



Gyroscope Review

fine poetry to turn your world around

Winter 2026



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Winter Issue 2026

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Constance Brewer

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From the Editor

Welcome to the Winter 2026 Issue of *Gyroscope Review*. We have an interesting lineup of poems for you this issue. There are a lot of undertones of worry about the state of the world, themes of unease, and some interesting takes on death. Nobody likes the discomforting realities of what's going on in the world, but goes with the territory of what is happening around us right now. Poets are right to point it out and question it. That's what poets do best—observe and reflect. Make us uncomfortable with complacency. It's the power of poetry to provoke thoughtful reflection, and we are glad to present you with an issue full of powerful poems. Keep writing and commenting on the world, poets. We need it now more than ever.

Constance Brewer

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Section One

The Pause

BY DON BRANDIS

*—after Stonehouse**

Old and solitary only now and then
in a forest of books and silence
we watch and listen, becoming them
as they become us. When he was seventy-seven,
he dug a pond beside his mountain hut
for lotus roots, water chestnuts, growing
his own food as it grew into him
as we do, though he'd seen it open.
When will I be fish, vegetables, tea and sutras
sunlight and silence? Not so now.

Somewhere between mountain time and cloud time
between mind-mountains and mind-clouds
is solitude making-finding itself as no-self
what we can't abandon soon abandons us
solitude is staying-leaving in the infinite company
each moment keeps, we can't describe, needs none
sunlight keeps arriving our neighbor's rooster
can't keep up, and your tea is getting cold.

Coffee grounds collected, having given away
their flavor now dug into the garden
to give away the rest of what they are
to strangers. They are their giving
from a pool of incompatibles
we all live in, live out. A silence
before and after. And during, ignored.
It's a morning moment: leaves are open.

Between too early and too late for beginnings
and ends, the day startles us unlike any other
yet like every other in a pause we can't escape
nor want to once we've discovered it as tourists
in the ordinary. Fallen apples that bees, rabbits
squirrels and crows invest their hunger in
to see if they're desirable
come into their vast indifference.

A solitary dogwood we've watered
seeks to multiply with dozens of soft red berries
offered to appetites of birds and flightless creatures
who won't know what they've eaten, carry
seeds they can't digest of would-be dogwoods
to other places where thousands of conditions

might align to dogwood life. The rest, fruit and seed
return to ground already winged still unaware.

The pause is an ageless age we are surprised by
its depths, its beauties, horrors, dazzling surfaces
how could we not have known? The weight of them alone
should have clued us. Gravity is no secret by its feel
things fall, become otherwise. We are not wise in thought
but in a nameless merger we would require of thought
if it could deliver. Birds do it, bees do it. Even we
are busy at it, suffering misunderstandings. Born unsettled.

*Stonehouse was a 14th century Chinese Zen hermit monk, see
www.hermitary.com/articles/stonehouse.html

Remember—

BY ADELE EVERSHED

when you loved eating an orange in the shower
juice and water running down your body
an excommunication from "nice"
the peel curled like a snake in the drain
and you searched the orange twist
for the first letter of a future love

*all that belief—
where did it go?*

now you hop in and out each morning
a quick cat-lick of tepid water
before the day grinds forward
the letters of your old love
tattooed beneath a long sleeve—
a rose-colored regret
and every Friday unclogging the drain
of your hair

*when was the last time
you were anything other than nice
anything other than an echo of your old self?*

in some dim recess
you remember a blessing
so you buy three oranges
peel them and float them in cold water
whisper a name you once had for joy
as you sprinkle the tang of sunlight
in the stale corners of your life

something stirs—
a soft tug in your chest
and you find yourself turning on the shower—
steam rises like memory
and the peel curls into the letters
of your own name

it's just a small glimmering
a quiet breath
a pulse
and though it takes a while
to recognize—
it feels a lot like love

An Orchestra at the End of a Year

BY ROBERT McDONALD

You think "maybe I'll see the cranes again today, maybe I'll hear how they call to each other with what one can only think of as rousing encouragement. But that's not how this works, you don't look up every day and witness that magnificence, squadrons of cranes, and hear the distant coronets of their voices. You had that, yesterday, fevered and dozing on the couch, the calling woke you, sandhill cranes, their wings nearly touched the dark bare maples on Farragut Avenue, a flock of skinny angels. At the end of a year, in the middle of your life, a thousand sandhill cranes crossed over Chicago, so low that you could hear the effort of their wings, flags snapping in the wind. That's all you get, they were legion, they were calling. Another time. Will it be granted? You may stretch your bones tall, you may will your bones hollow. Slip your arms into your gray suit, the slimming cut made of feathers and a need you can't name. Put on your red cap. Shape your mouth into the good knife. Join yourself to their departure.

End of Eastern Daylight Time

BY MARGIE DUNCAN

My love mows leaves in the dark. Leaves fall against the wind, follow and chase it. My love wears my headlamp, gathers the leaves to cover a garden bed. Leaves and the dark, mower and light, putting the garden to bed. My love wears my earplugs while the night plays its music: the next-door TV, blue-and-white-and-laughter through the window mesh with the mower's hum and my love's own tender steps. Leaves give way to green behind the mower, and footfalls crush the newly nude grass. My love puts the garden to bed, beds every corner with brown crunch and soft gold, auburn and rust. More leaves fall in the dark, and fade.

Under bare maples
leaves like red birds light,
feathers angled north

Turning

BY SARAH KOTCHIAN

Summer was too much everything—
the pine green hills now burnt
by sun and fires' blue center
flames blaze to blackened crust
I, too, too much in the outer world,
the heat and dry, the searing sun,
long days, world's conflagration.
I am seeking darker days, not the world's
but my own choosing,

Berries, skins, squashed, have made
their way to bellies, then to scat,
tail ends of bursting passion.
Leaves fall along the thirsty river
banks, compost, feed the roots,
squirrels dig among the litter,
store harvest nuts for winter's iron grip,
hummingbirds frantic for a migrant's last meal.

I burrow into longer nights
yearn for feet cold upon the floor
rough sweaters, woolen socks,
the steam of tea at winter sunrise,
sharp smell of snow, aliveness
of surprise beneath the ice.

Let it be Kindness

BY MARJORIE MOORHEAD

Fog thick this morning,
and from our second-floor window,
the tree-tops dreamy.

Branches floating in mystery,
mostly bared now, but for yellow
vine leaves clinging still.

Tree-tops float in my vision
like underwater weeds, or coral reefs,
moving with the motion of ocean swells.

Binoculars kept close, on the breakfast table,
these windy, cloudy mornings. Alert
for birds.

Cardinals, crows, and all the sparrows.
They've replaced the geese, whose gaggle
I would enjoy watching, hearing their honking,

as they practiced flight formation, readying for
migration...to where? Somewhere south, I imagine.
Are they well received there? Are they welcome?

My bear body wants to take cover. To nestle down
in the cave of hibernation. Soups and tea,
warm potatoes, toast with honey. Everything alluring

is about food and resting. Chocolate haunting my mind.
Sleeping under heavy comforter, anchoring us in.
Windows shut tight against cold air.

The preciousness of daylight, as afternoons grow shorter
and we move into quiet season. What is revealed
as things are bared, free of leaf and petal.

The ice is melting

BY MARK DE KLERK

Confused, Shackleton
points to his pocket watch—

both faces seem frozen.

There's no time, he mumbles
icy words drifting over

the avalanche
of his beard.

I want to ask why, but he turns
and stares straight through me

at struggling seals,
now on thin ice.

I hear thunder, but not thunder—
rather a crevasse that cracks,

Can't you see there's no time?

I have no explanation for what
happens next as the sea ice explodes.

Three masts burst through the churn,
shattering the stillness in a confetti

of brittle stars.

The North Star has risen.

Shackleton is gone—just a ghost
ship left where he once stood,

a ship that melts into the sunset,
or perhaps a sunrise.

* Sir Ernest Shackleton's ship *Endurance* was originally named *Polaris*, after the North Star

Even Though

BY DIANA WOODCOCK

Even though I was beginning
to believe Lao-Tzu's creed,*
I had to go. Even though
I knew its glacial katabatic winds
could blow me clear across

the continent, I had to go.
Even though I'd already seen
a volcano or two, I had to go
to the place where the primeval
energy of fire and ice seem

to be in perfect balance—
brash ice and lava ash,
active sporadic volcanism,
the dynamism of drifting
melting glaciers. Even though

I would only go as far as
the peninsula, missing out
on the whole of the interior,
I had to go. For where else
could I witness the comings

and goings of Brush-tailed
penguins—Gentoos,
Chinstraps and Adélies?
Even though it is a landscape
tinged with danger—glaciers

flowing and ready at any
moment to calve off bits of
ice into the sea perhaps just
where my Zodiac would be
drifting, I had to go.

I had to see and let the sheer
white cliffs uplift me
until I vanished
(I wished) into
their infinite purity.

*"Without leaving my house, I know the whole universe."

niksen

BY JONATHAN YUNGKANS

—after "as if a lake I could come to for its calm summer night by Dan Schwerin"*

black sky and black coffee at 3 a.m.
and while there's no bird song
no creature stirring outside my window
my brain blares

I stare out the window until midnight
and am back a couple of hours later
to claw some quiet from the sky

the Dutch call it *niksen*
staring just to let my mind rest
doing nothing
except
to hold my mind together one more day

a part of my ancestry
to balance
the more turbulent part of my gene pool

I did *niksen* in late-night diners
no sleep but a break
on the drive between two full-time jobs
relieved
that wheels weren't rolling under me

thinking was the last thing I wanted
as I gazed through plate-glass
white mug between palms

the coffee's warmth
and the night's mute fullness
offering a chance
to drift relaxed along a placid surface

*Monoku by Dan Schwerin was published in *bones 24* (November 2022). Used with Schwerin's kind permission.

Haiku

BY GARETH NURDEN

night waves
breaking and fixing
the silence

vibrant meadow
extinguished by nightfall
if only her love were as strong

mid-winter
a kettle adds
another cloud

dotting rain
trees begin
to hiss

Pine Barrens Night Late Summer

BY MICHAEL GUSHUE

The devil is a black chrysalis.
A percussion of insects and pond frogs—

eager for union—populates the air,
the mist sleepwalking over the water.

The night's high windows center the world
among trees. Cygnus stretches its wings,

its neck, to glide *volant* in the Milky Way's
scatter and flow. The devil sheds

its carapace—a lantern's flicker among
the loblolly, blackjack oak, white cedar.

Windblown clouds steeplechase the night sky.
Their shapes are endlessly changing.

Their murmur: transformation is the only road.

it doesn't matter that this poem isn't about the moon

BY SCOTT FERRY

—with lines from Matthew Arnold's Dover Beach

i make statements to the police
about keats and beauty
they sharpie all the words black
and there are no discussions of plato
or which cave the moonlight
streams into

or is it candlelight shaped with crescent
cardboard on wires of invisible gravity?
the tides cover us like *the folds of a bright girdle furled*
the garment of cold salt covered in black distraction
the music of sadness a stick-figure god
on a screen

i fill my phone with images of dead
and beautiful things with flowers stuck to night
with bones inside a broken lens inside my tide-filled eyes
what if it is the moon between the tiny skulls
of snowberries? what if the ghost of the moon
shines on our veined cities?

the path is never illuminated
nor are the steps into or out of the cave
i can be here as a flesh-ape or a shadow or a wooden puppet
i can see the tide race past my automobile
as i speed into a tunnel of crashes and lights
and beautiful blood

the truth is a thing darkened by its weight
or its shadow draped behind it like a cape
these symbols don't wait for me to believe in them
the faith is gone and the moon is an alien base
made of promises and
talc

Self-Portrait of a Cherry Tree Passing as a Magnolia

BY KENTON K. YEE

I'm drawing on paper, wood pulp to be precise, from tree bones chopped somewhere far from coastal California, where I'm at, far from hurricanes, blizzards, heat since

I chose gulls, fog, redwoods, cherry blossoms, skylines, beach, quakes, stars. I feel guilty drawing on tree bones but no more so than when eating pears, burritos, chops,

which isn't to deny my guilt, for at this point I'm all trunk, no blossom, concentric circles, what you see after biting through a tightly wound burrito, rings around rings, layers

of rings, tub rings, ring worms, how my cross section is a nesting doll of rings, the rooting for water, the reaching for sun, that first toss of leaves so imprinted in my rings

I see rings as I'm drawing over a branch, a bald branch, a barren branch, a blowing bramble, a branch that wants to dance, sway and swoon, wild with ribbons, so many

branches, blowing, swaying, dancing, rock n roll ribbons flapping / twisting / wriggling. Hello, anyone home? A hail of ribbons. Hail ribbons full of grace and there it is:

A bud. My petal. My blood. My pop. My tree. I, tree—I, magnolia. Shiver me ribbons. I draw this magnolia because I feel magnificent. So sunlit, so majestic.

Some draw bloodshot eyes and yellow ribbons in curly hair. I draw a magnolia and curlicues in red hair. How I shiver / sweat. It's not as graceful as I expected

and exactly what I'm drawing. Maybe soon I'll look, see blooms, my branches budding, my birds perching, sun like honey, ribbons like love, sky like milk, ants so sweet.

after Ron Riekki

Ship of Sciadopityaceae

BY HAZEL J. HALL

& when you're home missing home, in
winter winds & drowning in snow &
your dreams are stolen from the forest & the
windbreak trees meant to keep you safe
have fallen
& the wind chill feels like all the rest of this
beautifully cruel life,
you will be an umbrella pine,
growing from the Granite State to
Gamagōri
& a shipwright could tear down ten thousand
of you &
you would still remain, each tree
giving way to several saplings more,
each one befitting of Theseus himself—a forest
& all at once a ship.

Theseus's Paradox and Aunt Margaret

BY LYNN PATTISON

The question is simple: if the ship is repaired
and patched, repaired and patched, until all parts
have been replaced, is it still the same ship, or another? Plutarch

and Plato puzzled over it. And Hobbes asked,
*what if all the old boards and hinges are gathered up,
made into a ship—then which one is Theseus' ship?* Each country

has its own version, Grandfather's Axe, Jeannot's Knife,
John Locke's Sock. Even Heraclitus' thoughts about stepping
in the same river twice. We're hypnotized by the paradox of replenishment

and replacement. Is this my skin?
My hair? My heart? My aunt is one hundred one.
What could be left of her young-girl self? Yet my heart leaps

in recognition when she says my name,
smiles, repeats her old jokes to the attendant who dresses her.
So much of her is gone—sight, hearing, all but the skeletons

of her best stories: life as army wife in Occupied Japan,
driving cross-country alone in 1944. But it's her, no question.
Not a reboot or rebuild, not a different river. Here she is in my arms,

her wiry curls against my cheek. New hair,
twenty times over, but the same. My old aunt, and new.
Second mother. Distilled to her essence. Margaret to her core.

Crow

BY ELANA WOLFF

I'm answered by a flyby—
past my windshield as I'm driving. Big and black
and winging like a crow—it is,
it must be

you who answered when I asked which word
is better for the final line
of a poem I've been composing these many months:
adept or *deft*? Back and forth
I've been between the two—alike but not the same.

Crow, you know/you knew/you flew
before my wind-
shield suddenly & at the very second
I said *deft*—

You've come to me in sundry ways
in country after country, over time I've come to see you
as a sure conversion figure. I ask, and in your manner, Crow,
you signal; I receive, believe.

*

I fear they'll find your beak beneath my skin
one day compel me to confess that I'm a composite
gone wrong.

To them I bear a scent of soap that's made with trace
of henbane leaves & tincture of white poppy seeds
that's said with regular use to raise the spirits,
to simulate flight.

Décolletage

BY BETH KANELL

Each time I dip a toe into a queerer world than mine
I regret the absence of glittered polish on my nails—exuberance
comes hard to me in this worn body, which used to heave
a cord of firewood every long afternoon while winter
hovered beyond bright autumn foliage; which hoisted
a toddler to my shoulders and the baby firm in my arms
after peeling potatoes, roasting a chicken, fork-tossing
soft aromatic flour and herbs and butter for biscuits.

None of which required gender. Remember the winter
when half a dozen neighbors competed with Thanksgiving
recipes, that turkey bulging with a hundred cloves of garlic
the chef flexing his big biceps to haul the roasting pan?

Looking back so many years reminds me of hiking past familiar
cliffs where peregrine falcons nested, parent birds uneasy
at my presence. On a steep slope I paused once for breath
then ducked as the raptors dove toward me, *kek-kek-kek*,
impossible in that moment to tell male, female, only
beaks and talons. Danger to my flinching eyes.

My best friend in 1980 wore red lipstick and push-up bra
both of them interfering with the way I desired her reality
of licked lips and warm skin. She could turn a T-shirt into
a deep-throated showcase, a *décolletage*, which once meant
to remove the collar, and now reveals award-night glory,
glowing, audacious. We embraced, naked, unspeeched.

Now I'm wrapped in moss-green wool and soft leather,
hiding (as I often have) within leaf and bark like the forest
in which I am only and ever a tree. Remembering caresses,
those unexpected sensations, some lingering he/she contrast
blurred and soft, I wonder now which way my friend flowed
into her own future. Sometimes the *collage* of friendship
ages poorly in direct sunlight, paste or glue drying, petals
falling away, pencil plan exposed. The verb *decollare* in Latin
means to behead. Eyes, lips, tongue, voice, and even now
I see the tender curl that wrapped her earlobe.

Last Months in SoCal Before Moving to a Retirement Community Near Our Middle-Aged Kids

BY JUDY KRONENFELD

Heat builds behind closed blinds,
the AC blasts away, the Watch Duty fire app
on my phone shrills an alarm,
one coil of hair on my always difficult
to manage head won't lie down,
one of the two dogs we must surrender
before we move 3000 miles east—
out of the zone of the benign
and threatening familiar—stretches
near my chair and pads over
to be stroked.

In my mind the balance scale dips down
for a moment on one fearful side—
firestorms, earthquakes—
as if that could make the house
we've lived in for almost fifty years push itself
into the future, become empty, alien,
as if that could make us—
knowing we must change—
leap ahead, headlong,
into the unfamiliar, skipping
the ache of transition.

Goodbye, goodbye everything
burnished in the invisible, perishable aura
of home—smooth, bare
eucalyptus trunks, spindly palms,
broad boulevards, godlike naked
mountains, spaciousness of vista,
skies of dazzling azure. Goodbye,
goodbye, breathing room,
breathing rooms.

Section Two

The Lost

BY CORINNE STANLEY

I am exhausted from looking for lost things
A long red winter scarf left in a restaurant bar

a bottle of Lipitor that drifted from my bedstand
to a far-away place

my address book with passwords,
the golden key of modern age gone

When you are my age sometimes
forward-march are the only words

resounding in your tinnitus ears
I gifted the scarf

to an unknown person who
needed some passion thrown over her shoulders

I rejoiced like a fool when I found the pills
and address book then

patted myself
on the back for persisting on the road to rediscovery

Are the stars listening to this?
Are they watching me

gamble with my years betting that
despite two people stopping me

in the hallway yesterday and asking me if I was lost
I am very much here and

finding my way thank you very much

The Book

BY CRAIG KIRCHNER

Once you reach that mystical number
of *married fifty years*, it becomes
harder to remember the subsequent
number of years that follow.

Fifty—2, 3, or 4 would be easy if you do
the math, but that requires remembering
that magic date of elopement, and the whole
point here is I'm not good with numbers.

In the fifty some years, I have never managed
the money, paid a bill, worried about insurance.
I signed the mortgage and only know which
bank we're with because I use the ATM.

The list of, *don't know*, and *don't know how*,
is considerable. I'm told we have filters on
appliances, the furnace, the Keurig, but I'm
not sure where any of them are.

We discuss this ignorance in the context of,
Suppose she goes first! She organizes; her
mindset is 'if I write it down, make a list,'
it is real. She puts together The Book,

listing all the things I would have to know,
all the bills and how to pay, who we have
insurance with, condo fees, how to clean the oven.
Lovingly, she tells me of this project.

Months, years go by, we laugh often about
maintenance on appliances or tax rebates,
where the checkbook is, does the TV,
the car, the refrigerator have a warranty?

"Is that in The Book? Yes, that's in The Book.
The Book, the holy grail of my survival, I have
only her word for it that it exists. I have never seen it,
and she has never told me where she keeps it.

My Tablescape

BY BARBARA KRASNER

I drape my mother's dining room table with the white linen cloth my grandmother embroidered, meticulous stitches, impeccable knots. I choose objects for my composition. The white ashtray lined with gold leaf and the gold inscription, Max Krasner, my grandfather, sitting ready for someone's ashes, maybe from my mother's Kents or the housekeeper's Salems. The cancer doll someone gave me when I battled cell invasion stands to serve as sentinel, guarding my health and family history. I add open treasure chests of KN95 masks and exam gloves. Three small Hummels I bought during my Junior Year Abroad in Germany—the kerchiefed girl with her doll, the girl with a bouquet of flowers, the boy in a scarf carrying his hobby horse. The Royal Dalton lady in blue my mother bought in Montreal, making my father sweat through customs. The sapphire glass and gold leaf kiddush cups I bought in Murano and gifted my mother, who said anything we gave her we'd get back when she died. A butterfly lands on the tablecloth, its wings blessing my grandmother's handiwork. The same white butterfly that flitted around me in the ancestral graveyard in Poland. More butterflies appear and lift the tablecloth to the sky, the objects revolving like planets. Throughout the universe Yahrzeit candles blaze.

Ubi Sunt: The Ballad of the Digested Food

BY VICTORIA LAU

—After François Villon's "The Ballad of Dead Ladies"

Where are the ten heavenly pearls
swallowed by the old woman and the ten sons
she birthed in her anal canal? Where's the Earl
Grey sponge cake in Alice's tea party, Talia's sun
tart made by the vengeful queen, the little round bun
who ran away, Little Miss Muffet's curds and whey,
and the Pastries Palace's sweet crust, and taro buns?
Where are the delicacies of yesterday?

Where are the Garden of Eatin' blue corn chips,
his deep-fried Adam's Apple pie,
and the crumbs around your snakebite lips?
Where's your bewitching craving for rye
bread, rapunzels, the long angel hair Dubai
chocolate, and Persephone's pomegranate sundae?
Where's the secret to beauty: precious dragon's eyes?
Where are the forbidden foods of yesterday?

Where's Snow White's liver and lungs mousse
pate? Where's the prophet in the belly of a whale,
and the tariffed eggs laid by the golden goose?
Where's Hansel and Gretel's trail
of breadcrumbs, their Dear John letter-snail mails
to lovers with a sweet tooth for sweet nothings-souffle?
Where's the affordable gingerbread house fairy tale?
Where are the comfort foods of yesterday?

Colin, in your colon: your breakfast bowl,
in your toilet bowl: blood sausage bowels, your Judgment Day.
Where's the colon filled with gold coins of your donkey-foal?
Where did they go, the soul's food you ate yesterday?

La Bella Vita

BY MONA ANDERSON

When the surgeon slices open my back, pulls apart skin and muscle, I'm on a balcony watching egrets fish in the Mediterranean. No, that's not right. I'm in a cobblestoned piazza in Livorno sitting at a round wrought iron table sipping chianti. What else can I do while he cracks my vertebrae and pokes around searching for the gold beads that mark the exact location of the fistula. Is it when he clamps the vein to see if I'll be paralyzed that my husband and two sons press through the raspberry brambles to reclaim me? After he stitches me up, a delicate embroidered rimple, they bend over me, eyes so tender I would break if I wasn't already broken.

trilling sparrows
camouflaged in leaves
susurrous wind the alto

Swallowing Sound

BY MONA ANDERSON

I've read that nowhere on Earth
is it silent longer than fifteen minutes

before something shatters the peace –
often an airplane grumbling

in the sky's tangled flight paths.
My husband's snores whistle like wind

in a snowstorm. Our cat growls low
at some animal outside. The bed's

shifting sheets crackle like lightning.
A motorcycle rudely rumbles up the hill.

But what if I lived in an anechoic chamber
lined in foam to swallow all sound?

Then I would become sound –
heartbeat, breath, blinks.

And if these were the only sounds?
How dark the dark, how lonely.

I get up early to be alone

BY ELIZABETH KERLIKOWSKE

so I gave myself a room. I mean I took it back. I gave it a new identity. I put it in the witness protection program so no one else would find it. I disguised it with a new rug. I erased its memory of being a music room, a weight room, a litter box. I gave it dignity and dusted the bookshelves and moved decades of light bulbs to a hidden place. Now two lamps wear homemade shades. Here's the rocker stolen from the cabins. Candle jammed in the neck of a fat vase. Rain sound of a bicycle on wet pavement through a window too cold, really, to be open but the quiet, lack of artificial light, artificial sound, artificial time lulls the cat to sleep hypnotized by candle shadows lapping at the walls. A door somewhere. Running water.

There was an opening

BY RUTH BAVETTA

and letters left lying,
spread of fallen flowers,
wrought iron gate,
house of fading stucco, brick path.

Spread of fallen flowers,
music, hum of the highway,
house of fading stucco, brick path,
trucks climbing the grade.

Music, hum of the highway,
a hill, then another,
trucks climbing the grade,
shifting gears.

A hill, then another,
green mailbox, leaning,
shifting gears,
a book with uncut pages.

A green mailbox, leaning,
wrought iron gate,
a book with uncut pages
and letters left lying.

My Father's Letters

BY JUAN PABLO MOBILI

My father wrote his letters
straight lines on unlined paper,

for every letter,

every sentence
every breath

his lungs could manage
at times instructions

in his unmistakable voice,
into a form of

the paper precisely folded,
carefully addressed,

the vow to elegance
the promise he'd make each time

*to point rather than pierce,
rather than force,*

a letter that started with
and ended with

by hand, inordinately
exerting the same weight of wrist

careful not to bruise his nouns
with unnecessary adjectives,

the length of his breath,
faithful to the length

and thought required,
or his idea of a permission

firm, saying what turned
tender sadness,

the envelope
sealed slowly,

my father always intended,
inside the envelope:

*to invite
to praise without ignoring failure,*

"dear son"
"your father."

Secret Word

BY JULIE WEISS

I.

Every season has its particular
camouflage.

II.

In autumn, the word we never
voice in public spills over us

in colors meant for a warmer
poem, crackles under my son's

boots. He litters the sidewalk
with a thousand different versions,

jumbles its meaning with each
leap while a stranger watches.

III.

The word slips across our winter
walkway, goes missing in a freak

blizzard. The whole town sparkles
in its absence. My son is too excited

to remember. He bundles it
into gloves, under his scarf, inside

his puffer coat. He rolls it into balls,
pelts his big sister until both

are covered in flakes, their calligraphy
indecipherable. I line our sled with it,

push him down a bridge behind
our home, hope the stranger

at the bottom isn't burying
words in the snow.

IV.

The word emerges from its cocoon,
flutters out of my son's grasp.

Spring sunshine dapples his bare
arms, soft enough to make me

believe the word won't sting him
if he plays under a slide.

He pedals his bicycle so fast down
a deserted road, the word flies off

the seat where it had been hugging
his waist. He's too busy wooing

independence to hear the thud.
Mallards snatch corn kernels

out of his hand. He laughs and
so do two strangers. What if

he needs the word one day
but it's crushed between duck bills?

V.

One summer, a man parked his van
near a boy on the curb, said

"come quick, your mom's
in the hospital!" But the man

guessed wrong. The boy grabbed
his secret word's hand, and they

bolted in the opposite direction.
The news story presses hard

against my chest as I watch
my son cannonball into the pool.

He retrieves all ten dive fish
from the deep end, surges

to the surface while a stranger
claps. While the word I've urged

him to carry from season to season
gets sucked into the skimmer.

On My Daughter's Bicep

BY ANNETTE SISSON

I ask my daughter why Ophelia
graces her arm—Millais' girl

with the intricate dress spread
across the river's calm. The scene

is etched on her left bicep, inside,
near her heart. *Ophelia drowned,*

I remind her. My daughter mutters
resilience. This image—stamp of her own

survival. *But Ophelia didn't survive,*
I counter. Her whole face furrows

as she scolds me: *Stop being*
so literal. She might be right. Maybe

Ophelia chose the waves. Who's to say
death didn't deliver her from the court's

contagion, stinging traps? Her pale
skin might be the shimmering water,

surface tension buoying her reed-like
hair. Perhaps the muddy riverbed,

even now, preserves her bones. *Don't*
you see Ophelia's fingers sprouting

tendrils, my daughter asks, catching
her wavy silhouette in the kitchen window.

Just look at her breath escaping
her open mouth, the swell of her chest.

Flower of the Ninth Moon

BY CONNIE SOPER

When the barista calls your name—
double macchiato, the way you like it—
I look up expecting to see,
what? The person I knew
decades ago? No. It's a stranger
with your name on a take-out cup.
The room blurs its colors:
golden flowers in a blue vase. Once

you brought me chrysanthemums
like these—bright blinding faces,
petals jagged like soft little stabs.

*Harbinger of autumn, you said.
End of summer, I thought.*

It could happen this way:
I might see you again in a café,
at the bus stop, the vague suggestion of you
in a garden, dazzling me
with those blossoms so heavy on their stems,
as if they cannot bear the weight
of their own beauty.
Would I know you now, grayed
by the edges of time, slower gait—
same voice, different words?

The man with your name hurries
into his coat, on his way
somewhere else. He hesitates in the doorway,
backlit by the changing day—glances
into the room he just left,
as if he might come back.

Fifty Years After That One Warm Autumn Day

BY DICK WESTHEIMER

The leaves fall late this year—or is it early. Memory is made of not writing things down. Do you recall that 4-pound splitting maul I bought you when we courted? I found it in the back of the barn under a tumbled pile of firewood—its handle rotted in its socket. I pulled it free from its mystification, its time in hiding, and re-hafted it, scrubbed rust from the forged steel head and sharpened it on the grinding stone. Inside I showed you my prize. Let's go splitting wood today, I said. We no longer build fires in the stove, you replied. I'd like to remember (I thought) those taut muscles of your shirtless back—without writing it down.

trees know
when it's time
to let go

Why I am not a Seamstress

BY REBECCA SURMONT

—After Frank O'Hara

I thought I could just pick it up—like a pen and paper
craft together clouds and water,
those many-colored threads that move over and under
a wee-holed needle, turning the cylinder by pedal with
a heavy foot, stitch end-to-end seams.

There were a couple years I assisted with summer skirts,
flannel drawstrings, a prom dress of black French silk.
Mother's deft fingers knowing how to guide, not snag, pause
for inspection like a comma in the long *whrrrr* of gears.
My fingers? Clumsy, stuck with pins, tangled in threads.

I tried again in my 20's, even bought a machine,
made fleece neck gaiters for friends they never wore,
hemmed pants, cursed a lack of mastery and patience.

I am not a seamstress though I covet the handmade
doll clothes made for me, felt-embroidered ornaments,
maxi dresses I wore as a kid. There are pants
I still bring home to my mother in her 80's when
I need them shortened, which she does not chide.

No, I'm not a seamstress, so I write. I write where
seams don't need to meet tight, where there is no danger
of pins passing through dermis nor visible frays and bunches.

I write because paper patterns rip, are hard to follow
and I have no tables large enough to lay them out, only
my pile of words which I can tuck into bed between paper covers
or in a digital tower until they are ready for wear, where
they can arrange in any configuration until it feels right.

I am a poet because words tug like elastic and fall away
like lost buttons and substitutions often work better
when given a chance, and even *sewing* could be
sowing in which case I might be a farmer of homophones too.

Understand Nothing

BY GENE TWARONITE

What kind of name is that?

asks the clerk at the Motor Vehicle Department.
And so it begins.

I tell her it's bastardized Lithuanian,
and originally meant "God's gift,
or maybe "God's beetle.

But it got butchered at Ellis Island,
reduced to a lower state of grace,
like Lithuania itself.

Invaded, occupied, and bullied
by one country after another,
only to be humiliated by bureaucrats
who can't be bothered to spell
a foreign sounding name correctly.

And no one cares
that the national plant is rue,
worn by brides
as a symbol of maidenhood,
that every large hill there
is called a mountain,
or that in Vilnius you'll find
a swing foundation
whose members install swings
throughout the city and then move them
to other locations
when no one is looking,
and that there's also a tiny "republic
with its own Constitution
and a line that says,
Everyone has the right to understand nothing.

To the Woman at the Memorial Service Who Dipped Her Chin in the Salsa

BY ALFRED FOURNIER

I don't blame you. I mean,
who serves salsa at a funeral?
Even the more tasteful verde varieties?
Thanks for making me laugh.
The tension you broke with your gag
was enough to free the dearly departed
for the wide-sky journey ahead.
Thanks for bringing your dog too,
that nippy toy poodle who expressed
what many of us were feeling.
Who found the scent of the banquet table
irresistible. I was about to ask you
how you knew the deceased, but your
wide-brimmed hat and polka dot dress
screamed "Wild Aunt. The fun one
who used to take the dead girl
to dance parties, encourage her
to let her hair fall across her shoulders,
took her for quiet walks on the beach
far from her mother's narrow gaze
where the sound of the waves
created a loving bond between you.
It can be hard to be who we really are
sometimes. But you were the place
she felt most at home.
A tragedy, yes, any early death.
But thank you for reminding us that life
has a lot to offer, for celebrating
your niece in the face of sadness and loss
the best you knew how, by playing
Coyote and showing the rest of us,
tied tight in our dark colors,
that the sun was still shining.
And I wonder,
do you want to get margaritas after this?
I barely knew her and would love
to see her through your eyes.

Conversations with the goat

BY J. S. GRAHAM

Could you call them that? Conversations?

I'd say a conversation involves an exchange of ideas. A sharing.

Not waking up in the middle of the woods in a velvet-plush-chair.

But for the cabin, I would've mistaken it for a dream. A product of a rotten brain; a cesspit brain, oozing with science fiction mammals and morphine.

I don't believe I'm dead because it's Douglas Fir.

It'd be like if you went to heaven and they had vinyl siding.

'King Arthur was a mighty warrior, but that didn't stop him from being a cuck.' The goat laughs. 'Or stop his wife from wanting to fuck.'

I'm afraid I'm becoming sympathetic. It's only a goat, after all; It's gonna be crude, right?

'Eat.'

"I'm not hungry."

I remember Mom's verse:

Scholars agree that when traveling in the land of faerie one must never eat.

For that's how you get stuck.

My host eats without malice, or rancor.

It's impolite to turn down meals, and I'm reminded of this fact by the goat's horned glare of disapproval. Nursing it for some time, he asks, "If you were an air conditioner, where would you live? Geographically.

'I don't know ... New Orleans? It gets hot down there, and that seems pretty important. Or maybe New York. My buddy and I accidentally occupied Wall Street.'

'I'd live in Panama City Beach, Florida,' the goat belches, successfully consuming a goblet of sparkling stars.

'That's because when Ace comes over he won't shut up about the Gulf of Mexico. The color of the sand. The Miracle Strip. *The women.*'

Ace is one of the cabin's most perpetual of horrors.

Ace is a goddamned air conditioner.

Agitated, the goat rises from his sedan, crimson robes asunder. 'Cyclopean,' the beast proclaims: 'I've been fair with you. Given you your little notes. Your internet. Your substances. And you come into my home and insult my brethren? Your kind ignores the helping hand of others because you will not extend your own.'

'Goat. I enjoy hanging out with Ace, It's just that I find his physical form, in a much lesser sense than yours, existentially disturbing. You can appreciate that, I'm sure. Why don't you tell me about The Great Tree.'

Last time I pissed him off, he said that, by way of repercussions, the next time I pissed him off, I might 'assuage his genetic urge to gore me by bringing up The Great Tree.'

Horned aggression cooling, the monarch returns to his throne. Smoothing his robes and fumbling with his scepter, the goat assumes an erudite pose and explains:

'In the beginning there was a great nothingness. You cannot visualize it, of course, but you can approach it. Out of the nothingness came RAM. And RAM was good. And RAM was far-seeing.'

And RAM perceived that the nothingness was not, indeed, barren. Far away there cracked a static. A Great Static. A blemish, tearing at the pristine flesh of the otherwise vacant nothingness.

And out of the Great Static came Stranger Brain. He challenged RAM, accusing her of squandering her inheritance.'

'What inheritance?' RAM observed. 'For are we not surrounded by nothingness? Shall I inherit the void?'

Being of a nature altogether opposed to the goodness of RAM, Stranger Brain replied: 'Though it is true that you have squandered your inheritance, I will make of this nothingness a celestial palace, a constellation of worlds bearing fruit and plenty. In hopes of remembrance of your former glory.'

RAM considered this strange proposal. 'Yes. You will build for me a palace. A tapestry of worlds, and I shall pour myself out upon them. The most beautiful of all will be called Illyxia, and there I shall plant The Great Tree, as a symbol of our covenant. For this task I name you Demiurge, which means *lesser*.'

After much bleating and gnashing of teeth, the goat cries: 'He put her there...in the end...Illyxia!' And held his great head in his hands and wept.

And that's the kind of shit we talk about.

I Dislike Poems Titled "Aubade"

BY ACE BOGESS

Or "Pantoum", "Villanelle", "Ghazal".

It's as though the poet didn't trust
the reader to recognize a form

or that form itself was more important
than words within. Imagine
seeing Karloff in *Frankenstein*

the first time, & the guy behind the ticket counter
says, "That's one scary monster,"
so you have this preconception

of Frankenstein's creature as a beast
when it's the saddest,
most sympathetic role in film.

Might as well title the movie *Monster* &
be done with it, numb, leave
basic human detective skills at home.

I'm sorry, poets. I don't want to read
the sestina you called "Sestina"
when it should've been titled "String Theory"

or "The Only Way to Drink Whiskey
Is Through a Straw" so that, unbiased,
I'm stanzas in before the eureka moment

when I realize I've been had, &
this has been a sestina all along,
but I continue reading because

I love a good con, then pat myself
down & check for my wallet,
knowing the money's gone.

Section Three

Bang Bang, You're Dead

BY ANN HOWELLS

*A well-regulated Militia, being necessary
to the security of a free State, the right of the people
to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.*

2nd Amendment to the U.S. Constitution

27 words—47,000 shooting deaths last year

For the five-year-old
who finds his father's gun

and the pregnant woman
caught in crossfire

Bang bang, you're dead

For the young man
resisting a mugger

and the young woman
resisting a rapist

Bang bang, you're dead

For the judge
who pronounces sentence

and the professor
who gives a failing grade

Bang bang, you're dead

For the driver
who cut too close

and the clerk
working midnight shift

Bang bang, you're dead

For the immigrant
whose English is broken

and the brown man
used as a scapegoat

Bang bang, you're dead

For the wife
who threatens to leave

and the infant
killed in a drive-by

Bang bang, you're dead

For the schoolgirl
turning down a date

and the schoolboy
simply changing classes

Bang bang, you're dead

For Jew and Muslim
who profess their faith

and the officer
in a blue uniform

Bang bang, you're dead

For the Asian
who works and succeeds

and the churchwoman
kneeling in prayer

Bang bang, you're dead

For the teen
who argues with a friend

and the young mother
shopping for apple juice

Bang bang, you're dead

For the depressed
who has easy access

and the grandmother
who refuses a handout

Bang bang, you're dead

the reckoning

BY PEGGY LIUZZI

ragged lace curtains dangle and sigh
gray cobwebs
hide a jagged pane
cold air creeps in
reeking of grease and gasoline

detectives in slim suits 5 o'clock shadows
hard eyes cruel grins holstered guns
break open the door bark questions

I don't make eye contact just twist
the bloody rag in my hands a little tighter

Rabbit and Stone

BY DAVID GRUBIN

Like strangers from Mars,
nothing escapes their scrutiny
I'm thinking,
stroking the stone
in my pocket
veined blue and green
my grandkids
found last winter
on a Brighton beach,
as now I watch them examine
the bulging eyes of a rabbit
my daughter didn't want them to see.

This summer of rabbits,
they discovered it anyway,
turning it over with a stick
like hamburger on a grill,
gently—to keep it whole,
inquisitively—
noting the four toes
on the rotting hind legs
which once propelled
a hop into the high grass.

The whiskers quiver,
enlivened by wisps
of moldered air
as they probe,
these still feral children,
their milestones penciled ladders
climbing a plaster wall.

I pet my lucky stone
worn smooth
by millions of years
and time's accidental calamities,
cool on my fingertips.

Surprise Encounter

BY MICHELLE GEOGA

You find the remains, the little buck: skull, ribs, spine, femur, antlers gnawed to mismatched spikes, know how he should be: not disaspora-ed bones, not fleshless scabbed skull. You sniff, circle, reflect. I imagine your thoughts, of your own mortality, or confusion, this hide-less barely skeletal deer no longer a sum, just parts. You don't snatch a shin bone, scamper away, taunting eyes, absconding the forbidden, favorite game. No merriment in your demeanor. You look at me, unbidden. Perhaps you confirm this is the little buck, first basket rack, who tolerated you, who gave up stomping and snorting to watch you pass, instead of bolting. We haven't met him since August. I am about to drag you away, nose glued to tragedy, when you relent, choose merry not death, and scamper toward the pond. I call you back; you ignore me. Any body of water, your entitlement. When I catch up, that Great Blue Heron, whom you ignore, who ignores you back, takes one look at me and takes flight. Like I am the predator. Like I am the one who brings death.

Picking Flowers

BY EVELYN M. HOYT

The smell
of your favorite
dog decaying
in your bed
would be
unpleasant.

So I'm outside
digging.
My body
as hollow
as the hole I dig.

Her body
as lifeless
as it should be
if you're buried.

The sounds of
a sweet elegy
sung by cicadas
dismantle
around me.

The earth
opens its arms—
promises to
cradle her paws
til they are
fully absorbed.

Soon flowers
will grow from
her fur and
I will pick them
to bring her inside
once more.

Dead Dad Alley

BY DOUG CROWELL

—after Tony Hoagland

After dinner I sit on the stoop and wait for the dead
dads to pad out from the vacant lot by the bodega.

They are reborn as tomcats, and at night they loaf
around the ruins of some long-demolished home,

singing of love in the purest tones, a song
plaintive as an aria but without words.

They have no nostalgia for words.
This heady night: tang of fermenting trash, grease
stains on the sidewalk like a crayon called drudgery.
In the park up the hill, two hundred Union soldiers
lie entombed beneath a statue, younger men
than I'll ever be, and over them an obelisk
points toward the night-grey sky,
and what wheels above, invisible to my eyes.

Dad, I see you now—a magnificent cat,
sleek and serious in your mackereled coat.

Crouched to stalk your prey, you are sure
of your desire, and quiet, of course, a silence

I'd mistaken for absence, as I mistook you for a dog,
calling your name, whistling, expecting what—

the clamber of obedient paws?

Let's leave the trash for the rats to mine.
Take me to the park, where hawks hunt

from the canopy. Keep me out till dawn.
Let our wives worry while you teach me

tricks to catch a mouse, the fine points
of caterwauling, how to be a tom. Yeah, ok,

I know. All cats hunt alone.

Maybe Jesus Works at the Taco Bell

BY MICHAEL DWAYNE SMITH

Like in her kids' cartoons, she keeps a portable hole in the night. She slips through when he isn't looking. He goes on for hours ignoring her or watching TV

or talking at her doll face with no attempt to make eye contact. She, meantime, slides through the astral tube to emerge at various inclinations. She puts on

makeup at the vanity her parents never gifted, rabbit moon in the window. She flies away to Paris with the lover she took last summer, and they parachute

to the Eiffel Tower, where her paramour dies of love in her arms. She's a snowball. She's a solar system. She is soundproof. A spaceship takes her away, but

she returns as a tugboat. Often, she simply sits under waves of stars on the ivy-covered slope outside her high school's chain-link fence, looks down at a row

of cars reflecting purple-pink neon in the Taco Bell drive-through line. Caterpillar-like, they inch along each, one-by-one, pulled toward the mercury vapor

light of the cashier window, closer, in ever-hopeful anticipation of the soft-glow menu's crackly voice, closer, closer still, to bathe in a moment of jejune

comfort when it offers—*Welcome, can I help you?* Always it is *Yes*, and she closes her eyes, relaxed, warm quesadilla in her lap, topaz heavens twirling.

Something to Believe In

BY SHAWN AVENINGO SANDERS

At the funeral parlor, she tells me
how happy she is my dad died in December,

and how he would soon be an honored guest
at *Jesus' birthday party in the sky*.

My grief wanted to coldcock her
and swap her body with my dad's.

My midwestern manners prevailed.
I escaped to the kitchen to plate cold cuts,

find spoons for all those casseroles we'd eat
with cake and small talk at the repast.

I didn't want to believe
in birthday parties—celestial or otherwise.

I marked each future RSVP with "regret"
to avoid the taste of sheet cakes

their bittersweet reminder of grief.
I can't say I know where we go

when we die. We all need our crutches
of comfort, possibilities to believe in.

For me, it's hearing my dad
in sarcastic one-liners spilling out

of my children's mouths. Or when I hear
his inappropriate jokes slip off my own tongue.

I see him in my obsessive glances at the forecast—
how he would have enjoyed holding

the Weather app in the palm of his hand.
I believe he exists in the first mowed lawn

of summer. And in lightning bugs
blinking, blinking, blinking: *I'm here.*

Giving My Daughter a Tour of the Funeral Home

BY CAT DIXON

Yes, it's bright—eight chandeliers light the lobby;
on the accent tables sit five tiny lamps.

In this corner, filled with crystal trinkets, a curio.

One woman attends a wake a week like this is her hobby.

No clocks on the walls. Like in a casino,
time should be irrelevant.

Most services are brief—twenty or thirty minutes,
and then to the cemetery.

The mourners clutch their grief—
a wet tissue in a fist,
a rosary wound around a wrist,
a sweater tugged closed against the A/C.

When I'm handed a bra, a slip, a pair of pantyhose,
I appear cavalier. I hang up the clothes
on a rack. No, we can't go in the back.

Enter the lounge. The coffee machine has a face.
I restock the sugar and cream baskets.
I greet each mourner with an offer
of bottled water or coffee in a Styrofoam cup.

One funeral director cracks jokes, dances,
and sings when no one's here.

We decorate for Christmas as if this green
velvet deer and glittering tree
will give some relief.

Peruse the showroom. Pull out the drawer
to touch the interior fabric of the casket.

Step into the chapel. That's called a bier,
and yes, it has wheels, and no, I won't push
it while you lounge like a princess surveying
her bright kingdom. I don't want to see
you on the bier. I don't want
to imagine you here for that.

The Last Time I Slept Before The Insomnia

BY CS CROWE

It is the final weeks of summer when the flicker of fireflies tests the evening air in the wistful hope of their first taste of autumn's chill. Soon, their eggs will hide on the underside of leaves, and the last of the frogs will hunt them before they burrow deep in sloughs of mud for winter's chill. We are eleven years old; after a week at a church camp for children held at a tiny, Christian College, our little country church's van groans up and down the rolling hills of Eastern Georgia. Too young to look out the window and watch the whorls of wisteria blur past us until it is too late. We play games. We sing songs. In ten years, none of us will remember each other's names or faces or even this precious moment. This is childhood. There are adults. There are trees. There are flowers. All of these things carry us softly in their arms from one moment to another. Memory like a quilt. Somewhere between the top of one hill and the bottom of the next, kudzu claims the roadside, a sea of green leaves that begs us to find shapes in it; it yearns to be a cloud. Someday, we will understand this desperation to be something other than ourselves, but today, it is the final week of summer. After an eleven-hour drive, someone carries us from the van to the couch in the old house by the glass factory, and someone else carries us from the couch to our old bed by the railroad tracks. We close our eyes, and it is night, we open them, and it is morning. A railroad's song vanishes into the distance, getting further and further away. Something settles for the first time deep in our bones. We are still tired, and we don't know why.

Thirteen Ways of Looking at Girls

BY ALISON STONE

On streets, at school—men's eyes review a girl.
Grandmothers' unlived lives pursue a girl.

Ban gender-reveal-party fireworks—Guests
have burned to death. Just shout, *Woo hoo, a girl!*

Predators can see and smell the wounded.
Encounters from the past tattoo a girl.

Brother, how would rivalry and pain have
changed if I'd been born a boy, you a girl?

Doubt *It's always been and has to be this way.* Once pink clothes meant a boy, blue a girl.

The world open—Pilot, doctor, welder,
spy, captain of a pirate crew—a girl

has dreams before she's squeezed into place. In
art class, she used hard lead and drew a girl

struggling with rising waves. In a coastguard
boat, three sailors. In a canoe, a girl.

Let her stay messy and wild. Don't let *Don'ts*
and *It's not ladylikes* undo a girl.

She wants hair like Medusa's, Io's thick
skin to pass jocks bragging, *I knew a girl ...*

Jezebel's tramp makeup, Eve's lust for fruit,
Mary's hijacked womb. In each pew, a girl.

Blast of beauty standards, zephyr of male
desire. So many winds blow through a girl.

Crone Stone's toughened heart holds her young bride and
middle-aged selves. Living there, too—a girl.

Why Some People Spend Years in Therapy

BY CORA McCANN LIDERBACH

Hand me your twisted earbud cords—
I love to untangle messes,

free needles threaded to pincushions,
snarls from a child's hair.

Each night I out-sleuth Britbox bobbies,
sort lies from leads

to unearth a corpse in Northumberland's
hidden hills.

Some people are fine skating blind
across the mottled pond

of family. Not me—I long for thaw,
want to examine the rubble

of troubled union. My therapist
says people who spend years

in counseling are simply curious
about their journey—

I keep slashing at the kelp entwining
my propeller, stalling me.

Will I ever tease my strand from
family's knot, solve its twisted history?

Perimenopause

BY ALISON HURWITZ

Now I begin to understand the prefix fog of peri:
it gathers near, around, about my indecision, vague shapes
looming out of vapor, trailing warp and weft

of what I've missed inside my head. Soon
my hanging womb will dwindle, loosening to dark.
Given severance. I'm told that now at middle age

this gradual unravelling resembles my son's variable
attention: its fits and starts and interruptions,
the startlement of tripping over sudden root or boulder,

skin frissoned and frayed by skree of hawk and jackal,
leap of bobcat in the brush. A narrative thread strung slack,
unfinished or amorphous. I walk into periphery, witched

and feyed, a protective perimorph surrounding his bright
mineral refraction. I sweep and sweep my own perimeter,
aware that I am missing things, almost ready not to bleed.

Night Deity Chasing Day

BY KAREN LOZINSKI

She speaks moths from grass
aches constellations into seasonal place
strings together beads of dew for later.

Sleeves run long, brushing horizon
hazy violet and royal blue expectancy
strides myriad mythologies and cultures

night deity, chasing day
I only imagine you, I do not believe
cool air baptismal sans submergence

there is a succulence to the chill
don't yield to fire to fight it
sundown and midnight require no guardians

we are always watching, still
counting time with weight and water
pretending to know more than we do

God is a twin

BY DANIEL L. MASK

I am the light before
there were ears—
a place before memory.

I named the waters
before they knew their names.
I walked where the ground is unsettled—
left my footprints.
I made things grow because
I wanted to share myself.

I lit the world
and mistook my reflection
for revelation.
I did not ask if I would last,
if anyone was listening,
or if I must serve kings—
carrying my own brightness
like a star
until I rest.

Birds pass overhead.
I wonder if they have names.
I looked at the trees—
they remember.
They've been here before me.

I thought of calling out—
the sound of my own voice
returned, as if a stranger's.

Was it an echo
of what I had made
without staying to see?

I lit the sky again and again
because I could.

The last time I waited
to see what would rise
from beneath—

nothing answered
except the earth—
which had always known
that it never needed a God.

I Ask Sappho

BY LOIS MARIE HARROD

—after Sappho's *Anactoria*

What is most beautiful?

*Some say bright eyes, some say feet
one sister says the way he tilted his head
when he saw her coming down the street,
another the fleet of rings clicking on her finger—*

so I say with Sappho *whatever you love best*

but *it's not easy to understand.*

Yesterday two young men came from Home Depot
to put in a new backdoor, one I could lock without slamming,
one that I could open without tugging. You understand, . . .
I am no longer young.

They were young
but not conventionally beautiful,
no Adonis and Apollo in tees.
Diego the smaller wore thick glasses
and Jon the taller, black curls
and strangely formed ears,
but here they were unconventionally
smiling, and here they were working
in the swelter from 10:30 am to 3.

Here they were—and I loved them,
what else could I do?
Leave for Troy?
No Agamemnon left to abandon.

What else could I do
but give them a pitcher
of lemonade and tumblers?

You understand, don't you—
how my heart was suddenly shaken—

how they seemed young gods.

What more can you say

BY DURRE MAKNOON ZAIIRA

What more can you say
when you've made peace with
eternity
and friends with the sun,
in its sanguine glory
though my friend insists it be vermillion.

The vast indifference of the heavens
and the grief that comes after
of forgetting the northern mountains
in that one person's eyes,
and the ache
for the stars
that died out
before we were born,
and the fading *ajrak* on your favorite *kurta*,
and scrawling your signature onto landmarks
knowing that writing your name onto history
won't
make you part of it.
Though I am content
that the cosmos won't remember
the time I spilled chai on my white dress
or when I stumbled down the stairs.

I imagine the sun does not focus on such intricacies;
he focuses on the bigger picture
finding joy in the way humans gather for festivals
and grief when the sky brings its floods,
and often he writes *ghazals* about the
moon.

Contributors

Mona Anderson, a retired clinical mental health counselor, has lived in the New Hampshire countryside for 46 years where she and her husband raised two sons and a multitude of cats. She is co-author of *The Art of Building a House of Stone*. Her work has appeared most recently in *Touchstone*, *Smoky Quartz*, *Adanna Literary Journal*, *Northern New England Review*, *Earth's Daughters*, *Voices Unbound* (An Anthology of International Poetry), *Portrait of New England*, and *Rat's Ass Review*.

Ruth Bavetta's poems have appeared in *Rattle*, *Nimrod*, *North American Review*, *Slant*, *Nerve Cowboy*, and many other journals and anthologies. She likes the light on November afternoons, the music of Stravinsky, the smell of the ocean. She hates pretense, prejudice, and sauerkraut.

Ace Boggess is author of seven books of poetry, most recently *Tell Us How to Live* (Fernwood Press, 2025) and *My Pandemic / Gratitude List* (Mōtus Audāx Press, 2025). His writing has appeared in *Indiana Review*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Hanging Loose*, and other journals. An ex-con, he lives in Charleston, West Virginia, where he writes, watches Criterion films, and tries to stay out of trouble. His first short-story collection, *Always One Mistake*, is forthcoming from Running Wild Press.

Don Brandis lives quietly outside Seattle reading and writing poems when they show up. He has a degree in philosophy and a long fascination with Zen. Some of his poems have appeared in *Amethyst Review*, *Black Moon Magazine*, *Blue Unicorn*, *Last Leaves* and elsewhere. A book of his poems is available, called *Paper Birds* (Unsolicited Press 2021). We live in hard times. We endure as art.

CS Crowe is three crows in a trench coat that gained sentience after eating a magic bean. He spends his days writing stories on a stolen laptop and trading human teeth for peanuts. A poet and storyteller from the Southeastern United States, he believes stories and poems are about the journey, not the destination, and he loves those stories that wander in the wilderness for forty years before finding their way to the promised land.

Doug Crowell lives in Brooklyn, NY, where he manages the dining room of his restaurant, French Louie, and studies poetry at The Writers Studio. He is the author of the cookbook and essay collection, *Kindness & Salt: Recipes for the Care and Feeding of Your Friends and Neighbors* (Grand Central, 2018).

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Scott Ferry helps our Veterans heal as a RN in the Seattle area. His most recent books of poetry are *Sapphires on the Graves* (Glass Lyre, 2024), *500 Hidden Teeth* (Meat For Tea, 2024), and *dear tiny flowers* (Sheila-Na-Gig, 2025). More can be found @ ferrypoetry.com

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Michelle Geoga is a writer and artist from Southwest Michigan. She has a BFA in art and an MFA in writing from the School of the Art Institute in Chicago. Her work has been published in the *Little Patuxent Review*, *Third Wednesday*, *Unleash Lit*, *Cleaver*, and elsewhere. She was the beneficiary of a residency at Yaddo based on an early version of a novel in progress and a finalist for The Big Moose prize by Black Lawrence Press.

J. S. Graham is an emerging poet from Yorktown, Virginia. His work has appeared in *Mantis*, *The Round*, and *Space & Time Magazine*. He writes for the friends he's made along the way.

David Grubin has been a documentary filmmaker for decades, winning prizes that include 10 Emmys and a Guggenheim fellowship. His PBS series from the Dodge Poetry Festival, *The Power of the Word* and *The Language of Life*, both with Bill Moyers, brought the work of contemporary poets to a wide audience. He's received an MFA in poetry from Pacific University, published poems in *Narrative* and *Gyroscope Review*, an essay in the *American Poetry Review* and serves on the board at Poets House.

Michael Gushue has been published in many journals, including the *Indiana Review*, *Third Coast*, *Eunoia*, *Gargoyle*, and *American Letters and Commentary*. His latest book, in collaboration with Kim Roberts, is *Q&A for the End of the World*. His other books are *Sympathy for the Monster*, from Alien Buddha Press, *Gather Down Women* (poems in the voices of women from Greek myth), *Conrad*, *Pachinko Mouth*, and—in collaboration with CL Bledsoe—*I Never Promised You A Sea Monkey*, *The Judy Poems*, and *Palace of Depression*. He lives in the Brookland neighborhood of Washington DC.

Hazel J. Hall is a poet powered by insulin. She is an undergraduate student studying English, media studies, and photography. She is the winner of the Victor Howes Prize in Poetry and the Hinman Award for Literary Studies; more of her writing can be found in *Bending Genres*, *Amsterdam Review*, *Sunlight Press*, *Last Leaves Magazine*, and *boats against the current*. Find her website at www.hazeljhall.com

Lois Marie Harrod's 19th volume of poetry, *The Bed the Size of a Small Country*, appeared October 2025. *Spat* appeared in June 2021. *Woman* won the 2020 Blue Lyra Prize. Dodge poet. A lifelong teacher, she has been published in journals from *American Poetry Journal* to *Zone 3*.
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Evelyn M. Hoyt, born on the rocky coastline of Maine, was raised with a love for nature and animals. Her passion for giving the voiceless a voice started at a very young age when she began rescuing and rehabbing wildlife. All grown up, Evelyn now has an MA in writing from Johns Hopkins and is the current editor of *Ink Nest Poetry*. Her most recent work can be found in *Brushfire Literature and Arts Journal*, *Blood e³ Bourbon*, and *The Avalon Literary Review*.

Ann Howells edited *Illya's Honey* for eighteen years. Recent books include: *So Long As We Speak Their Names* (Kelsay Books, 2019) and *Painting the Pinwheel Sky* (Assure Press, 2020). Chapbooks include: *Black Crow in Flight*, Editor's Choice –*Main Street Rag*, 2007 and *Softly Beating Wings*, 2017 William D. Barney winner (Blackbead Books). Ann's work appears in many small press and university journals here and abroad. She is a multiple Pushcart nominee.

Alison Hurwitz (she/her), is a former cellist and dancer who finds music in language. Nominated for the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net, Alison hosts the monthly online reading, Well-Versed Words. Published in *South Dakota Review*, *Sky Island Journal*, *SWWIM* and others, her work was named as a finalist for *RockPaperPoem's* 2025 Poetry Prize. When not writing, Alison officiates weddings and memorials, hikes, and dances in her kitchen with her family. Find her at www.alisonhurwitz.com

Beth Kanell lives in northeastern Vermont among rivers, rocks, and a lot of writers. Her poems seek comfortable seats in small well-lit places, including *Lilith Magazine*, *The Comstock Review*, *Indianapolis Review*, *Gyroscope Review*, *The Post-Grad Journal*, *Does It Have Pockets?*, *Anti-Heroin Chic*, *Ritualwell*, *Persimmon Tree*, *Northwind Treasury*, *RockPaperPoem*, and *Rise Up Review*. Her collection *Thresholds* is due in early 2026 from Kelsay Books. Join her for conversation (bring your own tea) at <https://bethkanell.blogspot.com>

Elizabeth Kerlikowske is the author of several chapbooks and "real" books. She was the recipient of the Community Arts Award in 2017. She is the past president of Friends of Poetry and the Poetry Society of Michigan. With novelist Bonnie Jo Campbell, she founded the Kalamazoo Writers Disorganization.

Sarah Kotchian's poetry collection, *Light of Wings*, was published by the University of New Mexico Press in 2024 and was a finalist for the New Mexico/Arizona Book Award in Poetry. Her poetry book *Camino* received the New Mexico/Arizona Book Award and Seven Sisters Book Award. A contributor at the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference and Pushcart nominee, she holds a B.A. in American Literature from Middlebury College, a Master of Education from Harvard University, a Master of Public Health from the University of Washington and a Ph.D. in American Studies from the University of New Mexico.

Barbara Krasner holds an MFA from the Vermont College of Fine Arts. She is the author of three chapbooks, including the ekphrastic *Poems of the Winter Palace* (Bottlecap Press, 2025) and the forthcoming ekphrastic poetry collection, *The Night Watch* (Kelsay Books). She lives and teaches in New Jersey.

Craig Kirchner is retired and living in Jacksonville. He loves the aesthetics of writing, has a book of poetry, *Roomful of Navelo*, and has been nominated three times for a Pushcart. Craig's writing has been published in *Chiron Review*, *Main Street Rag*, *The Modern Artist* and dozens and dozens of others. He houses 500 books in his office and about 400 poems on a laptop; these words help keep him straight. Craig can be found on Bluesky.

Judy Kronenfeld's six full-length books of poetry include *If Only There Were Stations of the Air* (Sheila-Na-Gig Editions, 2024), *Groaning and Singing* (FutureCycle, 2022), *Bird Flying through the Banquet* (FutureCycle, 2017), and *Shimmer* (WordTech, 2012). Her third chapbook is *Oh Memory, You Unlocked Cabinet of Amazements!* (Bamboo Dart, 2024). Judy's poems have appeared in four dozen anthologies and in such journals as *Cider Press Review*, *Gyroscope Review*, *MacQueen's Quarterly*, *New Ohio Review*, *Rattle*, *Sheila-Na-Gig*, *Valparaiso Poetry Review*, and *Verdad*. Her newest book is *Apartness: A Memoir in Essays and Poems* (Inlandia Institute, 2025).

Victoria Lau holds an MFA degree from Lindenwood University. She was the 3rd place poetry winner for the Random House Creative Writing Competition in 2013. Her poems have been published in *Rogue Agent*, *The Orchards Poetry Journal*, and elsewhere. She was a poetry reader for *GASHER Journal* and is one of the marketing coordinators for *The Adroit Journal*. She is a writing assistant at the Borough of Manhattan Community College Writing Center and an English adjunct lecturer at Queens College and John Jay. Follow her IG: victoria.lau_calliope_poet.

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Peggy Liuzzi is a long-time resident of Syracuse, NY, a city known for its grit and its long winters. She's an active member of the Syracuse YMCA's Writers Voice program where she finds inspiration and community. Her poems have been featured in *Stone Canoe*, *Slippery Elm*, *Nine Mile Magazine*, *Doubly Mad*, and other publications.

Karen Lozinski hails from New York City and lives in New Orleans, where she befriends anoles and cicadas and enjoys Spicebush Swallowtail caterpillars pupating in her kitchen. She's a multidisciplinary artist who earned her MFA at the California Institute of the Arts. At work on a novel and a poetry collection, her writing appears in *Mantis*, *The Citron Review* (2024 Pushcart nominee), *Chapter House Journal*, *Red Ogre Review*, *The Broadkill Review*, *The Bookends Review*, *The Naugatuck River Review*, *The South Florida Poetry Journal*, *Poetry South*, and many more.

Daniel L. Mask is a writer whose work has been published by *Rattle* a few times and is soon to be published in *Red Cedar Review*. Daniel writes with meditative clarity, rendering ordinary gestures with cinematic attention. His work balances understated emotion with deep resonance, creating a voice that is simultaneously observant, reflective, and quietly urgent. Daniel has a Master's degree from the University of Houston and has taught English in America and in Africa and is a Returned Peace Corps Volunteer. They live in Wilmington, NC.

Robert McDonald's first book of poems, *A Streetlight That's Been Told It Used to Be the Moon*, is coming from Roadside Press in 2026. His work has appeared in *2 Rivers View*, *Action/Spectacle*, *The Tiny Journal*, *Le Petite Zine*, *Blood e3 Honey*, *Sentence*, and *West Trade Review*, among others. He lives with his husband in Chicago.

Juan Pablo Mobili was born in Buenos Aires and adopted by New York. His poems appeared in *Tupelo Quarterly*, *Louisville Review*, *Hanging Loose Magazine* and *The Worcester Review*, among others, as well as publications in Europe, Asia, Latin America, and Australia. He's a recipient of multiple Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net nominations, and an Honorable Mention from the International Human Rights Art Festival. His chapbook, *Contraband*, was published in 2022. In January of 2025, he was appointed Poet Laureate of Rockland County, New York.

Marjorie Moorhead is author of poetry books *Into the Thrum* (2025), *What I Ask, Every Small Breeze*, as well as three chapbooks. Her poems appear in *Amethyst Review*, *Tiny Seed Literary*, *Moist Poetry Journal*, *Bloodroot*, *Sheila-Na-Gig*, *Porter House Review*, *Poeming Pigeon*, *Verve-Virtual*, *Touchstone*, others, and 20 anthologies to date, including *The Wonder of Small Things* (James Crews, ed.). Marjorie lives with family and writes from a river valley at the NH/ VT border.

Gareth Nurden was born in Newport, Wales and enjoys writing poetry in his spare time. Over recent years Gareth has had pieces published in seventeen countries worldwide in journals such as *Modern Haiku*, *Presence*, *Wales Haiku Journal*, *Hedgerow*, *A Heron's Nest*, and more.

Michigan poet **Lynn Pattison**'s work has appeared in numerous anthologies and journals, including *Gyroscope Review*. Her newest collection, *Matryoshka Houses* (Kelsay Books) debuted in June, 2020. Her work has garnered several nominations for a Pushcart Prize and been nominated for inclusion in Best Micro-Fiction.

Shawn Aveningo Sanders overcame a lifelong fear of birds when she fell in love with the chickadees in her backyard. Shawn's poems have appeared in *ONE ART*, *CALYX*, *contemporary haibun online*, *MacQueen's Quarterly*, and others. Shawn is multiple Pushcart Prize, Best of the Net, and Touchstone Award nominee. Her new chapbook is *Pockets* (MoonPath Press, 2025). She is the author of *What She Was Wearing* (2019), a hybrid chapbook that reveals her #metoo secret after 30 years of silence. When she's not writing, you might find her in a shoe store hunting for a new pair of red shoes.
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Annette Sisson lives in Nashville, TN, and teaches at Belmont University. Her poems appear in *The Penn Review*, *Birmingham Poetry Review*, *Rust c3 Moth*, *Cider Press Review*, and many other journals and anthologies. Her second book, *Winter Sharp with Apples*, was published by Terrapin Books in 2024. Her first book, *Small Fish in High Branches*, was published by Glass Lyre Press in 2022. She won The Porch Writers' Collective's poetry prize in 2019 and has been a finalist in numerous inter/national poetry contests. Seven of her poems have received nominations for the Pushcart Prize and six for Best of the Net.

Michael Dwayne Smith lives near a ghost town in the Mojave Desert with his wife, rescued horses, and Calamity, the California calico cat. He's the author of four poetry collections, most recently *Shaking Music from the Angry Air* (Sheila-Na-Gig Editions, 2025), which has been nominated for the Rilke Prize. His work haunts many literary houses, including *ONE ART*, *The Cortland Review*, *Gargoyle*, *Third Wednesday*, *Heron Tree*, *Star 82 Review*, *New World Writing Quarterly*, *Superstition Review*, *Monkeybicycle*, *Chiron Review*, *San Pedro River Review*, and *Heavy Feather Review*, receiving several Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net nominations in recent years.

Connie Soper is an Oregonian who finds inspiration while hiking or beachcombing. Publications include *Catamaran*, *Canary*, *Cider Press Review*, *ONE ART*, *Willawaw Journal*, and elsewhere. Her first full-length book of poetry, *A Story Interrupted*, published by Airlie Press in 2022, celebrates walking and witnessing her native terrain.

Corinne Stanley is a poet, memoirist, translator, and collage artist. Her work includes *Breathe into the Known*, *Down into the Upward Golden*, *La tercera Luz: A Poetic Journey through Spain*, and a book of translations of Spanish poet Esther Bendala Pavon, *Silence from the Forest/Silencios del bosque*. She resides in Iowa City, Iowa. www.corinnestanley.com

Alison Stone is the author of nine full-length collections, including *Informed* (NYQ Books, 2024), *To See What Rises* (CW Books, 2023), *Zombies at the Disco* (Jacar Press, 2020), *Masterplan*, a book of collaborative poems with Eric Greinke (Presa Press, 2018), and *They Sing at Midnight*, which won the 2003 Many Mountains Moving Poetry Award. Her poems have appeared in *The Paris Review*, *Poetry*, *Ploughshares*, *Poet Lore*, and many other journals and anthologies. She is also a painter and the creator of The Stone Tarot. A licensed psychotherapist, she has private practices in NYC and Nyack. <https://alisonstone.info/> YouTube and TikTok—Alison Stone Poetry.

Rebecca Surmont has a love of corn fields, rivers, trains, and funk. Her poems have been in *The Mackinaw*, *Last Leaves*, *The Orchards*, *RockPaperPoem*, *Amethyst Review*, *Hare's Paw*, *Eunaia Review*, *Nature of our Times*, *Steel Jackdaw*, *Amethyst Review*, and *Crowstep Poetry Journal* among others. She lives in MN where wool is in fashion nine months of the year.

Gene Twaronite is a Tucson poet and the author of six poetry collections. His first poetry book, *Trash Picker on Mars*, was the winner of the 2017 New Mexico-Arizona Book Award. His latest poetry collection is *Death at the Mall* (Kelsay Books). He is a former Writer-in-Residence for Pima County Public Library. Follow more of Gene's writing at: genetwaronitepoet.com & genetwaronite.bsky.social

Julie Weiss is the author of *The Places We Empty*, her debut collection, and two chapbooks, *The Jolt* and *Breath Ablaze: Twenty-One Love Poems in Homage to Adrienne Rich*, Volumes I and II. Her second collection, *Rooming with Elephants*, was published in February, 2025. "Poem Written in the Eight Seconds I Lost Sight of My Children" was a finalist for Best of the Net, and she won Sheila-Na-Gig's editor's choice award for "Cumbre Vieja". Her work appears in *Gyroscope Review*, *Variant Lit*, *The Westchester Review*, *Up The Staircase Quarterly*, and others. You can find her at <https://www.julieweisspoet.com/>

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Elana Wolff writes from Ontario, Canada—the ancestral land of the Haudenosaunee and Huron-Wendat First Nations. Her writing is widely published in Canada and internationally—most recently in *Anacapa Review*, *Best Canadian Poetry 2024*, *Blood+Honey*, *Horseshoe Literary Magazine*, *The Nelligan Review*, *Pinhole Poetry*, and *The/Tenz/Review*. Her cross-genre Kafka-quest work, *Faithfully Seeking Franz*, received the 2024 Canadian Jewish Literary Award. Her poetry collection, *Everybody Knows A Ghost*, is forthcoming with Guernica Editions in 2026.

Kenton K. Yee recently placed poetry in *Kenyon Review*, *Threepenny Review*, *Cincinnati Review*, *RHINO*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Electric Literature*, *The Offing*, *Hobart*, *Poetry Wales*, *Rattle*, *Best Microfiction 2026*, and other journals. His debut chapbook is due out from Bull City Press in 2027. Kenton writes from Northern California. FB: @scrambled.k.eggs INSTA: @kentonkyeepoet

Jonathan Yungkans listens to owls, drinks coffee and tries not to wake the dead, though they tend to pop up now and then from his laptop with the excuse of showing up in literary dress. His poems have appeared in *Book of Matches*, *MacQueen's Quarterly*, *Sonic Boom*, *Synkroniciti* and other publications. He has also written three poetry chapbooks; the latest, *The Ravens Will Arrive Later*, is slated for a 2026 release from Gnashing Teeth Publishing. His e-mini-chapbook of short poems, *as the sky fragments*, was published by Yavanika Press in August 2025.

Durre Maknoon Zahra is a high school student, emerging writer, and artist based in Islamabad, Pakistan. Influenced by Eastern spirituality and Western literature, she writes about borders, the universe, and the human condition.

Announcements

The Spring Issue welcomes in our 11th Anniversary. If you have an anniversary poem—happy, sad, or ornery—we'd love to see it. Otherwise, there is no theme for this issue; we're just looking for fine, contemporary poetry. Ekphrastic poems are welcome. We can QR code a link to the artwork or use the picture on the page if it's in the public domain. Nature poetry is always welcome. Other than that, send us the work you love and want to see out in the world.

Spring Issue 2026 submissions open January 15th, 2026, and run through March 1st, 2026, with the issue releasing on April 1st, 2026.

We will close submissions if we get all the poems we need, so submit early. We also close early if we reach our submissions cap for the month. Put 4 poems in one .doc(x) or .rtf document, page breaks in between poems, use easy to read fonts like Times New Roman 12 pt, and an up-to-date bio of no more than 100 words in the Submittable bio section. You can have your Poem Title and under it put "by Author WXYZ" but we don't need page numbers, headers or footers on the poems. Use the name in your bio you'd like to be published under.

If you submit over four (4) poems in a doc, we will read the first 4 and ignore the rest. We welcome poems from both new and established poets and have eclectic tastes, so give us a shot if you're not sure if you fit. Read some past issues to see what we print. We do like form poems if they are well done. Rhyming poetry is a hard sell unless well done. We'd love to see what you've been working on. Check out past issues at <https://www.gyroskopereview.com>

See our full guidelines on Submittable: <https://gyroskopereview.submittable.com/submit/>

Thank you for Reading!



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