

THE BIG WINDOWS REVIEW

Issue 25 Fall 2021



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.

Design and digital images by Tom Zimmerman.

The works herein have been chosen for their literary and artistic merit and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of Washtenaw Community College, its Board of Trustees, its administration, or its faculty, staff, or students.

Copyright © 2021 the individual authors and artists.

The Big Windows Review

Website: thebigwindowsreview.com

Email: thebigwindowsreview@gmail.com

Editor: Tom Zimmerman



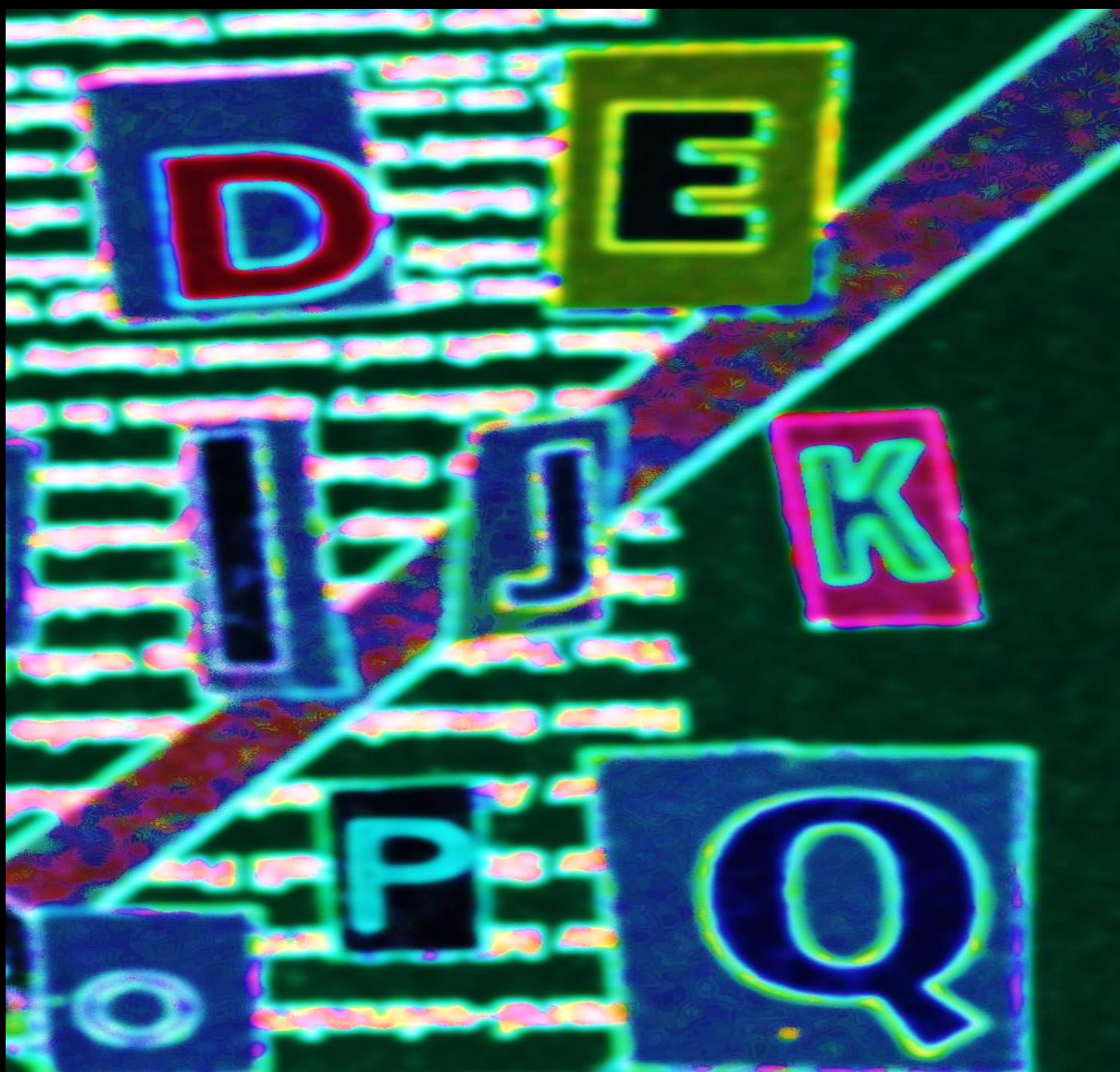
THE BIG WINDOWS REVIEW

Issue 25 Fall 2021

Contents

L. Ward Abel	Coat of Birds	5
Christopher Barnes	What the Street Remembers (3)	6
Leah Browning	Brute	7
Alan Catlin	Mirror of Enigmas	8
Ellen Chia	The Poem	9
Sinéad Delaney	Needing to Knit	10
John Dorroh	Carlsbad After Dark	12
Tim Fitts	Gigi	13
Ian Ganassi	Whatever Works	14
John Grey	Life on the Flood Plain	16
	That's the Wrong Pose	18
James Croal Jackson	Talking Stand-Up Comedy in Pittsburgh	19
Madelyn Kreienheder	Losing you was like winter in Alaska.	20
Len Krisak	A Sonnet	21
Peter Mladinic	The Great Billy Williams	22
Cameron Morse	Neurooncologist	25
Elisha Osorio	The Angry Man	27
	Ginger	29
Kenneth Pobo	A Barred Owl Speaks to Me	30
	I Open the Door	31
Frederick Pollack	At This Late Date	32
	Maestro	33
Charles Rammelkamp	Clueless	34
	Therapy	35
Russell Rowland	Apology	36
Andrew Shields	Early to Rise	37
Brad Shurmantine	Head of the Metolius	38

Kelley White	Bobulate	39
Chila Woychik	So What Do You Think About Cows, or, A Lingering Grief	40
Contributors		43



L. WARD ABEL

Coat of Birds

He wore a coat of birds
and played muted horn
but only mornings
and even then only on spring mornings.

When the train would blow
from five or six miles away

it made a moving note that he followed
like religion.

He may have wanted
harmony
but thought better of it.

One day
his coat flew off
taking him along

like
a flag
with hollow bones
in the wind of one mind,

an act of improv.

Now we call him
His Most Serene Dissonance of the
Beautiful Sky—
and composer of jazz.

What the Street Remembers (3)

Daddy why there?
Been at work
You little sod
I haven't got change
Chack! Chack!

*

Isaiah Berlin jiggles a greenfly
Off his lapel.

*

Cteck-cteck-cteck-cteck
A party
Yi knaa what it is
Ooom la la la la

*

Bertrand Russell agrees terms
With the squall.

*

He's denied
Peaches only a pound
Dong dong dong dong

Brute

He was the type of person who was always getting into bar fights. It was an easy way to get rid of some aggressive energy, and there was often an explanation that let him come out looking like a good guy. He'd been defending someone's honor, let's say. Every time you ran into him, it seemed, his knuckles were taped.

He and his roommates lived in an apartment building just down the street from a fire station. In that city, firefighters were first responders at everything from highway collisions to your garden-variety home accidents. Day and night, the garage door rolled up and sirens began to scream.

Why don't you move, I asked, and he just shrugged. I didn't push the issue. If you must know, I had discovered that he was an adrenaline junkie in all the ways that mattered. He pulled my hair, clung to the headboard, did everything but hang upside-down as sirens oscillated outside, growing louder and louder, and the engines roared past the open windows.

Mirror of Enigmas

*"Forget the dead you've left behind
They will not follow you."*

—Bob Dylan

The mirror reveals something different
every time you look inside

The back of a head can be seen in infinite
regression, fading inward as far as a hall
of mirrors will go

A composite sketch of what you might
have looked like once, long ago, represents
nothing now no matter how far inside you go

Even in that other time zone, where a duplicate
mirror resides, where all the reflective glass
surfaces are turned flat against blank walls,

Something is happening inside the framework
but it is impossible to see what

Impossible to know anything

Even the answers to the simplest questions like:
Who am I ?
Where am I going?
Who will I be when I get there?

The Poem

Would the poem lurking within
Please announce yourself?
Are you nature?
A bird, a cloud, a tree
Or a lily?
Are you woeful or hopeful?
Dwarfish or epic?
Perhaps I don't wish
To know just yet –
But to savor that moment
Of being seized unawares;
To gape with delight
When you rear your head
Exclaiming peek-a-boo
Along with the messy
Train of bones, sinews
And flesh tumbling
From your hiding place,
Rolling off my tongue
Onto the creamy leaf,
Giving birth to yet another
Slice of me.

Needing To Knit

I knitted another you, a tinier you, tiny for a variety of reasons. I wanted to make you big enough to hug but not so big that I couldn't conceal you in my handbag. I couldn't knit your feet, I hope you don't mind. It seems strange to see you now, staring at me judgementally through your one button eye. I knitted you baby blue so you could be kind, like I imagined you were. I know you are calming because you've shushed me in my dreams. I've screamed out and tried to clutch you.

"Ssssh!" you hushed, your face scrunched up tight in disgust. You hated me then but that's alright. I understand.

The room is scattered with many yous, all half-finished and crumpled on the floor. I wanted my first, and only you to be perfect. I know you wanted a body. I can feel your burning resentment following me from room to room. I couldn't give you a body so I knitted you this.

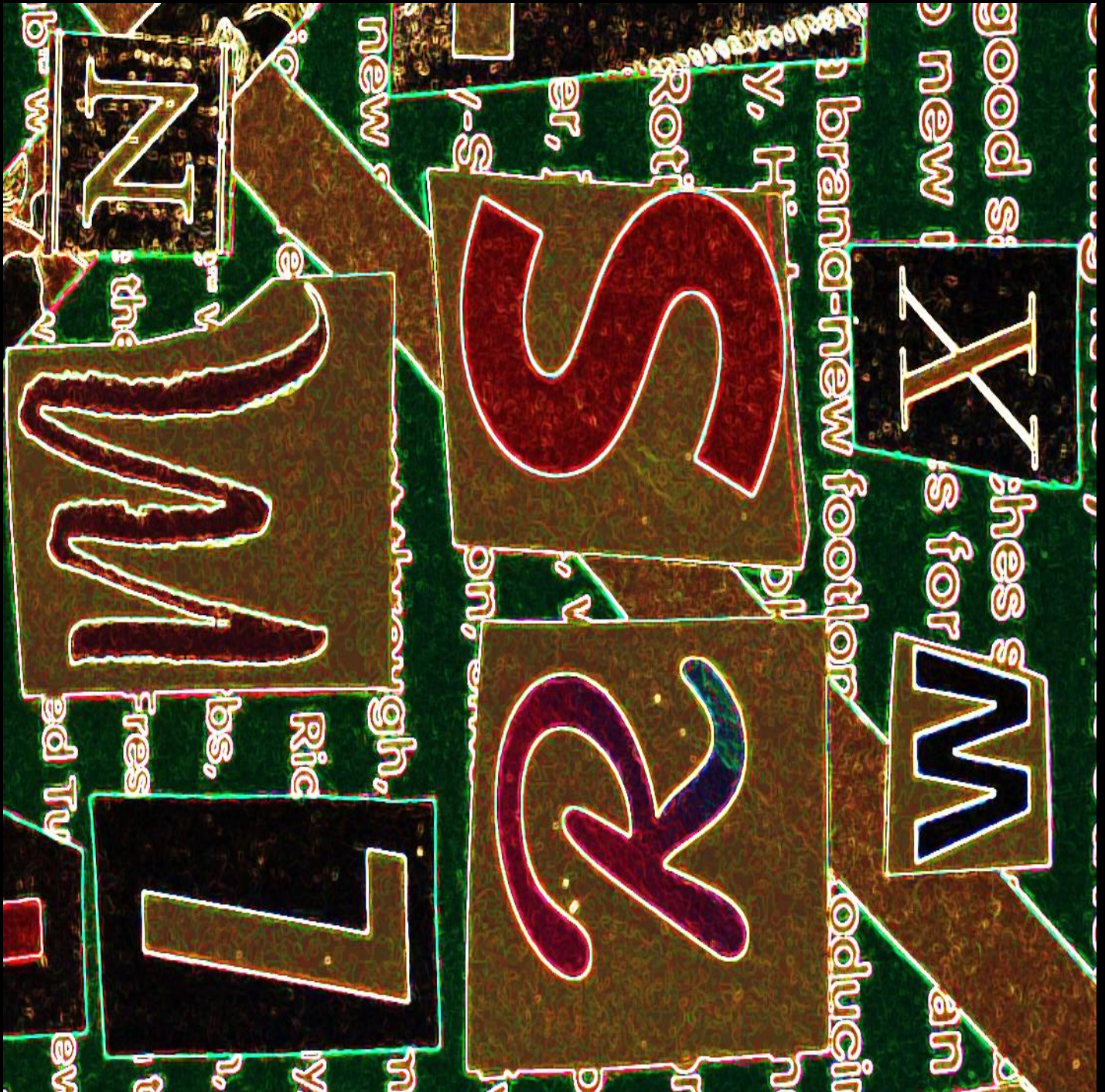
I'm regretting the colour now. It seems cold and reminds me of the sky, the vast space above me that jeers when I look up and try to look up and search for you. I know you're there but the sky has eaten you up. Some time, some place I will forget to look up and you will float by. You'll think I don't care. I care that you care whether I care, if you do. I'm just finding it tiring to search the sky.

Once you crawled on my bed and my chest filled with a sweet ache. You left as soon as I felt you, but I know you were there. If you return, I'll still be sorry, I won't act as if all was forgiven. You can hate me, as long as you stay.

I wanted to have you but I couldn't. I sometimes wonder if my fear made you leave, before you were ready, and the thought makes me ashamed, that my baby couldn't have a body.

Please accept my offering, Live in the doll. Even if you don't move, I'll know if

You'll be my doll. My tiny, knitted you.



Carlsbad After Dark

I remember how the air smelled like warm guano
before the bats swarmed out of the cave at Carlsbad.
How they spiraled up toward a full orange moon.

How the park ranger joked about rattlesnakes
eating a family's chihuahua while they crooked
their necks toward the purple sky. I remember

looking at my wristwatch and the itching sensation
on the back of my legs. How I was worried about
desert fleas. I don't remember where we parked.

I remember how the air-conditioned air chilled
our faces. How the ice machine spat out perfectly
square cubes. How we smelled chlorine

from the pool. I remember the bite of white
onions on our fast-food hamburgers and how
the salt on the French fries made our tongues

swell like sea cucumbers. I remember how
we slept like bats in a cave. How no one snored.
But I don't remember the drive back home.

Gigi

I recently visited my buddy in Santa Clarita for his fiftieth birthday. It's a treat, in a way, knowing all the things that might have killed you haven't killed you—you can ease up on yourself a bit. It's nice, too, seeing a good friend emerge from middle age. He likes his kids. He likes his wife. I like them, too. The dog, though. Gigi, a poodle. Gigi is so old, she's gone bald on her back, and what's left of her fur has turned a strange type of purple, as if the purple had been applied by a generic brand of cosmetic powder. *Gigi*. Even the name is purple. On top of it all, Gigi is deaf and blind. She roams the house like Roomba, but joyless, seeking neither heat nor affection, bouncing from kitchen cabinet to garbage can, to the fridge, then back to the living room sofa and coffee table. Outside, Gigi roams from one side of the yard to the other. Fence to fence. Lately, however, a pack of coyotes have caught wind of Gigi. The coyotes live in the patch of wilderness that separates my buddy's neighborhood from the next. Keen to Gigi's disabilities, the coyotes have altered their game, abandoning the tactic of feigning gimp or playful, hoping to lure the dog into their grips. Instead, the coyotes have begun baiting the back of their yard with strips of jackrabbit.

During the birthday weekend, I found myself standing in their backyard staring at the patch of desert, sipping a cup of coffee or a Knob Creek, depending on the time of day. I started wondering why a dog like Gigi would even be worth their trouble. By the time the coyotes ripped her apart, how much meat would any of the coyotes even get—just enough to make it to the next meal? Hardly worth the caloric effort or even a fair return on their investments. On the last evening of the trip, though, just before the drive back to LAX, my eyes somehow penetrated the tangle of sagebrush, I spotted one of the coyotes hanging about. The thing had been looking at me the whole time. Probably tracking movements, counting my drinks. He was thinking way past that rabbit.

Whatever Works

In the meantime, don't get too close to the guard dogs,
Especially the phosphorescent ones from the peat bog.

The inmates are wandering around my floor,
Standing there gossiping in front of my door.

The stake holding them looks a little stressed.
If they escape it can only be for the best.

I'm an ignoramus, it's true.
Would gladly pay you later for a few.

"What did you say?" he asked, grinning like an idiot.
These pants are a 38, they shouldn't fit.

Do you want an honest answer to that question?
You can multiply it by an obscure radical fraction.

It lasted all day, whatever it was.
That was one way to get a buzz.

Time is both progressive and cyclical—
I was going places on my bicycle.

My shoelaces don't always cooperate.
And my pupils don't always dilate.

At least I don't have to report back to the talent agency
Regarding my level of plangency.

It takes more than a costume to become an actor,
You have to be up on the beauty factor.

His architecture aspires to invisibility.
His can openers are arranged in order of utility.



Life on the Flood Plain

The river is overflowing,
and the wake along each bank
shakes feverishly,
is whipped away by strafing rain.

Pale faces watch from shore,
a step or two from the cresting waters,
backs to an avenue of vulnerable homes.

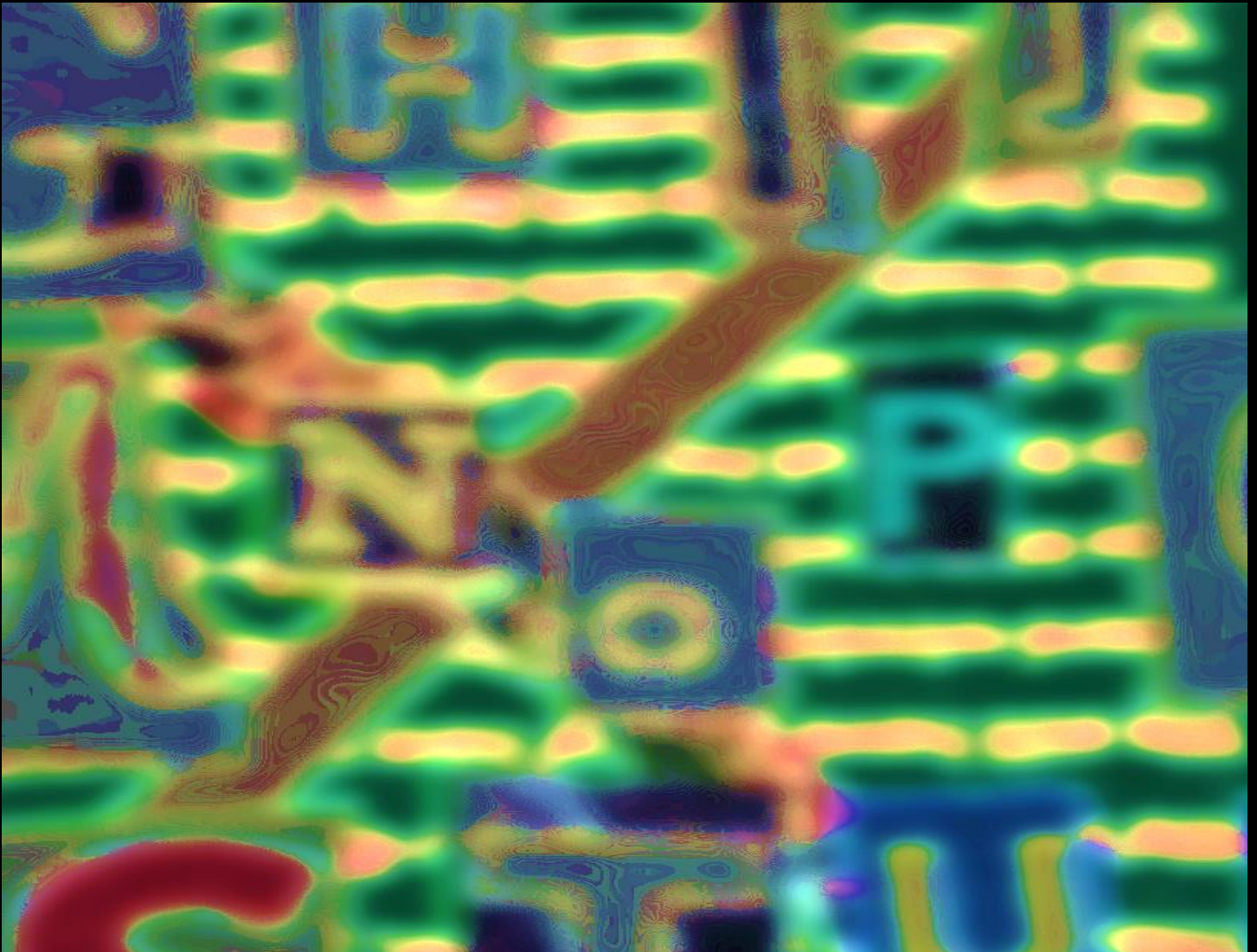
Eyes dull but hearts fast-beating,
each can only think
of their house's contents,
furniture, mirrors, carpets, beds,
unmoored and ill-equipped for floating.

Under dripping hoods,
the people draw closer,
a small town gathered,
talking out their fears,
their frustrations,
like they're all one family group.

Each is eager to start moving stuff,
from first floor up to second,
from basement to who knows where.
But there's no place really safe from damage.
Experience of past floods
couldn't be clearer.

The precious will be ruined.
Framework will need repair.
And, once the dry-out begins,
there'll be no escaping the mud smell.

People say prayers.
They grow bitter then they pray some more.
They make vows. "Never again."
All lead to that bitter vow,
"I'll never sell."



That's the Wrong Pose

Please don't fold your hands over your chest.
I've been to too many wakes.
Let them drift down to your sides,
swing them if you have to,
don't worry about hitting me,
my head is harder than the night.
Having felt this was worth getting into,
I don't want to lose it
to a grim imitation of a corpse,
an accident yet to happen,
a heart without heart,
some magician disease that can
turn you into a door jamb.
It's two a.m. and a man should be
occupying dreams fully,
stirring a little mental mud,
not watching all he loves
strike a pose for the end times.
Sure, I'm drowsy, I'm incoherent,
I'm fully aware of the stand-over
tactics of the imagination.
But I don't want
the worst that can happen,
getting any ideas.
My loneliness
is holed up in the past.
Let's leave it there.

Talking Stand-Up Comedy in Pittsburgh

It's Kat's birthday and the room laughs
at sad Neil Young songs opposite this
vibrant party. I meet Meeti who says
she has good jokes, bad presence.
She has grander aspirations. I tell her
I never planned to be in this city, either.
She needs a New York or LA. I came
from both & couldn't hang. Birthday
spirit drifts in this room around us,
everyone having an amicable time.
We are, too, except we can only dream
of spotlights, butterflies, our names in
neon because we'd rather smoke quietly
in the dark corners of social gatherings.

MADELYN KREIENHEDER

Losing you was like winter in Alaska.

Warm summer days dwindled
as a chill crept over the land.

The seasons started to change,
leaves drifted to the ground,

and when you joined them,
the sun stopped climbing into the sky

leaving me in a world
without light.

Life without you has been a season of dusk.
Even though your absence is eternal

the sky keeps reminding me
darkness won't last forever:

Gray will eventually turn blue
as tears turn to smiles when I think of you.

A Sonnet

She, 91; he, only 54,
In disproportioned death (he's here no more).
Nor do we need demons from Hell to tell
Us this, nor did we learn it in the stocks:
That everything in going goes not well,
By seemly precedence or proper age,
But serves the flesh more than its share of shocks—
More than the thousands it is mortal heir to.
Confused that she must now turn back the page,
Tear out a son she thought that she had read,
His mother seems to say she doesn't care to.
She seems to wish that only she were dead.
Dazed now, she sits, re-mouthing without rest,
"He had the best doctors. He had the best."

The Great Billy Williams

When I was a little kid there was this pop
song, "I'm Gonna Write Myself a Letter."
I remember hearing it in a bar, on a jukebox,

some drunk guy singing along,
like lightly slamming the open palm of his hand
on the bar in time to the jaunty rhythms.

Well, it was just a song, kind of catchy, but I
didn't think much of it. The bar, the building
itself was wooden, and in a low valley,

between one steep hill and a lower hill.
By the mid-sixties it was torn down and
replaced by a small brick strip mall.

But this song was a big hit, and the guy
singing, his voice sounded kind of cranky.
"Gonna write myself a letter,

make believe it came from you, oh yeah!"
Just another song. When I got to my teens,
I bought a 45 disc, "I Don't Wear My Heart

on My Sleeve" by the Charioteers. A ballad,
the lead's male alto was high-pitched and very
smooth. Elegant. I loved it, love it still.

Fast forward to me in my fifties. I got
a Charioteers CD and realized this alto lead,
singing ballads and up-tempo tunes like

“Way Down Yonder in New Orleans” was
the same guy who, back in the fifties,
had this one smash hit. On “Letter”

his voice didn’t sound high and smooth like
on the ballads. I was astounded to learn
they were one in the same, Billy Williams.

I purchased the CD from a record shop by
mail. I talked to the shop owner, now
deceased, and he said Billy Williams

was a pretty good singer. He sure was!
A very good singer. He made other pop
things but also a lot of pretty great music.

You listen to him on “So Long,” really listen,
and you know you’ve been someplace.
So smooth, so sad it’s sadness

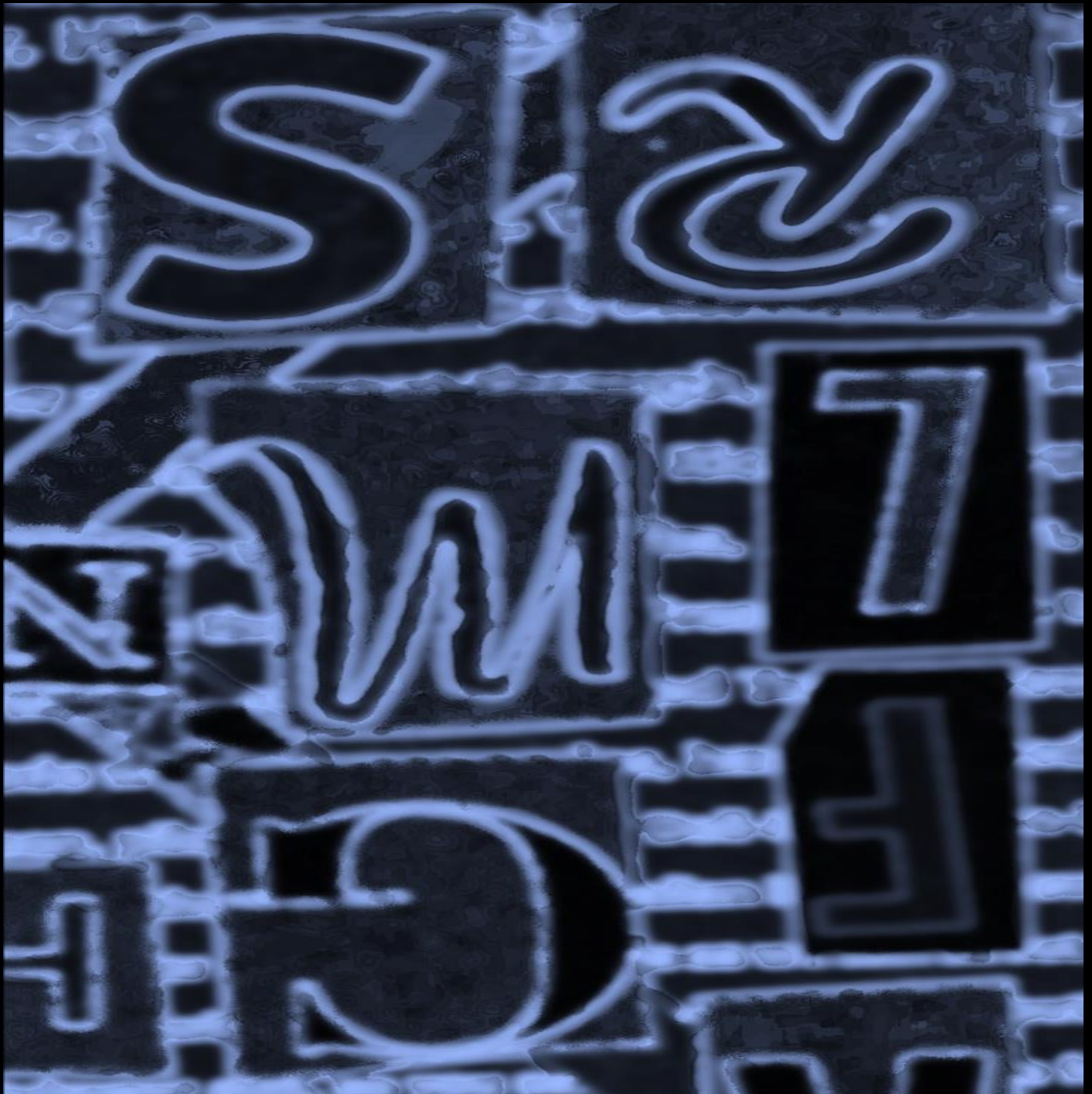
shed to the limits of joy, pure joy.
The sound of a singer in love with what he’s
singing. A master. A blend of passion

and control. He did enough of that, over
and over, to where he went beyond good,
to greatness. Billy Williams, a great singer,

I read somewhere, ended up living in
a basement, on the fringe of homeless.
He needs some credit, though

he’s long dead and it won’t matter to him,
but as Frost said, “The fact
is the sweetest dream labor knows.”

The truth is in the sound of the smooth alto
that is Billy Williams, alto lead
of the Charioteers, the great Billy Williams.



Neurooncologist

My NO says no
evidence ear

buds cause anything

to sprout in your
ear canal

*

Empty lane
night of the big game

fireworks purchased
for touchdowns
thunder at

halftime in defeat
the city's hurt
feelings

*

Any survivors willing to chat

my hubby's having
a hard time

filling out tax
forms in a snow storm

Death is at the door

*

Dystopian weekend
tailgating

my gateway to hell

*

Night I met her
English name was Alice
asked if I'd been

drinking I said it was
the only way I
could sleep with myself

ashamed of my breath
on the dark track

I entered her empty field

The Angry Man

There is only one angry man in this house but there are many ways to see him. I like to think I am a girl on the verge of becoming something else; a monster, a beast, a worthy opponent. Girlhood; an entity so lost to me is one I will continue to seek despite the overbearing knowing that such an entity only exists in places rid of angry men. Or this is what I believed.

There is only one angry man in this house but there are many ways to see him. I see him in the boys I have kissed at my ex's party, in the ever-growing concave pools under my mother's eyes, in the snide undertones of words exchanged in this household. I see him in my sister, taunting and mocking, begging to be challenged. I see him in my love language; the honey-sweet nothings that bask in my words of adoration, the cheap and rusted colognes I offer as gifts. I see him in my pitiful vanity mirror from which I have watched myself wane into a forced advancement of bigger breasts and everything else considered the embodiment of modern beauty. "You and I are the same," the angry man silently taunts. No, we're not. No, we're not. Oh, but we are. We are of the same vile essence. We are the products of a barbaric augend and addend. We are the politicians, the riots, the abused and the abusive, the orphans, the killers and the dreamers. We are everything that passionately desires change. In that sense, then yes we are the same. I am the angry man and he is I.

There is only one angry man in this house but there are many ways to see him. I, with a heart that holds enough vastness for two planets, am one of them. She, with her silent potency that leaks from her unstitched wounds, is one of them. They, with their foolish promise of a better land or a harmonious world, is one of them. He, who swears to his high-school love the stars, the moon, this life and the next to follow, is one of them. As you see, I have been gifted with the curse-like ability to perceive the angry man in everyone and everywhere but perhaps this isn't true. Or maybe it is, I am terribly uncertain. But last week in my Philosophy lecture, Mr. Saunders said that everything returns. "Everything returns, everything

Ginger

the moths flock in array upon
time immemorial, untouched.
like the love we were promised,
spectres of kisses descend
upon tabletops and bookmarks; they rest
and they decay, hand in burnt-hand.
do you remember where we first met,
the person i was, the person i thought you were
sometimes i cannot think
and this juts out and congeals—
to its source, its fossil.
and there is not enough time
in this plane of memory
to realize i cannot think like i cannot bleed
i have no desire to ask myself
what this means, i am meddling in a pool
of confusion, a pool i have always known
but i am a child still
caught up in the breeze of wonder
spiraling like the ginger in my mother's tea
where did it all go wrong?
and i ask this,
again and again

A Barred Owl Speaks to Me

Time throws an axe at my head. I don't
duck quickly enough. Wounded,
I keep walking. The forest deepens

and darkens. A barred owl speaks to me
with a charming owl accent. We talk
about Butternut Lake which knows

many spring songs. A harpsichord
inside an uncurling fern plays so I start
to dance, no longer lonely. The owl

flies away. One feather
drops on my shoulder. I suddenly know
every word in the dictionary of trees.

I Open the Door

and it's Bette Davis, dead
for over three decades,
but fresh as a can
of Mountain Dew.

I make her
a stiff martini. She says
death is like getting
blood work done.

A small prick,
you say ouch,
and walk out into forever.

At This Late Date

It's noon. Sun rages through the skylight.
I'm hiding from so many things:
in air-conditioning from heat
which, long before one heard of global warming,
I regarded unhealthily as dirt
(and vegetables as mud). From the political future,
the not-so-secret police who must soon come.
From covid and its bearers.
From life, as seniors do unless
they manically embrace it. Perhaps from the memory
of some idiot ideology
of the prosperous years that advocated
living in the moment—Try that now . . .

Then randomly, in this light, I recall
someone—but I'm sorry, it isn't
a person, only parts:
the curve of neck and shoulder on a pillow,
the subtle place below where breasts began,
the view obstructed by a younger hand . . .
Why her now?
Last night a fresh depressing image, sent,
I realized, from the afternoon she left.
So that by day I seem to tabulate
the victories of night, and by night
the defeats of day,
when neither are especially relevant.

Maestro

They laughed when I sat down to play.
But my opening arpeggio broke
a string and several octaves and they stopped.
The development unleashed
my Scriabinesque color-and-scent-organ
effect, plus touch:
ectoplasmic frotteurs and lap-dancers
assaulted gown and tux. A certain fortissimo
progression confronted them with
the Irreducible; other capitalized nouns
transcended taste itself. Then I hammered them
with subtlety, till by the end
they were lost somewhere wider
and better aerated
than the usual opium den.

Clueless

“You know ‘evil’ is ‘live’ spelled backwards,” the boy announced to his father from the doorway.

Ogden looked up from his laptop computer. He was sitting at the dining table reading the online version of the *New York Times*. The boy was just starting to deal with pimples, he noticed again. Always a distressing time of life.

“You’re right,” Ogden replied after a moment, since Jeremy seemed to be expecting some kind of response.

“You just don’t get it, do you?” his son muttered, disgusted, and he turned to leave the room.

What was this all about? Ogden had a brief terrified thought that his son was suicidal. “Jeremy!” he called, but his son ignored him, and Ogden heard the heavy tread of his boots on the stairs, heading for his room. After a moment, Ogden turned back to his laptop.

Therapy

"If I have to live with him like this, I think I'll go nuts. I feel like a trapped animal, like I might have to chew my leg off to escape."

That was Eileen, describing her marriage to Marvin, a misanthrope about twenty years older than she was. He'd lost interest in sex. She hadn't.

We were in the same therapy group that met every month, only we called it a writers' group, and some of us really were there for the writing. Patricia was writing a series of stories about zombies. Jenny wrote poems about her mom and about nature. I was farting around with a movie script about a woman who goes off the grid.

I was between jobs. Somehow I'd gotten stuck in the technical writing line of work. It started when I worked for an electrical firm, writing their codes and procedures, then a software firm that did computer games, and after that an insurance agency, methods and standards. Even when I tried to bust out of the mold – ad writing, promo work, speechwriting, anything – they always looked at my resume and told me I was a technical writer and that's the kind of job I should be looking for.

"I told him, I said, 'Mitch, I want to have sex,' and he said, 'Well, then go have sex, Eileen. I'm not stopping you.'"

"So are you going to have sex?" I asked her.

Eileen rolled her eyes. "That's what my novel's about, Karen," she said.

Before the next monthly meeting I got a new job – technical writing for a company that makes microwave ovens and other appliances. Troubleshooting, assembly instructions. So I stopped coming to therapy. One day, several months later, at noon, when I was going out for lunch, who do I run into on Presidents Street? Eileen.

"How's your novel coming?" I asked her. I explained about my new job, said I hadn't been able to work on my script, so I'd stopped coming to the writers group.

"Me too," she said. "I stopped writing on my book and moved out to my own apartment."

I didn't ask her if she was having sex. The question seemed too personal.

Apology

You teased crocuses out of the soil,
beguiled goldfinches back to sing
at our window that it was finally spring—
but my heart strayed ahead to fireworks,
sparklers, and sunscreen's frankincense.
I am sorry for my faithlessness.

You rubbed sunscreen on my shoulder-blades,
arranged for the lake to be as blue as sky,
donned a bikini unsuited to your modesty—
yet I opted to give myself to autumn:
pumpkins, sheaves of corn, swamp maples
going pyrotechnic. Forgive me please.

You cut jack-o-lanterns, raked brittle leaves,
dressed children up as heroes and royalty
for Halloween, gave me the leftover candy,
carried the harvest home. I snuck around
with a Flexible Flier, wore mittens sleeping,
text-messaged Santa. I fled your weeping.

You learned to ski, installed snow tires,
bought carrots and coal for the man of snow,
decked the halls with boughs of holly,
fa la la la la. I left you—wandered glades,
seeking tentative hints of green. I listened
for the early bird. I was that mean.

Early to Rise

Sleep can also come too easily,
and dreamlessness can wake you up at dawn
to a world where the birds have forgotten to sing.
The sun staggers up into the sky
behind bedraggled clouds that don't know where
to put their rain. No rivers seem to want it;
the trees are ducking; the hills have nowhere to go
and nowhere to put whatever might be offered.
You should have stayed awake another hour,
until the nighttime breeze stopped being shy
and each mosquito in your room had had its fill.

Head of the Metolius

It gushes out of a little cave in Black Butte
but originates in the Cascades,
a hundred miles away.
Cold! Too cold to stand in.
And clear. Right out of the ground.
And these old man poems—
where do they come from,
after so much dark and silence?
They burble out free, easy,
fresh and clear to me.
Sixty-odd years of tears & sweat
roiling in the caverns of my mind,
seeping forgotten
into hidden caves and crevices.
Chilling there. And flowing out
as I tilt and head downhill,
hitting the light, sparkling there.

Bobulate

to leave a state of confusion
or to become confused? To full on
thrash befuddlement. To move
a ripstick (a skateboard made
by razor) and by extension to move
any movement at all. To un-
fuddle. To disconfuse? Fuddle
wine. Muddled mine. To muddle
through. With con—to befuddle.
With discon—we are back with
unbefuddle. Oh mother, I miss
you. Be with me, be cuddle me near.

So What Do You Think About Cows, or, A Lingering Grief

“Words are like nets – we hope they’ll cover what we mean, but we know they can’t possibly hold that much joy, or grief, or wonder.”

—Jodi Picoult, *Change of Heart*

We’ve carted this grief halfway around the world but now I’m calling dibs. She slipped out in the early dawn, dropped her light, love dried up. Did some things she can’t take back, but none of it matters now. In what world does it turn out this way? In what world does a mother die, stroked out in days of remembering? Months have turned to years because perception stains reality.

I’ve been trying to understand a love of elephants. Mother had them all: figurines, jade replicas, earrings, all visual indications of her dire enchantment with the earth’s largest land-dwelling pachyderm.

Who knows what these times are, these latter days of reminiscence and grasping for a few more hours to feel young and vital? Maybe that’s it. The ageless cues of the elephant, virile long after so much time would minimize other beasts. “They never forget,” she would say. And maybe this drove into her heart some replica of remembering, of not forgetting the secrets she held so boxed and heavy. If I could have a last conversation, I would ask her why.

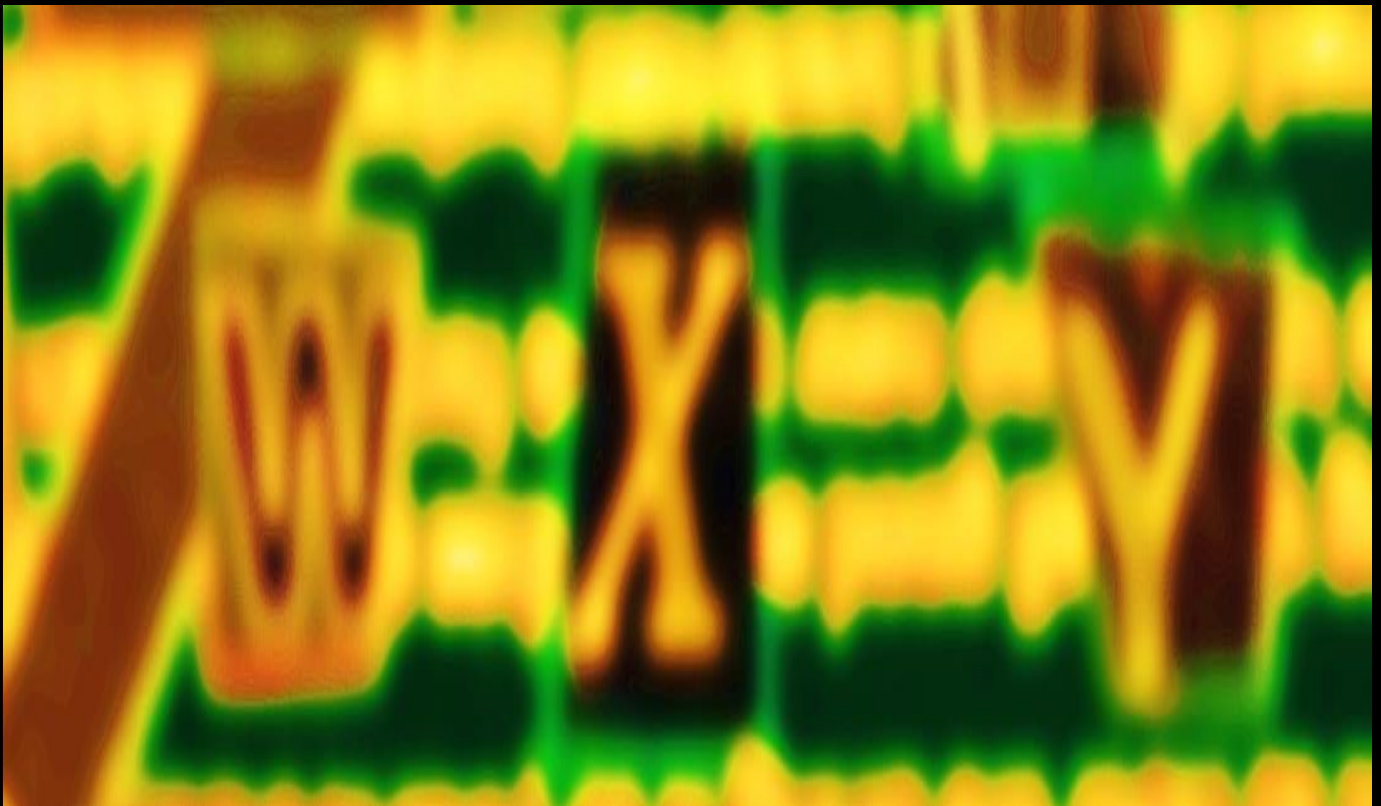
Life glories in spanking us in the face, on one side, grief, the other, awe. Grief is waking in the middle of the night and forgetting where you put the flashlight. It’s that constant scraping against a dark window, a hard rain shouldering the earth and not letting up before the creeks rise too high.

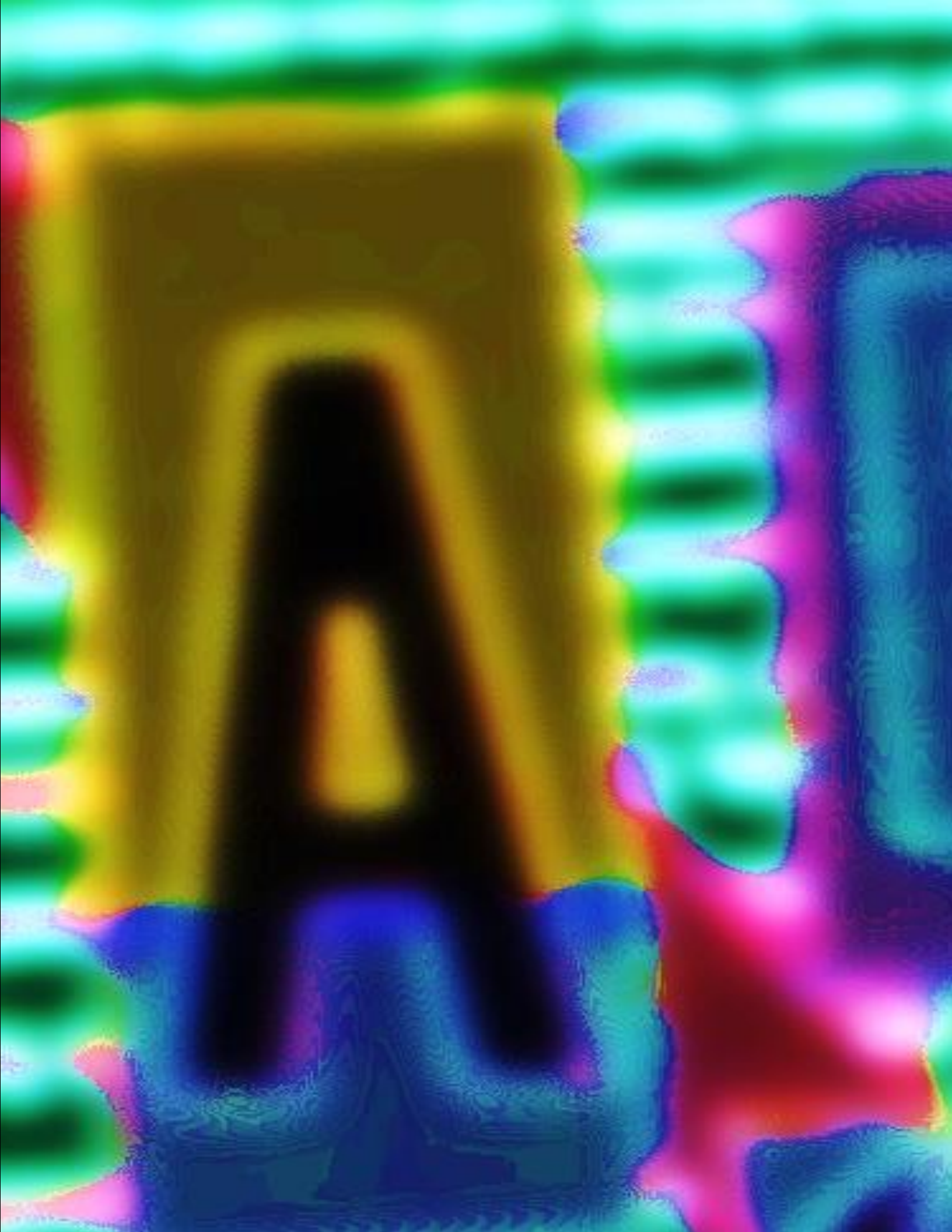
I wonder if she did all she wanted to do. If not regrets, were her memories unbridled, a rampaging elephant in the wild? Or were they shoved into a musty corner, shackled lest they run amuck and trample her life’s spoken narrative? Not all secrets can be corralled forever, and forgiveness covers with blankets of love:

these were the last lessons I learned from her.

Grief settles in low places, in hollows and dry creek beds, and everything stays the same until it doesn't. Huddled in a field, two farmers made a pact. "We'll call it harvest," one says, patting her stomach. "We'll call it profit," the other says, stroking his wallet. We're teaching everyone these days. One big whoopie. It all runs together, a jumble of seconds clacking toward meaning and a sudden sunset. The girls you knew in school, those boys, the teachers and lessons now gone, and there's a reunion coming up. When did we get so sad?

Outside my doors, a field of lowing cattle. Love hurts, it's true, but what about those cows? Sometimes we've earned the right to be eccentric, to embrace the unusual and harbor admiration. Living's our excuse, the grief, the awe. And even, sometimes, the cows.





CONTRIBUTORS

L. Ward Abel's work has appeared in *Rattle*, *The Reader*, *The Istanbul Review*, *Snow Jewel*, *The Honest Ulsterman*, *Worcester Review*, hundreds of others, and he is the author of three full collections and eleven chapbooks of poetry, including *Jonesing For Byzantium* (UK Authors Press, 2006), *American Bruise* (Parallel Press, 2012), *Little Town gods* (Folded Word Press, 2016), *A Jerusalem of Ponds* (erbacce-Press, 2016), *The Rainflock Sings Again* (Unsolicited Press, 2019), *Floodlit* (Beakful, 2019) and the forthcoming *The Width of Here* (Silver Bow, 2021). He resides in rural Georgia, and is a reformed lawyer, now teacher of literature.

In 1998, **Christopher Barnes** won a Northern Arts writers award. In July 2000 he read at Waterstones bookshop to promote the anthology *Titles Are Bitches*. Christmas 2001 he debuted at Newcastle's famous Morden Tower doing a reading of poems. Each year he read for Proudwords lesbian and gay writing festival and partook in workshops. 2005 saw the publication of his collection *LOVEBITES* published by Chanticleer Press, 6/1 Jamaica Mews, Edinburgh. In August 2007, he made a film called 'A Blank Screen, 60 seconds, 1 shot' for Queerbeats Festival at The Star & Shadow Cinema Newcastle, reviewing a poem...see www.myspace.com/queerbeatsfestival He has also written Art Criticism for *Peel* and *Combustus* magazines.

Leah Browning is the author of three nonfiction books and six chapbooks. Her most recent chapbook of short fiction is *Orchard City*, a collection published by Hyacinth Girl Press in 2017. Browning's work has appeared in *Four Way Review*, *Newfound*, *Valparaiso Fiction Review*, *Watershed Review*, *The Stillwater Review*, and elsewhere.

Alan Catlin has been publishing for six decades, which feels like the answer to a *Jeopardy* question these days. His most recent full-length books include, *Asylum Garden: after Van Gogh* (Dos Madres) and *Memories* (Alien Buddha). *Memories Too* is due soon from Dos Madres.

Ellen Chia lives in Thailand and whilst pondering over the wonders and workings of

her tiny universe finds herself succumb time after time the act of poetry making. Her works have been published in *The Ekphrastic Review*, *The Honest Ulsterman*, *Neologism Poetry Journal*, *Zingara Poetry Review*, *The Tiger Moth Review*, and *Chiron Review*.

Sinéad Delaney is 30 and from rural Ireland. She enjoys languages and writing. She also enjoys stargazing when cloud cover allows. After lockdown, she hopes to go to beer gardens in the sun, and walk around the shops without fogged up glasses. “Needing to Knit” first appeared in *Lockdown BabyBabble*.

John Dorroh is a composter, recycler, and procrastinator. His first poem was written with his mom’s red lipstick on the bathroom walls. He may have evolved a bit since then. His poems have appeared in *Feral*, *Blue River Heron*, *Os Pressan*, and many others. He also writes short fiction and the occasional rant.

Tim Fitts is the author of two short story collections, *Hypothermia* (MadHat Press 2017) and *Go Home and Cry for Yourself* (Xavier Review Press). His work has been published by journals such as *New South*, *The Gettysburg Review*, *Boulevard*, *Granta*, *Shenandoah*, among many others.

Ian Ganassi’s work has appeared recently or will appear soon in numerous literary magazines, such as *New American Writing*, *Bluepepper*, *Beyond Words*, *Offcourse*, *Home Planet News*, and *The American Journal of Poetry*, among many others. His full-length collection, *Mean Numbers*, is available in all the usual places. Selections from an ongoing collaboration with a painter can be found at www.thecorpses.com.

John Grey is an Australian poet, US resident, recently published in *Orbis*, *Dalhousie Review*, and the *Round Table*. Latest books, *Leaves On Pages* and *Memory Outside The Head*, are available through Amazon. Work upcoming in *Lana Turner* and *Hollins Critic*.

James Croal Jackson (he/him/his) is a Filipino-American poet. He has two chapbooks, *Our Past Leaves* (Kelsay Books, forthcoming 2021) and *The Frayed Edge of Memory* (Writing Knights Press, 2017), with recent poems in *White Wall*

Review, Subnivean, and Thin Air. He edits *The Mantle Poetry* (themantlepoetry.com) from Pittsburgh, PA. (jamescroaljackson.com)

Madelyn Kreienheder is a graduate student at Truman State University, where she will graduate with a Master's in Education. She is completing her student teaching now and will begin her career teaching English following her graduation. Madelyn's first published poetry appeared in *The Big Windows Review* Issue 17.

Len Krisak is the author of several books and has been awarded the following prizes: Richard Wilbur Prize, Robert Frost Prize, Robert Penn Warren Prize, The Able Muse Poetry Book Award, and The New England Poetry Club Book Award. Len has poems in (or forthcoming in) *The Antioch Review*, *The Sewanee Review*, *The Hudson Review*, *Raritan*, *The Southwest Review*, and *The Oxford Book of Poems on Classical Mythology*—and is a four-time champion on *Jeopardy!*

Peter Mladinic has published three books of poems: *Lost in Lea*, *Dressed for Winter*, and *Falling Awake in Lovington*, all with the Lea County Museum Press. He lives in Hobbs, New Mexico.

Cameron Morse lives with his wife Lili and two children in Independence, Missouri. His poems have been published in numerous magazines, including *New Letters*, *Bridge Eight*, *Portland Review* and *South Dakota Review*. His first collection, *Fall Risk*, won Glass Lyre Press's 2018 Best Book Award. His latest is *Far Other* (Woodley Press, 2020). He holds an MFA from the University of Kansas City—Missouri and serves as Senior Reviews editor at *Harbor Review* and Poetry editor at *Harbor Editions*. For more information, check out his Facebook page or website.

Elisha Osorio is a student at The Winchester School, Dubai. She (unrealistically) aims to pursue journalism and creative writing in her undergraduate years. "The Angry Man" first appeared, with the title "What I am," in *The Bitchin' Kitsch*.

Kenneth Pobo is the author of twenty-one chapbooks and nine full-length collections. Recent books include *Bend of Quiet* (Blue Light Press), *Loplop in a Red City* (Circling Rivers), and *Uneven Steven* (Assure Press). *Opening* is forthcoming

from Rectos Y Versos Editions. *Lavender Fire*, *Lavender Rose* is forthcoming from BrickHouse Books.

Frederick Pollack is the author of two book-length narrative poems, *The Adventure* (Story Line Press, 1986; to be reissued by Red Hen Press) and *Happiness* (Story Line Press, 1998), and two collections, *A Poverty of Words* (Prolific Press, 2015) and *Landscape with Mutant* (Smokestack Books, UK, 2018). In print, Pollack's work has appeared in *Hudson Review*, *Salmagundi*, *Poetry Salzburg Review*, *Manhattan Review*, *Skidrow Penthouse*, *Main Street Rag*, *Miramar*, *Chicago Quarterly Review*, *The Fish Anthology* (Ireland), *Poetry Quarterly Review*, *Magma* (UK), *Neon* (UK), *Orbis* (UK), *Armarolla*, *December*, and elsewhere. Online, his poems have appeared in *Big Bridge*, *Diagram*, *BlazeVox*, *Mudlark*, *Occupoetry*, *Faircloth Review*, *Triggerfish*, *Big Pond Rumours* (Canada), *Misfit*, *OffCourse*, *Big Windows Review* (2020) and elsewhere.

Charles Rammelkamp is Prose Editor for BrickHouse Books in Baltimore. A chapbook of poems, *Me and Sal Paradise*, was published last year by FutureCycle Press. Two full-length collections appeared in 2020, *Catastroika*, from Apprentice House, and *Ugler Lee*, from Kelsay Books.

Seven-time Pushcart Prize nominee **Russell Rowland** writes from New Hampshire's Lakes Region, where he has judged high-school Poetry Out Loud competitions. His work appears in *Except for Love: New England Poets Inspired by Donald Hall* (Encircle Publications), and *Covid Spring, Vol. 2* (Hobblebush Books). His latest poetry book, *Wooden Nutmegs*, is available from Encircle Publications.

Andrew Shields lives in Basel, Switzerland. His collection of poems *Thomas Hardy Listens to Louis Armstrong* was published by Eyewear in 2015. His band Human Shields released the album *Somebody's Hometown* in 2015 and the EP *Défense de jouer* in 2016. Twitter: @ShieldsAndrew
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/andrewshieldspoems/>

Brad Shurmantine (bradshurmantine.com) lives in Napa, Ca., where he writes, reads, tends three gardens (sand, water, vegetable), takes care of chickens, cats, and bees, and works on that husband thing. He backpacks in the Sierras and

travels when he can, and has a serious passion for George Eliot.

Pediatrician **Kelley White** has worked in inner-city Philadelphia and rural New Hampshire. Her poems have appeared in *Exquisite Corpse*, *Rattle*, and *JAMA*. Her recent books are *Toxic Environment* (Boston Poet Press) and *Two Birds in Flame* (Beech River Books). She received a 2008 Pennsylvania Council on the Arts grant.

Chila Woychik is originally from the beautiful land of Bavaria. She has been published in *Cimarron*, *Passages North*, and elsewhere, and has published *Singing the Land: A Rural Chronology* (Shanti Arts, 2020). She won Storm Cellar's 2019 Flash Majeure Contest and Emry's 2016 Linda Julian Creative Nonfiction Award. www.chilawoychik.com





L. Ward Abel Christopher Barnes Leah Browning Alan Catlin Ellen Chia Sinéad Delaney
John Dorroh Tim Fitts Ian Ganassi John Grey James Croal Jackson Madelyn Kreienheder
Len Krisak Peter Mladinic Cameron Morse Elisha Osorio Kenneth Pobo Frederick Pollack
Charles Rammelkamp Russell Rowland Andrew Shields Brad Shurmantine Kelley White
Chila Woychik The Big Windows Review Issue 25 Fall 2021