

A close-up photograph of a bee on a purple flower with a yellow center. The bee is positioned in the upper center of the frame, facing right. The flower has many light purple petals and a bright yellow center. The background is a soft, out-of-focus purple and green.

# *Gyroscope Review*

*Fine poetry to turn your world around*

*Issue 19-2*  
*Spring 2019*



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Spring 2019

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Constance Brewer & Kathleen Cassen Mickelson

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For further information, visit our website: [gyroscopereview.com](http://gyroscopereview.com).

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## FROM THE EDITORS

Happy anniversary to us! With this issue, *Gyroscope Review* celebrates four years as a publication.

We did a little digging to get a perspective on what those four years have meant. Since we began, we have received more than 7,000 individual poems in our submissions system and published nearly a thousand of those poems. We received fewer than 300 submissions for our very first reading period; our last reading period pulled in more than 700. That's quite a significant difference. We've all had to work harder but along with that comes the opportunity to engage with an ever-expanding range of poets.

One of the ways we've decided to honor that broad group is by figuring out ways to share poets' voices beyond what we publish every quarter. You may have noticed The Quatrain Project on our website during the month of February; we opened comments and invited anyone who wished to contribute a line to a giant collaborative poem that we then divided into quatrains in honor of our fourth anniversary. The results of that event are published in this issue. We were delighted that more than two dozen poets added their own lines and had some fun.

Another way we are honoring our poets is with our 2019 National Poetry Month event: Poets Read. For this project, we asked poets who had work published in these pages since last year's National Poetry Month to send us an audio file of themselves reading their own work. We received more poets than there are days in April, so had to turn a few people away. But we did take some extras and doubled up on our Sunday slots. Each day in April will offer a new poet reading their work at both our website, [gyroscopereview.com](http://gyroscopereview.com), and our YouTube channel (look for *Editors at Gyroscope Review*). We had a marvelous time listening to poets' voices and hearing how they emphasized different parts of their work; we think you'll enjoy them, too, and perhaps share your favorites on your own social media.

Now, back to this issue. We are really pleased with the continuing high quality of work that we see, as well as the variety of topics covered and far-flung geographic locations of poets. There are plenty of poems that have a seasonal connection to spring sprinkled among our other offerings; these poems give us spring in the desert and spring in the woods, celebrate birds and flowers and warmth, make us think about what the earth offers. We have some biting commentaries on racism, parenthood, education, the economy, and even potholes. And we have a piece by high school student Clayton Arble (*Mindfulness*, p. 13) that we are sure indicates an emerging poet who is going to write many more engaging pieces.

All in all, a strong group of poems forms the body of this fourth anniversary issue. Thank you for sticking with us, helping us grow, and being part of our efforts to form a generous community of poets and readers.

*Constance Brewer and Kathleen Cassen Mickelson, Editors*  
*April 2019*

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## POEMS

## THE QUATRAIN PROJECT

*On February 2, 2019, the staff of Gyroscope Review invited public participation in a giant collaborative poetry effort in honor of our fourth anniversary as a publication. We decided that quatrains would be the perfect vehicle since four-line verses for a fourth anniversary made sense to us. So, we got together to create a quatrain of our own to kick off this collaborative poem, put it up on our website, opened the comments, and The Quatrain Project was born.*

*The rules were simple: anyone who wished could leave one line to contribute to the poem in the comments section of The Quatrain Project post. People had to leave their names so we knew who to credit at the end. We asked for contemporary language, since we are a contemporary poetry journal. At the end of February, we closed the comments, took all the lines in the order they had been written, broke them into quatrains, and formatted them as you see below. We did not edit anyone's lines.*

*We now offer you a poem that reflects that the many voices, sensibilities, and styles of the Gyroscope Review community. And we thank everyone who took part in The Quatrain Project.*

Your obituary in the NY Times twice mentioned rhododendrons  
as if to tell the world that you too planted roots in the Appalachian rust  
and found ways to bloom over and over again, made your own luck  
hard as the gritty dirt encrusting ten year old boots and new laces

you were budding, bright, brash but ultimately delicate  
Spring is a sad gift to those still living, a reminder  
sitting on the shoulders, growing heavy with the rain  
and as the rain falls, you were left wondering —

that tending, we revisit all we might amend, if past were prologue  
or future a hidden refrain, as if every fruit-bearing flower you glimpse  
that escaped the seasonal respiration of transitional frost could be  
a trivial seed that had once fractured enormous boulders

Containing heart memories, stories of love unleashed  
And in angel tongue, in grief language, bargaining in plastic sonic  
the future ain't so far away with bullets at any moment  
We will all jerk and dance briefly but with such energy and fire

A double-basket, then, of long-named flowers  
With colours in many languages, as you grew  
Hearts full, whilst souls ache among fallen petals  
That pillow breath against barbed blades of grass

Like violet fire burning something with pulses on  
Your memory gives me solace throughout my toughest times.  
But memory is fleeting, like wind through blades of grass  
Unless we anchor it with love amidst the sea of sorrow

Unravelling now, we forget the double-knot grandma showed us how to tie  
fingers dripping with honey, nails rimmed with moons of gold  
That Celtic marvel designed to keep the cord rubbing against itself  
as the fragrant petals descend into your boot print etched with falling, windswept tears

rain may muddy your print on Earth but my memory firmly holds  
Of your backbone holding my mountain rockslide, our feet in the rhododendrons  
your crow's feet neatly carrying the pain of those times  
eager to split into bouquet possibilities

born and raised in the mountains of the east  
passing through and entangling these vines and wishes  
where does death take its boot heavy grief  
There is only what came before, and flowers, always flowers

Contributors, in order of appearance:

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- SECTION ONE -

**HABOOB COMING**  
BY ROBIN SCOFIELD

Desert spring wind rattles sand into the sky  
so that you understand emptiness, how it stings.

Even though no water runs in the river,  
can you believe the heron still finds minnows?

Like the mockingbird, do you unleash  
your song tonight, or do you seek out silence?

Do you miss a beloved's teases,  
or do you abide an absence in the spring?

Autumn will come without your doing.  
The trees will be empty, the nests used.

Will you be mute like the stars  
in the night sky that do not light the Earth?

Now that mesquite thorns cover up the trail,  
do you still pretend to walk home?

ENTHUSIASTIC CENTO  
BY JACQUELYN SHAH

*The Hindu goddess Sarasvati—pure like jasmine,  
bright like the moon—causes the river of inspiration  
to enter the artist in joyous swirls and fountains*

I dig for words  
I want these words  
chase them, catch them  
go harvest all the world—  
more fruit and petal,  
a hundred jewelled birds painting the sky,  
another creature apart from me . . .  
the color of silver and gold,  
androgynous as a god.

Between the lines the mind grinds up,  
only eyes, eyes, eyes.  
In the mouth of poetry  
the croak, croak, croak of the last fanatic frog,  
like big and small puffs of cotton scattered everywhere,  
as if dragged from the throat at night.

If something shatters today  
stirring up the dust this hot noon at my  
arabesques of fire in the forest  
with parrots in a cage and fortune cards  
(inside the poem)  
whole rows of mansions will be hurled into the air!  
Books strewn all around!

The more poetry there is  
the more I write,  
as the earth hangs from a thread of sound,  
as silver veins erupt over the peaks  
and numberless other creatures  
breed in endless motion,  
and the flocks of bats break up into lines  
in the shadow of the pines.

The wonder of the forest is everywhere  
in my poems  
and I want to crow, clap my hands!

***Lines, in order of appearance, from:***

*Keki N. Daruwalla; Subhash Mukhopadhyay; M. Gopalakrishna Adiga, Adiga; P. Lankesh; Sumitranandan Pant; Rabindranath Tagore; Aziz Qaisi; A. K. Ramanujan; B. S. Mardekhar; Shiv K. Kumar; K. S. Narasimhaswami; Buddhadeva Bose; Shamsar Bahadur Singh; Sitanshu Yashaschandra; Devdas Chbotray; Kamala Das; Dom Moraes; Kamala Das; Kedarnath Singh; Sunil Gangopadyhay; Sunanda Tripathy; Nara, Nara; Chennavira Kanavi; Agha Shahid Ali; Chandrashekhar Kambar; Kambar Kambar; Naresh Guba; Jibanananda Das; Api; K. Nisar Ahmad*

FILLING KIMONO SLEEVES WITH FIREFLIES  
BY PAULA KAUFMAN

Fill heart  
with each fluttering thing.  
Make appointments with light.  
Dance like courtiers in ancient Japan,  
filling kimono sleeves with fireflies.  
Then, poetry was everything. Lovers risked  
family, honor, life, to best describe plum blossom,  
cloud. Mountain, moon, rice, knife, lover, rain.  
Is poetry the only tree that forever blooms blooms?  
I wish to release moon's burden. Sash tied with pots.  
Hammer spear into-shoe-into-sunrise, lungs  
winging, waving open. Arms buoyed free.  
Feet stargaze future, chart motion,  
that vocabulary of praise.  
Calmly breathing  
sea light.

**HAIKU**

BY MARY HARPIN

Cliché, poem with crane  
But her murderous beak! Her  
Bridal veil, tattered.

## URGENT MESSAGE

BY DEBBIE HALL

I was shocked that Bob would call again, much less leave a message on my answering machine. Our last conversation had ended poorly. Bob-from-Computer-Support-who-spoke-in-an-Indian-accent had insisted that my *Windows-based PC has serious problems from your computer virus*. I told him I did not own a PC, but a Mac. I thanked him for his concern and added how much I enjoyed Bollywood music. I knew experts say not to engage with potential scammers, but I've made friends with quite a number of Catholics despite dire warnings from my Baptist grandmother.

Bob grew hysterical with worry as he described the catastrophe that would ensue if I didn't give him control of my computer *right now*. I suggested a number of self-calming techniques. This just escalated his anxiety. He kept repeating himself: *Ma'am! You aren't listening to me! Ma'am!*

"Bob, where are you from?" I asked. "Mumbai, Delhi? I so enjoyed visiting those cities on my last trip. Tell me about your happy place, Bob—where do you go in your mind when you're stressed?" On the other end of the line, a loud wail, click and silence.

In today's message, Bob was clearly on edge. He'd apparently changed jobs and sounded more anxious than ever. *Ma'am! This is the IRS. We have discovered fraud and misconduct associated with your account. The FBI has a warrant for your arrest! This is a very urgent message!* Oh Bob.

VEGETABLE HUSTLER (SCENES FROM AN ORGANIC FARM)  
BY RYAN BLOSSER

Skin pores - dripping poetry tonight,  
The valley smells like honey, red wine, and garlic.  
Oh dirty, sweaty, Virginia.  
Muggy evening air drapes my shoulders like a black snake,  
Tomorrow I will wake up before the sun rises and work that shit.  
There I go,  
Nodding off to Finnegans Wake again over a glass of valerian chocolate mint tea.  
Dream of bullfrogs croaking out antiestablishment elegies through mashup linguistic ciphers  
all in the color blue,  
And plowing the clouds clad in an Indiana Jones Fedora and a beaten copy of the glass bead  
game  
Tucked into my belt  
Poetry is my poetry, but you see the gardens - well now - that's my music.  
Wake early to Spring who ain't ready to undress yet, while the garlic greens posture a stormy  
optimism - even the softnecks are showing some spirit.  
Remember last night I danced with a swarm of bees to a firefly turn-on, then the sky lit up my  
domepiece and the rest of the night found me swapping favorite Tom Robbins stories with the  
beets and carrots.  
Suddenly everything feels like a Bruce Springsteen song remembering what it was like to be  
Jimmy Carter's Beat Poet Prince.  
Why is it the roots always seem to get it?  
It ain't lonely, pulling onions and radishes in the dark before market - the landscape is melting  
in the low light like a Dali on fire, an electric thistle stands at attention and that Pear tree over  
there next to the cedar has got its eye on me  
There's brother goose - side eyeing the moon knowing that this time next week it'll be his turn  
for the knife  
The snapping lady laying her eggs in the lower garden patch  
Winks at me.  
While the sunflowers are in heat and whispering shit in my ear that is making me blush  
Now, lunch, a spread of raw honey bee brood - with nasturtium flowers paired with a  
limestone filtered May rainwater.  
The solitude of the meal reminds me,  
Merton watered dead sticks, Socrates walked for days, some folks sing call and response bald  
headed hoping God will talk back while the early Taoists hung out in caves downing mercury,  
me, I weed thistles bare handed for hours.  
Forearms rashy and swollen - calloused hands bleeding from one thousand paper-thin cuts  
On a walk this afternoon I notice the tomatoes flashing a gold tooth grin and chewin' on  
platinum grit - they finally got that swagger.  
Dog and I get caught in a storm that smells like candied watermelon.  
Garden is wet with laughter and feelin' somewhere between a Nas rhyme and an Earl Scruggs  
breakdown.  
This party stands in stark contrast to next door's somber tone of,

Spooky fascist corn marching in uniform across the valley with a Promethean Shelly grin  
The clean up is when gratitude sets in - blood rinsed from a knife, dirt dug from the  
fingernails, splinters pulled from the hands  
All of it throbs and aches  
The dirt and the wind will change you, make you grow strong roots  
Face tragedy with a grin  
Search for a handhold.  
And never fucking let go.

## MINDFULNESS

BY CLAYTON ARBLE

*Stop asking big questions, I think  
after I catch myself thinking. Just observe yourself.*

I am sitting on my grandfather's back porch  
with a copy of *The Branch Will Not Break*  
cracked open by the middle of its spine.  
I am aware of the breath in my nostrils,  
the wind drying the sweat on my face,  
the shifting shadows of the clouds on my eyelids.  
I hiked Mt. Tom today. On the way up,  
a fallen branch became a walking stick  
I left leaning against a railing at the peak.  
Maybe someone will use it to climb back down.

After ten days of silence and solitude,  
I will get a job and get my life together.  
Tomorrow, I will hike Mt. Tom at a patient pace,  
thinking only through my senses.  
I will be aware of the pearls of dew on the grass,  
the bumble bee on the seeds of a sunflower.  
The skeleton inside me will be proof I existed.  
I will meditate in a forest for ten days, then go home.

Leaves are hissing in the wind. They're starting to rustle.  
Slowly, a man emerges from the woods behind the house.  
The branches slap him as he stumbles through the exit  
he's hacking into creation with his walking stick.  
"It's all right," I say, "no-one lives here anymore."  
Behind him, the woods close up again.  
Single leaves fall in the new pathway  
that's only a way out so far.

## BEACH STONES

BY BENJAMIN D. CARSON

We've been rubbing up against each other for so long we've worn all of our edges off, those sharp angles, the little divots and nooks that make you you and me me. It must have been the waves pulling us in and out, back and forth with the tide, led by the force of the moon, that has left us so smooth.

And now, as I have grown round, and you have grown round, too, we can no longer sink into one another when the salt water washes over us. I always knew you were stone, but your hardness surprises me, even as now I have nothing to reach for, and nothing to receive me.

THE DAWN WITHIN  
BY BARBARA BLATT

In the midst of the usual  
Baroque ritual surrounding  
our simple meal, we noticed  
we had turned inward,  
become deeply introverted,  
perplexingly clairvoyant.  
The lake was gliding toward us.  
We could sense the stillness  
of our neighbor's house,  
the flaking away of old sneakers  
on the forest floor. Outside,  
someone had crumbled a stone  
leaving a trail down the dark blue street.  
A few heads were set a gleaming  
by the light of street lamps.  
Fire flies gathered at the horizon  
and the sound of a fog horn  
cloned itself along the bluff.  
Tom coughed. Just then,  
a marble rolled out from beneath the sofa.  
A stack of postcards  
shuffled themselves on the table.  
And when at last, the private moment came,  
thundering through the door,  
it was all we could have expected  
at this time of night  
nearing the hour of dawn,  
the dawn within the dawn within the dawn.

*after the poetry of James Tate*

## FOG

BY ANN HOWELLS

Light sweeps measured arcs, illuminates lithesome shapes, writhing appendages. It is then we hear the horn, as fog weaves in glittering silver-white. A sparse congregation at the Methodist church sings *Brightly beams our Father's mercy*, piano slightly off key, *from his lighthouse on the shore ...* but the light is secondary. It is in the horn we place our trust: a Greek chorus welling from sea floor, reverberating night with two tremulous blue notes, eerie basso profundo mellowed by fathoms of seawater. If possible, it queries, *Would you? Would you?* And fog creeps chiaroscuro along dirt lanes, twines among pines and headstones. The sky has shed its skin, promises a dawn emergence pliant and achingly new. And we fogbound in dreams, we too emerge at dawn as from a chrysalis – each with consciousness of the other glistening flushed skin.

## SELFIE

BY CAROL TYX

You live alone.  
Most of the time  
that suits you just fine.  
You need to say that because  
you think it will fortify  
like a vitamin, but instead  
sticks in your throat.

You would like to go  
to a play. All week  
you have called friends  
about one-a-day, and no one  
can go. Today, final show,  
you start scrolling.  
Sixteen calls,  
all strikes.

You try to find  
the spiritual angle: how to sit  
with emptiness, how to be  
like the solo hummingbird  
who pauses outside your window  
at the petal-less bee balm  
then moves on to other  
sweetness.

You are trying to learn to  
ease into loneliness, the awkwardness  
of feeling so needy  
in those final calls.  
You look up and see  
the hummingbird back at  
the petal-less bee balm: all of us  
in search of sweetness.

You want to end  
this poem with a rush  
of zen-like oneness —  
maybe tomorrow  
or next year. For now  
you sit and hold the hand  
of your human heaviness.

**JOAN OF ARC**  
BY TOTI O'BRIEN

And if myth is the thing you eat for breakfast  
stale bread soaked in milk  
plastic cup of faded green

And if fair is the flip side of what burns under your sternum  
when you feel you have been wronged  
but how, you can't tell

In the cellar, where you have been shut  
in order to meditate on your sins  
you sip bitter swags of angst and revolt

If unfair has nothing to do with justice or rights  
only with a knot in your throat  
that causes your gagging

\*

Suddenly, as rage's eating your chest  
you are climbing a ladder  
your wrist ringed by the sweaty grip of mute fingers

Fair has nothing to do with kind  
like your missing mother  
or with blond and light-skinned

Only with a noise beyond the smothering hush  
of your blindfold, a crowd witnessing  
your blame and your shame

Unaware of the vain, vague rebellion  
making you into their laughing stock  
their thrill

Their attraction that is just a distraction  
to relieve endless tedium  
and the vacancy of gods

\*

Dusty wind pricks the skin of your nape  
the pink strip between ear and scalp  
freshly shaven

Itchy like the brush  
you strike on the back  
of your darling mare

In the stable, that's where you belong  
or else back in the kitchen  
but the hand you can't see holds you tighter

\*

In a somnambolic daze  
you sense smoke  
and the heat of a distant summer

(Sun scorching your freckled cheeks  
in an open field  
remote innocence)

Your heart throbs  
while your jailer crushes your bones  
as if squeezing lymph out of a broken twig

You are the kindling  
to your own holocaust  
Slowly, you become myth

## PHOTO OPPORTUNITY

BY KAREN LOEB

In New York my daughter stands  
against a gigantic black and white butterfly mural  
on a brick building  
and opens her arms against the wings  
becoming the butterfly body  
her long lean form fitting perfectly.  
“Take the picture, Mom.”  
The command issued, I dig out my phone,  
tap the button  
catching her wide smile  
imagining that she’ll launch herself,  
soaring above us, startling diners  
in this neighborhood populated with  
outdoor restaurant seating,  
people pointing upward with their forks  
or knives, amazed to see this enormous  
butterfly with long black hair sailing above them,  
one man declaring, “It’s a kite. It has to be a kite.”

HAIKU  
BY ROBERTA BEACH JACOBSON

first robin sighting  
of the morning  
- make a wish

- SECTION TWO -

**BRUCE LEE AND WALT WHITMAN**  
BY KENZO FUKUDA

Bruce Lee told me,  
"Become like water"  
One of the more vague similes out there  
The human is 60% bodies of water  
Swashing through our veins and arteries  
Hydrogen and Oxygen atoms fused  
But paralyzed without a drum  
    Water can become the vessel that holds it  
    Unless the vessel is without a sculptor  
That leaves 40% of us floating  
{or drowning}  
in Carbon and Nitrogen and Calcium and Phosphorus and  
wanderers in an ocean of ice and sorrow

Walt Whitman recited to me  
he sung the body electric  
I thought that would kill a person  
Though the brain pulsates this thunder  
with synapses opening to receive the Sodium and give Potassium  
    {positive and negative}  
and lights the spark, passed from neuron to neuron  
a simple waltz, if you will,  
as Sodium and Potassium, spin outwards  
Lock arms and embrace, spin again  
generating a rapture of electricity

I say  
the water runs currents with lightning  
To feel the surge of the heart  
    {or heartbreak}

## AFTERLIFE

BY JAMES FOWLER

The upside of checking out early  
is the large circle of friends  
happy to indulge his last wishes.  
So after the pit barbecue  
32 packets of him in priority envelopes  
will arrive in select locations  
for dispersal per instructions.  
As the song says, he'll be nationwide,  
from the northwest Hall of Mosses  
and red-rock Garden of Gods  
to the Charleston dolphin tank  
and flank of Mt. Mooselauke.  
Trippy Sookie will mix him with  
colored chalk for release at  
Burning Man. There's leeway also:  
to be fed to a roadside dinosaur  
along Route 66, set sail on  
some Minnesota headwater, set  
in concrete like D. H. Lawrence.  
He'll join his favorite playground  
beneath the rocket-ship slide.  
Look under your Keds, kid.  
And because he never did get  
a backpacking year in Europe,  
Dave and Kris can surprise him:  
maybe a curbside planter  
outside a Paris café, or an  
alpine meadow. Or is it vibes from  
a Lennon singalong in Prague?

**RECASTING THE FRAGMENTS**  
BY ANN HOWELLS

based on Portrait of Sonja Knipo by Gustav Klimt, Austrian, 1889

Imagine me, ruby-colored  
among teacups  
a Klimt woman  
exotic, bejeweled.

Among teacups  
a twilight odalisque  
exotic, bejeweled  
black-eyed with disinterest.

A twilight odalisque  
grown old in another century  
black-eyed with disinterest  
as crazy stars gaze down.

Grown old in another century  
skin like silver pebbles  
as crazy stars gaze down  
arabesques of light.

Skin like silver pebbles  
while neon steals the stars  
arabesques of light  
gilded copper and gold.

Neon stole the stars.  
Leaving me, ruby-colored,  
gilded copper, and gold --  
a Klimt woman.

## HIGH CEILINGS

BY HARI BHAJAN KHALSA

Where dreams float, nestle into rafters, memories  
roost and preen. Where you hear the echo

of your voice swirl the walls. Where the eyes  
rest in the morning, slide down the sides at last

thought before sleep. The space in between,  
where there is nothing but air and dust motes,

shafts of light, where no sentient being crafts  
their day, argues with mother nature about

the turning of time or how much it takes just to stay  
alive. Where songs you've sung, arguments

about love and how much you love, deep-throated  
cries, pleasures, drift into cornered webs —

wonderings if you're meant to live another day  
or press the edges of glory. On the other side,

on the flat-planed roof, leaves skitter and whirl.  
Rain beats its doubled fists, clamoring to be let in.

## COMPENSATORY

BY DAVID B. PRATHER

Every summer for five years  
we hear reports of the Sunnyside rapist,  
of careless college girls getting caught  
in parking garages and side streets.

We suspect everyone.  
I even start to wonder about that  
homeless man who lays it on thick,  
going through his spiel where he played

with BB King in Boston, and all the greats  
I've never heard of. But I want to believe  
it's true. And so I believe. Even the story  
of his wife and kids, working his way back

to Texas or Minnesota or whatever place  
he mumbles and calls home, a shadow  
in one hand and a beer in the other.  
And there on the sidewalk, waiting for the heat

to let up, I empty my pockets  
and hand over everything, the quarters,  
dimes and nickels, the stray button, the dry cleaning  
stub, the hasty notes to myself I will never read

anyway. We stand there like two phantoms  
on the verge of dispersion, buying and selling  
bits of our lives to see the fog breathe heavy  
into the trees. I start thinking of the specter

of all those best friends I left somewhere  
in the ditches and gullies of the past,  
how they must still be alive,  
and how easy it is for me

to live without them. Including the girl  
I took downstate for an abortion,  
the day of the first snowfall that amounted  
to much of anything. She kept asking me

if it was a sign, and I kept saying no.  
But that was for her because I couldn't help  
but read it as a portent, not a judgment,  
as anyone might expect, a catalyst for change.

Even the way she wasn't allowed to eat  
all day. I tried to fast with her  
and failed, and excused myself because it wasn't  
my child, it wasn't my fault, it had nothing

to do with me. I was wrong.  
Now, I recognize that ghost for salvation,  
like dogs down the block that draw my attention  
from the man who keeps asking

for spare change, and acquires, instead,  
the smallest of my secrets. I kick  
at a pigeon that has been pecking at pebbles,  
like any other stupid bird, for its survival.

Years later, I know they will apprehend  
the rapist, an associate professor of engineering,  
I think. Or something we condition ourselves  
to take on faith as normal. They must have trapped him

through his DNA, since he always wore a mask.  
I didn't read the article all that closely.  
But by the time this gets out, it isn't much more than fodder  
for darkness, the odd corners and seams

where we lose ourselves one small portion at a time,  
digging up handful after handful we think nothing of giving away.

THE ODDS AGAINST A STARRY COSMOS  
BY ABBY BLAND

refer to  $Q$ , the degree of non-uniformity  
in the cocktail of elements in the big bang,

A ratio smaller than 0.0001  
and the universe would have been rendered  
too smooth, stillborn  
without atoms and elements, trapped  
in sterile homogeneity.

If  $Q$  had been a fraction  
larger than 0.0001,  
the violence and turbulence  
would have rendered unrecognizable  
lumps of matter that could never  
fragment into stars.

The fundamental mystery:  
the precision of the early universe,

0.0001 led to you, my love  
here with your green sweater,  
unraveling slightly at the waist,  
mitten hands holding your mug  
as we watch the snow fall,  
flakes disappearing into the cluster  
of mallows caught in the swirl  
of dark chocolate.

## FALSE PROPHETS

BY henry 7. reneau, jr.

So much of who we are  
is who, & what, we are capable of accepting: the free expression  
of citizen will. First, words of politics were distorted: the shrapnel  
of lies, like purpled-black tumors  
where the absence of reckoning  
left a vacuum to be filled, the words like *Muslim terrorist*,  
enemy combatant, & collateral damage. The ambiguous  
persons of interest & meta data. The detainees,  
enhanced interrogation & tender care facilities. Fake News &  
*the enemy of the American people . . .*  
conjugated to new Nigger! A dog whistle  
loud enough to resurrect Selma attack dogs, billy clubs &  
whiplash fire hoses. Then, actions, dates, &  
identities were altered,  
& history was rewritten:

*The Atlantic Slave Trade between the 1500s and 1800s  
brought millions of workers from Africa to the southern  
United States to work on agricultural plantations.*

Religion became the part of the body where sickness lived:

AIDs became God's wrath on Faggot Queers &  
Bull-Dagger Dykes & abortion, murder.

Too late, we saw the writing on the wall, the anomalies  
of police brutality, that had been graffitied there all along.

The concrete blocks of incarceration, squatted like stumps  
of deforestation throughout the State.

The bent & broken laws  
when they came for your neighbor in the morning;

you equivocated, rationalized your cowardice:

*They must be guilty; the police are at their door.*

The huge uniformed horde moving in three parallel columns,  
cut broad highways of litter &

devastation, the gunshots blooming into a mercenary sky,  
throughout an already neutralized countryside.

*Editor's note: The part of this poem that talks about the Atlantic Slave Trade between the 1500s and 1800s is from a section of a 2015 McGraw-Hill Education World Geography textbook that covered patterns of immigration. The textbook language was changed after it was pointed out that referring to slaves as workers did not convey the reality of what happened. McGraw-Hill later apologized for their error.*

**BIRTHDAY POEM IN APRIL**  
BY PENELOPE SCAMBLBY SCHOTT

From across the street, piercing shouts  
of school kids at recess

From my black locust tree, deep lament  
of mourning doves

long white bridal bouquets of the locust  
not yet in bloom

For seventy-some years I've been married  
to this blue, blue sky

A ten-year-old girl hunches under juniper  
her skirt pulled over her knees

I could run across Sixth Street and tell her  
*Look up past the branches*

*Honey, it gets better Better and better*

GLASS JAR OF VOLCANIC ROCK FROM MT. SAINT HELENS  
BY CANDICE KELSEY

*a present from Uncle Harry, 1980*

Ten years old  
We were all figuring it out  
Fifth graders  
Little volcanos sitting in rows  
Desks like inhales  
Recess our only exhale

Ten years old  
All we knew of the human heart  
Could fit  
In that glass jar  
Of volcanic rock from an uncle  
In Washington

I asked my mother  
What it meant  
The other girls and boys  
At recess or lunch  
Behind the gate by Fields Ertel Road  
*Frenching*

She swiftly informed me  
That it involved  
Tongues  
Not something even married people do  
Her fear airtight  
My questions tightly screwed shut

I once saw a photo  
Gutierrez' shot of the Chaitén Volcano  
Pride of Chile  
Neon veins lightning dirty thunder  
From the caldera  
Ashen plume eruption

Perfect metaphor  
To prepare my own daughter  
Ten years old  
Collision of rock ash ice  
Endless bloom of electric illumination  
I tell her *unscrew the lid*

DAUGHTER  
BY EMILY ELLISON

when you wake  
eat an orange,  
surprise your mouth  
by letting it have  
an unknown juice  
sing on the tongue,  
    you will be surprised with  
    the pleasure of a soft crescent  
so right after you wake  
eat some humility,  
let seasons of cultivated fruit  
still the insides, still the skin  
    when it wants to perfume  
    the morning

come into the half-glow of your own  
mind slicing open,  
come  
    tumbling  
    as you drop  
the outside flesh —

drop your zest  
into the ground,  
plant a tree  
as how the sun

    births  
        a new  
            sun  
            each day —

for in the beginning was a fruit  
    called dawn  
    spitting itself up as a seed,  
spitting up its beloved  
    because  
gold seeks gold —

when you wake  
peel back the skin—  
    oh my daughter,  
    what might have been

blossoms blossoms blossoms

H

BY ROBERT RENÉ GALVÁN

From the Table of Elements

*for Neil deGrasse Tyson*

Loneliest atom  
born from a battle  
of quarks  
and bosons  
that raged  
for three hundred  
centuries,  
begat from a single  
note,  
a mote smaller  
than a photon,  
a cataclysm  
that framed time  
and all the elements;  
*Harmos*,  
the binding  
of gravitons,  
cosmic crescendo  
of spheres,  
not from Mendeleev's  
blocks,  
but from a helix  
of strings,  
a whirlwind:  
we rose from the lightest  
elements like a dervish  
out of dust:  
carbon and phosphorus,  
hydrogen and oxygen,  
acid strains  
informed by light,  
for a scant waking,  
then back  
to the furnace of stars  
before we can  
know why.

WOMAN HER WORLD ON SKIDS  
BY DOTTY LEMIEUX

Paused at the red light, I see her —  
urban traveler at a crossroads,  
waiting out the light  
weighted by her world on skids behind her  
arms bent back holding the plastic  
reins of flattened cardboard  
bearing the world —  
not aloft as Atlas —  
but on folded boxes that can be opened  
into shelter,

black plastic bags, the heavy kind  
for cramming every bit of trash  
you clear from your property  
before you move in or everything  
you call your own  
as you move out

in her bags she has crammed husband  
house, children now grown, job  
in a bank or a store  
or a factory in another state

nice clothes or rags  
an apartment, tenement, old folks' home  
crazy house  
the faraway lap of ocean  
on foreign shore  
wing of white bird soaring

I watch her adjust the weight, knuckling  
gnarled hands into locked grip  
bearing the more private, the more precious, cargo  
on her bent back not a bit  
of slack in sinewy limbs, face taut as a fist, eyes  
tight against unforgiving sun, not an ounce of wanting  
to be here but with steadiness  
because after all, she is moving

if not quite upright, at least, not quite  
prone, and with purpose

as the light changes.

POTHOLE  
BY DON POMERANTZ

a pothole defies conjuring  
and so must be the devil

gouge of destruction  
lovechild  
of ineluctable water  
and systematic futility  
nature  
burping up our expediency  
scattered handfuls of  
*better luck next time*

and here come  
the men in trucks  
with their hot black silence  
of self-deception  
gag stuffed  
into *same time next year*  
along the stretches of a temple  
that coaxes water to bury it  
for the months of winter  
in the name of what's gotta be done

H<sub>2</sub>O's never been so amused  
kinda like when Old Scratch hit  
on the Eureka of  
"Them that's Preachin' Your Love  
won't be able to make it  
then let's see what happens. *Yeab...*"

## UNWRITTEN POEM

BY KAREN WHITTINGTON NELSON

I know you've gone to bed when  
the gray-stained silence between us,  
a boulder blocking our bedroom door,  
dissipates into the calm of night and  
I slip into the routine of evening chores.

While the dishwasher is running, I pull  
your work clothes from the dryer. Folded  
into rectangles, arranged and neatly stacked  
they lie upon the kitchen table like cards  
dealt in a game we've tired of playing.

I carry the faded blues and browns down the hall  
to overnight on the spare bed so as not to wake you.  
On the way back I avert my eyes, sidestep the clutter-  
newspapers, baseball cap, loose change.  
Muddied boots left in the middle of the back hall.

When it feels like more than enough, I sit down  
at the keyboard and wait for inspiration: a phrase,  
some snippet of conversation, or perhaps a forgotten  
peal of laughter lodged between the cracks in the plastered  
walls of the den- the explosive explanation point  
at the tail end of one or another corny joke you used to tell.  
But nothing, save the muffled footfall of our indifference  
patrolling the hallway, comes to me-  
here alone in the quiet house and you in bed.

UNTIL THAT MOMENT, CONTENTMENT SUNK DEEP IN OUR BONES  
BY DEBBIE HALL

Before dark, a man in a long boat herding hundreds of ducks, river heron nested in a raft of green, we travelers coasting down the Palla Thruthi River. After nightfall, our three houseboats lashed together, bow-to-bow. Soft air all around; clear, moonless sky. Our mouths still warm with curry. Laughter and stories wind down to silence. One by one, we depart the communal gathering for bed. My head is turned away as you step over the dark cavity of water between boats, snaps around at the sound of a loud splash, panicked shouts of the crew. All I see is darkness, empty, *gone*. I hear my voice cry, *Where is she??* Then the river spits you back out.

Summer storm rolls in—  
hailstones tattoo the river.  
Which trees will blow down?

ALL ART IS ARGUMENT  
BY CECIL MORRIS

*Paintings were nothing but research and experiment.*  
Pablo Picasso

Yes, perhaps, experiment—  
a chance to try, first, for oneself  
a new way of seeing, of flattening experience into art,  
of making and making again the world in quiet mess of top-floor flat  
or drafty spattered studio and buzzing solitude  
where shy ideas unfold themselves  
into geometric approximations.  
Look at *Weeping Woman*, all those bright colors  
(green and yellow skin, orange hat, coarse black hair  
streaked pink and purple), the face in profile  
with both eyes showing, staring straight out,  
the handkerchief that reveals the form,  
angle and plane, but hides all color—  
face in facets, perspectives overlapping,  
looking and turning away,  
everything at once.

Or, perhaps, argument—  
assertion and example smeared in oily pigment  
on wood or canvas or wet plaster of walls and ceilings.  
Look at Michelangelo's 300 figures, their fleshy formidable shoulders  
twisting, turning, their powerful arms reaching,  
their thighs thick with potential energy, robust,  
athletic, *terribilità*; see too their faces, their eyes, fierce or fearful,  
frenzied, tormented, downcast, yearning:  
a divinity of flesh, an agony of spirit.  
And that garish, fractured, weeping woman  
with astonished, lash-fringed eyes,  
her face jagged with grief, discolored by loss,  
her handkerchief an x-ray of her face—  
she makes her own claims,  
screams them as loud as *Guernica*,  
but she keeps her reasons to herself.

WHAT WILL SAVE US?  
BY BRIGITE GOETZE

*An idol is...a truth based on insufficient evidence but maintained by constant affirmation within the tribe of believers.*  
- Curtis White

I.  
Science. The body, which it has  
cut apart, it cannot bring back  
to life. No matter how significant  
the mountain of cold, hard facts,  
it is just another, P(iled), h(igher) and D(eeper).

Economy. Experts expound the dogma  
of growth, the rule of profit from 401(k)s  
to rivers. If their beauty cannot be  
monetized, “we just have to  
try harder.”

Justice. Blind-folded goddess,  
handcuffed to precedent, forced  
to concede privilege to a mere  
legal construct, cannot perceive  
the personhood of forests, bees.

II.  
Guilt. You get it—  
nevertheless, down it goes  
together with the indulgent pleasure;  
your tongue’s delight overrides all  
gut feelings of indigestion.

Shame. Your hands in the pillory,  
you can’t eat crow,  
even if your head can see  
the evidence, compiled,  
indicates a certain complicity.

Sympathy. Impelled to act,  
you write a check for the starving,  
the almost drowned, the blown to  
bits and pieces. That’s all you have  
the courage to do.

III.

Choice. None of the above.

Hearing the cry of a just-born  
ethos, shattering your light slumber,  
you race to the cradle, reach for the new  
life, hold it in your care.

- SECTION THREE -

**SHERWOOD GARDENS**

BY S.B. MERROW

The dogs of winter have gone, taking their brittle sticks.

Tulips sun labia in public, normal as any folk  
as fairies cavort and sing somewhere between hearing and sense  
in not-quite harmony — spring's fertile confidence.

Magnolia and worm penetrate — the eye, the tender ground —  
strawberries rise and leave their beds, sashay across the lawn,  
a slow rainbow of creeping green, then yellow, fattening to red.

The apple tree's pink earrings adorn a couple in love  
who kneel and clasp for the camera, as children above in the branches  
climb to reach the sky, no thought of coming down.

THIS OLD FUNKY FRUITY BLUEBERRY-BIRD  
BY DAVE STACEY

My youngest says I look like a blueberry  
when I wear my favourite sweatshirt.  
Perhaps it *has* shrunk a little in the wash.  
She shakes her head. She thinks the size change  
has more likely occurred in another department.

We'll have to agree to differ. As it happens, and despite  
the extra insulation, I dig my funky fruity body.  
It comes fully equipped with a partnership of legs,  
still largely on speaking terms, and still quite  
serviceable for shooting around and about.

And the remote-control mechanical arms  
are very responsive and continue to maintain  
good dexterity, although small shirt buttons can cause  
a minor malfunction, generally remedied  
by application of the curse command.

There has, however, been some notable  
deterioration in visuals, with the graphics  
not being nearly as sharp, and this physical  
infrastructure thus needing add-on magnifying  
enhancements to extend its useful economic life.

Plus audio looks like going the same way.  
Perhaps a bigger worry would be the loss of the onboard  
computer which suffers some notable intermittent  
"issues". And as for the exhaust backfiring when  
it really ought not, enough said. But while

my vintage body might not return into the world  
with the same potentiality from whence it came,  
and while the runway shortens daily, there's  
still plenty of yardage left for this old funky fruity  
blueberry-bird to rise and fly and glide and soar.

## NAVIGATION

BY WENDY TAYLOR CARLISLE

I'm ready. I have been in training all my life to be frail.

I had role models. Their lives were nothing to emulate

but I do, having no other.

I started out sturdy then cut my body

aiming for the female lace that made my auntie.

I carry a dry mouth in the dry months.

I scuff my elbows as well, my face can rot for all I care.

I will not smooth out this journey.

Which wounds may I use as a lodestar, which words?

If I am not careful I will navigate into shore.

If I am not careful, good things will happen.

## A POET LOOKS AT 60

BY ANN HOWELLS

My daughter says I'm far too pessimistic.  
I fear that I'm about to go ballistic.

Blackberry. Blackberry. Blackberry. All this buzz -- familiar as a bee hive, as sounds that open barred doors. I collect three dollars for this poem, five dollars for that, tuck them beneath my belly like a dancer in a girlie show -- age exponentially as I stitch my raveled sleeve. Two roads diverge, and I bumble undergrowth, play the blues on tissue covered combs, ponder rhymed couplets. And now it's misting, drizzling, raining. Does it ever rain in Monte Carlo, in Shanghai, in Istanbul? Glasses cannot correct my vision to 20/20.

Families, like straight-jackets, extend long arms.

Sunset, unleash me. Swaddle me in unclaimed hours. I've squandered daylight at the stove, the kitchen sink. The world of light is a world of lightning. Reptiles repulse, yet flickering tongues fascinate. I return dreaming to Pontypool grotto, cavern of nacre and stained-glass shards. The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream. The last 1943 copper penny has yet to be found. Stars dangle from my ears. The earliest crocodiles, I read this somewhere, walked upright.

I need a shot of rum in my hot toddy.  
Bullet wounds leave asterisks on the body.

**TAKE MY HAND**  
BY JOSEPH MURPHY

I want the rain to end this silence.

I want your lips. Let me  
give you this stone; once a star.

Take my hand: someday, it may be a wing.

I want to hold you  
while the night has the scent  
of a lily.

I want you: before the snow  
covers us. I don't want to fear  
ice and frozen soil.

I want the rain to fall  
because your shoulders will glisten;

because I want you to understand  
that the heart has many lives.

## FLIGHT

BY SHERRE VERNON

*for Justen*

I do it every time. Refill the soap dispenser. Change the cat's water in the bowl. Hang the shirts you'd as easily throw in the drawer & forget. Today I even replaced the tube of toothpaste behind the mirror in the bathroom cabinet & managed to get through to that scar of red wine on the kitchen counter.

If you notice (& you won't or it will be 4am & you'll forget) — If you notice — you'll chalk it up to my preference in love: clean, unspoken, methodical. & I'll never get a chance to tell you at the core of it, I am

planning for what happens after the ruckus of death overflows the radio, the web & you. After you wait, all cried out, still not believing, for my name to be keened by some news anchor (do they even do that anymore?). Eventually,

life needing as it does, you'll dig up the email where all of our accounts are ordered & encoded. You'll think of the burial plot we were too young to buy & be grateful & relieved in a small, secret way, that there's no body to worry after after all. But first

people will bring you food  
you won't eat. Your stomach will  
turn & you'll be  
thirsty. & you will need, deep  
& without thinking, a clean glass.  
& I want it to be easy for you  
to find. In that moment, everything  
in its place, I want  
your hand, nails roughed to the quick  
& jagged — one last time — I want your hand  
to cover mine.

THE STUDENT I FAILED IN WRITING AND LIFE STORIES  
BY CAROL TYX

He disappeared, the last paper never showing up  
claimed by some other world, like his first essay  
where his mother left what he said was like a cult.

After reading the opening I thought the story might  
take a heroic turn — we escaped, yanking ourselves  
into freedom — but he understood the narrative as exile —

he had already been free, careening across the valley  
on horseback, a multitude of brothers and sisters galloping  
with him, jumping off to Sunday dinners prepared by

multiple mothers, mountains of mashed potatoes  
fields of corn, rivers of pie.  
He had hair like thatch and the feel of wind

as if he had been blown to class. This world —  
classrooms without windows, the press of assignments —  
was the captivity — no horses, no sun-drenched afternoons

a place where he was related to no one, a solitary self  
or no self, losing himself in fantasy worlds of video games  
or drugs, his head crashing onto his desk and no matter

how many times I called his name, I could not find him  
until finally he flung himself into the wind  
his story blown beyond what I could see.

**CHOCOLATE MILK**  
BY JAMIE CREPEAU

So little, she won't remember  
the storm of tubes and wires over  
her body during a rapid blur  
out of reality as a surgeon  
dug around like a prospector to seal  
up the hole in her heart, leaving  
her with a scar pointing simultaneously  
at the grass and the clouds only  
to recall chocolate milk filling and coating  
her mouth like oil in the engine  
of a brand new car.

**ZERO IN THE DENOMINATOR**  
BY CASEY KILLINGSWORTH

Until now I never understood math,  
or at least the concept of zero in  
the denominator. Teachers tried  
to tell me that zero in the denominator  
isn't nothing, or something, or anything;  
it isn't even zero. They said instead it's a  
question that can't be asked or answered,  
like what would the world be like if someone  
hadn't invented tires, or if you wouldn't  
have left me standing so awkwardly on your  
front porch so long ago now. Nobody  
can answer what would have happened,  
so I spend my days not asking, and things  
come and go and what might have been is not  
something or nothing; it's a zero in the  
denominator, just a wish whose candle  
was never blown out.

THE END OF WHALING  
BY DS MAOLALAI

and so  
we grew tired  
of lamp-oil.  
whaling;  
too cruel a sport, and death  
too much a price. dirty yellow light  
like tobacco-stained apartments.  
too cruel. better this way;  
crack the skin of rocks  
and dig down. and we did  
and black oil oozed forth,  
a boon  
without cruelty. more oil  
than we could ever use  
for lamplight. and the earth  
flapped its flippers  
and made sad  
roaring noises.  
we couldn't hear,  
lashing it hard  
on the side  
of our boats.

## IN MY TORN SUIT AND WALKING AWAY

BY KEN MASSICOTTE

1

We want the journey to end so many times calling your name  
we want to refuse, withered and thin stoning pigeons and other easy prey  
but even killers see themselves in the realm of the beautiful unknown  
even the skinhead with his spiked-out pit caught in some labyrinth  
on the crowded subway, I am in my essence, divine  
trained like a monk but read the wrong books you too, you too  
it was not transcendence, I needed a grail I could bring to you  
but I was alone watching through pale weeds trapped under water  
and always another hundredweight drawbar murder at the gate  
we need to crash the solstice ball crazy as gold  
steal the seven league boots and walk, finally, into fortune.

2

It was the future words worked if you believed  
like bitcoins, hell could be heal death could be deal  
there was a distant ancient knoll glowing in the setting sun  
we lay down and slept on the still warm peat the sea on the night wind....  
lying in the tall reeds whispering like fire  
everything was before us our first steps, first money  
the sails thrumming as we stepped aboard the language of a new skin  
your name for silver was *arian* and it was medicine  
snow was *eira*, the huge flakes like faeries streaming past the porthole glass.

3

I remembered the smell of the Morgan Sweet my gift for my Dad as I waited in the field  
seven cows and seven ears of corn the Pharaoh's dream  
the engine's hum and my parent's gossip the thrashing rain on the metal roof  
St Christopher on a cord from the mirror fording the midnight raging river  
nostalgia for the words I'd learned that night *empathy, tragedy*  
driving back to the suburbs from the rundown farm blessed are the meek  
my uncle not right since he'd hit his head as a boy with crooked teeth and crooked bones  
like my cousins at his unconsecrated grave who would inherit the earth.

4

I carried the words like a spell    like fire in a pot  
I knew they were important    I knew I should remember  
in the corner where my mother died    a singing bowl and rosary beads  
the air was red and tasted of olives    I found stones and sacrificial bones  
my body was bathed and cradled in sorrow    polished like marble  
you followed me up the dank worn steps    but I couldn't trust  
that winter I slept but remember only    floating in the dead sea  
falling from a ladder high on a tower    in my torn suit and walking away.

**THERE ARE NO MORE DOGS ON THE MOON**  
BY BARBARA BLATT

Today is crushed ice melting in the sun, smashed candy and a flattened cup. Anger builds in the pepper shaker. The lemon tea tastes like my bitten lip. I know I'll never see you again. I know the cosmic eraser has found you. And I don't believe in this white plastic table or the cauliflower on my bent fork. Everyone in this room is a moving circus. The blind man, given new sight, recognizes nothing that doesn't move. And maybe the baby shrieking in the next room has it right. He doesn't believe in heaven anymore—just like that. I am a compass whose needle flutters. Only a polished surface. I grieve for a night that never comes. There are no more lies to tell.

MY TRANS FRIEND COMES OVER TO DO LAUNDRY  
BY DAVID. B. PRATHER

I worry about the nomenclature. Sometimes,  
I expect to utter masculine,  
when I am supposed to think feminine.

Last night, we drank much-too-sweet wine  
while talking and laughing  
the way we always have,

but all I could think was, Is her wig on straight?,  
or I know she's bald  
like the man she was. This person

standing in my kitchen is no longer comfortable  
in the binary world, part male, part female,  
part something else I cannot fathom.

She confesses  
a loss of strength from hormone therapy,  
forcing the body to fit the mind.

I'm not sure I can carry what she carries, though,  
and I've carried plenty of my own:  
boxes of books packed however they best would fit,

laundry baskets stuffed with socks and underwear and jeans,  
concrete blocks for small foundations.  
Her voice

is distinctly slight and re-tuned  
for this new body. She's living now  
at a higher pitch.

Can I say these things  
and not be offensive?  
I don't know. What I do know is that

the lights in the house are dim,  
and I have fucked both women and men  
under the soft glow of table lamps and bedside lamps

and television screens  
and fluorescent bulbs.  
I've seen flesh under all kinds of light and delighted

in the pure woman  
and the altogether man.  
This I feel.

This I know. But here  
with my friend, I have no words.  
She goes outside to smoke,

a bad habit she picked up as a man. And I know  
she still has remnant parts between her legs  
that speak of a not-too-distant past,

perhaps a false extinction,  
a latent being, like a vestigial twin.  
And I know

the soul of a woman swells  
newly upon her breast.  
I do not know that I know this woman.

I do not know that I knew the man.  
And when the wine is finished,  
and she backs out of the driveway,

I touch my own  
simply masculine body.  
I tell myself I know

who I am.

**CATCHING THE BREATH**  
BY AKEITH WALTERS

A journal found in the back of a dusty shelf  
amends a faded, black-and-white memory--

the half-eaten sandwich  
plated on the desk,

lamplit darkness,

and the window,

evening's deepest pit against moonlit glass,

as it reflects eyes at half-mast

while the whiskey taste from a drained cup  
clings to distilled lips

mouthed aloud  
in all its lush colors  
my favorite part of our story,

the never-ending beginning.

VENICE  
BY TOTI O'BRIEN

He trades in silks and spice, he said.  
My fan slipped through my fingers  
falling on wooden boards with a click  
like a snapping bone. I gasped while  
he bent, picked it up, dusted it off  
flourishing an immaculate scarf.

It is silk and spices. Silk is one.  
It unspools, tight, unbroken, from our  
bustling harbor to a place small as a dot  
receding horizon where the sun hides.  
Impalpable like a taste of tea  
unique lingering promise.

Spices are quintessentially multitude  
spread of powders in wooden bowls  
rainbow of earthy juices, crushed jewels  
tender petals and leaves. Spices  
are symphonies saturating the senses  
scattered butterfly wings.

Gingerly I put my fan away, lest  
I drop it once more. Lest it disappear  
through the planches, gulped  
by thick oily waters. I looked at vessels  
wrapped in mist. I would marry him, I knew.  
No one can resist a trader.

**THIS GRACE**  
BY ROBIN SCOFIELD

Sunshimmer on creosote  
shifts from yellow  
blossom to furry grey seed.  
And I have seen it happen.  
Yellow-eyed hawk looking  
into my green eyes:  
the startle of it, the flash  
of danger and the gratitude  
I had for being by the arroyo.  
When the coyote snarled, I stood  
there stupefied with grace.  
The dog immobile in hot May sun.

We moved on, impelled  
by what we cannot name.

As if the word coyote  
or falcon would be something.

And words, listen,  
there's a singer in the park, uttering prayer  
in a language strange to me.

A yellow song bird,  
the western meadowlark,  
lifts into the blue  
from the old acacia stand,  
lighting there again and  
rattling unfallen seed.

## GRAY

BY CAROL SMALLWOOD

The shades are many—the obvious to subtle: charcoal, pearl, dove and may describe politically correct words on gender and race including: them/their; diversity/multicultural fitting as a glove.

The terms used by lawyers in cases are ubiquitous and shove away what occurs as inconclusive, circumstantial with utmost grace: the shades are many—the obvious to subtle: charcoal, pearl, dove.

Shades are made combining black and white named like the above making the wide palette we experience everyday from place to place including: them/their; diversity/multicultural fitting as a glove.

It takes a discriminating eye, a willing eye, an artistic vision sort of to appreciate nuances in the variety making up our airspace; the shades are many—the obvious to subtle: charcoal, pearl, dove.

Sometimes recognition will come that tolerance is a labor of love when gray creeps into our hair making a soft frame for our face including: them/their; diversity/multicultural fitting as a glove.

If lucky, tolerance is ours when young and the difficult disposing of prejudice isn't necessary and our days go by without a trace: the shades are many—the obvious to subtle: charcoal, pearl, dove including: them/their; diversity/multicultural fitting as a glove.

I THANK THE QUAIL FOR ENTERTAINING ME  
BY DEBBIE HALL

with their three-note calls  
bursting from the sagebrush —  
*Chi-CA-go, Chi-CA-go,*

present on this day  
when my thoughts pitch  
toward bleak, just as

I am brightened  
when the skyscraping Eucalyptus  
lifts my mood

up through its crown,  
into the air like a balloon  
and I thank it too.

Do not let me forget  
the tiny Alligator lizard  
practicing push-ups nearby,

or the quarreling blue jays,  
the fallen feather, even the dead leaves,  
the rose thorns poking my fingers,

even the rattlesnake —  
as long as he shows himself  
from a distance —

the smell of rain, the hail pounding  
the hard-packed earth,  
high whine of the rusted windmill —

let me thank them all,  
even those weeds, sprawling  
and resplendent in their ratty coats.

## CONTRIBUTORS

**Clayton Arble** is a poet from Holyoke, Massachusetts. His poems have been or will be published in *Leveler Press*, *Whiplash Magazine*, *805*, and *PØST*. He can be found at [clayton.arble850@gmail.com](mailto:clayton.arble850@gmail.com).

**Abby Bland** lives and writes in Kansas City, Missouri. She is a regular host of Poetic Underground's open mic and a member of the 2018 Kansas City Poetry Slam nationals team.

**Barbara Blatt's** poems and essays have appeared in *Pearl, Askew* and *The Book of Symbols: Reflections on Archetypal Images* (Taschen). Her visual art has been featured in *Los Angeles Art Association* (Prolong Press). She can be seen reading her poems at [www.poetry.la](http://www.poetry.la). She lives in Santa Monica, California.

**Ryan Blosser** is a writer and farmer living in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. His previous poetry, fiction, and nonfiction can be found in *Chaminade Literary Review*, *Taproot Magazine*, *The Journal For Understanding And Dismantling Privilege*, and *Prose Axe*.

**Wendy Taylor Carlisle** lives in the Arkansas Ozarks. She is the author of two books, *Reading Berryman to the Dog* and *Discount Fireworks*, and five chapbooks, most recently *They Went Down to the Beach to Play* (2017.) Her work appeared in two anthologies in 2018, *Untold Arkansas* (etAlia Press) and *50/50* (Quills Edge Press). Her new book, *The Mercy of Traffic*, is due out from Unlikely Books in 2019. For more information, check her website at [www.wendytaylorcarlisle.com](http://www.wendytaylorcarlisle.com).

**Benjamin D. Carson** lives with his dog Dora on the South Shore of Massachusetts. His creative work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Red Fez*, *The Ampersand Review*, *Cactus Heart*, *The Bitchin' Kitsch*, *The Boston Small Press and Poetry Scene blog*, *The Somerville Times*, *Poetry24*, *Free Inquiry*, *Oddball Magazine*, *Poetry Leaves*, *The Poetry Porch*, *I am not a silent poet*, *Not Your Mother's Breast Milk*, and *The Charles River Journal*.

**Jamie Crepeau** is a writer, an aerospace machinist, and an amateur bartender who lives in Connecticut. He enjoys writing, playing video games, and bowling with his friends. His poems have been published in magazines including *Freshwater*, *Fresh Ink*, *The Helix*, *Broad River Review*, and *Crab Creek Review*. In 2014 he won an Excellence in Poetry award at Asnuntuck Community College in Enfield, Connecticut.

**Emily Ellison** is a second year MFA poet at Texas State University, where she also works as a Teaching Assistant for their English faculty. Her work has appeared in *Southword*, *After the Pause*, and *Haiku Journal*, and is upcoming in several places. Emily lives in San Marcos, Texas, with two cats and an abundance of plants (withering at the moment).

**James Fowler** teaches literature at the University of Central Arkansas. His poems have recently appeared in such journals as *Futures Trading Magazine*, *Sheila-Na-Gig*, *Cave Region Review*, *Elder Mountain*, *Valley Voices*, *Aji Magazine*, *Malevolent Soap*, *Seems*, *Angry Old Man*

*Magazine, Dash, and Common Ground Review*. He has pieces forthcoming in *Westview* and *The Poetry of Capital*.

**Kenzo Fukuda** is a San Franciscan writer who has been published in *Soul Lit Magazine, Umlaut, and Alchemy Literary Magazine*. He plays basketball, listens to Kendrick Lamar, and can crack his elbow on command.

**Robert René Galván**, born in San Antonio, resides in New York City where he works as a professional musician and poet. He has taught at Manhattan College, The College of Mount Saint Vincent and the Brooklyn Conservatory of Music. His last collection of poems is *Meteors* published by Lux Nova Press. His poetry was recently featured in *Adelaide Literary Magazine, Right Hand Pointing, Hawaii Review # 89, Stillwater Review vol. 9, West Texas Literary Review*, and the Winter 2018 issue of *UU World*. He is a Shortlist Winner Nominee in the 2018 Adelaide Literary Award for Best Poem.

**Brigitte Goetze** lives in Western Oregon. A retired biologist and angora goat farmer, she now divides her time between writing and fiber works. She finds inspiration for both endeavors in nature as well as the stories and patterns handed down from generation to generation. She likes to eavesdrop on the never-ending conversation between the biological and spiritual dimensions of life. Her website can be found at: [brigittegoetzewriter.com](http://brigittegoetzewriter.com).

**Debbie Hall** is a psychologist and writer whose poetry has appeared in the *San Diego Poetry Annual, A Year in Ink, Serving Howe Journal, Sixfold, Tuck Magazine, Poetry24, Bird's Thumb, Poetry Super Highway, Califragile* and other journals and anthologies. Her essays have appeared on NPR (This I Believe series), in *USD Magazine*, and the *San Diego Union Tribune*. She received an honorable mention in the 2016 Steve Kowitz Poetry Prize and completed her MFA at Pacific University in Forest Grove, Oregon. Debbie is the author of the poetry collection, *What Light I Have* (2018, Main Street Rag Books).

**Mary Harpin** is a poet and content strategy consultant at CAVU Creative. Her work has appeared in *Crab Creek Review, Juked, Terrain, Fourteen Hills* and elsewhere. Read more at [maryharpin.com](http://maryharpin.com).

**Ann Howells**, of Dallas, Texas, edited *Illya's Honey* for eighteen years. Her books are *Under a Lone Star* (Village Books, 2016) and a D/FW anthology she edited, *Cattlemen & Cadillacs* (Dallas Poets Community, 2016). Her chapbook, *Softly Beating Wings* (Blackbeard, 2017), was published as winner of the William D. Barney Chapbook Contest. Her latest collection, *So Long As We Speak Their Names*, poems centered around watermen on the Chesapeake Bay, will be released in July from Bowen Books. Recent work has appeared in *Chiron Review, I-70 Review, Paddock Review, San Pedro River Review, and The Langdon Review*.

**Roberta Beach Jacobson** is a humorist from Iowa. Her poems have been published in *The Christian Science Monitor, The Heron's Nest, Japanophile, Akitsu Quarterly, and The Independent Review*.

**Paula Kaufman** hails from West Virginia. Her work is published or forthcoming from *Quail Bell Magazine*, *Brittle Star*, *North Dakota Quarterly* and other publications. She eats nori out of the package and craves sweet things like black licorice laces all the time.

**Candice Kelsey's** poems have appeared in such journals as *Poet Lore*, *The Cortland Review*, *Sibling Rivalry Press*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Burningword*, and *Wilderness House* -- recently her nonfiction was nominated for a Pushcart Prize. She's also the author of a successful trade paperback parenting guide. An educator of 20 years' standing with her master's degree in literature from LMU, she lives in Los Angeles with her husband and three children.

**Hari Bhajan Khalsa's** poems have been published in *Poet Lore*, *Comstock Review*, *Sow's Ear*, *Roanoke Review*, *Tiger's Eye*, *Schuylkill Valley Journal* and *Phantasmagoria*, among others. She is the author of a chapbook, *Life in Two Parts* (Main Street Rag, 2010) and a book of poems, *Talk of Snow* (Walrus, 2015). She lives in Los Angeles with her husband, just waiting for the perfect dog to join the family.

**Casey Killingsworth's** poems have been accepted in *Kimera*, *Timberline Review*, *COG*, and other journals. He has a book of poems, *A Handbook for Water*, (Cranberry Press, 1995) as well as a book on the poetry of Langston Hughes, *The Black and Blue Collar Blues* (VDM, 2008). He graduated from Reed College.

**Dotty LeMieux's** work has appeared in *Rise Up Review*, *Hanging Loose*, *Fredericksburg Literary and Art Review*, *Tuck*, *The Poeming Pigeon*, *Painted Bride*, *Ekphrastic Review* and *Café Solo*, among others. She has had three chapbooks published: *Five Angels*, Five Trees Press; *Let us not Blame Foolish Women*, Tombouctou Books; *The Land*, Smithereens Press and was the editor of the *Turkey Buzzard Review*, in Bolinas California. Dotty studied at the New College of California Poetics Program and with poets Joanne Kyger, Edith Jenkins and Thomas Centolella. Currently, she runs political campaigns for progressive candidates and lives and writes in Marin County California.

**Karen Loeb's** fiction and poetry have appeared in *Hanging Loose*, *New Ohio Review*, *Fiction Southeast* and other magazines. Her poem "In the Science Museum" won the 2016 Wisconsin People and Ideas contest. She is co-editing the 2020 poetry calendar for the Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets and is Eau Claire, Wisconsin's current Writer in Residence.

**DS Maolalai** is a poet from Ireland who has been writing and publishing poetry for almost 10 years. His first collection, *Love is Breaking Plates in the Garden*, was published in 2016 by the Encircle Press, with *Sad Havoc Among the Birds* forthcoming from Turas Press in 2019. He has been nominated for Best of the Web and twice for the Pushcart Prize.

**Ken Massicotte** currently lives in Hamilton (The Hammer), Ontario. He has published in several journals, including *Wilderness House Literary Review*, *Gray Sparrow*, *Poetry Quarterly*, *Ginosko*, *Crack the Spine*, *Matador*, *Sleet*, and *Easy Street*.

**S. B. Merrow** lives in Baltimore, where she writes poems and works on the fine flutes of professional musicians. Recently, her work has been accepted by *Salamander*, *Nimrod International Journal*, *Tishman Review*, *Panoplyzine*, *Gyroscope Review*, and other journals. Two poems were selected by the *Naugatuck River Review* in their 2018 contest. Her chapbook, *Unpacking the China*, was the winner of QuillsEdge Press' 2016 chapbook competition.

**Cecil Morris** retired after 37 years of teaching English---mostly at Roseville High School in Roseville, California. Now he tries writing himself what he spent so many years teaching others to understand and enjoy. In his newly abundant spare time, he has been reading Sharon Olds, Megan Peak, Naomi Shihab Nye, and Morgan Parker. He enjoys ice cream too much and cruciferous vegetables too little. He has had a handful of poems published in *English Journal*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, *Poem*, *Dime Show Review*, *The American Scholar*, and other literary magazines.

**Joseph Murphy's** poetry has appeared in a wide range of online and print journals. His second collection of poems, *Having Lived*, was published in 2018; his first collection, *Crafting Wings*, in 2017. This year Shanti Arts is publishing third collection, *Shoreline of the Heart*. Murphy is a member of the Colorado Authors' League and for eight years (2010-2018) was poetry editor for an online literary publication, *Halfway Down the Stairs*.

**Karen Whittington Nelson** graduated from Ohio University and has worked as both a registered nurse and a public school teacher. She has lived most of her life in southeast Ohio. Her fiction and poetry can be found in the *Women Speak* chapbooks, *Pudding Magazine # 66* and *Common Threads*, 2018. She is a participant in the Women of Appalachia Project and also shares her work at venues throughout her rural community.

**Toti O'Brien** is the Italian Accordionist with the Irish Last Name. She was born in Rome then moved to Los Angeles, where she makes a living as a self-employed artist, performing musician and professional dancer. Her work has recently appeared in *Metafore*, *Gyroscope Review*, *Mizmor Anthology*, and *Parentheses*.

**Don Pomerantz** lives in New York City and Peekskill, New York, where he is a retired software developer and educator. His poems have appeared in a wide variety of American and International journals. His poetry collection, *The Moose of Felicity*, is forthcoming in late 2019.

**David B. Prather** received his MFA in creative writing from Warren Wilson College. His first collection, *We Were Birds*, is forthcoming from Main Street Rag Publishing. His poetry has appeared in many journals, including *Colorado Review*, *Seneca Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *The American Journal of Poetry*, *American Literary Review*, *Poet Lore*, and others. His work was also selected for one of Naomi Shihab Nye's anthologies, *what have you lost?*. Currently, David spends his time as an actor and a director at a local theater in Parkersburg, West Virginia.

**henry 7. reneau, jr.** writes words of conflagration to awaken the world ablaze, an inferno of free verse illuminated by his affinity for disobedience that commits a felony every day, like a chambered bullet of immolation that blazes from his heart, a phoenix-fluxed red & gold, exploding through change is gonna come to implement the fire next time. He is the author of

the poetry collection, *freedomland blues* (Transcendent Zero Press) and the e-chapbook, *physiography of the fittest* (Kind of a Hurricane Press), now available from their respective publishers. Additionally, he has self-published a chapbook entitled *13hirteen Levels of Resistance*, and his collection, *The Book Of Blue(s) : Tryin' To Make A Dollar Outta' Fifteen Cents*, was a finalist for the 2018 Digging Press Chapbook Series. His work has also been nominated for the Pushcart Prize.

**Robin Scofield** is the author of *Flow*, which was named Southwest Book of the Year by the Border Regional Library Association, and *Sunflower Cantos*, as well as a chapbook, *And the Ass Saw the Angel*. Her poems have appeared in *The Paris Review*, *Western Humanities Review*, *The Texas Observer*, *Theology Today*, *Onthebus*, *The 2River View*, *Pilgrimage*, *Cimarron Review*, and *The Warwick Review*. She has poems appearing in *West Texas Literary Review*, *Phantom Drift*, and *The Ocotillo Review*. She writes with the Tumblewords project and lives in El Paso, Texas, with her husband and her Belgian Shepherd dog, Winston.

**Penelope Scambly Schott** is a past recipient of the Oregon Book Award for Poetry. Recent books include *House of the Cardamom Seed* and *November Quilt*.

**Jacquelyn “Jacsun” Shah**, M.A., M.F.A., Ph.D., English literature and creative writing, has received grants from the University of Houston and the Houston Arts Alliance. Her poetry has appeared in journals/anthologies, such as *Cranky*, *Tar River Poetry*, *The Texas Review*, *Anon (Britain)*, *Rhino*, and *Vine Leaves Literary Journal* (Australia). A poetry chapbook, *small fry*, was published by Finishing Line Press (2017), a full-length poetry book, *What to Do with Red*, by LitFestPress (2018), and she's a recent winner of Literal Latté's Food Verse contest. A Persian cat Eliot is one love-of-her-life.

**Carol Smallwood**, Marquis Lifetime Achievement Award recipient, <https://wwlifETIMEachievement.com/2018/12/12/carol-smallwood/>, is a literary reader, judge, and interviewer. Her most recent book is *Visits and Other Passages* (Finishing Line Press, 2019).

**Dave Stacey** lives and works in London. Recent poems appear or are upcoming in *The Cabinet of Heed*, *Bonnie's Crew*, *Dodging The Rain*, *Eye Flash* and *Picaroon Poetry*. He can be found on Twitter at @yepdavestacey

**Carol Tyx** is the winner of the 2018 Willow Run Poetry Book Award for the forthcoming *Remaking Achilles: Slicing into Angola's History*. Her work has appeared most recently in *Concho River Review*, *Two Hawks, Rising to the Rim* (Brick Road Poetry Press), and Iowa City's *Poetry in Public*. When she isn't teaching writing and American literature at Mt. Mercy University, you might find her discussing books in prison, singing with the HeartSong community, or pulling weeds at the Sundog CSA.

**Sherre Vernon** is an educator, a poet and a believer in the mystical power of words. Sherre has written two award-winning chapbooks: *Green Ink Wings*, her postmodern novella, and *The Name is Perilous*, a 2008 poetry chapbook. Sherre's work is heartbreaking, richly layered,

lyrical and intelligent. She strives for linguistic efficiency by stepping outside of familiar phrases into a dynamic, shimmering grammar.

For **Akeith Walters**, words are the art of his heart. Some of his literary credits include publication in literary journals, most recently in the *Kallisto Gaia Press Journals* and *The Linnet's Wings Literary Journal*. He's a member of the Sun Poets Society of San Antonio, Texas. At the end of the day, he likes to sit with a mug of ice melting in bourbon, contemplating the difference between poetry and prose. The latter is more difficult to pen down, but sometimes when the room is still, the stories will hang around like cigarette smoke exhaled in frustration.

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

Our reading period for the Summer 2019 issue of *Gyroscope Review* opens April 1, 2019, and will close on June 7, 2019, **or when the summer issue is full**. Please note that we have shortened our reading period by one week due to an increase in submissions and the need for more time to produce our issues.

If you are a writer who loves to produce seasonal poetry, please keep in mind that we will only consider seasonal work in this upcoming reading period if it is somehow connected to summer. For everything else, please read our guidelines at [www.gyroscopecoreview.submittable.com/submit](http://www.gyroscopecoreview.submittable.com/submit). All submissions must come to us through Submittable. Do not send us work via email, snail mail, Facebook Messenger, Snapchat, singing telegram, sky writing, or any other creative method.

As always, watch our website, [gyroscopecoreview.com](http://gyroscopecoreview.com), and our social media (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) for ongoing articles, interviews, book reviews, and announcements of interest to the poetry community. And now you can find us on YouTube (*Editors at Gyroscope Review*).

Thank you for reading.