



The Big Windows Review

Issue 16 Summer 2019

The Big Windows Review is a publication of the Writing Center at Washtenaw Community College, Ann Arbor, MI, USA. We publish poems and short (500 words or less) prose.

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The Big Windows Review

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Contents

Christine Stephens-Krieger	Myth of the Perfect Girl	4
Paul Kindlon	The Ideal Woman	6
Thomas Piekarski	Ars Historica	8
Brady Harrison	Buffalo Jump Brother	10
Roy Bentley	Ferret in a Brothel	12
Ian C Smith	Troubled in the Roaring Forties	13
John Grey	My War and Peace	14
Stacey Z Lawrence	Last First Night	16
Joey Nicoletti	Higher Unlearning	18
Charles Rammelkamp	What's in a Name	20
	Thank You for Being a Friend	22
Alan Britt	Last Chance	24
Luke Skoza	Body Framing Ceiling	26
Edward Lee	Too Late	27
Lori Ness	Code Blue///	28
	Ms./Ms/M/igraine Diary	29
Sonnet Mondal	Journeying	30
Tom Laichas	The Wait Won't Be Long	31
Simon Perchik	Five Poems	32
Sara Epstein	Loosestrife	36
John L. Stanizzi	Two Acrostics from <i>Pond</i>	37
Mark Vogel	At the Edge	38
Emma Demopoulos	Midnight Swimming	40
Rick Pieto	"As I was driving"	41
Kyle Kutz	Route 283	42
Ernesto Reyes	Day-dreamer	43
Peycho Kanev	Irreversible	44
Martina Reisz Newberry	Initialed	45
Contributors		47

Christine Stephens-Krieger

Myth of the Perfect Girl

I reached perfection by age twelve,
but no one noticed. Perfection

happens everywhere, all
the time not knowing itself,

perfect like dirt, like a squid,
perfection under wraps, enspelled,

swapped with changelings,
forced to live a goblin life,

hidden under veils, sometimes buried,
too precious, thrown in a pond to keep,

treasure only worth its legend,
perfect glimmer in the dark.

Once, I was every saint,
had a map for every step,

bought the magic, bookworm amateur
armed with a pen and a timid knock.

Perfect, I watched others transform,
fall into ruin when they ate the magic beans.

I watched for the color change, texture
shift, the red marks and wild looks,

the smirking and escaping, the finding
a hundred ways to break their shells.

When I was perfect, adulthood
was the land of broken dreams.

A witness, I swore to never get fat,
never have kids, never marry.

Perfect, I signed my name on every page
through my School Days book. Perfect,

I saw no reason I might change.
Perfect black and white shapes

cast perfect shadows, make perfect sense.
I tell myself, I'll never make that face, never

eat the whole cake, won't wear that, will not—
but then make the face, eat the cake, wear the dress,

those shoes, get in the car, go for the ride. Fall.
Perfect falling. Blossoms descend just so.



Paul Kindlon

The Ideal Woman

I was in Paris on assignment, but I was given a day to adjust and re-orient after having spent a year in Syria. My options were limited: stand in line with five-hundred Chinese tourists at the Eiffel Tower or visit the Louvre.

Before I went to the museum I chose to enhance my aesthetic experience by taking a hit of pure acid. I then stopped at an up-scale café for some quiche and a nice bottle of Bordeaux. The name of my server was Pierre. How's that for a nom de guerre? I spoke in impeccable French making sure to over-emphasize my American accent. Oh Pretty Pierre. I'm sure after work he exchanged his black vest for a yellow one. The French have to be the biggest complainers in the world, am I right?

By the time I got to the Louvre the acid was starting to kick in. This could get interesting.

Everyone has their favorites, right? I happen to like the Impressionists. Yes I know that "mind blown" is a tired old cliché, but on acid the term was "le mot juste."

My next stop was *Giaconda* herself—LV's little masterpiece. I swear . . . the painting seemed to beckon to me with some mystical magnetic force. As I drew nearer I suddenly realized why so many artists and critics believe the painting to be so extraordinary.

"My God she's beautiful!" I uttered a bit too loudly.

Her enigmatic smile instantly changed into a frown. Those gentle eyes became fierce and defiant. She was clearly angry.

"How dare you objectify me!" she said.

"But Lisa . . . I'm just being honest."

“You are focusing on my physical features as if they alone define who I am. Moreover, I know what men are doing when they call you beautiful. It is an attempt at leverage over a woman. To make her self-conscious of how she looks.”

I happen to love feisty women. And her sassy attitude really turned me on.

“I want to kiss you Mona Lisa!”

At that point two security guards grabbed me by my melting arms and took me to a room with no paintings. I was still seeing colors though. They started playing fifty questions with me which was ridiculously ironic, but it was messing with my high as well. To save my ass I had to blow my cover and confess that I worked for CNN and the CIA.

Their supervisor called the embassy and within minutes I was released with polite apologies and two free tickets to the Moulin Rouge.



Thomas Piekarski

Ars Historica

Ramses II had hieroglyphs of his father Seti I
Chiseled off the giant columns at ancient Karnak
And replaced with his own in an effort to swindle
History, and fool future generations into believing
The entire temple had been built during his reign.

But you can't hide from history, nor alter it.
Once something is done it's done forever.
Quasars billions of light years from Earth
May never be discovered by humans despite
Amazing technology, yet this won't alter facts.

Facts support the quasars, Hittites, World Wars.
Ignorance of them can't erase their efficacy.
The words wasted attempting to alter reality
Fall on cosmic ears deaf to insubstantial claims.
Humans can be mistaken, not so the universe.

You may have seen it with your own baby blues,
Heard it from a media source you always believe,
Experienced it in a frenzy of religious revelation,
Touched its fuzzy tentacles with fingers aflame,
Dreamed it repeatedly thinking yourself certain,

Yet it still could be contrary to history's physics.
I think perhaps there are infinite dimensions
To time and space, but in this fragile life we lead
Will only know three or four, and many will plod
Along the path of ignorance while only observing

Two or three, essentially trapped in fleshy shells,
Chirping in the trees of free will, observed by gods
Manufactured by clouded minds of righteous clerics.
But this is no reason to cry or commit suicide since
History whispers sotto voce in our malleable minds.

We have the arts diverting our attention from death,
Houses and countries and cars and plants to occupy
Our fallible senses. We've neighbors between which
To build temporary fences, governments that preside,
And history laughing gaily at man's misinformation.



Brady Harrison

Buffalo Jump Brother

Sometimes, when a buddy asks a favor, you agree whether you want to or not.

One day, your buddy—call him Mackey—says to you and another buddy: If it ever looks like it's going to happen again, I want you to kill me. You look at Arlo—he's wiry, ropey, his bullshit-detector running hot, the leader—and he nods: you know why Mackey asks what he asks, and after all that spite and ugliness, you know he means it.

Mackey had said it: "I had to marry her so I could divorce her."

A few years later, Arlo brings Mackey to Montana to see you. The old buddies getting together, the Buffalo Jump Collective, catching up, sipping whiskey, telling lies, cutting up, talking music, guitars, cigarettes. But Arlo knows, and you know—and Mackey's gotta know—that the trip West isn't just for fun, for old times, because, yes, he's done it again, and you and Arlo owe him, you made your promise, and Arlo's at the fridge at 6:00 a.m., sipping a Moose Drool, cracks one for you, and a half-hour later the three of you leave for Glacier, Going to the Sun, and you pull over, and everybody knows how it has to be.

Arlo says: "Call it a hike," and Mackey looking at the clouds says he always liked Montana, says it's not like Gasoline Lake, that's for sure, his hometown in the Illinois bottoms along the Mississippi. Oil refineries, superfund sites, depopulating towns, Church of Christ and biker bars, streams with names everybody knows but that don't appear on maps.

Later, the Rangers will say, Where did he come from, from a plane? Christ, how far did this guy fall? Or maybe he's falling still, your brother, your Buffalo Jump brother.



Roy Bentley

Ferret in a Brothel

I was a gift from Theodore “Teddy” Roosevelt
after he was elected President of the United States.
The piano player with a glass eye took charge of me

and a Colt pistol that once belonged to Wyatt Earp,
the lawman-friend of Mr. Roosevelt who frequented
Madam Satterfield’s. My first home was a hatbox.

The whores passed me around until I bit one—
she’d fallen asleep in my nest of sheets. Rolled
over, and so it was wake the sleeper or suffocate.

A tolerance for being gently handled went the way
of dying, dark-skinned men: out the door. Gone.
A war and then my house of women scattered

by fire, fingers of flame creeping up the skirts
of the drapes like the hands of Johns. The shrieks
of trick babies trapped upstairs—desiccated bodies

black and smooth as fur in the keeping of the men
who carried them down into the street. I escaped
that and the thud of engines, the crying woman

swaddled in a sheet on a bright avenue. I was
off into the grasses then into light again. It’s hard
being a ferret, but not as hard as being a whore

or the President of the United States.

Ian C Smith

Troubled in the Roaring Forties

Rain on a caravan roof in the Furneaux Group.
Awake late, his mind roils like the encircling sea
these dwindling fugitive nights, roils in chaos
he knows no escape from, but wants to,
toil over, children adults, problems reflecting
their parents', grandparents', as it is in fiction,
usual flaws, deceit, greed, a touch of the crazies.

He hears no vehicles at this witching time.
The rain's runoff affects these lonely rutted roads.
When he came down the dark mountain earlier
he bounced and jerked like an accident test dummy.
Here in the winter dark he feels rising dread,
reads, slowing, a novelist's memoir of his parents,
an inventory of muted regret steered toward death.

Earlier still, cloud mantling jagged mountaintops,
he waded in brine until staggering out bone-cold,
unnoticed, skin, sun spots multiplying, mottled.
He has medicine, mourns people he once cared for,
mourns Donald Trump's effect on the not guilty,
seeks solace in his football team's fraught season,
down but fighting, a trace of the past's conjured magic.

John Grey

My War and Peace

Nothing better than the gentle grade
of a river bank,
book in hand,
tree-sheltered,
breaking with plot and characters
now and then
to take in a scenery
that is anything but
what the author's been describing.

No smoky, loud, ferocious,
battle scene here.
Just a stream
a little less idle than myself.
A fenced field
where a herd of cows
nibble noiselessly.

The squirrels aren't concerned
about a further division
approaching from the rear.
The chipmunks are wary of hawks
not advancing cavalry.
Napoleon is a name unknown
to the wildflowers hereabouts.
And the elms don't care a hoot
for Natasha and her suitors.

My eyes begin to close.
It's not you, Tolstoy.
It's my surrounds.
Yes, your war had me
thrillingly engaged.
But, as always,
I settle for peace.



Stacey Z Lawrence

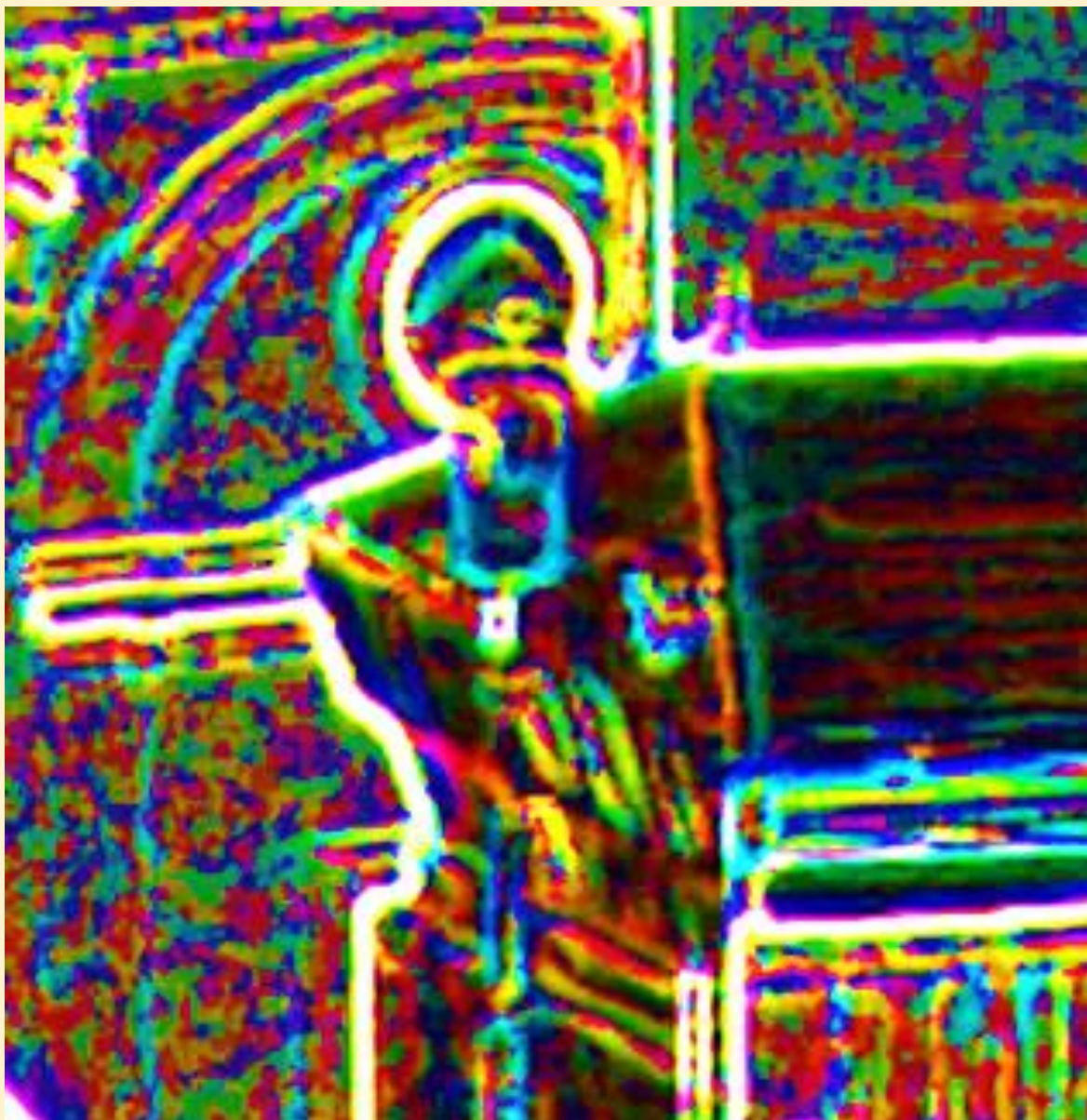
Last First Night

I pose we smoke
(the pleasure we can
still partake in)
but
7 becomes 8
8 becomes 9
and you are still
on the other side
of the locked door,
ursus in hibernation.

So I mark time
mull red wine
with cardamom
and lemon peel
pour the spirit
into porcelain
teacups and pass
to my teenage children
late popsicles
on a summer night.

At 11:55 you appear
your once strong body
fading with the year
you hobble a few steps
in striped pajamas
that Jew from Treblinka
watching *Anderson Cooper*.

I graze your shoulder,
strands of
your silver hair—
too weak to inhale
you peck me instead
with chapped lips as
your last year begins.



Joey Nicoletti

Higher Unlearning

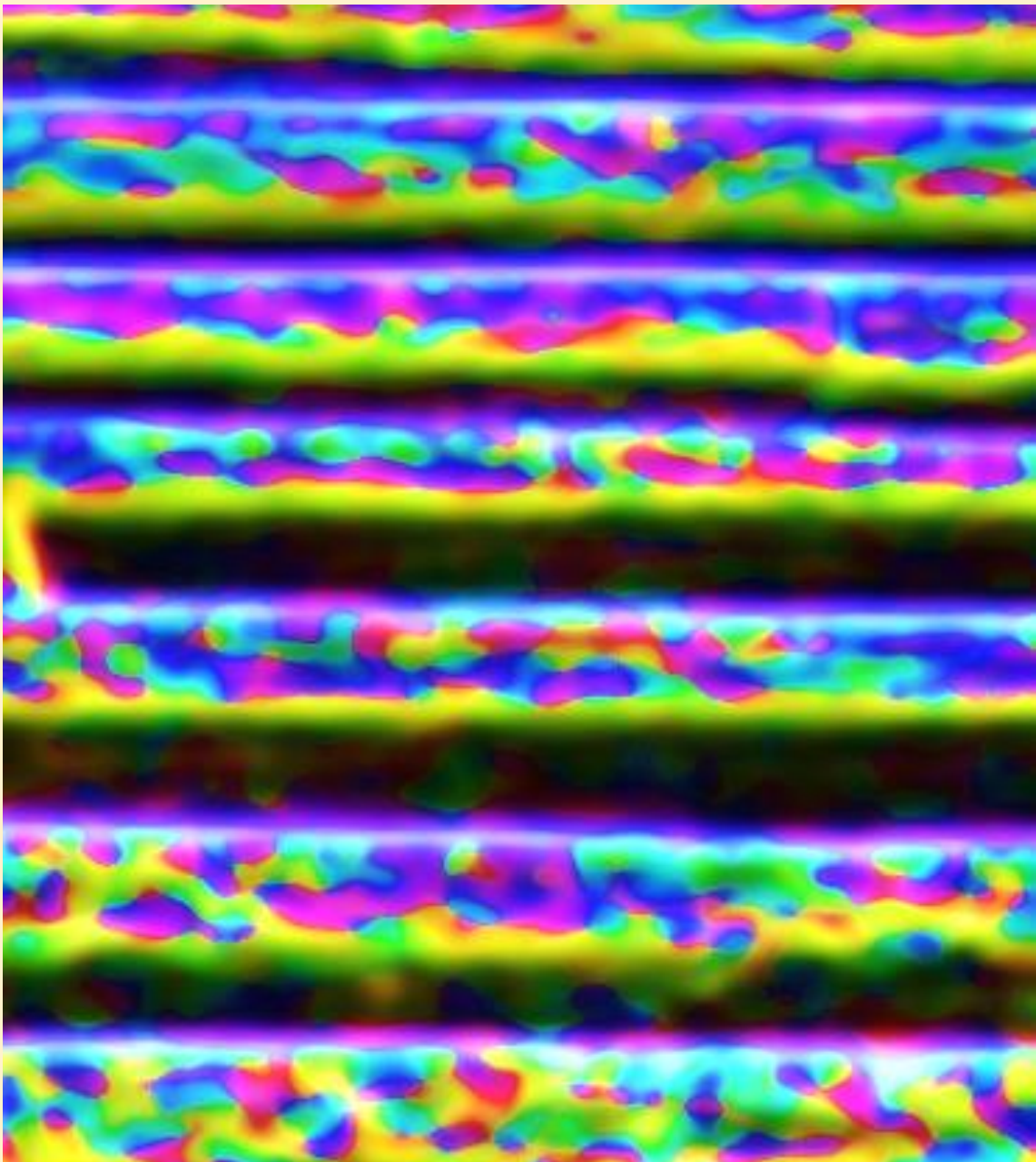
Do I have to shower every day
to keep my Mediterranean
hair and skin
in tip-top shape
as I was taught
when I was a child?

I admire the angel
on top of my Christmas tree,
who looks the way I feel
this afternoon, as if I can close my eyes
and smile at anything,
even when the cat climbs
a strand of silver garland
and kicks a ball and bell

to the rug. I am unlearning.
A requiem of sleet
falls hard on the hood
of the SUV in the drive,
its windshield wiper blades
raised like arms without hands.

I discover some paint, on the wall
beside the base of my bathtub,
rolled like scrolls
written by prophets of steam
from shared showers
and post-workday soaks. Then
I watch the dogs and cat
run back and forth with delight;

when they burn off their nervous energy. Friends, if you want to see something beautiful, look around you and in the mirror. If you want to hear something peaceful, take this moment and breathe it out. I am unlearning.



Charles Rammelkamp

What's in a Name?

Morna said, "Do you think he recognized me? Could you tell?"

I'd barely noticed the guy when he sailed past on his bike—a day-glo blue helmet, dark glasses. Who could tell what he saw? Besides, we were still in Morna's car at the time, just pulled up to a meter.

"We had a very brief affair," Morna explained. "We were both on a panel judging a poetry contest. My marriage was at a low-point then, and there was a lot of alcohol involved. But I knew it wasn't going anywhere. I didn't really like him, to tell you the truth. He was a snob, so superior."

We were having a pizza after a political rally. Another anti-Trump event. These meetings get to be tiring after a while, the need to sustain my outrage, but Morna and I hadn't seen each other for a while, so it was an excuse to get together for lunch.

"He was married, too. I wonder if he still is. I don't see how anybody could live with him, but Bob and I are still together, so who knows? How's it with you and Fred?"

"Ted. We're still married. Everything's fine, actually. It's been nineteen years. Wow. He's my second husband. The twins are from my first marriage."

"That's right, Ted. How are the twins?"

"You really don't think he saw me? Recognized me? I didn't know he rode a bike. Well, it figures."

"How do you mean?"

“He was always worried about his carbon footprint. Don’t get me wrong. I think that’s legitimate. It’s just that he’s, I don’t know. Wow, I hadn’t seen him in ten, fifteen years.”

“I really couldn’t tell if he saw us or not, Morna. What’s his name, anyway?”

“You know, I’ve actually forgotten! It might have been Ted, to tell you the truth. Or maybe Fred.”

I wondered how many affairs Morna’d had. She was forever complaining about Bob. She used to drink quite a lot, too.



Charles Rammelkamp

Thank You for Being a Friend

In the men's locker room, Buddy Haskell was sitting in one of the faux leather lounge chairs watching a re-run of an episode of *The Rifleman*, a black and white western that aired in the late 1950's, early 1960's, starring Chuck Connors as Lucas McCain. Buddy watched this show every Saturday morning at the gym. I'd just been for my swim and was headed toward the showers when I heard the kid on the show, Mark, Lucas McCain's young boy, say, "I can even say all seven stanzas of 'Sheridan's Ride.'"

Wait, a TV show where a kid recites poetry? Were people just more literate back then, was reciting a poem on a TV show not a big deal? "Sheridan's Ride," a Civil War poem by Thomas Buchanan Read, a portrait painter as well as a poet, though more popular in Florence than the United States. Portraits of Lincoln, Longfellow, Tennyson, the Brownings, William Henry Harrison. "Sheridan's Ride" among his most famous poems.

On *The Rifleman*, General Philip Sheridan had just ridden up to the McCain Ranch looking for a place to stay. Mark, who worshipped the man the way very young children admire army soldiers, began to recite, "Up from the south at break of day ..." and through to the last line of the first stanza, "And Sheridan twenty miles away."

But after one verse, Sheridan interrupted him. "Sheridan twenty miles away," he scoffed. "Now that's what a man gets for trying to serve his country. They write a poem about him!" An attitude that may be the most American of attitudes. Sneering at literature.

In real life, Sheridan was a career U.S. army officer, played a vital role in the Appomattox campaign that brought the Civil War to an end. He was also the one who initiated the scorched earth policy Sherman would later follow through Georgia to the sea.

After the war, Grant sent Sheridan out west where he fought in the Indian Wars—The Great Sioux War, the Red River War, the Ute War. Popular history credits Sheridan with saying, "The only good Indian is a dead Indian."

In 1870 Grant sent Sheridan overseas to observe the Franco-Prussian War, and the next year he was in Chicago to coordinate military relief efforts during the

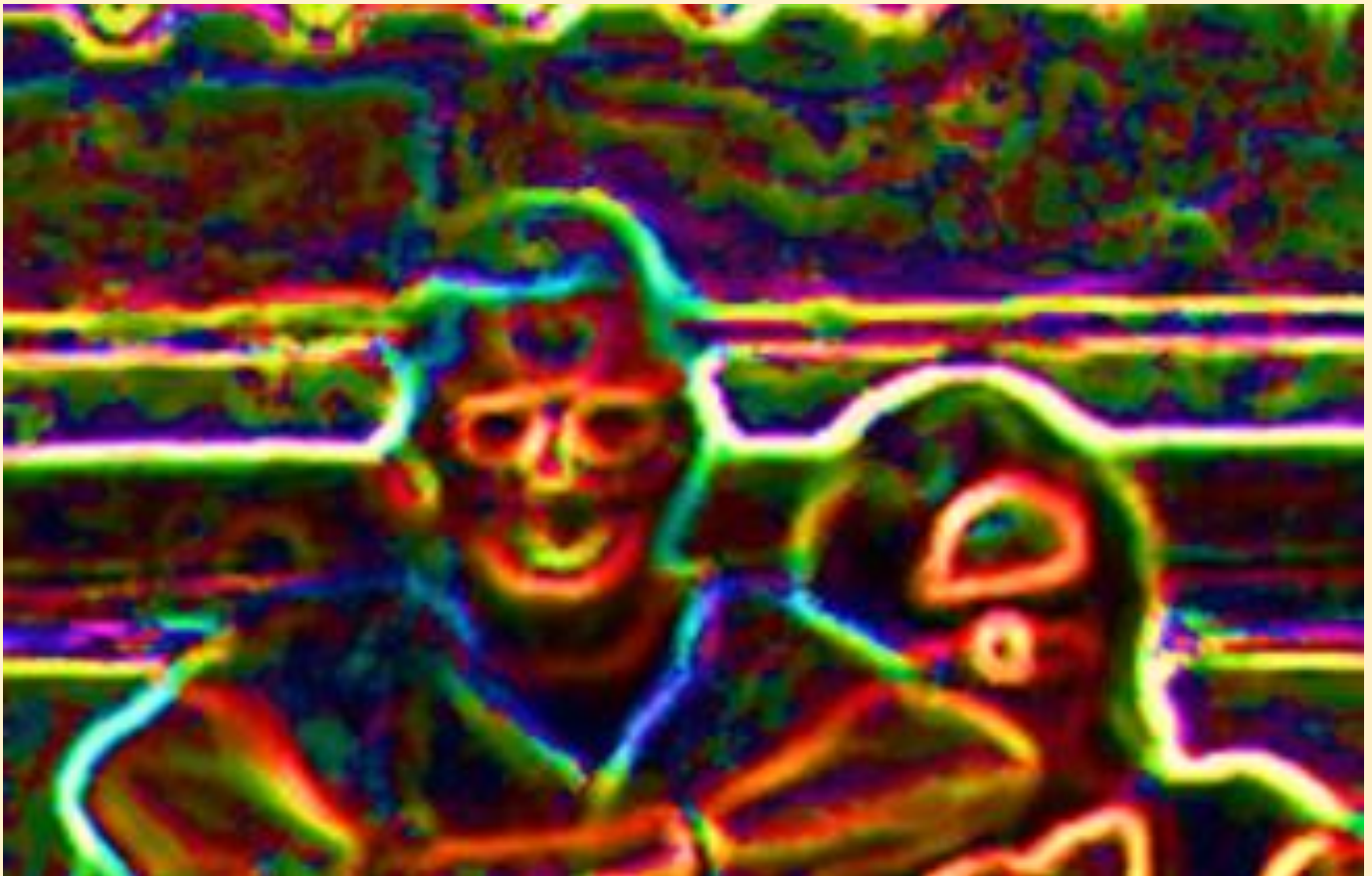
Great Chicago Fire. In the 1880's he became a great supporter of the Yellowstone area, preserving it from development (later to become a national park, of course). Sheridan died from a heart attack at the age of fifty-seven, in 1888, having just sent his memoirs to a publisher. He outlived Read by sixteen years, though obviously Read's poem was still being read in the mid-twentieth century.

"Sheridan, what a bloodthirsty bastard he was," I commented to Buddy, still marveling at how American history and literature'd been so casually part of a knock-off TV western.

Buddy grunted. We always greeted each other casually when we saw each other at the gym, not exactly friends but familiar, on a first-name basis.

"I figured he was a made-up character," he said. "You never know, do you? *The Golden Girls* comes on next."

A commercial for some kind of deodorant came on then, and I proceeded to the showers.



Alan Britt

Last Chance

Last chance to dream a wireless cactus
guarding the border between hope & despair.

Razor wire cactus.

Last chance to believe one is impervious
to common decency—it's the static that
gets me—but conglomerate algorithmic
crude not so much.

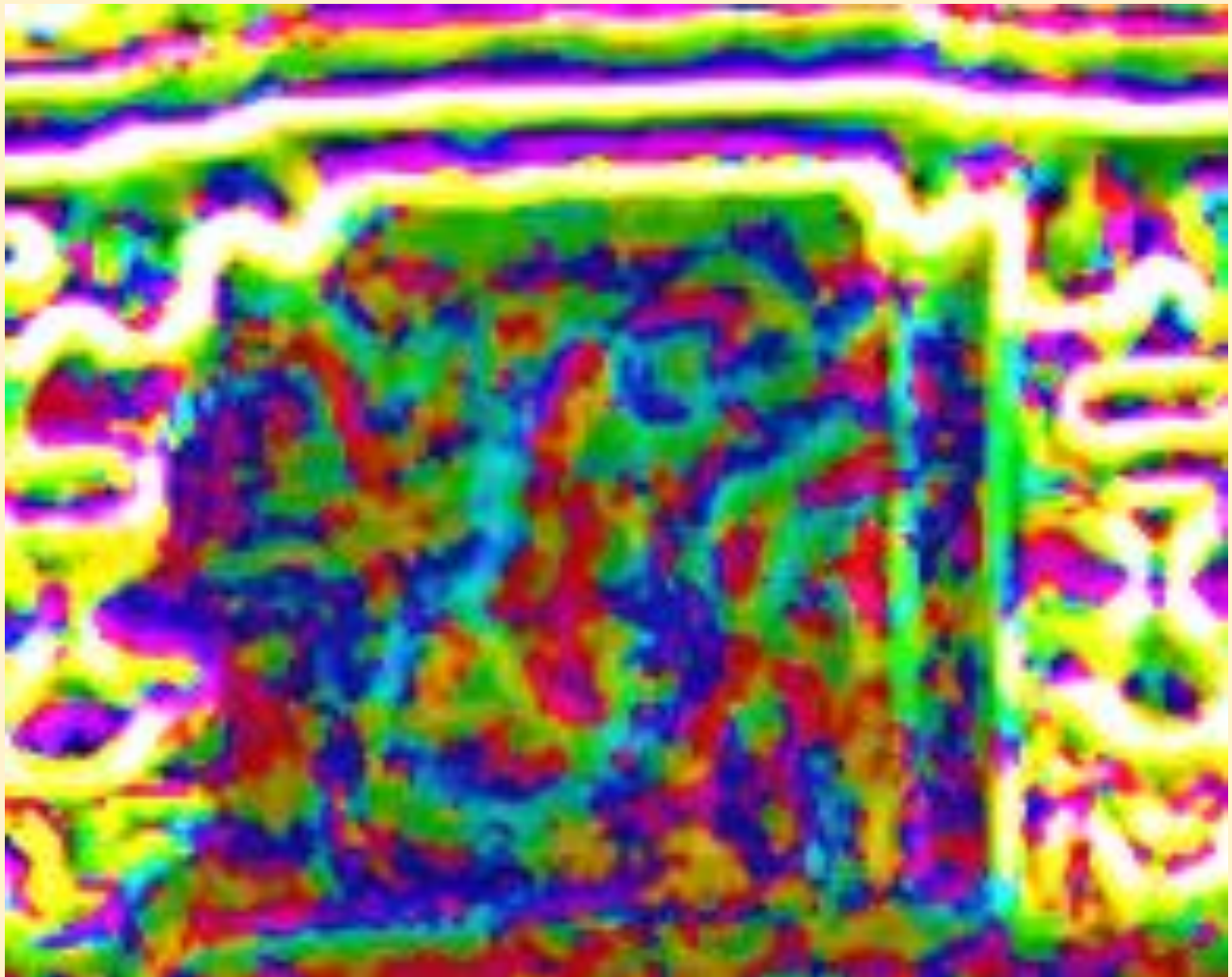
I've withstood floods, shifting states of mind,
& expectations pinned like butterflies
against the lapels of Nobel Laureates.

I ate dinner with an extinct diminutive short
pronged mammal for millennia, along
with my Neanderthal cousins.

I soiled the onionskin pages of early,
modern & contemporary Christianity
& lived to talk about it.

But, today, I'm too exhausted to commence
with existence like a wasp in my doughboy
helmet, wasp that stung me with a garden
shed & kitchen drawer full of green trading
stamps that amounted to pretty much what
no one expected them to amount to.

Still, that's not what I meant earlier; what I meant earlier is that I've just spotted a category five, & if I know what's good for me, tonight, I'll surf moonlight's crushed roach tablets sheltering our military graveyards until someone flips me upside down like an hourglass & dumps me into William Blake's heaven or Arthur Rimbaud's hell.



Luke Skoza

Body Frame Ceiling

The street never matched her voice or body,
Lightning hitting steel.

Ceiling fans fold over body frames
red skin on the floor.

A head
with two noses
closing themselves in.
Praying to God on a cellphone,
a ceiling light turned low.

It's the same when love comes to an end,
or marriage fails and people say
they knew it was the wrong idea,
staring directly into the eyes of an African cat.

But anything
worth doing is worth doing badly
on the other side of things while
the sun was moving from the sand to the sea.

Edward Lee

Too Late

I plunge my hands
into the soil
in an attempt
to feel the heartbeat
of the earth,
only recovering my hands
when I realise failure
is all I can feel;

looking around
I see dozens of strangers
on their knees,
clasped hands dirty
from digging,
their own found failures
bringing tears to their eyes,

the realisation of stillness
loud enough
for even those with clean hands
to hear.

Lorrie Ness

Code Blue///

From bed she hurled the spines downstream/
the pages cankered/
from the buckshot of her fingers/
The ossuary of warm colors/
not fully spent/
released to those who cast bones/
and divine the future/

Plucked petals of sky/
and sea/ and azure margins/
were her medium/
of mosaic language decoupage/

Mounds of torn blue breasts erupting at her hips/
like new volcanic islands/
breaking the tension for a moment/
ephemeral organs/

She festooned them with recycled names/
Reckless/ Stormy Pearl/
Just Below Heaven/ Swatches/
of retired cornflower bathrooms/
Turquoise excised/
identified/ She had become/
the Rosetta Stone/
naming each shade/
so she could offer herself to a friend's embrace/

Lorrie Ness

Ms./Ms/M/igraine Diary

My calendar is pocked, branded. Squared
a hundred ways. Mmm ssing
letters mounted.

Gridlines stamp steady lanes. Parameters.
Boxing my eyes up. And left and over
and. Then yesterday.

And with. The space of forward.
Marked by blood blue "Ms." The silent
strangle of brain on paper.

Ms -taken bruise on Tuesday. Plotted.
Manumitted.
Last week---forever?

Ms. the woman refusing
to blue the space with r. "M/s" map-over,
worked over lines.

Within the box
with blue convention in. My pillbox
is the shape of day.

My pillbox is a Russian doll. Nesting
neat on Tuesday.
No gridlines leaning on future.

Sonnet Mondal

Journeying

by and by
flying

life would pass like this
like a vagrant kite at night

earlier
sometimes

i used to tour inside my mind
with my mind into others

then i thought
hence i tour

my body should also tour
with both of them now

when
i would still tour

my bones would start forsaking me
inside my mind

and count
looking at

my days of travel
the curve of my shadow

Tom Laichas

The Wait Won't Be Long

Sometimes, in boisterous play, the two children scuff the Garden's soil, exposing floorboards and joists. Sometimes, on a wander through woods, they happen on paths too straight to be creature-made.

All day, the great tree shadows their questions. It sprouts from the center of a vast circumference. Its branches hang low with heavy fruit. Its height rockets toward a noontime zenith. Light as papier-mâché, it lofts well beyond sight.

Timber and starlight, sugar and clay: how long can such a confection last?

Lock children away in a room with a cake. Before closing the door, tell them *no, don't eat a crumb.*

Walk away.

The wait won't be long.

Simon Perchik

Five Poems

*

From far off though this wall
still grieves, stone over stone
closing from inside as mist

—still sags into each corner
the way mourners come by in twos
binding their dead to the dim light

that covers the Earth with your forehead
—you're lost, sinking in
till you stop as you did before

and again your back breaks open
for air and wings and in your knees
the bones that will go no further

are filled with an immense arch
pressing down on the thin shadow
waiting at home and loosening.

*

A losing toss though the dirt
hears you stretching out
for nourishment —the thud

grows wild now, every rug
smells from bare wood
and the unforgiving heaviness

pressed against a door
that wants more room
—you have to splash each floor

the way the Earth is pieced together
expects something underneath
to lean forward as the sound

its shadow makes from your arm
heavier and heavier, almost through
can't be seen from the air.

*

And though there are no planes
it's still a room, is standing by
has winds side by side

the way this fleece-lined jacket
never dries, hangs from the ceiling
around and around, loosening

in the ice, struggling with moons
and the drop by drop from your chest
left open for more sky

points to rain, to engines, wings, oil
no longer spreading through these walls
as the dim light near the window.

*

At last and the bare wood
half maple, half before morning
though this rag is already wet

caught up in a seedy summer rain
heated on a table not yet mountainside
wobbling, battered by waiting streams

trying to hold on, drink from a surface
sweetened by water –you lower the cup
face down, help it look for dirt

for its fragrance all night closing in
warmer and warmer alongside a dress
shrunk to fit the soft rim

running naked between your teeth
and dead mornings, around and around
squeezing the sleeves till they go black

the way this washcloth stares in the dark
for a sea to break open, by itself
find mud, the small puddle, her arms.

*

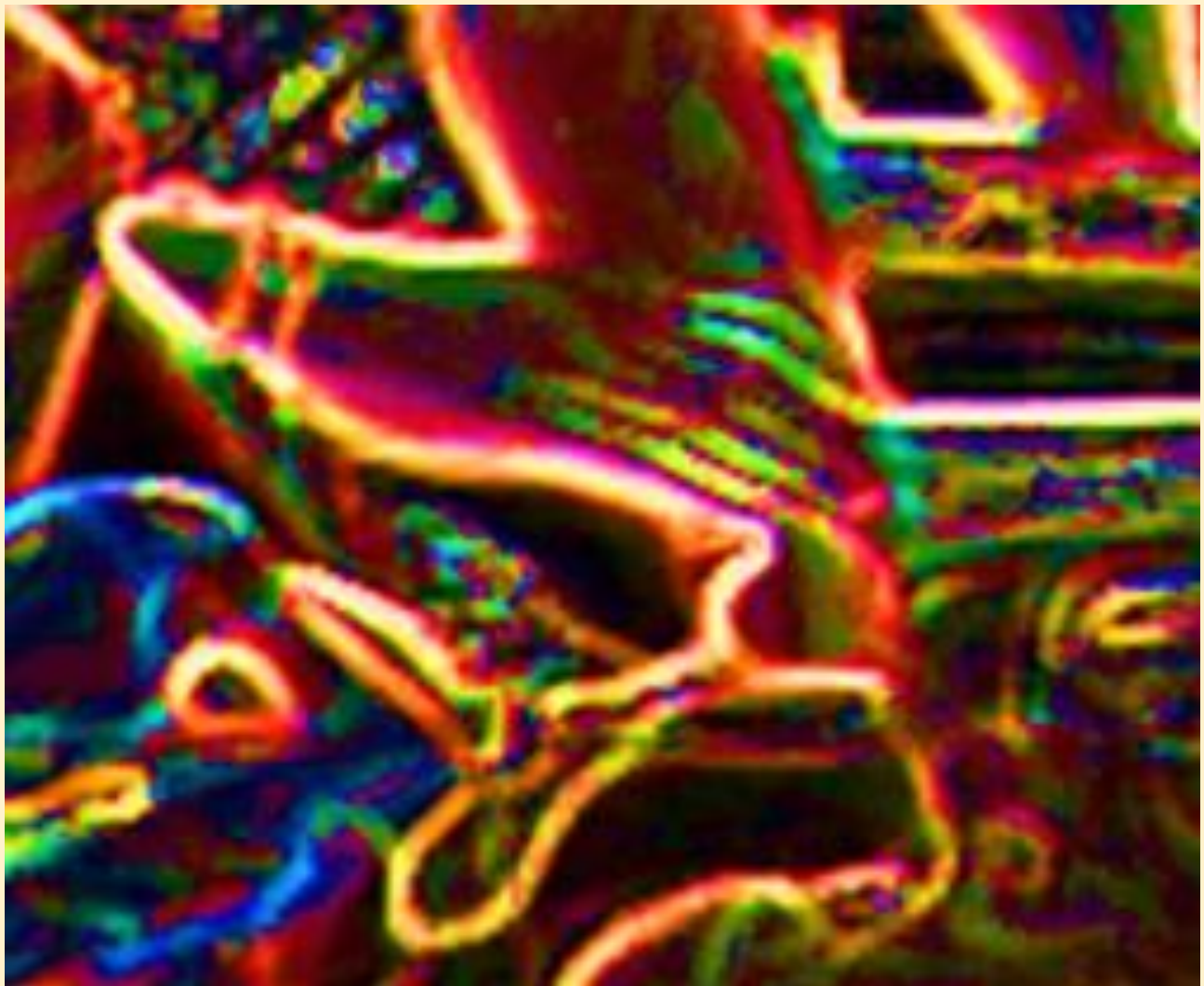
You are mourned the way a child
is taught, stacks wooden blocks
letter by letter letting them topple

spread-eagle into the distance
without a place for corners
or grieve stones –first day in class

and already an uncontrollable glee
growing wild, higher and higher
reeling into sunlight and far off hills

–a five year old Earth, forgetful
hidden from falling skies and shadows
end over end looking for a home

in bedrock, hardened by you dead
still standing by as the dirt handful
everywhere just by moving your hands.



Sara Epstein

Loosestrife

I think that's what it's called.
August is suddenly full of this wildflower, this weed.

It spills from marsh to field to roadside
Splashing everywhere I go.

Green stems and purple flowers
Remind me that you are with me
Everywhere in August, even as you
Prepare to leave.

The blue sky, too.
The colors that you swim in,
That swirl around us both, now
Grow wild, unbidden, everywhere this August.

Heart-shaped rocks show up, too,
Warm from August sun and my fingers rubbing their smooth surfaces.
Since you mentioned them, I see them more easily,
I feel warm and slightly comforted that you will see them too, and,
Perhaps, think of me missing you,

Of open hearts and hope and love,
Of someone else who healed your heart,
Whom you, perhaps, still miss, this August,
While glimpsing fields of purple loosestrife everywhere.

John L. Stanizzi

Two Acrostics from *Pond*

1.19.19

9.02 a.m.

29 degrees

Panoply of birdsongs—titmouse, chickadee, cardinal, jay, nuthatch, and outward from the feeders, somewhere in the woods, a red-shouldered hawk is naming the world with two syllables—*keee-aaah*; the morning is deep-rooted shadows, and the *bump-bump* of a red-belly in the cedar.

1.26.19

8.10 a.m.

17 degrees

Pulled from the road and poured into the pond, mud run-off is frozen into what was, a few days ago, clean pure ice. Narrowest shadow of me, long and thin, stretches way out in front of me, dances on the muddy ice when I dance on the muddy ground.

Mark Vogel

At the edge

Wind-shaped vegetation and sand submit forever
to ocean winds. Fat clouds drift in
a seamless sky, bunching like a herd.

From the picture window scraggly pines and hemlocks
rise over tangled power lines and gray
shingled roofs on houses built on stilts.

Below, gold-finches flit in yellow bushes,
but my binoculars lock-in on a toy ship
stuck on the horizon, on the Pacific pushing to eat land.

As if just for me, the sun appears, pinpoints white waves
that mark the separation of worlds, as they lap,
then retreat before birds darting to secure tiny treasures.

I focus on a misty trail that meets the beach where
a walker with dog flirts with water,
wind, light. Far out, a startling hint of more—

a whale surfaces, promising that others are close,
though this morning not mature I feel like a child who
is drawn toward snake highways, shiny cities,

named mountains—where land flattens into time zones.

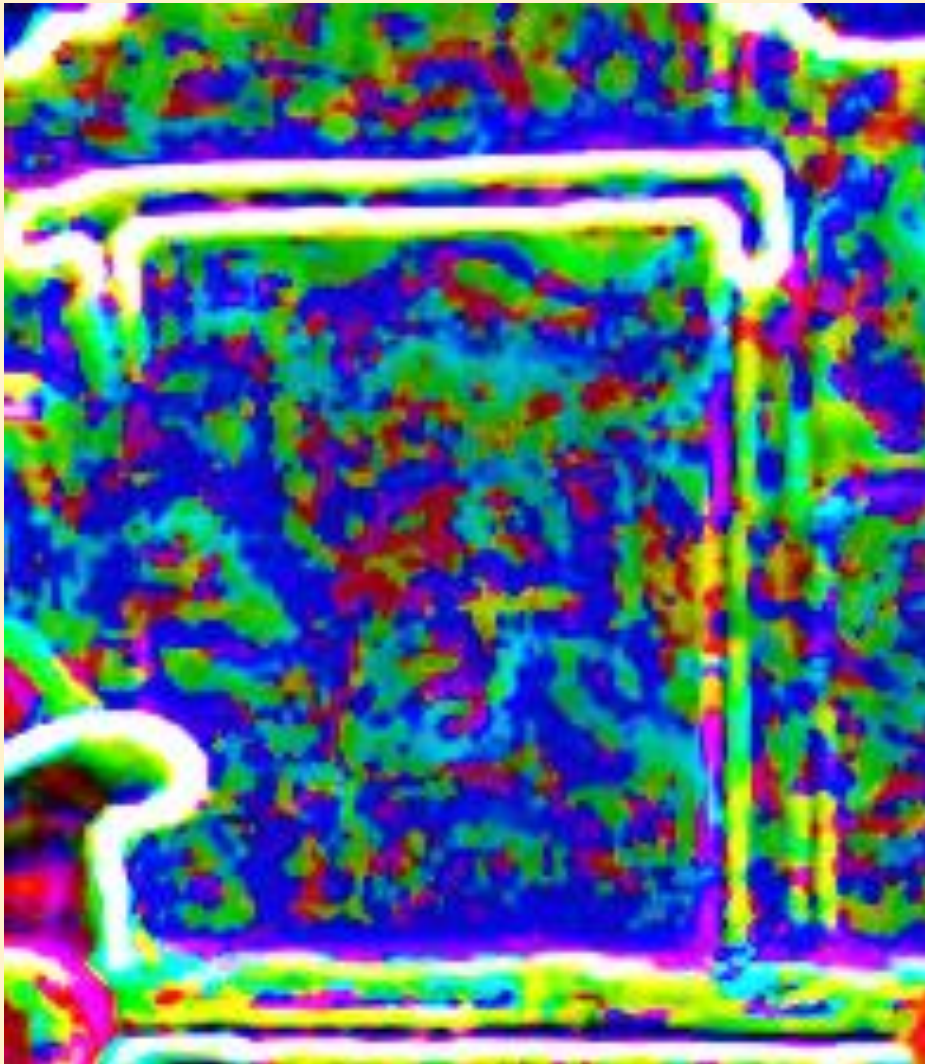
A child growing responsible facing what must be faced.
A child who already knows how pig-faced
politicians gobble orange pumpkins in a pile.

How multi-colored RVs own the fat river. How further
on in the aging concrete urban heart,
burnt and wounded relatives laugh

under this same infinite sky,

with the same ache determined to push boundaries.

Until a last look at the ocean shimmer
leaves no doubt the grey will burn away.



Emma Demopoulos

Midnight Swimming

I float, suspending face up in cool water, letting my legs drip toward the ground
The matrix of chlorine, hydrogen, and oxygen cups my head and fills my ears
I wait to hear the sounds of the night, but all I hear is the swirling of the above
ground pool
I steal a glance at the sky and hope that the universe does not return the favor
But it always does
It reaches down to me in all of its infinite glory, bursting out in colors, only some of
which I see
It bends at the hips, puckers its lips, and kisses my temple
I am only stardust clumped together and floating in a pool that's not mine

Rick Pieto

As I was driving, I glanced out the window and for a moment glimpsed on the road a small shadow of a bird flying above my car. I only observed the brief shadow and not the bird itself. The sun burns for 5 million years' worth of shadows but I couldn't take my eyes off the road for more than a second. I was seat belted in place and could not leave to climb to the roof of my car to see the bird. Maybe you could see the bird itself but would you see me seeing the shadow of the bird you saw? I was on my way to buy groceries and beer. The cave is where we park next to shopping carts and load our trunks. The cave is also where you're driving to when a bird flies over your car and you see only its shadow. The bird's shadow flew like a miner's canary into a cave where matter is burning deep in the heart of a blinding sun that projects the shadow of a small bird flying over the roof of my car.

Kyle Kutz

Route 283

There were eyes
in the skies of Cocalico

above Route 283

that loomed overhead,
in the middle of the night,
peering down at me.

I'd no clue what they wanted—

bloodshot yet serene—

or what tales they'd tell
if given a mouth
and good reason to speak.

I hit a ramp,
taken aback,
and lost 'em off the highway,

but my son
soon spoke of eyes
hovering above our driveway,

which didn't look too happy
about my decision to leave

them behind,
high and dry,
on Route 283.

Ernesto Reyes

Day-dreamer

I came into the kitchen to grab a quick snack—an apple, strangely, I was craving. My mother's in the kitchen as well, stone-faced, hand-writing my father's will. My father, in the living room, is watching a game show, sitting on his chair, smoking on his cigarette, coughing his lungs out.

The people on the game show seem young, inarticulate, and naive. They're asked, "In the 1954 film *On the Waterfront*, who is the actor that famously says, 'You don't understand! I coulda had class. I coulda been a contender. I could've been somebody, instead of a bum, which is what I am.'"

The young people look at each other, stumped, and struggle for the right answer. My father nearly jumps out of his chair and yells into the television, "Brando! Marlon Brando!" but unfortunately, he's *here*—and not in the game show; the young people decide to use one of their lifelines.

My mother, who doesn't like movies or music or art or books, says, "Even I know that." (She doesn't move nor look up from her writing when saying this.)

"I know, those dumb kids—*must be* college students," my father says somewhat sarcastically, although there's always, *always*, a pinch of seriousness whenever he talks. My father inhales on his cigarette, starts coughing uncontrollably again.

My mother chuckles, and turns to me: "Yes, or maybe they're poets." I don't say anything. I only take a hard bite out of my apple and leave and spend the rest of the day in my room, flipping through the worn, yellow pages of my aged book—one of my many—to explore, to discover, to escape.

Psycho Kanev

Irreversible

I always write on my desk.
There is a big clock
on the wall against it.
The lower end of the clock's pendulum
is attached to a shovel;
with every swing
it digs a hole in the floor
which gets bigger and bigger—
soon the hole will be my size.

And I write faster and faster.

Martina Reisz Newberry

Initialed

A well-known someone
once wrote a poem for me.
To my delight, it showed up
in a literary journal of some repute
and then in an actual book.

My initials were there,
right under the title and following
the word *for*. I was delighted
that this fine poet had discovered
words meant especially for me

and I hadn't even slept with him
or chatted him up flirtatiously.
My friends, I ask you to imagine it:
a poem for me who ground away
at her own poems—hustling

the hell out of every line,
always afraid that my lack
of credentials would become
oh-so-apparent in my ignorance
of literary intricacies. I must tell you:

that poem didn't care one bit
about my lack of formal education.
It mentioned beauty and had an
understanding inside it that claimed
the right to know what beauty is

and what it is worth. “It doesn’t matter
that you aren’t beautiful,” my father said.
“It matters whether or not you are smart.”
He, too, had discovered words just for me.

This all happened years ago. The poem
with my initials happened 35 years ago.
When I remember or dream, I forget which,
it is those initials I see: *for* _____.
Those initials are what I believe.



Contributors

Roy Bentley, finalist for the Miller Williams prize for his book *Walking with Eve in the Loved City*, is the author of seven books of poetry, including, most recently, *American Loneliness* from Lost Horse Press. He has published poetry in *Shenandoah*, *Blackbird*, *The Southern Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Tar River Poetry*, and *Rattle*, among others.

In August 2015 **Alan Britt** was invited to Ecuador as part of a cultural exchange of poets between Ecuador and the United States. In 2018 and in 2013, he served as judge for The Bitter Oleander Press Library of Poetry Book Award. He has been interviewed at The Library of Congress for *The Poet and the Poem* and has published 17 books of poetry, his latest being *Ode to Nothing* (bilingual English/Hungarian: 2018); *Crossing the Walt Whitman Bridge* (bilingual English/Romanian: 2017); *Violin Smoke* (bilingual English/Hungarian: 2015). A graduate of the Johns Hopkins Writing Seminars, he now teaches English/Creative Writing at Towson University.

Emma Demopoulos is a writer, creator, and general enthusiast of all things odd or quirky. She finished her debut novel and seeks representation. She lives in Cincinnati, Ohio, with her family and two cats. She graduated from Miami University with a degree in Creative Writing. Her Instagram handle is @demopwriter.

Sara Epstein is a clinical psychologist from Winchester, Massachusetts, who writes poetry and songs, especially about light and dark places. Her poems are forthcoming or appeared in *Silkworm*, *Paradise in Limbo*, *Mom Egg Review*, *Chest Journal*, *Literary Mama*, and two anthologies: *Sacred Waters* and *Coming of Age*.

John Grey is an Australian poet, US resident. Recently published in *Midwest Quarterly*, *Poetry East*, and *North Dakota Quarterly* with work upcoming in *South Florida Poetry Journal*, *Hawaii Review*, and *Roanoke Review*.

Brady Harrison's fiction, poetry, and essays have appeared in *Cardinal Sins*, *Cerise Press*, *J Journal*, *The Long Story*, *Mattoid*, and *Serving House Journal*, among other

literary journals. His fiction has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize, and a novella, "The Dying Athabaskan," won the inaugural Publisher's Long Story Prize from Twelve Winters Press. Recent poetry appears in the anthology *Poems Across the Big Sky II*. His most recent book is the co-edited collection *Punk Rock Warlord: The Life and Music of Joe Strummer*. He lives in Missoula, Montana.

Peycho Kanev is the author of 4 poetry collections and three chapbooks, published in the USA and Europe. His poems have appeared in many literary magazines, such as: *Rattle*, *Poetry Quarterly*, *Evergreen Review*, *Front Porch Review*, *Hawaii Review*, *Barrow Street*, *Sheepshead Review*, *Off the Coast*, *The Adirondack Review*, *Sierra Nevada Review*, and many others. His new chapbook, titled *Under Half-Empty Heaven*, was published in 2018 by Grey Book Press.

Paul Kindlon is a Professor of Humanities. He holds a PhD in Philosophy and Russian Literature and taught in Moscow, Russia, from 1994-2017. His publications include 11 short stories, 9 poems, 30 polemics, and a brief memoir.

Kyle Kutz is a semi-recent graduate of Kutztown University, earning his B.A. in professional writing. His work has appeared in numerous publications, such as *Expressions*, *Essence*, *Shoofly*, *Wood Coin*, *WORK*, *Visitant Lit*, *Aberration Labyrinth*, and *The Jet Press*. He resides in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, writing freelance for LNP.

Tom Laichas's recent work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Ambit*, *3.1 Venice*, *Masque & Spectacle*, *Panoply*, *Eclectica*, and elsewhere. His first collection, *Empire of Eden*, is due out from High Window Press (UK) in 2020.

Stacey Z Lawrence teaches Poetry and Creative Writing in a public high school in Northern, NJ. She is working on her first book of confessional poems, which explores the untimely death of her husband shortly followed by her bout with Breast Cancer.

Edward Lee's poetry, short stories, non-fiction, and photography have been published in magazines in Ireland, England, and America, including *The Stinging Fly*, *Skylight 47*, *Acumen*, and *Smiths Knoll*. His debut poetry collection, *Playing Poohsticks On Ha'Penny Bridge*, was published in 2010. He is currently working

towards a second collection. He also makes musical noise under the names Ayahuasca Collective, Lewis Milne, Orson Carroll, Blinded Architect, Lego Figures Fighting, and Pale Blond Boy. His blog/website can be found at <https://edwardmlee.wordpress.com>

Sonnet Mondal writes from Kolkata, India, and his latest poetry collections include *Karmic Chanting* (Copper Coin 2018) and *Ink and Line* (Dhauuli Books 2018). He has read at literary festivals in Macedonia, Ireland, Turkey, Nicaragua, Sri Lanka, Germany, Hungary, and Slovakia. His writings have appeared in publications across Europe, North America, Asia, and Australia. Mondal was one of the authors of the “Silk Routes” project of the International Writing Program at the University of Iowa from 2014 to 2016. Director of Chair Poetry Evenings International Festival, Mondal edits the Indian section of *Lyrikline* (Haus für Poesie, Berlin) and serves as editor in chief of *Enchanting Verses Literary Review*. He has been a guest editor for Poetry at Sangam, India, and Words Without Borders, New York.

Lorrie Ness grew up in rural Indiana and currently lives in Virginia. Writing is her means of connection and is her refuge. She draws inspiration for her writing through time outdoors. She has forthcoming work in the *American Journal of Poetry*.

Martina Reisz Newberry’s most recent book is *BLUES FOR FRENCH ROAST WITH CHICORY* (2019 from Deerbrook Editions). She is included in "The Sixty Four Best Poets of 2018" (Black Mountain Press). Newberry is widely published in literary journals in the U.S. and abroad. She lives in Los Angeles.

Joey Nicoletti’s most recent books are *Thundersnow* (2017) and *Capicola Slang*, which is due out in 2019. He teaches creative writing at SUNY-Buffalo State.

Simon Perchik is an attorney whose poems have appeared in *Partisan Review*, *Forge*, *Poetry*, *Osiris*, *The New Yorker*, and elsewhere. His most recent collection is *The Gibson Poems*, published by Cholla Needles, 2019. For more information including free e-books and his essay “Magic, Illusion and Other Realities” please visit his website at <http://www.simonperchik.com>. To view one of his interviews, please follow this link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MSK774rtfx8>

Thomas Piekarski is a former editor of the *California State Poetry Quarterly* and Pushcart Prize nominee. His poetry and interviews have appeared in literary journals internationally, including *Nimrod*, *Florida English Journal*, *Cream City Review*, *Mandala Journal*, *Poetry Salzburg*, *Poetry Quarterly*, *Pennsylvania Literary Journal*, and *Boston Poetry Magazine*. He has published a travel book, *Best Choices In Northern California*, and *Time Lines*, a book of poems.

Rick Pieto is a visual poet and writer living in the Silver Spring, MD, area. His visual poetry has been exhibited at Rhizome DC and Pyramid Atlantic Art Center and also published in *Foliate Oak Literary Magazine*. He received a Ph.D. in media ecology from New York University and has taught at Georgetown University and University of Baltimore.

Charles Rammelkamp is Prose Editor for BrickHouse Books in Baltimore and Reviews Editor for *The Adirondack Review*. A chapbook of poems, *Jack Tar's Lady Parts*, is available from Main Street Rag Publishing. Another poetry chapbook, *Me and Sal Paradise*, has just been published by FutureCycle Press.

Ernesto Reyes is currently an undergraduate at Fresno State, where he is studying English literature and creative writing. His stories have been published in the *San Joaquin Review*, *Flies Cockroaches & Poets*, *Subtle Fiction*, the *Acentos Review*, and *Brilliant Flash Fiction*.

Luke Skoza is a 30-year-old model, poet, and ESL teacher. He currently works as an ESL teacher in Moscow. His poems have appeared in the *Silenced Press*, *Unlikelystories.org*, *Retort Magazine*, *Anti Heroin Chic*, *The Houston Review*, and the *Chiron Review*.

Ian C Smith's work has appeared in *Amsterdam Quarterly*, *Australian Poetry Journal*, *Critical Survey*, *Live Encounters*, *Poetry New Zealand*, *Southerly*, and *Two-Thirds North*. His seventh book is *wonder sadness madness joy*, Ginninderra (Port Adelaide). He writes in the Gippsland Lakes area of Victoria, and on Flinders Island, Tasmania.

John L. Stanizzi is author of the collections *Ecstasy Among Ghosts*, *Sleepwalking*, *Dance Against the Wall*, *After the Bell*, *Hallelujah Time!*, *High Tide-Ebb Tide*, *Four Bits*, and *Chants*. His newest collection, *Sundowning*, will be out this year with Main Street Rag. John's poems have appeared in *Prairie Schooner*, *American Life in Poetry*, *The New York Quarterly*, *Paterson Literary Review*, *Blue Mountain Review*, *The Cortland Review*, *Rattle*, *Tar River Poetry*, *Rust & Moth*, *Connecticut River Review*, *Hawk & Handsaw*, and many others. His work has been translated into Italian and appeared in many journals in Italy. His translator is Angela D'Ambra. John has read at venues all over New England, including the Mystic Arts Café, the Sunken Garden Poetry Festival, Hartford Stage, and many others. For many years, John coordinated the Fresh Voices Poetry Competition for Young Poets at Hill-Stead Museum, Farmington, CT. He is also a teaching artist for the national recitation contest, Poetry Out Loud. A former New England Poet of the Year, John teaches literature at Manchester Community College in Manchester, CT, and he lives with his wife, Carol, in Coventry.

Christine Stephens-Krieger finished her MFA at WMU and published a bunch of poems in the '90s. Her awards include first place in the *Macguffin* Michigan Poet Hunt and the Dyer-Ives Poetry Competition. She also appeared in the anthology *The Prepress Awards Volume II: Emerging Michigan Writers*. She submerged after that, raised a child, and taught herself to paint. Now she's written a new book of poetry called *What a World, What a World: A Life in Poems*. So far in 2019, *YES Poetry* and *Dime Show Review* will publish poems from this collection.

Mark Vogel lives at the back of a Blue Ridge holler with his wife, Susan Weinberg, an accomplished fiction and creative non-fiction writer. He currently serves as Professor of English at Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina. Poems and short stories have appeared in several dozen literary journals.



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