our daily lives —and now, many years later, I find it almost impossible to tease them out of the general weave.

I'm thinking of moments when the house is peaceful: a water-clear fall evening, late September, when the air is so perfect a temperature that it feels like no temperature at all. Outside my bedroom is a full moon between the telephone pole and the oak tree in front of the Fiello's house across the road. The moon is so bright that it eliminates depth and all the stars, smoothing the sky into a glossy navy blue. The house seems to take a deep breath. It isn't only protection that it offers, but a new sense of scale. No longer imposing, its smallness reminds us that we are small too, and that is as it should be. I'm in my room doing my homework. I can hear my parents talking in the kitchen. In her room at the end of the hall, my baby sister's sleep-breath is like a whisper. If I leave my room and pad barefoot along the gray hallway carpeting, I feel the smoothness of the bannister against my palm, the warp of the carpet between my toes. Through the window I catch more glimpses of the moon. Lamplight inside, moonlight outside. Love pours out of

my heart like the moon pouring light into the sky, love for my parents who built the house around us to make us feel safe.

Or it's the middle of the afternoon—2:45, 3:00, end of May perhaps, when school has just let out, or early June, before I go away to camp. I'm standing on the second floor landing in a place that only I know about—know about unconsciously, without actually knowing.

In front of the house I can see each young leaf on the little maple tree between the Calloway and Fiello houses, and I can hear the chesty exhaust-pipe growl of the few cars that bounce slowly along the unpaved road. My sister's room floats in the afternoon silence—hovering, dreamy. Into my parents' bedroom thick yellow sunlight streams, glancing off my mother's glass-topped boudoir table, the satin summer bedspreads, the graceful scrolled edges of the cherry wood headboards. I have nothing to do—no homework, no obligations, no chores. The house is breathing in a way that only I can hear. It isn't the nervous puffs of breath of my mother and her sisters, whose insecurities were great and constant. I imagine that I hear a voice that I never heard before or since. Maybe it isn't even a voice as much as an implicit promise of safety: *I am the future when things will get better. I am the gift that your parents could not give you but meant to. I am the right to be anything and everything, to belong in a world of slowly changing light and regular seasons with all the people you admire but do not believe will accept you. They will; you have the right to be among them. I know because I am the future.*

In his later years, my father was seized by a restlessness that propelled him across the country in search of new adventure. With hardly any warning my parents sold the house, packed their bags and headed west; they were in their late 60s. At first my sister and I were shocked. How could they abandon the house that they'd prized so much and still had a hold over all of us? By selling it, weren't they deserting us and their grandchildren, erasing our common past?

Except for the palm trees along the street, their new apartment could have been their starter apartment where I'd spent my earliest years: one bedroom, no dining room, a kitchen no bigger than a sailboat's galley. The furniture that they'd brought with them had stood for decades in the playroom, and they'd bought hardly anything new –just a few beds and some canvas director's chairs. But this little apartment was alive with activity: my mother flitted around in an apron cooking salmon croquettes, spooning into cups crystals of instant coffee, while my father sat on the edge of his chair, his shirt cuffs rolled into perfect armbands, waxing on eagerly about the real estate deals that he was involved in.

They looked like newlyweds! I realized that they were younger than I was: my father's face was as eager as that of a talented graduate student, my mother's gestures as demure as those of a young bride. Finally she was who she must have been at the beginning of their marriage: my father's partner, his helpmate, not the uncomfortable mistress of a too-big house.

Did they miss the house? I asked them.

They smiled politely and looked bewildered, as if they hadn't a clue to what house I was talking about.

It made sense. In a way the house had never really existed. We hadn't quite existed in it. We hadn't been able to truly enjoy it and trust it enough to fill it with our lives. It must have confused my parents: if they had bought Paradise, why weren't they happier? The anger and sense of persecution that they'd brought with them made it impossible for them to see that Paradise existed only in fairytales. In Bedford and Pound Ridge and Greenwich, the Christians were feeling and acting just like us, bickering and brooding, puffing the pillows and shining the doorknobs, envying too much and loving too little. Or maybe my parents sensed that there is a certain degree of hubris in trying to make an ideal house real. Dwellings in the real world are imperfect, provisional; to think anything else is a fantasy; and in that realization, conscious or not, my parents may have been liberated.

Bob Fiorellino AFTER ICARUS

NONFICTION

The Deep Limitless Air

Mary Allen

There's a bird in the chapel. Anne and I notice it as soon as we settle into a spot in the middle of one of the long wooden benches in the guest area. There are two other people here, a guy at the end of the third row and another guy at the opposite end of the second row—they're the only other guests besides us at New Melleray in this late-January, middle-of-the-week moment. They're both devout Catholics; we saw them genuflecting and crossing themselves before taking their seats along the rows during the two services we went to yesterday.

The bird wasn't here yesterday. It flies madly from one side of the ceiling to the other: a flash of white up by the rafters above the monks, swooping and circling, disappearing for a while—maybe perching on the ledge that runs along the edge of the ceiling—then appearing again. The monks' chanting seems to bring it out.

This is Vespers, the canonical hour that starts at five-thirty. Vespers lasts for about half an hour and afterwards you get to go down to the big empty dining room in the basement and eat dinner. The monks eat their dinner in a different room; someone told me they're strictly vegetarian. A local woman comes every day and cooks for the guests. Last night there was chili with hamburger and cottage cheese and carrot sticks and miscellaneous salads plus desserts and home-baked bread and red jello. You set a white china plate and bowl on a tray and move your tray along the line cafeteria-style, serving yourself what you want. In my regular life, I don't eat most of what they give you here, certainly not chili with hamburger or jello, but I eat it here and like it.

One of the monks gets up and stands at the podium and reads a passage from the Bible, Paul's letter to the Corinthians, and I sit here with my mind wandering. Vespers isn't thrilling like Compline, the service two hours from now, where four monks stand in the middle of the floor and sing the 91st psalm in the dark and then everyone sits in silence in the dark and then the bell rings, long and slowly three times and then three times again and then over and over, loudly, exultantly, at the end. In Vespers, there's chanting and not-so-inspiring singing, the reading at the podium, the Lord's Prayer.

I stare at the monks as they chant back and forth, two small handfuls of men in white-and-black belted robes seated in rows of stalls on either side of the

chapel. The expanse of granite-tiled floor between them is at least thirty-five feet wide, but the chapel is much longer than that so the effect is one of narrowness. We guests are all the way at the back, cordoned off in our area behind a black wrought-iron fence with a gate in it; at the end of Compline they open the gate and let us through so we can join a line and get a little splash of holy water. The last time I came up here with Anne, about seven years ago, I told her at the end of Compline on our second day that I didn't get any holy water—somehow the drops all missed me when I got to the front of the line and bowed my head before the monk dispensing the water with a snap of his wrist, and I hated it when that happened. Anne walked over to the big square stone font at the back of the chapel—the two of us alone in there by then—stuck her finger into the shallow puddle of holy water, touched her finger to her forehead, and said, "We get our own holy water!" And then we laughed uncontrollably, mostly silently, all the way up the stairs and down the hall to our rooms.

Only one of the monks seems to notice the bird today, the youngish one with thick brown hair and wire-rimmed glasses who looks, at least from this distance—I noticed when I was up here about five years ago—like Jim Beaman, the fiancé I was so in love with who killed himself in 1991. I feel a little thrill whenever I see that monk. It's almost as if I'm seeing Jim Beaman in a body again. It gives me the strangest feeling, as if that Jim-Beaman-lookalike up there wearing a robe is some magic trick played on me by life, some sleight of hand where someone who disappeared from one world shows up, startlingly, improbably, in a different world. Although I imagine the monk himself might object to being viewed as a magic trick or a symbol of someone else. Once last year, when I was staring at him during one of the services, I thought I saw him glance my way across the expanse of the chapel and then look down at his lap, alarmed.

He raises his head now and looks up at the bird and I can almost hear him wondering, like a homeowner who has to do something about an unwelcome problem in the house, *How am I going to get that out of here?* He looks back down and focuses on the song they're singing, and the bird flies madly back and forth above by the rafters. I can feel its terror and wretchedness at being trapped inside this place of man, its wild creature longing to fly freely through the deep limitless outdoor air, but at the same time it seems like the holy spirit itself up there, as if the monks have conjured it up with their chanting and their prayers.

When the service and dinner are over I go back to my room on the third floor—Anne and I are the only ones up here, the two other guests must be on the second floor—sit in the chair beside the window and prepare to spend as long as I want to looking out. It's dark out there now and the Virgin Mary statue is glowing

peacefully on the lawn, but when I sat here staring out the window before Vespers her light hadn't gone on yet and she looked like one more part of the bleak scenery. It was twilight then, everything black and white and gray: black tree trunks and branches in the foreground; ancient tall firs in the background, their top branches swaying wildly in the wind; the snowy lawn; more trees to the right. There were only two patches of color in the scene: an orange blaze of light between the branches on the left—the sun going down—and beyond the trees and the shadowy gray lawn, an expanse of something grayish steely blue. It must have been a snowy field sloping to the horizon somewhere across the road, but that blue seemed enigmatic, heavenly, and so did the light which suddenly appeared, traveling swiftly from right to left between the dark tangled silhouettes of trunks and branches, and then disappeared. It must have been a car on the road, although it was farther away than where I'd been thinking the road was: some person going home at the end of a long workday or coming back from a shopping mall in Peosta.

I close the blinds and open my book: "The Kingdom of Heaven Within You" by Meister Eckhart, which I took out of the Iowa City public library to bring here along with my novel. The Meister Eckhart isn't anything I would ordinarily read, but I thought it might inspire me or help me achieve a deeper level of spiritual satisfaction or something, while I'm here. "All creation should be as nothing to someone trying to get to God and the kingdom of heaven," I read. "The soul must remain distant from all earthly things." And so forth. I close the book and put it down on the wide, black, glossy windowsill. I don't know how to get to God and the kingdom of heaven, of course I don't, although I feel myself groping hopelessly toward them in this place. But I know I don't believe they can be found in some abstract something beyond earthly things. They're here, I can almost feel it, in the chapel and in this room and in the dining room in the basement, in that blue field across the street and the car lights traveling between the trees.

At twenty-five minutes after seven, Anne and I meet outside our doors and walk down the long empty third-floor hallway, descend two flights of stairs to the chapel, and sit through Compline; I get a good splat of holy water right in the face at the end. Then we go down to the little room in the basement where they have a coffee machine and hot water and a glass jar with a screw-on top stocked with tan, mild-flavored cookies—those cookies are always there, always the same kind, another mystery of this place. We pour ourselves Styrofoam cups of hot water and sit across from each other at the big table in the middle of the room and talk about this and that, our lives, our loved ones' lives, the wild things we did as teenagers, while the monastery surrounds and encloses us, huge, shadowy, silent, nearly empty.

When my friend Tania and I used to come up here years ago—I discovered this place in 1994 when I was struggling with a writing problem and somebody told me it was a good place to think and I've been coming here once or twice a year ever since—we tiptoed around feeling guilty about making too much noise, eating too much food, sneaking off to go for walks in the morning instead of going to mass. Nobody was watching us, nobody cared what we did, but we couldn't stop worrying that the monks thought we were doing something wrong. My friend Tania called it Joan of Arc syndrome. I tell Anne about that now and we laugh. She and I and Tania too, when Tania still lived in the area, go to the same Al-anon meetings. Anne and I have sat in rooms and listened to each other talk about our lives, have watched each other grapple with losses and challenges and scary long-term developments and come to grips with them and move beyond them to other problems and situations and overcome those, for almost twenty-five years.

When I read, in "The Silent Life" by Thomas Merton, that a monk is one who lives in truth, that when "saved from the painful necessity to serve his own will, the monk begins to see himself and other men as they are," and that "together monks embrace their united purities, of clean and disinterested wills," I thought of Anne and some of my other friends in Al-anon. We write out fourth steps, take responsibility for our parts in things, get real about our character defects. And we try, moment by moment, little by little, to let go of the painful urge to force our wills on others and on ourselves. I look at my friend across the table and think of all that now, and I think of how she and I, slowly and gradually over many years, separately and together and with our other program friends, have learned how to get our own holy water.

In the morning, we strip our beds and leave our sheets and used towels in piles in the hallway outside our rooms for the cleaning person, because our retreat is over and it's time to go home. We go down to the dining room and eat breakfast, but we don't have time to go to the chapel for Terce to find out whether the bird is still there. Instead we load our suitcases into the back of Anne's van, get in and buckle our seatbelts. Anne puts the van in gear and we head down the exit side of the circular driveway. She pulls onto the road in the gray January morning, and as we drive away from the monastery toward our regular lives, the snow gets dirtier and the air gets thinner and dingier, filling up with future work obligations and emails and voicemail messages and all the other fragments of the busy chattering everyday world.

The next morning, back at home, I sit in the green brocade chair in the corner of my attic study and meditate for twenty minutes, as I do every day, searching for the kingdom of heaven inside myself. Sometimes I find it there in

the form of a field of light that opens briefly inside me like a sunrise when I listen to the sounds around me: the furnace exhaling through the vent, cars passing, a truck accelerating, someone's dog barking in a backyard, various unidentified pops and creaks in the house. But this morning I find it there in the form of myself, which I envision traveling through an inner minefield of other people's energies and expectations, the threats they pose to me in my imagination, coming to rest at a place of peace and comfort which feels, in this moment, like my true self: fearless, steady, unassuming.

Then, just when I'm finishing my meditation, a ladybug appears suddenly on the arm of the chair beside me. Maybe one of those Italian ones, which aren't real lady bugs and which arrived in Iowa in hoards a few years ago and continue to be everywhere. Someone told me that when a carpenter tore down a sheet of wallboard in their living room, they found a wall-to-wall mass of them behind it. I wonder where in my house this one came from; the windows are closed and I don't see any cracks in the wall or anything; it feels a little as if she materialized out of nowhere.

I examine her closely. She has black spots on her head, a faded-orange cloak of wings. I hear minute clicking sounds as she walks back and forth across a tiny range on the arm of the chair, then she pauses as if confused about where to go or what to do next. I hold out my pencil and she climbs onto the point. I place the pencil on the windowsill and she totters along its narrow length like a small tightrope walker. I look at her, feminine, diminutive, a possible harbinger of a plague inside my walls, and I think again of the kingdom of heaven—I think of how Catherine of Siena said, "The path of heaven lies through heaven, and all the way to heaven is heaven."

And when I go upstairs the next morning and find nothing left of the ladybug but a light dry little shell on the windowsill, her disappearance is an even greater mystery than the tiny mystery of her living self.

POETRY

The Feast of St. Vitus

John Poch

O patron saint of lightning strikes, animal attacks,
and over-sleeping, I do my little dance for you
in Forio. For me, too, for I like late-night fireworks
out by the water in a thunderstorm and sometimes
don't think much of morning. The Napolitano pastries
will still be crackly at noon. The blue sky will wait
for me, or the white sky will come. The secret
of my skillset on the dance floor of the world
is that I just don't care, wave my hands in the air,
with a certain jerk somewhere between comedian
and happy epileptic. Yet you were utterly serious
in your cauldron of pitch and oil, only twelve
and steadfast in your faith. When I was twelve,
I asked my mother what a virgin was, because
my friends assured me Jackie Wheeler was.
And there would be a dance, and she liked me.
Oh the bizarre charm of the '70s, era of magazines,
when someone like Burt Reynolds could bare all,
and I was innocent, embarrassing my baffled self
at every turn and even learned to break dance.
Now, on the seawall, I can make my friends laugh,
when I perform the pop and lock, and grunt
like Michael Jackson, squeal, as if burned by oil.
Life is silly, superstitious, and still, the martyrs
somewhere are martyred. Just last week in Rome,
I went from chapel to chapel in a basilica
on an island in the middle of the Tiber River,
selfishly looking for a painter I might recognize
and swoon over. Instead I witnessed on each altar
relics of the new martyrs of our new, dumb century,
common women, men, children questioned, forced,
burned, bullet-riddled, hanged and swinging

in the trees by breezes, bodies crying Jesus,
thrown from parapets, throats cut mercifully,
each body dancing in its own way, almost puppetry,
though it was their own will that brought them
to this death in firm belief of a savior past and present
yet not fully by their own volition at the very end,
but by your will O God who must justify them.

POETRY

To a Dead Pine Warbler

Joe Weil

Nothing shows of a cat's claw
nor the rending of throat
nor shredding of plumage.
It could be a stuffed, and lifelike
replica of a Pine Warbler
so perfect, unsullied, and laid out
as fresh as Hector when
Zeus restored the flesh at night that
Achilles dragged around the
walls of Troy all day.
He lies there on the red
tiled roof—oblivious to his perfection
as if posing for
some retired dentist who has
taken up doing watercolors.
I didn't see him die and I am hoping
for a strong wind to blow him away
so I won't have to watch his beauty rot,
become lively with maggots—
proving that even our
desire to merely gaze can kill.
Pine warbler, dead ringer for some
dwarf gold finch, except for
the curved scimitar of its beak.
Just a day ago, a quick, bright flutter
among the transplanted Christmas trees:
the Blue Spruce, the Hemlock,
the white pine, and red cedar.
They're have all gone quiet now with your
demise. I can't stop looking and
on the hundredth look, my fascination

wars with my respect for your dignity.
Last night I dreamed I was Priam
and knelt to clasp Achilles knee,
to beg for the return of my son's body.
I moved like a ghost
through the Greek camp, the gods who
like arm chair progressives always want
to care (as long as it's not too much trouble),
aided me, and when I was given my son's
corpse to haul back in the Ox cart, it was
a giant Pine Warbler—larger than the gates
of Troy. I couldn't fit it through. And I
begged and cried but mercy ended at
the gates of my native city.
Now that I've looked Pine Warblers up
I know habits, calls, their love of
pine nuts. I know nothing. What can be known
until the head is bowed in submission
and sings for mercy to what is merciless?
I will go out in the middle of night through
an open window, when my children sleep,
and if there are stars, I will notice,
careful, afraid I might fall from the roof,
and I will touch you, Warbler, gently, and
drop you into the dark, my hands cold
with the chill of this late fall,
a good fifty-five years since I buried
any bird, and I will pray our spirits home.

POETRY

The Turning

Ray Cicetti

Two men, faces emptied of tomorrow, sit, forlorn, like abandoned lovers, backs against the coffeeshop wall. Their lives stuffed in ShopRite bags, the older one, smiles to his friend, and says, *don't carry ShopRite bags, people will know you're homeless*.

A mother passes by, pulls her son to her side, as if she could keep him safe from the news, as if she could stop the world from bleeding through. And I recall the saying, *we live in fear we will become what we imagine.*

I remember, too, my friend Carl, who, after deep meditation, stared into the night sky and realized *he* was the still point, that larger rhythm, from which all life's music and movement come.

After that, all he wanted to do was serve and so, in the winter of 1996, he went on retreat in Washington D.C to care for those who called the streets home.

The Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress that year, said up to 840,000 people were homeless over any given 7-day period. Twenty-three percent of them, children.

He told me he walked down the street, past the statehouse, and garbage cans lit for warmth, to a hut made of blankets and bent cardboard, and when he called into its womb like entrance to offer hot coffee, a hand slipped out to thank him. Like a single point of light from darkness, he said, that touch seized him, turned him, broke him into wholeness.

POETRY

Last Minute Talmud Review

Yehoshua November

He stares out the passenger window onto Rt. 4—
spas, sporting goods outlets, exotic pet shops—

then back to the fifteen-hundred-year-old
Aramaic text on the laws of transferring an item

from one domain to another
on the Sabbath. He's lost his place again,

rereads the line that began our commute
15 minutes earlier.

When we arrive at school, he'll be tested.
Air filled with mustiness and nerves

as the Head Rabbi enters.
Let go with one hand,

guide and push with the other.
But what if your child is the living example

who disproves the Handbook. Always,
the smiling or bawling son stares away

from the word you point at.
Mystery poking through the chinks

of uniformity—
intuitive soldier, the self.

POETRY

You Left Me Your Legacy, Love

Peter Cooley

This drawer of multicolored socks, all scored
with painters, Chagall's couple mid-air,
Van Gogh's cypresses churning, Cezanne's

sheened apples, so I can walk in wonder
every step. You left me my kind of belief,
art's pretense of immortality, an eternity

daily reflection of your faith in heaven.
But why does Seurat's pointillism afternoon
resist a mate unless it's "Echo of A Scream"?

This woman like a mermaid staring back
while I slip Matisse on my left foot,
now my right, crossing my legs, she'll be here

all day, when I sit down, presence of you.
Eternity of instants, that immortality.

MYKONOS CHURCH Burt Kempner

FICTION

Living Kaddish

Sarah Niebuhr Rubin

"Our child has been gone eighteen years, Aaron," Becky whispered as the grandfather clock down the hall began intoning the traditional Westminster Quarters — four notes per quarter-hour. He didn't answer.

Then came the chimes to count the hour itself. With the first, Aaron slid the keyboard to the back of his desk. With the second, he lifted his glasses to his forehead. With the third, he rubbed his eyes. As the clock chimed onward, he moved to the closet and pulled out the box, settling back down with it on his lap as the final note of the noon chimes rang.

At 12:01pm, he flipped through the papers — his will, the car title, Becky's death certificate with the ink more than twenty-five years dry — until he came to the thin manila envelope addressed to him in Sam's bold handwriting.

He turned the envelope over at 12:03pm to find the email stapled over the flap. An email that had arrived on a cold September day eighteen years ago, to the minute.

Aaron had recited Kaddish, the traditional mourner's prayer — *Yitgadal veyitkadash*, God is great and holy — daily as he sat *shiva* for Sam a full seven days, then weekly throughout the requisite year, and annually for seventeen *yahrzeits* since that dreadful email. Now here it was again, another year gone by.

Tomorrow morning he would go to synagogue to recite Kaddish for the eighteenth year. In the evening he would drag himself out again to *Selichot*, a service of prayers petitioning — pleading — for God's forgiveness in advance of the new Jewish year.

God can only forgive sins against God, not a sin against a man. Even after eighteen years.

"Life, Aaron," Becky said. "Eighteen is *Chai*. Life. No more mourning."

Aaron looked up, a protest on his lips. Becky had been dead longer. True, she wasn't gone. Nor had she ever suggested he move on from her.

The photo of them kissing under the *huppah* on their wedding day caught his eye. That moment had held such promise — as had the moment of the photo next to it, a family portrait, Sam at a year old wearing overalls and smiling that toothy smile he'd never been able to resist. Beside that was a drawing Sam had made

for him one Father's Day. She must have been about ten when she drew this portrait of him, a book in his hands, his mouth open as if reading, his face remarkably expressive. Aaron wondered at the innate ability Sam had shown for capturing emotion.

He turned back to the email in his hands, let his eyes trace the words. Again.

> Dear Dad,
>
> I've tried telling you, but you didn't seem to hear. You don't make it easy.
>
> First, I wanted to give you time to grieve for Mom. Maybe you could fill the hole Mom left in me, I thought, if I was your little girl for you, the one you always had so much love for and fun with. But I can't. I'm not your little girl. I never was.
>
> And then you just seemed stuck, grieving for Mom as if somehow it would bring her back.
>
> For two years, now, I've been correcting what nature got wrong. I've been taking hormone supplements. And I've worked it out with my insurance company, my doctor, and my lawyer.
>
> I am still Sam, but I am no longer Samantha. Mom knew. She seemed to know even when I was little.
>
> Please use simply "Sam" if you cannot bring yourself to use Samuel.
>
> I've mailed a copy of my legal name change and the most recent report from my doctors. I'm so sorry to do this from a distance. I wish I could give you a hug right now. But I don't think you're ready.
>
> Your loving and sweet child, always—
>
> Sam
>
> Samuel A. Jacobs
> Photographer and Painter
> MFA, MBA
> Philadelphia

Aaron wasn't sure he had ever noticed the signature before. *Your loving and sweet child, always* — he had seen that. Blanched and turned away from it. He had

printed two copies; one he handed to his lawyer when he went in to change his will, and the other he had stapled to the unopened envelope that arrived. Shoved it in the box. Tried forgetting it.

If not for Becky, who had to come all the way from her grave to bother him, he wouldn't be reading it now. Wouldn't see the career choice. *Photographer and Painter.* He hadn't expected that.

After Becky's death, Sam had stopped drawing. In college she had set her eyes on a business degree, following her father's practical path. And she'd barely come home, taking internships and working over school breaks, then stopped altogether. Stopped calling. Only this envelope, which had arrived the day after the email, still unopened.

He had felt Becky's presence before, lying next to him, holding him. But that was the first time she had spoken since her body had wasted away.

"Don't you remember how confused Sam was about other girls in her class?" she had asked.

Aaron hadn't remembered. Instead, he had shooed Becky away. Though he longed to hold her, to murmur into her ear, to discuss the world with her late into the night, he didn't feel she had any right to tell him about their daughter. She hadn't been here in those difficult adolescent years when Sam had needed a mother, hadn't been there to hold Sam through loss and rejection from friends who didn't know how to be with someone whose mom had died.

Or rather, Becky had been there – for him, but not for Sam. God had stolen her from him, and he had responded with anger to her advice, whispered into the night when he was lying alone in their bed. "Stop it!" he had scolded every so often into the empty room. "I love you. I love Sam. She needed you. I didn't know what to do after you died. I miss her."

Becky had said, "I miss Sam, too, Aaron. You know I would have done anything not to die. But he needs you, now."

"I'm sorry, Becky. I… I just can't."

Aaron fingered the bottom of the eighteen-year-old email printout. *Photographer and Painter*. He shouldn't be surprised. Maybe he wasn't; maybe he was even a little thrilled that Sam had gone back to art. Even commercial art.

Sitting at his desk with the email in his hand, Aaron felt strangled by guilt. He couldn't turn back time. He had watched life go by, day after day. Watched news about violence against people like Sam — hoped he would never see Sam's name in one of those clips. He understood the people who perpetrated violence against those

who went so against God's design. No, that wasn't right. He would never understand violence. But he recognized the repulsion and fear that drove the perpetrators.

Despite all this, he was unable to accept that Sam was one of them. The guilt weighed heavier with each passing season of repentance and forgiveness. This year it was unbearable. Yet he could not forgive Sam for changing what he and Becky and God had given her.

"Call him!" Becky scolded now.

Aaron shoved the envelope and the email back into the box he had pulled it from. "But she's dead. She's dead. I grieved her loss. I let her go. She's dead."

"He is alive. He is a brilliant painter. Go to him!"

Aaron shouted into the empty room, "How would you know! You're dead! I've had to do all this without you!"

"I'm sorry. I know. I wish it wasn't so. Please. There's time. It's time. Call him."

Aaron closed his eyes, pinching the bridge of his nose. As he exhaled, his shoulders slumped. What else was there to do? She wouldn't let it go.

He reached out and wiggled the mouse next to his computer, bringing the screen to life. He shuddered, almost backed away.

"Please," Becky said. "*L'chayim* — for the sake of life."

He typed *Samuel A Jacobs Photographer and Painter* into the open browser window.

Like lightning, the computer flashed its response — *about 65,232 results*. The first was an ad, *Samuel A. Jacobs, Portraits: Photography and Painting*. When he clicked on it, photographs and paintings of newborns, toddlers, teenagers, wedding couples, and more melted slowly into one another in a slideshow. Below, three squares, each with an image, linked to *Photography Services, Portrait Painting,* and *The Artist's Shows*.

Numbly, Aaron clicked on the last of these, pulling up a list of art shows and dates. At the top, a ticker counted down to the next opening — 1 day 6 hours 52 minutes. *Portraits Through Time* was opening the next night. Below was the name of a gallery in Pioneer Square. Sam was right here, in Seattle. Since when?

The next morning Aaron searched through his *kippah* pile as he did every week, as if he didn't wear the same gray fabric kippah to match his gray suit, gray tie, and white shirt.

His hand brushed past a crocheted rainbow swirl he had brought home from a *bar mitzvah* sometime in the last year. He had picked the head-covering up

off a seat where someone had forgotten it and tucked it in his pocket so he could carry a stack of prayer books. Rediscovering the rainbow *kippah* at home, he had dropped it into his *kippah* pile.

"Wear it, Aaron!"

His face flushed and he clenched his fist around the kippah. How dare Becky watch him like this?

"I can't," he whispered, placing the gray fabric on his head. "I'm sorry. I'm so sorry."

Everything sounded far away to Aaron that morning — the traffic as he walked to synagogue, the cantor's prayers, the Torah reading, the rabbi's sermon. His fingers played with the rainbow fabric in his jacket pocket. Surely he had put it there only so he could return it to the synagogue's *kippah* bin. Becky's words, *wear it*, echoed in his ears, in his heart.

"Samantha Jacobs, daughter of Aaron Jacobs." The end of the service had arrived, and Rabbi Schwartz was calling out the names of the week's *yahrzeits* and who in the congregation mourned their loss.

"Does she know, this new rabbi?" Becky's voice scolded.

Aaron shook his head, as much to clear it as in answer. He stood and turned to the announced page. The old rabbi had suspected, he thought. But the new – what was it to her? Samantha was dead. He stared at the words. *Yitgadal veyitkadash…*

They broke on his tongue.

He looked away from the page, away from the rabbi and cantor, away from the friends he and Becky had embraced — their synagogue community — and away from those he didn't know so well.

Tears filled his eyes and ran down his face. Many people had tried to console him after Becky's death, had tried to keep him active. He had accepted, for Sam's sake, when she was still home. But once she was at college he had abandoned pretense, disconnected from others, and come to services only occasionally.

Yehei shmei raba, the congregational voice filled the room, drowning out the sound of the few mourners who had begun the prayer.

When the mourners continued without the congregation, Aaron was silent. He walked slowly out of the synagogue, tossing the gray *kippah* into the bin. As the sun warmed his head, he held tight to the *kippah* in his pocket, crushing its rainbow colors into each other.

As the sun set that evening, Aaron stood diagonally across the street from

the Orca Gallery, staring at the open door. Down the street, he could see the Alaskan Way Viaduct, soon to be torn down, silhouetted against the lowering sun.

Shabbat was almost over. He wouldn't be home to make *Havdallah*, to celebrate the separation between the Sabbath and the new week. He remembered Sam holding the *Havdallah* candle with the flame at eye level, how her eyes would dance in the light of it. Remembered how the spices had made both of them cry after Becky's death. The ceremony had become perfunctory in Sam's absence, and Aaron rarely bothered anymore.

He wouldn't be at the synagogue for the penitential prayers of *Selichot*, either. The idea of a special service filled with prayers requesting forgiveness seemed as alien to him as Kaddish had felt that morning.

Aaron crossed the heavy traffic of Yesler, then 1st Avenue. He stood still again, the shadow of the stone building housing the Orca Gallery merging with the shadow of uncertainty inside him.

He was jostled in the comings and goings on the corner, startled into motion. With a sigh he entered the Orca's well-lit foyer.

There, Aaron froze. Staring back at him were three familiar faces.

The painting was based on the same photograph he'd been looking at the day before — Sam's first birthday. There was Sam in her striped OshKosh overalls and a white t-shirt, her golden curls bouncing over her ears. Becky, sitting in the grass to Sam's left, glowed with youth and motherhood. His own face, bearded, was full of the joy of the moment. He sat to Sam's right, his left arm reaching behind her. Looking at the picture, Aaron could almost feel Becky's warmth where his hand rested on her shoulder.

He rubbed his hand against his trousers and turned, his eyes finding the next painting, in which three figures were posed in exactly the same positions as the first. Silver streaks now glittered in Becky's dark curls and Aaron's eyes were framed with early age lines. Sam, dressed in a loose button-down shirt and purple wide-wale cords, had aged more substantially, as one does in childhood. Her smile darkened playfully where her two bottom teeth should have been. Aaron's painted fingers still appeared on Becky's shoulder, but Sam's size obscured his arm.

Standing in front of the portrait, Aaron's hand strayed to the beard he wore now, felt its shagginess. He had grown it, or rather stopped shaving, after that email arrived so many years ago. Hadn't gone in for a trim in too long. But in this second painting, the beard was gone, just as it had been shortly after the initial photo shoot.

The perspective of the third painting had shifted from landscape to portrait,

capturing the height of the growing child while the parents remained seated on the ground. Becky's face was tight, her hair completely covered by a beret. Aaron's breath caught as he remembered how fast and unexpectedly her illness and death had come.

A lanky tween Sam, wearing a Mariners cap and jersey, a baseball glove on her hand, stood between the parents. Aaron's tears welled in the corners of his eyes as he remembered cheering Sam on at games for years on an all-year multi-sport team: baseball, basketball, and soccer. Baseball had been Sam's all-time favorite. She had worn the glove to bed, dragged him to Mariners games. She'd even pitched a no-hit game — unheard of in her league.

"Becky." Aaron whispered to himself, involuntarily reaching out to the empty space in the fourth painting, where a ghostly figure shimmered in Becky's place. He felt the weight of Sam, a teenager now, slouching in the painting. He was stunned by the self-awareness with which Sam had captured sadness in her own face. And how she had captured the grief that had shut Aaron down. He could feel the emptiness in his own palm as he saw the painted hand floating over the glow that was Becky.

A hum had grown as other people gathered in the gallery, some at a second artist's showing further back. Aaron was aware only of the paintings. A tear overflowed his eye and he turned to wipe it before it caught in his beard.

He turned and gasped. The fifth painting brought Becky back, her glowing face framed by jaunty silver curls. But now, Aaron was no more than a shadow darkening the canvas. Sam, now a young adult, stood tall in a tie and jacket — a young man in self-portrait, his father erased from life in the same way Becky had been erased by death.

"Not the same," Becky's voice startled him. "Cancer erased me. You erased yourself."

How could he argue?

The final painting was a series of three self-portraits — a serious Sam in cap and gown holding an MBA certificate, Sam draped in multiple cameras and lenses, and Sam with a painter's palette, sporting a trendy beard and looking undeniably like the father of the first painting.

A shiver ran through Aaron and he choked on a sob. He looked behind him, past the series of paintings and other gallery-goers. Through the front window of the gallery, where darkness had set in. Shabbat had closed out the week, and the season of repentance was fully upon him.

For wrongdoings between a person and God, God may forgive; but for wrongdoings between one person and another, God may not forgive until first they make

peace with each other.

The ancient words echoed in Aaron's head as he walked backward through the exhibit until he again stood in front of the first painting, the portrait he knew so well from its original photo. "Never forget the love you have for each other in this moment," the photographer had said that day long ago, between rolls of film. "It is more beautiful than my lens can capture."

Eighteen years worth of tears burst onto his cheeks, sliding down unchecked as he stared at the painting. He felt a hand fall gently on his shoulder. He turned to the bearded man behind him — a mirror image of his younger self.

"Sam!" he breathed. Then he spoke the only words he could find, a prayer he had frequently wrestled with. "Blessed is the Holy One, *me<u>h</u>aye ha' meitim* — who gives life to the dead."

And Aaron fell into his son's embrace.

POETRY

Blessing of the Animals

Neil Silberblatt

Bless them, oh Lord.
The creatures who stretch
out before radiators and fires,
destroy our furniture, soil our rugs,
and eat our homework.

Confer on them Your benediction,
the domesticated and the foreign,
the pure and mixed breed,
those with and without papers,
even those with the unpronounceable names.

Smite their mites.
Ease their fleas.
Let them roam safely
like the wandering tribes,
and return at night to their space
on the bed, on which they are not allowed.

Grant them strong bones, good teeth,
health and wisdom.
Endow them with the power of reason
and speech, so they can tell us
which brand of pet food or perhaps
seek elected office.

We could do worse than
be governed by creatures who have not yet
learned the skill of duplicity and who
love us
unconditionally.

FICTION

Living the Gospel Message

Angela D'Agostino

What you did for the least of these

I skip past the article about the 7-year old Guatemalan girl who died in the custody of Border Control agents and read about the Rolling Stones cancelling their U.S. tour because of an unexplained condition of Mick Jagger. The Guatemalan girl stares at me forlornly in a cobalt blue short-sleeved shirt. Mick has the microphone pressed to his 75-year-old creased face, his brown hair flipped back from exertion. Why torture myself with inexcusably tragic events that I am powerless to help?

*

I am buying laxatives for my colonoscopy prep at Walgreens and don't stop the woman as she places my items into a plastic bag. Whales with multi-colored bags in their dead stomachs surface and disappear from my memory. The canvas bag I purchased to save the planet sits on the floor of my car. I think about transferring the items to the canvas bag and returning the plastic bag to the cashier, but my dog is breathing heavy and I'm too lazy to walk back. Next time.

*

An 11-year old American girl and 7-year old Vietnamese boy benefit from money I send to a charity. I'm not sure how. Handwritten notes are scanned and emailed to me. I don't know what to say to children I've never met. How do I talk about my life without sounding privileged? How do I ask questions without being intrusive and stalky? This isn't the relationship I pictured when I wept watching Sally Struthers' commercial all those years ago when I was broke and unemployed, vowing one day I would do my part.

Love your neighbor

The plump woman in the meeting pointedly looks at my colleague, an older man with a comb-over, when she is reflecting on long-term employees at the "end of their careers." Her stretch jeans are crying for mercy he tells me later. A pin and pop. Miss Silicon Valley. Miss pop-your-fat-ass.com. He said it, but I laughed.

Sell all your possessions

The bible says it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than a rich man to enter the kingdom of god. Nothing said about a rich woman.

*

The massage at the upscale hotel is expensive so I tip the masseuse 10% instead of 15%.

*

My boss encourages me to apply for a job to grow a product line by 43% in three years in a market with a 2% growth rate. Making money for the shareholders, who are a rich family and a rich investment firm, will be my priority because I don't want to get fired. I will squeeze every penny out of non-profits looking for ways to stretch decreasing federal and state funding.

*

I gave six thousand dollars to a stranger who was a friend of a relative so she wouldn't lose her house. She moved.

An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, but no sign will be given

My mother loved god and shared the virtues of her faith with her children and anyone who would listen. She lost her mind anyway, forgetting to brush her teeth and mistaking my brother for her dead husband. What if god doesn't exist, she asked my brother days before her death.

*

Pray the rosary flashed on a digital billboard as I drove home from a prayer meeting, sparking hope. A cerulean robe flashed quickly and was gone. I waited to see if the message would return, but blackness remained. I wonder if it was a sign.

POETRY

Winter Solstice, Past Midnight at the QuikCheck on Maple

Rogan Kelly

The neon green of the 24-hour convenience store reflects in the parking lot puddle. A pothole in the shape of Seneca Falls, full of dirty snow and oil. *It's a Wonderful Life* plays on a small TV screen above the deli counter. The part where George Bailey stalls at the kiss, tells Mary her mouth will overtake the moon. My brother, all wraith, in a t-shirt and jeans swings the door open to the sound of bells. An unlit cigarette hangs from his lips. He says, *hey mister, you have the time?*

NONFICTION

Prose Poems: One Foot in Prose, the Other in Poetry

Adele Kenny

Which of us, in his ambitious moments, has not dreamed of the miracle of a poetic prose, musical, without rhyme and without rhythm, supple enough and rugged enough to adapt itself to the lyrical impulses of the soul, the undulations of the psyche, the prickings of consciousness?

(from *Petits Poèmes en Prose* by Charles Baudelaire)

In recent years, prose poems have appeared more and more often in mainstream journals, anthologies, and books. There is justifiable fascination with a form that challenges readers with a name that seems contradictory if not downright oxymoronic. How can a piece of writing be both poetry and prose at the same time?

In the first issue of *The Prose Poem: An International Journal,* editor Peter Johnson explained, "Just as black humor straddles the fine line between comedy and tragedy, so the prose poem plants one foot in prose, the other in poetry, both heels resting precariously on banana peels." A fusion of poetry and prose, the prose poem commits completely to neither.

While prose poems are not defined by the line breaks (lineation) typically associated with poetry, they maintain a poetic quality and necessarily use techniques common to verse. A standard prose poem is one that resembles prose in structure (paragraph form), but moves away from customary prose techniques in favor of poetry-like imagery and/or emotional effect. Prose poems may vary in length from a single paragraph to more than a page. Their lines break with the margins and, significantly, their margins are justified (left *and* right whenever possible). Thus, they appear in blocks of language (or as "language in a box").

The prose poem's allegiance to poetry is unmistakable in sonic impression, compression, internal rhyme, assonance, alliteration, and figures of speech. Although prose poems appear as paragraphs, they lack the narrative structure of prose.

Characterized by complete sentences and deliberate fragments, they are often driven by metaphor and imagery, and they sometimes speak the dialect of dreams. Prose poems generally include unexpected juxtapositions and startling twists of language. Based in reality, they often give a nod to the surreal.

Importantly, prose poems should make sense despite the fact that they are often presented through highly poetic language and almost always stretch the boundaries of poetry *and* prose. A confusing mishmash of words, however, is not a prose poem (at least not what might be termed a good one). By the same token, a prose poem is much more than a narrative story told in a generic way; there is always a strong element of surprise in the language, always something unpredictable. Too often, inexperienced poets assume that a prose poem simply tells a story, and many amateur prose poems read like diary entries or travel journals. Often confused with flash fiction and mini-memoirs, they are distinctively neither.

Historically, the prose poem is not a new concept. There are, arguably, prose poems contained in such ancient texts as the Bible, but prose poetry is most recently related to the haibun, a Japanese literary genre that became popular during the 17th century. In most haibun, short poetic prose passages (paragraphs) are followed by haiku. Haibun are not exactly prose poem prototypes, but there is a relationship in the blending of prose and poetry, as well as a similar affective sensibility.

Western prose poetry emerged in the early 19th century as a rebellion against traditional poetic structures. Symbolist poet Louis-Jacques-Napoléon "Aloysius" Bertrand is credited with introducing prose poetry into French literature in 1842 with *Gaspard de la Nuit*. In 1869, Charles Baudelaire published *Petits Poèmes en Prose* (Little Poems in Prose) and gave prose poetry its name. The form was firmly established in France by Arthur Rimbaud (*Illuminations*, 1886) and Stéphane Mallarmé (*Divagations*, 1897).

Throughout the 19th century, poets continued to experiment with prose poems, which remained popular into the 20th century and enjoyed a mid-century renaissance of interest during the 1950s and 1960s. Several distinguished American poets of that era wrote prose poems, including Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, William S. Burroughs, and Robert Bly, to name a few. In 1989, Charles Simic won the Pulitzer Prize for his collection of prose poems, *The World Doesn't End*.

Over time, individuals and groups of writers have adapted the form and developed their own rules and restrictions, ultimately widening the parameters of prose poem form. Other prose poets involved include (among many others) Paul Fort, Oscar

Wilde, James Joyce, Gertrude Stein, Amy Lowell, William Carlos Williams, Kenneth Patchen, John Ashbery, and Mark Strand. However, prose poetry was not embraced by all. T.S. Eliot contested the form and argued that it lacked the rhythm and musical patterns of verse; he did, however, write one published prose poem called "Hysteria."

It may be said that the prose poem is not yet, and likely never will be, defined by a specific "method." That is, a "prescription" for writing prose poems is elusive at best. Prose poet Russell Edson stated in his essay "The Prose Poem in America" (published by *Parnassus* in 1976), "… for all the interesting poets who have written them, the prose poem has yet to yield up a method."

Today, prose poetry is developing a 21st century character. It remains uniquely neither poetry nor prose but is fundamentally a hybrid of the two, and is widely considered its own genre. Because prose poems do not function in a linear, logical manner, some may seem, at first blush, to be rather "odd." They frequently require considerable thought and, more often than not, they mean much more than the words they contain. For poets who embrace the form, prose poetry is both a challenge and a delight that takes poetic art into a singular area of aesthetic expression.

Recommended Resources:

The Prose Poem: An International Anthology
By Michael Benedikt

The Penguin Book of the Prose Poem: From Baudelaire to Anne Carson
By Jeremy Noel-Tod

Great American Prose Poems: From Poe to the Present
By David Lehman

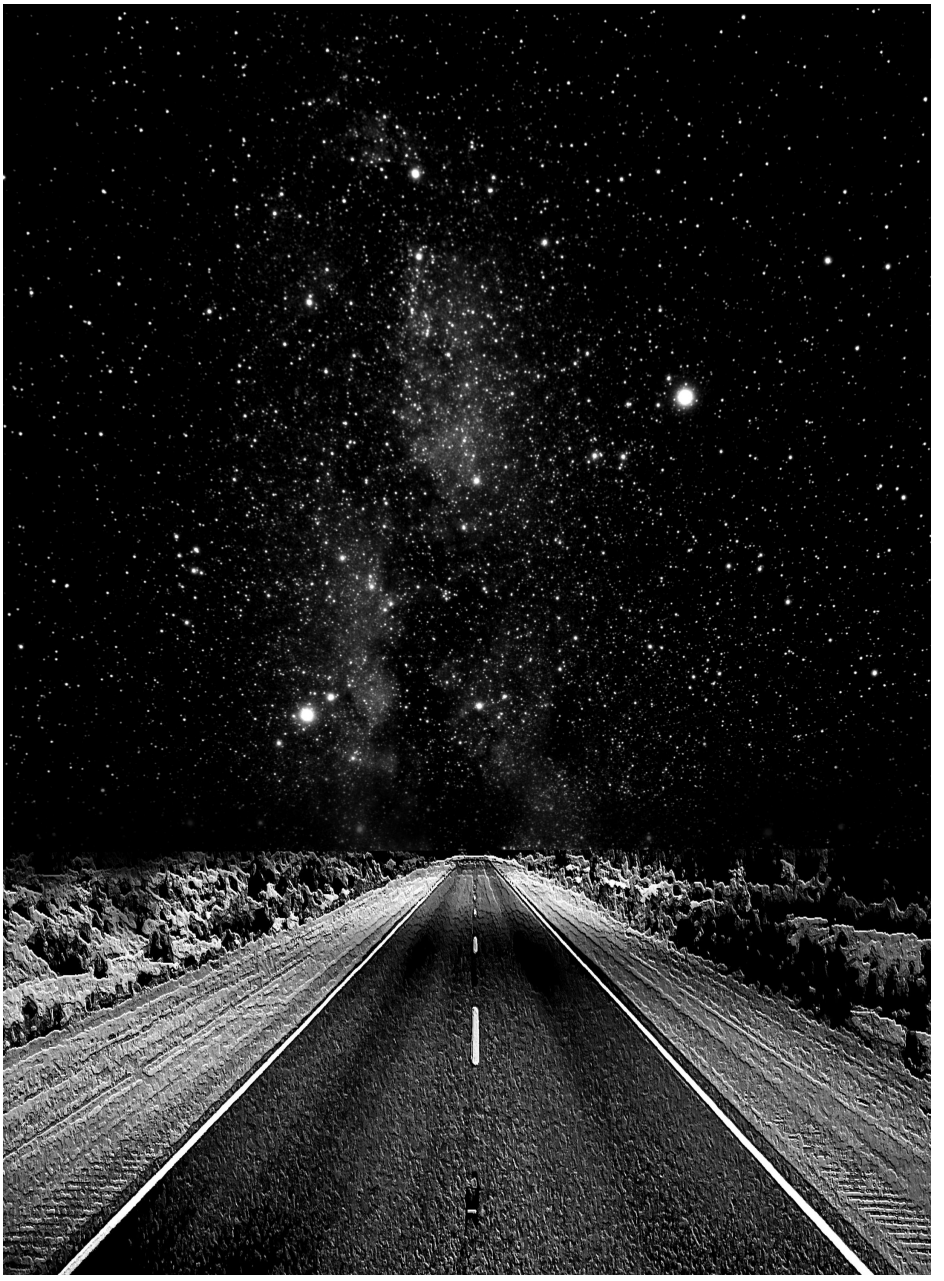
An Introduction to the Prose Poem
By Brian Clements and Jamey Dunham

The American Prose Poem: Poetic Form and the Boundaries of Genre
By Michel Delville

Models of the Universe: An Anthology of the Prose Poem (1842 – 1995 / 1995, Field)
Edited by Stuart Friebert

The Illuminations
By Arthur Rimbaud (Translation by John Ashbury)

The World Doesn't End
By Charles Simic



Lauren Raine ASTARTE

POETRY

Astarte

Lauren Raine

With age, I've learned to watch my feet.
I've become cautious of falls,
the honest frailty of bones and equally fragile,
the choices found at every crossroad.
Time makes us bend.
We learn the habit of looking down.

I was blessedly no where, just some where
between "here" & "there",
a truck stop off I-40, falling off
the edge of the world into a nameless desert town.
Disappearing
into a sweet black halcyon midnight.

After a summer rain, wet, shining asphalt
the smell of diesel and chaparral.
And Below,
somewhere between my feet and eternity
reflected, you made your puddled,
gracious descent: luminous Orion,
and faithful Sirius, the dog star.

Antares, the scorpion's tail,
the Pleiades, dancing in Indra's shining jewel net.
And the Big Dipper
offering,
offering forever

POETRY

Roadside Memorials

Cheryl Vargas

On the way to Michigan, billboards, road signs, all the water bottles, the lonely shoe.

Radio set at 106.7—vocals, karaoke style. No microphone necessary. I cruise along Route 80 at 58 miles per hour, dusty sunbeams reflect on my sunglasses (rims that Elton John would approve).

White crosses, so many crosses. Angels and angels and angels. Weather-beaten memorials: deflated balloons, faded stuffed animals, plastic flowers. Names inscribed, rainbow colors pay homage. Markers positioned where loved ones died.

Life ends without permission; moves forward the same way.

NONFICTION

Bigger Than Death, Larger Than Life: Embracing Our Greater Value

Jennifer Paros

"We are in a constant state of transformation."
— Alejandro González Iñárritu

My father died recently. He was eighty-five years old and died in his sleep. When we arrived at his house, the police officer told us we could look at the body if we wished. The emergency care workers had laid it on the floor in his bedroom. After some time, I walked up the steps and peered in from the doorway. There it was – covered with a sheet – and the first thing I thought was how very *small* his body was – much too small to have housed him.

All that intelligence; he was an idea-, word-, movie-, book-loving, writing, teaching, leading director of all sorts with an unrelenting persistence and stubbornness.

Everything I knew about my father, which was certainly not his totality, must have *streamed* through his physical self but couldn't have been contained in it.

It made me think of neuroscientist Jill Bolte Taylor's 2008 TED Talk in which she describes suffering a hemorrhage in the left hemisphere of her brain. Her language-centers, memory, and logic gradually went "offline." She describes being unable to define the boundaries of her body – seemingly blending molecularly with her environment and losing her personal identity. She says she knew a great peacefulness. "I felt enormous and expansive, like a genie liberated from her bottle . . . I remember thinking there's no way I would ever be able to squeeze the enormousness of myself back inside this tiny, little body."

The fact that my father was in that body in the first place, and then managed, like Houdini, to escape, seemed remarkable. Death is mostly considered an awful thing, but it felt magical to me. And just as in magic tricks, the audience is both perplexed that the magician has disappeared, but also knows he is still around – somewhere.

Not too long ago, my father told me he was afraid of being *irrelevant* (his word). I replied that we are all inherently relevant. Accomplishments can be wonderful, and sometimes even a great service, but our relevance does not depend on them. Having held my sons when they were newborns, I've never been able to shake the knowledge that everyone *comes in* valuable and that that value does not diminish. And what is valuable *is* relevant. But my Dad hoped to know his relevance through external recognition, though his true relevance was so much greater than any work he did and any recognition he received.

"Love is anterior to life, posterior to death, initial of creation, and the exponent of breath."
— Emily Dickinson

In Oprah's recent interview with Timothy Shriver, Chairman and CEO of Special Olympics, he describes growing up in the Shriver family and their intense drive to do, accomplish, and serve. But Shriver wanted to know his worth apart from performance. It was his exposure to Special Olympics (founded by his mother, Eunice Kennedy Shriver) and his time spent with his cousin Rosemary who, herself, had a mental disability, that taught him about human worth far beyond achievement. Shriver explains how people with special needs don't usually meet society's definitions of "pretty," "accomplished," or "smart" – everything we're told

is important and makes us relevant. Yet from working with those with special needs he's coming to understand the greater value inherent in all of us. When asked what lesson he is still striving to learn, Shriver replied: "I matter regardless of what I do."

An old college boyfriend contacted me years ago and the first thing he did was send me what seemed to be a resume. He was a musician, composer, and teacher, and there in a dense, long list was (seemingly) every country to which he'd traveled, each time he'd performed, every place he'd taught, everything he'd done. I didn't bother reading it all. I had cared about him long before all of that. What he'd accomplished did not make him more important or relevant to me; he just was – naturally.

Love is a divine property, unprovable and endless. It inspires all the wonderful actions and creations in the world, and it flows through us whenever we allow it. It has no place on a resume, but it remains the greatest determining factor of just how much of ourselves we express. We can make and do fantastic things. Sometimes we mistake our accomplishments for our value. But it is the force of love behind those accomplishments and us that is so much bigger than death, and so much larger than these little lives could ever be.

POETRY

Hands: A Love Poem

Deborah LaVeglia

I fell in love with you, when I saw your hands—
Strong:
Hands that do things.
The veins that move through them,
Remind me of my grandfather's hands:
Capable.
The kind of hands that rub Vicks on your
Back when you're sick.
The kind of hands that change flat tires for friends,
That paint houses and fix plumbing.
The veins are so beautiful.
I imagine they lead to your soul.
I wish I could trace them with my fingers,
Touch you lightly,
So lightly,
But you're a stranger to me.
I don't even know your name.

FICTION

The Kind You Can Ride

Eric Reitan

While my grandfather was busy dying of intestinal cancer, my grandmother was busy telling me why it wouldn't happen.

It was an old story. An old miracle she'd been riding for twenty-seven years. That's how my mother put it: "She's been riding that damned story for half her life."

And my father would mumble, from behind his newspaper, "They say some viruses can cause spontaneous remission, you know."

The story was about their friend, Wanda Jean, who had cancer so bad that her whole body was one great big ocean of pain. They had to tuck her into the car with pillows all around, and even that didn't help much. They drove slow, but even so she screamed when they hit the stretch of patch-and-pothole on Seventh Street. She wept as they led her from the car, supporting her on either side, my stocky grandfather surely doing most of the heavy lifting.

The tent was full of people hoping for a miracle, and the Reverend Jimmy Burlowe was there to deliver. He looked more aging hippie than preacher, that's what Grandmama said.

I would imagine a beard and flowing brown hair. "Like Jesus," I'd say.

"No," she'd answer. It was ritual. "Like an old hippie." She'd spit out the last as if it were something vile. That was part of the ritual, too. "Oh, but the Holy Spirit was in him. And Wanda Jean knew, she knew even before he raised his arms. She knew that on that day, the miracle was for her."

"How'd she know?" I asked.

"God told her. He told her she had to get up onto that platform. Said it right in her ear. She pulled away from us and she was screaming from the pain. Sobbing. But she stumbled down the aisle until she hit up against this big man standing in her way. Reverend Burlowe was healing someone else, you see. Some paralyzed boy who rose and walked right off the stage. Parents were weeping and holding him, and Wanda Jean, she knew she had to be next. But Burlowe, he didn't see her, and that big man wouldn't let her through."

"So what happened?"

"She started grabbing at the people around her, shouting that she was dying, that the cancer was everywhere, that Reverend Burlowe was her last hope. She kept screaming it, over and over: My last hope! My last hope! And the crowd started

hearing her, and they started chanting it, too: Her last hope! Her last hope! And they were pushing her forward. And Reverend Burlowe—he looked scared! But the crowd had picked her. No. God had picked her and used the crowd to bring her to the stage. There she was, and so Burlowe went and put his hand on her head and said the words."

"What words, Grandmama?"

"Be healed!"

"And was she?"

"Yes, Michael. Wanda Jean was healed. No need for pillows on the drive home. She was healed. And Grandpapa will be healed too." This last was a new piece of the story, a new addition to the ritual.

"But Reverend Burlowe isn't here, is he?"

"It was God who healed Wanda Jean, and it's God who'll heal Grandpapa."

We had variants of that conversation on Tuesdays after school, because it was on Tuesdays that both of my parents worked late. I'd take the school bus to the base of the hill where their condo was perched, and I'd hike up with my backpack full of fifth grade math and English books, and I'd come in huffing and hot in the cheeks and Grandmama would serve pastries and rosehip tea with plenty of honey, and she'd tell me why Grandpapa would be healed.

She told me the day they came home with the diagnosis. She told me the day before the first surgery, the minor one that wasn't enough. She told me the day before the one that would remove his colon. "It won't happen," she said. "The surgeons will open him up and they'll be astonished, because the cancer will be gone. And they won't understand it, and I'll tell them it's what I prayed for. I'll tell them it's a miracle."

And when, instead, he came out of surgery with a hole in his abdomen and a bag to collect the excrement, she paced around the kitchen the following Tuesday afternoon and kept saying that she didn't understand it, that it made no sense, she'd been so sure. Until it hit her that this was all setting the stage for the greater miracle.

"What's that gonna be, Grandmama?"

"I don't know, Michael. I don't know, but it will be astonishing. It will be a great work of God that will win souls to Jesus. Hundreds will be saved because of your Grandpapa." Once, he'd been a preacher and saving souls had been his work, his mission. But the fire in Grandmama's eyes told me that what he'd done was nothing next to what the miracle would bring.

But I was afraid. "What if it doesn't? What if he dies?"

"Don't say that, little one."

"But what if?"

"We can't ask that, Michael. Don't you see? God wants to use Grandpapa to show his glory. We have to have faith. We have to know. There can't be any what-ifs."

But I couldn't stop the what-ifs. At least not in my head. So when I was with Grandmama and the what-ifs came, I asked instead, "What will the greater miracle be?"

"We can't know, Michael. We'll have to wait and see."

A week later I sat and watched cartoons with Grandpapa. A cot had been set up in the living room so he could pass his waking hours watching TV. He watched, coming in and out of sleep, and once chuckled and reached for my hand. I clenched it tight. He said, "This one's my favorite." Five minutes later—a different cartoon—he said it again.

"They're all your favorite, Grandpapa." I laughed.

He tilted his head towards me, blinking. "Because you're with me," he said.

And I thought: This. This is the greater miracle.

And in the months that followed Grandpapa learned to manage the bag on his belly, and he got strong enough so he could walk with me slowly around the block on Tuesday afternoons.

One Tuesday the fall leaves were fire and the sky was ice, and Grandpapa was slow but steady and his eyes were everywhere, taking it in. He held my hand and said, "I used to preach about heaven like it was some other place, some world we couldn't see until we died. But this is heaven, Michael." There were tears running down his face. "I was so wrong about so many things."

And I thought: What if this is the greater miracle?

But Grandmama still waited for it. And when he got weak again, she clutched my hand and said, "This is it, Michael." When the doctor said it had spread to his liver, that it was a matter of weeks, at best of months, she sat at the kitchen table and looked out into the wintering light, and her eyes were full of joy. "This is *it*."

And I tried not to think, what if it's not? I tried so hard.

At night I'd lie awake in bed, and the devil was there and he was whispering, "What if? What if?" I told him to shut up, but it was too late. I was doing all the work and he was only smiling at me from the corner. What if? What if?
I tried so hard not to kill him with my what-ifs, but I was just a boy. And it wasn't months. It was only weeks. And at the funeral I could see my Grandmama staring at the body in the casket, waiting for it.

And I thought, what if she can do it? What if she can do it all by herself?
I held my breath and watched her, and until I breathed again I almost believed. Maybe, if I could've held my breath forever, the story would have been the kind that you could ride.

NONFICTION

Turning our Backs to Apps: Technology, Spirituality, and Sex

Benjamin Bagocius

I remember sitting on wooden chairs arranged in rows on Sunday mornings in my church basement. Mrs. Hemsley lifted an invisible weight with her open palms, the sign for us kids to stand. Piano music announced the next song, "This little light of mine." Half in boredom, half in reverie, we rehearsed an almost unimaginable idea: human beings radiate light. To be human was celestial; it endowed us with resplendence. To squelch the fullness of this radiance was a betrayal of human sanctity. "Hide it under a bushel?" we sang. "No!" we stomped. "I'm gonna let it shine!" In the Lysol-scented basement, we sang for shared human light that entwined us to the divine in each other.

Those lyrics, seared into my pre-pubescent DNA, make it painful when I see people -- myself included – genuflecting more to the glow of dating apps than to the radiance of bodied, brained, and beautiful human beings. To what degree has smartphone convenience become more than addiction, but a betrayal of a sacred fire burning within and between all of humanity? In the age of smartphones, being "in the closet" might no longer apply exclusively to gay isolation. Speaking as a member of the gay community, I wonder if the glow of the screen has seduced us all, regardless of sexuality, into the closet and out of public life, our inborn resplendence atrophying with the dying battery-life of phones. Looking up from my phone, I see my closet literally feet from me as I sit at home before the glow of thumbnail-sized likenesses of men on dating apps instead of adventuring toward the sacred bio-luminosity of real humans.

And this time, inching toward the closet is more disturbing than ever. It's not foisted upon me by society. I'm doing it to myself. We're doing it to each other. We voluntarily pay fees to phone providers to hide our lights under smartphone bushels. App convenience has become more important than living the divine truth I learned in my church basement: expressing inborn glow is an imperative from God. We do not have to upload a picture to an app or pay a dime to Verizon to illuminate. Exchanging and sharing human light is not a monthly service from AT&T or Sprint,

but an eternal, free gift from God. Stumbling out of the closet to reclaim our inborn iridescence and find our way back to each other cannot be solved by GPS upgrades, but demands a spiritual reprogramming toward our common human radiance.

Sexual pleasure, spiritual fullness, and technological promise are not incompatible. As spiritual scholar Thomas Merton wrote more than fifty years ago, "technology can elevate and improve man's life only on one condition: that it remains subservient to his *real* interests; that it respects his true being." Our true being is to serve not phone providers and app updates, but our soul, that weightless and wild interior-GPS that never requires monthly fees to connect to ourselves and others. Only our souls – not algorithmic radar – signal wisdom and intuition that must be given more space in public conversations about the role of technology in betraying or furthering our soul intelligence. Insofar as we allow technology's "ethic of expediency and efficiency" to take precedence over "the basic needs of man," Merton writes that technology becomes "genocidal," a tool to destroy ourselves. Merton, following ancient wisdom from Plato, cautions that technology's betrayal of human light may not be obvious, but seductive. Technology camouflages its dehumanization with appearances of comfort, convenience, and even beauty. But when the addiction to technological glow (more followers! more pixels!) overrides the cultivation of inborn luminosity, technology disgraces us. Abandoning the hard work of cultivating inborn divine light for the ease of apps, we get to be lazy and leave unquestioned the cliché that technology is progress.

Smartphones draw attention to an epidemic of brushing off human light not limited to dating-app culture. Sherry Turkle, a professor at MIT, studies the ways in which technology impacts all human relationships. *In Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*, Turkle points out that smartphones are popular not only because they make daily life convenient, but because of a deeper reason: they "meet our human vulnerabilities," allowing us to feel a sense of control over human interactions that are unpredictable. Because we are vulnerable to feeling unwanted, misunderstood, or just plain nervous in our interactions with each other, smartphones give us a modicum of control over when, where, and how we respond to each other. Rather than do the hard work of befriending uncertainty and discomfort that are integral to self-exploration and human interrelation, we take the easy way out and look at our phones to surf the web. We escape inner discomfort and anxiety by attending to devices instead of to the commotion in our hearts. When we study Instagram rather than the aches in our own hearts, we are less equipped to reach out with interest toward the human mystery of ourselves and others. Suffering from an epidemic of hiding behind screens, we are less practiced to undergo the inner work necessary to live with one

another. The emotional range of motion we're able to extend to ourselves and each other becomes smaller. We're so distracted by glowing phones we are not in touch with the emotional constriction this distraction causes. We mistake this constriction for normalcy.

For gay individuals, Turkle's observations about hiding behind phones take on startling consequences. Gay men increasingly rely on apps not only because we, like everyone, hide our vulnerabilities behind the screen, but also because we use phones as receptacles in which to pour desires that are dangerous in public life. In a still homophobic culture, smartphones make us feel safer. Turning to apps in private on our phones increasingly appeals because it allows us to hide from public life our interests in other men's light. If we can meet men on apps instead of the gay bar, no one will see us at the bar and accuse us of suspicious desires. If we can use an app to communicate, no one can suspect a questionable sexuality if we strike up a conversation in a coffee shop. With apps, we need no longer flirt in public at the gym or library. We do not need to expose that we're drawn to men's light because we can wait until we're in the safety of our private closets -- living rooms or kitchens -- to open the app and indulge sexual curiosity. Thus, app usage throws into relief the sickly state of gayness in public life, not its health. Gay desire becomes less a God-given free exchange of male radiance than a piece of plastic we have to pay for.

Almost all religious traditions tell a coming-out story of a figure brave enough to emit superabundant light in public. Humanity's oldest story, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, is a love story between two men, Gilgamesh and Enkidu. The epic opens with sun god Shamash creating Gilgamesh, literature's founding protagonist. Henceforth, protagonists in religious texts follow the pattern of associating light with sharing love in public. In the Torah, one of God's first acts is to "let there be light," an ingredient which eventually gets mixed in to his most prized creations, Adam and Eve. Later, as a burning bush, God is flaming, literally. He extends his love to Moses publicly, flaming heat rising from that bush. In the Christian tradition, Jesus is said to be "the light of the world." Like gay people, Jesus risked public condemnation for his love that went out of bounds. Jesus famously came out of the closet to show affection, touch, and love toward those in public whom it was forbidden: so-called sexual deviants such as prostitutes and adulterers, poor people, ill people, national and religious others, even his opponents. Allah in the Quran expresses radiance and shares "the Light of the heavens and the earth" with those bold souls who adventure beyond the safety of their private corners and seek him. "Namaste," the Sanskrit greeting and blessing common across Buddhist and Hindu traditions, means "I bow to the light in you which is the light in me." The figures worthy of emulation in spiritual traditions come out in public to express light, tantamount to extending

humanitarianism. Radiance, like the divine, is freewheeling. It adventures out of bounds, peeks out from underneath closet doors.

Some of us are beginning to inch out of the closet from behind our bushels. I sensed during last summer's gay pride festivals that participants clutched these public events more dearly than ever, like anything rare and therefore sacred. To witness so many living-and-breathing human beings out in public transmitting bio-luminosity through flirtatious eyes, impromptu gestures, and enlivening conversation can seem overwhelming after having become accustomed to pics of each other squeezed into jail cells of app grids. When the light of day hurts our eyes, public gatherings in this age of smartphones thrill like a jailbreak. As Emily Dickinson might say, we were "shattered with Dawn," communal light waves emanating from our shared presence. We "stood bewildered," stunned by the kingdom of human resplendence holding our beers and pride flags.

Our collective stupor in the sun signals a change in the experience of eros. Sexuality typically names attraction toward human beings. But now our sexual orientation tends more toward screens. Perhaps this orientation toward pictures is a new expression of queerness, since "queer" names a style of challenging typical categories of sexuality such as gay, straight, and bisexual. Some people might argue that orienting desire to the glow of screens more than to the radiance of human beings ushers forth a new queer sexuality: "I'm neither gay, straight, nor bi. I'm pic-sexual."

But pic-sexuality comes at great cost to the soul. Perhaps we've complied to squashing our sexual radiance into a screen because we think we deserve to be small. Many of us grew up in sexually phobic – especially homophobic -- environs eager to delete the delicious strangeness of human eroticism.

Some app users do celebrate these technologies as opportunities to express a freer sexuality and thus a more fulfilled humanity. Gay people for instance express sexuality in annual pride parades and on cruises to get married, and now across the far-flung reaches of the interwebs. With apps, we connect to each other on a scale heretofore unseen. Pointing north, south, east, and west, apps expand our paths to sexual freedom anytime, anywhere. Like glancing at the online menu, ordering the pizza, and choosing pick-up or delivery, there's always a thumbnail-sized picture ready and waiting to deliver what you order. A never-ending buffet open 24-7. What's there to complain about?

"A lot," stomps my eight-year-old self from the church basement. That interior flame – this little light of mine, of yours, of ours – needs oxygen to flare. As gay bars, the traditional places for gay radiance to breathe, increasingly shut down, apps become one of the only sites left to follow the flame of desire, not only in rural

areas, but in urban ones too. Many gay men, for example, use apps not because they like them, but because they are becoming the only remaining crumbs leading to each other. Gay apps are not freeing us. They reduce the space we occupy in public life. They are pushing us back into closets and out of public visibility, removing us from the public picture. Hiding our lights under smartphone bushels is one reason for gay spaces such as bars and lounges shutting down, and for business owners not risking to open more. As June Thomas writes in a recent *Slate* article, "The Gay Bar: Can It Survive?," the number of gay bars "has declined from peaks in the 1970s," when there were "118 gay bars in San Francisco; now there are 33. Manhattan's peak came in 1978, with 86; the current tally is 44." Thomas attributes this decline in part to people of all sexual stripes deciding to go out less and stay in more – on their phones. We can now socialize on our phones, in the privacy of our own homes. But for Thomas, staying in the closet on the phone does not disgrace our radiant divinity. She concludes that "our need for community can be met by interaction with feeds and comment streams."

But I do not believe phones supply the substance of community for which human beings hunger. I ache for a community of warm bodies, not warm plastic. When I interact on my phone, I'm bonding with plastic unequipped to register the magnitude of my luminosity, unlike a human being, whose light is powered by mine. When we stay home chained to our phones, we're moths to a bankrupt flame. The gay bar where the intelligence of our bodies determines attraction goes out of business. With mobile devices incapable of computing mysteries of desire in hand, I cage my eyesight to a five-inch plane. I share my erotic light with a device that disgraces it through robotic indifference.

Hiding our lights behind phones, particularly for vulnerable communities in the U.S., may be understandable given the country's political climate. People feel increasingly entitled to commit acts in the name of patriotism that were once understood as hate crimes. Men who desire men join the growing list of undesirables, targets of individual and juridical violence including women, Muslim people and Muslim Americans and their families and friends, transgender people, people of color, and immigrant communities. The glamourous glow of pictures on apps is seductive – so seductive it makes exile from each other feel pleasant instead of genocidal. But backing into our hiding places will not save us. Turning to apps, we're doing people who oppose "undesirables" like queer folk or immigrants a favor.

So, step into your closet. But only to grab your jacket.

Share your light with others by strolling on the sidewalk, walking to a different department at work, visiting the bar – all without your phone. When you get the urge to look into a phone, look into eyes instead, or at the curvature

not of plastic but of a person's jaw journeying to the ear. Listen to voices during conversations, hold the gem of a spoken word in your imagination, turn it over in wonder at its kaleidoscopic magnificence. These wonders are all free; we'll never have to pay a dime to the app store for them. If leaving the phone behind is too much too soon, then use apps to exchange lasting, not throwaway, light: poems, dreams, and art.

Recognizing luminosity as our defining feature demands we approach and delight in each other differently. We are our bodies, and we are more than our bodies. We speak of sexuality in terms of orientation. But doesn't sexuality disorient, throw us off compass? Phones we can predict. iPhones 12, 13, and 14 are coming. Only humans leave us guessing, each gesture, glance, and tongue-tied exchange a shape-shifting lightning bolt sent from the heavens it is our privilege to witness.

My evangelical church in small-town Ohio taught me to stomp my feet and say "no" for the sake of bio-luminosity. Let's stomp together: "No!," we're not going to hide our light under smartphone bushels any longer. Let's glory in the kingdom by disorienting our longings from the screen. For gay men in particular, let's show the world how our twenty-first-century desire can disorient modern love toward a bolder, nobler queerness: the radiance of each other.

Turn off your phone. Try it with me.

POETRY

The River

Elaine Koplow

She sits on the bank
where small stones punctuate
the surface in front of her,
and the river ripples
gently at her feet.
Here the forest waits
while the river crosses,
tall trunks reflected
in its flow.

This is a place
where grief and love come
together. She comes here to watch.
She comes here because.

She comes in the morning
when dreams of before
dissolve with the light
and she wakes
to the thinness of things
around her.

She comes in the evening
after the din of distraction
and the business of living
have concealed all thought.
She comes here to listen.

This is a place
where knowledge fails—
and she comes here
to the river
for the answer.

THE DIVINE FEMININE Mark Hillringhouse

POETRY

Wisdom in a Crayon

Gary W. Szelc

(for Eleanor)

My daughter, my daughter, did you leave me a page in my notebook?

At last, I find an empty sheet, and begin to write. But then, when I turn the page on my written thoughts, a childish scrawl reveals indigo streaks of a magic universe where the curve of an angel's wing unfurls to one side and flutters in a breeze. On the page before my discourse, a rainbow horse swirls over a fuchsia tinted sea. Elsewhere, a purple forest and orange fruit surround a curious red spider (or octopus) or perhaps a swinging orangutan. There is marvel after marvel in this museum-quality exhibit of imagination—so much wisdom in crayon. So much that I tear out the page with my once pithy words.

NONFICTION

Anonymous Together

Michael Hahn

If I didn't know it was a church, I'd have thought I was walking into a Saturday night recovery group. There are only about twenty people in the dimly-lit sanctuary, middle-aged men and women scattered close to the entrance, yet far enough from each other to avoid obligatory small talk. With the exception of a few couples, everyone is sitting alone, hunched in postures like wilted flowers and completely still as if they had crept in and were afraid of being caught trespassing. There are no ushers around and so I sneak to the end of one of the long, polished pews and find my own little space close to the stage - a broad platform upon which sits a long wooden table lined with brass wares that look like the unpolished decor of old peoples' homes. The immense sanctuary is lined with mahogany panels while its vaulted ceilings enclose us in a void that swallows up the murmurs, rustlings, and all the sounds of collective impatience. As I sit quietly waiting for the service to begin, I start to feel like a trespasser myself, or a neophyte who failed to read the orientation manual.

I'd never been to an Anglican healing service before; despite being raised Christian, both *Anglican* and *healing* service were concepts as foreign to me alone as they were together. While a standard practice for those in more "expressive" denominations, healing services were exotic fare for the Evangelicalism I knew, a lukewarm porridge of individualism and dogma just right for a white, upwardly-mobile milieu - and one that had to suffice for being a Korean *other* in the suburbs. But with my thirtysomethings came a slow estrangement; a disillusionment from an anemic Christianity bloated by sentimental tropes. With each year church community reminded me more of what I was not - *un*-married, child-*less*, *non*-white - and *faith* was less about obedience than it was about having a tidy orthodoxy scrubbed of mystery and hollowed of humanity; a cold, sterile house with all the furniture thrown out and nowhere to rest. If Christianity was *God Abiding in Me*, then I imagined that house to be lived-in, warmed by a hearth, filled with mismatching

bookcases, chairs, and all the ugly fixtures that made it home because I loved them. *Preacher*, I wanted to say, *I'm not searching for faith, I'm searching for belonging.*

A classmate in seminary told me about the service as we were discussing the practice of Deep Healing - not the healing of sweaty preachers palming foreheads or dervishes prattling in tongues, but a service for introverts where you have your own personal quiet space to meditate and receive prayer for whatever ails your soul. As over-stimulated as I am, the mere idea of *Personal. Quiet. Space* stoked a gentle mirth within me as if I were looking at a postcard of a tropical beach and thinking: *Someday*. I saved the date on my phone: a new gray dot on the third Saturday of November to save me from the tyranny of other gray dots that swarmed the rest of my calendar, and a few weeks later, I've navigated my way to a suburb 45 minutes north of Boston, killing time in the church parking lot because I got here too early and I'd rather not draw the attention of a disoriented newcomer. Walking into the church, I start to feel a little sheepish that I don't have some urgent crisis; seeing the glum faces in the sanctuary makes me feel like I'd shoved my way into a crowded emergency room over a paper cut. Yet still, God knows all about this low-grade melancholy that I can't articulate even to myself; this bludgeoning sum-of-a-thousand-aches for which the American gospel has nothing but a prescription of bourgeois gratitude and positive thinking. *Blessed are the poor in Spirit for theirs is an early retirement, house on the Westside, and a glam life on social media. Blessed are the meek for they are grateful for thriving on the injustice of the Other. Blessed are the…*

Can I at least find a congregation where I won't always need a nametag and a quip about what I do for a living?

From the front of the sanctuary, a solemn young woman walks down the aisle, handing out 3x5 index cards and ballpoint pens while a tall elderly man in a black habit paces to the middle of the stage and turns to the congregation in a slow, seemingly rehearsed motion. Pale and gaunt, the priest looks as if he were dragged out of hospice and propped-up by the muscle memory of having done this a million times. Meanwhile, a man with a gray ponytail strums the melody of a traditional hymn I can't quite place, accompanied by an synth machine that creates the ambiance of a health spa. I don't know the lyrics and nobody is singing along, but even in this room full of silent strangers the music enchants me into a calm introspection. From elevators to shopping malls, our avoidance of spontaneous human connection is set to the soundtrack of smooth jazz.

The priest instructs us to write down our prayer needs on the cards, after which he begins to preach a short benediction, but all I'm thinking about is what I will write on my card. I could fill a blank journal at will with my stream of consciousness but here in my lap this small blank space is cursing my small blank mind. I write, *I need*. Need what? God already knows what you need for prayer, but the child in me says, *If God already knows it then why do I need to say it?* Am I writing about acid reflux or am I going full-on existential here? After a few minutes I feel the rising pressure of being the last one to finish in an exam, of hearing *Time's Up* and missing out on miracles being handed out like swag while I sit in the pew like a barren island in a sea of blessedness. I start to focus on the music in the background… nothing…and then I try to dwell on the stillness…nothing…allowing the chatter of my thoughts evaporate into the hollow void…nothing…until, slowly, as if released from a hidden valve, the words begin to spill like water from a crumbling dam, pushing the point of my pen across the immaculate white space. And yet despite the words, I find my fears hiding behind paltry expressions - of being incomplete, of unholy thoughts before a holy God, of my soul carrying a burden as if it were dragging its own fractured limb. I stare at my card for a moment, my soul's cry for help in a 3x5 postcard to God, and set it down on the pew. *I guess I should close my eyes and wait.*

In my own darkness I start to pray silently but soon I tire of my own words, already wearied of my own company. I try emptying my mind, focusing on the music again but my own conscience fidgets in the silence and whispers, *Are we done yet?* After a few minutes of jostling for inner peace, a man from the pew behind me speaks in a low voice over my right shoulder: "Can I pray for you?" It's about time. I nod as he leans in to read the contents of my index card, as if I were an abandoned toddler left on a doorstep with instruction attached for my care. He doesn't say another word but I know he is praying by the warmth of his hand that floats just above my shoulder. I'm unsure what to do while he prays and eventually I am praying silently, too, although in the meantime I'm trying to feel something, anything, to indicate that the prayer is working: the warmth of an invisible embrace, a burst of dopamine. I don't normally pray with such demands, but I am at a healing service, after all, and maybe I am secretly wanting the dramatic preacher, the fainting spells, and the *Hallelujahs*.

Abruptly the man withdraws his hand, leaving me alone again with my thoughts. It feels anticlimactic (should one say thank you or give a tip?) and it isn't long before more visitors come, one after the other, some asking to pray for me while

others dive into their routine; a hand on my shoulder, one on each shoulder, fingertips lightly touching the area just above my temples as if placing a garland upon my head. Each person stops to read my pocket confession and then lingers in prayer while I bask in their presence, relieved that in the anonymity I don't have to justify my anxieties or endure the pitying eyes and unsolicited advice of those eager to fix. Here, I'm not asked to do anything; in fact, I can do nothing. I am the paralytic of the Gospels, who, despite the impossible crowd is carried by his friends to the roof and lowered to the feet of Christ. And suddenly, with my eyes closed, I find myself weeping, the tears and snot dripping from my bowed head and blotting the ink of my once immaculate card. I don't ask questions in my quiet unraveling, but perhaps here I don't need to. Here, alone with the help of my invisible friends, helplessness is celebrated rather than feared.

The mysterious guests stop coming around and the priest in black returns to dismiss the crowd. I am wiping my face with my hands; there are no tissues around and so my jeans will have to do. I tuck my postcard to God, bent at the edges, into my back pocket as people slowly rise together, gathering their coats and belongings in silence to brace for the winter night. There is no exit music, nor invitations to coffee and snacks in the foyer, which is fine with me as I don't want to talk to anyone with my swollen eyes and face wet with tears. As I leave the sanctuary, I trade a tentative smile with a woman standing at the doorway before I turn towards the exit. Once outside, the people file out into the parking lot as they came, quietly and alone.

POETRY

Still Life of Headstones, Road and Evergreens

Jack Stewart

Not a heavy snow, and the dirty yellow grasses
On the roadside across the street
Are still a few inches above the surface.

A few quick sweeps of my hand
Clear the name on the headstone.
Little freckles of ice remain.
The names mean less to me
Than the dates. Even as a boy,
I knew math means most in marble.

Chagrin Village is filling up
With young families. They
Are tearing out kitchens
And widening garages. Almost
Every front porch has a flag.

The small waterfall pours itself
Onto wide patches of ice.
In down vests and parkas,
A few people look over the railing.

The cemetery is small,
And my mother says no plots
Are left for sale. The flatness tells me
There have been no recent funerals.
Snow turns the stones into topiary.

The metal vases are filled
With water. Birds drink

Tiferet

From them, sometimes pecking
Through a scrim of ice to do so.

In a sudden gust, the elms
Surrounding these dead
Shrug themselves into
Their overcoats of sky.

The light is fading. In the west,
The sky is just the faintest ridge
Of pink marble.

POETRY

The Crucifixion of St. Julia

Jeff Fearnside

(After the painting of the same name by Netherlandish artist Hieronymus Bosch)

Bleak. Dark. Either
early morning or late
evening, sun but a haze

on the horizon.
No blood, though
much is bathed in umber or madder.

She hangs, hair an umber
waterfall behind her,
from a crucifix.

Oddly, no legs
seen—her body seems
an extension of the instrument

of her present torture
and imminent death, rising up from it.
Vermillion sleeves droop.

Dress and sash billow
about the gibbet.
Surrounding it, only men.

They point, spread their hands, weep.
Her gaze is skyward,
above them all.

POETRY

Asylum

Michelle Ortega

after Overbrook Girls: a photographic collection by Nicci Silva

Wild-haired girls lean from doorframes, roam the hallway. Hang in corners.
Footsteps over broken glass, no blood anywhere. A shadow behind a roller shade.
This asylum–a place to keep them safe, where they froze to death in bed.

who broke the glass, who tossed a steel bed, who would have
jumped, who would have found her, who would have cared

Cracked plaster, chipped paint: the art of abandonment. Comb the ruins for life;
ghosts are enough. A paper rustle, a rat, a belief that some beauty can keep this
thing alive, whatever this thing is.

POETRY

New and Bitter Flowers

Joel Peckham

We begin with the corpse of the deer in the road on the way to Loews to
buy new and bitter flowers and herbs for the garden we had
planted the evening before only to wake with our morning coffee
to stems of tulips and violas and the ruined azalea chewed down
to its bones—red and pink petals sprayed everywhere. It looks
like a bomb went off in here, Rachael said, as if she'd just entered
our son's room on a Saturday Damned deer!

Which is to begin with two endings of two different stories that seem
like the same story because I can't see this deer without
imagining him, alive and elegant and with one or two others
guided by the moon and the scent of blossom into the sub-tropic
warmth of our yard in summer, to chew on flowers as we slept.
And I wish I could have seen it. And wish I could get the image
out of my head. We can't

feel everything, can we? And sometimes aren't we blessed by what we
don't have to see? Imagine being so raw that each of our
unnumbered dead shook us by the shoulders, saying wake up,
wake up. So raw that deer driven by hunger into the human
world dipping their heads only a few feet away from our beds to
feast would enter our sleep and tear it apart with their little teeth.
So raw

that we had to think about each time we almost didn't make it to where
we were going, how close we have come to being clipped by the
semi to be lifted and spun toppling over and over like a doll
dropped from the window of a car by a child. Would we ever
leave the safety our rooms? Would we ever enter them and risk
closing the doors behind us? Could we even sleep? It is too much

for any of us. And so we plant marigolds and vincas basil and rosemary throughout the garden as if from them we might weave a dream-catcher to fasten to the wall above a child's bed, as if dreams could be caught or warned away or watched from safe distances. As if we were not all driven to the same places by the same hungers. Or that we don't ache to wake one night among the dear, awash in the moon, our mouths full of flowers.

A Review of *Ruined Traveler*

BY ADELE KENNY

RUINED TRAVELER
By Renée Ashley
Ottis Books, Seismicity Editions (2019)
64 Pages
$12.95 Paperback
ISBN: 978-9980243041
To order: https://www.amazon.com/Ruined-Traveler-Renee-Ashley/dp/998024304X/ref=sr_1_2?keywords=ruined+traveler+renee+ashley&qid=1583778236&sr=8-2

Typical of Renée Ashley's craftsmanship, these prose poems are all tightly compressed, filled with rich metaphor, and built on language and form that are wildly unexpected.

With the exception of a poem titled, "McNomee Has a Question for a Dead Man," the poems avoid all terminal punctuation. Capital letters signal the start of new sentences, and cause the reader to slow down and *read* each word carefully in order to extract the un-sentences' deepest meanings—not only an aspect of style but also a brilliant way to distinguish Ashley prose poems from everyone else's.

The majority of the poems are set into "boxes." Justified left and right margins contain the poems in a specific appearance on their pages. There are no paragraphic separations to suggest line breaks or stanzas as we often see in prose poems. A few shorter, lineated poems spring out of the right margin, and poems "from *Her Book of Difficulties*" and "*Ruined Traveler*" are interspersed among the others to create a narrative blend that is striking and multisensory. Readers come away with the feeling that, in her particular genius, Ashley has created these poems for their own sake as well as for the sake of contemplation. Importantly, and unanticipated among the shadows that these poems straddle, there is a sense of gratitude and affirmation of being in much of this collection.

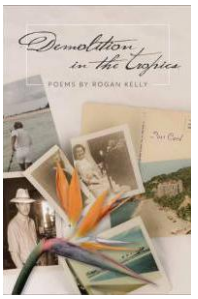
For example:

> In the brand new sunlight & the mud pits that were grassy late last spring—black dog & brindle dog—play hard Play serious They are waves cresting as one Are tremblors shaking the needles of the spruce Harbingers of all things golden—daffodil forsythia and the yellow Lenten rose—while all around them bare trees comb the wind & release their chilly songs Crocuses bloom without a lick of help from us. (Page 52)

This book is Renée Ashley at her unique and virtuoso best. The poems may very well be a road trip built on "tension and association" (the quoted term taken from market reviews), but Ashley is far from a "ruined" traveler. She's at the wheel of a racecar that courses through life and through her newest book with perception and technique that stun and delight her readers.

A Review of *Demolition in the Tropics*

BY ADELE KENNY



DEMOLITION IN THE TROPICS
By Rogan Kelly
Seven Kitchens Press (2019)
33 Pages
$9.00 Paperback
ISBN: 978-1-949333-59-6
To order: https://sevenkitchens.blogspot.com/2019/06/demolition-in-tropics-by-rogan-kelly.html

This tightly constructed collection of prose poems is an intimate narrative through which Rogan Kelly brings the lingering effects of a love that scorched and burned into sharp-edged reflection. While these poems express the disappointment, anxiety, and depression that rise naturally from the landscape of loss, they never stumble into the pitfalls of sentimentality; there's no pity party here—no whinging, no *poor me*. Finely crafted and without superfluous detail, the poems are all intensely focused and filled with finely crafted language.

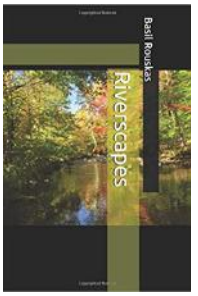
Kelly's masterful handling of prose poem form includes all the elements generally associated with prose poetry: striking imagery, complete sentences along and deliberate fragments, the diction of dreams, and a nod to the surreal. Beginning with workmen jackhammering outside a funeral home, moving through local geographies, to Egypt and back, Kelly captures time and place with immediacy and creates an integrated whole of meaning and form. His blended accounts of remembered people, places, and feelings give a wide view of the poet's experiences without unnecessary backstory. Deftly nuanced by unexpected juxtapositions that astonish without jarring, these quiet but powerful poems speak to a curio cabinet of emotions. They commemorate the fine distinctions of self-examination in a clear and compelling style.

> The cleaner assumes you're still a couple. At the pizza place, the owner makes a point to ask, still, *How is your wife?* Since she thought she would be better off without you, and she remains without you, you consider it efficient to say, *She is well.* … Ever since you've been dying your life has gotten interesting. And you wonder if it is your exploding heart's intent to love her straight through to your end. (p. 15)

This must-have addition to your personal library is an outstanding debut from a poet who is nothing less than a brilliant rising star.

A Review of *Riverscapes*

BY ADELE KENNY



RIVERSCAPES
By Basil Rouskas
Learning Arts Publications (2019)
99 Pages
$12.00 Paperback & Audiobook
ISBN: 978-1099503320
To order: https://www.amazon.com/Riverscapes-Basil-Rouskas/dp/1099503329/ref=sr_1_1?keywords=riverscapes+basil+rouskas&qid=1583784915&sr=8-1

This handsome volume is the fourth collection written by Basil Rouskas. It contains poems of family and friends, of loss and longing, of distance and dreams. Rouskas first wrote poems in his native Greek when he was a university student as a means of protesting against the military junta that took over Greece in 1967. Two years later, he emigrated to the United States where he lived in New York, in New Jersey and, currently, in California. The poems in *Riverscapes* tell the story of a life lived in these different geographies, and they reflect upon the author's spiritual and emotional involvement in each. The poems are of people, place, self-realization, awareness, and acceptance—they are about the interior life graced by attention to the outside world. Essentially a verse-memoir, this collection contemplates the poet's heritage, his place in the world, and a journey always at the balance point of then and now as he seeks his heart's true home.

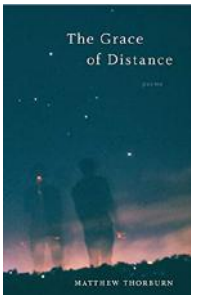
Rouskas is the deeply imbedded correspondent in his own life who writes a narrative of what he knows with clarity and accessibility. Although the individual details may be different, there is much of the human spirit in these poems with which readers can identify. The work is skillfully compressed, well metered, and powered by image and feeling. Each poem rings with poignancy and with the authenticity of a poet who is keenly observant and profoundly aware of human frailty.

He said to me—

The past is gone
the future does not exist
and all we have is "now." (page 76)

A Review of *The Grace of Distance*

BY ADELE KENNY



THE GRACE OF DISTANCE
By Mathew Thorburn
Louisiana State University Press (2019)
71 Pages
$18.95 Paperback
ISBN: 978-0807170762
To order: https://www.amazon.com/Grace-Distance-Poems-Barataria-Poetry/dp/0807170763/ref=sr_1_2?keywords=the+grace+of+distance&qid=1583789038&sr=8-2

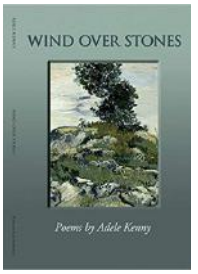
Matthew Thorburn is a distinguished poet whose mastery of image and line is especially noteworthy. His use of enjambment, metaphor, and his uncompromising honesty enhance simple and accessible phrasing. In this new collection, he writes about distances—closing them and diminishing the borders that they create. The poems include the distances between doubt and belief, distances among cultures, and distances in human relationships. Not only does Thorburn write about closing distances, he also contemplates what we can learn from the process. His voice is genuine, gentle, and filled with lyrical precision.

... Some days the past
is as present as the present.
Two sides to the same pane, that old
out-of-place feeling—looking out
or looking in? Half past five and darkly
falling goes the day and each
of us can only glance back, hazard
a guess just what it is
that's left us. There's so much
I didn't know I didn't know.
And if *loneliness* if only a word?
There are only words. (Page 52)

Thorburn's poems are graceful, giving, and filled with the joy of what it means to be gladly and gratefully alive. There is an elegance in these poems that is built around rich emotional centers. Each poem is informed by the poet's intelligence and sensitivity. He is not a writer who attempts to curry favor with the world as much as he looks toward finding a deep peace within himself and ways in which he can share that peace with the world. Thorburn reminds his readers that we are all seekers, searching for the reality that is larger than we are.

A Review of *Wind Over Stones*

BY LAURA BOSS



WIND OVER STONES
By Adele Kenny
Welcome Rain Publishers (2019)
74 Pages
$10.00 Paperback
ISBN: 978-1566494052
To order: https://www.amazon.com/Wind-Over-Stones-Poems-Adele/dp/1566494052/ref=sr_1_1?keywords=wind+over+stones+adele+kenny&qid=1583794323&sr=8-1

Adele Kenny's most recent collection of poetry *Wind Over Stones* is her most powerful book to date. Although her signature craftsmanship and luminous language remain, she achieves an almost magical combination of ekphrastic poems (poems based on paintings) interwoven with an interior psychological landscape that often blends time, memory, and dreams. Each poem works individually in its own universe of language and subject—every poem its own gem of moment and memory.

Kenny prefaces her book with an epigraph by Simonides:

" Painting is silent poetry,
and poetry is painting that speaks."

Her poems reinforce this quotation.

The book uses the paintings of numerous, varied master artists as Rossetti, Cezanne, Munch, Cassatt, Magritte, Klimt, O'Keefe, Picasso, Hopper, Gauguin, and van Gogh. There are three sections of poems in which each poem focuses on an individual painting. To enhance the reader's experience of the poetry, there is a section at the end of the book that includes a description of each painting, so that each painting is translated into written language.

A very special feature of this book is that QR codes are included so that readers can access the paintings that inspired the poems while they are reading. This unique interactive element enables readers to enjoy a multi-dimensional experience through their smart phones or free QR code scanning applications on their mobile devices. This distinctive feature is contemporary and *au courant*. It's completely distinctive, something I've never seen before in a collection of poems, and it greatly enriches the reader's understanding of Kenny's work.

In addition, Kenny seems to be aware of Michael Benedikt's landmark anthology *The Prose Poem: An International Anthology* as she selectively chooses the prose poem as the most effective form for her ekphrastic poems. I also see in her poems a shared spiritual sensibility. Benedikt wrote, "I want poetry to be a way of both creating and experiencing. I want my own poetry, increasingly, to contain a maximum of spiritual information." The content of Kenny's poems, the combination of paintings and poetry, and the bonus of being able to experience images of the paintings while reading truly offer the reader a "maximum of spiritual information."

Among some of the most memorable poems in this collection is "What You See" (After *The Somnambulist* by Millais):

> Balanced on a ledge of memory's spectrum, she knows more than she needed to know— the loss after each loss that doesn't go away— the way life never goes back to life as it used to be—and how much dark we need to see the stars. (page 4)

Memory and time continue to be major themes in her work, as is light. In each poem, there are layers of meaning: peel one layer only to find a deeper layer of meaning. Kenny also employs surrealism in many of her dream sequences.

In one of my favorite poems, "The Part" (After *The Weeping Woman* by Picasso), Kenny flashes back in time to childhood abuse that her mother never revealed to her daughter or anyone else until she finally confided on her deathbed to her daughter the poet. The mother lived all her life with the abuser's words:

> She couldn't remember how many times or exactly where,
> Just an almost-suppressed memory of his face, his voice:

> *Don't tell anyone, your parents won't love you if you tell.*
> She said his breath smelled like spoiled milk. (page 23)

In another outstanding poem "What She's Always Known" (After *Flaming June* by Leighton), Kenny writes about a friend's cancer diagnosis:

> Having lived through it twice herself, having lost her mother to it, she says her friend's diagnosis is a sledgehammer (one of those appropriate clichés that, even so, still fails). So many fractions, so many sorrows. This friend... this autumn... (page 25)

In "Poem about Angels that Begins with a Sump Pump (After *Head of an Angel* by Van Gogh), Kenny writes about her guardian angel:

> Angel with a body, body of an angel. Tracked through sky and sky (when his own weight escapes him), he's musty, ephemeral, but he loves me the way people need to be loved—without pretense, without lies—and he flies toward me (always at the last minute) wrists like bells ringing, a miracle in each fist. This is the angel of all my worst uncertainties, the angel who never speaks but stands behind me, the one with his hand on my shoulder when I say *I'm not sure*—his hand on my shoulder when I say *I believe.* (page 26)

Again, such absolutely gorgeous writing. Actually, I can't think of another book of ekphrastic poems that I love as much as Kenny's *Wind Over Stones*.

These poems all address the spiritual condition of who we are as human beings, and Kenny describes the last poem in her book, the title poem, "Like Wind Over Stones" (After *The Rocks* by Van Gogh) as a statement of faith and an affirmation life after this life:

> Fragment to whole. Life is a skyward thing. It moves over us—like wind over stones— until we shine. And when we are ghosts (gone into what we believe), it will be more than

the end of breathing (the end of water, the end of sky), as straightforward as this:

> flickers of air that rise up and leave as light. (page 45)

Contributors

MARY ALLEN

Mary Allen is the author of *The Rooms of Heaven,* published by Alfred A. Knopf and Vintage Books. Her work has appeared in *Poets & Writers, Real Simple, Library Journal, CNN On-line,* and in the anthology *If I Don't Make It, I Love You: Survivors in the Aftermath of School Shootings.*

RENÉE ASHLEY

Renée is the author of a novel and seven volumes of poetry. Among other awards, she has received fellowships in poetry and prose from the NJ State Arts Council and a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts. She is on the faculty of Fairleigh Dickinson University's MFA in Creative Writing and MA in Creative Writing and Literature for Educators.

BENJAMIN BAGOCIUS

Benjamin Bagocius holds a Ph.D. in English and teaches literature at the Bard Early College campus in Cleveland, Ohio. He writes broadly on themes of gender, sexuality, and spirituality, and his work has appeared in *On Being, Modernism/ modernity, Criticism, Lit, MAKE*, and others. He is a two-time U.S. Figure Skating adult Midwestern champion.

GEORGE BLECHER

George Blecher's articles and essays appear regularly in the *New York Times Metro Section* and a number of European venues, including the trans-European website eurozine.com. "Ghosts on the Landing" is from a memoir, *How To Be Alone in Denmark*, that originated in an essay in the Home Section of the Times and was published last year in Danish translation by Vandkunsten (Copenhagen).

LAURA BOSS

Laura Boss was awarded first prize in Poetry Society of America's Gordon Barber Poetry Contest and she was the sole representative of the United States at the International Struga Poetry Readings in Yugoslavia. Among other awards, she has won an American Literary Translators Award and three Poetry fellowships from the New Jersey State Arts Council. Founding publisher of *Lips Magazine* and a long-time Dodge poet, she is the author of six poetry collections.

RAY CICETTI

Ray Cicetti's poems have been published in a variety of journals including *Tiferet, Exit 13*, and the online journal *The Metaworker*. He also contributed the chapter "A Journey Toward Awakening: Self-Relations and Mindfulness," in the sourcebook *Walking in Two Worlds*, edited by Gilligan and Simon. A featured poet in various reading series, Ray is also a teacher in the Zen Buddhist tradition and senior teacher at the Empty Bowl Zen Community. He currently lives in Mountain Lakes with his wife Carolyn.

PETER COOLEY

Peter Cooley was born and educated in the Midwest and has lived over half of his life in New Orleans, where he was Professor of English and Director of Creative writing at Tulane University and is now Professor Emeritus. The former Poet Laureate of Louisiana, he received the Marble Faun Award in Poetry and an Atlas Grant from the state of Louisiana. The father of three grown children, he published his tenth book, *World Without Finishing,* in 2018. Cooley is Poetry Editor of *Christianity and Literature*.

ANGELA D'AGOSTINO

Angela D'Agostino was awarded first prize in a Tiferet short fiction contest for her story "Freda's Truth." She lives and works in New Jersey.

JESSICA DE KONINCK

Jessica de Koninck is the author of one full length collection, *Cutting Room* (Terrapin Books) and one chapbook, *Repairs* (Finishing Line Press). Her poems appear in journals and anthologies including *Diode, The Paterson Literary Review* and *The Valparaiso Poetry Review* and were featured twice on *Verse Daily*. She leads a poetry workshop at the Greenwich House Senior Center in New York. Jessica is a long-time resident of Montclair, New Jersey, and very active in the community.

JEFF FEARNSIDE

Jeff Fearnside's poetry has appeared in numerous literary journals and anthologies, including *The Paris Review, The Fourth River, Permafrost, Clackamas Literary Review, The Los Angeles Review*, and *Forest Under Story: Creative Inquiry in an Old-Growth Forest* (University of Washington Press). Honors for his work include writing residencies at the Bernheim Arboretum and Research Forest and the H. J. Andrews Experimental Forest, a Peace Corps Writers Poetry Award, and an Oregon Arts Commission Individual Artist Fellowship.

BOB FIORELLINO

Bob Fiorellino is a retired customer service, purchasing, and shipping manager for a multi-national corporation, and has worked in Italy and in the U.S. His post-retirement interests have included painting in the plein air style, nature photography, and classic and current Ford Mustangs. His photographs have won awards in local contests and have been published in such books as *The Raritan River: Our Landscape, Our Legacy* by Judy Auer.

MICHAEL HAHN

Michael Hahn is based in Hamilton, Massachusetts. He is a researcher at the Center for the Study of Global Christianity and a contributor to its publications including the *World Christian Encyclopedia, Third Edition* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2020). Michael writes essays and is currently working on a collection of short fiction.

MARK HILLRINGHOUSE

Mark Hillringhouse is a published poet, essayist, and photographer whose works have been widely published in many books, journals, magazines, and exhibited in many galleries and museums. His recent photography exhibition titled "The Divine Femine" is at the Hamilton Club Gallery, Paterson, NJ. Visit his photography website: http://mhillringhouse.zenfolio.com.

ROGAN KELLY

Rogan Kelly, poet and educator, is the editor of the poetry journal, *The Night Heron Barks*. He was a finalist for the 2018 Jane Underwood Poetry Prize as well as for the 2020 Mikrokosmos Poetry Contest. His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in many journals, including *Bending Genres, The Citron Review, The Cortland Review, Diode, New Orleans Review, The Penn Review, Tiferet,* and others. His chapbook is *Demolition in the Tropics* (Seven Kitchens Press 2019).

BURT KEMPNER

Burt Kempner is a writer-producer whose works have appeared on PBS, Discovery, History, European and Asian TV. He is also the author of seven children's books, including the *School of Animal Magic Adventures* series. Photography is his main hobby.

ADELE KENNY

Adele Kenny is the author of 25 books, most recently *Wind Over Stones*. Her poetry and nonfiction have been published in journals, books, and anthologies in the U.S.

and abroad. Among other awards, she has received Kean University's Distinguished Alumni Award and poetry fellowships from the NJ State Arts Council. A former creative writing professor, she is founding director of the Carriage House Poetry Series and has been poetry editor of *Tiferet* since 2006

ELAINE KOPLOW

Elaine Koplow, retired English teacher and union organizer, is Director of the Sussex County Writers' Roundtable, Associate Editor of *The Stillwater Review*, and Associate Editor of *The Paulinskill Poetry Project*. A three-time Pushcart Prize nominee, her poems appear in the anthology *Voices From Here Volumes 1&2, Spillway, Edison Literary Review, Wawayanda Review, Exit 13 Magazine, U.S.1 Worksheets, Journal of New Jersey Poets, Adanna*, and elsewhere.

DEBORAH LaVEGLIA

Deborah LaVeglia has been director of the PoetsWednesday reading series at Barron Arts Center in Woodbridge since 1991 and has coordinated a wide range of other poetry festivals and readings. Former poetry editor of *Black Swan Review*, she has been a guest on National Public Radio. Her poetry and essays have been widely published. Deborah holds an M.A. in poetics from NYU and has worked as an adjunct Professor at Middlesex County College.

LISA LÓPEZ SMITH

Lisa López Smith is a shepherd and mother making her home in Mexico. When not wrangling kids or rescue dogs or goats, you can probably find her riding her bike. Recent and forthcoming publications include: *Helen Literary Magazine, Jabberwock, Mom Egg Review, TJ Eckleburg Review, Mothers Always Write*, and *Bluestem*.

YEHOSHUA NOVEMBER

Yehoshua November is the author of two poetry collections, *God's Optimism* (a finalist for the *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize in Poetry) and *Two Worlds Exist* (a finalist for the National Jewish Book Award and the Paterson Poetry Prize). His work has been featured in *The New York Times Magazine, Harvard Divinity Bulletin, The Sun, Virginia Quarterly Review* and on National Public Radio. November teaches writing at Rutgers University and Touro College.

MICHELLE ORTEGA

Michelle Ortega is a licensed speech-language pathologist, founder and president of Communicare Ltd., Inc., her private practice. Her writing has been published, or is forthcoming, online and in print, at *Tweetspeak Poetry, Casual* (an e-book), *Tiferet*

Journal, Exit 13, Contemporary Haibun Online, Snapdragon: A Journal of Healing, and abroad in *Horizon: The Haiku Anthology*.

JENNIFER PAROS

Jennifer Paros is a freelance writer and artist living in Seattle, Washington and a regular contributor to *Author Magazine*. She writes fiction for children and adults and is author of the children's book, *Violet Bing and the Grand House*. For more of her words and pictures, please visit jenniferparos.com.

JOEL PECKHAM

Joel Peckham has published seven books of poetry and nonfiction, most recently *God's Bicycle* and Body *Memory.* Individual poems have appeared recently or are forthcoming in *Prairie Schooner, The Southern Review, The Sugar House Review, Cave Wall, The Beloit Poetry Journal* and many others. Currently, he is editing an anthology of ecstatic poetry for New Rivers Press, titled *Wild Gods: The Ecstatic in Contemporary Poetry and Prose*. These days he works at Marshall University and lives in Huntington WV, in the woods, on a mountain, by a creek.

JOHN POCH

John Poch's sixth book, *Between Two Rivers,* was published in 2019. He has published poems in *Paris Review, Poetry, Image*, and other journals. He teaches in the creative writing program at Texas Tech University.

LAUREN RAINE

Lauren Raine MFA is a cross-disciplinary artist, mythologist and writer, known for her *Masks of the Goddess* collection, which traveled throughout the U.S. for over 20 years. She recently published her illustrated collection of poetry *Aphrodite in Brooklyn and Other Mythic Voices.* Her work can be seen at: www.laurenraine.com.

ERIC REITAN

Eric Reitan's writing has earned numerous awards, including the 2008 Crème-de-la-Crème Award of the Oklahoma Writers' Federation and a 2019 win in the Writers' Digest Short Story Competition. His short stories have appeared in *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction, Gamut, Deciduous Tales*, and elsewhere. He's written three nonfiction books, including *Is God a Delusion?* (Wiley-Blackwell), named a 2009 Choice Outstanding Academic Title.

BASIL ROUSKAS

Basil is the author of two poetry chapbooks, *Redrawing Borders* and *Blue Heron on Black River,* both by Finishing Line Press. In 2019 he released his full size poetry book *Riverscapes* in hard print and audiobook (by Audible - an Amazon Company) formats. Basil has worked in corporate and not-for-profit organizations in the roles of executive, entrepreneur, consultant and leadership coach. He also lectured on leadership development in graduate schools of Cornell University from 1994 to 2016. He lives in Santa Monica, CA.

SARAH NIEBUHR RUBIN

Sarah Niebuhr Rubin believes in improving the world one relationship at a time. With an MA in anthropology and rabbinic ordination, Sarah enjoys learning about other cultures and expanding her own. She lives with her husband and son in her native Seattle, where she writes from a place of love. Twitter @WriterMeRSNR www.sarahniebuhrrubin.com

NEIL SILBERBLATT

Neil Silberblatt's poems have appeared, or will be appearing shortly, in numerous journals, including *The American Journal of Poetry, Tikkun Daily, Plume Poetry Journal, The Aurorean, Mom Egg Review, Ibbetson Street Press, Naugatuck River Review, Chantarelle's Notebook, Muddy River Poetry Review, Nixes Mate Review*, and *The Good Men Project.* His poem, *Burnt Offering*, was selected by Mass. Poetry as their 'Poem of the Moment'. His work has also been selected for various anthologies, including *Collateral Damage (Pirene's Fountain)*; and *Culinary Poems* (Glass Lyre Press). He has published two poetry collections: *So Far, So Goo*d (2012), and *Present Tense* (2013), and has been nominated twice for a Pushcart Prize. His most recent poetry book, *Past Imperfect* (Nixes Mate Books, 2018), was nominated for the Mass. Book Award in Poetry. Neil is the founder/director of Voices of Poetry which has organized and presented a series of (more than 300) poetry events, featuring acclaimed poets - including the current or former Poets Laureate of CT, RI, VT & NH - at various venues in NY, NJ, CT and MA.

JACK STEWART

Jack Stewart was educated at the University of Alabama and Emory University. From 1992-95 he was a Brittain Fellow at The Georgia Institute of Technology. His work has appeared in *Poetry, The American Literary Review, The Dark Horse Review, The Southern Humanities Review*, and other journals and anthologies, most recently in *New Welsh Reader* and *Image*. He lives in Coconut Creek, Florida, and teaches at Pine Crest School.

GARY W. SZELC

Gary W. Szelc is a civil engineer and planner, former instructor at NJIT, and an engineering trade journal editor. He is the author of the poetry collection *Red Mars,* and his poems have appeared in various journals. When not working, climbing mountains, or contra dancing, he attends poetry readings throughout New Jersey, serves as a member of the Fanwood Arts Council, and is a Board Trustee for the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions.

MATHEW THORBURN

Matthew Thorburn's *The Grace of Distance* was named a finalist for the 2020 Paterson Poetry Prize. His previous publications include the book-length poem *Dear Almost*, honored with the Lascaux Prize, and the chapbook *A Green River in Spring*. His more recent poems appear or are forthcoming in *Cave Wall, Hotel Amerika, The Southern Review*, and *The Best American Poetry 2020*. He works in corporate communications and lives in New Jersey.

CHERYL VARGAS

Cheryl Vargas is a New Jersey native who writes for pleasure. She is honored to have her first publication in Tiferet. Her poems are inspired by the many hats she wears. This includes her daily experiences in working and in enjoying life with her husband, sons, and daughters.

JOE WEIL

Joe Weil was born and raised in Elizabeth, NJ and currently lives in Binghamton, NY. An assistant professor at Binghamton University, his books include *Painting the Christmas Trees, What Remains, The Great Grandmother Light*, and *A Night in Duluth*. He has presented both poetry and music at such venues as the NJ State Performing Arts Center, the Detroit Opera House, The Walt Whitman Arts Center, Poet's House, and the Dodge Poetry Festivals.

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Contest Judges

Ananda Lima: Poetry

Ananda Lima's work has appeared in *The American Poetry Review, Poets.org, Kenyon Review Online, Colorado Review, Rattle, Jubilat, The Common* and elsewhere. She has an MA in Linguistics from UCLA and an MFA in Creative Writing in Fiction from Rutgers University, Newark. She has served as the poetry judge for the AWP Kurt Brown Prize, as staff at the Sewanee Writers Conference and as a mentor in the New York Foundation for the Arts (NYFA) Immigrant Artist Program. She has taught at UCLA, Montclair State University and Rutgers University. Her chapbook, *Translation* (Paper Nautilus, 2019), won the 2018 Vella Chapbook Contest.

Dorothy Rice: Nonfiction

Dorothy Rice is the author of two published memoirs, GRAY IS THE NEW BLACK (Otis Books, June 2019) and THE RELUCTANT ARTIST (Shanti Arts, 2015). Her personal essays and fiction have been published in dozens of journals and magazines, including *The Rumpus, Brain, Child Magazine, The Saturday Evening Post, Hippocampus* and the *Brevity* blog. An essay about her mother's descent into Alzheimer's was awarded second place in the 2018 Kalanithi Awards (honoring Paul Kalanithi, author of *When Breath Becomes Air*) and her work has been nominated for a Pushcart and Best of the Net. After raising five children and retiring from a career managing statewide environmental protection programs, Rice earned an MFA in Creative Writing from UC Riverside, Palm Desert, at 60. She is a certified Amherst Writers & Artists Method creative writing workshop facilitator and works for 916 Ink, a youth literacy nonprofit. You can find Dorothy at dorothyriceauthor.com, and on twitter at @dorothyrowena..

R. L. Maizes: Fiction

R.L. Maizes is the author of the short story collection WE LOVE ANDERSON COOPER (Celadon Books/ Macmillan). Her novel, OTHER PEOPLE'S PETS (Celadon Books), is forthcoming July 14, 2020. Her fiction has aired on National Public Radio and has appeared in *Electric Literature's Recommended Reading, Witness, Bellevue Literary Review*, and elsewhere. Her nonfiction has been published in *The New York Times, The Washington Post, McSweeney's Internet Tendency*, and has aired on NPR. Find her at RLMaizes.com and on Twitter @RL_Maizes. *Photo credit: Adrianne Mathiowetz*

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