



The Big Windows Review

Issue 33 Fall 2023



***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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Longing

Today, I am keeping a true course, Mother!
I swear, I will wash your lustrous black idol with my blood,
And, invoke millions of your incarnations
If you absorb my white skin, NOW.

Don't you know?
I have a need to finding patterns,
More than your ghouls.
Come, Mother!
Come to my body tonight,
No more foot-dragging
I am standing at your doorstep,
Ready to be crushed by your LEFT foot.

My heart is your cremation ground
Surrounded by jackals, corpses and girdle made
Of treachery.
Slaughter, mother!
I am what exists when time is transcended.
I am Shiva, I am Sati! I am 'Maharatri'!
Don't wait too long to take me
Back in your womb!

Sunday, from a Further Garden

I wake to a morning without dread.
The sky's thrown off its sodden gray coat.

Pain my hips gave me for weeks is gone.
For once, my falsehoods don't shackle me to shame.

I indulge the quiet of these hours.
Pretend phones may still be left off the hook.

Monarchs hover flowers I thought I'd let die.
I have no intention to buy trite things online.

Today I'm what sails seek in soft tradewinds.
A pretty neighbor waves to me, dawnlight in her hair.

I am not jealous of fame or beautiful eyes.
Grief took an overdue holiday, or fell asleep.

My neighbors have no goods worth coveting.
At dusk, I'll see myself approaching home in a dark window.

CHRISTOPHER BARNES

Fragments 1-5

Fragments 1

Overtures – a rumour. Darkened.
Wide-angled lens exposed purlieus.
'Ministers need to take heads out of sand.'
Abstemious craws, promising landscapes.

Fragments 2

Bamboozled foothold, nonplussed hedgehog.
Detail of a second – close-up.
'Move patients to hotel to free up beds...'
Skid eyes, as though bemused.

Fragments 3

Croon, it's viable – don't blub.
Slide trays keep record.
"Critical incident declared."
Young'uns edge in family mirror.

Fragments 4

Peach elflock on bather.
How inimitable this lustre?
"...scheme due to begin within weeks..."
Peppy colour, anomie is genial.

Fragments 5

Morass, gloaming slugs.

Pinkies loading film.

“Declared victory yesterday.”

A braggart’s overshadowing tower.



Coleridge on Scafell

He speaks his mind
in a Devonshire accent,
leaves home on a Sunday
morning for nine days
to walk around the Lake District.
He disregards the weather,
has no professional guide,
his thoughts high
on fresh air,
freedom and adventure.
He sees the wild, green panorama,
a sunset viewed from a sheepfold
with dreams for company.
A letter written on Scafell,
bruised ink on paper,
the thundery forecast
in a life,
with those clouds
that came from the sea.

Herman Melville in Hell

He'd been there before as
a port of call, all the natives
dressed in missionary suits,
descendants of cannibals
who made their way North in
long boats with oars carved
from whale bones or so dream
fathers said around the pot
belly stoves smoking their long
stem pipes stuffed with aromatic
blends of hemp, dried tobaccos
soaked in cactus juices and left
out in the sun to bake the resins
right into their brains insuring
that the stories they told were
as vivid as the sunsets over
tall ships, their empty riggings
manned by spirits of drowned
sailors lost at sea.

Altar

I take the weekend to remember the tree that lived for 220 years, stood another five as physiographic totem to how high a tree can grow, dropping branches yearly until its trunk's decay threatened neighboring houses.

On the last morning still itself, core of rings unrevealed, the tree climber slingshots a silky yellow line skyward through its last remaining V of top branches, ties a rope, has two men on the ground pull him up year by year.

From the crook of the V he uncoils a yellow rope, drops it down, calls out "Ninety feet." From there he must see the marsh over the cathedral of surrounding trees, the nearby storage complex moored on the capped artesian lake.

This tree that my grandfather buzzed in his Piper Cub in the 50s and 60s, back from jobs in Nashville, Pittsburgh, signaling my grandmother to drive to the airport, never guessing Irma's winds would give it a swaybacked bend.

Like a reverse game of building block tower, decades of cylinder fall away from what becomes memory hologram of a once grand being, host to songs of various birds, drone chant chirrs of cicadas, scampering darts of lizards.

Five days later the smell of sawdust still ripe, I walk down the trail to the stump whose rings I've counted, recounted, to the Jenga crash of toppled sections, the tessellated cloak of bark kicked down into a carpet of Escher-like mudcracks.

On the trail I've overturned a grill top, girded it with bricks,
placed in sticks and dead-dry magnolia leaves, forsook bow
drill for Circle K cigarette lighter, but refuse to use accelerants
which would cheapen my method to send up a memorial.

I've waited for twilight to remember the tree's centuries
of strength and stillness, without knowing real devotion means
great labor. The magnolia leaves light like flares, burn bright,
but won't light the sticks. Vespers pass to Compline.

I work from my seat: a cut ring of top branch I could barely
lift and carry, flicking the lighter on stacks of wide dead leaves
under sticks, until finally embers become steady golden light,
and I add the shaved piece with its many Saturn rings of age.

A gibbous moon hangs above the tree's absence as witness.
A gaze of raccoons bustles through the underbrush. I cup
the tree's warmth as fire crackles and glows, rich smoke curls
up. Under, around me, worms and insects work their ministry.



There Is Madness in the Iodine

there is madness in the iodine
buttercup mystery
an enigma of grayish-white
entrails or slice brains
without the blood
blanched cross section
the sky full of fat unfolding clouds
after the rain
looking like body parts on *Gray's* dissection table

Louise Bogan's Journey Around the Calendula in Her Garden

To me, one silky flower is like another.
Most offer shameless buds of lust or pride.
These few flourish as well as any other.
Tame, like women, but with a wild side.

Most flowers offer buds of lust or pride.
For them there's no growth beyond all reason.
Tame, like women, there is no wild side.
They are content to thrive confined.

For them, there's no growth beyond all reason
or rows in summer gardens. It's their season
to be content, to thrive confined,
to wait for rain, to open to the sun's bright light

in rows in summer gardens. It's their season.
For me, it is better to remain still,
to wait for rain, to open to the sun's bright light,
to listen intently for that brazen bee.

For calendula, it's better to remain still,
to flourish as well as any other,
to listen intently for that brazen bee.
To me, this silky flower is like no other.

river

There are still
those notes
you can hit.

There are still
the girls
who do smile
back.

Time is softer
than water.

All who swim
are bound
to drown.

Dear Louise

I have nothing to report but this.

I feel dull
and the weather is belligerent.

Yet I still keep my eye out for bird-life.
Not just the bluebirds and the tanagers
but even the lowly sparrows.

I'm not so dead that I cannot dream.
And I regularly walk to the pond and back
despite the foul smell from the factories.

A breeze in my face
is the next best thing to a kiss.
But a strong wind
is not a breeze a hundredfold.
In truth, it diminishes me.

I can't afford a sailing boat
and I cannot reach the clouds.

I do smile at strangers
but reciprocation is not expected.

I have enough clothes for one body
and, money-wise, I hover above the poverty line.

I suffer from some things and I'm ignorant of others.

I've tried self-improvement programs
and, though I'm still myself, I haven't improved.

It's beginning to rain.
That's what I meant to tell you all along.



After a Japanese Festival

“and so one should know how to address the moon.”
—Czeslaw Milosz

I went to the city officials for a permit,
but the police came to check us out anyway.
We gathered in a deep park darkness,
my grad students, their mates, children,
even one mother, to share moon poems, lore,
songs around a bonfire to honor
a ritual practiced in Japan. We sang
the childhood song, “I see the moon
and the moon sees me,” made the mother cry,
she orphaned young. She had almost forgotten
how her father held her, sang this song to her.
Nearby stood my huge and bulky
Dobsonian telescope with its big mirror
encased in a sturdy cardboard tube,
developed by a priest to provide
the best sky watching for those
of meager means as well as those
wedded to poverty by choice.
We saw the moon’s sun-washed side
with its pockmarks and gray dust.
It was a beautiful night to gather
under heaven’s wonders and recite
and sing together of the many,
many bright things we had almost
forgotten, barely understand and
rarely think to celebrate.

goethean poem (for lee-anne and christine)

main-à-dieu, nova scotia; 23/12/22

bog-
moss roses (si-
lence changing
colour): our

eyes list-
en in, find their
register – serious

matter.

*

as we can't simply
see, a poem's
longtime

in the making: cloud-
shadow brush-
ing

rock-
lichen
braille.

—gathering of small things—

Brown-gray leaves
caught in wind
tumble across parking lot,
get stuck under worn tires.
Drink coffee
that cools between sips
steam rising.
Hawks circle owls watch
mice dart under empty cars,
under carriages covered in spider webs.
Nature gets by
despite humanity
trying to shut it down.

Washing

you wash my blistered feet, not because I can't but because you need to-
need to in a way I once needed to prove myself to you, once needed to hide my calloused
edges, my dry skin, my cavernous life that I disguised with discount suit jackets and
packed days answering emails and never having time to really admit how my life was
passing, how yours was passing more quickly- how I discarded my dreams but kept yours
until I couldn't anymore

when you finish, my skin is raw from scrubbing; I am clean and broken and bare
and we can no longer pretend I turned out the way you once imagined, we can no longer
exchange words because words are inaccurate in the kitchen with broken tiles &
cavernous ceilings

this space was always
too small
for us both.



Watching Your Step

The leashed dog tugs ahead, head low.
The future is right under his nose,
and he is not careful where he steps.

Perhaps what is ahead for me
is merely a matter of distance.
I look far beyond the stop sign
but maybe cannot see as far
as the dog can smell.

The mutt belongs to that smell.
Perhaps I belong to the mirage
of roses and scented flowers
and believe the future
always leaves a scent behind.

The Briefest of Reprieves

We are free now. Taller, wiser
than the myths of childhood.
Gone, the sins we held like stones.

We touch our chests with the shape
of the crossroads. We begin to forget
the singe of shadow on our foreheads.

Look around. No higher beings here.
No devil to touch us like a whirlwind.
No angels turning in the sky like bells.

But freedom leaves a hole. Do we miss
the pleasure of an undertow, the hiss
of demon in the foaming wave?

Do we want a cave where we run deeper in,
twisting like the shadows on the walls?
In dream, most of us call fear or wonder home.

Nothing Happening Again and Again

Which is a reminder of not-love, of the
never-touched and unhoused, of withheld
sunlight. That crevice between syllable and
tooth, the one concealed to the south. Look:
the chrysanthemum nods in acquiescence
as thyme-scent and oregano-starred nights
drift from the terraced hills of decades past.
That was loneliness. Walking the road, thumb
out, no one slowing. Not speaking
the language, unable to say the right words.
Visibility's curse. Life as it could be. But
wasn't. And every long day, repeating.

The title is from a line in Jack Gilbert's poem "How to Love the Dead."

What is the Sound of the Cold Moon

Infiltrating the screen. The word for that bleakness
expelled as a blade enters the grapefruit's
flesh. The fragrance of a burnt night in snow.
I recall shivering on the path between barn
and greenhouse, wondering how one moment
had mushroomed into slammed books and drunken
shouts, the cattle dog slinking at my knee. I
had never sought perfection, had always made
do. Now I question such practice. My body
was a wilderness in a country of yellow lights,
pleasure robbed of delights never shared. Again
and again we perfected loneliness. Later, sipping
tea solo in front of the fire, I heard a screech
owl's trill. The embers grayed over before dawn.

Olive Oil Cake

I am plotting
the next cake
I will bake.
Olive oil and lemon.
Or orange.
Bright, not too sweet.
Simple but elegant,
topped with rosemary
whipped cream.
What about you
I ask. What
are you thinking?



TIMOTHY ROBBINS

A Little Time

It may take a little time to be thankful
for a dream that was so dutiful and so
unifying; so susceptible to your inner-
most yoga that frantic haste to embody
it woke you. Its sweetness having been

snatched from you, a bitterness seized
on your tongue, and you swore a bitter
oath. It may take a little time to admit
if you had accepted him for the vision
he was, you and that dark resplendent

buzz might have fulfilled the promises
your dream bodies made to that closed
room. It may take a little time to stop
feeling robbed, to give palpable thanks
for fleeting gifts, as every gift's a ghost.

Layers and Layers

open sky
heavens weep
curtains of rain
random drops
on stones
where time began
welcoming wet
slipping into soil
recovery
feeding layers
to roots
webs of connections
underneath
warming
pushing up
forever growth

Death Is Wide

Death is wide.

Wide like the mouth of a whale,
Sucking up the ocean and filtering it through
Where we all eventually get caught in the baleen.

Death is wide.

Wide like the nights
When you can't sleep
Or like the days
When you're stuck at work until it's dark outside.
You go outside to your car
And the road is so vast it swallows you as you drive.

Life is narrow.

Life is narrow
Like in that dream
Where you can't fit through the door
And you get jammed in there
As the tiger or the masked gunman
Advances upon you.

Life is narrow.

Narrow like the shaft of sunlight
That peeks into a closed room.
Narrow like the shiver of temporary excitement
That is love.

Life is narrow

And most of us cannot fit through
So we meander in one place

Until the day death arrives
So forcefully that it pushes us out the only other door
And we exit –
Entering something so dark and wide.

Wide like the open mouth of a whale.



Sunday Afternoon

Stadium seats
grumble
in their bolts
like old men
fishing a lake
when the fish
don't bite,
when the game
is away.

Empty seats fold
against themselves
like forearms crossed
against their chests
expecting a big catch
where silence and water
exist in reflection,
and the winning
touchdown replays
in memories.

T.C. WIGGINS

Lunacy

The lobotomy of night is with me again
and it begs me to remember their name.
What's the difference between the sky
and my skin; purple and brown. These
are the simple answers we look for. A
quality, a trait, a sign we aren't just wasting
time looking at the stars. Shoot for the
moon and you'll land on it. Don't worry
about if you miss, not yet. Shoot for the
land and you're fine just where you are.
Simple answers because we barely know
the question. No one asked. Why should
you? You can ask now but we're already
past that. Shoot for the moon, but look at
the stars. Suited in open-caskets, burning.
Shoot too high and you'll land in one, too
low and you're land. What's worse? You
don't have enough time to ask. Look at
the moon. Shoot for it. If you miss, you'll
still hit the dead. Isn't that close enough?
Or don't. You're already where you need
to be anyways. Put the gun away. Just look
up. You could be on the moon but your
spacesuit already has holes in it. So why
bother. Why answer. Why ask.

Grace

Grace is a funny gal –
she's on everybody's mind
but she won't wear anybody's ring.
She's hard to see –
a leprechaun without a pipe
a unicorn without a horn
but when light opens
behind the eye and in the chest
you know she's in the room.
Feel the brush of her dress?
Look up and almost see her head
spiral to another world.

Fishing Trip

I suppose I could make a comparison between myself, age ten, seated on the endgate of an old pickup truck, my feet wriggling beneath me while my father explains that he and my mother are getting a divorce, and the carp I saw moments later, wriggling on a muddy, desolate mound, the lake around it having receded, leaving it with nowhere, and no way, to go. Yes, I suppose I could do that, and in the end I will, because I'm a writer now, and that is something that writers do—we make comparisons, create metaphors, indulge in the many layers of life. But as I said, when all this happened I was only a boy, and unmoved by rhetorical flourishes, which was why, instead of crafting an analogy, I performed a deliberate act: I stepped into the lake, trudged over to the fish, grasped it with my bare hands, placed it into the water, released my hold upon its slimy scales, and allowed it to swim away—because on that day, only one of us had a chance to return to a world in which we knew how to survive.

CONTRIBUTORS

Nidhi Agrawal, who grew up in India, focuses on issues of emotional and physical trauma in her poetry. She strongly believes that poetry is a source of joy, pain, and wonder; a tool that keeps her going in life, and is driven by the intense physical and emotional trauma she encountered through her medical condition. Nidhi's writings have been featured by *Laurel Review*, Altadena Libraries, University of North Dakota, *Project Muse* sponsored by John Hopkins University, Hobart Books, Writing Center at Washtenaw Community College (WCC), University of Illinois at Chicago, BYU College of Humanities and the Department of English, The University of Pennsylvania, Quadrant Australia, University of California, Riverside, Chicago School of Arts, Lewis Clark State College's literary journal, St. Francisco University, Xavier Review Press, California State Poetry Society, The University of Tennessee, *Chronogram Magazine*, *Letters* (Yale University), *Setu Journal*, *South Asian Today*, *Indian Periodical*, *Garland Magazine*, *Muse India*, etc. She is the author of *Confluence* and an esteemed contributor to the Suicide Volume 2 Poetry Collection & *Anodyne*.

JC Alfier's (they/them) most recent book of poetry, *The Shadow Field*, was published by Louisiana Literature Press (2020). Journal credits include *The Emerson Review*, *Faultline*, *New York Quarterly*, *Notre Dame Review*, *Penn Review*, *Southern Poetry Review*, and *Vassar Review*. They are also an artist doing collage and double-exposure work.

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.

Byron Beynon coordinated Wales's contribution to the anthology *Fifty Strong* (Heinemann). Collections include *The Echoing Coastline* (Agenda) and *Where Shadows Stir* (The Seventh Quarry Press), which was launched in February 2023 at the birthplace of Dylan Thomas.

Alan Catlin has several new books out in the past year including, *Exterminating Angels*, a full-length book by Kelsay Books channeling Noir and art movies. His *How Will the Heart Endure*, a labor of love about the life and art of Diane Arbus, was just released by Kelsay Books. His long-lost book *Altered States, a cross country trip of a United States of the mind*, will be out in 2023 from Cyberwit.

Steven Croft lives on a barrier island off the coast of Georgia. His most recent chapbook is *At Home with the Dreamlike Earth* (The Poetry Box, December 2023). His poems have appeared in print and online journals and have been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net.

Peter J. Dellolio: Born 1956 New York City. Went to Nazareth High School and New York University. Graduated 1978: BA Cinema Studies; BFA Film Production. Wrote and directed various short films, including James Joyce's short story "Counterparts," which he adapted into a screenplay. *Counterparts* was screened at national and international film festivals. A freelance writer, Peter has published many 250-1000 word articles on the arts, film, dance, sculpture, architecture, and culture, as well as fiction, poetry, one-act plays, and critical essays on art, film, and photography. Poetry collections *A Box Of Crazy Toys* published 2018 by Xenos Books/Chelsea Editions and *Bloodstream Is An Illusion Of Rubies Counting Fireplaces* published February 2023 by Cyberwit/Rochak Publishing.

Deborah H. Doolittle, having lived in lots of different places, now calls North Carolina home. A Pushcart Prize nominee, she is the author of *Floribunda* and three chapbooks, *No Crazy Notions*, *That Echo*, and *Bogbound*. Editor of *Brillig: a micro lit mag*, she shares a home with her husband, four housecats, and a backyard full of birds.

Jacob Friesenhahn teaches Religious Studies and Philosophy at Our Lady of the Lake University in San Antonio.

John Grey is an Australian poet, US resident, recently published in *Stand*, *Washington Square Review*, and *Sheepshead Review*. Latest books, *Between Two Fires*, *Covert*, and *Memory Outside The Head*, are available through Amazon. Work upcoming in the *McNeese Review*, *Santa Fe Literary Review*, and *California Quarterly*.

Carol Hamilton taught 2nd grade through graduate school in Connecticut, Indiana, and Oklahoma, was a medical translator and storyteller. She was Poet Laureate of Oklahoma and has published and received various awards for 19 books and chapbooks of poetry, children's novels, and legends.

Sean Howard is the author of six collections of poetry in Canada, most recently *Trinity: Tribute Sequences for Robert Graves* (Gaspereau Press, 2022) and *Unrecovered: 9/11 Poems* (Gaspereau Press, 2021). His poetry has been widely published in Canada, the US, UK, and elsewhere, and featured in *The Best of the Best Canadian Poetry in English* (Tightrope Books, 2017).

David E. Howerton is a part time programmer and lives in the American River Canyon outside of Auburn CA. He has done landscaping, sign painting, cooking, and made jewelry to pay the bills. He and his wife live with two bossy cats. He has three adult daughters and eight grandchildren. His hobbies include type design, soapstone carving, walks in the woods, collecting dragons, and a growing library of Science Fiction.

Erin Jamieson (she/her) holds an MFA in Creative Writing from Miami University. Her writing has been published in over eighty literary magazines, including a Pushcart Prize nomination. She is the author of a poetry collection (*Clothesline*, NiftyLit, Feb 2023). Twitter: @erin_simmer & @EJAMIESEE

Robert S. King is a cofounder of FutureCycle Press. His poems appear widely, including *Chariton Review*, *Kenyon Review*, *Midwest Quarterly*, and *Southern Poetry Review*. He has published eight poetry collections, most recently *Developing a Photograph of God* (Glass Lyre Press, 2014) and *Messages from Multiverses* (Duck Lake Books, 2020).

Patricia Nelson has worked for many years in the "Activist" group of poets in the San Francisco Bay Area. Her new book, *Monster Monologues*, is due out in 2024 from Fernwood Press.

Robert Okaji lives in Indiana among hundreds of books, with his wife, stepson, and cat. His most recent chapbook, *Buddha's Not Talking*, won the 35th annual Slipstream Poetry Chapbook competition, and his work has recently appeared in

Threepenny Review, Concho River Review, Samjoko Magazine, Evergreen Review, and other venues.

Timothy Robbins was born in Indiana in 1964. He has a B.A. in French and an M.A. in Applied Linguistics and has been teaching English as a Second language for three decades. He has published six volumes of poetry. He and his husband of 26 years live in Wisconsin.

Dr. **Roger Singer** is the Poet Laureate of Old Lyme, Connecticut. He has had over 1,000 poems published on the internet, magazines, and in books and is a 2017 Pushcart Prize Award Nominee. He is also the President of the Shoreline Chapter of the Connecticut Poetry Society.

John Tustin's poetry has appeared in many disparate literary journals since 2009. His first poetry collection is forthcoming from Cajun Mutt Press. fritzware.com/johntustinpoetry contains links to his published poetry online.

Diane Webster's work has appeared in *El Portal*, North Dakota Quarterly, *Verdad*, and other literary magazines. She had micro-chaps published by Origami Poetry Press in 2022 and 2023 and was nominated for Best of the Net in 2022.

T. C. Wiggins is an African American poet residing in Cincinnati, Ohio who has been writing since the August of 2022. He has been previously published by *Red Noise Collective, Every Writer, Small World's City, Big Windows Review*, and his favorite writers and inspirations are Linda Gregg, Richard Siken, and Ada Limón. His Instagram handle is [scaringthemuse](https://www.instagram.com/scaringthemuse).

Mike Wilson's work has appeared in magazines including *Amsterdam Quarterly, Mud Season Review, The Pettigru Review, Still: The Journal, The Coachella Review*, and in Mike's book, *Arranging Deck Chairs on the Titanic*, (Rabbit House Press, 2020), political poetry for a post-truth world. He resides in Lexington, Kentucky, and can be found at mikewilsonwriter.com

Wolfgang Wright is the author of the comic novel *Me and Gepe* and various short works scattered across the ether. He doesn't tolerate gluten so well, quite enjoys watching British panel shows, and devotes a little time each day to contemplating the Tao. He lives in North Dakota.

