

CHAOS

A Poetry Vortex

Edited by
Marc Rosen

Chaos

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*Dedicated to all the poets over the years who have brought
CHAOS to the world.*

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Kim Acrylic

Neon White

Articulate souls that are fused dance naked upon Graves of un
known apathetically marked creatures.

I taste with my spikey buds, the bitter cold winter they had been
laid upon the tombs.

Grey matter is regurgitated on the flat, round ball of beings
dressed in politics and hate.

The immaculate conception of your dream is projected in black
and white strobe lights

Neon white horror shows sing the story of your invisible star
crossed lover's beautiful homicides

I taste test your smile that burns to black as the wars of the world
begin and end again

Star Crossed Birth

A death based upon a true phantasm, echoes the premonitions of your star-crossed birth.

The being of your human sews grotesque wishes into dolls made of fictitious voodoo

Chronically ominous, you begin to atrophy like a woman without the right to bear child.

Phantom limbs hug your decrepit body close, swaggering to the opera of the worn ones

The melancholia of the harmony will lead you to follow the umbra of the psychopomp

A rhapsody of fevers peak and break within your alphabetically placed fringe of muses

Irregular heart and souls, terminal in their sick, lie in a death bed of yellowed, dense clouds.

Morning after deceit, wounds the adolescent spirit of men, woman, and beasts looking for purity.

You let the mad, rabid dogs gnarl on the recess of your father's poorly formed fetish

What will be your redemption?

cartoonish Religion

I kiss the sun from your plump, pink translucent cheeks.
My brassy hair falls into my sad tired with time eyes.
Your eyes are deaf to the blind sounds of my abandonment.
Cascading through my cartoonish religion, I kiss death.
Feeble are my tired, pill shaped pupils that never bloom.
Read to me my eulogy spoken in an abstract, mute dialect.
Karma refuses me time and youth, diseased and pretty, I die.

Austin Alexis

Crisis Mode

Sirens in the distance,
lancing the air.
I don't panic,
unless not eating for two days,
not venturing outdoors for three,
spells the story of a rattled psyche.

Something is "off."
The feel of the world
is that of treading, treading
in one glued place
upon a pile of used tissue.
Citizens rub their eyes in vexation
until they're told to stop
by society's shrill voice
they could be contaminating themselves.
But they are only trying to focus on
the emergency that lingers, invisible.
They are only trying to gauge
how far the Earth has spun
off its axis, off its rocker.

I wouldn't and I don't attempt to calculate
the miles-crazy trek our planet has plunged

from where it should be.
I tell my fellow citizens
to put optimists' lenses on,
then kick back with a voodoo bombshell,
leisure themselves to sleep.

I hide my shaking hands,
am glad all others fail to see
my sweat-stained back.
I want no jangled nerves, no alarm.
Playacting, I hum a lullaby,
while, in my head,
and in the world, symbols
clash, whistles blow.
I'm aware of sirens
squealing in the distance.

Dee Allen

The Silversmith

It took a silversmith
A Tsalagi* silversmith
To give seven clans,
His tribe, a unique voice.

In the early 19th Century, the silversmith
The Tsalagi silversmith
Had found, scattered by the wind,
Snow white leaves
Not seen on any bushes he knew

Curiosity drew the silversmith
The Tsalagi silversmith
To closely examine
Snow white leaves
Bearing unusual marks he couldn't read

Inspiration stirred the silversmith
The Tsalagi silversmith
to avoid using the
Hammer, anvil, sheetmetal, flame
In forging the new items his tribe needed.

Imitation drove the silversmith

The Tsalagi silversmith
To pick up a feather dipped
In ink and copy 26
English letters, designed 60 more
 behind them.

It took a silversmith
A Tsalagi silversmith
To give seven clans,
His tribe, a unique voice

Written on
Crisp, flat
Snow white leaves
That talked back
To the eyes.

**What the Cherokee Indians called themselves.
Pronounced "Chah-lah-gee".*

Spirit Horse

For Loreal Tsingine, 1989-2016

Every Spring, as
Trees sprout new leaves,
Aboriginal nation
Reflects and grieves

Long after Justice
Failed them – one more slight -
They remember a beloved sister's
Departure from her family's sight:

At close range, muzzle flash
From a policeman's gun
Panic from a petite Dineh* woman
Dissipated – her life was done.

Street-bound transition
From flesh to spirit
Hoofbeats pound, a steady gallop
And only she could hear it.

Sky-blue eyes, grey spotted body,
Stray horse drew near with a neigh
Instinctively, she knew
It came to carry her away

From a White man's world that shown her

Nothing but disrespect-
She climbed onto the steed's bare back,
Wrapped her arms around its massive neck

And finally rode off
On a distant course
To her peaceful, eternal repose
On the Spirit Horse

** What the Navajo Indians call themselves.
Pronounced "Dee-nay".*

C.B. Anderson

The Libretto of the Spheres

Extreme compression is to brevity
As puerile humor is to mordant wit.
How many auditors will gladly sit
For episodes of worn-out levity?

We like to pride ourselves on our concision
While posting entries in our daily logs,
As though the sloppy tongues of friendly dogs
Would save us from a feral wolf's derision.

We mend our fences, we restore our walls,
And ordinarily defend our borders,
But sometimes we must disobey our orders,
Especially when a higher duty calls.

We write long letters in response to mail,
Which doesn't mean our praxis is inept,
But promises that we have never kept
Remind us of how frequently we fail.

Unexploited Providence

“Why am I here?” I was afraid to ask,
While walking—half asleep—this land of wonders;
So, stumbling on, I took myself to task
And totted up my many glaring blunders.

Creation offered me its very best
To satisfy my least advertent leaning,
But tendencies of wastrels never rest
And rarely lend a life sufficient meaning.

A universe that’s made of scattered dust
Will not suffice to keep the trains on track,
And transits way off schedule, as they must,
Ensure that ennui keeps on chugging back.

But if the world should suddenly stand still,
With me, before all others, at its center,
Then more than likely I’d have time to kill
When facing pathways posted: DO NOT ENTER!

I’ve failed to take advantage of the gifts
Profusely strewn along my winding path,
But if the fog of self-absorption lifts,
I might behold a brighter aftermath.

Matt Anstett

Low Tide

The Cicada In Your Ear
Restless
Even on the coldest night
Buying
Lululemon Board Shorts with
Pink Triangles and a
Three Quarter Open Bottle of
French Toilet Water
Cock out on eBay

It doesn't sate
the deafening years
of boy bands, nightcore ballads, music for the girls
and other faggoty odes (though none less faggier than nightcore)
and maybe

being the one they talk about
as you imagine
as you are
wrapped in cute board shorts
with those frilly triangles
wearing french cologne
in the pursuit of colon
you consume to become

the shameless hussy

you paid for
if only for the weekend
from the job
that pays for it

I've spent years selling cloud storage to businesses
Just to sell myself

In the line at Glo on the Saturday of Pride at 12:22 AM

I may go in alone
And walk out with someone.
I might marry
Likely not
I may not even get in
This fucking bar
Waiting longer to get in
Than to take a drink out
And leave
With someone
Likely not

If there is a cover
I'll leave this line entirely

Even if I stumbled on
Forever tonight
I'll die alone
No cock
Nor its tail variant
Will fix that

There's a cover

Lynda Scott Araya

A Poem for Petra

The first time I met you
You sat
All hard edges, on edge
Eyes the frigid blue of glacial ice.
Your blonde hair sat fat upon your shoulders
The elegance of the scarf at your neck
Was pocked with dandruff
Dead skin sloughed.

You spattered English
Like harsh guttural shots
Surprising yourself at the words so short.
Without the picture book clarity of German:
Die Nacktshneke, a slug is a naked snail
Der handshuh, a shoe fit for a hand
The words demanded a dictionary.
You spat your words with effort
Sharp bullets punctuating the air between us.

Over time, though, we became friends.
Speak your German, you would tease
And so, I would
Perfect school-girl German:
Wo ist die toilette?

We formed rituals:

The town's street markets in January
Visits to the second-hand clothing stores
High teas with china plates and
Thinly sliced cucumber sandwiches.
Once, in the pool changing rooms
I glimpsed your shaved pubic region.
I had looked away quickly -
Embarrassed.

It was,
If you excuse the pun,
Too in the face for me,
Too raw.

Then,
I had thought that you had it all,
Was jealous that your body played the game
That it allowed you to wear matching bra and undies.
So beautiful with their black lace, rich reds.
Powerful.
Like blood.
Like death.

Beside you, I felt dowdy
With a body shaped by children
Underwear colours determined by cost.

In the same neighbourhood,
We had cooked, laughed, discussed our men and their foibles,
Books,

Religion and politics.
When you moved away
The friendship continued.

Until....

I told you that my son had died
By his own hand
In his garage
One solitary chair kicked away.

You would call me back
When you were less busy
You said.
You were at an international airport terminal
In Germany to visit with family.
The phone line was poor
It shat shards of splintered words
Thick rough and glottal.
Your voice was disjointed
Colder than ice
Like the finality of a lonely metal gurney
Carrying a lost life.

A week later
And the funeral done
I wondered
How to gather up everything that there was
With everything that had once been
His birth, his life, and achievements.

His death.

His belongings were strewn over the floor
Remnants of a young man leaving panicked
And too quickly
A refugee from his war within.
An internal conflict he had never revealed.

There was a pile of shoes,
Tongues falling slipshod out of gasping mouths,
Jackets, sweatshirts, undies
A tattered primary school spelling chart
Dotted with tiny stars
Curling up at the corners.
A file of his academic certificates
And his powerlifting medals
Glinting gold.

Yet still you made no contact
So, at 5am after he and I had sat in my dreams
Trying to puzzle out the reasons why
He did what he did
After a walk again through his final day
I looked you up on Facebook.

Without warning,
There was no writing on the wall, the doors, the windows,
You had blocked me.
Numbed,
I imagined you cutting me out of photographs,
Binning the letters I had written

Gifts I had given and
Deleting emails sent.
As though you had never known me
As though I had never been.
You attempted to erase me.

Faced with raw bald sorrow
Unsure how to act
Of words to say,
You had tossed me aside.
A deliberate choice.
An electronic crossing of the road.
For you,
Suddenly, I had the wrong family
Had done the wrong thing.
My grief, unknown to you
Was now a threat.

15 years of friendship,
I bawled to my husband
And yet you had betrayed me
Though we had shopped, eaten and gossiped.
Watched my toddler outgrow clothes
And grow into himself.
In the end, that all counted for nothing.
So callous and
With no words
You simply decided to end it all
Coldly.

Now,
I realise I had nothing to be jealous of
All that time that I had thought we were friends.
My unravelling of reason, of, for a while, being
Was also yours.
A friendship unraveled
Forever
Your honour gone.
But perhaps
Your conscience
Still
Nagging.

Bud R. Berkich

(drown)

Outside
the inside
you've
been
living in
side of
a little
too long

A strange
new familiarity
different
from the
not feels right
you've known
all too well
a little
too long

You're strong,
right?
(Enough)

This bad

good
(a little)
then

fall in
(drown)
get out

get back on--

Memo

(to W.C.W.)

In William Carlos Williams's
poem "The Yachts,"
the yachters look straight
ahead or not at all,
oblivious to what lies
just underneath.

The yacht, their symbol
of wealth, power and security,
will steady them through
on course to that far distant shore.

Aye, but if it should bottom out,
if it should spring a leak--

remember the Titanic.

Think.

End Song

(In Memory Of Neil Peart, 1952-2020)

On the evening
I first heard of your death,
I listened to Signals
once again;
my introduction to you
all those years ago

(the intersection
of the perfect union
of your precision playing
and cutting edge lyrics
in time and space),

and it seemed as though
only a moment had passed
before the last song
"Countdown" was reached--
all too quickly ended--

just like your life.

Cristina Marie Bernich

The Blackness and Whiteness of Now

It is the grief of the death of hope
that seeps through the holes.
A trickle, permeating, unnoticed,
A drip drop of discouragement,
A confounding culmination,
Puddling, pouring,
All that was in, full and spilling over.
The in to the out.
The flow feeding the fall.
Roaring thunder mourning rain overflow.
Drowning in a deluge of despair,
Immersing dark the light,
The peace,
What was hope.
Buried in the flood-muck and sludge of grief.
Rooted and tangled in the mire,
Faith swallowed, soaked and sodden.
Left grieving in the flood plains'
Barren black and whiteness of now.

A Slip of a Girl

Just the bones, a slip of a girl, a fallen ghost of me
my trusting heart long ago from this body did flee
Leaving a dark faulted shadow where there used to be light
Smothered by your pleading that no one should discover our
plight
To protect that fragile, gullible girl who couldn't possibly
understand
You spun your sticky webs while my buzzing questions you
reprimand
Arguing and reassuring yourself under your breathe while
we drive
your deception nurtured by naïve trust then still alive
But glass houses do break and sand castles do crumble
Feeble webs do tear and the honored one day will most certainly
stumble
Never again to stand
never again to hold my hand
without remorse in your eyes, without seething blame in
your heart
that your treachery was discovered, our sunny bluebird life just
a farce
Your carefully constructed world, just twigs of wishes and hopes
stacked and teetering high
with nothing to tether them, and no foundation to which they bind
Tangled and piled sat all your brittle, spindly lies
until she plucked one hard, and we fell, buried in a tumbling
snarled mass never again to rise

Haunting me still, are those choices that were forever to be
the end of my childhood, the end of me.
Now left wandering, forever broken
trusting not a promise, only fabrications I hear spoken.

Sayan Aich Bhowmik

Somewhere Else

I don't need alcohol to want you
And you needn't be sober to refuse.
You could just move your fingers
Around the rim of the glass..
Again and again
Like the earth around the sun.
I'd still be at the table
Plucking the stars from inside your clothes.
I'd still be at the table
Working on the order of words
To adorn that letter of parting
I've been wanting to write.
Isn't death another way
Of being accepted somewhere else?

Larry Blazek

The Land Grab

someone has moved
the portable chicken house
that you built out of
the dog house that
someone built out of
an old shipping pallet
that looks like
an outhouse
a too -smooth man
wants to purchase the land
as far as the fence
around the chicken house
leaving you with a tiny
splinter of land
not big enough
to use for anything

The New Rifle

looks like the old one
but it has special
electronic cards
that must be inserted
with the magazine
you aim out the window
at an old oil filter
in the trash
the rifle fails to fire
you get a cartridge
to explode outside
of the rifle
you continue
to tinker

The Young Artist

has a desire
to draw motorcycles
he studied magazines
and a catalog
to observe details
he goes to
a motorcycles shop
no motorcycles
are displayed
in the showroom
the photos
that once were displayed
upon the wall
are replaced by
photos of a girl
named Kyra
taking up his sketch pad
he leaves the shop
walks by the
members-only door
a dark-haired man
opens the door and asks
if he is going to work
he says no

Edward Charles Bossong

Shutter

Polaroid photos shimmer sentimental love
Capturing vibrant memories in white-bordered cages
A fluttering of images cascade their visual story
Yet blind and despondent, deeper love exposed lighter

Ignited its corner, a flame catches hold
Gripping the confined figures to seek their own refuge
Colors once married spill dewey-eyed tears
Dismantle all framework to prevailing embers

Packed cardboard box ruffled of its contents
Vivid commemorations blackened.
Devoid in meaning what once formerly soared
Now rendered flightless, these disposable Polaroid keepsakes,
But for the flick of feathered ashes
Released into the wind

Alewife

Broken people swallow the bottle
Allow its glass to cut them only deeper
Swish with Jack, Jim and Jameson
Different sips have different trips
Will their numbing fill your void
When your last drink doesn't have
A closed tab

Michael Lee Bross

Las Vegas, Nevada

For Adrienne

when I am old my love,
and the seasons are sick

with the threat of loss,
I will vacation in Vegas,

on the Strip, to pick showgirls.
She'll be death as promised,

in a pink boa,
she'll be a holy peacock

in this El Dorado made
white lights and lipstick.

She'll dance to slots,
curl into my lap like a genie

I rub for wishes, deep throat
my ring finger and swallow.

She'll smell like candy and the womb.
breasts too small, teeth too white,

Curves too thin, all leg
and a birth mark. too wet—too perfect

too immortal to be a threat
like you, my love, so great a danger.

So let Vegas deliver me baby,
too much a coward to love
and die last.

The Magic Kingdom

The day Dad got AIDS
we're plucked from school and packed
into a Geo Prism, with the Goofy plushies,
and overnight bags, a pilgrimage into the sun,
counting the distance from home in license plates
and the scroll of the pink and caramel sky.

Body heat burns us to sleep,
heads rested in the hammocks of the seatbelt,
dreaming car windows are Monorail's Plexiglas,
Fantasyland rising in a halo of lost balloon,
a triage of mouse ears and the damaged souls of vacationers,
who come for the Miracles of this Wizard Walt,
idol in brass, miracle man on a pulpit of awe,
were we congregate in a mass
circling in wishes, a fanfare of the fatal,
wheelchairs whisked to the front,
first in a fiction of flight

*“Come children of the world to this happy place!
Come oh limping, oh amputated,
oh lonely and polluted!
Dream of magic mountains, scented in chlorine,
And living cartoons. Dream of sing-song parades
Oh you hitchhiking ghosts!”*

And come night,

with captured stars in sorcerer hats,
we'll have forgotten, sold absence in Spectromagics,
dancing brooms sweeping away the debris of our days.
Sweep clean the blood and lost limp.
Sweep clean into picture frames
Where we are invulnerable,
asleep in the hammock
of my father's arms, starving
while dining on the food of dreams.

Summer Vacation

At 19, I finally got around to sex and I'm cool with the wait how a horse is cool with a full bladder. And on the day of the deed Pam ditches her parents and I shoplift a condom out of a porn store which is blue with a Superman wrapper and unwrap her from her t-shirt as if breasts were a birthday present, her teeth with braces grate against the shaft of my penis, I gag at the taste of her vagina and we grind like we're assembling a bicycle but the instructions are in Mandarin as I try to penetrate with my eyes closed for mood lobbing lawn darts and planting a few pokes into her pelvis bruising our trust on the sacred tradition of teenagers misunderstanding each other's mechanics because sometimes when I kiss I mistake it for the act for chewing my spit dissolves her tongue looking for flavor mistaking her for my own biology mistaking color for flavor and flavor for color firm in my belief that if blow jobs were a color they would be rainbows and fireworks but I'm bad at being a man because I am bad at invasions I can't climax because Pam fails to be the women I was raised on women mistaken for porn store mannequins but she can't bend backwards or twist her tits back like a cat falling and photo'd mid-flop, she doesn't slink, her underwear doesn't match her bra, she gets her foot stuck in her sock, winces from pain of the hymen snap and bleeds a trickle of blood that I am scared is made of death limping home on the one-good leg my father grinding from his body, as she lies still like a beautiful and boney pillow with too much truth in her biology and I'm making love to the rubber I mistake for her vagina, our sex set to "Me and Gun"—her pick—because I am made a weapon by my want, my want of my tongue tip to her nipple, my

finger tip to her clit, as if I could tell the difference between a clit and a horse, or a girl and joke whose punch-line is a real girl.

Kathy Burgin

Infection

I don't know how to navigate
This new normal we now know
I cannot wrap my head around
The dread this virus grows

My mind is paused on frozen
No plans, no hopes, no joys
This ghastly threat around us
And the sickness it deploys

Broken lies my lonely heart
The people I love I so miss
It's hard to keep a grateful soul
When terror like this exists

I want to scream out and holler
I'm fighting to punch back my fear
As I try to get a handle on
The madness occurring here

I must hold to my own mortality
Stay home now and just lay low
I'll be patient and kind and loving
In defiance against this new foe!

Recovery

Our world is crashing around us
Consumed in a frenzy of fear
We're steeped in angst and in worry
For ourselves and those we hold dear

Life seems so stopped and silent
Eerie in lack of display
We need to rely on each other
To get through these difficult days

Don't let the darkness deflate you
Don't dwell in the well of despair
Kindness stabs with its brightest light
When each of us chooses to care

We share only one world amongst us
As we travel this journey of life
We need to ensure it continues to spin
Without such division and strife

So, let's hear it for small acts of kindness
Being mindful of each other's plight
Old earth will discover a notable change
A resurgence of peace, love and light!

Ryan Buynak

eat the things that don't believe in you

I wonder if trees know we exist,
like humans, and specifically,
you and me and love.

Do redwoods look down
and know we are there?
Do cypress trees
sit on their knees
and see us hills or haunts?
Do willows weep
for our treasons and triumphs?
Do old oaks wanna share
their wisdom, but just
don't know how?

I know tigers and fire
both believe in us,
because they eat
our hearts, hungry.

Frames and furniture and firewood,
all felt in the bark of the best,
I feel it in my chest.

Sub-Suburbia

Bourdain is rolling over in his grave
as I devour this microwaved meat patty,
watching terrible television,
washing it down with generic sparkling water.

Tonight, I will have sweet dreams
with sweaty legs, tossing and turning,
running but not getting away,
but right now this grin is made of lead.

Midnight means more to me,
because I rarely see it these days;
too tired, too wired, as the world is wild
and getting crazier, therefore exhausting.

It's music and memories,
coffee tables propping up my lazy legs,
which walk with hands around green lands,
where my tattoos stand out.

This is organized crime,
trapped in hashtags and tiny acorns,
bungled and bribed to be beautiful,
but has my best interest.

The indecipherable sounds
of baseball in the background,
and wind chimes in the foreground;
the place that I love is no longer my home.

Bowery Philosophers, We Were

running up tabs
and doing coke in the bathroom
at the poetry club.

jumping turnstiles to get
to Willytowne and back
before our midnight sets.

we called ourselves
visceral interns of the word,
but we just helped Gary.

and mooched for beer,
stage time, strange poet girls
who wanted nothing to do with us.

the young bucks,
with the world by the balls,
we pissed off the old beatniks.

dancing this way
and that,
we gave our poems to people on the rumbler.

Tom put his under
the windshield wipers
of all the cars on Bleecker.

happiness was still
attainable, even if
it was just behind the bar.

the loud jazz of the city
was the soundtrack
to the movie that was my young dumb life.

it was a blink of the eye
in time,
but it still lasts long into my nights.

Mehmet Büyüktuncay

Havoc Wrought

The asphalt, the pavement, the cement blocks
are evolving; they are transforming into fragile
cracked clay pots
out of which wild weeds creep forward
with the force of a coil spring in a haiku,
brave and resilient in deep reticence
proceeds the wilderness
into the very heart of civic virtues,
surfacing as the dandelion, the thistle, the mold, the virus.
The meek and the long subdued
are paying off a score with hefty thorns,
a layered thickness of parasites and poison seeds
to crown the fake industry of numbers out,
to weed out the concrete plants of incarceration,
to pave the way for the procession of the elder races,
the earthbound giant species
from non-human times,
bringing on a lost language of the earth
spoken in inhuman syntax.
In the rage of the wild on the anthropocene
resounds the wrath of Tomyris on the ill-starred Cyrus II,
the Massagetaen blow on the abusive Persian patriarch
that ended in blood libation.
There sure is pattern in decay

and purity in rebirth is to be sought.

Yet, goes the ancient wisdom,
matriarchal violence is a big tamer,
not a pretender for any earthly throne,
as with earthquakes, eruptions, pests
and the relentless uproar of storming winds.
It is thus no genocide
but an urgent call for change
leading into a sincere arena of work,
of cooperation, human and non-human,
of interplanting perennial seeds towards
mutual existence,
towards the garden of three sisters

where the stalks, the vines, the mulch,
companions of the same big plot
empower a hive politics
over the infodemics of autocracy
with the urge to wind up into the sunlight,
to poultice the scraped skin,
to mend the broken bones,
to save the human race from iron lungs.
To exist demands bitter methods
learnt after witnessing epic havoc wrought.

R.T. Castleberry

Walking Out

Clouded spring,
I slip on twice-worn jeans,
high top Chucks, ironic uniform shirt.
Mingled musk of hibachi barbecue,
wheat beer, Marlboro lights
press balcony and stairs.
Leveling whine of a service dog,
twist of a Piaggio scooter
disturb the courtyard.
Stepping to the sidewalk,
a rushing whistle warns as
downtown rail lights a lane of
oak limb overhang,
painted chains and guard posts.
Open hours, no work for the week,
I take the liquor store sip.
Walking to the car, I weave
across root crack sidewalk,
stretch a weary, shaking hand
to drop spare coins into a beggar's palm.
Blood shadow darkness carves
a high rise Southern horizon.
Tension seals the day.

The Season We Knew Sickness

In the spring, we reap a smaller harvest,
roast pigs on empty playing fields.
We read from the plague Bible,
clean gutters with firebomb and bone.

The ring hangs loose on the lover's hand,
ribbon twisted tight on a supplicant wrist.
Winter scars seal on sunlit skin.
The plague summons is absent cause or penalty.

The chase continues in rain, a gritted fog.
Mastiffs scatter suspects across the hills.
No harm, little charm in the plague roses.
They grow gruesome along forest battle trails.

We cross the headwaters of the plague river,
drink as anointed, drained of spite.
Take the bridge. Take a ferry.
We'll scrape the caves of lamentations.

Jamie Ann Colangelo

Blizzard Here – Tropical Breeze Elsewhere

Expectedly and furiously
The blizzard snow came barreling in
The news forecasted it correctly
Yet, mom, nanny, aunt, didn't listen
Off they went to a bridal shower
From Queens to Brooklyn by subway train
To partake in the event for hours
From Brooklyn to Queens by subway train
Trying to return to a warm home
Stuck overnight, with themselves to blame
No service, no connection, no phone
On foot, they travelled, home their aim
Braving the freezing cold and wet snow
I wonder what their thoughts might have been
And how they kept themselves on the go
Perhaps, a fresh pie from the oven
Or a tropical island escape
Lying on the white sandy beaches
Soaking up all the heat they could take
Caressed by fresh and balmy breezes

Snowflakes

Clouds engorged with more like me
Release us into brisk air
Floating ever so gently
We make our earthly descent

Lightly, setting down
On ground that awaits
Blades of grass still brown
Our new resting place

Glistening in the suns' rays
Bouncing off each ice crystal
Melting slightly in the day
'Till the evening cold sets in

A bright new day calls
Childrens' laughter surrounds
Rolled into a ball
Thrown up in the air

Smashing down on hardened ground
Quickly, falling back to earth
No more a mass of snowflakes
Ice crystals are now rebirthed

Ushiku Crisafulli

The Language of Lies

Society's fucked up,
but how do we handle this?
Allow me to take a step back
and play the role of analyst.
Linguistic Leonardo,
words are my easel.
They pull shit together,
I decimate evil.
Poetic anarchist,
allow Indigo to handle this
I grope the grotesque
so I can have my hand on it.
I see past the division with my IMAX vision
my lyrics are my TARDIS as I make my incision
on society, in all it's notoriety
I let out a primal scream ***growl***
and I won't go quietly.
You see the language of lies is intellectually insidious
my soul hijacks radio waves to make sure you're hearing us,
poetic piracy but it ain't plain sailing
I'm like Robin Hood as I challenge our assailants.
So even though the perjury is very well encrypted,
I'm a son of Turing, so I shall resist it.
I leave you split like the atom then I fire bard ballistics.

You say resistance is futile,
I say it's fertile.
Your threats are as weak as your minds are puerile,
you say brainwashed, I say brain-infected
there's nothing clean about corruption
in fact it's septic.
But your corrosion is nothing more than a placebo
every me beats every you every time that we go.
So bring it,
you can't wing it.
When clipped wings heal,
we're rowing and we're sowing as we glide toward greatness
authentic as our auspices so you can't take this.
So quit your mama jama our goals are MC Hammer,
I didn't stutter stammer – you can't place it in a planner
it's organic,
you're in panic – cos you just can't touch this...
I laugh at the schemers and yell
“I'll disrupt shit”.
I'm a wave of flashing lights when you're feeling delirious,
I discard my scars like Why So Serious?
You use words free market, when it's really an oligarchy
then you call it trickle down as you commoditise essentials.
You call yourself job creators – then accept workfare,
if work truly pays then end corporate welfare.
I can feel the force awakening as there's no pennies left to drop,
you gave them all to Disney for them to set up shop,
while Google dodge tax... like Saville dodged convictions
and Rotheram? They just get let off the Abu Hamza.
I'm free flowing, so no change of stanza.

You call it grooming when nothing is improved
just a paid off judge and kid that's abused.
You call yourself pro-life but you're really pro-birth
cos when a poor kid is born then what are they worth?
To you? Yes, in the eyes of the insidious they're just a number
for sociopaths they're just booty to plunder.
Anyone who challenges the system's a pariah.
They're crazy,
you're a bunch of Bowser bozos,
society's Daisy.
I'll create a rainbow road from your entrails,
I'll tell you what that entails...
It's the ending of injustice,
a gift from God that's amongst you:
that's Ushiku – I wear the name proudly
I'll protest evil loudly
and do it publicly too.
The Indigo Angel binds crooks for eternity,
I'm ending this nightmarish enmity
all lies in wake are my vanquished enemies.
To truly beat evil... you must leave the demons eviscerated...
cos humanity's my church ***choral sounds***
and I shan't see it desecrated...
BITCH!

Lyndsey Collison

That Familiar Song

Today I heard you on the radio
It felt like you were talking to me
I thought my mind already let you go
That my heart already set you free

Then that song begins to play
The song that brought back memories
Our song when things were going our way
That song that made you fall in love with me

The tears begin to fall
I want to change the station
But I hesitate and stall
My thoughts filled with such irritation

Why do I let this song get to me
Then the thought crosses my mind
This song brought you to me
When our love was blind

You Make Me Smile

When the world shuts me out
Your right there to lift me up
When I let out a loud shout
You remind me to let up

When my world is falling apart
You just hold my tears in your hand
You love me with all your heart
Always giving me a safe place to land

Without you to come home too
Where would I be
Honestly, I have no clue
Finally, for once I am allowed to be me

Noah Count

Where Dreams Go To Die

Hate, that's where
And, you want a fine line,
how about, retribution and revenge
Now there's a nano line,
makes the love/hate demarcation
the chasm of despair it was meant to be

Linda M. Crate

an angry god

if you didn't want chaos
you shouldn't have
broken bread with loki's daughter

you wanted someone you
could control,
someone who would bend to your
every whim and desire;
someone who wouldn't question
your motives—

big bad wolf was actually a puppy
hoping there would be no murder
of ravens to slaughter him,
but i am not the chickadee you wanted;
rather the immortal of the flame
the phoenix whose tears don't only heal
but whose wings will burn vampires into ruin—

you joked that a vampire shouldn't be
sent to buy the garlic,
but i don't need that to slay you;

i have the power to defeat you in my wings

and i will afford you as much mercy as you spared me:
none—
& i will not be sorry for it,
i'll send you back to your bride death
laughing;
because i'm an angry good.

Shawn Creech

Of Ghosts and Goals

"Of Heritage and Hate" (part 1)

Like screeching and moaning freight cars lurching forward
through endless nights.

Shrieking and howling past transgressions at the dark-thirty of
history's horizon.

Wishful thoughts and thoughtless gestures weep at hopes of stoic
measures that reap the countless spoils of pointless treasures.

Unrelenting rot in soil 'till it's tilled and newly roiled, torn asunder
and freshly nurtured.

"Of Change and Compromise" (part 2)

A nightmare born of dreams and the means to quiet the screams, a
silent stalker that never sleeps so in your own home you fear and
flee.

It gnaws at the very fabric of the spirit like the gnashing of teeth at
the resolution of battles.

The sword was the shield but now the sword is the pen to shield
us from a self fulfilling end.

Now we grow our olive branches but must understand the distrust
of bloody hands that cultivate stolen lands.

Earth

When tides retreat along a rocky shore,
Where ranges cloak the ending of the day,
Survival, so sublime; a seldom bore,

With engineering cogs of molten core
And windswept pines that genuflect and sway,
When tides retreat along a rocky shore,

The droning bee, its nectared honey-chore
And birds in ceaseless flight that never stay,
Survival, so sublime; a seldom bore,

The rise of Man brings science to the fore
And animals are reared to hunt and play ,
When tides retreat along a rocky shore,

Of fishing-lines cast out to catch a score,
Of flowers blooming, celebrating May,
Survival, so sublime; a seldom bore,

Now pollinated, seedlings start to spore
Producing cities set across the bay,
When tides retreat along a rocky shore,
Survival, so sublime; a seldom bore.

Mike Croghan

invaded

get out of my house
take off those shoes
they're not yours
spit out that sandwich
i made it
not you
DON'T TOUCH MY DOG
why is he letting you pet him
you with your stranger smell
you with your stench
give me back my phone
don't you dare text my friends
my family
THEY ARE NOT YOURS
get out of my skin
let me back in

wickedness

the stigma had been stitched to him
since he was six and skinned his knees
ascending quick the crooked tree
to nest and see and sense

the neighbor kid
who flicker-lit from kindled wick
eked eden from a cherished book

he arched his neck to nick a look
until he slipped and skidded
sinking

then the sidewalk kissed him
and he cried out loud
and slowly drew a crowd

they always called him wicked and
as nicknames went this sucked
and stuck

as week and decade sunk and died
he staked out sin as his, like ink
soaked deep inside his skin, in sinew

wickedness defined his psyche
itched and tickled at his sides

until he dined on wine and liquor
wed himself to growing sicker

embraced his pain and bitterness
like weeds wound round his neck and breast
he knit himself a thick and sticky shroud of styx
and sewed his bones inside

sixteen septembers after
the kid from that old luckless scene
shows up and snickers at the trick
and all the broken moments since

and offers him a warm and wayward hand
beneath a dewy eye
and wide and wicked grin

Why We Roam

This was late July, you know?
So what I'm saying is:
Damn hot outside. I mean
Just really flippin' hot outside
Ridiculously hot outside
You know? The air so thick and humid
Burning on my skin like fever sweat
And blackening my mood

OK, I'm pushing this old mower
And I'm wearing shorts and flip-flops
'Cause it's hot outside
(I mentioned that, I'm pretty sure)
And so I get to this back corner
Of our yard, this one dark corner
Back between the shed and fence
That's almost always in the shade

I kinda shove the mower back there
Really quick, because
That gloomy corner sort of
Creeps me out. You know?
The weeds grow extra thick there
Even though the sun can barely
Shine. And so I shove, and feel the first
Hot stinger pierce my tender foot

And then it's like the flippin' blitzkrieg
Man, they're coming fast as lightning
Goddamn yellow-jackets
Jamming fiery toxic daggers
In my feet and toes and ankles
Even underneath my sandal straps
I did what any normal man would do
You know? I turned and ran like hell

Now roughly two or three hours after this
My wife comes home from work
She finds me sitting in the living room
With ice packs wrapped around my feet
Of course, she wonders why, and also
Why the lawn's half-done. So I
Explain, and say there ain't no way
I'm going back to get that mower

So, she rolls her eyes and goes
To get the mower, then two minutes later
She comes running back and says
I didn't see your yellow-jackets
But there must have been
Eight copperheads! The one
Coiled on the mower struck at me
And I'm not going back out there, uh-uh

I figured she was mocking me
(Despite my glaring stinger-wounds!)
So I got up and winced

(My poor feet called me dirty names)
I went back out there to that corner
And I wish I didn't have to get
So close before I trusted my own eyes
We're seeing crocodiles

I turned and went back to the house
My wife and I grabbed weapons
We approached the corner carefully
I can't remember which I noticed first
The smell of sulfur or the smoke
But when the reddish-purple demon-thingies
Flexed their wings and turned our way
We ran, and we will NOT go back, uh-uh

Ginger Dehlinger

Room of Doom

I enter this chamber of horrors
three times a day,
dreading the torture of its
buzzing, screeching, whistling things,
hissing griddles
and razors that prefer my blood
to that of the tomato.

Choppers and beaters roar
like Sikorski war machines,
slaughtering whatever comes near.
They are especially fond of fingers.
To avoid their slashing blades
I switch to a stealthy grater
but end up bloodying my knuckles.

Hot, hot, hot!
Gas broiler and indoor grill
throw tongues of flame
as they try to incinerate me.
Tea kettle scalds
oven rack bites
fryer spits blisters.

Merely a rib of the one I serve,
I receive no medals
for vanquishing these conspirators
that lie in wait for an opportunity
to ambush my modest objective
of putting a meal on the table.

A Rose Is a Rose Is a Weed

Noble bloom, pride of queen and pharaoh,
centuries of breeding grace your face.
A blueblood now your palette runneth over
on velvet petals crowning shapely legs.

Yet ancient meadows tell of baser roots,
of tangled limbs and blossoms pale and small,
a prickly past your breeders cannot stem
nor halt the thorny legacy you bear.

Aristocrat of weeds, your rowdy cousins
ambush country fences, blight the harvest.
Outlaws from distinguished family tree
or spoilers of your pretty pedigree?

You blush at such denouement (tres outré!)
and pucker lipstick petals for a kiss,
seducing those naïve to the deception
with mesmerizing wafts of French perfume.

A Bar Stool's Lament

Though I have no acorn memories
I cherish those from my mighty days—
birds nestled in my arms in spring
brow warmed by summer's rays.

Cloaked in gnarly sun-bronzed skin
I stood tall on a hard-as-granite stalk.
My deep underground footing
made me solid as bedrock.

Then along came the saw
the planer, the lathe.
Spindled and stained I'm furniture now
with a bar as my grave.

Legs wrap around my legs
nervous legs jiggle.
Butts of all sizes warm my seat
and bare thighs make me sweat a little.

How I ache for my forest home—
smoke-free, no bright lights
no twangy tunes
keeping me up all night.

Polish me, please
stroke my gorgeous grain.

Don't scrape your muddy boots on me.
Sit lightly, honor my roots, feel my pain.

Abby DeSantis

abandoned house

abandoned house
shuddering on the hill
waits for golden rays
to warm shivering walls
tangled cobwebs dangle
in stagnant silence
mangled silhouettes
vestiges
of forgotten lives
cracked windows
bitter shards of glass
colorless fragments
reflections
of shattered dreams
peeling wallpaper
stained with tears
faded distortions
remnants
of empty promises
abandoned house
shuddering still
echoes the history
of lives unfulfilled

old woman

she stares at her reflection
tracing the lines and hollows
of her hands and face
her beauty weathered
by time and age

prophetic eyes looking
backward bespeak
memories bittersweet
forever etched in
the furrows of her mind

pieces of her paper soul
torn into tiny fragments
broken and scattered
in the shadowy abysm
of time and thought

lost never to regain
she takes refuge
in her solitude
silently listening
to the echoes of her youth

monochromatic musings

listening to the distant disquiet
enveloped by a tattered quilt
I gaze at the ceiling
wall papered poppies dancing
in shadows of a flickering streetlight
amorphous shapes beguiling
altered silhouettes seducing
from the sweet temptation of slumber
I avert my eyes
seeking solace
in the dark penumbra of the moon
against the tenebrous starless skies
monochromatic musings fill the night
was Cain banished to the Land of Nod
or forever doomed to circle the earth
as the man in the moon
was Eve led astray
by half-truths and self-deception
am I too in danger of eating forbidden fruit
or do I share her hopeful promise
unburdened
as the night turns into day
beginning to understand the truth
I surrender
to the furrows of my unmade bed

John DeSantis

negative spaces

dog lying in the congruent folds of her body
her legs languishing in fitful sleep
he watches them there
silently thinking of black holes
and alternate universes
dimensions within dimensions

are they numbered ad infinitum
reflections of reflections
before and after regarded
behind and in front of
the barber's chair

do they reflect forever
or do they finish in spaces
unseen and untouched
negative spaces more potent
than the visible ones refracted
in the spectrum of seen light

unseen visions sweeter more
than visible ones and mind
meandering around the edges
of his imagination go

for the name of spaces
negative but as they posit

in the mind his mind
your mind my mind
the conscious appears
from out the unconscious
collective of all the spaces
we are wont to call negative

William Doeski

Freewheeling

Bicycling downstream on back roads
from Walpole to Keene I feel
as supple as well-worn suede.
With grave ancient empathy
the brown hills flex in the breeze.
Brooks twinkle in gutters of stones.
The roads pour down through valleys
scraped by glaciers, smoothed by age
to resemble flesh folded on flesh
after acts of bristling love.

I remember everything: turtles
basking in the emerald marsh,
herons lancing the ooze for newts,
minnows shivering like chain mail.
That was the moment I became
the self that bicycles downhill
at terrible speed, lathering
shadows that surf across landscapes
with reckless but actual purpose.

I haven't plied that marsh in decades;
but as I flash past wooden houses
that withhold their grim expressions

I free myself from scalded cities
and silt-encrusted suburbs
of the adulthood I've never earned,
and let a single note fly.

No one hears me or cares if
I crash into a friendly boulder
dumped from an ice sheet ages
before I fully evolved. Knit
and purl of the last bird call
caresses the flight I've taken
from one lost town to another—
the roads left clutching their scripts
and the small uncharted places
fulfilled for one sunny moment
while treefrogs gather their breath.

Alex Edwards-Boudrez

The Plague of COVID-19

Too much Merlot is slowing me down...
humor has left me behind
faded in a Twilight Zone fog
and drowned in NBC's phlegm.

Insidious symptoms ravage
my digestive and nervous systems,
and lodge their permanent effect
deep in my primal brain stem.

We will all be one with the alligators:
we will live through this and on forever
along with the cockroaches that feast
on the craven and callow myopia.

Such is the evolution of our times:
a frightening, accelerated return
to the glory of the emperor Nero
raising a toast to his consuming dystopia.

Carousel

I want to plant a little garden in myself
of indispensable things to cultivate—
I'm overwhelmed by possibilities,
infinite, coursing through
my paralytic fantasy head—
Tightness tingles just above
my ankles I stroke
my eyebrows rhythmically
spinning on this carousel
posting up and down my stomach,
excited, sinks—
I whiz by you
in your stillness firmly planted
in the fertile soil you grow
an ever-evolving life
with roots and aspirations—
an inspiration for my jealousy
and shame of missing my chance
again and again in revolutions
of whizzing and spinning and sinking
and clinging and clinging
and never letting go—

Lynette Esposito

Addressing the Issues of Veterans

*A Poem in Response to: A Veteran for Bernie Digital Print by
Dr. Kurt Bonze*

The logic of the analysis is always the same

It is

RED.

What price is paid?

What happens to retired soldiers

when the

WHITE

paperwork is processed?

How many steps are free? How much

Help is needed? Who comes forward with
a workable solution?

What price are we willing to pay signed in

BLUE

ink on multiple dotted lines,

A cup of coffee from WaWa? A gym membership?

A job, insurance, practical things?

These are not political questions.

These are humane questions on how to protect our protectors?

We should shake the veteran's hand. Stand with them.

Share an experience, a story,
Sit on the cement steps. Look them in the eye like family.
Share the burden of war like cousins.

Untitled

Sky birds fly above
tigers' flight from fire's rage,
unafraid of smoke.

Melissa Esposito

The Dating Game

Hi, my name is,
Hey, I'm,
What do you do for fun, for a living?
Answers I'll never remember,
Questions I've prepared like flash cards.
Names I don't bother with.
Because really, none of them compare to you.
And I know, I know I'm not supposed to do that, to compare.
But when you're driving late at night listening to Taylor Swift's
"All Too Well"
It's impossible to not think of you.
I don't even know why I bother to remember you instead of them.
They are here, they are willing, when you weren't.
You were scared.
Until I meet someone that can sweep your memory under the rug
in my brain,
I will continue to play this game.

To The Boy I Loved In Mexico

I should have left you there,
With the sun, and the sand, and the tequila.
But I didn't.
I couldn't.
I carried my feelings home for you like a souvenir.
They weighed my suitcase down, crammed in between my bikinis
and skirts.
I almost had to pay for overweight baggage.
There were two thousand miles and a screen between us.
But then it wasn't two thousand miles,
It was a plane ticket, a time difference, just for now, not forever.
It was meet the family, and long stemmed roses, and I love you.
It was a long-term puzzle and future plans.
And then it wasn't.
Twenty-four hours after whispering I love you into the phone,
You used the same whisper to tell me you were a coward.
You were scared, you were giving up, you were a boy.
And now it hurts to breathe, hurt to think.
Now it's fingers shaking, ten pounds lost, dry heaving into a toilet
bowl at three a.m.
And you're fine.
You're fine.
I was a sugar skull you picked up in the gift shop, beautiful, but
not something you
planned to keep forever.
Nothing more.
Like the tequila bottle,

You should have come with a warning:

Consume responsibly.

Just like the drowned, engorged worm at the bottom of Mezcal,

I wish I never tasted you.

Timothy Paul Evans

Longwall

tides mingle,
fatigued of night,
shearing half remembered
dreams: heroic utopias
clamoring down rabbit
holes searching for
the next “big thing”
Gideon’s Bible lies
unopened in a peeling
wallpapered motel drawer
(guess there’s no one
needing saved today)
distilled into an icon
of mom-and-pop
American Flyer-Red
Ryder downhill slide.
a dingy-grey bed sheet
“praying 4 our Miners”
bows its head and weeps

Paul Ferrell

The White Apple

The shape. The shape of an apple. I'm out of shape and I drain the apple until it's white. All of this sexless grinding. A head full of exploited stars. All of this breathing is like a full time job. You never learn to bite the hand that feeds you because they don't teach biting in school. A sharp right turn with burning rollover symptoms. You wake up one morning and your body is on the other side of the room and you apologize for being late.

Tom Fillion

No Shoes, No Socks, No Funeral Service

There was a large, barefoot man
walking his dog
during the coronavirus pandemic
he had on a striped, tank top
and khaki shorts
he stepped gingerly over sidewalk cracks, roots,
grass, asphalt, and cobblestone
the muscular white dog on a leash
followed suit and social distance
both seemed oblivious
to any contagion
the contagion preferring unwashed hands
and open mouths
instead of bare feet or paws
hardened and callused by the ground
behind my flimsy, cotton mask
that filtered and shuttered
the invisible virus
lurking everywhere
I whispered
to the contagion
no shoes, no socks, no funeral service
for takeout or delivery:

Pandemic of Lies

The real pandemic,
the pandemic of lies
started on inauguration day
Sean ‘Dancing With the Stars’ Spicer
Spun his podium
about crowd size
truth and facts were
shredded into a Whopper
and a Happy Meal
of American carnage
every lie since then
has increased
as a logarithm of acquiescence
and culpability
those infected with the first lie
have let it incubate and fester
with impunity
simple truth and facts got quarantined
at the border
like children in cages
repetition, false flags of praise
and patriotism, bluster
and bigotry
have scarred, fissured, and blistered
the american landscape
they have no known antidote
or test kit

except for truth
and veracity
which are living elsewhere
disguised in exile
waiting to be repatriated

Robert Fleming

Earth becomes Venus

rain to snow
a promise made long ago
birds sing Turn, Turn, Turn
in the galaxy's foremirror earth's destiny
Venus, a planet of CO₂
as earth & Venus remain miles apart,
they turn closer in CO₂,
when im no more,
the snow wont fall,
the earth ends in CO₂

dear chemistry teaching assistant

If chemistry lab is life,
 i choose Death -
Boil poison into a beaker,
 down the throat with a pipette -
until, until,
my electrons buzz,
my arms break ten test tubes,
dont make me separate H₂O,
Again, into H & O,
leave my protons alone,
my pulse pulses to a puddle,
nd my remains r neutrons.

Joanne Kennedy Frazer

Sea Change

Off-water wind too brisk for my comfort,
I sit at the cottage window to watch ocean life.

Waves curl into themselves
roll over, break onto ebbing tides.

Brown pelican queue leans left,
wings sailing along surf bends.

White gull grasps, gulps
a still-wriggling fish.

Exquisite sand art sculptures
wash away, licked by tidal tongues.

House finches in winter brown
coats chitter on the deck railing.

A submerged truth drifts
to the edge of my reverie:
rising sea levels
will drown this house,

wipe out its memories.
Our era has disregarded
the evidence.

Tony Gentry

It's Easy To Fret Over Failure

It's easy to fret over failure. It's American as apple pie.
I do it. Every time an old classmate makes The Times.
Roads not taken, opportunities waved away, fear.
You look back and can't imagine what brought you here.
A faded Kodak with the rippled edges of a fat boy
smug in a row of cousins in a jumble of plastic toys
looking into the lens and the face behind it with just --
Well you can read what you want in that pudge,
a hint of the tremble to come in the chin, the creases
at the eyes. They call that callow youth, who sees
the highway not the ruts, the pie and not
the rolling pin, the venison not the guts.
Except, that something in the chin and lips,
a shadow at the eyes, checking the box for a slip.
I guess that was me, but who can say?
And the thing is, what you forget today
is where you were, what mattered when the call came.
You forget that you knew epiphany by name,
threw off your clothes on mountaintops and sang.
Sought what seemed true at the time, what really rang
beyond the phone. Maybe you ran on heart,
misjudged, screwed up, never knew where to start.
Maybe you didn't do your best, never found your voice.
Threw days away and friends like so many plastic toys.

Figured that ending up tired at dusk meant a job well done.
Figured that leaving any place only meant you'd gone.
It's easy to fret over failure. To think of what might have been.
It's easy to stitch up a different life with different decisions
that add up to wins. If you'd turned to the mountains instead of
the coast. If you'd partied least and studied most.
If you'd followed the road that ran through the trees
instead of the one that seemed, for you, a breeze.
It's easy to fret and easy to wince at
what's left of you today, when at last you glimpse
through the camera lens a telescoped perspective
to the choices you'd make, the chances you'd take,
in a fat boy on the floor among relatives.

Door to the Floor

When I shut the light another appeared
like a louvered door to the floor
running south to north at the foot of our bed.

In that tremulous hour when I woke and tossed
got up with my twanging frets, what's that?
The door was gone, another imprinted
exactly the same but beamed down now
from the west-facing pane, a tic then a toc
of that slow lunar trek.

Which helped somehow re larger tossings
than my own, that roil in the heights of
night in that place we call space.

It's good to feel small.

It helps to be framed by the milky wash of
moonlight in your windows.

That finger pointing here then here
that marks your place, conducts
a silent lullabye:

*Now sleep and heal
awaken and reel.*

*If tomorrow the sky
is clear I'll peek
in again to tuck you in
tut-tut your
swollen fears.*

How Puny All We Perceive

Our eyes bathe in waves
an ocean of light
but along the crossed trail
to the back of our heads
look at all that's lost.

The lens warps.
The processor pixillates.
What they say about the workman
and his dull tools.

Envy hawks their piercing gaze,
gulls that glare through glare.

Same with our dogs
and the maze of molecules their long snouts
sniff, decode, and categorize

or whales so weird
we shiver to go there --
how they sing along with mates
a world away.

We sure do miss a lot.
And what if that's part of this longing
for some heaven? After all, right here
in the kitchen it's all too much.

I mean, look how little we get.
As if someone has whittled us pencil sharp
to just this width of line
despite our telescopes and audiometers,
our smellotrons and force plates,

slotting us into this pinched
particular area of investigation
a little prison where we etch
four lines and a cross then same
on a wall another being with what
we would call super powers
might ascend beyond.

More than enough, really.
Yet how we yearn, burn.

F.I. Goldhaber

Normal Life

You have a nice home to shelter in,
food to eat, shows to stream, games to play.

You don't live with an abuser or
parents who misgender you; insist
your orientation is sinful.

Yet you complain you're deprived of your
social life, restaurants, bars, park visits.

You don't need to risk your life and your
loved ones for minimum wage
without protection, sick leave, health care.

You've enough to pay your bills; credit
cards to order online; connected
devices allowing well-paid work.

But you miss the ball games, parties
band performances, church services.

You don't shiver in the cold, snow, and
rain under a tent if you're lucky,
or just a cardboard box, or blanket.

If your throat is sore, your head feels hot,
you can telephone your physician.

You don't have to stand in line for a
clinic that sends you home when they run
out of test kits. Or just keep working.

You know what the virus looks like, how
to prevent exposure and illness.

You don't toil next to those who could be
infected with no information
how or supplies to protect yourself.

You fret about event and concert
cancellations, missed graduations.

You don't worry about untreated
broken bones; forced sex without access
to birth control; deadly pregnancy.

The only people desperate for
life to return to normal are those
privileged to enjoy "normal" life.

Essential Services

In normal times (remember those?)
we buy most of our groceries
at the local Farmer's Market.

Pandemic panic makes shopping
dangerous, negotiating
grocery store aisles fraught with peril.

Local Farmer's Markets devised
plans to save growers, produce, those
who still want healthy, tasty food.

Many can't risk encounters with
selfish, shoppers oblivious
to social distancing orders.

As food purveyors, the market
qualifies as an essential
service, now safer than most.

Dedicated managers have
designed pre-ordering systems,
plotted lowest contact options.

No wandering to see what might
be available. No metal
carts requiring disinfectants.

Farmers survive. Food doesn't rot
in the field. Consumers thrive. Yet,
some demand markets terminate.

They claim violation of the
governor's stay-at-home orders
for all but essential outings.

Demonstrating how in normal
times Farmers Markets serve many
purposes beyond food exchange.

Folks gather to catch up with their
neighbors, listen to music, eat
and drink with friends and family.

But for us and others, markets
are just a source of fresh produce,
meat, milk, bread, occasional treats.

Altered Farmers Markets permit
healthier quarantine eating
and ensure small farmers survive.

Those who come to hear music, dine
al fresco, gossip with friends can
return when quarantine's lifted.

Hister Grant

Untitled (1)

At times we float around the ceiling
In our dreams,
We good people,
We're up there bumping around in our dreams,
We are dumb and maybe a just little worried
But mostly it's a gay time,
These are shop's ceilings or school's
Or occasionally, it will be a church hall's ceiling
At a fete,
The people in these rooms
Always try their best to ignore us good people
They usually keep their heads down,
seeming a bit flustered
But getting their work done in a fine productive manner
Though there will always
Eventually be some frustrated man or woman
With a rod or a stick, trying clumsily
To knock us good people down to earth
But the dream will have none of it
and we'll float out of the way
this will make us feel guilty
We good people don't like to disturb
So we wake up
And as we are slowly awakening from our reverie

feeling the floating sensation relax into our muscles
The happy memories of skylarking
Are soured a little with the memory of having vexed

Untitled (2)

Sometimes I hear the voice in my head
Such as it is
And I find it very strange
An unstoppable chain of thoughts
Anything:
ideas,
Pictures,
Shapes,
Colours
All from nowhere
And unstoppable
All passing through my head
It's very hard to explain
It's like
How bizarre it is
To find the shape of a dog bizarre
(All right angles)
These questions thrust at me
As bizarre and out of place
As the things troubling me seem
As bizarre and out of place
as the whole world is
'why is there something instead of nothing?'
you could agree,
but I would say
unreality in extremis is a lack of size
it cannot be reduced
there are no parts of it

therefore it cannot be whole
but then the next question
how is anything?
Because there is something
instead of the impossible nothing
if it wasn't this it would be that
and if 'that' is impossible
maybe everything is impossible
but just less impossible than nothing

my viciousness

have you ever gasped
and pulled in the whole universe?
at the sight of some loved one
blinking out?
their body slackening
knowing death in that moment
seeing the infinity of it
in the face of someone
you once knew

there is a moment
between realisation and grief
you can live in that moment
shell shocked and able
and long may it continue
without humanity
is the easiest way to be
no words to put things into
not daring to touch the morbid
but it comes, it comes

and the sorrow will come
as a gift from the gods
humanity is being human
and knowing death
is the most human of all
you are well in the sickness
of agony

so cry a little
as I remain cold
my stony face
in the face of the missing

I cannot cry
and I do not care
I cannot feel

John Grey

Tight Connection

Rare night of sleep,
my head can't find a parking space,
keeps going around in circles.
No one's leaving apparently.
Maybe I should stop where I am,
block them all in.

Here is a tight connection
to the good life
except there's no place for me.
And if I can't have it, nobody can.

I'm endlessly chewing gum.
It's stuck to the insides of my mouth
and resists all effort at spitting.
Sure I can relate this
to my current relationship.
The effort. The waste.
Damn commitments. Damn obligations. Damn gum.

I'm eating broken glass.
Just like I do on the job.
It's a hospital.
I'm the doctor. I'm the patient.

The operation is a draw.
And here comes a giant pretzel
to symbolize my twisted perceptions
when it comes to women in general.
Where oh where can the pickle be?
At least a giant penis would earn me some respect.

Rare night of sleep
but my dreams are emotionally cosmopolitan.
I'm being chased into a dead end.
I don't even need my subconscious for that one.
I'm falling. I'm falling some more.
I've let myself down again.

And then I awaken.
But the connection's too tight to let me go.
I build a house of cards.
I paint the house with a toothbrush.
I'm frustrated. Then I'm humbled.
Dreams, how right you are.

I Tried Listening to Music

Music is sentient:
sad bass's secret grave,
tremolo's mocking tremor.

I listen to relax,
adopt this aboriginal state,
but my life catches up with me,
as a new tune evokes the last tune.

My heart is here
in its faded battle colors
I owe its pain
to the instruments of others.

Heidi C. Hallett

Pattern Play

Cornfield quilts reveal
The contour of the land.
Pattern play can have a lot to say.

A marshland weave may deceive.
Intricate paths seem random
Until learn to read.

Why did the lemmings jump?
What incites the group to act this way?
Migratory behavior they say.

Lemmings could react out of fear, another survival instinct.
Read the signal that triggered the group.
What caused it and why?

Is it a lie?
What are you afraid of?
Are you a lemming?

A “jumped” lemming can’t go back.

Better to try to adapt.

Analyze the pattern play.

Even step away.

Chez le Coeur

Home base, safe from chase
Family hearth space
Home fires burning
Home is where the heart is truly.

If flame-to-ash displaced,
Memory coal carried
To reshape, rekindle,
Try to replace.

A new heart haven
Same sun and moon
Pero sol y luna
Ou soleil et lune

Some memory coals fade,
Slip and slide,
Too hard to retrace.
Sequestered in a secret place.

Coals asunder,
Search for another glimmer space.
Help from caring hearts
At least creates a hint of grace.

There, but for a twist in fate,
Go I.

Moonbeam

The moon sees the Earth
As a jewel in its onyx sky,
A boulder opal with flash,
Swirling clouds over sea glass.

For the moon, Earth shines
And tracks time,
A reassuring buoy,
Partner crystals in space.

Near enough to gauge
Change in the blue teal whirl.
We know the moon feels
The Earth's pull; an alliance.

Is there perchance another sense,
Signals we can't trace?
And so describe the moon as dense
When density is depth in space.

Sean Hanrahan

Emma

Emma's psychedelic quilted coin purse—
lays abandoned on trash day. It calls

to mind Anne of Green Gables on acid.
The odd bag must have been dropped

after a drunken spree, while fiddling with groceries,
or perhaps by a child practicing minimalism.

Admit it, we all like our names on things—
the twirling thrill of us dangling

from a key chain, or sipping coffee
out of mugs with our monikers. Often

,
the key chains and the mugs feature
illustrated, idealized scenes of places

we've been where we carve our
names on trees and benches. Humans are conditioned

to take ownership over time and space.
This cute trinket, discarded, will be stepped

on soon. Emma will be swept away by a storm or
a zealous garbage collector. I can see the

psychedelic quilted coin purse swirling down
a drain. Emma on her last, grand, deteriorating

adventure. But for now, Emma is sunning herself,
smug and pleased by her new dispossession, her

emancipation from holding grubby, unwanted coins.
She frustrates the birds who initially think she's food,

but discover she's cottony.

Eventually, they will find another use for her,

and rip out the personalized stitching
and the hippie-inspired patchwork

to build their nests.

Emma will become repurposed.

Mammoth Sunflowers in Francisville

Mammoth sunflowers herald a new city age—uncurbed by man,
taller than fantasy. So in love with this increasingly hotter sun,
they are
mutant beauties of climate change. They flourish in overgrown
vacant lots in flowerpots of abandoned shoes, signs from failed
political
campaigns, Skittle wrappers, and Wawa coffee cups. Nature is
fighting
back against our waste—multicolored remnants of a former
urgency
we cannot recall—were we late to a sports game, perhaps? Closer
than ever
now to Armageddon as opposed to mid-twentieth century
America. Kids
can't even hide under their desks for this doom. The city seems
intent on
fast-forwarding to latter peopled days during this record-breaking
summer.
Barely any faces on these streets, just things. The birds and I miss
spring as
robins seek tepid bathwater leaking out of a Dasani bottle.
I suspect
there is this overwhelming feeling of thirst across the world now.
A bunch
of us miss the taste of natural strawberries or making pies out of
rich soil.
We've woken from our tasty dream and now confront the reality
always

awaiting humanity. Skyscrapers sure, but no stars. Rain, but no
relief or
hydration. Flavorless food lasting forever, with us 'til we die. I
walk through
this new sense of emptiness. Hoping, at least, to spot a friend or a
butterfly.

Jamila W. Harris

STUCK!

Now, you know how I feel
To be stuck, for real
Have to remain where you're at
The new definition of TRAPPED!
Can't go out, be on the scene
Neo definition of COVID-19
Can only spread love through a computer screen
The new defining
Of Computer Love
Hope it doesn't crash, catches a Virus
So, either way the Corona Virus, could still be spread
Even from the confines of our homes and our beds
Have to worship from our screens to our Glory
Crying, sneezing, wheezing, difficulty breathing
We're still affected by our respiratory's system
Reminds me of the Criminal Justice system, Too
So, here's my suggestion for you
No matter what happens, or wherever you have a seat
Even when they pressed DELETE!
Whether you are WOKE or still in a deep sleep
Your mind can still be free
Internally, Mentally, Eternally, FOREVER!
Whether, you're trapped or cuffed physically
You can still fly, navigate through all frequencies

Be free as a bird, Like the Eagle in me
Escape any prison, your soul can't be chained down
And only when "YOU" decide to return
That's TOUCHDOWN!

Quest!

On a Quest to find my love
Took a moment to realize, nearly forty years to look inside
And see that my Quest started with “Me!”
Mission now complete
I love me, but still at the bus station
Mission two of my next destination
Man sat down next to me, and I feel his heat
Opened my mind, conversations deep
Suddenly next week, between my sheets
Trying to wife me, playing for keeps
But my heart still leaks
And speaks to my ears
Might feel lovely, but your Quest does not end here
So, the next year , I’m still on this journey
Full of desire, heart still burning
Emptiness consumes my soul, I am still yearning
Then next comes the one with the huge earnings
Multiple dollars, and capable of making me holler
Matter fact SCREAM! And did I mention again?
About his CREAM
Because Cash Rules Everything Around ME
So glad that he found me
But, sadly I still had to let him go
Even with all that dead Prez
Couldn’t fill that hole, that void in me
So, I voided him too, you see
Avoided everywhere that he could be
Still on my Quest, what’s next

On this journey for me
Then Suddenly! “She” arrives, catches me by surprise
Never imagined I could be attracted to Misses, MS.
But, she delivered to me the sweetest kisses
Never did last tho, could you imagine two Bitches
On that time of month, Right!?!?
Only ended up in fights
Will I ever date “Her” again , I don’t know
I might!
Don’t really know what to expect on this Quest
Swear ,I love the one who shares the name on my neck
But, He’s nowhere to be found
So, maybe I’ll skip this town, or jump on the next Greyhound
This journey may lead right back to me
The Earth is round!
So, I’ll settle with me, perhaps self-love is GREATER
Or maybe I’ll continue this Quest later
Or maybe that is it!
The Alpha and Omega, begins and ends with “ME!”
The only Quest that I needed to complete on this journey
Of “SELF LOVE!”

Mark Heathcote

Playing the hand of God

To divert the wind wouldn't that be good
To turn back the tide, remove the torrent.
Wouldn't that be me playing the hand of God?
Wouldn't that be virtuous, not abhorrent?
Life is a little slow at times pedestrian
But when chaos presents itself, it comes
Like a bolt from the blue on a chariot
In a head-on collision course, it comes
Ah, it comes to level the playing field
And flatten our sandcastles, meaningless
We're all stood in its path—of stand or yield
Inquiring, if it'll be redeeming-us.
But I wouldn't want to play the hand of God
Change-will-come, come as it-must-for-us all.
To divert the wind wouldn't be that good,
It would just be another kind of curveball.

Wasn't it curiosity killed the cat

Wasn't it curiosity killed the cat
I-truly-believe intelligent people do nothing
Knowing to do something unbalances the scales
Tips the world into further chaos
They're the true-observers of intelligence working.
They don't mind suffering the successes of other fools
As long as they don't have to share, swim
In the same overpopulated koi pools.

AI is coming all our way,
Soon it will be integrated into all our daily lives
And we will be consumed by our last free-thinking thoughts
Like a stone plunged into the deepest water
Till our ripples no longer individually, separately, cross,
spill-over.
Ridged as ice - with the forgotten-acumen to one day, thaw
We will become robotic and forget all that love and war
Forget we ever had a single fundamental flaw.

Wendy Hoffman

Recognition

My old dog sleeps, doesn't care to walk.
Now I go alone.
Couples stroll close together.
A large black dog
with beseeching eyes

circles me, sniffs hedges,
circles back.
I turn a corner
at the wisteria vine
by the neighborhood park.

The big black dog sculpts
figure 8s around me.
Are you asking me to help?
With all the sunny people on the street,
the dog chooses me!

Light flashes on tag numbers
jingling from his red collar.
But needing space and time,
I don't carry a phone.
A kind-looking man with two dogs,

big and little standing in the middle of the field,
calls from his. The owner drives up, hollers
Peppy. Peppy swooshes to her like wind.
Still I feel the dog stretch his paw into the air,
unfurl a thread, tug me toward life.

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Kevin Holmes

All Saints Day

He and she Harry and Marian
All saints for the day
Marian , Miss Star
Harry her pupil
What wonder and warmth
I had to sign the reports
I. M blessed

It is in this
Happiness
Marian a rock like Peter
Harry a hug like Peter
Me a hermit like Kevin
Claire a heart like Claire
Tim a light like Timothy
Donovan a strength like Donovan
Joe a calling like Joseph
Arlene like Joan of Arc
My house a table for them all

Called.

Mark Hudson

Howard Street in Chicago

1: The Scents of Howard

Upon exiting the Purple Line on Howard,
I am bombarded by a deathly perfume,
that emulates from an ancient creature,
which is no less pleasant than a skunk,
is it to mask a feeling of guilt and shame?
Then I step on to the bus stop at Howard,
where a pretty woman sucks on a
nicotine lozenge. These smells infect my
nostrils as another man lights up a paper
rolled of torturous tobacco, tormenting
the timid transportation troopers.

2: Noises

As I board the bus, people who were born
speaking English seem to lack basic
communication skills, while foreign
born riders speak better English and are
more polite. A mean mom gets on and
yells at her child, and tells her child
to stop making noise, but the child
is not being noisy, it's this loud

mother that I hear echoing through
the whole entire bus, like the wrath
of a thousand poor parent passengers.

3: Sights(Pink is the new Orange)

On the bus a woman in a pink jacket
gets on, and two men walk by in matching
pink striped shirts. Are they brothers?
Lovers? And what do the stripes symbolize?

Then we go farther on the bus
and a man walks by with his daughter in a
pink jacket, her hair done up in two identical
buns.

Then we get to another bus stop and
a woman with a pink jacket gets on. Then a
Pilipino man with a pink jacket and a
cane gets on. Then a woman gets on with
a pink pocketbook.

As I walk through the parking lot to
my church, I think about this poem that
I'm going to write. I look up, and a
Hispanic woman is standing by the
door of her car, looking at me in
fear. What is she thinking? That I'll
rob her in broad daylight? Oh, and by
the way, once again, she is wearing a
pink jacket.

I guess the only place I could
see more pink in Chicago is on the

pink line, but on the train they have the brown line, the purple line, the red line, the green line, and so on.

Howard Street is like suburbia compared to some hoods in Chicago. One friend said, “I never go down to Howard street because it’s always swarming with cops.”

I usually don’t go because I’ve heard its always swarming with rats. Under the tunnels of many restaurants, rats eat crumbs that man has disposed into the ecosystem. But rats don’t bother me that much. I can deal with that better than skunk-scented perfume.

The only poetic alliteration that is prevalent in Chicago is the four B’s, Bulls, Blackhawks, the Bears, and the Blues. We feel bad when our sports teams lose games, but they get paid either way.

There are those who have the blues for legitimate reasons. So before you judge those around you as weird, which I suppose I’ve actually done in this poem, try to picture what people see in you as you get on the train. One day, you may be the oddest oddball of all. Or you could move to Portland, where they have to try to maintain their weird image. But we’ve got them beat. We’re known for deep dish pizza. And deep Lake Michigan,

where people drifted to the bottom with cement
on their feet. But this is where the poem ends.
Otherwise, I might be in deep trouble!

Maria Iliou

Traffic Madness

Traffic strangers
Visualize your laughter
See's your smile
Seeing you for awhile
Traffic strangers goes away

Your life stories is
Hidden from unknown

Traffic madness

Unfolding people's attitude
Opinions or their reactions
Has no baring upon you

Be still in moment

Scenes of reoccurrences
Replay in corner of your mind

Traffic people of
Unknown strangers
Fading in distance
Disappear through the night

Fading in Distance

Hidden tears of
Silent cries
Fading in distance
be still
Sensing her pain
Her despaired

Longing for her
Recovery...he
Walks away
In distance

Finding tides of
Connection within
Writing...send
Waiting for his responds, she
Disconnect her own emotions
Of self worth

Be observing
within hearing
Repetitively stories
Recollections memories
Love she felt for him

His passion...floats
Floating in distance
His responds

Wheels...wheeling her in
Grasping on hope

Tears floating
Sobbing cries
Flood her
Fluffy pillow

Pummeling thoughts of his
Unkind words

His love for her
Once exist
Buried emotions

Glimpse of her
Future with out him
Within time
She gain her
Strength of
Self worth

Narrator of storyteller

Brian Donnell James

Hispanic Girl (Recuerda)

Maria sits contently,

Her head nodding drowsily
Against the window seat of the bus
Looking across freedom plains stolen from bush Indians
Where the bloodstained bones of her ancestors
Have colored canyons of clay crimson and copper
And their tears have made rivers, forming spines in desert terrain
She hears the drums in her heartbeat
The ancestors do not rest in peace
For they know of her intent
They are chanting in the echoes
They are arising from the mist of a forgone past

Trying to wilt her, kill her light

Like black wolves in chase, they are hungry
She hears gnashing of teeth, the screams of the dead
She runs for shelter
Surrounded in dark clouds
She feels hands clutching her neck
She is losing her breath
They want to wilt her, kill her light.....

Awaken suddenly to safety by a bump in the road
Maria kissed the golden cross upon her neck

She clutched the dream catcher (abuela) grandma gave her
Yes, Maria remembered grandma's secrets spoken through thin
broken lips

With a crack of her back and the aid of a walking cane

Grandma leans in and says:

“When the bus stops your hair is blond

And blue are your eyes

Chase the dream,

Reinvent yourself in American lies”

But Maria's Light is from within

And she had just been reminded

That it can be reclaimed

So she would persevere

For those who only speak in dreams

(Recuerda)

Transition

As my breath fell short and my body released
Fear was replaced with a sweet surrender
Suddenly I was all, existing and formless
There are no restraints
In the shadows of pulsars

In loneliness and afloat
I folded the universe
To travel with light speed
Further into blackness
Further into myself
To learn all there is to know
Further, farther still...

Mermaid

You are my mermaid of the night
You summon me, with delicate whispers
In the hours of darkness
Your chant is primeval
And your seductive ways are
Reminiscent of Eve

Let your hypnotic song sway me my love
Take command, guide me down to Neptune's door
Shipwreck me against the rocks,
Abandon me on distant shores
I care not, I am yours

You are my mermaid of the night
You summon me, with delicate whispers
In the hours of darkness
Your chant is primeval
And your seductive ways are
Reminiscent of Eve

Nancy K. Jentsch

What Good is a Smart Phone

if it can't

sing a phoebe and parula duet
as slumber's dust
falls from my eyes

fit warm into my hand
like morning's first-laid egg

boil elderberry blooms
to an ambrosial potion

warn of approaching storm
by air's scent leaves' dance

let dark chocolate's finish
linger on lips and gums

play rain's mantra on an old tin roof
as sleep's wet clay slip
cools my face

for these carve my journey's staff

Barbara Kent

Sympathy for Nero

Buses rattled thick summer city night
no open window caught any cool breeze
just hot thunder from the el and wheezing
from the buses painted blue and white
sporting saggy signs that proclaim
Amer. Zion and Temple E-Man-U-el
I,
perched high above the street
soft tar sticking to my feet
watched Brooklyn burn.
Nomad Jews fled East to Rockaway and Babylon
another galaxy to me
caravans of U-hauls and Mayflower trucks
snaked endlessly
slithering away secretly at night so no-one would know
Mamma laughed and said “Where would we go?”
“This is our home, they won’t hurt us.”
she glanced at the sputtering flames
on Broadway
And prayed they wouldn’t hurt us
while Brooklyn burned.

Lily Belle Boone my best best friend
called me “honky bitch” then smiled

flashing white teeth “just practicing”
she sang “for now” but never played with me again
changed that year to steely-eyed and grim
had twin boys she named Abdul and Ali
her mom asked “Hello, why don’t we see you anymore?”
but Lily called her “Oreo”, I felt ashamed,
and Brooklyn burned.

Slap-dash boarded windows line decaying streets
sprayed with shards of glass
where we once played
dying junkies nod
in mounds of rotting trash
becoming arid desert
Brooklyn burning block by block and

I
watched Brooklyn burn.

Kathleen Kinsolving

Pan

Yawning, deep into his woods,
Pan lays down his pipe,
And stretches his sinewy figure
Over a bed of moss,
His stalwart arms curled above the curves of his horns.

Slumbering in the seclusion
Of another afternoon nap,
A disturbance rapidly going viral
Awakens Pan

His crimson-faced roars of outrage
Now hold every nation hostage
In their own panic-stricken seclusions.

Jerry Kirk

Chaos Troubadour

SHOUT

at the indignities
the transgressions
the crimes against God
and Earth.

HOWL

(like Ginsberg)
at the inhumanity
the futility
the certainty

that man will never change.
Technology does not equal
evolution. We are all still

children immature wrestling
on an expanded playground
of land, sea and sky.

“Bang you’re dead!”
“I’m telling Mom”
“Wait till your Father gets home!”
News flash: Father is home.

God created Man.
Man created religion
to redefine God
to make God in Man's image
to use religion as an excuse
to murder, judge, sin.

SCREAM
at a future
in jeopardy.

CRY
because a voice
of reason goes
unheard.

Order, like peace,
is hard to evoke
without marring
the very definition.

Chaos is easy.

Uploading Bombs

Deep in the bowels
of this flight-line are the men
the lights the hum the whirr;
the heartbeat of this war game.
I am a sentinel of this dark corner
far removed. The closest plane
recognizable only as lights playing
off the wings of a menacing shadow.
A soulless mass patient and dull.

My task is to guard this line posing
as a threat to any not allowed to cross.
This is an illusion. I am only cold
and tired with an endless walk
a heavy gun and a numbing hate
for the hours left before I rest.

Thanks to Lawrence Ferlinghetti

Long dormant
my soul stirs and
I am inclined to write again
poetry

Taking the long trek down
deep into the heart of things
wrestling

with feelings, ignoring
blather, hoping to return
with something that constitutes
meaning; something of importance
that will make the effort worth the

folly

Judson Klein

Hills in the Morning

All my toil
surrounds me not today
only this grass
and the curvature of hills unto the sunrise

the orange and red simmering between
brush strokes of deep blue

voices rise, without phrasing
in my language – or anyone's

again come to realize what I've known

Part of me boils up
and asks, should I not be working?
or doing something somewhere
because certainly time fizzles away
to no more left to waste

while causality causes causes
making all at best not worse
at least too quickly

and I, with the guise of eagerness

am a well-integrated part of it

but not at this moment

every duty's done
nowhere are commands
the timeclock's not blinking
all deadlines are undone

the light flooding these hills
certainly has purpose, or it wouldn't happen
every day
and if we never see this,
whatever brought us here will try again

perhaps those who never transcended their darkness
didn't know
they had every right
to see this
to feel this

to live

so here I'll stay, for now
until every until is reached
'til what this morning reveals saturates all
and no process need describe it
through every night, where these hills wait

Caitlyn Lacovara

I'm a Hurricane

How do you sleep so peacefully
Next to the hurricane in your sheets?

How do you find love in its
Tempestuous mind and
Comfort in its ever-changing eyes?

How do you sleep at night
While my eyes flood
As the wind picks up
And the lightning strikes
My already shaken body?

How do you sleep at night
Growing more uncertain of me
As the thunder slams above
And our relationship flickers out?

How do you sleep at night
Without realizing the current
Is too strong and I am
Caught in its riptide?

How do you sleep at night
While I slip away.

Tom Lagasse

Questions on Immortality

After several decades
do redwoods wonder
if they will survive
the winter and see
their leaves reappear in spring?

Do the mountains believe
when their chins turn slack
to scree that one day
they will crumble entirely
and turn to dust?

And what of the salmon
which spend their lives
fighting the powerful
river current? Do they
question if their creation
was worth the struggle?

When The Last Page of History is Written

When the last page of history is written
white paper will be imprinted with black
lettering or with an electronic post in binary code.

When humanity recedes into extinction
what was hailed as progress will be seen
as folly.

When no one will be left to take responsibility
how long will it take the deep scars to heal
and for waters to be washed clean?

What evolutionary roads will be passable when
everything has been choked by power and greed?
A new language will be necessary.

Jim Landwehr

In-Network Provider

She was a bathroom surgeon
out of necessity, not aspiration
never took a medical board
or swore to a Hippocratic Oath.
But she was good with gauze
medical tape, Neosporin
and liberal applications
of homeopathic black magic.
Cuts that should have been stitched
took twice as long to heal
but the cost of an ER visit
will buy a lot of butterfly bandages.
She's an insulin cheating, pill cutter
heavily reliant on self diagnoses
with second opinions from WebMD.
She is a product of a health care system
that cares mostly for
the health of the system, not those
it allegedly serves.

Cretin High

My military high school was
ten-hut, spit shines and yes sir
keeping in-step and inspection day
white gloves and scratchy wool trousers.

Bits and pieces of my military high school
remain with me after 40 years away.
Self-discipline, preparation, hard work,
and a handful of lifetime friends.

Some of my military high school teachers
were Christian Brothers.
Urban, contemporary Friar Tucks
some stern, others lenient and forgiving.

And when I talk of my military high school
people are always intrigued and fascinated
like I'd gone to Hogwarts or Mordor.
But it wasn't like that at all.

My years at military high school
were as good as any teen could expect,
full of angst, hijinks and bad acne
dances, buddies and covert drinking.

Apologies

My son and daughter walk
in the shadow of the two
who brought them life.
As they move ahead with
purpose, direction and hope.
We recognize they must
hold with them better answers
than those who preceded them.
We've shortchanged their future
with wars on our brothers and sisters
killing them in the name of US.
We've maimed our environment
by quenching our thirst for oil.
Yes, our children will be better
of that I am certain,
and for our transgressions
you have my profound apologies.

Edward Lee

New

A part of my heart
I never knew existed - if
it existed at all before
that moment - began
to beat the day
you were born.
That first new movement,
a chamber opening, filling
with bright blood,
stilled my breath
and whitened my vision
as you emerged into the world,
all eager lungs and failing limbs.

Later, your fresh skin wrapped
in layers of blue towels,
I held you and lost myself
in your closed eyes, the cries
which announced your arrival
echoing through the new and tender chamber
of my suddenly meaningful heart.

Sorrow

I birthed a moon of my sorrow,
poured it forth from my eyes, nose
and mouth. It fell
to cruel gravity
rolled to, fro,
then settled,
this moon of sorrow
bigger than I.

I rubbed my hands,
stretched my back,
and lifted this moon of sorrow high,
high, pushed it far into the endless night.
It floated back down, slowly,
defying gravity as much as any law may be defied,
another moon already ruling
the sky, while stars shaped like regret
were spread far and wide.

The Bird Above

I could only see the bird
because it was darker
than the night
I woke in, the repetitive song
of its turning wings
the noise that woke me
from a dream
I could not remember
but vaguely knew contained oceans of pale skin.

It hovered above me,
like a hummingbird designed
by a man without light,
its black eyes
pouring down upon me,
my soul twisting like a mutated bone
as it felt itself weighed
and found wanting,

but before such judgment
could give way to solid punishment,
the bird of dark disappeared,
and I lay there
for the remainder
of the night, wondering
if it might return,

wanting to know it
as morning light
illuminated the room.

Elaine Leet

Heroes Fall Heroes Rise

Only I awakened
To the rubbish monuments
 and endless tombstones
On the battlefield
Of my expectations.

At the darkest edge
 of the battleground graveyard
In the cold wind
Rising through the snow
A single daffodil
Lifts its golden trumpet
Defiant
Refusing to yield the field

A morning glory climbs quiet and serene
 across abandoned dreams
Heart shaped leaves lift petals
Gathering the faintest ray of light
To set its heart aglow

Tiny forget-me-nots
Oblivious to the larger carnage
Gather in tiny communities of

Hopeful remembrance

Pristine white blossoms with yellow hearts

The possibility of sweet strawberries

Peaceful purposeful violets

Perfume the air

Reality is greater than my expectations

The battlefield of the fallen is

but a corner of the universe

Full of unexpected possibilities...

Amanda Little

Paradoxes of Truth

Freedom--being given the choice
to choose your own destruction
while being handed the tools for your liberation.

Empathy--temporarily becoming
someone else only to return
as a better version of yourself

Unity--surrendering to others
completely while cultivating
your own unique purpose fully.

You are important precisely because you
are a part of something far more
important than yourself.

Shackles

When we know the truth
we curse others with it
handing it down from one generation
to the next

When we know the truth
we box ourselves in it
loafing about in the simple beauty that
others apparently reject

When we *know* the truth
we bludgeon others with it
cursing their ignorance and willing them
to see the light

When we know the truth
we lock ourselves in its hold
so secure in our place in the world
fearfully avoiding the unknown

But when we are merely open to the truth
we release both the shackles
of ignorance and of assurance
those trappings of the mind

the one an imposed prison
the other an unbolted cage
which is up to the imprisoned

In remaining merely open to the truth
we float on the waters
of indecision until
we arrive at the distinct moment
action requires resolve

Paulie Lipman

Kaila, Patron Saint Of Earthbound Passengers

Faith is the only thing
that makes the busses run on time

No one wants to be passengers anymore
Everyone wants to drive

This isn't new
I've just been around
long enough to see it
come back

the first of any vessel
held only enough room
for one/the driver
responsible/liable
only to themselves
Once they were
beholden to passengers
they were all too quick
to conjure me and I
was overjoyed
to serve

It didn't matter

where we were going
just that we were going
to get there together

Given enough success
anyone will forget their patron
the debt and prayers owed
this is what together
gets you, *this* is
their gratitude

I didn't just safeguard their journey
I got them back home
Problem is they don't
know where that is anymore

But they know
what gratis means
that's what they expect everything for
but can't seem to remember
the meaning of tribute
or sacrifice

How convenient

Once they could
leave the ground/pierce the heavens
they anointed Joseph with
smug little Christopher
hitching along for the ride

“We will deliver the chosen and with them
touch the face of God”

Even among the saints, there
is a class system

Bitterness sets in when
you see the limitations of
what you once thought
infinite

Resentment blinds and
allows even the faithful
to fall into Neglect

I allowed too many
ships passage with
shackled human cargo
Thousands even leaping
to certain death rather than
accept the capricious fate
that waited across the sea

Trains packed with bodies in Poland
stacked like cordwood, they
not even given the option
of escape

Even in the sky above New York
seconds before collision, all

65 passengers turned their
prayers to me and rather than
be grateful for the opportunity
I told them to save their mewling
and give Heaven
my resignation

Millions dead
felled by restless ego
and still I have the nerve to ask
where have all the faithful gone

I have no idea
Destination is no longer
my province

Ave Kaila quia ego sum nunc solus viatoribus

“Hail Kaila, for I am now my only passenger”

When your last follower abandons you
all you can do is pray to and for yourself

Elliot,,, Patron Saint Of Small Town Escapes

Jesus may be the way up
but devil on your heels is
the only way out of
Memphis, TX
Natchez, MS
Ames, IA
Poe, WV

or

any place where
they'd run Christ
out on a rail in
his own name
right along
with you

the streets
too narrow
for flight
church
too puny
for any
deliverance
walls
metaphoric
but built so
solid with

every sin
fabled or
not painted
bold and
high and
thick along
with the
most sincere
thing they
can take
from you:
your name

If who you
are or what
you do in
any way
threatens
to push
out the
walls or

expose
blood
in the
mortar
or take
fire to
their
bedrock

they
will
bury
you
body
and
name
under
it

and write
any eulogy
they please
your name
forever theirs
just like
mine

So take
it back
my name
and yours
but never
speak them
we are built
to stick in
the throat
keep us
clandestine
sacrament

and run

8 blocks

from the end

of the parade route

one tick past midnight

beyond the town limits

just over the county line

shout our names out of your

mouth and wear us 'round the neck

We have no reason to hide anymore

Jeff Livingston (Annie Manildoo)

Regardless

I order dumplings;
I see something on my phone that makes me enraged

Is this real?!
Suddenly, I'm not hungry for dumplings.

Open up Facebook.
Let's plan a fucking protest and

show those fuckers.
Within about two or three days

we go viral.
I go on interviews with news, magazines, politicians, legislators,
town officials...

even the police...
The anger and heartbreak and emotions run high, gotta remember,

keep it peaceful.
Hate brings hate but love brings change.

The day comes,
We're here, we're queer, we're just trying to stay alive.

Don't erase us,
Don't ignore us, we'll only come back ten times stronger.

We'll be here.
We'll be loved.
We will thrive.

Re. Gard. Less!

Patricia Lynne

deafening quiet noise

Threatening terror trembles
Bodies viewed in mass graveyards
Life trimmed to fundamentals

Once secure lives now upside down
Revolving restlessly from inside out
Uncertainty creases a once smooth sky
Living confined lives, scream, shout!

This virus chooses indiscriminately
Ripping through the lungs of all
Surreal in its naked nasty nature
Yesterday reality only in one's recall

Cristian Martinez

My Superpower

My superpower is to fly
Fly into the air everyday
Saving lives like Superman
They will love me
Like a Florida palm tree in Miami
When I fly into the air
I see kids making games fair
When I get home
I do my hair with a comb

Power

Those with power often use
hardworking people who end up in defeat.
Since we have a smaller voice
we are taken advantage of and have no choice.
However, our voices have gotten louder,
protests and marches have created our power.
Hope has been given back to those who were once powerless,
realizing power in numbers is our choice.
Equal treatment for all is the fight.
We can regain the power
and cause the change that is needed.
Power is attainable
if we never stop fighting for what we believe.
Power can be the change this world needs.

Kindness

How hard is it to be kind?

To me it is clear some struggle with this.

Instead words of hate are used

Without thinking of the consequences

Shattering hearts like a sword

Causing more harm than if no words were spoken

Why is it so hard to be kind?

Being kind is drilled into our minds

However only a few listen

Spreading a swarm of love

Choosing to lend a helping hand

Putting others before yourself

Such a simple concept

Why is it so hard to be kind?

Louis Mateus

The Drummer

I don't always get recognized as the drummer,
but I syncopate the beat and I'm there.
That's all I need. I may sit on a chair
inside the cage of a twelve piece drum set
on the back altar of the stage, but my spirit mingles
with the city's high-rises, the traffic below
as bright as a thousand lit lighters.

It's all about sublimation. I embellish the politics
of the vocals and the guitar solo's wail
in the finesse of fiberglass with the flicker of broken
sixteenth notes on the balancing act of cymbals.
It's all on the wrist and the grip.

Then there's the solo. It's always a solo.
I take this beauty in a hair-do with barrette,
roll with her on the gut skin of a Jembe
and play a beat beneath her, when one pat
on the Jembe's hourglass
is all I need for stealing her for the night.
It's all on the palm of the hand.

Yet best of all, is my feel of the soul-blasting
guitar rhythm on my ribs and face,

the keyboard's chords out-tonguing Satan's
in their arpeggio-sequence; the feel of my feet
bouncing off the floor of a torrential bass-line
and my view of the flipping crowd
knowing I tickle the standing hairs of concert goers
in their own drum fire of light.

.

Michael McCarthy

Fragile and Faith-Bound

I guess we have to be squeezed
into a corner
where cold darkness
looms.

No place to go.

When usual routines
become shattered
like that glass coffee pot
which slipped out of my hand.

The death of a colleague
unthinkable
it cannot be
I dread the thought
of remembering his kind, vibrant face.

So I look to the news
for something
some kernel of hope
but the distant light
no longer spreads.

Just the virus.

Fretting in the moments
I turn to my backyard
to clean the beds
to trim hedges
to stay occupied.

Only to realize
I've been seized.

No place to go.

Or do I head
to the only place
I know
deep
down
to
wishfully pray
and
stay
with
what
I can never
know.

Let's talk about
faith.

Rosemary McKinley

Great Ball of Fire

My eyes were riveted up while I drove east
A great ball of fire in the sky
Could it be? A harvest Moon
The giant orange orb hugged the horizon
Larger than any moon I ever saw
I felt I could touch it, if only I moved closer
So near and yet so far
Holding my attention
Until I reached my destination
Missing the unique sight
Until next year

Joan Mc Nerney

This Savage God

Calamity hides under cover
lurking in corners ready
to rear its head.

It lies in neat lab reports
charting white blood cells
run wild.

*What is this savage God
who pushes us down to comas?*

Sneaking along icy roads
daylight ends while sea gulls
circle steel grey skies.

Brake belts wheeze and whine
snapping apart as we careen
against the long cold night.

*What is this savage God
who lunges us into storms?*

An official white envelope
stuffed with subpoenas

waits at the mailbox.

Memories of hot words
like razor blades slash
across our faces.

*What is this savage God
who rips open the heart?*

So we stand on the edge
breathing mean air
smelling fear.

Fires leaping out of rooms
where twisted wires
blaze from walls.

*What is this savage God
who stabs us with flames?*

Eleventh Hour

Wrapped in darkness we can
no longer deceive ourselves.
Our smiling masks float away.
We snake here, there
from one side to another.
How many times do we rip off
blankets only to claw more on?

Listening to zzzzzz of traffic,
mumble of freight trains, fog horns.
Listening to wheezing,
feeling muscles throb.
How can we find comfort?

Say same word over and over
again again falling falling to sleep.
I will stop measuring what was lost.
I will become brave.

Let slumber come covering me.
Let my mouth droop, fingers tingle.
Wishing something cool...soft...sweet.
Now I will curl like a fetus
gathering into myself
hoping to awake new born.

Gene McParland

Cosmic Sense

Deep in the core of every man
lies the sleeping core of
Everywoman.

Deep in the heart of every women
lies the restless dragon of
Everyman.

Deep in the bosom of the dragon
dwells the spirit of Mother Gaia.

And deep within her earthcore
is the fiery birthplace of our
conception.

We are all islands in the majestic
Milky Way of existence.
Separate, but connected, joined
but each our own spirit.
Dreams with our own realities
existing within the cosmos.

I close my eyes and am reminded
that we part of the true vision.
One within the all.

Bruce McRae

Hell's Kitchen

Today's special is pride pudding,
smothered in poor choices.
On the menu is a rare insight,
with a side order of lifelong regret.

Chef recommends the fear of success.
Our sorrow pie is very popular.
Would you like a glass of tears with that?
Are you ready to order?

To Deny Consensus

The Hollow Earth Society meets Fridays.
Formerly the Flat Earth Society,
the landscape has changed greatly.
Formerly the Illuminati. Formerly Druids.
There is no little thing as unfounded wonder.

The Golden Order of the Dawn is now in session.
Ignore the funny hats and peculiar handshake –
in ritual is comfort and community.
We welcome mass hysteria's warm embrace.
We are the engines of our own destruction.

Empire of What

Comets crashing and the emperor
has new clothes, new teeth, new girlfriends.
Continents adrift and the emperor
has a new car, new haircut, new horizons.

But what state of his empire?
The empire has fallen upon difficult times.
Fallen like a last soldier or archangel.
Like a fiery stone from the auspices of heaven.

Rose Miller

Wild Cards

We were wild cards
Conceived in the eerie quiet between wars
Born in the eye of the storm
We cowered under desks
Dreading the phantom bomb
While the cries of the righteous were muffled
By teenage love songs playing on transistor radios
In our time cities burned in the night
Glowing like the vanquished moon
Reflected on flickering TV screens
In our name ungodly manna rained down from the skies
And fell on blood soaked rice paddies
Madmen with rifles defined our history
We were wild cards
Our numbers had never been seen before
When we stood, the wind shifted and blew the past away
When we raised our voices, the roar shook the mighty and
the meek
Told that we were born to change the world
And drunk on the fearsome power we possessed
We believed the charlatans who crooned New Age lullabies
While we dozed, our dominion passed to the greedy and the rich
We were wild cards
Awakened too late, sober now

Our hours are measured by the colors of our pills
With unsteady gait we trudge off
A half-smile playing on our lips
We do not glance behind
We were wild cards
We had our turn

Gentrification

These derelict rooms speak of the past
Through spider-web cracks and stains on the floor
A record of human tenderness and despair
Is written in the pattern of holes where pictures once hung
Shattered windows mirror the crowded passions
And reflect the cold solitude of the souls who lived here
Can the dark specters of hate and fear be swept away?
There is much faith in new plaster and paint
To exorcise the ghosts of dreams unfulfilled
And banish the oppressive sorrow of love gone wrong
Can they linger to taint the air of those who come after?
Condemned to repeat the damage that is done
As we clumsily grasp at life and love

Chris Montgomery

Absurdity

What dark
splendors

you enthrall
smooth skin

pale as
porcelain

doll
and glide

gayly down
the hall

stupefied
by

love at
all.

Contentment

In stride with
the rhythm

of a new day

bird chirp music
dewy grasses

sweetness

the cadence
of my heart

thudding like a

lost ship
finally ashore.

Kathy Moore

The Appointment

The answering machine goes off
“Please be sure to keep your appointment on Friday.”
I always keep my appointments
Friday is here
Can someone watch Ron
I'll drop him off at Mom's
Running late
Oh, ok, you're going with me Tom
Let's get moving
You park- I'll go in
Oh that's right, you've never been here
Let's go
Sign in
Show ID card
Look at all the pregnant ladies
Been there- done that
Loved it but now I'm 42
Come in Mrs. M
How are you?
Weight, height, blood pressure
Room 5
Get undressed
Doors open
Hello Mrs. M

He's smiling, this can't be too bad
Get dressed
Meet in my office
Tell your husband to come in too
Or we could talk here
Chatting waiting for Doc
Door opens
Mrs. M some of the biopsy
results came back
with early stage cancer
What! He can't be talking to me.
I don't have cancer
Well differentiated
Be able to get it all out
Hysterectomy
Took the liberty of making an appointment
with the specialist
He can't be talking to me.
Is that my file?
Might not need chemotherapy
afterward
Think we caught it early enough
Why would I need Chemotherapy?
I don't understand
Let me know when
surgery is scheduled
I wrote up a script
for chest x-ray and blood work
Get it done early
This way you're ready

ASAP

Did he say I have Cancer?

Guna Moran

Time Will Write History On You

(translated from Assamese by Bibekanada Choudhury)

*Dedicated to those who have lost their lives in the
COVID-19 pandemic*

Time how cruel you are
My devotion is still far tougher than it

Fighting on
I would continue penning
on your bosom
The history of my triumph

You would remain a spectator
To my indomitable entity
You would remain a listener
To my fame and glory
You would turn into history
To carry to my progeny my motto

You would lose on the brink of winning
I would win on the brink of losing

I would stay alive even after dying
You would die even though living

You'd rise again
Like Phoenix from the ashes
Our Progeny would fight again with you
Pages in the
history of triumph would keep added on
countless diyas would blow on my altar

Time how cruel you are
My devotion is still far tougher than it

Fighting on
I would continue penning
on your bosom
The history of my triumph

You just watch

Ann-Marie Murzin

Something From Nothing

A brown butterfly landed on my shoulder as we shared stories in
Central Park:

John took my twenty-dollar bill and gave me back the wrong
change with a smile.

The banana bread that yearned to be eaten slid off the oven rack
crashing to the tile floor.

I climb to the highest hour ... sometimes.

Dense dandelions thicken the soup.

In my dream a purple pony rushed through the gate snapping it
into jagged white pieces.

And then I woke up singing about a salad.

Grasshoppers grow into good luck charms for boys dancing in the
outfield.

Always caress your mother with words.

The notebook never notices when I stop writing.

A Mom's Midlife Decisions

1

I unpacked the bin of Barbies you made me save even though you were a teen when we moved.

I am sorry, but the roof was leaking, and I had to slide them away from the dripping,

And protect them, but now I wish I hadn't.

2

Remember we shopped at the mall to find outfits to match? I donated them.

Forgive me.

I just could not decide what to do.

3

I gave away your varsity jacket that you saved in our hall closet even though you have not worn it in years.

A teenager came to the door with no coat on;

He seemed to need it more than you do.

4

Last month at Parent's Weekend we got a table on the balcony for dinner and you had to pay because I forgot my wallet.

Forgive me. I was forgetful.

I wanted you to track the expenses, reporting to me as the accountant.

Cream of Wheat

Her mom made a home,
From a box of red square comfort.
The granules doused in warm milk,
And sugar swirled in with a wooden spoon,
Like a magic wand
Stirring in warm wishes.

Gracie peeked into the pot
Standing by her mom's side,
Sloppy pigtails resting on her shoulders,
Brown-eyed waiting,
Tooth-fairy-like smiling,
Wanting to see the bubbling and believe.

The aroma filled the kitchen,
And splattered onto the stove.
Together they broke the lumps by force,
One callous hand holding one soft hand,
Avoiding the gas flames.

Now the box is almost empty.
The cardboard spout is worn down,
From opening and re-sealing,
With pale masking tape,
Evidence of the simple and sweet.

Grace is grown up now.
Starting to grasp that grain alone

Can't be enough anymore.
Missing those moments with mommy,
Stuck to the bottom of the pot.

Roxana Negut

We're running

We are running from shadows, from chaos
We are running from pain, from regrets

We're keeping our heart locked with our secrets and our doubts

Without knowing that these are the keys.

We're running from gratitude and unconditional love
Without knowing that this is the only key
To eternal life, eternal journey, eternal mind
For our souls, enlightenment is the only way.

We're running from sadness, from shadows, from darkness

Thousand of hours from our life
Seeking for joy, seeking for happiness
For our soul, for our journey
Without knowing that these are the key.

We're running from questions about life
We're hiding deep in our souls
Sad thoughts about the sense of humanity
Without knowing this is the only way.

We're running, we're running without rest or peace

Day after day, year by year
From loneliness, from truth, from life

Lost in common, ordinary days.

We are running from everything that is too hard, too painful
Without knowing that this is the only way.

Embrace these moments
When you don't know where to go.
They will be one of most useful experiences
You will ever undertake
Explore the shadows
This is the only way.

Broken glass of love

There is an ocean between us
A thousand of shadows, lights and regrets
A thousand of lost memories,
A broken glass of unseen hearts.
Expecting the end.
But i know, I just know
I just feel in my soul
A love without light, whithout hope
There is nothing
It is just
A forgotten love.

Michelle Oram

Autumn Cleanse

The trees strip away
The sharp, icy rains
Of yesterday's
Sun-baked blossoms

The moldy moss
Clings to bark
Like trophies
Never to be forgotten

Distant memories
Wrinkles of time
Make room
For a new tomorrow

Mother's Helper

I scrubbed and scrubbed
until the porcelain
chipped away
from my heart

I hammered my head
against the dark
wood paneling
until the fighting stopped

The chapped, slapped
enraged face snapped
as I ran into my room
eyes slammed shut

I am my mother's helper
I clean the dirt from
dark secret places
ashes scattered in coffee

Pasty, broken, runny
eggs prepare me
for life's journey
as I try and pass

Invisible from her wrath
sculpted on the sofa
once with paint brush

in hand, no more

As slumber erases
all dreams
nightmares multiply
replacing day with night

and night with day
pills get popped, dropped
adding to the decay
I pick up the pieces

I am my mother's helper

Carl Palmer

Confronting the Enemy

What reason do you have to steal into my marriage,
confiscate my husband with your morbid romance,
of all men why did you choose my man, Whore?

Why bring yourself into our house, disrupt our life,
arrive unexpected, unasked, unwanted, unwarranted,
can't you realize what you're doing to us, Trollop?

Why wrangle his thoughts, mangle his memories,
infiltrate his mind, defeat dreams, doom his future,
obscure consciousness, confuse reality, Harlot?

Why not come out, confront me, face me, who are you,
what name are you calling yourself today, Bitch,
or is it still Alzheimer's, Senility or Dementia?

Tom Pawlowski

Newtown

Monster and his means
Semi-automatic bursts
Twenty empty desks

Orlando

Flags fly at half mast
Honoring the rich fabric
Mourning the madness

Pittsburgh

Searching for reasons
Baruch dayan ha'emet
Ad infinitum

Joseph S. Pete

The City That Split Asunder

The attorney in the wool overcoat,
son of a Pullman-Standard worker,
stood tall against the bracing Lake Michigan winds
like the august 9-foot bronze statue of his likeness
that would eventually tower as a steely silent sentinel outside
city hall
in the long shadow of the smoke-billowing mill,
a sonata of rust and molten iron.
He quietly beamed amid all the jubilation,
the thronged masses in the thrall of a raucous liberated revelry
that stretched for six whole blocks along Broadway.

The bigots decried him, the hidebound feared him, and skeptics
doubted him.
His own party's establishment stood against him.
But Richard Hatcher defied odds, overcame half-blind spittle-
flecked hostility
on a depleted budget, won the mayoral election, and made star-
spangled history.
Everything had changed.
The sepulchral clouds split and sunlight spilled forth.
Whole new apertures and avenues opened up
in Gary, Indiana and the wider world.
America's first black mayor of a major city

shook up the settled order
that confined African-Americans to Midtown slums
while whites lived on tony brick-clad blocks
in leafy Glen Park and the lakefront Miller enclave,
and gave the majority in a long-integrated city
the political power that had long eluded them
in a rigged society always so shaped and structured against them.

Hatcher, the newly minted mayor of the second-largest city in
a state
where the Ku Klux Klan once ran rampant,
rid African-American neighborhoods of rundown slums.
He got affirmative action legislation passed, made city
government more inclusive,
and granted city contracts to minority-owned businesses,
trying to make the municipal government work for the many and
not just the privileged few.

And he built.

Oh how he built.

Hatcher built up poverty-stricken neighborhoods, Gary's airport,
the Holiday Inn tower downtown, the Genesis Convention Center
that bore his name and that hosted the standing-room-only crowd
of mourners where he was eulogized by national figures like Jesse
Jackson
before he was buried in the cold ground on that windy winter day.
He long tried to build a National Civil Rights Hall of Fame
Museum,
but the grandest aspirations often came to naught
in a company town the company largely abandoned,
where U.S. Steel shrunk its workforce to a fraction of its

former self.

But more importantly, Hatcher built a new road through terra in cognita,
paving the way for hundreds of African-American mayors, as well
as state lawmakers,
governors, senators, countless public officials, and of course
President Barack Obama.

Hatcher blazed brightly through history
as an inspirational figure instilling hope
for those who followed him.

History however passed by the city he so loved.
Battered by steel dumping and foreign competition,
its leaner mills reprogrammed by automation,
the company that built the Steel City
forsook its own once-bustling and brightly lit company town.
Racist attitudes set off a hasty stampede of white flight
followed by those who feared going underwater in their homes.
Storefronts emptied, houses vacated, and indomitable-seeming
institutions faded away.

As Hatcher put it, the city “split in half.”
Many fear-crazed folks decamped
east to Portage or south to Merrillville,
an instant suburb slapped up overnight
as a “repository of racism” in Hatcher’s phrasing.
Gary’s population hemorrhaged, property values plummeted,
crime rose, and hope rotted away along with
long-abandoned homes and mothballed factories.

In a telling scene, Hatcher was attending a political shindig at a suburban hotel.
Hatcher, who practiced law, who became the youngest city council president
in Gary's history, who served five terms as mayor, who forged ahead as a historic trailblazer,
who emerged as a national civil rights leader, and who left an indelible mark on the world,
was asked by a random white waitress
who came nowhere even close
to his level of education, resume, acclaim, or influence,
just what the hell he thought he was doing there.
Bold souls like Hatcher can change the world
but they can't change every small mind.

Mary C. M. Phillips

letter to the world

i wrote my letter to the world
rolled it up into a ball
and threw it out into the universe

it bounced against the planets
igniting some and setting
others into a
cold and endless spin
cold and endless spin

i know it will return one day
and will call me by my name
“here I am,” I will reply,
“i remember every word

allow me now to catch you
unfold you with my withered hands
bless each precious crease and
add a pretty poem
add a pretty poem”

Kevin Rabas

James Riva

shot grandma
full of golden
bullets, drank
from her holes,
said, "I'm a
vampire."

Weekend Retreat

She comes home
her hair woodsmoke
her things in clear
Ziploc bags:
shampoo, soap, says,
“You would have
loved it. Come along
next time,” and I restack
my set of books
for class, recradle
the phone, snap off
the monitor, and listen
to L’s new songs.

At the Gala

The fairy lights, like
fireflies
in early winter, first nights
of ice.

Allie Rieger

sylvia

I'm going to England
to find your stone
I want to eat the dust
of your bones.

Your words have sunk in
and won't let me go
insidiously intertwined
fused to my neurons
that form all of mine.

A copy cat killer
find me under the house
in the damp crawl space
all filled up with
little white pills.

Can I follow you
into the dark parts
of life? The dark
recesses of your mind?
Your corners and edges.
The shadows that
haunted you your whole life?

A copy cat killer
I'll stuff a towel under the door.
and my head in the oven-
not to sound crude.
But I want to be just
like you.

You have saved my life
more than once.

A thought on COVID-19 (and I'm not even religious)

The black plague is back in style,

“Danse Macabre”.

People think that this is it

(and maybe they're right)

This is the end of the world.

As we know it, at least.

They picked them all clean,

all the bones

in all the grocery stores.

Fear begets fear

like art begets art.

I do not doubt that things will

be eternally changed.

For the rest of our lives, and

the lives of those who come after

(I just wish my mom had missed this).

But,

But remember back

to that last walk around town

After the drinks you had

and you laughed, unknowingly.

happy,

Walking back to the car

you heard a cough. Throaty.

Unsettling, the drowning cough
of the dying
(as if he knew what was to come).

A cough.

Coming from the shadows
so you squinted your eyes
to see past the neon lights.

Past the florescent burn
of the bank next door.

Squinted into the shadow
of the brick black porch
attached to the only remaining church
on Main Street.

To the homeless man laying down
clearly unable to pull off
the peacefulness of sleep.

Under his blanket of cardboard
Atop his pillow of paper.

Horrid headlines screamed
even before the
“Triumph of Death”.

Think back to that
roll it to the front
That’s the end of the world right there.
A locked church door
next to the twenty four hour
illuminated bank.

Sarah Ritter

Books

So many books sit on a shelf
Begging to be read
“Which one to read first?” I ask myself

Tales of poverty, and of wealth
Of people living and of dead
So many books sit on a shelf

Holiday classics of Santa and elf
Legends of journeys heroes have lead
“Which one to read first?” I ask myself

Stories to lead my mind somewhere else
As I drift to sleep in my bed
So many books sit on a shelf

They say reading is good for your health
So I hold each open to a full-page spread
“Which one to read first?” I ask myself

Though time is scarce, I can't help myself
If I wait for free time, I'll soon be dead
So many books sit on a shelf
“Which one to read first?” I ask myself

Contained Rage

I wish you could open your eyes to see
How I clench my words inside of my fists
Pin my arms to the sides of my body
While the fight in me begs me to resist

I'm doing my best to control the rage
That simmers and boils throughout my veins
My thoughts bounce off the walls of my brain's cage
A concussion forms from my thoughts contained

I ought to toss each word at your blank face
Each letter speckling your ears, nose and eyes
Megaphone voice speaking in uppercase
Emotions steaming as they vaporize

Feel the embers of my hostility
Searing your skin till you finally see

Marc Rosen

Simmering

The spokes of the wheel run along my skin
Soothing an itch ever-simmering within
I sigh with relief from the much-needed stim
Yet somehow, I know, I've yet to begin

I yearn for impact, I long for touch
I desperately seek what I've never known
Desperate for something I doubt I'll see much
Needing those foreign things: safety and home

Each thud of the flogger, each lash of the whip
Brings me ever-closer, yet further away
I doubt I could ever realize this
Yet the more that I yearn, the further I stray

The touch of His hand, the touch of his heart
A need to belong, a need to feel home
He offers me something, a Master of His art
Is it acceptance, or am I still alone?

Midtown

Second floor walkup, coated in darkness
Check the coat, check the phone, check it all
Hide nothing, show everything, enter exposed
Spend hours getting to know your fellow man
Deeply, powerfully, biblically
Never quite seeing who, or where, or what
Guided only by the faint glow of old neon
The scent of amyl nitrite
The pulsing rhythm echoed in house music and writhing flesh
Embrace the staccato of flesh meeting its kin
The warmth of unknown depths
The joy of passion and its aftermath

Sonnet Prick

First greetings always seem to leave me mute
I always struggle as words come to mind
However, when the addressee is you
Vocabulary seems to flee my sight!
Perhaps this is the reason my tongue held
For after all, your face is kind and fair
And though I dare not suggest our minds meld
Perhaps, my faulty humor, you might spare
I ask you not for love, offer no flowers
I'm far from innocent and far from sweet
And rest assured, this poem did not take hours
Though it be faster to play in the sheets
I could not write a funny limerick
And so, instead, I am that sonnet prick!

Matthue Roth

Slayer No More

Don't remember when I stopped carrying stakes in my backpack
or who told me vampires aren't real

When do you stop believing in things and start
believing things people tell you

I'm asking for a friend

Told someone I'm sick of this world and she
thought I meant to kill myself

No, I just want to remember how to imagine
To trust my mind more than my eyes

And not use words so much like *real*
or *stakeholder interviews*

How to make my best hours really early and really late,
and wander the distance between

Not to believe animals can talk
But to remember how to listen

How to shake myself from drunkenness

unsure if I'm dreaming

and where the boundary would be

I still watch fog hoping for the world to disappear

or to catch sight

of the disappeared world

Narges Rothermel

They Know

A vibrant crocus in the yard announces, *spring is here spring is here*

Fresh green grass of the lawn hosts a few young dandelions
Between slabs of cement-blocks, a blooming-dandelion says, *hello*
Mother Earth's seasonal plants show off their untamed flowers
Swaying daffodils by the fence cheer the walkers by bright yellow
flowers

Birds start singing spring songs before dawn and sing all daylong
Sparrows and finches feed on the birdfeeder
They spread some of the seeds on the lawn below
Today, squirrels, morning-doves, grackles, sparrows, and a few
finches
all gathered under the birdfeeder for their daily meals

Birds don't mind the squirrels, squirrels don't mind the birds
They stand side by side they share the seeds, no hoarding no
social distancing

Do they know that a virus named Corona is spreading around
its power and its fear?

Do they know that this virus is moving from state to state from
country to country?

Do they know this unseen-enemy of mankind is moving from
continent to continent?

Do they know that Corona virus is killing thousands of humans
each day?

Do they know that the fear of Corona has prisoned humans in
their shelters?

I wonder if the grass, the plants, the birds, and squirrels know
that it is

The Corona-time in the world,

Do they know that it is The Corona-era on the earth?

Perhaps they use the given wisdom from Mother Earth and ignore
the virus

They remember the mysteries of Mother Earth and magic of her
seasons

They know after dark cold days of winter the spring comes back

They know sun gets closer and closer to Mother Earth when
spring arrives

They know the spring-sun thaws the land and softens the moods

They all with their beauty and wisdom tell us,

It is spring time on this side of the Earth

It is time to take a walk outside it is time to till the soil

It is time to sow some seeds in the gardens

It is time to touch and feel the life in trunks of the awakened trees

It is time to notice the green buds on the branches

It is time to feel the fresh green grass on the ground

They tell us, *It is time to sing, it is time to smile,*

it is time to laugh, and it is time to celebrate the life.

Wayne Russell

Digital Memories

Out of the blue, she sent me a text, she wanted copies of the old photos, snapshots of an old life, our life, now two years dead and gone.

I had to resurrect them from the laptop sleeping in the corner, a thin sheet of dust, nestling translucent dreams.

Wake up, wake up, I whispered within the thin prison walls, walls that had become the remnants of my life, cell-block C19.

Lights flickered and the motherboard lamented, her slow awakening, so uninspired, an emotionless drone.

Mouse in hand, hovering over icons of manila folders, behind every click lurking old memories, tears blossom like raindrops.

Leaves in the autumn could never outnumber those memories of us, of the children, as they so quickly grew up and how we so slowly and

quietly grew apart.

You never liked reminiscing, reflecting back into the past, you were all about the here and now, caught up in the moment with your friends while behind the camera, I captured the memories, that you would someday return to reclaim.

The World is Her Canvas

Post expressionist
mistress of the here
and now,
shes the painter
elusive, lost in cool
shades of
mystery.

Her life intertwines
with mine, for
the moment, I'm hers.

She holds my attention
within her rainbow blurred
palm.

Words are sparse,
captivate me in cell
phone wilderness,
paint me in hues of
your sorrow, embrace
me within brush strokes
of your beautiful joy.

She's enigmatic,
the doctor,
educating pupils,
painting her

thoughts upon a tattered
canvas of life,
that tapestry of emotion,
swirling in a dream, serenade
in cadence, wry smile upon
a photograph written in my heart.

Pat Gallagher Sassone

Bits and Pics

Wormholes seduce
gamblers in a whirlwind
Two mouths- one faster than the other.

Eagles eating crumbs around a park bench .
pigeons soar.
robots picket beside construction workers while
Savion Glover taps on
Imagine in Strawberry Fields.

Beethoven and Bach get down with
Dre and Jay Z.
drones walk 101 Dalmatians.
upside down devil card causes psychic meltdown as
Luke Skywalker's Millennium Falcon blasts
artists to galaxies unknown.

Beach in Waikiki reduced to sandbox yet President
plays with plastic shovel.
Smell of incense fills abandoned building where
pope blesses the homeless. Soon after,
Rodin requests sketches for The Thinker of the 21st century.
Needed: 7.8 billion Apple II pencils.

Daniel Scenters

The Crypt of Baphomet

A mortified forest of unformed coffins,
Crowd the conduit of the hidden synagogue.
Spiritless totems without end drape thee,
Eyes of the Watch Towers overshadow thee.
Whose assurance rises like the fallen fog,
Whose graven image bears the fifth inversion.

Emptiness births lowliness from yon Divide,
Unfathomed shul, thy tarnished brook treads deeply.
Wake: in the courts of priests and sorcerers,
Hierarchy of condemnation enraptures:
Thy bastard children breathe not remorsefully,
As the athame refines their conversion.

Hollowing parasites plague their souls with yen,
Their naked shrines be that abolished, from hence.
Lain upon the alter of crawling flesh;
Interwoven candles, the tongues of Dervish.
Thy glories, thy honors, part from thine chasm,
Disciples of the fallen Light's last remnants.

Temporal grain of ink and Shadows---becoming;
Rotting: thy age of divinity wrought ye.
Thy bestial demi-god unrestrained,

By Baphomet, all thine powers, art they drained.
Yea, ye apostles, declare his blasphemies---
Philosophers: works---his verses, ye poets.

Withered fowl perched atop skulls of the conduit,
Fog of thine infirmity---a broken mist.
Ye tread thine hour of pre-destiny,
Destruction wrought of thine naked dignity.
Hour of preparation cannot resist,
To grasp thy breasts---to strip ye of purity.

Marble Empire

The moist soil thirsty,
Lusting flesh thereof.
Flames seize ripe meadows,
Orb of fire blackened;
Weeping incense rising.

Indulging stones worn,
Courts where children sleep.
Epitaphs adorn,
A lineage fallen;
Shepherds of silent paths.

Barren veins collapsed,
Yearning thirst now mine.
Broken angel wings
Arousing brittle dust;
Compromised in my sin.

Summoning scenery,
Disembodied words.
Mind-cloaked illusion,
That God has forsaken;
The undertaken path.

Searing eventide,
Sorrowed throng dismayed.
Sightless wanderer,
Unveiled in laity;

Marred for obsequy.

Beheld fading hands,
My corpse they consume.
No power to foil,
To disrobe from this gown;
Leading me deeper down.

Phantom for bodhi,
Parlance forbade.
Nexus of voodoo,
Alembic to the hordes;
Liege to lyrics of night.

Prayers Upon Emptiness

Dying time greatly spent,
Fades into the dark sky;
Lost are the shadows of her scent,
Lost within her, am I.

Summon I, the darkness,
Longing for her pale lips;
Prayers upon emptiness,
Hallowedness my tongue slips.

A solemn remembrance,
Forever shall it burn;
Bitter tears of her abstinence,
Her kiss for which I yearn.

For how long hast ye wept?
Wept at the stones of rest;
By wings, her grave hast been swept,
She's found no more abreast.

Whisper a pagan rite,
Listen for her faint breath;
Dark are the candles burning bright,
Cold and empty I'm left.

Sofia Senesie

A Crack in the Glass

Downstairs in the cupboard
on the highest shelf you would find my cup.
It was tall, sturdy, and crystal clear and
the way it reflected the light was like
staring into another dimension.

Downstairs in the cupboard
on the highest shelf, I stood on my toes to reach
my flawless cup. I never drank from another.
The impudence of the thought....

Downstairs in the cupboard
on the highest shelf, my clean cup always stood.
But one day, it looked foggy.
I thought I just had not washed it right.
I rinsed him good, shoved him in the
dishwasher, and thought he would be good
in a few hours: crystal clear.

Downstairs in the cupboard
on the highest shelf, you would find my cup.
It was foggy and sad like a cloudy day or a car's
windshield stained by blotches
of nature's tears all dry and crisp

on its outer shell and it appeared to
be on the inside too. It was so foggy.

Downstairs in the cupboard
on the highest shelf, I firmly grasped my cup.
I examined it closely and sighed, “foggy still.”
I rinsed it again and again and again.
I even bought new soap, but nothing
could clear the clouds.

Downstairs in the cupboard
on the highest shelf, you would find my brittle cup.
I had carelessly dropped it. It was okay though.
It just left a crack. It was not completely broken.
There was no way I was getting a new cup.
The audacity....

Downstairs in the cupboard
on the highest shelf, you will not find my cup.
The little crack grew with each day.
With each fluid ounce of water, I
drowned it in until it broke.
It broke. Why?

Downstairs in the cupboard
on the highest shelf, there once was a cup.
There was a crack in the glass
long before I dropped it.
It was hidden on the inside.
It was very small until it grew.

Downstairs in the cupboard
on the highest shelf, there it was.
A crack in the glass.
I never knew.

Shoshauna Shy

How Many Breathed On This Quart of Milk?

100 More US Deaths

in a Single Day

Washington Post, March 23, 2020

“Six feet Six feet”

chants the buxom woman

stretching past my ear

for a can of peaches.

Truck driver – pallet loader

– case stocker – cashier –

What are the odds

at the dairy cooler

that this carton I’ve chosen

makes it to my kitchen pristine?

We Interrupt This Broadcast

The skies are wide open
except for Med Flight
helicopters on return
missions Traffic lanes

are vacated except for
police cars responding
to reports of gunshots
outside the ER

In a forest preserve two miles
from my house, a jogger happens upon
two bodies in a ditch
When I bed down for the night

I program 911 into Speed Dial
Station my phone close

Emily-Sue Sloane

Not the Founders' Dream

America's fascination with guns is killing us

Schools hold active shooter drills
kids certain they're next

Teachers blockade doors
follow their students into closets
bursting with fear, they crouch
in willed silence, amplified
by ragged breathing
in dread unison

Hastily composed farewell texts
await "send"

Phones clutched
in sweaty palms
no shield
against a spray of bullets

Hands raised in the air
those who can
run
single file
towards safety, a citadel
forever on the horizon

Thoughts and prayers
cold, cold ashes
scattered on breezes
fanned by NRA cash

Just Enjoy Life

“It starts with not stepping on cracks
and pretty soon you’re turning the light switch on and off 15 times
before you can leave the house.

Just enjoy life,” a man tells his young son as they walk,
hand in hand ahead of me, into the medical building
one winter morning full of sunshine

When I start my car to leave a half hour or so later,
no sign of the man and his son,
Paul McCartney sings on the radio:
“What’s the use of worrying?”

For most, worrying comes
with the territory
of minding past, present and future

*Don’t step on the crack,
you’ll break your mother’s back*

Nursery rhymes confuse young minds
then, long forgotten, they bubble up
through life’s layers
to haunt us

Perhaps that man was right:
We are stuck inside the house,
countering the darkness,
trying to ward off the bad stuff

Turning Point

This delayed change of seasons
confounds my to-do list.

Furnace cleaning leaps out ahead of digging up bulbs,
what with the canna lilies still blooming
and roses smiling in the autumn sun.

When icy winds swoop in on a sudden sub-zero Arctic blast,
sweaters, wool scarves, hats and gloves
spill out of closets and drawers
along with t-shirts and shorts not yet put away.

This jumble of weather and landscape mirrors my thoughts.
Uncertainty ahead.

In my little world
when work no longer fills my days
and in the wider world
where men rattle nuclear sabres
and trade childish insults,
jealously protecting their thrones.

Recalling my childhood training, I wonder
if I can still cower under a desk
when the air raid sounds.

I look out on the late-November maples.
Their leaves, still green, cling to branches
well past their prime.

It is late, this change of season.
Is it too late?

Elizabeth Spencer Spragins

Lava

in the lightless lair
restless hunters stir from sleep
when pumas rumble
flames of red-hot hunger crouch
within the molten mountain

~Mount Rainier National Park, Washington

White

(A Rannaigheacht Ghairid)

Shades of red
Mar my daughter's cradled head—
Perfect ponytail, undone,
Wet with crimson rivers fed

By cold hate
Aimed at all who immigrate.
Fingers stroke her matted hair.
“Thoughts and prayers” won't change her fate.

Her dark skin
Holds a body much too thin.
We knew hunger, thirst, and fear—
Years that stole her gap-toothed grin.

My child bled.
Bullets burned with racist lead.
Sixty seconds, sixty rounds,
Lifeless sounds, then shades of red.

~El Paso, Texas

From the Rubble of Camelot*

(A Rhupunt)

A dragon sleeps
While lightning leaps
From clouds to keeps
Of castles wrest

From blood-stained rocks.
Now rubble blocks
The moats and lochs
Kings once possessed.

Fields choke with thorn
And lie forlorn.
Aversions born
Of fear infest

This wretched land.
The weak demand
A champion's hand:
Wrongs unredressed

Breed bitter bile.
Deception, wile,
And crafty smile
Put truth to test.

While standing stones
Guard sacred bones,

A mage intones
Spells Druids blessed:

“Wake from your dream—
Rend moon from beam,
Rip night’s dark seam,
Take up your quest!”

~Castell Dinas Bran, Llangollen, Wales

**Legend holds that Arthur Pendragon did not succumb to his battle wounds and will one day return to rule Britain.*

CC Thomas

The Secrets of Oceans

The ocean is a dark entity,
jealously guarding the secrets
of thousands of years.

In his violent, murky depths
souls perpetually drown,
bony eyes scourged clean
by the gritty water;
the ebb and flow
of heartbeating in the night.

The ocean is a creature
of the moon, like
a werewolf or vampire,
lured from his lairs
to swallow whole
unsuspecting trespassers.

The ocean is the perfect murderer,
leaving no fingerprints
or witnesses, the only
evidence a pottery shard
spit upon the beach
a hundred years and

a thousand miles away.

The ocean is the black horse
of the pirates, until
the mastered became
the master.

Then the white foam caps
rolled and billowed,
hiding secrets that lie beneath
the watery dust of their crimes.

Decades of War

War can be seen most easily on the faces of our children
not yet having learned the politics of perception,
naked longing marking their age of innocence.
Blue eyes sparkle above ruby-cheeks, a sacrifice to patriotism,
waiting breathlessly for the return of a father,
listening deep into the night.

The first war, the Great one, when the suffering felt most keenly
at night.

Sleepless for the lonesome wail of the train, the children
wonder if, at last, tonight will bring the return of a father.
The iron monster crawls past drooping victory gardens, triumph
only perception,
and endless corn fields, returning the family sacrifice to
patriotism.

Padded feet down the hall, crawling into mothers' beds, the last
eve of innocence.

Years later, those same eyes, once full of innocence
now glance eternally skyward, no longer afraid of the night.
Racing to the backyard, praying for the tipped wings of a biplane,
patriotic
white belly glinting in a sky blue, red lips of children
rounded circles of hope, believing in the perception,
worlds away from the anguish, the heat, brought on by kamikaze
fathers.

Having been burned twice, now themselves to blame, the fathers

sign up again, so young they pack faded photographs and innocence.

Images flashed across the screen and colored their perception;
a green country with yellow enemies, hiding at night
gun blasts leveled at villages where the face of terror, the enemy,
is a child,
and the color red still flows, a tribute to patriotism.

In today's schools the Pledge is a forced patriotism,
smaller wars bring greater sacrifices for those lucky enough to
have a father.

Instant gratification with up-to-the-minute news, the children
see it on CNN, before the official notification, a televised death of
innocence,
a 4th of July firework show, red flashes against a black night,
orange and yellow terror alerts crawling across the screens of their
perception.

Little boys, death frozen with the Pause button, perceive
they should practice at this business of war, as their act of
patriotism;
playing games instead of playing outside, late into the night.
Orphans of divorce or discard, who never knew their fathers,
having been robbed by crime, or drugs, or man of their innocence,
having been born, turn instantly to adult, skipping a childhood.

Night after endless night, invisible mothers become the fathers,
a gentle perception that savagely fights against the sacrifice of
innocence,
standing patriotic, one hand on her heart, the other holding the
hand of her man child

J R Turek

Virtual Reality

I'm playing the best game of my life
high score toppled all the competitors
and I've gotten to Level 99, the toughest
bad-ass play ever invented and

my screen freezes. I click the mouse,
my controller, the keyboard but I'm still
frozen in place halfway through Level 99
and the world seems to stop spinning.

My breaths are shallow and rapid, pulse
is off the charts, and my level of control
is crumbling to dust, landing in a heap
in the pit of my stomach, exploding.

There on the wall beside my computer
is a cartoon: I hit escape – but I'm still here!
but I don't laugh or even smile. I hit escape
and I'm still an igloo in the middle of game play.

I hesitate, press all the buttons on the keyboard,
click the left right mouse buttons several times,
yank the controller cord from the usb port and
when nothing moves in the screen's frozen tundra,

I press ctrl-alt-delete. Lights flash like a disco strobe on/off on/off on/off in tempo to my heart rate, sirens blare, and the screen goes black except for a teeny tiny pinhole of light at the center of the screen.

I wait, fingers hover over the keyboard but touch nothing. Lights and sirens cease – the silence is unnerving, my fingers twitch to do something, anything but I control the urge to commit harikari

on my computer. Breathe in...out. Like the animation to close a Looney Tunes cartoon, the pinhole expands to fill the screen and Porky Pig stutters the worst phrase ever written –

Tha-tha-that-that's all folks!

– a tiny puff of virtual smoke, my screen goes dark. Game over is an understatement. I finally flex my fingers which have gone numb in anticipation of continuing play with the hope of reaching Level 100.

I turn off the tower, click my monitor off, pull all the plugs and wires that connect me to this simulated world offering fame and fortune in points and player high scores, and I go for a walk in the real world

where ctrl-alt-del doesn't exist.

Lesley Tyson

buttercream frosting

stumbling
into 23rd hour of wakefulness
my body confuses exhaustion
with hunger

i begin to envision walls of
sanctuary as cake
covered in paper-smooth buttercream frosting
decorated with strange fondant contortions

message whispered in strange voices
that might be computerized might be mechanical

tells me i can escape
this sleeplessness by eating
my way
through walls
finding nuts and raisins
nails and studs
carrot wiring

but i can't dream what is on the other side
and green apple licorice
ties the package of what covers red

traps itself between my teeth
to floss sense from wakeful hallucinations

even
as tired as i am
i can't look for invisible cake
to solve my problem

i avoid chipping my teeth on
the orange fondant of mind's private property
and swipe a fingerful of buttercream frosting
letting the hectic sweetness satisfy
need for sleep/

story in pieces

maybe if this morning
wasn't overcast
i might understand references
to dinosaurs and spiders in the article
about the bombed out city
where candles are the source of light
after dark
but the absence of trees in last night's dream
required a ziggurat journey
through a mix of rubble
freshly painted walls and
chrome and cracked glass tables
so this morning cutlery seems out of place
while i find myself looking for the treasure chest
in a drawer of suddenly rusty knives
almost as though opening
a time capsule from my future
with attempted explanation of
what today means except
it hasn't happened yet
such time travel confuses
no help to know
it will make sense tomorrow
i am distracted
trying to remember to whom
the sailboat and the bicycle belong
and in what tense

hidden meaning

the ghosts i write
transmute
dissipate
into mundane words
in nonsense order
creating peculiar metaphors

to hide in plain
confusing sight
from everybody but me

others trip over syntax
scrutinize impossible meaning
for ordinary messages

i accept surreal images
turning them inside out
twisting them round corners
to blur edges
of my now and present

i am not inscrutable
my altered understanding
reveals chronicles that cannot
be translated
into conventional sentences

thoughts discounted

for being outside normal usage
they give me labels
reconstruct me
into what they want me
to say

mainstream terms become
my facade
armor without weapon
behind this protective skin
i write the ghosts
haunting my life with meaning

Steve Wallace

Figure 8 Racing Legend

Starting on the front row
getting ready to go
Winning is on his mind
With another win sure to come
he's tough to beat no matter where he goes
He knows how to move and groove Through the Crossover
and get to the front of the pack
When the checkered flag flies

Ten years ago

Ten years ago I met you for
for the first time
Since then I could never get
you off my mind
I thought of you night and day
and knew someday I would
turn your loving warming heart my way
Since now you are mine to hold and love
all the time
I will always be true to your heart
and never let you down
I'll be the hero you been dreaming of
and rescue you from life's little ups and downs

Patricia Walsh

Mandatory Flesh

Mandatory flesh, cursed by these offsprings
recycled misgivings, bespoke statements
filing your own duties as best as possible
cold over sunshine brought over news stories
hapless flowers punctuating the weather.

Labouring with hair, dyed to more extinction,
infernal, eternal tattoos splay their wares
cutting through miracles, reminded of discovered youth
tolerated through history, not needed now,
forgiveness obscured a point worth taking.

Loving and loved, the perfect white elephant
kissed enough to lead the path of propriety,
fashionable stations beat a path to your ridicule
hardwired Catholics blocking comfortable parts
scarred through results not meant for some.

Poisoning atmosphere at every coffee break
needing a complication too much for all
spending loved where lies uncomplicated
mirroring these desperate hours like a shot
blowing minds but not enough for promotion.

Being lost and sorry, the hardware quips assimilated
not being touched is a surprising feat
sucked up to, under cover of professionalism
on the way of dead souls, apologies redundant
informatory, interrogated, won for this history.

Slam the Door on Your Way Out

sweat percolating down your imbued attempts
thinking of the worst no longer fanciful,
to apologise for belligerence these desperate hours
to go for walks and not count the cost
hiding behind locked doors, loving this aggression
exposition lighting through the drunken swathe.

This final declaration, seen coming for miles
scathing through the corridor, poison on a drip,
little left to lost or any place to go,
particulars on the table never concerns any
too lazy for redemption, or misplace a hatchet,
bleeding footsteps beating a path to perdition.

Loved by little, or by anyone's reckoning,
massacred by words lubricated by higher planes
informed by nature, not direct speech
poetry redacted by an irredeemable statement
giving trouble to this heartworm, inciting betrayal
singing for your country well out of this depth.

Children skirt on by, nothing to see here
a shroud of blood masquerading the higher good,
vomit and an axe to grind, still some stock-in-trade
terrorised, sinking fast appreciated, once dead
killed by courtiers on a studied whim
replaced too late, visceral out of time.

Jeff Wasch

I hope you see this

I thought I heard you laughing last night.
I turned around and I thought I saw you
smoking cigarettes in your bedroom
watching *Fraser* or something like that.

I remember we used to go out to eat whenever we went anywhere.
I always think about how the cheese would hang out of your
mouth.

We used to talk about everything all the time,
but now I talk to no one.

I took pleasure in the fact that you did not suffer for long,
but that just meant that you died faster.
Maybe I am selfish;
Maybe I am weak.

Anyway, I hope you see this.

Jon Wesick

Altar of Bedlam

I promised
not to disrupt
the writing workshop but
my poems worship
at the altar of bedlam.
They come with hip flasks of rye whiskey
and streetwalkers, in torn nylons, on their arms.

Harvard expelled them
because there are
 no safe spaces
 no safe spaces

So, they slam dance
to Blink 182 at 2 AM,
juggle plutonium detonators,
and offer a pen
that is an unmarked grave
in Andalucía.

Pick it up

Lynn White

Shall I Go Gently?

I've always been indecisive
and I'm still undecided
but soon
I will have to choose
whether to build my ship,
and furnish it
comfortably
and sail with you
gently
into the dark
into oblivion
gently
or to rage and fight
scratch and bite
kick and scream
so that you have to drag me
to where I will not follow
gently
into oblivion
into the darkness
the inevitability
of the end
whichever way I choose.

The Power of Gods

He would have had an easier journey
if he hadn't harmed Neptune's son.
He should have beat a hasty retreat
from the sailor-eating giant
leaving him unharmed by anybody
or nobody.

And Aeolus's gift of winds to speed them homewards
was not a blessing when Neptune heard about it.
So unsurprising that he magicked the sailors
into letting the winds out of their bag
with a chorus of "all together now".
What did he expect!
Gods are powerful,
some more than others.
The blinding his son was a fairly big offence in Neptune's eyes
and having control of the seas is a pretty impressive power.
So, Odysseus paid the price.

And then there was Circe.
Not only the goddess daughter of Titan,
Circe was also a witch,
of course she was,
she was female
so it went with the territory,
but her magic skills
were more renowned than most
and thus more feared by men

and rightly so.

I wonder if he ate pork in his year long stay.

I wonder if he counted the swine restored to sailors
or if he preferred not to know if any were missing.

I like to think he knew she bested him
with her roasted pork and crispy bacon.

Abby and Hanna Wilson

Ole Glory

When I see Ole Glory waving high,
She reminds us why heroes die.
They gave their all for liberty,
and justice for all

When I see Ole Glory waving high,
She waves proudly in the sky,
Faithfully watches over a land
Where freedom reaches out a hand.

When I see Ole Glory waving high,
I think of Neal Mccoy pledging her everyday.

Thomas Zampino

Ordinary Unknowns

If I were still awaiting a miracle, I could sit alone and rest.
Today is not that day. Today has been quite
ordinary.

What yet remains unknown, in the hours just ahead, will never be
enough to change anything.
Ordinary unknowns, these.

Ones like us that have long since given in, given up, given over.

Expecting nothing.

Except to wait.

Fortress

Words alone can let me in

or keep me out

A single touch can tell the story

or recall the lies

Morning can overtake the darkness

or fail to change a thing

I can stand here like some stupid fortress

or be just enough to keep you safe

Donna Zephrine

Chaos with COVID-19 Virus

Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.

Help reduce the spread of novel coronavirus and keep yourself and your community healthy.

Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.

Offer your help in getting those most at risk groceries and other goods.

Standard precautions for infection control. Stay at home as much as possible

About the Authors

Kim Acrylic is from Seattle Washington. She is a poet, novelist, and music interviewer. She collaborates with artists all over the world.

Austin Alexis is the author of the full-length collection *Privacy Issues* (Broadside Lotus Press, Madgett Poetry Award, 2014) and two poetry chapbooks previously published by Poets Wear Prada. His poetry and fiction have appeared in *Barrow Street*, *The Journal*, *Paterson Literary Review*, *Unstamatic*, the anthologies *Rabbit Ears: TV Poems* (NY Quarterly Press), *Poets4Paris* (Local Gems Press) and elsewhere. He has work forthcoming in *Maintenant 14*.

Dee Allen is an African-Italian performance poet based in Oakland, California. Active on the creative writing & Spoken Word tips since the early 1990s. He's author of 5 books [*Boneyard*, *Unwritten Law*, *Stormwater* and *Skeletal Black*, all from POOR Press, and his newest from Conviction 2 Change Publishing, *Elohi Unitsi*] and has 25 anthology appearances under his figurative belt so far.

C.B. Anderson was the longtime gardener for the PBS television series, *The Victory Garden*. His books of poetry, *Mortal Soup* and the *Blue Yonder* (2013) and *Roots in the Sky, Boots on the Ground* (2019) were both published by White Violet Press.

Matt Anstett is a sexually frustrated Torontonion with as much knowledge about gay culture as he has life direction. Through his words, he hopes to bring a brand of masculinity that encourages

others to embrace their own or shamelessly steal another - if it feels right.

Lynda Scott Araya is an educator, writer and editor from the South Island of New Zealand. Along with her husband, she co-owns a heritage accommodation provider. She has two children, one of whom is deceased. Her work has been published or is forthcoming in *Wards*, *The Pangolin Review*, *Verse-Virtual*, *The Blue Nib* and more.

Bud R. Berkich lives in Somerville, New Jersey. He writes in all genres, including screenplays and literary criticism. From 2003-2009, Bud was the co-founder and Director of the Borders Poetry Group in Bridgewater, NJ. From 2004-2008, he served as the liaison between poets and booksellers at three Dodge Poetry Festivals. Bud's favorite poets are William Carlos Williams and Emily Dickinson.

Cristina Marie Bernich is a former Teacher's College, Columbia University graduate, pediatric speech-language pathologist and mother of three rambunctious boys. She works full time with a school for brilliant children who have disabilities. She owns a small private practice in a small town in Long Island.

Sayan Aich Bhowmik is currently Assistant Professor in the Department of English at Shirakole Mahavidyalaya, Kolkata. A published poet, he is also the editor of the blog *Plato's Caves*, a semi-academic space for discussion on life, culture and literature.

Larry Blazek lives in a tiny cottage on the side of a remote hill. He plays his old guitar, gardens, and builds things. He has been pub-

lished in *Unal Songs*, *Red-headed Stepchild*, *Red Coyote*, and *Nightingales and Sparrows*.

Edward Charles Bossong, a recent college graduate, just completed his first self-published chapbook *Only From Pain* which explores the emotional demand of one-sided relationships. His poetry and art have been published in SUNY Oneonta's Art and Scope literary art magazine and the Nassau County Poet Laureate anthology. Aspiring to continue his career in higher education, he currently works in a local university's admissions office.

Michael Lee Bross hold an MFA in Poetry from Drew University where he was the recipient of the Jane Coil Cole Poetry Scholarship, and the 2015 Arts by the People Chapbook Award. His debut poetry chapbook, "Meditations on an Empty Stomach" was published by Finishing Line Press (October 2019), and his poems have appeared *Lifeboat*, *Mobius Poetry Magazine*, *Let's Talk Philadelphia*, *The Northeastern Poetry Review*, and most recently in ZPublishings *Best Emerging Poets Anthology 2019*. Michael currently teaches English at the University of Scranton and East Stroudsburg University.

Having lived in Southern New Jersey, **Kathy Burgin** has been enjoying the people, culture and beauty of Lancaster, PA for the past seven years. She is a retired educator of 32 years and the recipient of the Presidential Award for Excellence in Math and Science Teaching (PAEMST, 2010).

Ryan Buynak is a pugilist poet from New York City, who hates writing bios. He has published 10 books of poetry, which sit on bookshelves and backs of toilets all around the wide world. Every-

thing Ryan produces is shared under the brand Coyote Blood, which you should Google right away or else! He loves the Yankees, wearing overalls, and eating freshly baked chocolate chip cookies.

Mehmet Büyüktuncay is a Turkish expat currently living in Budapest. As a visiting academic, he lectures on modern Turkish language at ELTE University. He also teaches translation at Dokuz Eylül University in İzmir/TURKEY. His passion is to attest the gradual unearthing of dramatic irony in life histories and to enjoy the emergence of the inconsistent and bizarre in human existence as conveyed in life writing, extreme music and photography.

R.T. Castleberry is a widely published poet and critic. His work has appeared in *Roanoke Review*, *Trajectory*, *Blue Collar Review*, *White Wall Review*, *The Alembic* and *Visitant*. Internationally, Castleberry's work has been published in Canada, Wales, Ireland, Scotland, New Zealand, the Philippines and Antarctica.

Jamie Ann Colangelo is a Christian, living on Long Island. She is the mother of twins, Liane and Christopher, now adults. She is the author of *From The Father's Heart - A Book of Poems and Suggested Gifts To Inspire, Encourage and Bless Those in Your Circle of Influence*. She found her passion for poetry at the age of 12 and now enjoys using her gifts and talents to share God's love and encourage others on life's journey.

Ushiku Crisafulli is a chef, poet, playwright, actor, performance artist, musician and founder of the OpenMind Collective. His most recent publication, *Litany of Varied Experiences*, was published by

Local Gems Poetry Press in New York and he's currently overseeing their *Buzzin Bards* project in Manchester, England.

Lyndsey Collison lives in Dover, DE. Last summer two of her poems were published in *Delaware Bards Poetry Review*. She enjoys doing open mic nights and sharing her work.

Noah Count refers to the bulk of his "poems" as prose with crappy punctuation. Other than old and in the way, he enjoys late night cigars with the raccoons, preferably under a cloudless sky.

Linda M. Crate's works have been published in numerous anthologies and magazines both online and in print. She is a two-time push cart nominee and author of six poetry chapbooks, a micro-collection, and a novel. She recently published two full-length poetry collections: *Vampire Daughter* (Dark Gatekeeper Gaming, February 2020) and *The Sweetest Blood* (Cyberwit, February 2020).

Shawn Creech has lived the first 37 years of his life in the greater Raleigh area. He has two published works "Where The Oaks Meet The Pines" with NC Bard's and "Quarantine" in the anthology "The Revolution" out of Staten Island New York and hopes to self publish his own poetry book sometime this year.

Mike Croghan writes code by day, which has more in common with poetry than you might think. Mike's poems have been accepted to several anthologies, including NoVA Bards, The Poet's Domain, Thirteen Myna Birds, and The Stray Branch, and his first poetry chapbook, *Body and Soul*, was published by Local Gems Press in 2018. You can read more of his work at <https://freesourfruit.com>.

Ginger Dehlinger writes in multiple genres which includes two published novels, *Brute Heart* and *Never Done*. Her poetry and short stories have appeared in numerous journals and anthologies, and she has won two Pacific Northwest writing competitions for her creative nonfiction. Ginger can be found in Bend, Oregon or at www.gdehlinger.blogspot.com.

Abby DeSantis is a retired fashion executive from NYC who is currently living in rural northeastern Pennsylvania. Her poetry has appeared in *Pennsylvania Bards Poetry Review 2020*, *Thirteen Days of Halloween*, *Tiny Seeds Literary Journal* and *Covid-19 Poems from the Lockdown*. She is a member of Poets Live of Scranton and NEPA Pencils writing group. She lives with her husband and several furry and feathered friends.

John DeSantis is a retired NYC high school mathematics teacher recently relocated to rural Northeast Pennsylvania. He has been writing since about third grade. In addition to poetry he writes short stories and plays. His poetry has appeared in numerous publications.

William Doreski has published three critical studies and several collections of poetry. His work has appeared in many print and online journals. He has taught at Emerson College, Goddard College, Boston University, and Keene State College. His most recent books are *Water Music* and *Train to Providence*. williamdoreski.blogspot.com

Alex Edwards-Bourdrez's poems have appeared in various anthologies and have won recognition in Long Island contests. His collec-

tion, "Transformations," which won second prize in the 2019 NaPrWriMo contest, will be published soon by Local Gems Press.

Lynette G. Esposito, MA Rutgers has been published in North of Oxford, Fox Chase Review, Philadelphia Inquirer, Haiku Journal, Poetry Quarterly and others. She lives in Mont Laurel, NJ and was married to Attilio Esposito.

Melissa Esposito graduated from Chatham University with an MFA. Her work has appeared in "The Minor Bird," "Gemini Literary Magazine," "Poetry South Review," and "Angles Literary Magazine." Melissa lives in Pittsburgh where she is well on her way to becoming a crazy cat and horse lady, which are the same thing, just different animals.

Timothy Paul Evans came to writing poetry late (in his 60's). His poems have appeared in the 2016-2017 and 2018-2019 San Diego Poetry Annual as well as the 2018 National Beat Poetry Festival 10 Year Anthology. He has just completed his first book of poetry, *Litanies of the Moon* to be published later this year. He is also a finalist for the 2019 Pushcart Prize Best of Small Press Awards for poetry.

Paul Ferrell is a comic living in Las Vegas. His poems have appeared in *Jet Fuel Review*, *Pank* and *The Locust Review*. He can currently be seen performing comedy in his bathtub at home.

Tom Fillion is a graduate of the University of South Florida and lives in Tampa. He is the author of novels: *The Dream Mechanic*, *Giuseppe's Award*, *When The Moon Is In The Seventh House*, *New England Book of*

the Dead, and *Hubbly Bubbly*; and poetry: *Archipelago of Myself* and *The Sky's The Limit*, available at

<https://www.amazon.com/Thomas-Fillion/e/B00J938F2E>

Robert Fleming lives in Lewes, DE, USA. He is a member of the Rehoboth Beach Writer's Guild. In 2019, he was nominated for a Lambda Literary Award, as a contributor to the poetry anthology *Stonewall's Legacy*. In 1983, he won a US national student journalism award for his review of a Duran Duran concert in the Brandeis University student newspaper *The Justice*.

Joanne Kennedy Frazer is a retired peace and justice director and educator for faith-based organizations at state, diocesan and national levels. Penning her life's passions into poetry has become the delight and vocation of her silvering years. Her chapbook, *Being Kin*, was published in 2019. She lives in Durham, NC.

Tony Gentry has authored a novel *The Coal Tower*, a collection of stories *Last Rites*, the poetry collection *Yearnful Raves: 50 Poems*, and five young adult biographies. He is an occupational therapy professor at Virginia Commonwealth University and blogs at tonygentry.com.

F.I. Goldhaber's words capture people, places, and politics with a photographer's eye and a poet's soul. As a reporter, editor, and business writer, they produced news stories, features, editorials, and reviews for newspapers, corporations, governments, and non-profits in five states. Now paper, electronic, and audio magazines, books, newspapers, calendars, broadsides, and street signs display their poetry, fiction, and essays. <http://www.goldhaber.net/>

Hister Grant left school when he was 14 as he spiraled into a pit of mental illness which though he is heavily medicated continues to this very day. A cancer survivor he would describe himself as bitter but not angry. He identifies as asexual and is a moral nihilist.

Heidi C. Hallett sees creative expression through poetry as a way to collaborate and converse with others. She is a small animal veterinarian who paints with oils as well as words, often using these two mediums to complement each other. Her poetry has been published in several anthologies. www.aquaartideas.com.

Sean Hanrahan is a Philadelphian poet originally hailing from Dale City, Virginia. He is the author of *Safer Behind Popcorn* (2019 Cajun Mutt) and *Hardened Eyes on the Scan* (2018 Moonstone). Look out for his forthcoming chapbook, *Gay Cake* coming in March 2020 from Toho. He currently serves on the Moonstone Press Editorial Board, as head poetry editor for Toho, and workshop instructor for Green Street Poetry.

Jamila W. Harris is a published poet and novelist of both fiction and non-fiction literature. She resides in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Her works include "The Year We Didn't Vote", "When the Roses Smell Like Pooh-Pooh", "40 Rules to Being A True Diva", and "Five". She is currently working on her next non-fiction novel. All of her literature can be found at jamilawharris.com

Mark Andrew Heathcote is adult learning difficulties support worker, his poetry has been published in many journals, magazines and anthologies, he resides in the UK, from Manchester, he is the

author of “In Perpetuity” and “Back on Earth” two books of poems published by a CTU publishing group ~ Creative Talents Unleashed that can be found on Amazon.

Wendy Hoffman is a retired social worker. Karnac Books, London, published her memoirs in 2014 and 2015, and a co-authored book of essays, in 2017. Her books are now with Aeon Publishers in England and Routledge in New York. Her first book of poetry was published in 2016. A memoir is forthcoming. She has a MFA in creative writing.

Kevin Holmes: Criminal, no. Misogynist , no. Right guy, he hopes so. He likes words. Dance dance he says. He hopes they listen. He hopes you see.

Mark Hudson lives in Evanston Illinois, right near the border of Chicago, and Howard street which he has written about in his poem. He is a frequent contributor to Local Gems books, and happy to get in again.

Maria Iliou is an autistic Greek artist/ poet/ photographer/ actress/ model. She enjoys performing in live theatre. She connects through performing arts and finds solace and quietude within her inner soul self through meditation, energy and yoga. Maria is a published author, and designing her own documentaries. She plans to design her own college and magazine.

Brian Donnell James is an emerging writer who has been published in Africa, Europe, and throughout the United States. His work has received a letter of encouragement by the poet Nikki Giovanni, and

his work earned him praise as a finalist for the Virginia Prize, sponsored by the University of Virginia.

Nancy K. Jentsch has retired from teaching German and Spanish for over 35 years. She has recently published poetry in *Eclectica*, *3 Elements Review* and *Panoply*. In 2019, her poetry appeared in *Riparian* (Dos Madres Press) and *A Walk with Nature* (University Professors Press). Her chapbook, *Authorized Visitors*, was published in 2017. Her writer's page on Facebook is

<https://www.facebook.com/NancyJentschPoet/>

Barbara Kent studied poetry at SUNY Stony Brook on Long Island with the late June Jordan, author of *Things I Do in The Dark* and other books. Professionally, Barbara writes about technology, education, business and industry, but her passion is poetry, which is rarely lucrative. Her inspirations are the news, politics, societal observations and the dynamics of family relation.

Kathleen Kinsolving composed and performed rap songs in the 1980s. 25 years later she wrote and published two non-fiction books. She's also written screenplays, film essays, and a play. Kathleen's been teaching poetry to high school students for 12 years, and has written 15 poems since 2019.

Jerry Kirk is an emerging writer whose work has been published in Queen's University of Charlotte's literary magazine, 'Signet', 'Tangents' periodical, 'The Charlotte Poetry Review (90s volumes)' and other local publications. In addition to being a writer Jerry is also an award winning visual artist with paintings in many corporate and

private collections. He currently lives in Charlotte, North Carolina, with his wife Lisa and daughter Elysia.

Judson Klein is a writer of music, poetry and literature with a history of performing at open mics, coffee shops, book stores, small festivals and clubs. Growing up immersed in all genres of music and literature, both fiction and non-fiction, Judson has accumulated a portfolio of self-published novels, short stories and all-original records. Free downloads of the original music are available at:

Soundcloud.com/Judson-Klein.

Caitlyn Lacovara is a true renaissance woman with many passions, one of which is writing. Find her on instagram @caitthepoet.

Tom Lagasse's poetry has been published in *Word Mill Magazine*, *Wine Drunk Sidewalk*, *The Monterey Poetry Review*, *Wax Poetry & Art*, iamnotasilentpoet.com, *Plum Tree Tavern* and two anthologies. Other writing has appeared in *Edible Nutmeg*, *The Feminine Collective*, *Faith, Hope & Fiction*, and *The Sun*. He lives in Bristol, CT.

Jim Landwehr Jim Landwehr has published five poetry collections. He also has two books, *The Portland House* and *Dirty Shirt*. He has non-fiction stories published in *The Sun*, *StoryNews* and others. His poetry has been featured in *Rosebud*, *Off the Coast Poetry Journal*, and many others. Jim was the 2018-2019 poet laureate for the Village of Wales, Wisconsin. For more on his work, visit: <http://jimlandwehr.com>

Edward Lee's poetry, short stories, non-fiction and photography have been published in Ireland, England and America. His debut poetry

collection *Playing Poohsticks On Ha'Penny Bridge* was published in 2010. His blog/website can be found at <https://edwardmlee.wordpress.com>

Elaine Leet is holed up near Moscow, PA, with her sled dog Cleo near a stream in the woods. She enjoys the woods. Elaine has published a novel titled *Child of a Troubled Land* and is currently working on expanding her repertoire.

Amanda Little is a mother of two and a native of Salina, KS who has been teaching ELA and Public Speaking for the last 7 years. Her first publication was published in the local newspaper when she was in kindergarten, a short poem about Christmas trees.

Paulie Lipman is a former bartender/bouncer/record store employee/Renaissance Fair worker/two time National Poetry Slam finalist and a current loud Jewish/Queer/ poet/writer/performer. Their poetry collections *from below/denied the light* and *sad bastard soundtrack* are available from Swimming With Elephants Publications.

Jeff Livingston is a Long Island based entertainer who performs under the stage name Annie Manildoo. Jeff is a student of English education and a local political activist. More information can be found about Jeff and his performance career at www.anniemanildoo.com

Patricia Lynne (Janke) is a retired court reporter who found a passion for writing at a Hart Part Writing Class. Her works have been published both locally and nationally. Her poetry has won numerous awards including first place in Bo Carter Contest.

Cristian Martinez is a 13-year-old 8th-grade student at Ronkonkoma Middle School and award winning poet. *Glimpse of Tomorrow* is Cristian's first book. He has been mentored by Robert Savino for the past two years which has helped Cristian fine-tune his craft. Cristian also loves to play soccer.

Louis Mateus started to share his poetry publicly after many years of cultivating the craft of poetry privately while launching his career in the mental health field. He has been published in various publications: *The Federal Poet*, *The Listening Eye*, *Skidrow Penthouse*, and *Nova Bards* among them. He is an avid reader of poetry, believing this to be the key to good writing, and is very much interested in the therapeutic properties of poetry, in study and practice.

Michael McCarthy resides in Port Jefferson with his wife, Toni Ann. He teaches theology at the Mary Louis Academy in Jamaica, Queens. He is a lifetime explorer of the sacred and the author of *The Ways of Grace: A Book of Poems* (Goldfinch Publishing, 2016).

Rosemary McKinley is an eclectic writer who has had poetry, short stories, and non fiction published, as well as three historical books. She has been doing book presentations all over Long Island. <https://www.rosemarymckinley.com>

Joan McNerney's poetry has been included in many literary magazines such as *Seven Circle Press*, *Dinner with the Muse*, *Poet Warriors*, *Blueline*, and *Halcyon Days*. Four Bright Hills Press Anthologies, several *Poppy Road Review Journals*, and numerous *Spectrum Publications* have accepted her work. Her latest title, *The*

Muse In Miniature, is available on Amazon.com and Cyberwit.net. She has four Best of the Net nominations.

Gene McParland is a graduate from Queens College and possesses graduate degrees from other institutions. He has always had a passion for poetry and the messages it can convey. His works have appeared in numerous poetry publications. He is the author of *Baby Boomer Ramblings, a collection of essays and poetry*, and *Adult Without, Child Within*, a collection on poetry celebrating the child within. In addition, he acts in local theater and videos, and has written several plays.

Bruce McRae, a Canadian musician currently residing on Salt Spring Island BC, is a multiple Pushcart nominee with over 1,600 poems published internationally in magazines such as *Poetry*, *Rattle* and *North American Review*. His books are 'The So-Called Sonnets' (Silenced Press); 'An Unbecoming Fit Of Frenzy' (Cawing Crow Press); 'Like As If' (Pski's Porch); 'Hearsay' (The Poet's Haven).

Rose Miller is a geriatric poet who came late to the art of molding words into feelings and vice versa. She lives in the Village of Malverne, New York, known by some as the "Mayberry of Long Island" assuming you are old enough to remember when TV shows were in black and white.

Chris Montgomery is a blue-collar minimalist who cherishes synchronicity and metaphysics.

Kathleen Moore is a Graduate of Stockton University. She currently

works as a library assistant in Cape May County. She is and administrator of the Jersey Cape Writers' Facebook page. Kathy blogs about her blessings at <http://kathswriting.blogspot.com/>. Lives by the motto: "Take Time to Watch a Sunset"

Guna Moran is an Assamese poet and critic. He lives in Assam, India. His poems are being published in various international magazines, journals, e-zines and anthologies.

Ann-Marie Murzin is an entrepreneurial lawyer and emerging poet whose work draws upon images encountered in Westfield, NJ where she lives with her two children, and their feisty hound named Autumn. Find out more about her work at www.murzinlaw.com.

Roxana Negut was born in 1981 in Bucharest, Romania. She studied at the Faculty of Philosophy and Journalism and worked as an editor, copywriter, content writer and journalist for various publications. She writes children's literature, poetry and satirical prose. In 2019 she published *The dead do not Want Water* through Lumen Publishing House.

Michelle Oram is a published author; her book *Songs of the Woods* encourages children to begin and end each day with a song from the heart. Her new book *The Healing Powers of Nature & Music* to be published this year will help adults explore ways nature and music can heal, balance and empower their own uniqueness. When she's not writing Michelle is singing with her jazz band "...and All That Jazz" and performing her Jazz Poetry.

Carl "Papa" Palmer of Old Mill Road in Ridgeway, Virginia, lives

in University Place, Washington. He is retired from the military and Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) enjoying life as “Papa” to his grand descendants and being a Franciscan Hospice volunteer. Carl is a Pushcart Prize, Best of the Net and Micro Award nominee.

Tom Pawlowski (tomp) is a life-long resident of South Jersey. In 2012 he made a New Year's resolution to write a haiku everyday, and he hasn't stopped yet. He has previously been published in *NJ Bards South Poetry Review* and *Bards Against Hunger - New Jersey* in 2019 and participated in *Pitman Poems on Parade* from 2015 through 2018. His day job is in engineering.

Joseph S. Pete is an award-winning journalist, the author of *Lost Hammond, Indiana*, an Iraq War veteran, an Indiana University graduate, a book reviewer, and a frequent guest on Lakeshore Public Radio. He is a Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net nominee who was named the poet laureate of Chicago BaconFest. His literary work and photography have appeared in far too many places to list here.

Mary C. M. Phillips is a caffeinated wife, mother, and writer. Her work has appeared in numerous national bestselling anthologies. As a musician, she has toured and recorded with artists such as Matthew Sweet, Chris Stamey, Rob Bartlett, Don Dixon and Marti Jones. Her poetry has been featured in *Bards Annual 2019*, *The Mondo*, and *Pathways to Dreams* (Local Gems). She blogs at CaffeineEpiphanies.com

Past Poet Laureate of Kansas (2017-2019) **Kevin Rabas** teaches at Emporia State University, where he leads the poetry and playwriting tracks. He has twelve books.

Allie Rieger is a lifelong resident of Suffolk County. She has a deep love for any and all art forms. She began to write poetry many years ago but only recently started sharing. She has one previous published poem in *Suffolk County Poetry Review 2019*.

Sarah Ritter is a poet who published her first collection *Inspirations, Transformations and Revelations: A Poetic Expression of My Personal Journey*. She is also a contributing poet in *We Are Beat* and *Goddess Anthology* by The National Beat Poetry Foundation and the *Connecticut Bards Northwest Poetry Review* by Local Gems Press.

Marc Rosen lives, writes, and revels in *CHAOS*, in all aspects of life. He has begun his studies in Law at Hofstra University, and lives in a small studio apartment that is close enough to every place he needs to go. He is no longer allowed to use the Shape Water cantrip when playing Dungeons and Dragons, nor is he allowed to run Halflings after the Tentacle Incident. This is the fifth anthology project Marc has led.

Matthue Roth's work has appeared in *Tin House* and *Ploughshares*, and was shortlisted for the *Best American Short Stories*. His picture book, *My First Kafka*, was called "eerie and imaginative" by The New Yorker. By day, he's a writer at Google, and lives in Brooklyn with his daughters.

Narges Rothermel, a retired nurse, writes poetry in Farsi and English. Her poems are published in many anthologies. Her first book, *Wild Flowers*, was published in 2010. Her second, *Rays and Shadows*,

was in 2012, and then *Side Roads* in 2017. She is on the NCPLS Advisory Board

Wayne Russell has been widely published in creative writing magazines. From 2016-17 he founded and edited *Degenerate Literature*. In late 2018, Ariel Chart nominated Wayne for his first Pushcart Prize for the poem :”Stranger in a Strange Town”. *Where Angels Fear* is his debut e-book, currently out of print.

Pat Gallagher Sassone is a novelist and a poet. Her YA book, *Hanging in the Stars* has been a hit with high school students. Her poetry appeared in *Nasty Women Poets* and *13 Days of Halloween*. She believes in the power of poetry, especially in these difficult days.

Daniel Scenters has been writing poetry since the age of 17, working tirelessly to better his craft and genuinely express himself through verse. He is currently writing a book of poetry he hopes to have published in the near future.

Sofia Senesie is a young writer from Warren County. She writes to combat the chaos going on in both the outside world and her own. She likes to recall the old saying: the pen is mightier than the sword. She wants all writers to know that in these chaotic times we can build up our courage and strength on the battlefield training with our ink blades.

Author of five collections, **Shoshauna Shy** is the recipient of two Outstanding Achievement Awards from the Wisconsin Library Association, and was a finalist for the Tom Howard/Margaret Reid poetry prize sponsored by Winning Writers.

Emily-Sue Sloane writes poetry to help her cope with life's accelerating complexity and absurdity. Her poems have appeared in *Bards Annual 2019*, *Suffolk County Poetry Review*, *Amethyst Review*, *Front Porch Review*, *Avocet*, *The Weekly Avocet*, *Medicinal Purposes*, and *Performance Poets Association Literary Review*. She lives in Huntington Station, NY.

Elizabeth Spencer Spragins is a poet and writer who taught in community colleges for more than a decade. Her tanka and bardic verse in the Celtic style have been published extensively in Europe, Asia, and North America. She is the author of *With No Bridle for the Breeze: Ungrounded Verse* and *The Language of Bones: American Journeys Through Bardic Verse*.

CC Thomas's poetry has been selected for inclusion in various poetry anthologies, journals, and magazines, and has been awarded several prizes. Currently, CC calls Northeastern Pennsylvania home.

J R (Judy) Turek, 2019 Walt Whitman LI Poet of the Year, Superintendent of Poetry for the LI Fair, Bards Laureate 2013-2015, 23 years as Moderator of the Farmingdale Creative Writing Group, editor, workshop leader, author of five poetry books. 'The Purple Poet' lives on Long Island with her husband, Paul, her dogs, and her extensive shoe collection.

Lesley Tyson from Reston, Virginia, has had work in issues of *The Poet's Domain* and *NoVA Bards* and released his first book of poetry *journey through red heaven* in

2019. Lesley is a regular contributor to several local Northern Virginia poetry groups and co-leads Poets Anonymous ©, Northern Virginia's longest running open reading.

Steve Wallace is an award winning Songwriter and poet who has been writing over 35 years. Steve also likes watching car racing at the local race car track in Anderson, Indiana.

Patricia Walsh was born and raised in the parish of Mourneabbey, Co Cork. Her first collection of poetry titled *Continuity Errors* was published in 2010, and a novel titled the *Quest for Lost Éire*, in 2014. She has a further collection, titled *Outstanding Balance*, scheduled for publication in April 2020.

Jeff Wasch is an MA candidate in West Chester University's philosophy program. His interests include existentialism, phenomenology, and philosophy of mind. He also likes to write poetry and eat a lot.

Jon Wesick is a regional editor of the *San Diego Poetry Annual*. He's published hundreds of poems and stories in journals such as the *Atlanta Review*, *Berkeley Fiction Review*, *Metal Scratches*, *Pearl*, *Slipstream*, *Space and Time*, *Tales of the Talisman*, and *Zahir*. Jon authored *Words of Power*, *Dances of Freedom*, several novels and *The Alchemist's Grandson Changes His Name*. **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.**

Lynn White lives in north Wales. She was shortlisted in the Theatre Cloud 'War Poetry for Today' competition and has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and a Rhysling Award. Her poetry has appeared in

many publications including *Apogee*, *Firewords*, *Capsule Stories*, *Light Journal* and *So It Goes*. Find Lynn at: <https://lynnwhitepoetry.blogspot.com>

Twin sisters **Abby** and **Hanna Wilson**,¹² love writing poetry and music. When they are not writing they love bowling, racing BMX bikes and helping others in their community.

Thomas Zampino is an attorney in private practice in New York City. He and his wife have raised two daughters, four cats, two dogs, and various other domesticated creatures over the past three decades. He formerly blogged at *Patheos* and now writes reflections and poetry at *The Catholic Conspiracy*. One of his poems was published in *Bards Annual 2019* and another in *Nassau County Voices in Verse*.

Donna Zephryne was born in Harlem and grew up in Bay Shore, NY. She is a combat veteran who completed two tours in Iraq. Since returning home Donna enjoys sharing her experiences and storytelling through writing. She has been published in the *New York Times*, *Bards Annual*, *Oberon*, *The Mighty*, and countless others. She is studying for her licensing in social work.



Local Gems Poetry Press is a small Long Island, NY based poetry press dedicated to spreading poetry through performance and the written word. Local Gems believes in building local poetry communities through publications and events.

Local Gems has published over 250 titles.

www.localgemspoetrypress.com