

Pensive

A Global Journal of Spirituality & the Arts

Issue 10

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Pensive publishes work that deepens the inward life; expresses a range of religious/spiritual/humanist experiences and perspectives; envisions a more just, peaceful, and sustainable world; advances dialogue across difference; and challenges structural oppression in all its forms.

*Pensive: A Global Journal
of Spirituality & the Arts*

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Cover Art: *A Warm Embrace* by
Karl Kang

[clmp]



Northeastern University

Center for Spirituality, Dialogue, and Service

Artist Statement by Karl Kang

A Warm Embrace is a color pencil drawing on paper of thirteen inches by seventeen inches. It is an expression of my yearning for intimate love: of meeting and eventually sharing our life with that special person. I represent this fantasy with this scene of two bodies merging together while still maintaining their own form. They complete the other while being their own unique person. What surrounds them are scenes of their shared life. Their life is nothing extraordinary, but it's nonetheless quite charming. Even though the activity that these two figures are seemingly bland, it's the intimacy and time that they share with each other that makes the moments so special. Even though I approached this drawing with a romantic mindset, I wanted this scene to be applicable to the other relationships of love as well. Love may be platonic or familial, yet despite, this the relationships we cherish the most are the ones that are also the most intimate.

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Logan Garner

HAGIOGRAPHY

Francis, who gathers loose fur
in clumps off of floors,
who scoops away droppings
from the potbelly outside,
from the barn swallows
roosting above my door.

Benedict, who sings low
and quiet in basements,
holds moments in meager light,
Eats simple meals
of bread and coffee.

Mary, queller of all things
fearful and unsettling,
a ward against misfortune
for the superstitious,
soother and soothsayer.

Anthony, who apparently
loves rhyme and has a sharp eye,
whose prayer is a child's poem.
Who jokes that found things
are always the last place you look.

Stephen, whose stones
and cheeks were left unturned.
Taker of things early
into quiet and darkness,
into mystery.

Judas, who is most generous
for reminding us that flaws
faults and failures
are the deepest parts of being,
whispers kindnesses.

Pauline Chu

To my ancestors

I know god in the things that grow:

god laughs in sprays of yellow daffodils;

god weeps in lilacs that drip down a white fence;

god sleeps in the starlit feather moss;

god dances in the wind-born dandelions;

god mourns in the peeking forget-me-nots;

god holds me as the willow outside the library;

gentle branches sway me until the lashing storm abates.

You know, the first time I met god was on a Carolina beach.

I paced on the shores between life and death

until god kissed my feet hello in a foamy wave.

When I'm trapped in myself, god sends help:

like the time a hawk landed on my balcony

and watched me until I made a decision;

or the time a yellow lab ran free of its owner

and nudged his wet nose into my cold hands

until they remembered they were meant to love.

These days, when I am still, when I listen carefully,

I know god in the spaces between bodies and lives,

in the expanses between your time and mine,

between your bones and mine,

between your heart, and mine

Beatrice Greene

Visiting My Neighbor Noah

Noah, what's up?
Don't tell, I talk to trees as well.
My great grand me-ma Cherokee, she did too.
The old ones she said, they got plenty of stories.

Folks might think you strange
When you say it's gonna rain
forty nights and forty days.
But been in New England
too long to say you're crazy.

And what's all that banging night and day?
I smell fresh cut wood,
see sawdust mounds
and giant long planks out here.
Feels awfully funny like the Bible story.

Heat waves over-the-top, ocean waters rising,
icebergs melting,
I believe you sense the fix we're in.
Boy, where'd you get that name
Noah anyhow?

So just in case
you're building an ark,
hold me some tickets.

Beth Walker

Thin Places

My friend at the writing retreat
says her son the Episcopal priest,

who thinks he's no poet, looks
for thin places, as the Irish call them, spots

where you feel closer to God. He meant
nature hikes, waterfalls, mountains.

Places where it's a struggle, a turning point.
Then you open up, surrender, let go.

The year of my waterfall, I was feet-up
in a Lay-Z-Boy at the oncology center,

cutting it pretty thin. I turned my face
each time a nurse brought a fresh IV bag

to pierce the port of my heart,
for I'm deathly afraid of needles.

I've met some pretty thin people, poets
who didn't know it, their ache and longing

so beautifully fragile
that their words dapple and craze

like the spray of a waterfall
when they put their lives to the page.

The spots where they sit at their desks
to write or to weep,

or where they stand at the mirror
to brush their teeth or just to think

must be so special that the floor
could give way under their feet.

I wish I could follow them down,
but I am so not a follower.

I will sit on the edge, thin as it is.

Glenn Gitomer

DER PINTELE YID

My mother entrusted me to keep our family history alive. Emily was too busy shopping, meeting her charitable commitments and running the business to deal with mom, and David, the Roshi of a Zen retreat in Carmel, was too peaceful to deal with her. On a warm day in 1989 from the porch of her cottage overlooking the autumnal woods at the gated Willingham Adult Care Community in Rye, New York, she shared this tale. I hope my retelling does the story justice.

It was April 16, 1938. Ruth, who would become my mother, was nineteen. She was a second semester sophomore at Barnard. Rabbi Bertram Finkel, a leader in the Reform Movement and guest at the Davis Family Seder on the second night of Passover, spoke softly to Ruth with a pleading smile. His manner would have been entirely appropriate if speaking to an eight-year-old. "Now the youngest amongst us, our dear Ruth, will ask the Four Questions." Even unintended condescension demanded indignation. She read the questions as they were written in the Haggadah. The rabbi asked her father Abe to read the response to each question. After the responses, Ruth in a cracking voice demanded, "A fifth question: Why does Hashem abandon us?"

The rabbi silenced Abe's reproach and departed from the Haggadah. "An excellent question, Ruth. History has taught us that a once comfortable and prosperous life will meet with three choices: conversion, exile or slaughter. You'd think

assimilation would be the obvious choice, but a remarkable number of Jews chose exile and were prepared to risk slaughter. Our biblical curse compels us whatever the cost to honor our ancestors by clinging to *der pintele yid*, the spark that binds us.”

Abe and Rabbi Finkel shared a craving for attention. This was Abe’s Seder. He was hungry. The rabbi was just getting started. Abe had heard enough. “Thank you, Rabbi Finkel, for your wisdom. Now let’s say a *baruch ah* for our blessings in America.” What came before was best forgotten. Three and a half decades earlier Avram Davidich and his little brother Shmuel, filthy shlepps fleeing Lubny after the Pogrom of 1905, arrived at the Port of Baltimore. Abe built a supermarket chain reaching from the Eastern Shore of Maryland to the DC suburbs. His beautiful second wife Elizabeth’s family arrived from Vienna in 1865. Abe and Elizabeth lived in an eight bedroom Tudor in the German Jewish section of Owings Mills. He was certain that eventually all would be taken from him and he’d be cast out, kicked and tormented for sport. It was statistically and theologically inevitable.

Elizabeth told Abe to seat her father Friedrich Feinberg between Rabbi Finkel, whose father Rabbi Finkel welcomed the Feinberg family to America, and Abe’s counsel Leonard Cohen. Friedrich’s brother Ludwig left for Vienna in 1895 to study at the Vienna Conservatory with the Paganini, Countess of Stanlein Stradivarius cello his father gave him on his twenty-first birthday. There his talent was recognized by Arnold Rose’, the Vienna Philharmonic concertmaster and brother-in-law of Gustav Mahler. By 1898 Ludwig was invited to join the Philharmonic as third cellist. By 1905 he was the first cellist, an instructor at the Conservatory and a member of Arnold Rose’s string quartet.

Ludwig wrote to Friedrich, “Vienna is paradise. When the ornate doors of Palais Wittgenstein at Alleegasse No. 4 are opened to me, delights await. A week ago Saturday, in Herr Wittgenstein’s salon lit by candelabra and a grand crystal chandelier, I sat with Arnold Rose’ and Maestro Mahler as Fritz Kreisler and Pablo Casals, only feet away, played Haydn’s String Duo in D Minor. Maestro Mahler kindly spoke to me about the intricacies of the piece. Servants offered caviar and champagne. Herr Wittgenstein graciously inquired if I was enjoying the evening.

I live the happy life of a bachelor devoted to my art. On warm spring afternoons, my young manservant Kruger, who attends to my needs, opens the two paned doors to my terrace and places my cello chair two meters back from the railing. From that chair, I perform Bach Cello Suites, sometimes for hours. Strollers gather below on Ringstrasse. They applaud and shout, 'Maestro.' I cannot imagine a more perfect life. Vienna has welcomed me royally."

The War changed Vienna. In February 1918, Ludwig wrote to Friedrich. "I suppose I'm lucky. The Philharmonic is a national treasure. Its members are well-cared for and are not conscripted. We serve as a testament to Vienna's greatness. The subscription series continues, but the audiences have changed. The War has left many of our loyal patrons without the resources to renew their subscriptions. Their seats have been filled with those who found wealth during the War. The Chancellery respects our artistic independence. It does not interfere with our programming but requires us to play occasional free concerts of patriotic music for the Volk. Oh, how I hate Wagner! I have never experienced the emotion of patriotism. I am Viennese, the first cellist in the Philharmonic and a professor at the Conservatory. I love my life in Vienna, but that love is not patriotism. When I was told that it would be to my advantage to become a citizen here, it meant nothing to me to renounce my US citizenship.

The War has taken its toll here. Men return from the front disfigured and maimed. Many never return. Grief and anxiety have stripped the city of its vibrancy. When this is over I trust Vienna will blossom again. I have no regrets."

Letters from Ludwig were typically mundane. "We were treated so kindly in Zurich. A reception was held in our honor. We filled the Tonhalle for three nights, each ending in exuberant standing applause." "The concierge at the hotel across from La Scala told us of the most wonderful restaurant. Your family would enjoy Milan." But the letter that was received in December 1933 was alarming. "There are things happening that I had never conjured. The National Socialists are becoming influential in Vienna. Politicians are encouraged to speak openly about their hatred of Jews. They blame us for the War and their misery. The news from Germany is dire. Schoenberg was dismissed from his post at the Prussian Academy of Arts. His music has been banned. He has fled Berlin. Jews have been

removed from their positions in the universities. The works of Jewish artists and authors feed bonfires in town squares. Each day the reports are worse. I am still held in high esteem at the Philharmonic and Conservatory, but if Schoenberg can be cast to the gutter, what might come of me?"

Friedrich urged his brother to come home. Ludwig considered it but lacked the will to act. "Things will improve. They can't get worse. My life is Vienna."

March 1938. The Anschluss. During the Seder Friedrich read aloud Ludwig's letter that had arrived a week earlier. "My dear brother Friedrich, I have foolishly ignored your pleas and put off my departure too long. My neighbors cheered as the Germans goosestepped into Vienna. My positions with the Philharmonic and Conservatory have been terminated. The Schutzstaffel forced me at gun point to kneel before that talentless Nazi Gerhard Grupper. They said he was taking my place at the Philharmonic. I was forced to sell him my Stradivarius for five Marks. Five Marks! The Conservatory rejected Grupper three times! No Jews are spared. Arnold Rose' has escaped to the Netherlands. The Schutzstaffel bangs on my door at seven in the morning. My old legs do not move quickly enough. I am dragged down a flight of stairs. They force me to clean public lavatories and paint Jude on Jewish storefronts. Crowds gather. They point at me and laugh. After thirty years together, my loyal and affectionate Kruger has left me. The Gestapo threatened if he did not return to his village, he would be tried as a traitor. Every morning I stand among hundreds of Jews outside the Margarethen police station pleading for an exit visa. The line never moves. The ten Jews who were finally let in were told to come back another day and the line was ordered to disperse by SS thugs jutting bayoneted rifles. When I pushed my way into the US embassy I was questioned about the renunciation of my citizenship and sent away. The situation may be impossible. I am desperate, my dear brother. I hate to burden you. It is my fault for not believing what was obvious. I don't expect there is anything you can do for me. That is not why I write. If I don't awake from this nightmare, my life will soon be over. Please know that I love you and pray we may meet again."

Elizabeth left the table in tears. Friedrich and Abe followed her. "Papa, there must be something we can do." Ruth and Abe's counsel Leonard Cohen shut the door of the study behind them. Ruth had never seen her stepmother in such distress.

“Abe, you have connections. Use them dammit. I don’t care what it costs.” Abe stared at his counsel. “Leonard, what can we do?”

“I have ideas. Let me look into this. It may take a few days. No more than that. I understand the urgency. It’s not a simple matter.”

Leonard and Abe met privately on April 30. “Abe, I spoke to Edward Whitehall. He’s an assistant director of the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization Services. Close to the top. I explained that Ludwig is elderly. He is being subjected to unbearable torment. I shared Ludwig’s letter with him. He put on his bifocals. He shrugged. He’s a stiff. ‘Mr. Cohen, the Bureau is certainly aware of the Jewish situation. I’m not a callous man. My mornings are set aside for meeting like these. It weighs on me. Mr. Feinberg’s renunciation of his citizenship and his age have complicated his situation. He is an Austrian citizen. I am bound by statutory quotas. I know of your client Mr. Davis. My wife shops at his supermarket in Bethesda. I would like to help. But before I can be of any help, Mr. Feinberg will need an Austrian exit visa.’ I told him we needed help there. In confidence, he told me, ‘There is an attaché in the Austrian embassy, Gustav Hauptfuhrer. He travels under a diplomatic umbrella, but I understand him to be a colonel in the SS. For the right price, he has been known to be helpful. Here, this is his direct number at the embassy. Tell his secretary it’s a Code Twelve meeting.’ Hauptfuhrer’s secretary told me he would meet us at the bar of The Hay-Adams noon Thursday.”

The maître d’ escorted Abe and Leonard past the bar to a private room. As they entered a tall slender gentleman of obvious refinement stood and approached them. He addressed Leonard and Abe as he extended his well-manicured hand. “Mr. Cohen and Mr. Davis, greetings. I am Gustav Hauptfuhrer, at your service.”

Leonard took the lead. “Herr Hauptfuhrer . . .”

“No, no, *bitte*, Gustav. Mr. Davis, my wife shops in your grocery store in Bethesda. Hopefully I can prove to be of use and you will consider me a friend.”

“That is our hope, Herr, excuse me, Gustav. We are faced with dire circumstances. Mr. Davis’s father-in-law’s brother, Ludwig Feinberg, since 1895 has lived in Vienna. He was a professor of music at the Vienna Conservatory and a cellist

in the Philharmonic. He gave up his American citizenship for the love of your country. He's sixty-eight now. An old musician. He just wants to live what remains of his life in peace. He cannot survive there much longer."

"Mr. Davis, I am distressed by what your uncle is enduring. A mania is sweeping across Europe. I have no problem with Jews. My neighbors are Jews. Jews taught my children. I do not make the laws. I am a servant of the Chancellor. But I may have a way to help you. I have a network of friends who assist in these matters. I know it may sound callous but the price will be steep. This is a complicated matter. The network has many mouths to feed. I will need one and a half million dollars to begin our efforts and another million when Herr Feinberg arrives in whatever friendly country will accept him. I wish I could offer this service for less but the fee is firm."

Lunch was served. The men ate in silence. Hauptfuhrer's number did not surprise Abe. He thought of haggling but couldn't face Elizabeth if the deal went awry. Abe pushed his plate forward. "Gustav, we are both businessmen. We speak the same language. We are interested in your service and you've told us your price. Can you assure us you will be successful? How long will this take?"

"Herr Davis, it is impossible to predict, but if all goes well, it should be no more than three weeks from the delivery of the first payment to this account at the Union Bank of Switzerland. My secretary will call you when receipt of the funds is confirmed. An old Jew in Vienna should not be hard to find." Hauptfuhrer slid the wire instructions across the table to Abe.

"Herr Hauptfuhrer, my company will initiate the wire on Monday."

Hauptfuhrer bowed from the top of his chest and extended his hand to Abe.

"Herr Davis, it has been a great honor to meet you. I pray, gentlemen, that these conflicts will soon pass and we will meet again in happier times. I will contact you when I have confirmed your uncle is in safe hands."

Abe came home with the news. "Hashem has answered our prayers. Ludwig will soon be with us." Friedrich teared up. "Now it is only a matter of getting him to

America. Lenny met with this fellow Whitehall, high up in the government. He knows who I am. He's moving this along." Abe did not mention the details of the transaction. Cohen knew to keep that in confidence.

It was a night of celebration. Carlotta refilled the wine glasses three times. Elizabeth sat on Abe's lap, wrapped her arms around him and gave him a deep kiss. Ruth told me that the occasion called for their tongues to slosh around. The conversation floated from the past and back to the present. "Ludwig was a brilliant and odd boy." Friedrich chuckled. "My friends, we were a few years older. They didn't understand him but as time passed I realized that Ludwig didn't care to understand them. He had his cello and I had friends. He was always Ludwig. My friends called me Freddy. They laughed when I told them Ludwig would be the one people will remember. Ludwig lived in his dream. It's not over. In America his dream will continue." Elizabeth held Friedrich's hand. He squeezed tightly. That night Ruth passed her dad and Elizabeth's bedroom door. She heard the grocer and the Ziegfeld Girl moaning and the bed frame creaking.

Abe and Cohen met with Whitehall a week later. He greeted them cordially. "Gentlemen, I have wonderful news. There will be no problem. The Bureau has completed its review of Mr. Feinberg's file. He is a man of great talent. The reasons for his renunciation are understood. I hope when he arrives you will give me the honor of meeting Maestro Feinberg."

A week went by. Abe called Hauptfuhrer's office for an update. About an hour later, his secretary reported that the extrication was well underway. Two more weeks passed without a further word. Abe dialed Hauptfuhrer's number. "Lenny, have you spoken to Hauptfuhrer recently. The number I have for him appears to be disconnected. Any idea what's going on here?"

Cohen drove to the embassy. The receptionist told him there is no one there by the name Gustav Hauptfuhrer. "This is so odd, sir. You are the third person this week inquiring about a Herr Hauptfuhrer. Is there anything we can help you with?"

The next stop was to Whitehall. Cohen was told that he was on leave. "Give me your contact information and someone will get back to you promptly."

“Please, it is an urgent matter.”

At three-thirty that afternoon, two FBI agents appeared at Cohen’s office. “Mr. Cohen, we regret to inform you that your client Mr. Davis and others have been the victims of a scam. Mr. Whitehall has been arrested. He will be arraigned tomorrow. We believe his co-conspirator, Heinrich Strecht, who operated under the alias Gustav Hauptfuhrer, has left the country. He had been under surveillance for several months. He must have been tipped off and somehow slipped away. We have a recording of your client’s meeting with him at The Hay-Adams. We need to speak to Mr. Davis. When would he be available?”

“What? Wait a minute. Where is my client’s money?”

“We are working on recovering the money, but Swiss bankers are not particularly forthcoming.”

“You’re working on it? You had a recording of my client telling Hauptfuhrer or whoever he was that he’d been wiring one and a half million dollars to a Swiss bank. If you knew what was going on, why did you let this happen? How am I going to explain this?”

“I’m sorry, sir. That would have compromised the investigation.”

“How? You had it on tape.”

“We needed to wait until Strecht paid Whitehall. We are trying to match up the funds we’ve been able to recover to the victims. Some of Mr. Davis’s money should be recovered. How much will be for the court to decide. Please give your client a heads up, the press will likely pick this story up when Mr. Whitehall is arraigned. Unfortunately, this may put the gentleman you were trying to help in danger.”

Abe clenched his fist until blood poured from his palms. He roared from his belly. “Cohen, you fucking idiot, how could you have led me into this trap? You have humiliated me. Explain this to Elizabeth! How can I face her?” It had been decades

since Abe felt like the fool that arrived at the Port of Baltimore.

There were no more letters from Ludwig. His neighbor Franz escaped to America. He told a fantastical story. “Ludwig was held in a dark infested cell at Gestapo headquarters in Vienna. During the Gestapo’s dinners Ludwig would play a cello which he took great care to tune. When dinner was over he’d be led to his cell with a platter of cold gristle and a hard potato. As years passed, Ludwig was hunched over and hobbling. When he could no longer play, he was of no use to the Gestapo. As the train neared the death camp, the sound of Beethoven’s Sixth could be heard in the cattle car that reeked of death and excrement. He had often played that symphony with the Philharmonic. Ludwig floated above the packed train car to a cloud resting in the blue sky. As he stood naked and shivering in the shower line, he closed his eyes and conducted the prisoners’ orchestra.”

After the Seder, Rabbi Finkel led the singing of “Dayenu.” It’s a lively tune. Dayenu is loosely translated as “that would have been enough.” In three stanzas it recalls the beneficence Hashem had bestowed on the Children of Israel. It ends with the building of Solomon’s Temple. Archeologists estimate that it was built about five hundred years before the coming of the Jew regarded by many as the son of Hashem. The dark message of the joyful “Dayenu” was revealed to Ruth after the Seder of April 16, 1938. “I’ve been taught that monotheism distinguished the Jews from their heathen neighbors. The Shema teaches that, while others worship many gods, our Lord is one. Hashem wielded great power when the Fertile Crescent was the center of civilization. Since that time Hashem’s powers diminished. Several centuries after the building of the Temple, Hashem had been reduced to a trickster keeping a candelabrum lit for a few more days than anticipated. Hashem’s pride did him in. The other gods ridiculed Hashem’s incessant bragging about his Chosen People, as though they were far better than their more numerous supplicants. Jesus, for a domain of his own, lured his father to a feast of the gods. Hashem was outnumbered. Our Lord had no chance. The gods closed in. Gods are immortal. Deicide was not an alternative. The gods condemned Hashem to a mass so dense that neither he nor his power could ever escape. ‘Dayenu’ is a sentimental song of farewell. Hashem had done all he could. It should have been enough. Our prayers are now offered to our one Lord incapable of answering us.”

Ruth's revelation was compelling. But perhaps Hashem was never more than a figment of collective imagination, just a reason to persist in an ancient folly.

After the singing of "Dayenu," Abe stood, raised his glass and offered a prayer of his own. "Blessed is the Lord who has brought us to America. Please Lord, may we live here in peace for at least three hundred years."

Ruth ended the tale. "Son, somehow, even without Hashem, *der pintele yid* lives on. Go figure."

Anastasia Vassos

Stick Season

The sun's dying pours
yellow pigment in the foyer
and douses the stairway
leading up to intimate rooms.

We have called this building
home for as long
as we've known
this city on the Atlantic.

Carnations in a glass vase
incandescent on the credenza.

When I was small, I stood
before the iconostasis
and prayed to Virgin Mary
that I wouldn't die.

I begged to ascend into heaven
the way she did, riding
on a chariot into eternal light.

I grip my coat
tight against evening.

October's last leaves clutch
the oak's branches

and the rhododendron reaches
above me, just as years
have stretched past
my skin, my bones.

I will call prayer
by another name: moonlight,
overcoat, night without stars.

Kaymin Hester

amphitrite

I'm sipping on a dead sea like
margaritas on the beach, licking around the rim until my tongue is coated in salt,
burying my toes in gritty sand, slipping between banks of lifeless silt, swallowing
teeth & ocean breeze, running & running & running until

I'm sipping on a dead sea like
the gluttonous audience to my latest scene, staged & stated as follows: the gods are
still awake, the gods are watching us, the gods are angry & they want us to know.
so run & run & run until

I'm sipping on a dead sea like
dining on silence, cutting quiet with dinner knives & chewing on soundlessness a
hundred times, pulverizing action items between gnashing, monstrous mouths, &
the thirsty earth becomes void when it's engulfed in the endless water under my feet.

this is the lesson I'm trying to teach you:
run & run & never stop, for there are no prizes here, not even a moment of reprieve—
blessings are for beggars & the whispered elite, for mary on her iron cross & jesus at her
feet; rest is for the uninspired, the monotonous, the fortunate because

I'm sipping on a dead sea like
I've never lived up to anything, let alone the cry of gulls & the quiet murmur of
waves lapping up to my eyes, until
I'm sipping on a dead sea like

I can hold my breath for just one more day.



Jeffrey Fine

There Must Be a God Somewhere

Susan Spear

A Presbyterian Grasps Transubstantiation

On a winter evening, I unlock
the sanctuary door for choir rehearsal.
There, on the table sit the bread and cup.
In that dim light, it looks just like a vintage
still life composition. But the loaf
is picked at, plucked. The wine has dripped and stained
the tablecloth. This is no tableau,
but fragments of last Sunday's sacrament.
What do I do with consecrated leftovers?
Are they, once again, mere common bread
and wine? Then why can I not bring myself
to toss them on the snow for hungry birds?
I've heard that's what the Lutherans do. Minutes
pass. *This is my body. This is my blood.*
I tear and eat the hard and broken bread.
I lift the cup and drink the watered-down wine.
His body and his blood. This mystery.

Vincent Casaregola

Advent

[December]

I sit in the gray space
of the ambient room
where the little light enters,
indirectly, slanting from
the streetlight on the corner.

Colors slowly drain away
and fade to a gray wash,
and the air is quieter, now,
as if the light itself not only
shone but resonated sound.

Traffic sounds, lighter this late,
are muted further by the glass,
the cars travelling back and forth
and then away, somewhere
distant and intentional.

I stand, staring out, waiting
for what's to come, still unknown,
waiting for unnatural light
in the darkness, for a mystery
voice carrying a secret song.

So be it, sings the echo of time,
let it be, comes the brief response,
and though we crave knowing, still
we make the effort to be, to be waiting,
willing to wait, in order to know.

Elly Katz

*Curiosity About God as
a Naked Word*

If I invested more in God,
 snippet sound smeared of sense—

let it hold more of me,
seatbelt of my dad's phylacteries at the forehead,
the bicep, weaving him into him into Him,
would haranguing
 hurt
hold me less?

Would stains die,
 bruises bluing into
 softer skies?

I'm homesick for bedtime prayers boxed into my dad's body,
 the way I abused fatigued
prayerbooks as clipboards for
 overdue math homework.

You, intermediary of leather
 between my flesh and Yours,
parchment parched with You mothering time,
or time mothering You—

transducer of my awkward tangle of limbs,
 swarm of unruly blonde,
pasty skin wriggling against navy uniform
 into tactile connection

with what I couldn't then fathom:
reels of time,
 reams of pages,
edges I wasn't yet desperate
to evaluate—

 evacuation zones where my
body isn't my body but that girl's
adolescent roving form,
 to deliver me
into dreamscapes, or maybe just back to
believing,
 transfusing faith like gasoline
into a Ford Model T,
 into the word of You.

Paul Jaskunas

Biography of an Epileptic

He lives in the green gossip of ferns.
They nod their heads with him
below the window that holds,
as a chalice holds wine, his young face,
pale plate for a feast of signs.

Weed creature, creaturely he dreams
of thorned and hostile leaves.
He wakes to pain, head-to-toe aquiver.
Blame the boy's extended finger,
his lust for exiling touch.

His mother soothes,
ice on the wound,
on a fevered brain born
booby-trapped to seize
at unseizable names.

He hits the floor, twitch-a-twitch.
Up and down are no more.
Sky of ash, earth of gas.
No due north in the outer space
of a wilding eye

which rolls a stone from the tomb,
back, far back inside his head
where he grows someday dead.
But first a charade of years,
tattered sacraments, friends, ideas.

Mirrored scenes and sets
befitting a romance or two.
A wife with intact limbs and senses,
a name he'll soon forget.
Some say he's even misplaced his face.

He can't find much.
He haggles his days away in bazaars,
poking through bins of ephemera's
ephemera, on the hunt
for trinkets of truth.

His market finds slip through holes
in the pockets of his coat.
He was last seen dissolving
into a sheet of rain,
conversing with the Holy Ghost.

Amissa Miller

ON THIS BRIDGE

In Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower*, protagonist Lauren Olamina offers the first of the verses that will make up the scriptures of *Earthseed: The Books of the Living* on July 20, 2024. You and I have reached the point where Lauren's testimony of survival and salvation begins. I've been called to share my own testimony. I choose to trust that what I offer will meet, affirm, and activate those for whom it's meant. Even if it's just one person. Even, especially, if it's just you.

Below are some of Butler's most famous words – words that I have read, said, and heard referred to countless times. Perhaps you have, too. Perhaps, like me, you integrate more and more of their meaning with each reminder. Or maybe you're only meeting them now. Whatever your relationship to this verse, I trust that this encounter with it is right on time for you. The verse reads:

All that you touch
You Change.
All that you Change
Changes you.
The only lasting truth
Is Change.
God
Is Change. (Butler 3).

What if there are things we can “touch,” or that can “touch” us, that aren’t visible, tangible, or material? Lauren’s verse makes me think of dialectical materialism, a topic that challenged me for many years. I found it challenging not only because the theory is dense, but because of where I situate myself in relation to a foundational conclusion drawn by the theory. Dialectical materialism makes a clear distinction between the materialist and the idealist. A materialist believes that our material pursuits – our work, the things we must do in order to survive, the ways in which we keep our bodies alive and well – decisively shape our experience of ourselves as humans. Materialism says that matter is matter, regardless of how we perceive it, and matter is the foundation of our existence. An idealist, on the other hand, believes that our minds and our perceptions decisively shape our experience of ourselves as humans. Idealism says that our thoughts and ideas, as well as the influences of spirits, nature, and unseen forces, serve as the foundation of our existence. Dialectical materialism, as the name implies, lands firmly on one side of this distinction.

The older I get, the more I become a both/and rather than an either/or thinker. This tendency led to my struggle with embracing dialectical materialism, and my subsequent shame in relating with some of my leftist comrades. I was made to believe that, if I’m to be a good leftist, I must be a strict materialist – and everything that I create and articulate must come from this philosophical foundation. I questioned whether or not I was a serious anticapitalist. In most exchanges, I chose to keep my questions to myself, in order to prevent the possibility of being called out as weak-minded.

I’m currently practicing how to express my experience of reality more openly, even with the requisite fear of judgment or ostracization. And my experience of reality is both material *and* spiritual. I, like you, am navigating the survival of my physical body in a material world structured by late-stage capitalism. I’m also attuned to the Spirit realm, in regular contact with and shaped by encounters with unseen, intangible energies. I clearly hear messages from my ancestors, spirit guides, and Source. I clearly sense and experience unseen energies in my physical body. I clearly feel the emotions of others, whether or not they’re aware of them. And I clearly know things with no external or logical explanation. These modes of perception – clairaudience, clairsentience, clairempathy, and claircognizance – have been with me my whole life. To write these words and know that you’re reading them feels frightening. I feel most frightened by the prospect of you

regarding me as delusional, of you not believing me. I've had the experience in recent years of coming out as queer, coming out as non-monogamous, and coming out as neurodivergent. To come out as someone whose human experience is shaped in large part by extrasensory modes of perception feels the scariest of all, particularly as someone who has studied and organized on the radical left.

Can we critique capitalism without holding a materialist perspective as right and an idealist perspective as wrong? I speak to my ancestors, and they speak back to me. I feel energy. I feel Spirit. I understand how, from a materialist point of view, the forces of production shape our existence. In my body, that rings true. It also rings true that there are forces we don't see that shape us. How best do we show up for radical organizing work as people whose experience of being in our bodies lies between materialism and idealism?

As I hold these questions, Butler reminds me that God is Change. She reminds me that we are Earthlife equipped to shape God through how we shape Change. Later in her journey, Lauren Olamina elaborates further on this process in another verse:

To shape God,
Shape Self. (Butler 258)

If God is change, and we shape God by shaping ourselves, then we are God shaping itself on Earth through how we experience and create Change. Each of us, in this conception, is God in material form. On a soul level, we are all One. None of us are separate from God or each other. We're each God being and expressing itself on Earth. God is not an arbitrary being choosing willy-nilly what happens to one human or another. We can shape ourselves in the image of the truth of who we are. We can return to knowing ourselves as that Oneness. This is why I see God in people organizing and engaging in direct action to shape a world in which capitalism, imperialism, and settler colonialism no longer exist. Just as I see God in people opening their hearts to love, communing with nature, and receiving revelations through intuitive ways of knowing.

Lauren received the revelation that the universe exists to shape God, as God exists to shape the universe. She couldn't resolve this circular logic because she, too, came to know herself as a both/and thinker. She knew that all parts of the universe are Godseed. But we?

We are Earthseed
The life that perceives itself
Changing. (Butler 126)

Everything in the Universe is God, as God is everything in the Universe. But we can come to perceive ourselves as God. This understanding allows me to show up for my work in the world, my shaping of Change, by shaping myself. I understand myself as a specific fractal of Source that was meant to be embodied in the material in order to feel things, experience things, learn things, and create things that contribute to our collective Source experience of itself as Love. I know that every action I take in the service of the rebirth, regeneration, rebuilding, and renewal of the truth of who I am is shaped by and shaping God. And this work includes engaging with all of our capacities for knowing, both sensory and extrasensory.

Lauren says that the destiny of Earthseed is “to take root among the stars” (Butler 84). I don’t believe that we as humans are meant to leave Earth and populate other parts of the Universe. I’m coming to believe that perhaps we’re meant to root the energy of the stars into this Earth. To bring the frequency of the Heavens to Earth. And we do that through our actions. We do that through how we treat ourselves and each other. We do that through how we choose to shift and change from a place of love. The underlying assumption in the definitions that many use to describe idealism is that a belief in God or the Spirit realm as a shaper of our reality is a belief in an idea outside of ourselves. What I know of God is different. My relationship with God the experience of a drop in the ocean. It’s attuning to myself as a drop that, along with other drops, forms a wave that, along with other waves, forms the ocean. It’s remembering myself as that entire ocean, as I simultaneously experience myself as that single drop.

If we consider figures like Harriet Tubman or Nat Turner, we might remember that they described being in direct dialogue with God in ways that shaped their reality. They heard and felt God. From there, they took inspired action to change their material existence. Just as the practice of Vodou in Haiti sparked and fueled a very material revolution. Just as the Black church was an organizing home base for the very material Civil Rights Movement. Many of our fiercest revolutionaries also had an equally fierce and robust spiritual life, including regular contact with the unseen. Must we say that it was either the material or the spiritual that defined and shaped them?

Contemporary historians have looked back Tubman and Turner through the lens of disability and psychiatric disorder. I view myself through these lenses, too – autism, CPTSD, depression, generalized anxiety disorder. I recognize that my way of being in the world is different from the “norm” for these reasons. When I learned that I was autistic, my inability to tolerate injustice came into sharper focus. I find harm to and power over others so intolerable that my body physically can’t withstand them. A materialist might say that this is because my brain and nervous system respond in outsized ways to a lot of things, including injustice. They might say that my autism is a material reality of how my brain and nervous system work, and this trait can be explained through tangible data and scientific theories. An idealist might say that this is because I remember our Oneness and therefore can’t bear to see humans treating each other as though we’re anything less than parts of the same whole, anything less than the love that we all are at our core as Source. Both the hypothetical materialist and idealist explanations are true for me. The oppression, coercion, hierarchy, and violence of this system inflame and erode my physical vessel. My spirit within that vessel can’t understand how it’s possible that we’ve forgotten our Oneness because I’m here to be a part of the collective that returns us to who we are, that brings us back home through this remembrance.

Many pre-colonial indigenous cultures regarded those of us that we would today call neurodivergent, or that we would diagnose with a psychiatric disorder, as seers, prophets, oracles, diviners. We were known as vessels that were attuned in a particular way to the spirit realm, as bridges connecting Heaven and Earth. Under a disabling structure like capitalism, my autism and psychiatric disorders are disabilities. In a different context, those of us who are neurodivergent and mentally ill could perhaps be recognized and cared for as beings who function as that bridge, rather than being forced to conform to a material reality in which our both/and embodiment and processing become liabilities.

Lauren had extrasensory perception, too. She had a “fictional” syndrome called hyperempathy, feeling in her own body what others felt in theirs. I put that word in quotation marks because some of us know a little bit about what it’s like to live this way. To feel what others feel. Lauren’s hyperempathy made navigating her material reality quite difficult and dangerous. It was regarded as a disability. It also made her a bridge. Her depth of experiencing and processing supported her ability to receive the revelation of Earthseed, and to allow what she received

to light the way for herself and others. Through her hyperempathy, Lauren experienced our Oneness.

Religion has told many of us that God shapes us, but we don't have any power to shape God. That sounds a lot like capitalism, right? We must do our best to appease and obey God (the boss). If we do, God will dole out blessings (wages) to us. If we don't, God will punish us (fire us, leaving us without the means to survive). It's not surprising that this understanding of God is what we were fed. More and more of us now understand that we shape God as Change. More and more and more of us recognize that the material reality shaped by capitalism always had an expiration date, and we're nearing that date at a rapid pace. We recognize that there are people at the top of this inversion, this upside-down reality, who believe that they have the natural right to exploit and destroy life for profit. We get to reject this fallacy and choose interdependence, care, reciprocity, and love over exploitation, hierarchy, coercion, and destruction. We get to choose life, choose our Oneness. And we choose that through our internal, unseen, energetic experience as much as we do through our visible, tangible actions and efforts in the material world. They are, of course, shaping each other.

Octavia Butler once described the genre of science fiction as "a handful of Earth, and a handful of Sky." Earth and sky. We are both/and, shaping ourselves and our reality in the space between. I'm here on the bridge with you.

Works Cited

Butler, Octavia. *Parable of the Sower*. 1993. Grand Central Publishing, 2019.

Shamik Banerjee

Mother's Ointment

When stabbing aches impale my weary joints,
displaying faint black circles on the skin,
Ma takes an ointment, gently starts to spin
it clockwise on these ruthless swollen points,

and speaks about the science behind this paste
of turmeric: its curcumin, a strong
component, holds back pangs from reigning long.
Her fingers keep on working with no haste.

Some minutes later, there's a soothing hum
that rolls off like a river from her throat,
and then a hymn's melodic lyrics float
throughout the room. Her treatment seems like some

religious rite. I swim in deep repose
while leaning on the sofa, unaware
of her unequalled therapeutic care
and how each pain-borne minute slowly flows.

On waking up, I find out that each limb
is fully well. I draw a breath of calm
and contemplate which was the actual balm:
the homemade ointment or her holy hymn.

Alina Sayre

Dreaming

My daughter is almost ten months when we return to my birthplace,
her dimpled hands patting the airplane window and waving at strangers.
We descend into the dreamlike fog,
the blonde summer foothills dotted with live oaks.

I stroll her down streets I used to walk
as a frustrated teenager,
a single young woman so far from her dreams.
The stroller wheels softly slap the pavement
like echoes of wishes.

I take her to the beach,
take pictures of her sampling sand,
swoop her up when she cries at the cold water's touch.
Lulled by the low roar,
she falls asleep on my chest,
nestled like a newborn.

I walk and walk,
grounded by the heavy trusting weight of her,
wrapped in the rush of waves and the
salty clean wind and the
dreamlike brightness of the air.

Once I was as fragmented as the seaside shells.
Now I am timeless and powerful as the ocean.
I walk these landscapes
fresh as an infant,
yet wise as a monument.
Her newness makes them new.
My old life here feels like a dream.
I was never home before her.

Alison Davis

LOVE IS A SCHOOL OF FIRE

Religion isn't the theology you profess.
It isn't the way you kneel, the direction you face,
the face you present as pious, the prayers

you repeat at the appointed hours, the wine
you won't drink. It certainly isn't the commands
given to camels crossing the uncertain desert

to conquer some distant land. Nor is it the dutiful
watering of the roots, the putting of coins in a box.
It is not even the invisible dominion of Solomon's throne.

It is what you desire.

Some fall down before the golden calf. I fall down
to lick the damp earth. Clay and loam and dust
breathe me. I am not quoting any of the familiar sources.

I burn with want for whatever is. More kindling: the memories,
the music, the sermons, the girl walking weaponless in the blaze.
These words are an alternate existence. Love is a school of fire.



Willow Pannozzo
Embrace

Isabel Hoin

A Letter To My Mother: A Continuous Thing

The dark house of my mother's face is continuously asking for answers. I continue to tell it, "God had no name!"— but that never seems to suffice.

This dark sky, my whole world (I am its whole world) sits in front of me daily; it is a world entirely without.

Her dead son, my twin, continues to strive, alone, returning as a bird on the branches outside her window where she asks, daily, for repentance. For prayers to fix.

These branches, connected to our cherry tree outside, carry the bird that sings its songs of imagination to her— *just* imagination, though, as there was (is) no way of telling its/his moving in this world— at least how we want(ed) or wish(ed) it to be.

Mother, I wish I could give you an answer—
I wish I could tell you that he, all along, lacked the space

of regular being. A place to come back; to *actually* be. Where I be. Instead, he decided to live underwater, mother. He is not a bird. He decided to live all over your face. On *you*, mother.

That is where I see him now.

Jiang Pu

Inner Union

They are a dynamic duo. Team up to fire-
extinguish problems. Sometimes he gets lost
in the molehill mountains; sometimes she refuses
to compost the green clippings & brown scraps of
stale emotions. And yet like a pair of chopsticks
they always reconcile, tasting together life's sweet
& bitter.

Like all old couples they too argue & bicker.
Lost their way on a darker-than-blind night. Shocked
& shaken by an occult astral
connection. They were a bubbling
soup of confusion before they ripped open
the chrysalis. Even then, divorce

was never an option for this old couple—
my Mind & Heart—because they know
they'll never be excused from their shared custody
of me, a curious compassionate
observer; or my unapologetically
honest
body.

Ash McClelland

Do you think the stars hold the answers

I think about all the ways we say goodbye,
of the unpromised I love you
at the end of our lives,
or if the kisses I left on motionless
eyelashes stained their skin pink.

I have seen too many dead bodies
and learned that wherever love holds power,
death soon approaches.

Watching them choke
on their own spit
confirmed that permanence
is a made-up comfort.

I spend so much time not letting go,
numbly holding your lip between my teeth.
I will cover you in passion and prayer,
and offer you all of me, please
don't give me anything in return
because I can't protect you
from what I know is coming.

I hope I choke on silt
as my mouth fills with love.
We women bathe in blood
because we are driven
like animals bred for meat.

I am drawn to the downward slope of
your nose, and each freckle that paints your skin.
Leaning over you as if I am praying
at your headstone, I will seek your lips,
like water; like the mass of nondescript raindrops,
indistinguishable, that makes up the ocean. You are a
collection of broken cycles that cause a crosswind,
but I cannot think of you apart from love.

Gail Tyson

My Succulent Teachers

Turning what I have longed called my second home of Santa Cruz into home began when I left a lifetime behind on the East Coast. Plans for a studio apartment—an attic conversion in my friends' house—had guided the pruning of my belongings. Flying across the continent that June day, I felt elated. Yet summer ripened into fall, and the renovation never began. While my household goods languished in storage and I hunted for housing, scarce in a university beach town, I rented a room from a newer friend, Jun. We first met shortly after the death of his partner, Leo. The much older man had bequeathed his house to Jun, along with the complicated grief we feel for loved ones who choose their time and place of death.

Jun and I had that kind of loss in common. After an eleven-week siege with incurable cancer, my husband, Dick, elected to cease treatment and come home to die. Only a year after Jun emigrated here from China, Leo's physical suffering led him to end his own life. Now Jun and I shared space. Half a decade on, my grief trailed behind me like a shadow; his, for the most part, remained hidden. Despite his jaunty walk and four-hour tennis games, sadness lingered in the notes of the piano sonatinas he played. The house remained a shrine, hung with photographs of the two men and others from Leo's prior life as a husband and father. What, I wondered, had I been brought to this sanctuary to learn? And what could I offer a man half my age, who must find his way through both a foreign language and an unspeakable loss?

Right away, I offered to help tend the garden. The weeds required almost daily attention. That task brought to mind my uprootings: from a suburban house, mountain cabin, and city loft; from being coupled for twenty-five years; from a brief pandemic affair that blew the doors off a vault of buried passion. Every one of those partings was swift and abrupt—sudden change that heightened my fear of uncertainty. Weeding, slow and methodical, soothed me.

The succulents took care of themselves. During the four decades before Leo met Jun, he planted thirteen raised beds with twenty-five varieties of sedum: syncopated rhythms of tangerine and chartreuse, lilac and silver, pale peach, dusty magenta, lemon yellow. Some plants cascaded over the stacked-stone rims; others reached toward fruit trees: lemon, lime, Asian pear, plum, and fig. Ruffled and pointed, blooming dahlia-like on stalks or unfurling like ornamental kale, these succulents bore expressive names: Donkey Tail, Harvest Moon, Red Wiggle, Leatherpetal Rosette, Fulda Glow. Afternoons spent in their company made Jun's backyard a haven from worry about where, long term, I would end up living.

Geometrically precise yet lush, rosettes of spoon-shaped leaves, *Echeveria* “Mandala,” seemed to whorl, luring thought into its slow dance with imagination. Patterns have long helped me discern how to improvise through unexpected movements of my life. These plants' shallow root systems helped them survive; so too, I saw now, have mine. It's not hard to stay in a place for years, your only anchors the kind that extend laterally for stability and support, rather than far-reaching taproots. Until I married Dick at 41, the social connections I made in several cities weren't superficial as much as finite. Each time the life I was composing, the one that brought me to a place, wasn't enough to keep me there.

The longest time I lived in one city—half my life—was spent in Atlanta. Not because I loved that sprawling metropolis; rather, I met Dick by chance just as I planned to move on. We married nine months later, making our life together there and at our cabin before he died. Both places offered community that was a better fit for us than for me. After his death, there was no reason to stay. The Bay Area—where I attended graduate school and first took myself seriously as a writer, where I deepened friendships on frequent business trips, the place at age 23 I first felt at home—called me back.

When I arrived here, California had just recovered from a multi-year drought. Even during those years, close to 100 native species of these perennials thrived—the plant equivalent of camels. Now I knelt by a bed of plump succulents, considering how they can endure weeks without rainfall by storing water in their leaves. I, too, had lasted long stretches without replenishment. For years at a time I'd lived without a partner. Like succulents, the loner me learned to store up what I needed: conversations that made me feel heard, the warmth that lingered from a friend's hug. Now, five years and four moves after losing my husband, I'd regained the ability to expand into solitude that does not feel like loneliness. It returned like a muscle memory—one that could feel, at times, effortless yet familiar.

Crucially, succulents have evolved in a way I was still groping toward. Wounded, they heal fast. Given my fair share of emotional wounding by now, shouldn't I need less time to recover? At least I'd come to understand that hurt feelings are still flesh wounds. Whenever my mental gymnastics suppressed pain, resentment, disappointment, that dissonance could turn those emotions on me. Only staying connected with my body—fully feeling sensations I preferred to analyze—began the healing.

Why, in fact, do succulents repair injuries so quickly? Plant regeneration scientists, I had read, identified how cells directly touching the wound work cooperatively to mend the affliction. As I stroked a petal, an image came to mind: a community converging on woods to search for a lost child, including people who did not know her. Benevolence existed in the human world, too.

I'd felt stranded when my friends abandoned their renovation without a word. But look how Jun had opened his home to a mere acquaintance, filling my friends' silence with keyboard serenades and botanical harmonies. The past two months had taught me that life is less about having my expectations met than receiving the kindness of strangers—a phrase penned by a man from a region (the South) and a city (New Orleans) where I once lived. As if to say I could still learn from places I'd left behind.

So many times I'd inhabited uncertainties until they resolved, often in surprising ways. That day in Jun's garden I could not foresee, two months hence, discovering

a cottage for rent in the neighborhood I favored. Nor, after moving in, realizing the cottage—detached, peaceful—was a far better match for me than the attic I thought I'd occupy. It was enough that day to trust in a new beginning I could not yet imagine. A beginning that would give me and cuttings from Jun's garden, planted at my cottage, the slow start we needed. That has given us the chance music of growing in place together, growing faster as we grow older.

Steven Ostrowski

Hold Me

You're driving away but I'm trapped in my box of need
Hold me
Hold me with a thought under your looming moon so I can hold you in the heart
of my eyes as they close
Hold me the way my mother never learned from her mother how to hold a touch-
needy child
Hold me without haste or shame
Hold me so that I know your arms are real and not arms I've dreamt into holding
me, not arms that dissolve at dawn
Hold me so that my bones understand how love holds itself
Hold me because my father is at work is painting the house is shoveling coal is
resting forever
Hold me because I always hold on too tight and no lover can breathe for long and
so they go
Hold me as I confess
Hold me as I forgive
Hold me as if the dawn of life depends on it yet again
Hold me the way all the Marys holds their Christs
Hold me as I learn to hold myself lovestruck at last beloved born again able to
hold you
and not even trying to try

Tom Donlon

GLOBAL POSITIONING SYSTEM (GPS)

Because of my British Mum,
I chose a female British voice
to be the GPS guide in my car.

I still desire closeness to Mum.
We lost her to cancer fifty years ago.
She was forty-nine.

I tell many that the reason I am not
in hell is because of the Catholic nuns
and my British Mum.

The GPS lady just said "Bear right."
I looked over to the woods, but
I didn't see a bear.

Yes, this has been a long and winding
journey. I miss Mum and Dad
and still count on them for directions.

We recently lost our oldest sister, the
first of their seven children. Is Lesley
with Mum and sharing her stories?

I pray a lot for directions in this life
and how to be the husband and dad
I need to be. Lord, show me the way.

The GPS lady just said "Bear left."
Good. It appears the bear has left.
I can safely turn.

Brandon Marlon

Sigh of the Unknown Soldier

My remains, partial and unidentified, repose in a maple casket under a slab of granite and bronze, a grave rather more ornate than those of myriad comrades-in-arms in nondescript plots overseas, weeds and wind their most constant companions, unattended by duty pipers or sentries marching the beat.

My identity, strangely, has generalized with time; experiences once distinct now fuse in a plural blur that befogs individuality, somehow apropos of warfare's shambolic tableau that bloods the earth in every generation since the beginning.

Amid the haze, jumbled memories parade:
well-wishers, pats on the back, uniforms,
the fetor of latrines, wet socks, hand-scrawled letters,
formations, muddy battlefields, uphill charges,
deafening cannonades, chaotic fusillades,
blazes, smoke, choking lungs, confusion,
casualties writhing on gurneys, debridement without anesthetic,
cold dread in the trenches, ham-handed grenadiers,
bellicose foes, paralyzing sniper fire, air cover,
the off-key chorus of groans, fellows missing in action,
vultures wheeling above
a carpet of carcasses below,
teary-eyed chaplains chanting hymns at dawn.

Whelmed by flashbacks, we gasp again till all subsides.

Most of us upheld our youth
even as we laid down our lives;
small wonder, our ultimate thoughts drifted toward
women lorn and reft, mothers and sweethearts.

Rest assured, legatees, we appreciate the poppies,
acknowledge offered flowers, salute the mournful wail
of brass noting the Last Post, of bagpipes
solemnizing beneficiaries of our sacrifice,
lest they forget.

When summoned we arose and dutifully served;
let our examples ever serve to inspire.

From our composite self, a triune hope for the ages:
may you be free; may you know peace; may you have grace and courage.

JeFF Stumpo

the agnostic's three branches

my mom believes her father visits
as a white butterfly,
sees the first letter of her mother's name
in twisted rubber bands

I am not a believer,
but I will extend in this moment
three olive branches:

that an insect's eyes may be compared
to a biblically accurate
angel

that there is an old legend
about an Arab fisherman
who catches a tropical fish,
and the patterns on its tail
perfectly spell out
there is no God but Allah

that people go looking
for patterns, and who am I
to cast aspersions
when the search is not
in the service of blood libel
or gay panic,
just a daughter who has lost something,
and in a garden,
or on a table,
there it is:
a moment that proves love
was never the thing lost

a moment that proves love
was never the thing lost
at all

Emma Weiss

For Palestina

If every love grew a tongue
we'd all be good monsters.
green demons
betting our futures on
getting even.
And
if every Revolution turned the screw deeper on
the hand that wrests the
rock of power
so would
every sword cut
from dust the stuff
that purposes war
as purpose loves
to love itself
more and more
in every lovers hour.

Revelatory wheel
burdened by its forward notions
hums
war
in and out the voice box
a pen
the paper
turned into
airplanes
that carry poems over the wall
for us all
to put in Revolutions wagon
and go on draggin our
blood geometry across the desert.

And if there were no wall
to wail against
where would all those tears fall?
Just fodder for rivers
to float on.

(To be folded and flown as a paper airplane after it has been read)

Adam Sobsey

PATRICK LEIGH FERMOR AMONG THE JEWS

I.

December 9, 1933. He stands at the Hook of Holland. He has hobnail boots on his feet, Horace's *Odes* and the *Oxford Book of English Verse* in his rucksack. The sea is behind him. He sets out east, toward his destination. Istanbul. It will take more than a year to walk there.

He is confident, intrepid, strong, a bright young thing, eighteen, "a dangerous mixture of sophistication and recklessness," in the words of the final report of the school that has kicked him out. He has a small allowance from his family, a few letters of introduction to people along the Danube and the Rhine.

Many years later, his memoirs of what he became fond of calling "The Great Trudge" will make Patrick Leigh Fermor one of the most celebrated travel writers of the twentieth century. But this morning, although he carries a journal, he has no notion of writing a book and will in fact not begin publishing his memoirs of this adventure for more than forty years, in 1977. He has hatched his plan quickly, impetuously. He starts walking.

Why?

He is finally made to answer this question, many months later, far along a route that has been jagged with detours and lagged by diversions, most of them welcome. In the remote Transylvanian mountains, he finds himself without

shelter for the night. He is used to this, as he is also used to arriving at the estates of the aristocracy, presenting one of his letters of introduction, and being welcomed in to avail himself of the fine brandy and food, rich libraries, soft beds, fast horses, and high society. In the dusk he hears echoing reports of axes felling trees. He follows the sound to a group of lumberjacks. The foreman invites Paddy to stay in his cabin. There he finds, “most incongruously seated at a table, a bearded man in a black suit and a black beaver hat poring over a large and well-thumbed book.” The book is the Hebrew Bible and the man is a rabbi, the foreman’s younger brother. He has come down from the family home to spend a fortnight here, along with “two sons about my age, also dressed in black,” Leigh Fermor observes. “They too were marked for religion: you could tell by their elflocks and the unshorn down which fogged their waxy cheeks.”

These Transylvanian Jews regard their unexpected and wayward English visitor with apprehension. Perhaps they feel something that young Paddy, as he was then called, does not. It is less than a year since Hitler took power in Germany, to general geopolitical approval, and since T.S. Eliot said, in a public lecture in the United States, that “reasons of race and religion combine to make any large number of free-thinking Jews undesirable.” The blithe, even fashionable Continental antisemitism of the interwar years was—as the older Leigh Fermor would rue in his memoirs—“attached to trails of powder which were already invisibly burning, to explode during the next decade and a half, in unhappy endings.”

Perhaps his Jewish hosts perceive this invisibly burning powder. They certainly cannot understand Paddy’s purpose in *walking* all the way across Europe. To them this is a senseless and wasteful caprice. They press him: is his goal “to see the world, to study, to learn languages?” The garrulous Paddy is caught off-guard:

I wasn’t quite clear myself. Yes, some of these things, but mostly—I couldn’t think of the word at first—and when I found it—“for fun”—it didn’t sound right and their brows were still puckered.

II.

May 22, 2019. I am high in the Albanian Alps, looking out over one of the most extraordinary views of my life. A vastness spreads before me, swallows me. There is snow and green, stark granite and black earth, piercing sun and towering clouds, mountains soaring above, and below the bluest river I have ever seen. The vantage is from a stretch of trail that runs along a narrow, icy ledge from which the drop is hundreds of feet sheer. It is with the slowest, most careful motion that I reach for my phone to take a picture.

My hiking companion is nearby. He's a Korean traveler I met the night before in my guesthouse, where he explained in halting English—yes, I had understood him correctly—that he had *biked* all the way here from Seoul. Nine thousand kilometers: China, Mongolia, Russia, the Stans, the Caucasus, the Balkans. It has taken him two years so far and he still has a long way to go. His destination is Santiago de Compostela. I ask him why. He shrugs, gently, genially. It seems like the right place, he says.

He is twenty-eight, ten years older than Patrick Leigh Fermor was when he set out from Holland in 1933, and twenty years younger than I am in 2019. His last name is the second most common in Korea, indeed in the world. Leigh has been reborn as Lee.

I've come to Albania mainly because I have an Albanian colleague at the place where I tend bar. He is about my age, we get along, he often talks up his home country, and I need a starting point partway between Ireland, where my wife is currently working, and the Caspian Sea. My wife and I have recently discovered that we have both harbored a wish since childhood to see the Caspian. On such hidden concordances are marriages made. She is going to meet me in Albania. Then we will travel to Istanbul and the Caucasus, mostly overland by minibus, car, and train. We will reach the shore of the Caspian in Azerbaijan. Then we will double back to our final destination, the one around which this entire three month trip is organized. I have ancestry in Romania. No living family, no connection to the country, scant knowledge of its history or present conditions, and little interest in it or my Jewish heritage there. Little interest in my Jewish heritage at all. I was raised nonobservant. I regard my origins the way Primo Levi regarded his when he was young, before Europe's trails of invisibly burning

powder exploded into the Shoah: as “a small, amusing anomaly.”

Why am I going to Romania?

To stand where my ancestors stood. This is what I tell people when I am asked my purpose. It is as quixotic, insubstantial, and lightly examined as Patrick Leigh Fermor’s was in walking from Holland to Istanbul, and I am as dubiously outfitted as he was. In my bag, which is too heavy for this Alpine climb, I have a novel by Ismail Kadare, Albania’s greatest writer, which I will read here and leave in its author’s home country, and a volume published in 1939, one year after Hitler is named *Time Magazine Man of the Year*, called *The Portable World Bible*, which I found in a thrift store for fifty cents. Anticipating possible low moments of travel loneliness or a feeling of smallness far from home, but a practitioner of no particular faith in which to find solace, I have chosen this grab-bag: Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism.

I have not packed Patrick Leigh Fermor’s memoirs because I have already read them in preparation for the trip. He left a maze of footprints in Romania (and later lived there for a while), and his traipse through the country occupies much of his memoirs’ second volume, *Between the Woods and the Water*. I wanted to gain a sense of my ancestral country closer to the time of my great-grandparents, who emigrated in 1910. I knew nothing of their life in Romania. My great-grandmother died before I was born. I remember, as a small child, meeting my great-grandfather—he died when I was six—but much later, when I came across a picture of him taken in his old age, everything about it looked so familiar, including the surrounding room, that I suspected I had not met him but only this photograph of him.

My mother tells me that my great-grandparents always refused to speak of their lives in Romania, a virtual omerta. Nor did they explain why they left. They immigrated to Pittsburgh, where they joined a nascent synagogue of Romanian Jews and made their living as grocers. The only thing my mother remembers either of them divulging about Romania was what my great-grandfather would occasionally say: his village and my great-grandmother’s were separated by a beech forest, right near the province of Bucovina, which means “Land of the

Beeches” in English. When my great-grandfather went to pay visits to his future wife, he always made sure to walk as briskly as he could, because the woods, he said, were full of wolves.

In German, *Bucovina* is *Buchenwald*.

Two-dozen years after my great-grandparents left for America, when Leigh Fermor walked from the Rhine down to the Danube, he writes: “It was not at all uncommon to hear people talking of the [Jewish] plan for world domination—long exposed as a fraud—contained in *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.” One Hungarian squire pressed into Paddy’s hands a rare almanac that listed the names of powerful individuals who were supposedly concealed Jews, including Winston Churchill. “You can never tell,” he warned. “He was puzzled when I doubted the importance and accuracy of his favorite book.”

Paddy was interested in Jews. Walking in 1934 across the Banat—a region straddling Hungary, Serbia, and Romania—he spent a night in the home of a rabbi. “Ever since, I had been bent on learning as much about Jewish history as I could.” Later, crossing the southern Romanian plains, he stayed overnight in a general store-cum-inn whose proprietor, he discovered, was Jewish: “I longed to ask him about the exact difference between the Torah and the Talmud, which I was always getting confused, and about the Golem and the Hasidim.” The innkeeper knew little about any of this, but he told Paddy that if he was interested in Jewish scripture and culture, “the place to go was High Moldavia, far away in the north, in towns like Botoshani and Dorohoi—Domnul David’s hometown—which were almost entirely Jewish.”

Dorohoi is also my great-grandparents’ hometown. This was one of the few details I knew before I read Leigh Fermor’s memoirs in advance of my trip to Romania. But when I read this passage in Leigh Fermor’s memoirs, I took no notice of it whatsoever. It wasn’t until after I returned from “High Moldavia” and reread the passage that it made me sit straight up in my chair with the sort of mortified regret you might feel if you came across a rare gold coin in the pocket of an old coat you had worn in a country where you had run out of money and fallen destitute.

Leigh Fermor later went to High Moldavia and learned about the province's once abundant population of Jews. "Owing either to Jewish acumen or a general Romanian inaptness for commerce, and probably both," he writes, "nearly all [Moldavian] village grocers were Jews." Perhaps they included my great grandparents. Thus, in Pittsburgh they simply resumed the livelihood they had gotten in Dorohoi, among what Leigh Fermor calls Moldavia's "semi-alien bourgeoisie of middlemen and retailers": that familiar middle-class Jewry so vulnerable to "the deep-rooted and almost universal anti-Semitism of the Romanians toward the million or so Jews that lived in the country. The sentiment had a nearly mystical intensity. The hostile feelings were much more deeply rooted in [Moldavia], where the Jewish population had increased from about two thousand families to close on a million in a hundred and thirty years, most of them in flight from the appalling conditions in Poland and the Russian Pale." Conditions in Moldavia were only fitfully better. There were frequent attacks on Jews, and, in 1907, an organized pogrom in Dorohoi. I wonder if that's what my great-grandfather meant by wolves in the woods.

And that is how I learned about my family's likely history in Romania. Not in memories passed down from my great-grandparents, but from a god-and-country English schoolboy who once, awestruck and incredulous, asked his boarding-school classmate Alan Watts—already on his way, at age sixteen, to the Zen Buddhism that would make him a counterculture legend—"Do you really mean that you have renounced belief in the Father, Son and Holy Ghost?"

III.

My Korean hiking companion Lee and I walk twenty miles over the mountain in Albania, share dinner and a room in the village on the far side. The next morning, he walks all the way back to retrieve his bike and continue on to Santiago de Compostela. I continue traipsing all over Albania for three weeks, feeling as young, healthy, and intrepid as Paddy, and as "unboreable," in his self-description. I never have need of distraction or comfort and barely crack *The Portable World Bible*. I take bone-rattling bus rides, lifts on tractors to Roman ruins, I hop a ferry across a dazzling lake, and walk ten miles with my heavy pack on my back into North Macedonia. I read Kadare's novel and leave it in the museum dedicated to

him in his hometown (the curator insists that I inscribe it!). I am in and out of hallowed monasteries, ruined churches and castles, and galleries of ancient rare icon paintings. In one town I am befriended by an Orthodox priest, elsewhere by hospitable innkeepers, friendly minibus drivers, shrine caretakers, glassy eyed drifters, all of whom ply me with strong drink and stronger stories, press cigarettes and food upon me. I witness the last, preserved ashes of the trails of powder with which Europe was invisibly burning before World War II—the gruesome legacy of its aftermath: Enver Hoxha’s totalitarian regime, one of the last and most intractable holdouts of postwar communism, which suffocated Albania up until the early 1990s.

My wife meets me at the end of this Paddy-like adventure, and we make our way across northern Greece and stay four nights in Istanbul—where, in the event, Paddy found relatively little of interest after finally arriving, and in any case was so overcome with exhaustion from his wanderjahr that he could do little more than sleep. Then we sojourn for a few deep and dazzling weeks in the Caucasus. We reach Land’s End at the Caspian, where like pilgrims we dip our hands in the oily water and shed tears not quite of joy but of relief. A lifetime of quiet longing, finally quenched.

We turn back west and fly to Romania. The day we arrive, I fall ill. The possible causes of this illness are too numerous and unlikely to entertain. Its symptoms are so migrant—intense gastric distress, crippling aches and stiffness, alternating bouts of feverishness and clamminess, shortness of breath, general fatigue and brain fog—that it is pointless to try to diagnose what has afflicted me. And after these symptoms respond to neither treatment nor rest, my wife and I recognize what is really happening to me. This recognition results from first recognizing where we keep going, almost by instinct: to places in Romania where there used to be Jews. *People Love Dead Jews* is the title of a book, by Dara Horn, which I will read much later, as part of a great effort, still ongoing, to understand exactly why it is that people hate living Jews. Have always hated them.

In Bucharest, we visit a derelict synagogue in which dozens of Jews burned to death in 1941, after Romania’s fascist Iron Guard set it on fire during prayer services. We spy its broken windows through the bars of a gate, which we slide

open to reveal an irate man who will not let us approach. I scream at this man. I am someone who does not scream, of equable disposition, slow to anger. I am drenched with rage, bewilderment, sickness, and sweat. I scream virtual nonsense, I can hear it even as I scream it, strings of profanity, streams of vitriol. I feel as if he is the one trespassing, not me, that this is my ancestral possession, not his property. I turn on my heel and leave my wife, who is not Jewish, in danger, alone with this irate man. I am derelict on all duty, in all ways, under a derelict house of worship.

In Iași, the capital of the province of Moldavia, it is possible to plot a walking tour of the city via an official *Traseul Evreisc*, Jewish Tour. We follow the route from sign to sign, each one bearing the image, not to say caricature, of a man in telltale Orthodox *payot*, the “elf-locks” Patrick Leigh Fermor noticed on the rabbi’s sons in Transylvania. The signs mark where Jews had once flourished, including the very spot on which the world’s first professional Yiddish theater was founded. We also visit the Jewish Community Center, whose aging docent leads us into an exhibit devoted not to Iași’s rich Jewish history but to the city’s pogrom of 1941, a particularly bad year to be Jewish in Romania. Thousands of Jews were rounded up and packed into trains—not bound for concentration camps in Poland but for the Dniester River in what is now Moldova, where the cargo was disgorged and left to die of starvation, exposure, disease, or to drown themselves. And this deportation was not carried out by the Nazis. Romania joined World War II on the Axis side—they switched in 1943, when they realized they had joined the losing team—and they could rightly say, and did, that they had not let Hitler have their Jews. This was because Romania disposed of them on its own, although Romania did not and generally does not say this.

July 26, 2019. We are standing in front of the synagogue in Dorohoi. There used to be two-dozen synagogues in this town of fifty thousand, a third of whom were Jews. The synagogue is padlocked. There is a phone number on the door. My wife calls it, and we are told to come to the Jewish Community Center. It is staffed by a kindly old man, one of about a hundred Jews left in Dorohoi. He escorts us into the synagogue. It is moldering, in such disarray that it looks less neglected than ransacked. On the walls are a couple of memorial plaques whose lists of surnames include my great-grandparents’. Then the old man takes us into a

little side room where there is another display commemorating the Iași pogrom of 1941. People love dead Jews. What about my great-grandparents, I want to ask him, what about 1910, what about all the Jews who were here and gone before the Shoah, that chronological incinerator which had turned my ancestry to ash?

We continue north to the village from which my great-grandfather made his way through the woods full of wolves. This was a small but bustling commercial outpost in his day, a town so thoroughly Jewish that now, utterly empty and dead quiet—late afternoon, late July—it is as though no one is left alive here at all. The only Jews that remain are the ones long buried under toppled stones in a weedy, neglected cemetery in a semi-rural residential area at the edge of the village. We walk to it from the central square, perhaps half a mile, during which I wheeze and wobble. When we are within a few dozen meters of the location where our map tells us the cemetery lies, we come to an impassable roadblock, so massive it is almost comical, barring one side of the middle of nowhere from another. Everything Jewish in Romania, it seems, is shut tight against everyone and everything but time, which goes on with its decay.

We go back out to the main road that leads into the neighborhood. It is sweltering, I am feverish, the water in my bottle is too warm to drink. I sit down on the gravel and put my head between my knees. I stare at the ground. I have come all this way just to stand where my ancestors stood, and find it impossible to stand. It feels as though, were I to get up, the earth would fall out from beneath me.

My wife suggests, gently, that we might be able to get into the cemetery by going back up to the main road and around the other side.

I say, No, no, no. I say, There's nothing here, let's go.

Let's go.

I don't get up. I will not, I cannot. I am prepared to sit here forever.
A man passes by, walking a mule. They take no notice of us.

IV.

When Patrick Leigh Fermor tells the mountain Jews in Transylvania that he is walking across Europe “for fun,”

[...] The foreman shrugged and said something in Yiddish to the others; they all laughed and I asked what it was. “Est is a goyim naches!” they said.

“A goyim naches,” they explained, is something that the goyim like but which leaves Jews unmoved; any irrational or outlandish craze, a goy’s delight or a gentile’s relish.

Their hilarity over Leigh Fermor’s explanation warms them to him. Deeper discussion follows, which soon turns to the “terrible omens gathering in Germany, though how terrible none of us knew,” Leigh Fermor writes. “We talked of Hitler and the Nazis as though they merely represented a dire phase of history, a sort of transitory aberration or a nightmare that might suddenly vanish, like a cloud evaporating or a bad dream.”

Soon they turn their attention to the Bible on the table before them, “printed in dense Hebrew black letter that was irresistible to someone with a passion for alphabets, especially these particular letters, with their aura of magic.” Here and there on his walk, Paddy occasionally copied down Hebrew he saw on Jewish-owned shopfronts and Jewish newspapers. He has already had the rabbi translate some of these renderings into the common language they share—German. Perhaps some of the “aura of magic” wears off when the Hebrew he has written down turns out to read, for example: “Umbrellas Repaired on the Spot.” Now Paddy identifies various biblical passages:

The Song of Miriam, and the Song of Deborah; David’s lament for Absalom; and the rose of Sharon and the lily of the valley. The moment it became clear, through my clumsy translations into German, which passage I was trying to convey, the Rabbi at once began to recite, often accompanied by his sons. Our eyes were alight; it was like a marvelous game [...] Enthusiasm ran high. These passages, so famous in England, were doubly charged with meaning for them, and their emotion was infectious. Their poetry, their philosophy, their history and their laws were the lodestar of their passion.

They seemed astonished—touched, too—that their tribal poetry enjoyed such glory and affection in the outside world. Utterly cut off, I think they had no inkling of this.

V.

I finally get up off the ground. My wife and I go around the long way and gain access to the cemetery. It is very beautiful, the warm and worn headstones leaning on each other like dominos, like siblings. Shade is given by apple trees, the fruit littered about, abundant, fragrant. The prospect over the valley is wide, verdant, soft in the lowering light. I place my hand on some of the stones and find myself murmuring soothing words to them. My heart is briefly calmed. People love dead Jews.

We walk back to the central square and go into the only open business in the village, which is a pharmacy. The matronly pharmacist listens to all my complaints and selects a remedy for each one. That night, I take them all. None of them work. A few days later we leave Romania. The day after that, I wake up entirely well.

Patrick Leigh Fermor never finished the third volume of his memoirs. It is not clear why. He lived in vigorous health to the age of ninety-six. Journals he kept during his walk were posthumously edited and appended to bring *The Great Trudge* to its narrative completion. While in Istanbul, Paddy met the Patriarch of the Orthodox Church, who wrote him yet another letter of introduction, this one to the historic monastery at Mount Athos in Greece, and it's there, not Istanbul, that proves to be the end of his journey. Although he was never formally religious and was sometimes as bemused by the monastic activities at Mount Athos as the mountain Jews were by the purpose of his walk, his concluding month among the monks makes it clear that his purpose, whether he was really conscious of it or not, was not "fun" but faith, and it is faith of a quiet, disciplined, contemplative, restful kind—the kind of faith writers seek, in our cells of concentration and doubt. His search occupied Leigh Fermor throughout his life. As an adult, he spent time writing and self-restoring in numerous monasteries, a sort of serial oblate. His brief but piercing account of these stays, *A Time to Keep Silence*,

published in 1953, reaches deep into the turbulent waters of his spirit and is considered by many, including me, to be his finest book.

Home and well, I re-read his walking memoirs. His chronicle is full of adventure, full of the fun he claims to seek, and Jews and Judaism seldom appear. But the instances stand out, and when he is among my tribe, he stills himself, he becomes intense, serious, his flame concentrates and burns hotter. Writing these episodes down decades later, his flamboyant and busy prose grows immediately vivid, focused, intense, perceptive, firm, weighty, and clear—so clear. He finds faith in us. I take faith from him.

I also read the Hebrew Bible, which I had never done, and then I read it again, and again with commentaries. Now I read it every week, the cycle of prescribed Torah portions, and on Saturday mornings I go to the local synagogue to discuss the Torah portion in a group study session. I am usually the youngest person in the room by a wide margin. I was born during the Nixon Administration. The rabbi says a few introductory words, someone reads aloud the first verse of the portion, hands shoot up, and forty-five minutes later, there is enough of a pause for someone to read the second verse. Another forty-five minutes after that, the study session ends. A few weeks ago, we discussed Numbers 13-15. Numbers is not the Hebrew title. The Hebrew title is *B'Midbar*: In Wilderness, or perhaps Bewildered. Moses sends men into Canaan, the land of milk and honey which Adonai has promised the Israelites, to spy it out. They return demoralized, for they have seen among its dwellers ranks of Nephilim, the race of giants, against whom we are as grasshoppers and they will slaughter us.

The word Nephilim appears in only one other chapter in the Bible, Genesis 6, which tells us that the Nephilim are the offspring of gods and humans. The Israelites arrive at the threshold of the Promised Land, at the origins of their national destiny, only to behold the full and frightening height of their own antiquity. It will be forty more years before they summon the faith to enter.

June 28, 2019. A few days after dropping our tears of fulfilled longing into the Caspian Sea, my wife and I are in the mountains of western Azerbaijan. Outside

an ancient church are buried the skeletons of Bronze Age bodies. The bones had been excavated, matched, reassembled, and laid out a few feet down in their original resting places. We can see the skeletons through plexiglass. They look like giants, but this is not because they have been subject to an exploded view. The plaque informs us that the people who walked the earth in these skeletons stood over eight feet tall. I believe my eyes.

Giti Ganjei

Hidden Eyes



Giti Saeidian

Ma

Jacqueline Kolosov

The “Unknown Trauma Children” of Gaza

with refrain lines from “Hamlet”

“There is nowhere safe for Gaza’s one million children to turn”

-Catherine Russell, Director of UNICEF

One woe doth tread upon another. So fast do they follow.
A small boy kisses his sister’s cheek; gone too, his mother and brothers.
They say special providence abides in the fall of a sparrow,

That madness in great ones must not unwatched go.
The children’s bodies come to us broken, in pieces, one after another.
One woe doth tread upon another. So fast do they follow.

Parents scrawl names onto the bodies of sons, daughters. How
is this possible? Out of the rubble arises the keening of mothers:
Dare one believe providence abides in the fall of a sparrow

When thousands lie wrapped in shrouds, row after row,
small, wounded bodies wound in white: covered?
One woe doth tread upon another. And another. So fast do they follow.

Air strikes—more than 15,000—in five weeks alone. How
can human beings possibly survive one siege after another? Where
is refuge to be found for these many thousand sparrows?

Unknown Trauma Child 4,979: how a boy or girl is known
until someone comes to claim them: father, mother, stranger..
One woe doth tread upon another. So fast do they follow.
Who dares hold fast to providence amid this sea of forgotten sparrows?

Michelle Lynch

Risk

Spiral into the ache until you
open outward

Abandon yourself to this
new story of being alive

Together we'll risk peace
in this moment
 and the next
 and the next
 and the next
 until we crumble

against the wall of our own
weaknesses, where I'll hold you
at the base of all we can't scale

 until we grow wings
 out of these fissures

Side by side in absolute aloneness
we'll risk remembering the tyrant world
that broke our hearts, even as we struggle

to love it back into being

Ilma Qureshi

the night sky

he said 'language is never neutral
it always points to something'
as if language were a beautiful woman
wishing to don
some velvet of meaning

his voice rose through his green checkered shirt
that he wore on days when there was thunder
and rain

mist rose from his cup
like clouds breaking free of the sea

she wanted her two worlds to come together
for her, language had been broken into two worlds
Urdu—in which she had heard stories
lying on her grandmother's lap—of angels and miracles
and English
in which she learned to think
and make sense of the real world

two worlds that were suddenly cut some night
when she was asleep, dreaming of rivers-

have you ever stood at the top of a mountain
in the middle of the night
and seen the whole world shimmer with stars?
and it is hard to tell
where the sky ends and the earth begins

the strange sensation
that perhaps
in some faraway galaxy
where Great Britain never colonized South Asia
her two worlds that were cut up
like slices of bread
were one

Suzanne Simons

murmurs of earth

*to the makers of music – all worlds, all time.
inscription on the golden record of earth
sounds and images aboard voyager 1,
somewhere beyond our solar system.*

a footstep, a heartbeat, a kiss.

greetings to our friends in the stars.
we wish that we will meet you someday,
an *arabic* greeting on this gestalt of language
and sounds lacquered in uranium, its half-life
stretching into a future farther than all our pasts.

a kiss, a footstep, a heartbeat.

we greet you, great ones. we wish you
longevity, a *nguni* hello.
we hope we are not alone,
that we find each other,
embrace a million lifetimes.

a heartbeat, a footfall.

friends from space, how are you all?
have you eaten yet? come visit us if you
have time, an *amoy* blessing. like laughter
and licking, a scan of ann druyen's brain waves
still dancing two days after carl sagan proposed.

a kiss.

indian raga, navajo night chant,
johnny b. goode. a mother breastfeeds,
bonded in gaze with her child, an x-ray
of hands, a whale singing. welcome home.
it is a pleasure to receive you, a *punjab* welcome.

a heartbeat.

Note:

A gold-plated phonographic record—an audiovisual time capsule of the diversity of life and cultures on Earth—is on board the Voyager 1 spacecraft, traveling beyond our solar system. Launched in 1977, the Golden Record includes 115 images <https://voyager.jpl.nasa.gov/golden-record/whats-on-the-record/images/> and a variety of natural sounds, such as those made by surf, wind, thunder, birds, whales, and other animals. It also features greetings in 55 languages, music from a variety of cultures and eras, messages from U.S. President Jimmy Carter and U.N. Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim, and the heartbeat of astronomer Carl Sagan's fiancée, Ann Druyan, recorded after he proposed to her.

Sheryl Slocum

On the Dan Ryan Expressway

The brakes of the truck in the lane next to mine
make the querulous, pitiful cry of a tired baby.
I've noticed how the trucker spares them,
creeping along at a steady, slow pace
even if a car-length opens up
for an opportunistic car driver to swerve into.

The baby in his brakes frets and fusses
while we crawl along with nothing
to look at except each other's bumpers
gleaming dully in the oily air
or the sharded scraps of fender-benders
mixed into the roadside litter of straws,
cigarette butts, and lone tennis shoes.

How have we mothers' children,
born so bright and eager,
managed to progress only to this transit space
where no sentient being's offspring
would ever want to be?

I appeal to all parents and nurseries of the world
to love and nurture our future engineers, mathematicians,
organizers, developers, and dreamers
so that infant stars
birthed at the edge of our cosmos
three hundred million lightyears ago
may take their first peep
at our great-grandchildren's world

and pronounce it good.

Richard Hoffman

One

*Lockheed Martin, Boeing, Raytheon, General Dynamics,
Northrup Grumman, Honeywell, RTX Corporation, L3Harris Technologies...*

I'm only the pen in the pocket
protector of the manager who
signed off on the pallet of kits
sent to assembly. I'm only one
diode to be spot soldered to a
green motherboard, passed to
the next assembler on the line.
I am one single drop of solder,
to be placed in the same place
in exactly the same place each
time while never given a plan
or even the name for what I'm
part of only the parenthetical
stamps when I arrive or leave.
I am one beep in the beeping
as the forklift crosses painted
lines on the gray cement floor.
I'm one checkmark in one box,
one shift, one task, one break,
one family, one paystub. One.
I'm never the one responsible.

Elizabeth Harlan-Ferlo

Against Beatification

August 2014

At the hydra-headed podium
a Black woman steps in front
of the others with her sign. To get to
the mics you must pass
her body. To get to the Holy
City you must pass graves
because burial was forbidden
inside the walls.
Then martyrs became popular.
Now all locations are acceptable
for corpses: rooftops after levees,
a child's own living room. She stands
in front of assembled suits.
From behind her, a white hand
reaches, rests on her arm. She does not
flinch. Nor smile. She holds her sign
up. The hand on her sleeve
gives up waiting for her to turn
her attention, withdraws.
Another hand tries, rests
a moment, then withers
the same way, as if
from a sacred statue's extended
extremity eroded
by devotion: praying
that pressure on another body
might redeem your own.
They'd been saying,
that Brown boy,
he was no saint.

Melissa Gibson

Elegy For Words

they say
manufactured instability
when what they mean is that
she will wake to a Bobcat
where the swings used to be
and she will watch
as they take the trees and the tulips and
the late summer nights with fireflies and neighbors

they say
eminent domain
when what they mean is that
the asphalt is coming
and the neighborhood will
soon
be haunted by ghosts that gather
in the rubble of their dreams
and wonder at the highway
instead

they say
planned obsolescence
when what they mean is that
a boy is counting fingers
and also luck
in a mine that
glows on
in our pockets and our palms
while we ignore the encroachments of
greedy heat--
beyond repair

they say
technological innovation
when what they mean is that
a bayonet has become
a bullet and
a bullet has become
a drone and
a drone has become
a policy and
the mother in tent #107 has become an
accountant of losses

they say
collateral damage
when what they mean is that
a woman will watch a soldier
shoot her husband
in the back
and the next town over will be forgotten until
the old men are left face down
in the dirt
and a girl will cross borders
after rape but before child
and wonder if birth, too, is an act of war

they say
thoughts and prayers
when what they mean is that
you will look for something
impenetrable--
a steel post
your classroom door
a dresser in your bedroom--
when the guns come
for you, too

this is why I long
instead
for language that is precise--
a perfect staccato note to punctuate
our crimes,
like a triangle ringing true,
nagging us with our own intentions
when we try to hide
behind words
that trade cruelty for
righteousness.

Fran Markover

Kharkiv's Cello Tells Me What My Grandmother Couldn't

on March 23, '22, Denys Karachevtsev played his cello in the ruins of Kharkiv

Evening bombings shatter the children's wing of the hospital.
As I perform, I see the booted eagle roosting, whistling.
Daily tremolos, the air raids challenge my womanly sensibilities.
How contrapuntal, some notes agitated, some contralto with hope.
All I can do is cantillate through the emptiness, the hole dug inside me.
In string theory, everything vibrates, thrums across heartlands,
across the city wilderness. And as long as there are soldiers
my wolf tones demand attention. Each crackling from burnt-
out buildings, each arpeggio tells me that my country is alive
with ghosts, my scroll a sculpted psalm. So I let myself surrender
to elegiac bowings. My grief sometimes strummed with light.

Can you hear Bach's spiccato, the aspirated passages, lungful pulse
as if fingers sift soft scorched earth? And the cellist who embraces me,
holds me to what remains. My patina may be coated with dust,
but aren't we all from dust to dust. Aren't we all beholden
to the welcoming forest. It's who I am—ebony, maple tree trunk,
spruce, weeping willow. When I lean toward the ground,
my fingerboard is depressed. Lamentations sweep across the altars.
Imagine— if I sleep unplayed, there would be a gavotte-less stage.
Listen— there's a distant cry like a grandmother's— *I'm here*.
If only I could resurrect the names from sharps and minors.
Finesse these funereal swells. To be reminded— *who sings in this world
will sing also in the next*.

Joan Penn

Lamentation

*Is there no balm in Gilead?
Is there no physician there?
Why then is there no healing
for the wound of my people?
Jeremiah 8:22 NIV*

Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no skilled physician,
no mystical elixir, no salve to soothe societal distress?
Is there no miraculous Rx to cure all that ails people and planet?

Is there no serum sufficient to succor us?
No Garden of Eden, no Paradise, no Promised Land?
No sanctified space where we might reclaim our innocence,
sate senses, satisfy needs, eradicate hatred and greed?

Is there no antidote for lack of compassion?
Must refugees be turned away—
men, women and children
washed away at sea,

survivors shunned
at shuttered borders?

Is there no open-armed harbor,
no hungered-for Shangri-La?

Can there be no outlawing of weaponry,
no potion to guarantee peace, no sanctuary
where we might surrender our shadow side,
no schoolrooms where children are safe?

Is there no remedy for the existential?
Must we abide by a roll of the dice? Acquiesce to Kismet?
Accept fabrication as fact? Stand on shifting-sands?

Is there no nectar to placate, no drug to sedate
this ache? Oh, this ache. Is there no balm?
Is there no balm? Is there no balm in Gilead?

David Cameron

Birds of a Feather

Patrick didn't dare squirm on the hard chair. His intuition told him not to break the spell. "Look, look, look!" his father said, "That's a Brown Thrasher! Look at him attack that suet. Man, oh, man!"

Patrick liked birds as much as any nine-year-old. He especially liked red cardinals and comical chickadees. What he liked most about birds was that they provided his single best point of connection with his father.

Burge Watkins had been the pastor of the Watkins Memorial A.M.E. Zion Church for ten years. His days hummed with sermon preparation and church administration, and evenings buzzed with community meetings. When he was home, the Reverend often retreated into his study, and Patrick's mother would tell Patrick and his older sister, Connie, "You children be quiet, and don't bother your father."

But on Saturday mornings, after the breakfast dishes were cleared, Patrick and his father sat side by side at the dining room windows and watched birds come to the three feeders and the suet block hanging outside. One feeder was for sunflower seeds that attracted cardinals, grosbeaks, and the crazy titmice that seemed always out of control. Another feeder was for mealworms, the favorite of Eastern Bluebirds and Carolina Wrens. The third was for thistle seeds that attracted various finches.

Burge's resting face was stern, but when "that old catbird" showed up and started "struttin' his stuff," or a Pileated Woodpecker swooped down to bang away at the suet cake with his steely beak, Burge would light up in wonder. That was when Patrick got a brief glimpse of the man behind the mask.

One February morning they watched the birds, and Patrick said, "What's that gray bird, Daddy?"

Burge said, "That's an American Goldfinch. You know a goldfinch, don't you?"

"That's not a goldfinch."

"Yes, it is."

"If that's a goldfinch, why isn't it gold?"

"Well, it could be a female; they're always drab. But it could be a male lying low in his winter clothes. Soon, you'll see him take on his true nature. He'll turn gold before your eyes, and by May, he'll be so bright you won't believe it."

"Why doesn't he stay gold?"

"I don't know. I've wondered that, too."

"I think it's sad to hide your true nature when you can be gold."

Burge cut his eyes toward his son. He knuckled the stubble of Patrick's crew cut and said, "How did you get so smart?"

Just then, heavy footsteps sounded on the porch, and the front door flew open. Grandfather B.D. roared in like a locomotive, giving no thought to family privacy. In his mind, privacy was for those who had sins to hide. He scanned the interior like a hawk zeroing in on his prey until he spotted Burge. Pointing, he said, "You—In the study."

Once they were in Burge's book-lined sanctuary, B.D. pointedly examined the portrait of his father, Burgess, Sr. that hung on the wall. The organizing pastor of Watkins Memorial Church had been the patriarch and B. D. his faithful scion and appointed pastoral successor. Under B. D.'s leadership, the congregation had tripled in size, and he had formally retired as the lead pastor when Burge was ready to take the reins.

B. D. and the bishop went way back, so it was no trouble to convince him to appoint Burge as the third-generation Watkins Church pastor. After ten years, though, B. D. regretted that he hadn't held on longer. He said, "Close the door." Pushing the door shut, Burge steeled himself for another of his father's verbal assaults. He said, "Is something wrong?" though he already knew.

Rigid, his back to his son, B. D. said in quiet, clipped words, “Walters tells me you said ‘No’ to the bishop when he wanted to appoint you Presiding Elder of the district.”

Burge thought he could feel heat radiating from his father’s neck and ears. “Yes sir.” Through gritted teeth, B. D. said, “May I ask why?”

“You may ask,” Burge thought, “But you don’t want to hear the truth.” Aloud, he said, “Pop, you and I both know that position requires political will and finesse I just don’t have. It’s not my thing.”

B. D. turned. “Oh,” he said in a mocking falsetto, “It’s not your thing.” Burge flinched. B. D. crossed his arms and enunciated clearly, his head bobbing to emphasize each word. “You’d better make it your thing. Next to bishop, it is the greatest opportunity a young minister in our church can have—an honor! Out of all the pastors in the district, Bishop Jones has chosen you. And it’s NOT YOUR THING?”

B. D. again pivoted away from his son and looked at the portrait of his father who had been their church’s pastor for thirty years until a massive stroke cut him down. Burgess, Sr. had marched with King, dined with Mandela, and, by force of will, had cowed even the white, high-steeple preachers of the city into following his lead on issues important to black citizens.

B. D. played his trump card. “Don’t let your grandfather down, Son.” Stepping close, he clenched his right fist, and holding it under Burge’s nose, growled with righteous fervor, “Man up, Son, MAN UP!”

Six years passed, and despite his initial reticence, Burge proved an effective Presiding Elder of his district. The district committees functioned efficiently, and churches and pastors under his care negotiated the turbulent events of the Covid-19 pandemic and the George Floyd/Black Lives Matter protests. To his dismay, hallway whispers and behind-closed-door conversations began to swirl, touting him as the leading candidate to fill a vacancy for one of the denomination’s twelve bishops.

Burge had his detractors—some who found him too reserved and others frustrated by his unwillingness to bend rules or encourage the usual network of cronies and sycophants. But B. D., now diminished by his own series of small strokes, beamed a lop-sided smile and wiped his watery left eye every time one of his buddies brought up the possibility of Burge as a bishop.

One evening, Burge sat in his study re-reading his dog-eared copy of August Wilson's Pulitzer Prize-winning play, *Fences*. His eyes misted when he whispered Cory's monologue to his father, Troy.

"I used to tremble every time you called my name. Every time I heard your footsteps in the house. Wondering all the time... what's Papa gonna say if I do this?... What's he gonna say if I do that?... What's Papa gonna say if I turn on the radio? What you gonna do... give me a whupping? You can't whup me no more. You're too old. You just an old man."

Burge imagined himself on stage, bringing his passion and physical presence to the role. He heard shouts of "Bravo!" and saw the standing ovation as he bowed deep and long. What had his high school drama teacher called him? "A talent to be reckoned with." And the local paper's theater critic? "A rising star, the next Poitier."

B. D. had humored his son's proclivity toward what he considered frivolous entertainments, but when the boy wanted to go to a summer drama camp instead of the denomination's Christian camp, B. D. put his foot down. "We gonna nip this in the bud!" he had thundered to his wife when she timidly tried to plead Burge's case.

A quiet knock on the study door interrupted Burge's reverie. He closed his book and scrubbed his face with his palm. "Come in."

The door opened and fifteen-year-old Patrick peered in. "Dad?"

"Yes, Son, what is it?"

"Mom says it's time for supper."

Patrick backed his head out and started to close the door, but Burge said, "Patrick, come here a minute." Patrick paused and stepped into the room. Burge thought hard for something to say to his son; struggled to find some scrap of connection that could span the widening gulf between them. He began to speak, hoping his brain would give him words when he noticed his son's lips were bright red.

"What's wrong with your mouth?" Patrick's eyes widened and he dragged his sleeve across his lips. Burge sputtered, "Are you wearing lipstick?" Patrick turned to dash out the door, but Burge commanded, "Stop!" Patrick froze.

Burge stood, walked over, and reached out to grab his son's chin, roughly lifting the boy's face so he could see the China Red gloss. "What is this?" Patrick looked away. "Patrick?"

Tears coming to his eyes, Patrick said, “I was messing around with Connie and her friends. They dared me.”

Burge released the boy’s face and said, “Go clean that off. I don’t want to see it at the supper table.”

The lipstick incident faded as the campaign for bishop claimed Burge’s every spare ounce of energy. Though Burge hesitated to promote himself, his wife Grace had no such reluctance. Her day job as Director of Communications in the mayor’s office gave her the skills to get Burge seen in the right places with the right people. With Grace working the women’s groups and B. D. calling in favors, Burge had the sinking feeling he would be elected.

The General Conference was four months away, and, thanks to Grace and B. D., Burge’s name recognition across the denomination was strong. One evening, as Burge and Grace were rushing to get out the door to attend a reception for a visiting bishop from West Africa, Connie pushed Patrick into their bedroom. “Mom, Dad,” Connie said, “Patrick needs you to sign something.”

Patrick stumbled forward. He looked at the floor and clutched a paper in his sweaty right hand. Grace attached the backing to the post on her left earring and turned to look, her eyebrows raised. Burge popped his shirt cuffs to one-half inch below his jacket sleeves. With an eye on the clock, he said, “Yes?”

Connie nudged her brother. “Go ahead, you’ve got to do it. You know you do.”

Patrick would have preferred for his mom to see it first, but since her hands were busy, he extended the sheet to his father. He mumbled, “Ms. Washburn says I need your permission.”

Burge took the paper and fished his reading glasses from his shirt pocket. Focusing on the note printed on school letterhead, he said, “Permission for what?” Then he read. Patrick watched his father’s face as he read, dreading the man’s response. He didn’t fear an explosion. Sometimes he thought he’d prefer that. What he dreaded was the stony silence.

Burge whipped the paper toward Grace, who noted the tension in his neck and jaw. She took it and read, glancing once at Patrick and giving him a sad smile. Connie was about to say something, but Grace looked at her and shook her head imperceptibly. Burge then started to speak, but Grace put her hand on his arm and said, “Dear, we need to go. Let’s think about this and we can hear more from Patrick when we get home.”

Grace steered Burge out of the bedroom to the front door where they put on their overcoats against the chilly late-winter air and left. Patrick sighed with relief, and Connie hugged her brother from behind. “I’m proud of you,” she said. At the reception, Grace kept reminding Burge to smile. “Get your mind in the game,” she told him. “We’ll know what to say to Patrick when the time comes. Until then, all we can do is pray.”

Through a forced smile, Burge leaned in close and said, “You pray. I’m all done with praying.” He hadn’t known it until he said it, but it rang true. He could be the bishop. He could moderate the meetings, tell the jokes, furrow his brow in compassion, and fold his hands in humility, but all the God talk suddenly seemed threadbare. He was no longer sure he believed a word of it—not a flippin’ word.

When they got home, Patrick and Connie were already asleep. Fortunately, it was the weekend, so they had two days to decide what to do. Patrick had left the permission slip on the kitchen table, and Burge sat down heavily to re-read the note from Patrick’s guidance counselor.

“Dear Rev. and Mrs. Watkins. Your son has been exploring his identity as normal teenagers do. He has asked that hereafter we call him by the gender-neutral name, ‘Pat,’ and also that we no longer refer to him with the pronouns ‘he’ or ‘him’ but ‘they.’

I want to assure you that I see no evidence of Patrick being in crisis. He is simply trying on different ways of being in the world. It is our policy, though, to inform parents of such developments and to gain your permission to accede to Patrick’s request.”

Burge went to bed, but he didn’t sleep, unlike Grace who seemed unperturbed. The next morning, he rose at the usual time to make coffee and pancakes. Patrick and Connie slept in. Just as well.

After breakfast, Burge retreated to his study to brush up on his sermon for Sunday. He forgot what had possessed him to preach through the book of Revelation. He dimly recalled it was a spasm of disgust at all the wing-nut conspiracy theories arising from slap-dash scholarship regarding the book. It was a tough code to crack, but he had come to appreciate his text for Sunday.

In Revelation, chapter 4, the Seer describes the one seated on the throne of heaven as an array of colors. Not a bearded old man, white or black. Not a coddling papa or damning judge, just colors. Burge couldn’t imagine a more honest description of the Divine.

On Sunday night, Burge and Grace signed their permission for Patrick—Pat—to slide into gender-neutral territory. Grace was her usual magnanimous self, giving Pat a hug when she had signed. Burge kept his eyes focused on the paper and bore down hard with the pen. All he could think of was what his father would say if he found out.

The week before the General Conference, a nature show was on the TV in the den, but Grace was in the kitchen setting the table and programming the coffee maker for the next morning. Burge tuned out the jungle noises as he studied drafts of two speeches for the election of bishop—a humble acceptance speech full of self-deprecating humor if he won, and a gracious, congratulatory speech if he lost. Pat was on their knees looking for a glue stick in the craft cupboard. Burge noted the chipped blue polish on Pat’s chewed fingernails. What next?

Growling lions on the TV covered the sound of slow, uneven footsteps on the porch before the front door opened, and B. D. stepped in. Oblivious to the irony, he called out, “Knock, knock.” Burge rose to meet his father and invited him to sit.

“No, no, I can’t stay. I was passing, and I thought I’d stop to tell you the good news.”

“What’s that?”

B. D. grinned. “I ran into Claude Jessup at the barber shop this afternoon. You know his gospel group, Men of One Accord?”

“Yes, I’ve heard them.”

“Uh-huh. The Men are going to be singing at the conference, and, you know, Claude is in good with all the preachers. He said he thinks you are a fine example of Christian manhood and that he has been talking you up! How about that!”

“That’s great, Pop,” Burge said evenly, “That’s good to hear.”

Riding the wave of anticipated glory, B. D. looked at Pat. “Patrick, what do you think of your old man? Is he a fine example of Christian manhood?”

Standing, the glue stick in his hand, Pat said, “Uh...yeah...he’s good.”

B. D. froze, the grin stuck on his face. A cloud crossed his eyes. “Patrick, what’s that on your fingernails?” Patrick put his hands behind his back. The grin gone, B. D. said in a quiet, menacing voice, “Patrick, show me your hands.”

Pat kept their fingers out of sight, but B. D. stepped close and, with his good hand, reached around and grabbed Pat’s skinny wrist, pulling the teen’s digits

forward to examine the evidence. Burge stood up and stepped over to his father. "Now, Pop...."

B. D. glared at Burge. "Did you know about this? Tell me you didn't know about this...this...mess!" B. D., still gripping the wrist, gave it a shake. "This son of yours is wearing nail polish!"

"Pop, don't upset yourself."

"Upset? I'll show you upset. This is a disgrace. You've got to nip this in the bud if you don't want it to get out of hand. I'll tell you one thing, nobody wants a bishop who can't keep his own house in order."

B. D. shoved Pat's hand away and stared at Burge, daring him to respond. Pat looked at their father, too, wondering whose side he would take. Burge, his hands raised in supplication, stood paralyzed and mute. At that moment, Grace entered. Seeing B. D., she smiled warmly and said, "B. D., I didn't hear you come in." Feeling the tension, her smile faded. "What's wrong?"

B. D. glowered and stepped around her, doing his best to stand erect and walk without shuffling. After the door slammed behind him, Grace looked at Pat and asked again, "What's wrong?"

Pat looked at their father with bitter disappointment and said, "Ask him." They turned and walked out of the room.

The evening before leaving for the General Conference, Burge sat in the overstuffed chair in his study, again reading from *Fences*. He nearly had the play memorized, even Rose's part. Now, though, he whispered aloud Troy's lines to his son, Cory.

"I done give you everything I had to give you. I gave you your life! Me and your mama worked that out between us. And liking your black ass wasn't part of the bargain. Don't try and go through life worrying about if somebody like you or not. You best be making sure they doing right by you. You understand what I'm saying, boy?"

B. D. had been all business after he blew up over Pat's nail polish. He wanted Burge to be bishop so bad he could taste it, and Burge didn't think his father would breathe again until after the election.

Grace was a different story. He didn't deserve her. She never said a bad word about B. D., but Burge knew she was in his corner. Grace had never pressured Burge to be anything more than what he wanted for himself. On the other hand, he knew she would enjoy the prestige and challenge of being a bishop's wife.

Shy about his dream of being on stage, Burge had never told Grace that, as a teenager, he prayed hard for God to make him an actor. For the first time, it occurred to him that the Divine Jester had, very literally, granted his desire. If only Burge had known all those years ago to also pray for more than one part, more than one stage. The holy joke was on him, but at least by now he knew his lines. Was that enough?

Burge closed his book and sat a moment staring into space. He rose, left his study, and went to the bottom of the stairs to call up to Grace who was getting ready for bed. “Baby, I’m going out for a little bit. I won’t be long.”

Grace called down, “You’re going out this late? Is there something I can do for you?”

“No, that’s OK. I’m only going to Target. I’ll be back in a jif.”

The next morning, Pat slept late; thankful they would be alone in the house for three days. Connie was on an orientation weekend at Winston-Salem State University where she would go in the fall, and the ‘rents were at some conference in Greensboro. They pulled on sweatpants and thumped down the stairs to the kitchen. Pat reached in the fridge for orange juice and taking a bagel from the bag, sliced it and levered it down into the toaster.

They carried their breakfast into the dining room. It was a sunny July morning, and they noticed through the windows the latest brood of bluebird fledglings camped in the mealworm feeder. The birds were gawky creatures, barely able to fly and just learning to feed themselves.

Watching them, Pat nearly set their plate on a small object that didn’t belong on the table. It was a new bottle of nail polish they didn’t recognize with a sticky note underneath. The handwriting was Dad’s—three letters—PAT.

Lifting the bottle, Pat examined the label. The brand was “Essie.” The color, “As Gold as it Gets.”



Alexandria Tsourides
Mola Market, Panama City, Panama

Yazdan Khoshsiraf

i wanted to leave

Somet.mes . feel over-sens.t.ve
today a man
Whom . work w.th
Sa.d that
“don't feel the way you do”
Cause he thought he feels
Worse than me
That .ndeed
Hurt me

To be
Part of a system
a mach.ne
w.th parts
ready to break
On every other break
Ready to take
Whatever .t takes
To be seen
as a part
To have Mean.nG
For the.r l.ves.
Sad.

Not hard to understand
But tough to comprehend.
To set barriers, to hate
To be late for my date
With this hated desk
Blinded
blinded
There isn't any eye left to see
Or to be
Let me not be present in this moment
in this place
in this piece
I have left and left
a dot behind
Maybe some find more meaning
For their lives.

Anne Elezabeth Pluto

PARADISE

For MT

1.

My young grandmother on her knees
begging her husband not to take them
back – that leaving America was like
God sending Adam and Eve out
of Paradise.

When she returned – the old country
within a new border – language is forever
the only homeland – a careful midwife –
she made sure the baby was not born —
then three more live births.

My father – eating snow – eating
sand – shredding bullets – America –
Kept his eyes on the prize –
and entered Paradise – paperwork
intact – border crossing – my mother
waiting.

2.

You tell me that you live in Paradise.
Palm trees – giant redwoods – endless
ocean – the view from the mesa – a fast
ride into the desert – kick up all that
dust – pure bliss on a wide-open road.

It's skipped a generation – I didn't know
I could name it – imagine it on a map –
The child of immigrants – there was no
welcome mat – no door that appeared –
and I came to a city – 2500 miles away –

This is not my Paradise -

3.

When you're a first gen American
You don't get paradise – you get work.
I'm a woman – I got a career – I got a lecture.
Don't rely on a man to take care of you.

In Eden four rivers meet – the trees grow huge
The animals keep us company – and I am not
afraid of snakes – I've been eating the fruit
of the tree of knowledge for years – large
pomegranates cracked open ripe—in the hands of Mary.

Everything a seeded offering – an opportunity
I want to taste from the tree of life – we were
expelled long before our births – but the rivers run
the sea – to the desert – to the *Yucca Brevifolia*
native to the Southwest – native in your Paradise.

Hannah Grace Greer

I saw a deer

It is common, “natural” to see carcasses on every hometown road. On “America’s Cheapest Family” they showed how to collect & cook it. I remember seeing a dead wolf once, I heard they’re rare now.

Rubber-streaked raccoons and torn fox tails are just as normal as buying baby clothes basking with lead for cheap. It’s hard not to wonder what my own items absorb and leech into me. The answer to chemicals and inhumane working conditions overseas is always, “no, no, outsourcing and machines are better for the economy.”

I often dwell on the scent of gasoline, question if I will remember, asking—how will I feel if my skin crinkles and dots, and someone asks, “oh, what were gas stations like?” More so, what else soon becomes antique? cotton cash, check-out-lanes, physical libraries, pollution-free, family farms—

I saw a deer today—a living one for once. It stood on the frontier of road and oak, abyss and time, watching. As its body ran and a truck speeded passed, I prayed silently *let this one remain*.

Scott T. Starbuck

Adding Ice Cubes to Hot Jasmine Tea While Thinking of Melting Arctic

“A heatwave in Morocco has killed at least 21 people in a 24-hour period in the central city of Beni Mellal last week, according to the health ministry. The North African country, which is sweltering under soaring temperatures of up to 48 degrees Celsius [118.4°F], is also facing a prolonged drought.”

—France 24, August 2, 2024

Humans like a narrow range of temperature
on their taste buds and flesh
when possible, but it's not always possible,
and the difference is life or death.

Last night I dreamed a Moroccan girl
with Paris smile
now skeleton and ash.

In early morning I dreamed
through stained glass
of the old stone church
butterflies dancing behind
scourged Jesus.

In nearby window a dove balance-walks on high branch
with confidence
she can fly away any time.

A distant song is playing about loss,
more loss,
and promised redemption,
but not for small island and developing nations.

Preeth Ganapathy

Blessings

The dew-swept grass threads sway
in the petrichor. The fallen, crumpled
leaves turn into little ponds-
a collection of yesterday's dreams.
A prinia launches from the springboard
of the foxtail flowers into today.
A blue dragonfly flits from bloom to bloom
before alighting on the soft petal of the morning.
A tiny ladybird crawls along the outline of a mint leaf,
each serrated moment.

Butterflies as big as birds
birds as small as butterflies
balance like trapeze artists
from the perch of temple flowers.
The wagtail dances on the cement courtyard,
unmindful of the audience
behind ajar windows.
The cool air settles on the face of an orchid
misting the petals
without a plan, with no rehearsal
just like the everyday music
of silent conversations.

Robert Cording

Deluge

Four days of nonstop rain, so explosive
we watched television with subtitles,
nothing gained by raising the volume.
The small pond behind our houses rose
and spilled over the lawn, making an island
of one neighbor's garden and a watery home
for the poles of another's purple martin houses.

Just as sudden: the rain stopped.
Patches of blue cohered into a cloudless sky.
A ring of palm trees and live oaks doubled
themselves on the pond's mirror. Everyone
came out to witness the new sight
of their own backyards—collages
of sunken gardens, trees, water, and grass.

Two cormorants popped up, their heads
glittering with sunlight. We wished
we could see what the resident osprey
was seeing from its height above the water.
Back and forth, purple martins ziplined
over the pond with what, rightly
or wrongly, we took to be delight.

Ismael S. Rodriguez Jr.

The Hollow Tree

Once, I stood tall—
Roots deep in the earth,
Bark thick as armor,
Branches stretched toward the sun,
A fortress against the storms.

But time, like a slow river,
Carved me hollow from within,
Worms and winds whispering through
The chambers of my heart,
Until I was emptied—
A shell of what I'd been.

The world peered inside,
Saw only darkness,
The hollow core,
The rot and ruin left behind.
They called me broken,
Unworthy of the sky.

Yet still I stood,
My roots clinging to the soil,
And in my emptiness,
Something new began to grow—
Moss and flowers filled my scars,
Birds built nests within my chest,
Life found me, even in my hollow.

Now I shelter what I could not before—
A home for others to belong,
A cradle for the wind's soft songs,
And though I am not whole,
I am enough.

For in this hollow,
There is space for light.



Karl Kang

Life Branched Out, 3-Color Reduction Print, 2021

Mary Morris

Full Moon Over Serengeti

Serengeti is a Masai word
meaning *endless plain*.

Within jacaranda, its sweet scent—
numerous pairs of eyes.

The Serengeti is *always* alive.
Sound of wood owls carry through acacias.

A leopard draped on branches
chews its kill.

Great thirsty herds of wildebeest
gaze at the Mara River

in their prolonged deliberation of
crossing the treacherous.

The full moon shines its radiance
on all nocturnal.

A ghostly flower blooms
in the dark.

Tom Laughlin

Earth Air Fire Water

for Marion

Curl your toes into the pine-needled path
smell the earthy woods of your childhood
ever green trees who know the depths
having reached for millennia
their alligator-like roots delving deep
and strong in their knowing
follow them down
feel your solid roots

Curl your toes into the rocky island cliff
gaze out across miles of ocean
toward foreign shores and teenage accents
close your eyes slowly
to the shore birds floating around you
taste the breeze filling your lungs

Curl your toes into thick grass
stars scattered across dark sky
the sparkle of fiery gems above
and here faces surrounding you flicker with firelight
walk calmly across the hot coals
the fire is within you
it will not scorch

Curl your toes into snowy sand
watch the sparkle of sun on waves
feel the beating of your heart – full, warm, open
dive now into salty cold
embrace the watery darkness
burst upward into the light

Diane Solis

Witness to Beauty

a poem of lists

Every morning the artist rises
to the first bird song,
cooks a creamy bowl
of Irish porridge,
sautés potatoes
with mushrooms and onions,
drinks black tea with honey
while munching a berry scone.
Then she gathers her paints

and easel, crossing
her street to the beach
—to her clouds tinged
with pink, and her
waves awash
in silver, and her
skies of cerulean
blue and ocean.
She envisions

grassy cliffs fringing
County Cork's Ireland,
Louisiana-jade marshes teeming
with catfish, with alligator grins
and red tipped
devil-horse grasshoppers,
enchanted serene green
elephant forests veiling
veridian mountains rising

above Bangkok, and Alaska's crisp
blue-fire glaciers, her rivers jeweled
with lobster-bright salmon spawning
—she recalls racing
a magenta bike away
from a smog choked valley,
from a home with drawn
curtains, and no aunts
nor school friends visiting...

Life succored her then
as now with the paradoxes
of vague specific childhoods
that were never her own.
Now she gives witness to beauty,
to love-ly persistence, resilience,
and distant pastoral muses
living in her footsteps, bursting
from the colors of her paint strokes

Ariel Tovlev

The Silent Witness

when the sun is shining
the otherwise still
clear air is animated

gnats catch the glare as they
fall like snowflakes then rise again
like a video on loop
rewind in reverse to start over

bugs bounce among blades of
grass and bundles of leaves
landing launching repeat

spun spiderwebs shine
cutting through the landscape like cracked glass
their hosts hidden in wait

a leaf lazily falls
with no wind
to hurry or hinder its descent

potted prayer plant
releases its prayer position
letting its leaves lay down

a solitary blue jay
darts between branches
shrieking with every leap

and then there is me
the silent witness
suspending my thoughts
surrendering my senses

my breath a small contribution
to the fullness of
the life present
sharing the shining sun

Deborah Leipziger

I am offering these wildflowers to you

this superbloom of poppy and lupine.

Here is the earth made whole,
wind made manifest

I offer you these wildflowers and all they contain
Seed petal calyx

Here is wildness
color and courage
brevity and expansiveness

Here is meadowness
mountainness

From this you can make the whole world.



Alexandria Tsourides
Arco Iris, Panama City, Panama

Jeffree Morel

Making Friends with Fire

O. The Freeway Complex Fire

The joy of campfire
the horror of wild
coming over the hills
dried by summer droughts
blurring to a baked autumn
another frontier to burn.

The riverbed on fire
beside La Palma's two lanes
jammed going one way
the other a dead end
where we used to live.

AC pumps what's outside in
choking sealed chambers
and combustion engines flee by explosion
the same power we depend on
uncontained.

I. Fire Season



As I write, Fire rages across the western US and Canada.
It's August in the Pacific Northwest,
which now means **Fire Season**.

The flames aren't always visible, and evacuations are scarce in metropolitan areas, but smoke from forest fires turns the blue skies gray, the orange sunrises and sunsets red, and hampers plans for summer recreation anywhere except near the breeze-soaked coast.

It wasn't always like this.

I've lived in this bioregion only nine years, but I remember a time before these oppressively smoky conditions started to seem like a dreaded inevitability, cutting short the season of warm nights and water sports Cascadia's residents are so practiced at making the most of.

At times, even the anticipation of Fire Season has been enough to aggravate my insecurities around committing to a home in place, getting attached to any plot of land when it could burn away at a moment's notice. Not to mention how this

would aggravate my **climate despair**, the sinking suspicion that somehow, in some roundabout way, I, as a member of humanity, would deserve it.

In many ways, this has been a long time coming.

Our society is reaping what our policies have sown, because we have forgotten

or never learned how to care for this land,

to listen at the pace or through the senses with which it speaks to us, and honor rather than merely fear the place Fire has in it.

II. The Havoc of Fire Suppression



When I was 16, my childhood home in Orange County burned down in a wildfire. Two years earlier, my aunt and uncle's house in San Diego County burned down in a wildfire. Fourteen years later, in 2022, my *other* aunt and uncle's house in Mariposa County burned down in a wildfire. This year, my sister bought a new house in Riverside County that no insurance company will cover, due to the risk of wildfire.

I grew up with the image of Smokey Bear warning, “Only you can prevent forest fires.”

Turns out, I can't.

Smokey was the cartoon mascot for a federal policy of

Fire Suppression

that's left forests and grasslands like tinderboxes, drier, older, more homogenized, and more susceptible to uncontrollable burns.

Fire has always been a part of this landscape. Many of the plants that grow in this ecology have adapted a resistance to regular burns, and some actively need them. Fire burns away the old, makes way for the new, and stimulates dormant plant and fungal lifeforms in the underground **soil seed bank**, dependent on disturbance to awaken and grow into the light.

Before European Americans settled the Western half of the ~~United States~~ **Turtle Island**, the many bands and tribes of indigenous peoples employed Fire consciously, based on practices that had been preserved and passed down through oral traditions for centuries, possibly millennia. We have a term now for this kind of time-tested, land-based cultural understanding: **Traditional Ecological Knowledge**, or **TEK**.

III. The Fallacy of Separation



Most settlers didn't see or respect this kind of knowledge.

They saw

according to their biases,

their desires for cheap arable land to mine or farm fortunes from.

They saw a fertile garden of Eden and groups of savages who, they assumed, didn't know how to care for it properly. They didn't see the plowed fields of vegetable crops they knew from feudal Europe. They couldn't, or wouldn't, recognize the integrated methods of

tending the wild

that had created land of plenty over generations. Most European settlers who did endeavor to learn from the indigenous American tribes—already heavily depopulated from foreign pathogens by the time most settlers arrived—became outcasts

demonized by their own people.

According to the settlers' culture, nature wasn't something to work with, but to conquer. They saw the West as wild and unruly. They thought it was man's duty to tame it into submission.

Most indigenous languages didn't even have a word for wild;
nature was nature,
human cultures another natural part of the natural whole.

In the Progressive Era of the early 1900s, American attitudes towards nature shifted from oppositional towards protective, but the underlying assumption of separation between man and nature remained. Naturalist John Muir and President Teddy Roosevelt stewarded the concept of national parks to preserve some scraps of the landscape and its nonhuman inhabitants from agricultural or industrial development. Now documented as "America's Best Idea," the national parks remain a poor substitute for the indigenous stewardship ethics that came before colonization. Instead of reciprocity and belonging within our natural environment, our federal and personal policies towards natural areas still rely upon

The Fallacy of Separation:

man is over here,
nature over there,
and never shall the two meet
for longer than a vacation.

The federal Wilderness Act of 1964 stated this plainly when it defined wilderness as "where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man."

Implication: man does not belong to the Earth's community of life. Man only trammels the Earth, whatever that means. Government institutions assume the mythological status of a stern punitive parent for its children citizens, who are not trusted nor allowed to grow up and learn to care for their own home without the mediation of impenetrable bureaucracies.

Fire Suppression is one extension of this cultural belief we carry.

We see Fire as a problem to suppress, rather than a power that can be used for health or for ill. We have tried to protect our remaining natural areas from it, but this has only deprived them of an essential element for their growth. This worked better before the decline of industrial logging in the early '90s, which destroyed most of the continent's old-growth forest habitat,

but also substituted in Fire's role of thinning the wooded brush. Now that industrial maintenance and indigenous land tending practices have both ceased, when Fire breaks through our safeguards, it is overwhelming,
angry at its forceful exclusion,

welcomed with open arms by aged, mono-cropped conifer stands, terrorizing human communities for our failed crusade to exile it.

IV. Fire and Humanity



This is not the version of history most of us are taught. I never heard this perspective before stumbling into the budding fields of regenerative agriculture and **permaculture**—a system of landscape and cultural design principles based on mimicking patterns in nature—largely by chance.

My first permaculture teacher, Brian Byers of [Lost Valley Ecovillage](#), taught that working with Fire is one of humans' most important and irreplaceable functions in the ecosystem.

It may be obvious, but bears repeating:

No other animal can work or play with Fire like we can.

The conscious collaboration with Fire is one of our greatest innovations as a species.

Brian also complained how government restrictions prevented him from executing controlled burns to clear brush and make **biochar**, a form of charcoal that acts as a sponge for nutrients and slow-releases them into the soil, adding fertility for decades, if not centuries.

When I proposed to write an article about his work restoring Fire to the

land, Brian pointed me to his permaculture mentor, Hazel Vaarde of [Siskiyou Permaculture](#) in southern Oregon. So, this winter, I enrolled in Hazel's weeklong **Social Forestry** course.

A gender-nonbinary Quaker from the Adirondack Mountains, Hazel has been educating about forestry and ecology around the West Coast since the early '70s, as well as agitating for environmentally sane policies in less official ways too.

How much eco sabotage do you want to know about?

In the endorsement section of their book, [Social Forestry: Tending the Land as People of Place](#), executive director of the Permaculture Institute of North America Peter Bane says Hazel

walk[s] with wisdom between the settler and indigenous worlds.

And Hazel has the stories to back this up, which are worth more as social currency in oral cultures than any amount of money or certifications. They also speak in **phrases**, rather than the atomized, alienated words of most modern English. Each phrase, they'll explain, represents a cultural memory containing both a story and a scientific truth within it. So, every lesson from them is about building a

Vocabulary of the Land

as much as working with it hands-on.

Since the financial crash of 2008, Hazel has been stewarding and educating from a plot called Wolf Gulch Farm, in the Little Applegate Valley of the highly biodiverse Siskiyou Mountains. A pocket desert at the intersection of several bioregions, this land is home to a bizarre mosaic of trees and other fauna, leftover from a convoluted history of boom-and-bust resource extraction schemes, from gold and coal mining to industrial timber and weed production.

Hazel's mission here is to restore **Cultural Fire** as it was used by the native Dakubetede. They enlist their community of current and former students to conduct forestry projects to this end, who can then, hopefully, share and apply what they learn elsewhere.



Hazel set the tone for our course right away in their first lesson.

This is a post-apocalyptic, power-down scenario.

We were 12 students, ages ranging from late teens to early '60s, tent camping and sharing meals with no phone service or internet access, asked to roleplay a re-indigenized village. The presence of vehicles and plenty of storebought snacks and produce broke the illusion, to everyone's relief. Our goal for the week was to conduct an **under-burn** of the west-facing hillside above the winter camp where we were staying.

We're going to be painting with fire.

The area blends from a meadow of introduced European grasses to a sparse woods of ponderosa pine and white and black oak trees. The white oak, Hazel explained, has been worshipped as the

Triple Goddess

by indigenous peoples across the Earth's mid-latitude forests since time immemorial.

This divinity has a scientific basis, since the white oak is implicated in more beneficial relationships than any other species in these woodland ecosystems.

She rents rooms.

Following the local governance model of **Watershed Councils** laid out in Hazel's lectures and book, our cohort split into **Guilds** of differing skillsets and tasks. I wound up as a **Ranger**. Our task was to scout and carve a trail uphill of the proposed burn area, noting hazard trees the **Sawyers** could saw down, plants the **Mothers** could harvest for medicine, tree limbs the **Bodgers** could turn into furniture, and dead wood the **Charcoaliers** could assemble into a pyre at the ridgetop.

That was where our trail ended. Beyond were only blue flag markers tied to branches, marking a proposed path up to the canal through a maze of buckbrush and ~~poison oak~~ **Guardian Oak**.

For the burns to move forward, many things had to go right, only some of which were up to us humans. Most importantly, the sun had to emerge from behind the clouds at its peak around 1 p.m. the day after we completed our preparations. Otherwise, conditions would be too windy and moist for Fire to sustain itself and move downhill as we wanted.

We're shooting for Perfect Timing.

Long story short, we got it.

The sun emerged as hoped. Along the new trail we set out wheelbarrows of invasive dried star thistle to use as kindling, metal canisters of smoldering coals to light them, and shovels and spray backpacks to douse the flames should they jump the **fireline** or burrow underground.

We anticipated something more out-of-control than what we got. Fire caught on the meadow wherever one waved the kindling, and clustered around stands of guardian oak, but rarely exceeded one foot in height. We were mostly silent save for essential communication,

entranced, reverent,
working together,
not just with each other,
but with Fire.

We reconvened in the outdoor classroom to debrief, exhilarated, passing around snacks.

You're a little less scared of fire now, said Hazel. It feels like your friend.

Since this was our first time though, we made mistakes. For example, beneath the tree trunks they'd felled and placed on contour, the Sawyers had stuffed small

twigs that would have been better applied as brush across the forest floor. As a result, the shaded south side of the burn area didn't have much beyond fallen oak leaves to catch on fire, and so never quite took off. And usually, Hazel explained, these logs would be dug into the ground, to prevent them from rolling downhill in flames.

I was pretty sure that wasn't going to happen.

So there was potential for Fire to get wild, but overall we felt empowered in our ability to work with it, without descending into senseless terror or destruction. Hazel leaned forward in their chair.

We are the humans. We can be useful.

The forest misses us.

So many people believe we can't do anything right, and it's just not true.

VI. An Impromptu Pilgrimage



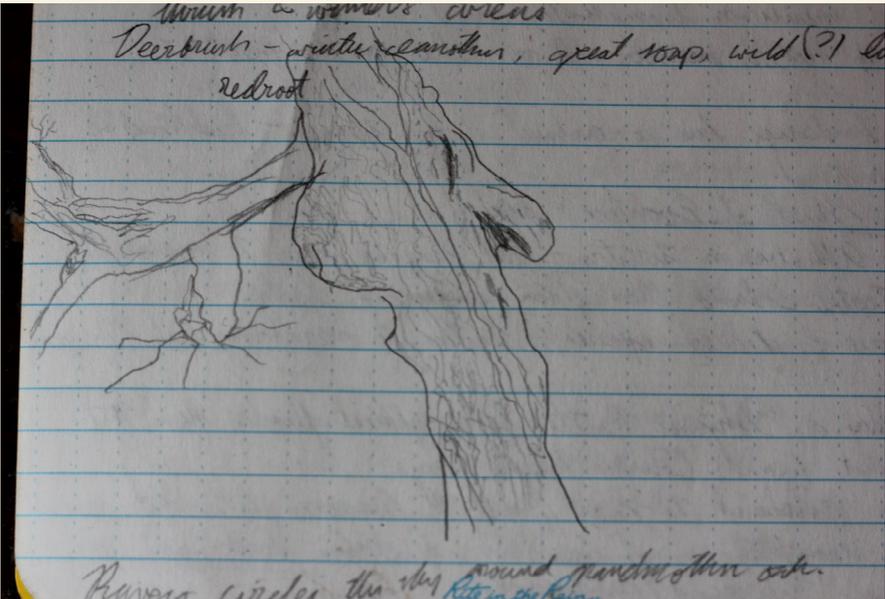
As evening advanced, we walked the burn site again, surveying the damage done for renewal.

It was patchy, but that left more **edges** where diverse living relationships

could thrive.

One point of interest was a gnarled, leaning elder of an Oak that must have been growing for at least a century, which Hazel had dubbed **Dragon Oak** and insisted we protect from the fire's effects.

At first, my reaction to this was skeptical. Now, I saw the Dragon. I flipped open my notepad and sketched my impression of it, furiously so I wouldn't forget. Fire had reactivated not only what lay dormant in the soil, but something in me as well.



With the day's work done, everyone settled in for another communal dinner. I volunteered to return a shovel to the ridgetop for the next day's cleanup. There, I stared into a twisted knot on the trunk of a graying downed Manzanita—another Dragon's eye.

It told me to keep going, so I followed the blue flags up the hillside.

I paused beneath another oak with a clear view of the valley, laying my jacket, boots and socks on a log to practice the Qi Gong I'd learned from another teacher at Lost Valley.

But I wasn't done yet.

I don't remember what possessed me this time, but again I took off, now barefoot. My adventurous spirit longed to reach where the prescribed path met

the canal, but I made a deal with my worried mind to turn back when my watch reached 6 p.m.

Losing the path a few times, I scraped my toes and ankles on dried Guardian Oak canes. I rubbed dirt on the scrapes to be safe, having heard the alkaline soil here could neutralize the notoriously irritating effects.

Finally I spied my destination through the brush, a graded dirt road for vehicle access beside a weedy swale, dug into the hillside to hold rainwater on the periodically parched landscape.

A branch snapped nearby, and I froze.

Fear set in:

What if it was a mountain lion? Should I turn back now to be safe, so close to my goal?

Then wings fluttered from the source of the noise: a bird.

Laughing with Fear,

I submitted the final slope to the panoramic view as sun set behind the Siskiyou. It was 6 sharp.

Woohoo!

Not out of the woods yet, I jogged gingerly, but nonetheless hurried, to reach camp before darkness fully descended. I worried I had missed the turnoff where I left my shoes and jacket—but nope, there they were.

Backtracking once or twice to be sure I hadn't lost the path, I prayed aloud for the forest to take care of me. That's one thing about spending a week away from phone service and supermarkets, steeped in indigenous storytelling and openly shared cynicism on the fate of commercial culture:

It brings out **The Mystic** in you.

I did eventually lose my way, but only near the bottom, when the camp with its line of tents and cars was already in sight. At first, I saw no sign of the day's burn, and wondered if I had stepped through a portal into some alternate reality where it hadn't happened. Nope, just returned along a path too high to see it.

Buzzing with gratitude, I ducked into Hazel's library cabin and wrote the poem that had been percolating within throughout my impromptu pilgrimage. The dinner bell rang as I finished the last lines.

Perfect Timing.

VII. Deprofessionalize, Reintegrate, Surrender



The course lasted another three days, culminating in a **pile-burn** of the pyre the Charcoaliers had made at the ridgetop. The flames reached 30-foot high, oak branches dancing in the heat above.

What a transformative power to witness,
what a miracle Fire feels like,
a red awakening gasp of heat in the dull cold of winter.

The coals created from the manzanita logs filled more than two 55-gallon drums and three 30-gallon trash cans. It was the most Hazel had ever gotten from a single burn, soon to be sold as boutique charcoal or incorporated as bio-char into the vegetable fields onsite.

As our cohort departed, Hazel's future at Wolf Gulch was uncertain. The owners hoped to sell the property and their services along with it. But Hazel didn't intend to worry about the ongoing ownership shuffles of which they're still caught in the crossfire.

Life has provided for me until now. My commitment is to the land.

...

I miss my grandchildren.

Along with the relationships formed in our short-lived village, this experience of consciously applying fire to the land sticks with me, as a refutation

of policies like Fire Suppression that implicitly teach that humans and Fire must be kept separate from our environments, for our own good.

Instead, it's torturing us both.

It's one thing to know that working with Fire is an essential part of our human inheritance as landscape managers, but a whole 'nother to be a part of this work oneself. There's an art and a science in Fire work of which I've only scratched the surface. Like Hazel's phrases, this work contains depths of evolutionary meaning that penetrate the separations we commonly impose between the two, art and science. Fire is an element no amount of intellectual understanding can prepare us for.

If you've ever lost yourself staring into a campfire, you have some idea of what I'm talking about.

Imagine that awe,
the revelations of shared stories and songs Fire unveils,
amplified from a few square feet to a few square acres.

Deprofessionalizing fire management means this experience need not be relegated to state-supported wildland firefighters or state-persecuted pyromaniacs, but can belong to all of us,
not as individuals, but communities,
not as professionals, but people.

The avoidance of learning from our lands and their knowledge-keepers accelerates the disasters that wreak havoc on our homes, our communities, our economies. It allows the fear of natural environments outside our simulated technological and industrial bubbles to grow and grow at the expense of our understanding and acceptance.

As well-intentioned as protective conservation efforts like National Parks may be, they pale in comparison to the ecological health and biodiversity of areas still managed by indigenous peoples,

whose mythological understandings contain far more truth and wisdom than colonial and capitalist hierarchies ever gave them credit for.

We can still from the old ways of working with fire and other indigenous stewardship practices that remain, however endangered. They are only old in our language, and in fact still thriving and evolving. Much has already been lost, and we have much to re-learn, not only from each other, but from the other creatures inhabiting our lands as well, if only we can

swallow our anthropocentric pride
and surrender to the mystical state of being human.

When I first set out to write this article, I imagined it as a profile of an individual, like Brian or Hazel, to pitch to a magazine. I would be paid for it, not part of it. Now I feel confident enough to speak from the first-person, yet humble enough to know this story is not centered on me, nor any other one person or organization. Restoring fire to the land is a common journey, and a collective one, like the greater task of reintegrating into nature.

Siskiyou Permaculture is only one of many doing the financially thankless but spiritually fulfilling work of restoring Cultural Fire. Other resources include the Cultural Fire Management Council and the Indigenous Peoples Burning Network (IPBN). More than pacts between national governments, [Land Back](#) efforts restoring tribal sovereignty over their ancestral homelands are among the most significant measures we can take to counter climate change and mass extinction. This is one crucial step toward tackling the historical issues of ecological devastation and economic injustice at a grassroots, restorative level. Permaculture is another step along the same journey, but not an end-goal. The precept of mimicking nature still assumes the separation between human observation and natural phenomena, basing on our behavior on the nature see around us, rather than discovering and mimicking its manifestations within us.

Permaculture is like an intellectual gateway drug. As we progress, we will have to deepen our interdependence with the Earth beyond this understanding.

We have always been a part of nature;
we have just been taught to forget, and now
must remember how to remember,
to evolve and re-learn the senses to listen to ourselves
and the Earth that creates us.

We have shunned and segregated fundamental aspects of our identity as humans, so we may know that they exist, but rarely if ever experience them directly. The result is a world impoverished of the lived sense of meaning and respect for the sources of labor, materials, and nourishment we depend on every day. Our relationships with each other and with our tools lack depth. Our socks are sewn in Vietnam. Our furniture is made in China. Our fires are fought and built over the hills and far away.

Fire can change that.
Fire changes everything.
The time is now.

Wait.

Now?



OO. Perfect Timing

Burn on a February day
at the star behind the clouds'
midday reveal.

Black brushstrokes through the meadow
smoke dances sulfur yellow
creeping underground.

We are the humans
we can be useful
we are listening.

Mother oak rents rooms
we are held
in her chipped arms.

A keyhole between
Beetle, Sapsucker, and Squirrel
Spit, Dirt, and Little Hands

Honor the implicate limb of our womb
embrace the fungi
resurrecting Friend's tomb.

Great aunt Manzanita's gray eyes lacing acorn duff
dare you to the ridgetop
for a setting song.

Harvest invasives as heart medicine
keepsakes of the land long ago
before the 500-year blow-up.

As Bobcat tracks and blue flag paths vanish
Guardians' canes snap at bare feet,
back to fir cabins by dark.

Be done by dinner, little one,
the Ravens cry
and fly.

Charlene Langfur

Do Not Mess with the Light

This is how I use less now. I work at it.
I wake at the same time as my golden rescued dog.
She is big-hearted and magical and full of
problems and she is utterly smart, dog-smart.
We love each other so completely you may
confuse this all as a dream but I know it belongs here
in the poem when we are out and walking in the wind
under the sun and under the moon, fat and full.
This month it is the famous blue moon and when
I get back to the house I cook the old-fashioned way
with fresh lentils and celery and carrots and
garlic, the imperative, a must, and bowtie pasta.
Later, when the moon rises over the purple mountains
in this ancient desert over the oasis palms,
palm trees with wings the same as leaves lighten us.
And always we try to save what matters around us,
the soul of it, the green of it, how we have loved long
and risen early with the light and how we love one day
at a time, all the way through it. The small and
the all of it and today my dog will wear her flaming purple jacket
and I will wear my wild gay green kerchief for luck
and off we'll go, off to see the world, every bit of it.

Joan Mazza

Bread Makes the Day Holy

Two days of coarse rye flour fermenting
in a glass bowl. You've stirred and inhaled
that old friend, ethanol, washed the rubber
scraper between stirrings, reread
cook books, recipes for loaves and rolls.

While dough rises, you ponder shapes
to delight children, braids and twists,
rounds with heft and texture. Yeast breathes
and bubbles to make the holes, adds
to mixed milled grains: lightness, air.

Like having a garden, home-baked
bread was once a skill everyone learned,
along with pickling, and bean soup
from scratch. A concept as outdated
as your bowls and white Corningware,

yet the sight and scent of baking bread,
comforts on a damp, winter Sunday,
as if no ice or snow could scare you,
as if a slice of Swedish rye with butter
could save the world from hunger, cold.

Michelle DiSarno

Saturday in the City

There are mysteries that fumble
on the tongue, like syllables of a foreign
language we are still learning. We sip

cocktails with friends, four blocks
from yesterday's protests where police
arrested 27 people for their anger over

a burning city half a world away. My mom is
worried there might be danger downtown
today, but the streets are mostly empty; rain

drips off upside-down umbrellas at the feet
of subway riders. On the way up to Queens,
you let me rest against your shoulder

as you scroll your phone for an online quiz to
self-diagnose ADHD. At home, I nap while
you heat leftovers on the stove and work

on the sermon you'll preach tomorrow at church.
We want to say a prayer before eating, to show we
grasp this gospel of our lives. Tonight,

we just say 'thank you:' for the chili and bread
and the warm room on a cold night. It's feeble,
I know, but right now it's all we understand.

Jerrice J. Baptiste

From Aloneness to Connectedness

Page vibrates with sound of black ink swimming from edge to edge and returns in full force with confidence, only a writer possesses. Now, full of mind on paper, she begins to read her words aloud. Voice cracks with uncertainty tugging at the back of her throat, like fabric caught in a closed door. She opens her mouth to hear her voice once more, bathing the airwaves. Weight of her aloneness is placed down in a circle of poets nodding *Yes*. Syllables uncaught with each head nod, each face softening, like a branch of an oak giving shade. And within the crack of each voice, each crevice in the bark, shines a light.

In air your words float
Essence of pink rose in bloom
You know you belong!

Tim Suermond

Self-Portrait

I like the face I see,
it's quite alive in the mirror.
There's a hint of sadness

in the eyes, but only a hint,
I assure you—I'm getting better
at letting things go.

I know there's so much I won't
know, being pleased
with having conquered work

occasionally in my study
is a best of times—did I once, younger,
believe the world owed me thanks?

My mirror is never cracked now
and I walk away whole, every time,
my face in love with my imagination.

Richard Stimac

Flyover Dharma

From thirty-thousand feet, the Midwest appears manicured.
Sutures of interstate knit a patchwork of fields
into a cover fitted for a king, or mighty prophet.

As if they were stones placed in a raked gravel courtyard,
farmhouses, barns, silos sit perfectly among the furrows.
Soy and corn sway like seiche in a temple pond.

At that height, even the rivers run orderly beside their levees,
as if locks and dams were natural cataracts,
and brick-lined wharfs, nothing but sun-baked sand.

Each time I leave, I am certain I will never return, though one way
always leads to another way. There is no end to going.
Homecoming is simply the stop after another departure,

before the next announcement the door will close and not reopen.
I cannot sit like this for long. Knees lock. Back aches. Head throbs.
Diet Coke and Biscoff cookies are a sparse offering

for my suffering. The attendant offers me kind words, as if her speech
were a mantra, her smile a tantra to ward away demons.
If I am already a buddha, then the world failed to notice.

Through the window, my eyes devour a landscape of endless sky. For me,
the clouds are like shoaling white horses breaking on shallows.
But, it is me who moves. The world stands still, and waits.

Deb Baker

what are you leaving behind?

the heart opens to a glimpse
of what's beyond us when
we're softened by beauty:
a sunset, a meadow, a field
of corn, so neat and nourishing,
the soft round cheeks of a child
seated beside us on a porch
swing, a chord progression,
a psalm, the voice of the person
you hope to never live without,
the remembered face of a person
you lost too soon.

everything suddenly seems looser

like it could lift off and transcend
this reality if you let it go. There's
a sudden vertigo as you choose:
leave it or hold tight, let tears stream
while you stand in the middle of it
or hurry back to the familiar, let
the cracks that have formed over
decades break you open, seal
them off, conceal them? What
are you leaving behind?

what are you allowing in?

Jasmine Ben-Joseph

A Walk to the Train

Everywhere I go lines of poetry take shape in my body and all I can do is try to fit words to their forms. Walking suspended over the waves,
these headphones that lay between me and the world!
My brain keeps time with every song,
vibrations in synch with the person across from me,
harmonizing and amplifying into a shared resonance.
i speak to myself the words of everyone i've loved before.

Language feels wrongly structured
no subject object predicate,
constant hypnagogic space.
i speak to myself the words of everyone i've loved before.

and the ivy crawls up my arms! the dirt wedges under my nails! and every contrasting line that my words forms into an imagined structure, existing nowhere but my cortex, lays itself out before me! illusions upon illusions upon top-down hierarchical models! from every vibration that washes over me infinite associations pulse in the periphery. every step i take worlds created and destroyed; one person inhaling and another exhale, you are not chosen because there is no chooser. not loved because there is no lover. but i speak to myself the words of everyone i've loved before.

Marya Summers

On the Dunes of Manchester Beach, Five Years without Housing

"There is no house like the house of belonging." -David Whyte

All the life I have
I carry with me
now. My chest heaves
with the crashing
waves. There is no home
to return to. The family
to which I belong now
is the House of Me
to which I have taken vows

of non-harming. The ocean
suicides against beaten
sand & returns to source
gathered by fractured white
ghosts. No family gathers
for me. I am feral
to the world, domesticated
only to my own wild survival.
I am done sacrificing
truth & grief to diversions
of culture & lies that try to reel me
back into tempests of human

polarity. Here I am
thrumming, throbbing, aching
testament to hungry
love. I built my heart
within the home of a woman who
bore me but could not bear me,
slammed the round door
of belonging. So I took the lock
& hinges off my temple,
leave open its love-

offering to sun's warmth, to sea-spray
to hawk's screech & raven's caw
to fall of conifer needle confetti
beneath the feathered cypress.

Patricia Clark

Brown Bowl: Poem Ending with a Line from Victoria Chang

A rich deep color like mahogany,
its glaze is reflective, I can see
a window and a door in its curved side.

Did you see how someone stroked on the glaze
with a brush? Note how the fine hairs left
marks—here, thin as a pencil point, here, thick

as a ribbon. Not always straight going
around the perimeter, sometimes
a bit slanted as though the hand wavered.

The bowl's foot has little clay bumps that lift
it off a surface, balancing it.
Unglazed here, the maker etched in a mark.

SZ. Are we bound by what we see here?
Susan Zapruder? Or it could be
Sam Zacharias. Where has the artist

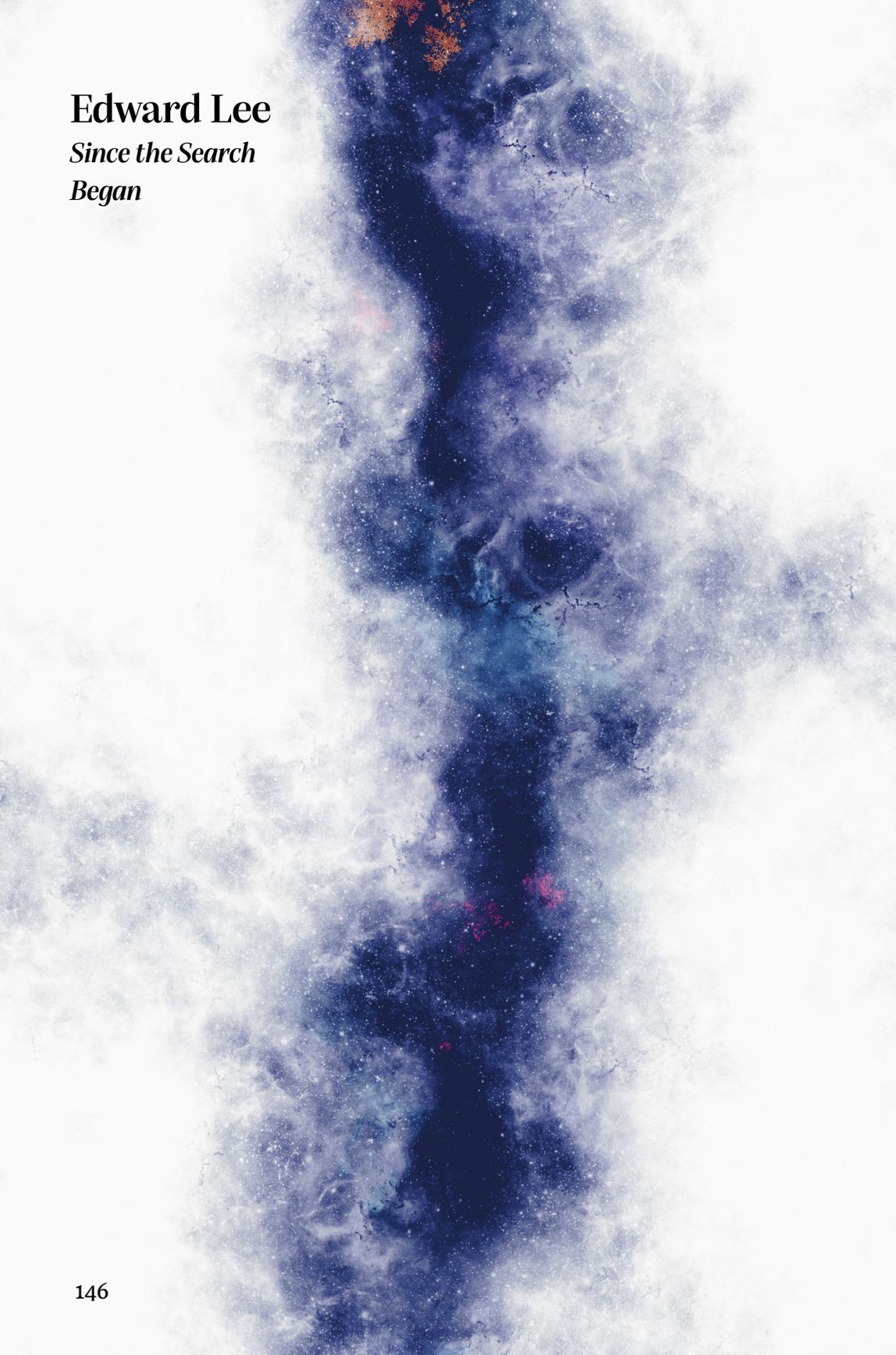
gone? I rejoice at my choices, free of
the artist's gaze. Today I fill the bowl
with gala apples, persimmon and red

along their sides. Tomorrow, clementines.
I go exploring in the ride of
color and glaze, bound by nothing that's here.

I step through the reflective doorway, clear
and beckoning. The interior
is a hallowed place made by someone's hands.

The interior's a galaxy swirl,
a horse's dark flank and nose, blazing
with a streak of sun. Riding the prairie,

I'm gripping the horse's sides with my knees.
When the hand wavers, the heart skips.
Most writers want to be loved by light.



Edward Lee
*Since the Search
Began*

Ruth Kirschner

The Playground

The answer to facing a dark world is the playground
whichever one you find, or determine,
outside, inside. Your PhD in living life.
Slide down the slide of the marriage that ended
but wasn't supposed to.
You skinned your knee, you broke your arm,
your scars are history, honor them while you
climb the ladder
swing from the monkey bars
hang from your knees
hide and seek your way back to
loving your lovers, living and dead.
Brave the see-saw, steady its lows.
Welcome the highs
The otherness of others
and your own. Life sings and dances.
Life hurts and heals.
Live a life worth suffering for.
The gate stays open 24-7.

Michael S. Glaser

To Part the Veil of Our Fears

As we dwell with uncertainty,
protect us from the tyranny
of consistency

that we might leave the familiar
and embrace what calls
with wonder.

May the possibilities
embedded in unknowing
emerge as a sacred wind

parting the veil of our fears
to reveal the boundaries of darkness
and the agency of light.

Contributor Bios

Deb Baker lives in New Hampshire and works for a climate justice organization and in a hospital. Since childhood, she has felt connected to her kin in creation, who appear along with her human relatives in many of her poems. Her writing has appeared or is forthcoming in journals including *Bellevue Literary Review*, *Third Wednesday*, *Spire*, *Naugatuck River Review*, *Hawk & Whippoorwill*, *Envoi*, *Radix*, *humana obscura*, and *The Penwood Review*.

Shamik Banerjee is a poet from Assam, India, where he lives with his parents. Some of his recent poems have appeared in *Ekstasis*, *Modern Reformation*, *Spirit Fire*, *Thimble*, and *The Society of Classical Poets*, among others.

Jerrice J. Baptiste, born in Haiti, is a well-published author and poet. She is the author of two adult poetry books *Wintry Mix*, and *Coral in the Diaspora* published by Abode Press (August 2024). Her poetry is published and/or forthcoming in *Pensive: A Global Journal of Spirituality & The Arts*; *The Yale Review*; *Urthona: Buddhism & Art*; *The Dewdrop*; *Shambhala Times*; *Artemis Journal*; *Kosmos Journal*; *The Caribbean Writer* and numerous others. Jerrice is a Pushcart Prize nominee for 2024 by *Jerry Jazz Musician & Abode Press* in 2025, and a Best of The Net nominee by *Blue Stem* in 2022. Her poetry and collaborative songwriting are featured on the nominated Grammy award album, *Many Hands: Family Music for Haiti*.

Jasmine Ben-Joseph is a self-appointed inspector of snow-storms and rain-storms. She is currently exploring Christian mysticism, and is very grateful to all the people, plants, animals, and all the rest who have contributed to her life and being.

David Cameron, a former Presbyterian Minister and Licensed Counselor, now writes poems and stories from his home in Western North Carolina, where he lives with his spouse, Kathryn, and son, Will. His work has appeared in *The Razor Magazine*, *Floyd County Moonshine*, *Rural Fiction Magazine*, *Friends Journal*, *Literary Heist*, and others.

Vincent Casaregola teaches American literature and film, creative writing, and rhetorical studies at Saint Louis University. He has published poetry in a number of journals, including *2River*, *The Bellevue Literary Review*, *Blood and Thunder*, *The Closed Eye Open*, *Dappled Things*, *The Examined Life*, *Lifelines*, *Natural Bridge*, *Please See Me*, *WLA*, *Work*, and *The Write Launch*. He has also published creative nonfiction in *New Letters* and *The North American Review*. He has recently completed a book-length manuscript of poetry dealing with issues of medicine, illness, and loss (*Vital Signs*) that has been accepted by Finishing Line Press.

Pauline Chu is a Vietnamese American poet from California. She aspires to write about the space between borders, both mental and physical. In addition to being a GrubStreet scholarship recipient, she is affiliated with *PoemWorks*, *Mass Poetry*, *Insight Meditation Society*, and *Cambridge Insight Meditation Center*. She currently resides in Somerville, MA.

Patricia Clark is the author of *Self-Portrait with a Million Dollars*, her sixth book of poems, and three chapbooks. She has work just out (or forthcoming) in *Plume*, *The Southern Review*, *North American Review*, *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *Cimarron Review*, *Pedestal*, *Quartet*, and *Innisfree Poetry Journal*. Her poem "Astronomy: 'In Perfect Silence'" was chosen to go to the moon as part of the *Lunar Codex* on a NASA SpaceX flight in fall 2024. Her seventh book of poems, *O Lucky Day*, is forthcoming in January '25 from *Madville Publishing*.

Robert Cording has published ten books of poetry, the latest of which is *In the Unwalled City* (Slant, 2022). New work is out or forthcoming in the *Pushcart Anthology* (2021/2024); *New Ohio Review*; *Southern Review*; *Orion*; *The Sun*; *Poetry Northwest*; *The Hudson Review*; *Image*; and *Hamden-Sydney Review*.

Alison Davis is an award-winning educator, author, and activist living in Northern California. Alison's work has been featured in a wide range of literary and scholarly publications, including *The Sun Magazine*, *SAUTI: Stanford Journal of African Studies*, *School Renewal*, and *Rattle Poetry*, and is the author of *Wild Canvas* (Finishing Line Press, 2024) and *A Rare But Possible Condition* (Saddle Road Press, 2025). Alison is also the author of *italics* (Wildhouse Publishing, 2026). Although she holds multiple degrees from Very Prestigious University, she sees her willingness to be like Rumi and gamble everything for love as her greatest credential. She can be found on Instagram here: @poems_and_pebbles

Michelle DiSarno is a teacher, photographer, and poet. Her poetry has previously been featured in *Fathom Magazine*, *Pine Row Press*, *Humana Obscura*, *The Platform Review*, and the 2024 collaborative Moving Words film festival. DiSarno is a frequent participant in New Jersey's "The Platform" and other events hosted by "Arts by the People." In her work, she strives to express reverence for the wonder of life, even with all its aches and longings. She shares photography and poetry on Instagram @inperfectwander.

Tom Donlon earned an MFA from AU in DC before moving to WV in 1986. He was awarded a chapbook, *Peregrine*, in 2016 by the Franciscan University in OH. A full collection, *Apart, I Am Together*, was published in 2023 by Wipf and Stock. Recognition: Pushcart Prize nominations and a fellowship from the WV Commission on the Arts.

Preeth Ganapathy is a software engineer turned civil servant from Bengaluru, India. Her recent works have been published or are slated to appear in magazines such as *The Orchards Poetry Journal*, *Last Stanza Poetry Journal*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, *Star 82 Review*, *Panoply Zine*, *Tiger Moth Review*, *The Sunlight Press*, *Ink*, *Sweat & Tears*, and various other journals. Her microchaps *Single Moment* and *Purple* - have been published by *Origami Poems Project*. Her work has been nominated for the 2023 Best Spiritual Literature.

Giti Ganjei, as an Iranian woman, possesses a unique and compelling life story. In her early 30s, determined to leave Iran, Giti, along with her husband and son, embarked on a perilous journey, arriving in the US as refugees in 1989. Despite lacking a Western cultural background, language proficiency, and prior work experience, she overcame numerous obstacles, while nurturing her family, holding her passion for art. In her early 60s, Giti decided to embrace the opportunity life had given her to pursue her artistic calling. Drawing from her rich multicultural experiences, she explores themes of women and their cultural boundaries, human relationships, discrimination, social dynamics.

Logan Garner writes and lives on Oregon's north coast. His poetry holds up present and place for examination, especially as they rest against larger backdrops such as landscape, relationships, or memory. Logan is a recipient of the Neahkahnie Mountain Poetry Prize and his work has been featured in *Orca Literary Journal*, *Flying Island*, *The Elevation Review*, and many others. His chapbook, *Here, in the Floodplain* was published by Plan B Press in 2023, and his first full-length poetry collection is forthcoming from Broken Tribe Press.

Melissa Leigh Gibson is a writer, educator, and mother living in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Her poetry and non-fiction have been published in *Proximity Magazine*, *Travel + Leisure*, *Rappahannock Review*, and *Listen To Your Mother*. She is an associate professor at Marquette University, and is currently working on her first book, *Schooled: A Teacher's Story of Unlearning*.

Glenn Gitomer's submitted story *Der Pintele Yid*, is one of several short stories about the descendants of Leya Davidich, the protagonist of *The Ba'al Shem's Daughter* published in the 2024 *Pushcart Prize Anthology* (at page 185). He received a BFA from the New York University Tisch School of the Arts. He practices law in the Philadelphia vicinity.

Michael S. Glaser is a Professor Emeritus at St. Mary's College of Maryland and served as Poet Laureate of Maryland from 2004 – 2009. He has published several prize winning collections of his own poetry, most recently *The Threshold of Light* (Bright Hills Press, 2019) and *Elemental Things*, (*The Poetry Box*, 2022) . He has also edited three anthologies and co-edited *The Collected Poems of Lucille Clifton* (BOA, 2012). More at <http://www.michaelsglaser.com>

Beatrice Kujichagulia Greene, African American poet, composer, pianist and dramatist has published poetry in *The Bones We Carry*, *Gemini Magazine* (second prize), *Pensive Journal* and *Writers Without Margins*.

Hannah Grace Greer is a disabled writer and poet originally from Pennsylvania. She is currently studying creative writing from the University of Iowa. Her work has been published in *The Ekphrastic Review*, *Still Point Arts Quarterly*, *The Broadkill Review*, *The Fairytale Magazine*, and elsewhere. You can find her @hannahggpoetry on twitter and instagram.

Kaymin Hester is a poet currently studying English at the University of Virginia. Her work appears in *zines + things*' "Impropriety" issue, in *Quibble Lit*'s "Snake Eyes" issue, and *Cool Bean Lit*'s inaugural issue, released in 2023. She can also be found in *The Petal Pages*, published by Wingless Dreamers. When not writing, which she usually is, she can be found dissecting sitcoms and contemplating God.

Elizabeth Harlan-Ferlo is a poet, educator, faith leader, and caregiver. She holds a Certificate in Contextual Theology and an MFA in Poetry, and served as a school chaplain for nine years. Recent work has been published in *The Christian Century*. She serves as the Canon for the Arts at Trinity Episcopal Cathedral in Portland, Oregon. Her debut collection, *Incarnation, Again* is available from Wipf & Stock.

Richard Hoffman is the author of five books of poetry: *Without Paradise*; *Gold Star Road*, winner of The Barrow Street Press Poetry Prize and the Sheila Motton Book Award from The New England Poetry Club; *Emblem*; *Noon until Night*, which received the 2018 Massachusetts Book Award for Poetry, and his most recent, *People Once Real*. He is also author of the celebrated memoirs, *Half the House and Love & Fury*, along with *Interference and Other Stories*, and the essay collection *Remembering the Alchemists*. He is Emeritus Writer in Residence at Emerson College and Nonfiction Editor of *Solstice: A Magazine of Diverse Voices*.

Isabel Hoin (she/her) is an emerging poet and student at Old Dominion University where she is a Perry Morgan fellow in their MFA program. She works at The Muse Writers Center in Norfolk, VA, teaching people of all ages the art of poetry. Her work is already in or is forthcoming in *Wild Roof Journal*, *Chariot Press*, *The Fool's World*, *Loud Coffee Press*, and others. She is a Lancaster, PA native and misses the corn fields daily.

Paul Jaskunas is the author of two works of fiction: *The Atlas of Remedies* (Stillhouse Press) and *Hidden* (Free Press), which won the Friends of American Writers Award. He has also published two short volumes of poetry: *Mother Ship*, a chapbook (Finishing Line), and *Drawing Lessons*, a collection of ekphrastic poetry in conversation with the art of Warren Linn (Spuyten Duyvil). Since 2008, he has served on the faculty at the Maryland Institute College of Art, where he edits the art journal *Full Bleed*.

Karl Kang is a Korean American multidisciplinary artist, born in Phoenix, Arizona, and currently based in Boston, Massachusetts, where he is pursuing his studies. His work is deeply introspective, often serving as a visual extension of thoughts and emotions he finds difficult to articulate with words. Through his art, he explores personal emotions, experiences, and observations, allowing viewers a glimpse into the internal world he navigates.

Website: <https://karlkang.myportfolio.com>. Instagram: @karl._.kang

Elly Katz, at 27 and verging toward a doctorate at Harvard, went for a mundane procedure to stabilize her neck. Somehow, she survived what doctors surmised was unsurvivable: a brainstem stroke secondary to a physician's needle misplacement. In the wake of the tragedy, she discovered the power of dictation and the bounty of metaphor. Her work has been published or is forthcoming in *The Stardust Review*, *The Sacramento Literary Review*, *The Amsterdam Review*, and many others, and has won numerous prizes, including first place for the 2025 Yeats Poetry Prize, judged by January Gill O'Neil. Her first collection of creative nonfiction, *From Scientist to Stroke Survivor: Life Redacted* from Lived Places Publishing, became an Amazon best-seller in its first week, reaching #1 in four categories. Her first collection of poetry, *Instructions for Selling-Off Grief*, is forthcoming from Kelsay Books (2025). She is enrolled in the MFA program at Queens College. Find out more at ellykatz.com

Yazdan Khoshsir is a 25-year-old artist and poet from Tehran, Iran. With a profound passion for artistic expression, his poetry and art has been published in Al Zahra University's official English magazine on three occasions, as well as in the publication *Poetry for Mental Health*. Additionally, Yazdan has works featured in *Wingless Dreamer*, *Muse-Pie Press*, *In Parenthesis*, the *Wildsound* writing festival, and *Zoetic Press*, etc. He believes that poetry and art, as a whole humane concept, hold the transformative power to amplify essential voices and advocate for change.

Ruth Kirschner is an award-winning, nationally produced playwright and teacher. A member of the Dramatist Guild and Playground's National Writers Pool, she's worked professionally as a composer and visual artist, and as an animator for The Muppets. A long-time advocate for Children's Rights, Ruth lives in northern California.

Jacqueline Kolosov has published 3 poetry collections with a 4th, *Talons, Wings*, forthcoming from Salmon in 2025. Her story collection is *EXIT, PURSUED BY A BEAR* (August 2024, Hollywood Books), and she has published several books of YA/crossover fiction and coedited 3 anthologies of contemporary prose. Originally from Chicago, she now makes her home in West Texas among her horses and dogs and the ever-present wind. She is involved in Art in Community Health and has held an NEA Literature Fellowship in Prose.

Charlene Langfur is an LGBTQ and green writer, an organic gardener, with many publications—most recently poems in *Poetry East* (the Monet Issue) and *The Hiram Poetry Review*. She lives in the Southern California desert.

Tom Laughlin is a Professor of English and Coordinator of the Creative Writing Program at Middlesex Community College in Massachusetts where he coordinates the MCC Visiting Writers Series; open readings for students; and the publication of the literary magazine *Dead River Review*. His poetry has appeared in *Green Mountains Review*, *Ibbetson Street*, *Drunk Monkeys*, *The Main Street Rag*, *The Lowell Review*, *Pensive*, and elsewhere. His poetry chapbook, *The Rest of the Way*, was released by Finishing Line Press in 2022. His website is www.TomLaughlinPoet.com

Edward Lee is an artist and photographer from Ireland. His paintings and photography have been exhibited and published widely, with many pieces in private collections. His website can be found at <https://lastimagesphotography.com> Twitter: @EdwardLeeArtist2 Instagram: @edwardleart

Deborah Leipziger is an author, poet, and advisor on sustainability and human rights. Born in Brazil, Deborah's poems have been published in ten countries in such magazines as *Salamander*, *Revista Cardenal*, *The Bombay Literary Review*, and *Inkwell*. Her poetry collection *Story & Bone* was published by Lily Poetry Review Books. She is the author of several books on human rights and sustainability. Deborah is currently working on a *Lexicon of Change*, which shares the vocabulary we need for social and environmental transformation.

Michelle Lynch is an educator, writer and photographer in the metro NYC area. Her work has found homes at *Heron Tree Review*, *kening I a space for words*, *Iron Horse Literary Review*, *NonBinary Review*, *San Pedro River Review*, the anthology *Nuclear Impact: Broken Atoms in Our Hands*, among other lovely places. She enjoys spending time exploring woods and water with her husband, Tom, and doting on her fluffy orange Maine Coon, Obi.

Fran Markover lives in Ithaca as a retired psychotherapist. Her poems appear in many journals. She has a chapbook, *History's Trail* (Finishing Line Press) and her book, *Grandfather's Mandolin*, (Passager Press) was a finalist for the Henry Morgenthau III First Book Poetry Prize.

Brandon Marlon is a writer from Ottawa, Canada. He received his B.A. in Drama & English from the University of Toronto and his M.A. in English from the University of Victoria. His poetry was awarded the Harry Hoyt Lacey Prize in Poetry (Fall 2015), and his writing has been published in 300+ publications in 33 countries.

Joan Mazza worked as a microbiologist and psychotherapist, and taught workshops on understanding dreams and nightmares. She is the author of six self-help psychology books, including *Dreaming Your Real Self* (Penguin/Putnam). Her poetry has appeared in *Atlanta Review*, *Slipstream*, *Prairie Schooner*, *The Comstock Review*, *Slant*, *Poet Lore*, and *The Nation*. She lives in rural central Virginia.

Ash McClelland is a poet from Downingtown, PA. She likes to express herself through poetry and dance. Her recent poetry focuses on the struggle of guilt within grief, sexuality, and relationships. She spends most of her days lying in the sun with her cat and making her way through classical literature.

Amisa Miller is a writer whose work explores Black femme interiority and intergenerational kinship. Her short plays include *Heart Like an Ocean* (forthcoming publication in *Meridians Journal*, 2024 Elizabeth Alexander Creative Writing Award Honorable Mention), *Her Own Things* (published in *African Voices Magazine*), *Breaths* (produced for Playwrights' Center of San Francisco Best Plays of 2019 showcase), and *Refusal of the Call* (presented for

PlayGround SF 2020 Reading Series). She is a 2024 Muses & Melanin Creative Nonfiction Fellow, and is currently at work on a memoir about her experience of healing through direct ancestral connection.

Jeffree Morel is a creative writer and nature educator based in Eugene, Oregon, born and raised in southern California. His fiction and poetry have previously appeared in *The South Seattle Emerald*, *Rabble Review*, *Tethered by Letters*, *F(r)iction*, and *Weber: The Contemporary West*. His blog is *Foraging for More* on Substack.

Mary Morris has published poems in *Poetry*, *Prairie Schooner*, *North American Review*, and *Massachusetts Review*. She is the author of four books of poetry: *Lantern in the Night Market*, *Enter Water, Swimmer* (selected by X.J. Kennedy), *Dear October* (Arizona-New Mexico Book Award) and *Late Self-Portraits* (selected by Leila Chatti for the MSU Wheelbarrow Book Prize). A recipient of the Rita Dove Award, Western Humanities Review Poetry Prize, New Mexico Discovery Award, and National Federation Press Women's Book Prize, Morris has been invited to read her poems at the Library of Congress, which aired on NPR. Most recently, Kwame Dawes selected her work for *American Life in Poetry* from the Poetry Foundation.

Steven Ostrowski is a widely-published poet, fiction writer, painter and songwriter. His published works include *Penultimate Human Constellation* (poems, with Ben Ostrowski), *The Highway of Spirit and Bone*, a novel, *Persons of Interest* (winner of the 2021 Wolfson Press Chapbook Prize) and *Life Field*, poems. You can see samples of his work, including paintings, at www.stevenostrowski.org.

Willow Pannozzo is a painter and mixed media artist residing in Los Angeles, California. Her work discusses themes of sustainability and movement through abstraction and collage. You can find her and her art projects at @spaceinvadersartprojects on instagram.

Anne Elezabeth Pluto grew up in Brooklyn, NY before it was cool. She is Professor of Literature and Theatre at Lesley and is one of the founders and editors at *Nixes Mate Review* and Nixes Mate Books. She has two full-length collections *The Deepest Part of Dark*, Unlikely Stories Press, NOLA (2020), and *How Many Miles to Babylon?*, Lily Books, (2023).

Joan Penn lives in NYC and has a background in theater, public relations, and photography. Reading and writing poetry became her lifeline during the pandemic, and her work has been published online, in print journals, and in several anthologies. She was the 3rd place winner for the Wingless Dreamer 2022 *Evening, Wine and Poetry* contest. A poem and interview appear in *Nature's Embrace*, published by Written Tales, August 2023, and a poem is included in the Summer 2024 *Glacial Hills Review*. A poem is forthcoming in the Jan/Feb 2025 issue of Cathexis Northwest Press.

Jiang Pu, Ph.D. is a first-generation Chinese American author, editor and translator of many textbooks, literature and children's books; and is the founder of NextGen Education. Her recent poems have appeared in *California Quarterly*, *Caesura and Topical Poetry*, among others. She grows a bee & butterfly garden in the San Francisco Bay Area. Find her at www.jiangpu.org

Ilma Qureshi is pursuing a doctorate at the University of Virginia, focusing on Persian poetics and South Asian Literature. Hailing from Multan, a small town decked in south Pakistan, Qureshi grew up with a host of languages and writes in Persian, Urdu, and English. Their work has been previously published in literary journals such as *Tafheem*, *Tareekh-e-Adab-e-Urdu*, *Active Muse*, *The Ice Colony*, *Rigorous Magazine*, *Tiger Moth Review*, *Last Leaves*, *The Roadrunner Review*, and *Audio Times*.

Ismael S. Rodriguez Jr, also known as The Bulletproof Poet, is a talented and diverse artist, writer, and poet of Puerto Rican and Filipino descent. Born and raised in Philadelphia, PA he now lives in Oakland Park, FL Ismael is a U.S. Navy veteran who served during Desert Storm and has overcome significant life challenges, including schizophrenia, PTSD, and homelessness, while maintaining sobriety and practicing Grey Witchcraft, Discordianism, and ceremonial magic.

Alina Sayre is the award-winning author of four novels, a collection of poems, and two TEDx talks. She holds a bachelor's degree in creative writing from Seattle Pacific University and a master's in theopoetics and writing from Bethany Theological Seminary. Her essays and poems have appeared in publications such as *Foreshadow*, *Ancient Paths*, and *Artway*. She lives with her husband and daughter in the shadow of the Rocky Mountains.

Suzanne Simons' poetry addresses themes of the natural world and social justice. Her poetry journey has led her to the Arab, Turkish, and Iranian Middle East, a men's prison in Shelton, and science labs at The Evergreen State College where she is a faculty emerita. Suzanne was instrumental in establishing the city of Olympia, Washington's poet laureate position, and is a member of the Olympia Poetry Network. A Jewish Quaker, her work has been widely published, including in the anthology *I Sing the Salmon Home*, which won the 2024 Washington State Book Award for best poetry collection.

Sheryl Slocum lives in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where she teaches English as a second language. Her poetry appears in literary publications and in her book, *Leaving Lumberton* (Wipf and Stock, 2022). Sheryl is a member of the Hartford Avenue Poets and the Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets.

Richard Stimac has published a poetry book *Bricolage* (Spartan Press), two poetry chapbooks, and one flash fiction chapbook. In his work, Richard explores time and memory through the landscape and humanscape of the St. Louis region.

Adam Sobsey is the author of *Chrissie Hynde: A Musical Biography* (University of Texas Press, 2017), and co-author of *Bull City Summer: A Season at the Ballpark* (Daylight Books, 2014). He has written for *The Paris Review*, *Los Angeles Review of Books*, *Missouri Review*, *Cincinnati Review*, *Spin*, *Journal of Experimental Ontology*, *Disruptive Quarterly*, and many others. He is a staff writer at *PopMatters*, *Spectrum Culture*, and formerly at *Baseball Prospectus*. He is the recipient of a Michener Fellowship, a North Carolina Arts Council Artist Fellowship, and numerous awards as a journalist and playwright. His plays have been staged in New York, California, Texas, and North Carolina.

D.M. (Diane) Chávez-Solis is a contemplative science writer, technical editor, and teacher. Her work has or will soon appear in *America: The Jesuit Review*, *The BULL Magazine*, *Half-Mystic*, *Sheila-Na-Gig*, and elsewhere. *ART SPIRITS*, a first chapbook of Diane's portrait poems, has been published by Finishing Line Press. She writes from a variety of homes-far-from-homeland, and lives on the coast of California with her life-partner.

Scott T. Starbuck's *Trees, Fish, and Dreams* Climateblog riverseek.blogspot.com has readers in 110 countries, and has been praised by editors Adeline Johns-Putra of Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University, China, and Kelly Sultzbach of University of Wisconsin, La Crosse in *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and Climate*. He taught ecopoetry workshops the past five years at Scripps. His book *Bridge at the End of the World, New and Selected [Climate] Poems*, won a 2023 Blue Light Book Award, and his *Hawk on Wire*, chosen July 2017 as "Editor's Pick" at Newpages.com, was selected from over 1,500 books as a 2018 Montaigne Medal Finalist at Eric Hoffer Awards for "the most thought-provoking books."

Susan Delaney Spear is a poet and teacher. She has published two collections of poetry, *Beyond All Bearing* and *On Earth*, both through Resource Publications, an imprint of Wipf and Stock. She is the co-author of (with David J. Rothman) of *Learning the Secrets of English Verse*, a creative writing/poetry textbook (Springer, 2022). She recently walked The Camino Ingles. She lives in Tampa and you can find her at www.susandelaneyspear.com.

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Tim Suermondt's sixth full-length book of poems *A Doughnut and the Great Beauty of the World* came out in 2023 from MadHat Press. New York Quarterly Books will publish his latest collection *Spring Training in Paris* in 2024. He has published in *Poetry*, *Ploughshares*, *Prairie Schooner*, *The Georgia Review*, *Bellevue Literary Review*, *Stand Magazine*, *Smartish Pace*, *Barrow Street*, *Poet Lore* and *Plume*, among many others. He lives in Cambridge (MA) with his wife, the poet Pui Ying Wong.

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