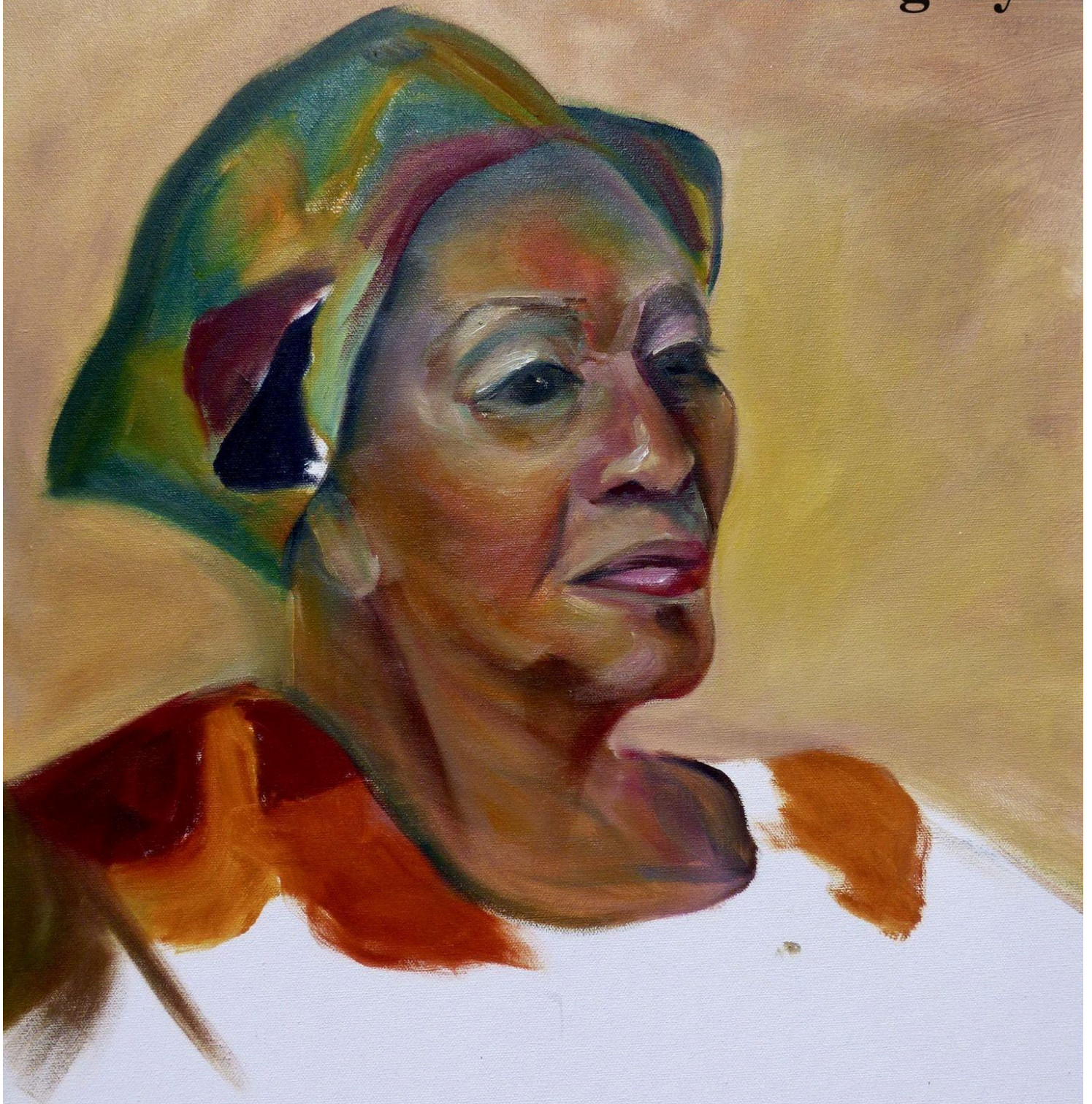


The Listening Eye



2022-2023

Letter from the Faculty Adviser

Dear readers,

The 51st issue of *The Listening Eye*, a literary and visual arts magazine published by the Kent State University Geauga Campus since 1970, is now complete. The second of two consecutive double issues—2020-2021 and 2022-2023—this number marks a decided milestone in TLE’s history.

The 50th number, a celebratory semicentennial issue, was the last to appear in print. This 51st number inaugurates the first exclusively digital publication of the magazine readers may download and print on their own from the “File” tab at the top left of this screen. Because of the challenges of converting typewritten to digital text, this issue is also the last to accept print submissions.

These decisions are not made lightly. We are saddened that the material exigencies of the print-to-digital revolution will inevitably alienate some of TLE’s most loyal contributors and supporters. TLE’s founder and only EIC in its half-century history, Geauga English Professor Emerita Grace Butcher, admirably advocated to keep operations status quo for long-standing stalwart and marginalized voices, such as prison poets, who will lose access to submission venues with our digital turn. However, in the end, our little magazine is no match for global change. In the interest of carrying on, we must adapt.

This issue bears the first markers of such adaptation. The first section of the magazine contains the artwork and writing of digital contributors who found us on our new online submissions site, [Submittable.com](https://www.submittable.com). The second section showcases our last print submissions in picture format, resulting in nonuniform typeface because the editorial labor of typewritten text conversion is now infeasible. The third section highlights student contributions as a necessary effort to encourage the next generation of writers and artists to preserve and evolve our traditions.

We are delighted with the selections in our current magazine. Our featured artist is Marilyn Shaker, whose vibrant work graces both of the magazine’s covers. **NB: While my married surname is Shaker, Marilyn and I have never met, nor to my knowledge are related—something I now consider my distinct misfortune.* Editors of this number are happy to share her work, along with that of the other gifted artists and writers herein enclosed, with all of you.

My enduring gratitude goes to those editors, local Geauga poet and author David J. Adams, who has published with TLE, and of course, the inimitable Grace Butcher, who officially retired from EIC duties in May 2023. With her departure, I enshrine the EIC title behind glass, adopting for myself and successors the role of “faculty adviser” as custodian of the magazine. While we will do our best, there will only ever be one Grace.

Moving forward: Please consult TLE’s open calls for poetry, short fiction, creative nonfiction, and artwork on [Submittable.com](https://www.submittable.com). Submissions are typically invited shortly after the new calendar year through spring. Novice and established artists are welcome; [full guidelines](#) can be found on our website. Look for highlighted contributors on related Kent State social media, including the KSUGTAC [Student Media Club](#), Kent State Geauga Campus, and Wick Poetry Center.

Thank you for your patronage as we begin the next chapter of this venerable Geauga tradition.

Here’s hoping you stay with us,

Bonnie Shaker
Faculty Adviser to *The Listening Eye*

The Listening Eye 2022-2023

Number 51

Grace Butcher: Editor

David J. Adams: Assistant Editor

Bonnie James Shaker: Assistant Editor/Faculty Adviser

Featured Artist: Marilyn Shaker

Front cover: "Arlene"

Back cover: "Sunflower in Elegance"

Magenta Poppies: Marilyn Shaker





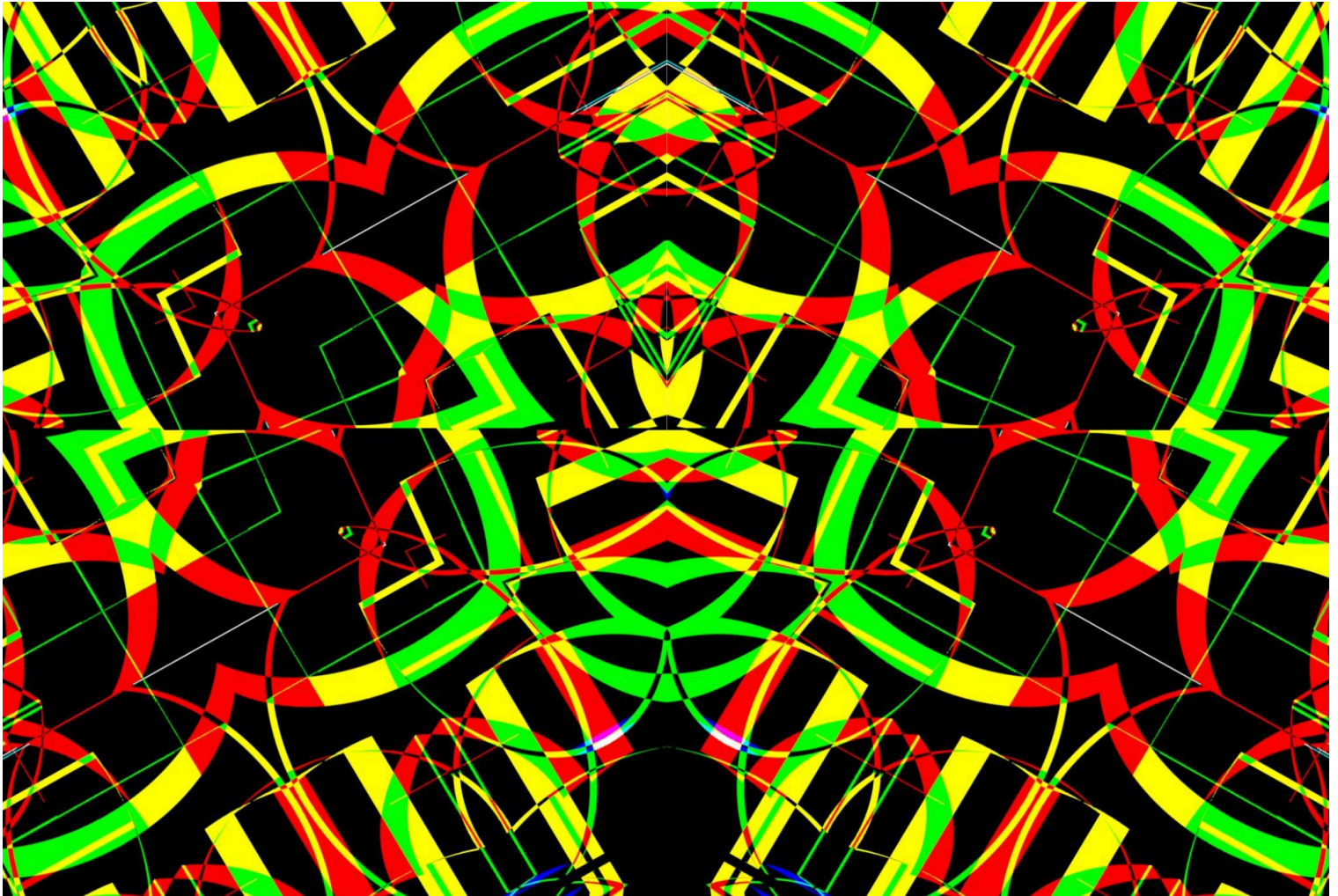
Bold and Beautiful: Marilyn Shaker



Vintage Dogwood Duo: Marilyn Shaker

Monday: Erin Jamieson

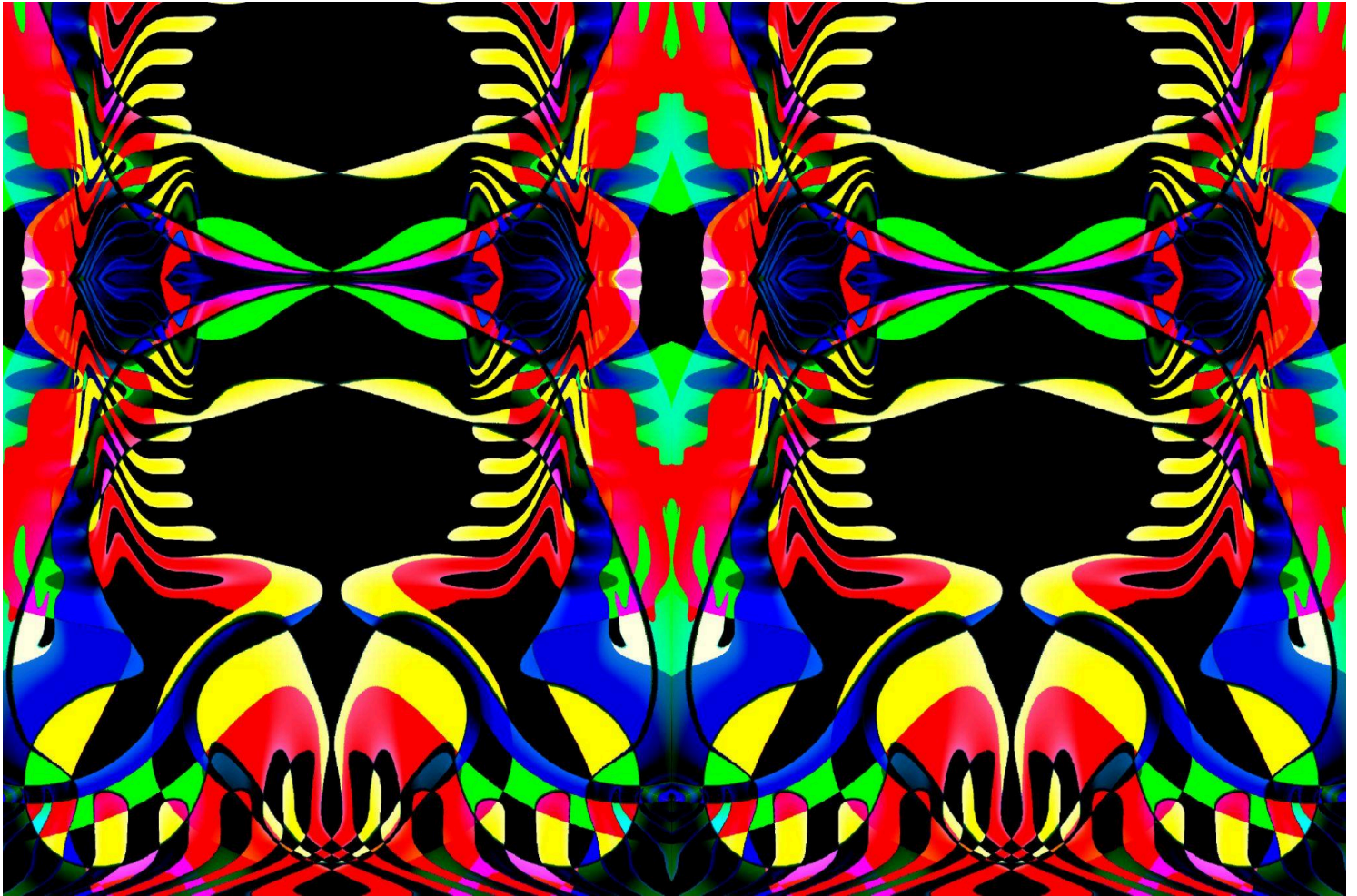
no post office issued stamps
with sealed notes from someone
who left me behind
no subtle hints
that I once meant anything
just a gentle breeze
tickling my cheeks
the sound of chirping crickets
who do not question
their own value



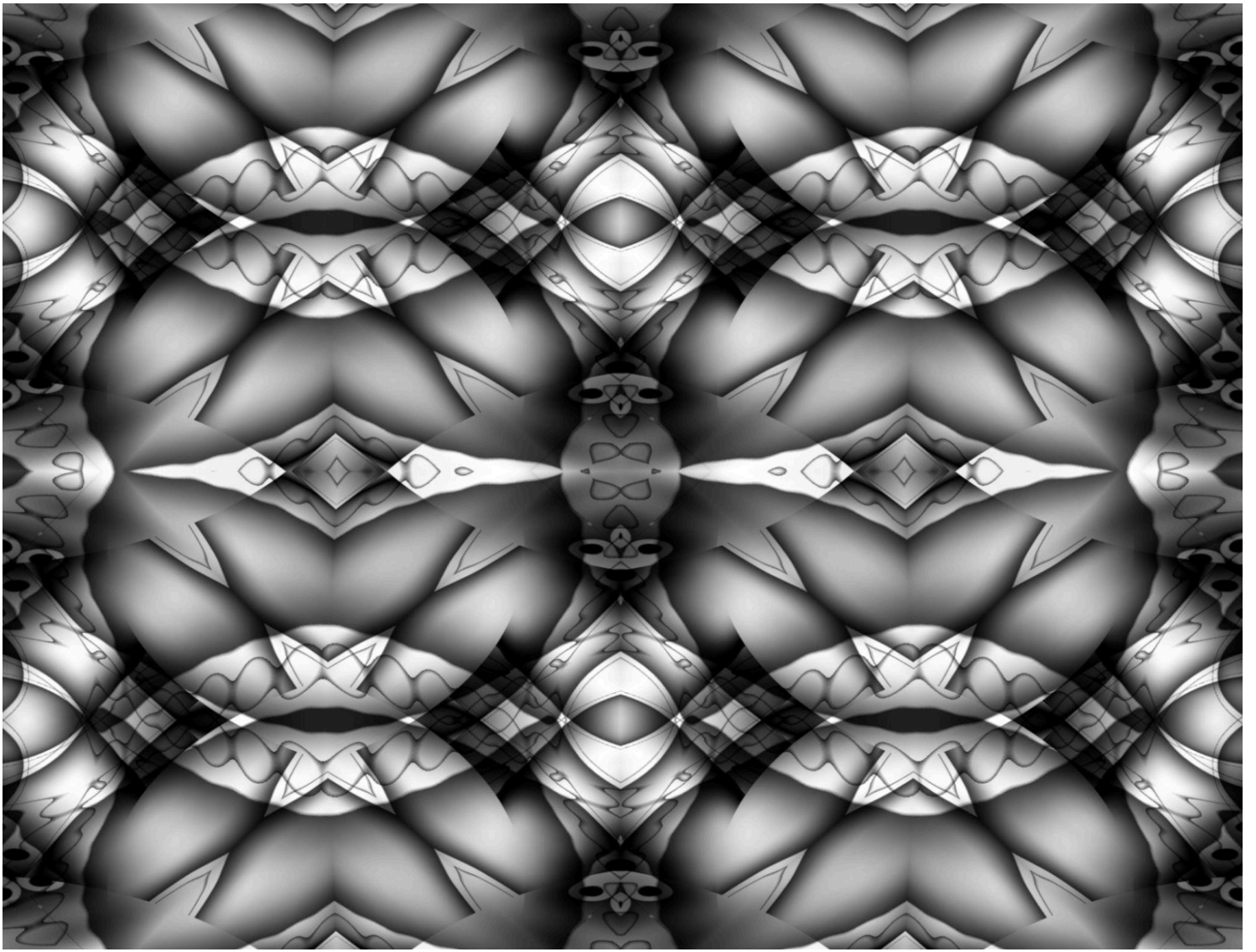
Lost in Thought: Edward Michael Supranowicz

Savage: Kris Green

I am a savage lost among the creeping things.
Working my way through ferns and ficus,
Viciously cutting back the short green terrain.
Wacking the weeds that encroach on civilization.
Inside, disagreeing with my wife's mother about needless things.
Applauding my son's trips and follies,
For if he learns to pick himself up when he is in diapers,
He will stand one day a man.



Bertha Gets Mad: Edward Michael Supranowicz



All Puffed Up: Edward Michael Supranowicz

Elegy for Addiction: Ace Boggess

No longer with me & still with me
like a pill that slipped through
a hole in my pocket—
part of the fabric, lump—
I could find you
if I searched graveyards of yearning.

I try to leave the dead in place,
sometimes wish to talk to them.

You have seen me on my knees
pleading with gods
of dirt & fragments for a find.
Sincerely I embraced you,
said goodbye in frantic pacing of a cell.

I placed a bell inside your coffin.
Why does it keep ringing?
Just the wind.

Alarm: Ace Boggess

Goes off twice a day to warn us that it isn't working,
power line to its main circuit cut by roofers' nails,
battery backup burning its ultimate spark.

We've yet to locate a wound in vastness
of the ceiling, don't know how to fix
the problem behind the problem,

snakebite or the overgrown wood
that led to nesting spots for snakes.
Our house has been poisoned,

the alarm says in the voice of a child's hands
banging piano keys or playing a videogame
filled with characters that die & die,

though no one is in danger, those games
stories without middles, only beginnings &
endings that come around again.

Your Poem: Ellen Taylor

This is written for all of you
 who may feel defeated,
deflated, defunded, under-rated
 even on your own personal playlist.

Though the sky shrieks blue
 and “I Feel Good” erupts
through the café speakers,
 no number of refrains will convince you

it’s true, you who need a different version
 of hope, perhaps in the form of written words.
So, here: You are your own safety net, tow
 rope, lifeline, life jacket, oxygen.

Sometimes you need to hold your own
 hand and be glad for it. No one knows
the weight of your sorrow better than you.
 It is you who shall dissolve it. Like salt in broth,

 stir in what’s needed and taste, drink it down.

Final Performance: Ellen Taylor

It’s a theater for the living, I told my husband,
whose mother requested “No Service.” Gather
to review the days and months and years of the life
she wrote for 96 years; invite those women she dog-
eared pages with in her book group; call the rug
hooking friends she met with for decades, pulling loops
of yarn through burlap’s warp and weft. Reserve a special
place for her little sister, who’s never lived a day without her
only sibling, and the cousins who sent Christmas cards with
photos and annual letters which she saved and read and read.
Invite the chorus of neighbors who made banana bread and shared
sleeves of Girl Scout cookies. Everyone has a role, however small.
This is the last performance, no understudy waits in the wings.
We’ll all sing praise together, we’ll all stand when the curtain falls.



Bolt Action: Ian Marshall



Midsummer Haze: Ian Marshall



Endless Summer: Ian Marshall

The Feeling of Falling In Love: Carlina Krajnik

We danced at Old School
And you told me that you fell in love;
It all came crashing down.
Then came October
Too many drinks and drugs
I danced all night and watched you stare--
You told me that you fell in love.
A dark night in this dump of a town
I parked in front of home
We kissed with passion and got lost
You paused with a smile on your face:
"It feels like I'm falling in love."
January 31st
Someone has gone to heaven
A funeral must be planned
I arrive in black and white
And take too many shots
That day, you treat me with delight
Just as all the other days
Again, you tell me that you fell in love.

Those words have so much power
So much comfort and divine
I think we all have layers of things to unwind
I fall in love with some part of you every day
Learn something new, so out of the blue
So here I am. I'm here to say
I fall in love with you
Every single day



The Eyespots of a Luna Moth: Willy Conley



Foyer Downtown: Beverly Rose Joyce

Iowa Note: Carl Boon

The old couple strolled among the elms that lined their farm, one of the most profitable in Kossuth County. They strolled in the spirit of the unabashed, a spirit only gifted to the old and young. They held hands a moment, then released them so that both could gaze unfettered at what the late-afternoon sun was doing to the leaves, everywhere intensity and shadow. Everywhere, they thought, beauty happened in moments instead of years. It was September and yellows reigned.

Soon it would be October, which meant the first snow, and it would come the way it had for the fifty years they'd been together. It would come first like a scout, a thin boy attempting to decipher what was there, what danger, what weak spot. Such work accomplished, it would come then in reckoning waves and quickly cover what the squirrels hadn't found—errant ears of corn in muddy ruts, blackberry twigs mostly dead at their edges, forgotten tomatoes and cucumbers blackened by the usual August rain. She kept a kitchen garden.

He remembered 1993, the Great Flood of that year that sent the Mississippi tumbling against itself and ruined many farms to the west. They'd been lucky then: the soil held, and the youngest boy had come from Des Moines to make sure. Neither of them ever said they loved him best, but they did. He was the responsible one. His older brothers—one a musician in Minneapolis, the other a professor in Omaha—didn't give a damn about the farm. It had sustained them as boys, allowed them to buy milkshakes and movie tickets for the girls they dated, but the ease of youth is soon forgotten. Only the youngest cared enough to dirty his Timberland boots and barn coat. Of truths most pertinent to farms, the deepest this: when sons step away, disaster waits. At least one cared, and he would take it one day. He would come from Des Moines with methodology, with Washington science, and a girl who wasn't afraid of mosquitoes. They had him, but he was the future. Among the elms, they only had each other.

The corn in, twelve acres of winter wheat seeded, and the workmen paid, they decided on supper at Emerald's and perhaps a movie. She liked going to Algona, and in the mirror reminded herself of Steinbeck's Elisa, the dark clothes, the spots of rouge, the way she'd eventually walk to the car and ask her husband if he was hungry. She'd have the Chicken Cordon Bleu and he the cheeseburger and fries. They'd share a salad. She hoped there'd be a Clint Eastwood movie playing. For her, his acting was timeless and charged with the kind of emotion she wished she had. It wouldn't be *The Bridges of Madison County*, but that was fine. He would barter for a Sylvester Stallone, but she would remain firm. Something with drama, something with romance. Anything but bombs and guns and Russians.

That would be the evening, later. That would be after he went out to inspect the crowns on the winter wheat and make sure the snowblower was gassed and oiled. They had a driveway, a path to the back porch, and he was good about such things. She went inside to ready the Mason jars for canning the next day. The tomatoes and peppers would last them all winter, and the cucumbers would be pickles, his favorite.

Such is life on a farm in northern Iowa. The youngest had promised to visit in mid-September to "have a look at things," but there was really nothing to look at. All was done except the details—the canning, the beating of the rugs, the counting of quarters and half-dollars in the jar above the toaster. These things she could do herself. But he would come because he cared, and in the evening they would play Scrabble and talk plainly about complicated things.

Dot Dot Dot: Paul Hostovsky

The way her hands danced across the braille page, it was a beautiful choreography to behold. Her left hand beginning each line, handing it off to her right hand halfway across the page, the right hand finishing the line as the left hand moved down to begin reading the next line. Left hand to right hand to left hand to right hand. Expert, fleet, like a concert pianist, or like relay runners in a race, the hand-off accomplished seamlessly over and over and over, line by line down the page, page by page through the book, book by book through his entire childhood...

There was never a time when he didn't know it. He'd learned it with his ABCs, fingering the raised dots with his tiny hands, sitting in his mother's lap while she read to him from the print/braille children's books and he looked at the pictures. B was but, C was can, D was do. M was more. M with a dot five in front was mother. White dots on a white page, but they cast these tiny shadows that he could see in the light. Like a country of igloos as seen from an airplane on a sunny winter morning...

Having blind parents was as unremarkable as having breakfast in the kitchen, having mail in the mailbox, having rain on rainy days and sun in the summertime. Lending his mother or father his shoulder—his elbow as he grew taller—was like offering his arm to the sleeve of his own jacket, like giving his hand to his other hand. He thought nothing of it, didn't even have a word for it until he started kindergarten and it got spat on the ground by some older boys snickering and pointing, mimicking his parents as they swept their white canes back and forth, back and forth. Click sweep, click sweep, click sweep...

Those white canes. At home they leaned against the wall like backslashes in the unpunctuated dark. Or else they sat folded underneath a chair or table like bundles of long chalk, a red one in each. K was knowledge. P was people. And the braille dictionary, in seventy-two volumes, was stacked practically to the ceiling, like a cord of wood...

His mother would stop reading, open her watch then close it, click, reach under her chair for her cane and open it, chick-a-chick, into a white line which she swept across an invisible line which she walked unwaveringly out the door and down the street to the grocery store. Q was quite, U was us...

Braille was dots in a cell, lots and lots of cells. Each cell was a three-story building at dusk, the lights on in certain windows, not others. And each book was a city—a country—where he and his mother looked through the windows with their fingers pressed to the panes...

Outside it's beginning to snow. And each snowflake is a unique character in the Complete Works of Beauty. Which contains no mistakes that he has ever been able to find. And he has looked—he has looked his whole life—but has not yet found a single mistake...

The Dreadful Things She Says: Patricia Nelson

We oracles who breathe
our truths from rocks
that gleam and gabble.

We who call to bell-gray
swaying birds and a yellow sky
that shines so oddly at the rim.

We are sorry when the ones
we warn can't find their way
to the light within our voices.

Even we can dream
that we are different from
the dreadful things we say.

The Seer Startled Us: Patricia Nelson

The seer came and startled us,
a scarlet ibis on a wet, white day.
a warning bright as a wound.

Her commands fell around us
like colors strange to us
among the many that we know.

Is it right that a woman
who is odd but not beautiful
is chosen to bring us light?

That she carries in her mouth
the crimson knowledge of the gods?

Child's Play: Jared Pearce

Elijah is counting,
from zero to an unknown limit,
one for every time he bounces and catches the ball.
He disregards poetry, he ignores social graces, the two
factors I most want to consider. Three times
he's failed, and on the fourth the ball
leads him out, his body bent like a five
as he follows the ball's spiraling six in the middle of the living room.
His seven family members are getting annoyed, with him
under the table with its eight chairs standing guard,
crashing into potted plants, breaking the ninth
of ten glass panes in that old window, counting
clockwise from the top left corner. There's no danger
haunting him, no regret. If I could so focus
I could burn a hole in the sun.

All this Love: Jared Pearce

She's working to remove the grass,
the grass I've worked to grow and green,
the welcome mat I'm holding out
to God, she wants turfed for flowers,
A giant stone, and when I arrive I see
her cutting the yard into patches, rubbing
her sore wrist from mining the clover.
She hopes I'm not angry because
She loves me, she says, she wants me
to rip my lawn in half, she wants a thousand
hours of care sacrificed at her delphinium
altar, she's willing to wait two hours
For me to finish knifing my weekend bits
to a rubbish pile. It takes me a little
longer because I've got to pick the grubs
out the roots and feed them to the robins.

Print Submissions

Devils on the Fire Trail: Wade Davenport

Devils on the Fire Trail

I like to walk the Fire Trail.
It is the middle course,
not too high like the Survey Trail,
and not too low like the Meadow Trail.
It is a sweet spot, not too high, and not too low.
The only problem is the devils.

Devils run up and down the Fire Trail.
They arrive from the lowlands and can't help themselves.
They are who they are.
There is Mr. Giggles and Mrs. Snickers, two of the more powerful devils.
When they laugh and giggle or snicker and twitch
you will shrink in size like a t-shirt over cooked in a dryer.
It hurts to become smaller than you think you are. But then again,
maybe you should be small.

Next come the measuring devils.
They like precision.
With slide rule and ruler they will set your limits,
define your boundaries and color you in between the lines.
They do this by tripping you, then helping you up.
All the while they have measured you, defined you,
and confirmed this with the other devils.
Unbeknownst to you, they all agree.
You really should be small.

Then there are the singing devils,
walking straight up, smiling at themselves in the mirror.
They sing "happy are they who admire themselves"
for intelligence, looks, physique, and their greater whatever.
"Blessed are they who glisten in the sunlight
Blessed are they who glisten in darkness
Blessed are they who turn ignorance into truth
and truth into ignorance. Amen"
So they sing on the Fire Trail.
And so those who do not glisten, shrink.
And there you go, getting smaller again.

Of course, talking devils move about almost everywhere on the Fire Trail.
They talk about you, the other devils, world events, and powerful people.
Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow you are going to shrink.
Devils make you small. They shrink you, reduce you to something edible.
And then they eat you. So enjoy the Fire Trail, but don't abide those devils.

The Last Words of the Movie: Helena Minton

Hiroshima, Mon Amour

She: *I will call you Hiroshima.*

He: *I will call you Nevers.*

Nevers her birthplace.

Hiroshima, his.

She is laying one life
across another
like a deck of cards.

*

As a young girl
she made plans to run away
with an enemy soldier.
He was shot dead.
They shaved her head,
sent her to the cellar
where she gouged the walls.

One morning she breathed fresh air.
Her mother tucked money in her pocket;
she bicycled to Paris
to begin another life.

*

On his side of the world
babies were born
malformed; no flowers grew;
or, no babies were born at all.
Women were left empty for life.

The Last Words of the Movie, P. 2

She has a husband.

He has a wife.

*

In black and white the city
looks western, the hotel,
the tea house,
the peace film re-enacting the horrors, make-up
designed to look like burned skin.
She plays a nurse, neat,
in a white skirt and blouse.

He is an architect,
his these skyward buildings,

tall, geometric, stone and glass.

*

They walk all night,
fingers locked, cross bridges, stop
for a glass, follow each other in the dark,
led by jagged neon fragments,
staccato on the water.

Her movie is over.
Together they fear they' 11 start to
lose each other's eyes,
mouth, hair and flesh.

Her departure makes them weep,
struggling to disentangle
in the shadowy hotel room,

awake at dawn,
arms covered with ash.
Never will they forget,
or is it remember?

Nevers, he whispers.
Hiroshima: she.

Three Boys Bathing by a Canal,
1901

—Paula Modersohn-Becker

They have goose bumps,
never get enough to eat, these boys
who look like old men,
naked in the village of *Worpswede*.
They cut through dead stalks to get here,
hunting for something shared between them,
one with distended belly, curious,
another, white-blond hair,
the third all scowl and challenge,
beside the shrill grass,
a tin stripe of water.
No sun burns through.
It isn't swimming weather, isn't fun.
They are staring up.
She must be on a rise.
A face-off between them,
manners stripped of veneer,
begudging her a look.

February 16, 1860 in Thoreau's Journal:

It is a moist & starry snow--lodging on trees--leaf bough & trunk. The pines are well laden with it. How handsome, though wintry the side of a high pine wood--well greyed with the snow that has lodged on it-- & the smaller pitch pines converted into marble or alabaster--with their lowered plumes--like rams-heads' drawings. The character of the wood paths is wholly changed by the new fallen snow-- not only all tracks are concealed--but the pines drooping over it--& half concealing or filling it, it is merely a long chink or winding open space between the trees--

February 16, 1860 Thoreau's Journal

It is a moist & starry snow—lodging
on trees—leaf bough & trunk. The pines
are well laden with it. How handsome,
though wintry the side of a high pine wood
—well greyed with the snow that has lodged on it
—& the smaller pitch pines converted
into marble or alabaster—with their lowered plumes
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wholly changed by the new fallen snow—
not only all tracks are concealed—but
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or filling it, it is merely a long chink
or winding open space between the trees---

January 21, 1838 in Thoreau's Journal:

Every leaf and twig was this morning covered with a sparkling ice armor. Even the grasses in exposed fields were hung with innumerable diamond pendants which jingled merrily when brushed by the foot of the traveler....It was as if some superincumbent stratum of the earth had been removed in the night, exposing to light a bed of untarnished crystals. The scene changed at every step, or as the head was inclined to the right or to the left....Such is beauty ever, neither here nor there, now nor then, neither in Rome nor in Athens, but wherever there is a soul to admire.

January 21, 1838 in Thoreau's Journal:

Every leaf and twig was
this morning covered with
a sparkling ice armor. Even
the grasses in exposed fields
were hung with innumerable
diamond pendants which
jingled merrily when brushed by
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It was as if some superincumbent
stratum of the earth had been
removed in the night, exposing
to light a bed of untarnished crystals.
The scene changed at every step, or
as the head was inclined
to the right or to the left....
Such is beauty ever, neither here
nor there, now nor then, neither in
Rome nor in Athens, but wherever
there is a soul to admire.

The Knocking Spirits Rise: Jane Stuart

It was so cold--
a spring night,
we were walking,
walking
across dark hills
and bubbly creeks
led by red balls
of burning fire
that ran up and down
across the wind
around a ring of starlight
and then, it seemed,
the portals of a house
where we would stay
while the spirits rose
and talked--
ghost figures walking
room to room,
telling time by laughter,*
weeping when it was time to go.
Cold snakes, old snakes
writhing away
in the silver grass

Telling time by laughter,
weeping when it was time to go

If She Goes: RC Wilson

If She Goes

If she goes first
I will see the dust
Not all at once
but sudden pangs
a mote here
a mote there
a cloud above
some pile of poems
If she goes first
I'll see the dust

If I go first
she will find the stones
Not everywhere
Along the fence
and overgrown
Sinking sinking
into soil
If I go first
she'll find the stones

If she goes first
I will see the curtains
Let darkened windows
close their eyes
then open for
the coming dawn
If she goes first
I'll see the curtains

If I go first
she'll hear the drip
when faucet washers
lose their grip
or bonnet packing
slowly fails
If I go first
she'll get the pail

If she goes first
I will deadhead
marigolds
And sucker tomatoes
If I go first
She will
cover blueberries

Prune the old canes
If she goes first
I will feel the stickiness
And smell the sour laundry
If I go first
she will see the cracks
and falling tiles
If she goes first
I must learn to spell
If I go first, hell
She'll figure it out
If she goes first
I will drink more
And see it all
Not a damn thing
to do about it
but see it all

It was a Thursday in March just after ten o'clock count when you told me it was OK not to think about you. Those are always the dangerous calls. If a dinnertime conversation goes sideways, you can always try to mend it before bed. Those late night calls... They can haunt you.

"It isn't like you never cross my mind," you assured me. "Would you rather I feel this ache every single moment?" you asked. Surely not, I answered. "Then maybe we should forgive our-selves for finding ways to deal with... This."

I didn't sleep well that night.

I feel your absence constantly, but it doesn't mean the good is gone.

I remember the smell of your curry. I remember the sound of each cat's purr. I remember the taste of that first too-salty

meal. (I remember that you still let me cook for you again.) I remember the security of your head upon my shoulder. I remember being speechless when you told me we were through.

Your memory lives in each of these five senses, even if I'm no longer your Home. I sometimes cook my food to taste like yours did. I see you in commercials for coffeeshops and beach resorts. I feel you in the still-smooth skin where my ring used to be. I hear you in every damn song.

Smells are the hardest to evoke, though I've read they reside the deepest.

Earlier today, I was helping a colleague unpack something called core samples. These one-foot-square tiles of varying types of wood are used by our factory's quality control to... Actually, I'm not sure what they do with them.

What I do know is when I opened that box, I was home again. I could feel the carpet beneath me. I could hear the rain kissing our fifteenth-floor window. But it wasn't the smell of particle board; it was the smell of just-opened IKEA. And I wasn't labeling core samples; I was assembling our bookcase, in the apartment where I left you behind.

That bookcase was so unsteady. We were terrified to use the top shelves. But like us, it settled in. We trusted it, and it showcased all our joy.

I passed the remainder of the day a spectre, and left as soon

as they sounded the bell.

I pray this finds you well, though it will, of course, remain
unsent. I've made your home as insecure as I'd ever care to.
(And I'm unsure which of you checks the mail.)

My cooking didn't kill you. My construction efforts didn't
either. But they say a team is only as strong as its weakest
member, and it was my weakness that brought them to our door.

But it wasn't the Feds that killed us. It wasn't the courts
either. I failed you, and me, and ultimately us. My choices were
our ending. Full stop.

But I often find you in the darkness.

I can still feel your smile.

Every night, I taste your words.

I will always see your sweetness.

I'll forever hear your touch.

The smells? Still elusive. But every now and then, I'll meet
you in those moments, when my senses lead us home.

Sleeping Car: Marjorie Power

In the word *roomette*
emphasis falls
on the second
syllable. The first
drops altogether
when two elders step in
with luggage. The space becomes
an *ette*.

An *ette*
is an engineering feat
of niggling and
steely requirements.
A final arrangement, a this-far-
and-no-farther-and-
don't-even-think-about-it.
You may remember
how you and your companion
used to bump around
in a pack tent. Even a
small tent forgives much.
Your knees are not soft.
Keep your knees
to yourself.

After a night
on the bottom shelf
you unvelcro
the little curtain. If
you're lucky, dawn's broken
over the Potomac
south of DC.
A few tiny boats as you cross,
wintry trees
along the bank. The river –
glassy, sunlit, wider than you thought.

Buttermilk Johnson

With sugared brain and oxygen tank
the old blues man staggered across the stage,
plugged in and turned to face
ten thousand eyes, cheers, whistles,
waves on waves of love.

Where were you fifty years ago?

*Why am I here? All my life
most things haven't worked out.*

In sharp suit with sweet tooth
He goldily grinned *I'm a bad motherfucker!*
The love crowd swelled and wowed
to every wrist flick, every pick pinch
from thumb to pinky. Sting and burn,
snare crack, harp moan, the old man
in shiny shoes sweated through his hat band.

His rings caught light, flashed and fired.

He woke this morning with the staggers and the jags,
wished he would have woke up dead.

*Look at them out there,
they don't even know my name.*

Why they call me Buttermilk?

The old man tethered by tubes
to oxygen, cable to boom box, moved
back into the shadows, made it weep,
made it sting. *They don't know
my favorite word's goodbye.*

The old men who worked there were in their forties,
crippled by manual labor, poisoned by paint fumes –
they were drunks to make sense of it, to live with it. They
made a truck, their last gasp, we had one –
a 1968 Travelall with three rows and a wayback,
no seat belts, AM radio, three on a tree.
Everyone in Springfield worked there
as long as they could stand it.
Dad made it three years,
Grandma thirty. She died of cancer
at sixty, Dad at fifty. Dead drunks.
I learned to drive in the Travelall
with bad clutch, vinyl seats, huge mirrors.
The smell of the heater was popcorn and
cigarettes, December. I remember Nat King Cole,
the Rolling Stones' "Satisfaction."
Willie Woods, Juvenile Delinquent of 1967,
smashed the windshield with a brick one summer. Police
never caught him, but he died
of a heroin overdose, his slicked back hair
in the newspaper. I cracked my window
to get fresh air, sucking in oxygen to escape
the smoke, and they laughed at my gasping fish lips.
I could read road signs before anyone else
could see them, we made a game of it
and I won, blurring *Ashtabula 32 Miles*.
I never worked on the line, they shut it down
before I graduated. Dad joined the Coast Guard
for \$88 dollars a month, free housing,
a chance to see the world.
I don't know why he bought the International,
it was a terrible vehicle with bad clutch,
popcorn, cigarettes, and mirrors.
Everyone one in Springfield died making the Travelall –
the fumes, the drinking, the crippled crawling
down the sidewalks with their pension checks
falling from their pockets, their eyes on fire,
inflamed with anger, love for the shoddy product.

Just after Eisenhower,
Well before Nixon and Tet,
When I was a little boy,
I watched her transformation,
My mother happily, airily
Constructing her uniform
In precise, ritualistic layers for
Canasta and Tupperware parties,
Sorority or out dancing
At the Armory with Dad:
Black hair, electric blue eyes,
Vivid crimson lipstick
Set against pale skin,
White, white, all white
Bra, girdle, garter, panties,
In intricate, incomprehensible
Hooks, straps and elastic.

When I was a little boy,
My mother, the modern,
Woman was mostly modest,
But not prudishly so.
Occasionally, before matching
Dress, purse and high heels,
Before her door was routinely shut
I'd see my mother naked:
Her girlish design,
Breasts, belly, waist, hips,
A puzzling iconography.
Eventually, it occurred to her:
I was beyond the age
When it wouldn't matter.
She saw the formation
Of a permanent image,
My fabrication of memory.

Giverny: David Sapp

Driving south for a day,
Ohio hills and woods a stunning,
emerald vision, my Arcadia,
oddly idyllic in this harsh century,
bucolic nostalgia flew by
too swiftly by car, everything
a pastoral blur, impressions
too fleeting to catalogue.

In those last years, content
in his routine, Monet rarely left
Giverny – London, Waterloo Bridge,
even Rouen Cathedral too distant –
cataracts and pigments thicker,
unapologetic arabesques of hue
(some dubbed him *expressionistic*),
though celebrities all over Europe,
artists from America, visited.

Sacha Guitry filmed him in 1914,
a black and white sacrilege, and
even Clémenceau, his neighbor
along the Seine, strolled in Monet's
garden, goading him to paint oval
panoramas for *L'Orangerie*, for
Paris. But Giverny was enough,
the unceasing color, an abundance
of instaneity, wisteria, waterlily
Nymphéas, the Japanese bridge.

I rarely leave home now.
This is enough: the kingfisher
and blue heron surveilling
Old Woman Creek for minnows,
trillium, trillium, trillium every
spring, my wife's roses in June
and on remarkable mornings,
the disposition of sunlight
on dew, jewel-like refractions
beading upon the grass.

On the Further Bank: Daniel P. Gunn

On the Further Bank

*On the further bank the willows
wept in perpetual lamentation,
their hair about their shoulders.*

—Virginia Woolf

Perpetual, meaning forever, that moaning
like an animal on the further bank
by the trees, in *lamentation*, meaning
grief or sorrow over loss or death,
crying aloud with the windows closed
and slamming your hands against the steering wheel
because she was gone and you wanted her.
Nobody was dead, and it wasn't forever:
you went to class, found a ten-dollar bill
on the stairs, got drunk, graduated, married,
moved from grief to grief, grew old
enough to wake with a premonition
in the night, but still that animal sound
of pain and longing has survived in memory
until today, when it made a home
in these lines, which were supposed to be
about crying quietly like a willow
with delicate ringlets of hair falling over
your shoulders and air and sky
and sunlight finding their way through.

Pick: Daniel P. Gunn

Pick

My father always called it
a pick but I think perhaps
it wasn't the right name
for that heavy iron bar,
maybe five feet long, ribbed,
with a point at one end
and a chisel at the other.
It felt natural to my hand
as I broke the earth
under the sills or levered
granite slabs into place.
It was my grandfather's,
supposedly, the tool he used
as he dug under Eighth Avenue
with a thousand other
unskilled Irishmen
opening a space
for the Independent line.
By the time I knew him
they were watering his drinks
in the kitchen and warning him
not to touch my grandmother.
But once he worked all day

in that tunnel, using the same
tool I used, now lost,
I don't know where,
and then, on a whim, I imagine,
sat for a formal photograph
dressed like a gentleman.

Look at himself,

said my father.

*He must have rented
those gloves.*

Two Days Without: Mark B. Hamilton

i.

The bear-like dog is drawn along to lope
across on crusted snow, with Captain Lewis
astride his horse beneath the arching wood
and Captain Clark so sick he hunches forward
with York following on tilted slabs of snow,
their silhouettes flaming with ragged light
like remnants cut and placed in the rising sun.

Our Sergeant shouts out assignments at parade
for work details and guard duty, dismissing us
to eat the corn porridge at mess. In groups
we gather quickly and warm to tasks, wishing
for Captain Clark's renewed health and success.
Our leader is well-versed in wilderness life,
has known the strife of long winter campaigns
and those wearied dangers at isolated outposts
so low on stores, and threatened by loneliness—
the hunger that drives a man in raw weather
to find solace in fighting, whiskey, or sleep.

No wonder, the sounds of clinking draft animals
are calming: their breath, bells, tack and bits,
the dragging chains from skids to pull the sled
that squeaks and slides over crushed new snow
—creating a peace of mind beyond the drudgery.
From chore to chore, we walk along and police
the camp, then down to cut the ice for water
with axes hefted in the drowse of foggy river.
Once filled, wooden barrels top-off the troughs
along communal paths woven from army life.

In silence we find contentment, in the quietude
of falling snow that veils a hunter's readied rifle,
concealing the scent of a body's rising breath,
while others place goods and bedding to dry
or scrub the cook's black kettle. Everyone
has hauled the ashes, dug the trench, or stood
the hours as posted sentry of horses and sawyers
who feel their sweat in spite of freezing weather.
Our muscles ache, our shoulders sway, our hands
have cramped around the tools that give us a name.

ii.

Imagine how this rough-cut world could turn toward far away thoughts of luxuriant ease, toward village lambs encouraging the spring and lolling on rolling hills as skies unfold—each festive dancer wrapping all in joyous shining warmth, every scented orange candle surrounding the baked bread and musical tunes inside an oaken room, where stone and walnut floors now gleam for colorful soft shoes, beneath gowns that sway with fluid gaiety. Outside, the porticoes of moon-lit symphonies and verandas enraptured by carriages and servants with floating platters—that reign of gifts commanding regal passengers, each assisted up the steps of newly swept snow.

How we could imagine these elegant galleries of republican jackets and liberty gowns, the sounds of women conversing in perfumes along a table sumptuously strewn with game and roasted pork, rare beef, and French pastries. The world was bountiful. The spacious rustlings free to waltz around the room in strong arms of brightly attired officers, as we, the hesitant in our frippery of shadows, listened to laughter and the teasing promises of hosting elites as happy portents for their graceful ladies.

By day, we used our strength to hone our skills as posted picket, carpenter or clerk, working together through early hoof hours, but at night we escaped the gnawing at those bonnie stands to sit and drink our harsh whiskey and rum as blacksmith or blackguard, no matter. We held ourselves within ,as simply rowdy, until on wooden racks in huts and smoky-drenched we woke again for parade, some a bit groggy.

Lonely Craftsman: Akiva Israel

Past the red staircase,
there is a room:
full of toys under construction.

A woman built the room
without permission.

In submission, she intends ruin for that room
giddy to the slaughter.

Inside that place, inside of her imperfect idea,
drips noise of labor; on the workbench:
two men that will not speak work.
One man thinks somebody
Will tell him the truth.

He stares at the dolls—and gives them names:
Man, Woman (nude) and he made them.

Among stuffed beasts, the red yo-yos,
cheap board games & toy-trains,
those dolls are damn good.

He has something peculiar
No one else has.
This he needs to develop:
adamant, let the thing take its course,
but this strange thing cheats him.

Beyond the room is a hole
wherein the Craftsman stores:
wingless eagles,
tiger-heads with each eye sliced out,
and kingdoms of breathed flesh
meticulously disassembled.

Nobody can tell the toys come from this,
this non-Euclidean necropolis,
the crop that smells
of flower fertilized in Hell.

The woman knows & hears him:
'At the beach I swim on the face of the deep.
I've put on nothing
Nothing except my blind eye,
drunken, with stained boot-heels,
quiet on a curb—smiling with children.'

After the first invasions of death,
every hurt drains--
with books and Indian shawl
pulled close like a shuttering silence
with coffee and improv music
on the back porch
(*Circles of Water*) on the disc of future peace.

He walks back and forth before her
his usual path from their house to his barn
carrying scrape tools, and, later, paint cans
and every time he passes they smile
and nod. He is over ten feet distant
steadily headed atop the field slope
and they smile like teenagers they were
forty years ago, with deeper knowledge
after thirty-seven years, married.
She won't rise from her chair
and though she waves to the empty
Adirondack beside hers, he won't veer

from his inner work. In her book,
she follows the fantasy
of a woman slogging up a rainy mountain
in the Hebrides trying to straighten lines
of the self. She reads in daring
vicariousness. Her lifeblood.
she, a clinging wayfarer while he
goes along to scrape slats of lattice
framing the courtyard space
by the garage, meticulously,
minutely with his whole soul
concentrated in his hands, for her.

Close to paradise, Herring Pond. The sky
is silver clouds gilded by sunlight
layering sparks on gray water.
The country you have carried in
is under-girded with a layer
of the family dead while
the younger generations (a land
from which you are debarred)
find no obstacle to leave-taking
follow another star. You ventured, once.
and returned, and returned, and stayed.
Some keep experiences limited
to what they can control, what
they can understand. You muse.
You could try swimming farther out
this year on the pond, tying on a float
to go on, but still rest safe.
atop depths.

This house is backed by grassy hill.
In the sedimentary record
one age leaves off and another begins.
You can walk on surfaces now
but cling to former worlds gone
where perhaps baffled dear ones
trapped in other ages
stand and stare having no access
in layers eroding behind us
their cries caught with their pale gaunt faces
hands still itching for the old tasks
signed by beach grass in September wind
tracing circles in the sand.

The Owl at Noon: John McBratney

Through the window of my sickroom,
the site of my daily self-infusions,
where my dire prognosis prints itself
like a legend indelibly in air,
I see a shadow fall on the edge
of vision, a large, gray shape that
draws my eye to the woods outside,
where a huge Barred Owl
reclines on the forest floor, his wings spread
in a wild pattern of white and brown,
his eyes closed, facing the sun square on,
as if sun-bathing, so vulnerable
before a hungry world, so careless
of predators, as if snatching himself
a spot of joy before dying.
Then, catching my slightest twitch
through the glass, he raises himself, stares,
and then, deciding I'm not yet ready, flies off.

I know he'll return, a year hence
or thirty years off—who knows?—but I hope
by then to have my life in train, calm
before the looming shadow, easing
into a soft bed of leaves, with my face turned
full to the sun, feeling its warmth cool suddenly
under the rush of dark, wild wings.

Snapping Turtle: John McBratney

Like an old lump of basalt lately dug up,
a piece of Jurassic slipped into our time, a ghost
of antique memory hardened into dark, stubborn form,
you've returned again to the place of genesis,
your nest in the soil at the edge of our paved road,
where you lay and brood over your eggs every June.
This year, you wear a touch of gauche modernity,
green algae from the bloom where you swim
(a pea soup now thickened to toxic gruel),
which you wear like chic chain mail over your shell.

You come from the mud, and you bear it with you.
With your dark head coated with slime, your features
are barely distinguishable, eyes, nose, and mouth
blurring together in anonymity, in one
unbroken brown mask from which,
when we draw too close, you dart out and snap,
a flicker that seems so futile before the threat
we pose to you: the prying sticks of curious boys,
the phosphates that foul your swamp, and the cruel craft
of hurtling steel that leave you crushed on our roads.

Yet you crawl back as inexorably as the spring,
nestling into your hollow just as the thistle
pushes its purple tufts of bloom into the wind.
Perhaps we'll burn in the flames of our own fires
or choke in the fumes of our mills' success
or drown in the steady inland creep of the seas,
as the highlanders battle the lowlanders
desperate for a stake of dry ground. But come what may,
you, in sync with the slow, shifting rhythms of your pond life
in ways we've never mastered in our towns, will prevail.

As the stars wheel through the sky, and new earths thrive and die,
you'll follow your ancient cycle, in habits etched by eons,
emerging from your swamp to lay and bury your eggs,
where you always have, by the side of the asphalt road,
now cracked and bare of traffic, crisscrossed by animal tracks,
and wild with a riot of timothy, thistle, and buttercups.

Cabbage Cutters: William Boggs

Wet wood, the Old Hickory cabbage knife,
slashing head from stem,
two cutters each side
of the dump wagon, two behind,
walking bent over, cut and throw
as fast as the driver could make us work.
1966, cutting cabbage for school clothes,
poor and near poor kids, non-migratory
field workers, a buck and a quarter
an hour,
sometimes a break for rain.
Three semi trailers a day,
cut, bagged, packed for produce markets.
While the kids going to college
headed for Waldemere and the beach,
their 396 Chevilles gleaming in sun,
we were singing
"You better slow your Mustang down"
every time the foreman pushed
the throttle up another notch.
Our parents went to truckstop
kitchens and factory smoke,
teaching their kids
there was no free lunch,
get used to hard work
and long days early.
When we were waiting out the rain
inside a barn, Swiderski
was copping a feel from Penny,
and the guys called Marsha "Fried Eggs"
for her still flat chest,
and I thought
"One of these early mornings
You gonna be wipin' your weepin' eyes,"
as the children of the poor
became parents of the poor,
wanting the life of
"Ride Sally ride,"
the things we could buy
hiding the things we couldn't buy,
a pack of smokes
but not a brand new Mustang, so
sharing a Marlboro in the back
of an old pickup, we
headed to the next field.

How rain and my prayers changed this
dead rock into glistening stone.
How strange it must feel to listen
to my voice droning on and on
like a bee buzzing about
daybreak and dew dropping the way
manna used to do from heaven.
Whatever its jingle-jangle
melody means to you, I will
remember the cool clear notes
it invoked and the wound it healed.

Affiliated (v) *Real World:* Associated with a company, group or organization. *Prison:* A member of a STG. See also "Security Threat Group" and "Gang."

Bars (n) *Real World:* Place for social gatherings, often including ingestion of intoxicating beverages and displays of obscure mating rituals. *Prison:* The physical pieces of steel that separate inmates from the Real World and hinders social gatherings, obscure mating rituals and ingestion of intoxicating beverages.

Canteen (n) *Real World:* A hollow utensil used to store liquid. *Prison:* Place where inmates order and receive snacks, clothing and hygiene items. Returning to your cell with a large canteen order guarantees a proliferation of new friends.

Cell (n) *Real World:* An ubiquitous mobile telephone device carried with one at all times. *Prison:* An inmate's assigned sleeping quarters, often shared with multiple strangers. "Wet cell" means you have the added convenience of a fully-functional flushing toilet inches from your sleeping bunk.

Count (v) *Real World:* the ability to indicate an ascending sequence of numbers. *Prison:* the ritual by which inmates are accounted for throughout the day. "Stand-Up Verification Count" – making inmates stand-up to insure they are still alive. "Emergency Count" – often done when someone has failed to accurately add-up the numbers from an earlier count.

Formal (adj) *Real World:* a designation of a special or significant event requiring special attention. "Formal Attire" means Tuxedo and Evening Gown. See also "Formal Dance." *Prison:* A designation of a special or significant rule break requiring special attention. "Formal Discipline" means doing time in Segregation. See also "The Hole."

Good Time (n) *Real World:* An expression of happiness and joy, often surrounding enjoyment of a social event with friends and family. *Prison:* Time credited to an inmate's sentence for staying out of trouble.

Kite (n) *Real World:* A lightweight device flown in the air and tethered with a string. *Prison:* A yellow piece of paper formatted for official written communication between inmates and prison staff.

Property (n) *Real World:* A tangible item owned by an individual. *Prison 1:* Tangible item owned by an inmate, as long as it is on the allowable items list, received from an approved vendor, not above the maximum allowable limits or altered in any way. *Prison 2:* The name of the Department where you pick up new underwear once a year. See also "Yearlies."

Yard (n) *Real World:* The grassy area of land surrounding one's house where children often gather to play games. *Prison:* the rarely grassy area of land surrounded by razor-wire fences where inmates often gather to play games or try to kill each other. See also "Shank."

Scared: Matthew Feeney

I'm petrified of getting shot
when I get
pulled over

or go to
church
mosque
grade school
parade
synagogue
gay club
protest
hospital
music festival
nail salon
congress
movie theater

grocery store
or
even the mall.

For once, weirdly enough,
I'm glad I live where I do:

NO GUNS ALLOWED!

even cops can't carry here

I'm lucky I live in prison
where it's so much safer.

An Image to Uphold: Dan Grote

Four decades of being
a drunkard, a dead-
beat, a poor husband
and absent father,

An overall disappointment
to most everyone who
ever put their faith
in me, and now nothing

More than a convict- to
make a long story less
so, let's just say I'm
a monster. Call me

What you will, just don't
take away my pencil, and
don't ever call me a
Poet, especially not here,

Not on The Yard, and not
in front of The Guys. You
see, this prison shit is
hard enough as it is, and

You have to be hardened to
survive in here, I have to
hide my feelings just like I
hide my drugs and my knife

And even though I've drawn
more blood with razor sharp
words than I'll ever draw
with my shiv, I just don't

Think they'd understand.

Student Submissions

Mute: Courtney McCombs

She ignored her soul for so long,
Her clouded view hid the right from the wrong
Easily she swept away dust of time and crime
The dust didn't settle far from the mind.
Should it be a crime to hide words from the light?
How guilty a confused girl can seem
No longer mute, her world will be.

Deceived with wit
Her heart splits
Charms and whims leave scars
Jokers, bluegrass, plucking tunes with her heartstrings,
snap.
Speechless, silence, bots, while the music plays
Through the muffled noise and the silenced
She screams, no longer mute her world will be

What Writing Means To Me: Isabel May

When I was younger, books were my portal to words and writing. I would devour book upon book, trying to scrounge up as many novel words and information as I could. And as the years progressed, I started working to create my own words; my own sentences; my own phrases in the hopes of being better understood by my peers. School helped me to better string together my ideas into more formal writings, but it was not until I started high school that I truly found my writing passion: Poetry. Poetry has helped me to be more honest with myself and others, be more confident in my abilities, and has allowed me to give back to the world in ways I did not know were possible.

Being open with my family and those around me has always been a struggle, but through poetry I have been able to express my inner thoughts and emotions and have been able to share them with others in a way they could finally understand. When I wrote my first poem, I felt a huge weight being lifted off my chest, and I felt like I could finally breathe clearly again. I never thought writing would become an outlet for me like it has been, but if it were not for writing, I may not have ever been able to be upfront with my peers about the struggles I was going through.

Confidence is just one of the many reasons why poetry has become so important in my life. Before I started letting my work be my voice, I would always feel as though I was never good enough; I would feel as though my life served no purpose and I never understood the point of trying anything new. However, once I created my first poem and allowed someone to read it, I started to feel a new sense of purpose in the world. I finally began to feel like I belonged in a society I used to think did not accept me or believe in me.

Throughout middle school and high school, I have dealt with mental health issues that I always feared could never be solved. I would come home with my body filled to the top with fear and guilt about the secrets I thought I would never be able to share. I would feel miserable when I caught the small worry-filled glances my parents would give each other, and even when I would try to get the truth out, my mouth would become covered by a hand whose only purpose was to keep me silent. Months went by and I kept my secrets bottled up inside, fighting for a way out but never quite strong enough to achieve the goal, until I started spilling the truth out using only a sheet of paper and a pen. I would come home from school and administer my pain to the paper in ways that my family could finally understand. And once they fully grasped my situation, I was able to get the help I needed; and now that I have been on my path to recovery, I hope to use my poetry to break the stigma that you need to silence your pain one poem at a time.

Writing to some is seen as a chore--just something you must do in school to pass a class; but for me, writing is an outlet for all my built-up stresses and emotions that are too difficult to speak aloud. Over the years, I have come to the realization that society will take a while before it starts to fully grasp the importance of mental health in our world today, so in the hopes of speeding up the process, I have a goal to publish some of my poems to the world so people can finally have something to relate to and so they do not feel the need to keep quiet. Many times, people refuse to speak their truths because they worry others will not be able to understand, but with my writing I hope to give them the courage to rip off the hands that were once forcing their mouths shut and to finally let their voices be heard.

A Take-Out Drama: Annika Newcomer

Yet another agonizingly drawn-out Sunday afternoon stuck working the lunch shift at Roma Palooza: Italian Kitchen. Most people stayed home to watch football or headed to a bar. Which meant I was making no money with one table an hour.

I lingered at the take-out counter, idly putting mints into little plastic to-go containers and twaddling with my friend, Beth.

“Beth, there’s a blue car in spot 3,” said one of the hosts.

“Oh, maybe it’s Linda,” she sounded hopeful as she checked the receipt for a car color. “Linda. Linda Cardellini. Ba be Belinda,” I sing-songed. “Ugh, I’m bored.”

Beth stared at me for a second with a bare shake of her head. “It isn’t Linda. It’s Camryn in the blue car.” She grabbed the giant paper bag, “I’ll be back.”

“Have fun.”

Intrigued now, I peeked at Linda’s order, equally horrified and amused to see it consisted of three massive take-out bags and two full catering boxes. What I had mistaken as being several orders waiting to be fetched was, in fact, one colossal order.

“Oi vey. Yo, what’s Linda’s total?” I asked.

Beth slammed the drawer shut and dropped her tip into the glass jar under the counter. “Um, \$456.74.”

“Holy shit! Who orders \$400 worth of Roma Palooza?”

“Woah,” Carly swung around the corner, balancing a precarious stack of dirty dishes. “Someone ordered four hundred dollars of pasta?”

I threw my hands in the air. “That’s what I just said!”

“Yeah, well, she’s late, so…” Beth’s voice trailed off. Carly ducked away, leaving for dish.

I looked at the order again, reading the contents this time. It wasn’t all pasta either; there were six pans of chicken fingers, four pans of mozzarella sticks, jumbo salads, a couple of gallons of soup, and of course, garlic bread.

“Damn, this is crazy, Linda,” I smirked as the story began to form in my mind, which honestly was to be expected during such a slow shift. I glanced at Beth and knew she could see the cogs turning and connecting behind my eyes.

Clearing my throat, I sweetened my voice with a falsely high pitch. “Oh Bill, I’ve ordered the Italian, and I made sure to get Bill Jr.’s mozzarella.”

Beth chuckled and rolled her eyes.

Switching roles, I groaned in a deep tone, “Linda! I’m watching the game! You know this is my only time off each week. You keep spending so much gawddamned money on fricking Roma Palooza.”

“But Bill, you know I love their salads!”

“You just like the dressing!” I drawled out as Bill, stifling my laughter as Beth collapsed into a fit of hysterics. The hosts had turned away from the doors and watched the show. Carly, too, had reemerged from the kitchen.

“This is family day. Stop being so grumpy!” I wailed out.

“GRUMPY!” Carly roared in Bill’s voice, “I work three jobs, six days a week, so you can spend \$400 on the fast-food version of Italian. I break my back and sell myyy soouull.”

Vaguely I registered that Erin, the bartender, was staring at us, utterly confused. Server card dangling, forgotten, between her fingers.

Beth chipped in with a tiny voice, “Gammy, it’s my birthday; where are the chicken fingers?”

I fell to my knees, clasping my hands together on the counter and taking a deep, shuddering breath. “Bobby, I will get you your chicken fingers if it’s the last thing I do.” I, as Linda, glared up at Carly’s Bill, who scoffed with crossed arms.

Clamoring to my feet, I reached for a medium voice, “MOM! DAD! ARE YOU STILL FIGHTING OVER THIS!! IT’S BEEN YEARS!!”

“Look, Junior, I know it’s Bobby’s birthday, but I can’t take it anymore. I mean, maybe, if it were a different place, but... Roma Palooza chicken fingers? Seriously? That’s what I’m killing my body for?”

Beth, fully embracing Bobby, burst into tears. Linda, i.e., myself, being overlooked by the sudden distraction, lunged full-forced at Bill with a terrific war cry.

At this point, everyone was utterly enthralled with the unfolding events and stepped in to take sides— DI DI DOOP. A take-out customer had checked in online.

“Oh shit.” I backed away from Carly, who blinked slowly to clear the spell over us all.

Beth checked her computer, and sure enough, it was Linda in spot 2. “Wanna help carry out?”

Numbly, we carried the order to the middle-aged woman. She pulled out a fifty for Beth and said, “Thanks for this. It’s my grandson’s birthday.”

Belief I Choose: Annika Newcomer

“What do you believe in?”

I hear this question more than I ever anticipated. I grew up in a religious environment, always at least one parent actively participating in religious activities and trying to make the rest of the family attend. Yet, despite all the time and energy spent being preached to, I believe in no perfect divine being. I may have at one point; I might still if my mother wasn’t cruelly taken decades before her time, leaving behind a distraught husband and three young children.

No, I could never believe in an all-powerful creator that would turn a blind eye to such soul-sucking despair and grief. But my father sought solace and hope in his faith. One event, two very different beliefs. And I don’t knock anyone who still believes; it just isn’t for me.

I spent four long years pretending to be a believer and paid my dues to the religion. Then, when I was 17, I finally told my father that I was done, that I hadn’t believed in years, and would no longer accompany him to a place that felt so foreign and wrong to me.

We sat in the car, surrounded by a painfully tense silence, tears gathering and spilling from our eyes. He finally turned to me and asked softly, “Well, my dear, what do you believe in?”

I shrugged, swallowed, wracked my brain for an able reply. “I don’t know, Dad. I just know that this isn’t it. I believe I will see mom again, but not like this.”

In the two years since, he and many others have continued to ask me what I believe in, and my answer never changed – I had no sure belief, nothing but my absolute faith in seeing mom again.

Recently, I have spent much time reflecting on my life, observing others, and searching for truths in this maddening world we all play to. Through these reflections, I have decided that I believe in people.

I don’t call it fate because I like to think that each person remains in control of one’s agency, but I do believe that the people we interact with can change our lives. I have many people for whom I’m grateful each day. Yet, I

struggle to elucidate my affection and respect for them in a way that ever feels satisfactory. Perhaps this is a good start.

For years, my teachers mentored and comforted me. They saw something in me that I have yet to truly understand. I consider myself blessed with numerous excellent instructors, more than I can pen here. Some, though, deserve to be named for changing my life, knowingly or not.

Ms. Spencer, an incredible science teacher who, ironically enough, encouraged my love for writing and English, has supported my dreams since the 7th grade and listened to many rambling emails. Mrs. Evans, the math teacher who saved my life the year my mom passed; I would not be standing here if not for her. Dr. Shaker, my incredible MPC professor, helped me discover my passion for the social sciences and provided me with excellent academic and career opportunities.

Last but most important to me is Calarco. Mrs. Calarco was my high school senior English and public speaking teacher. At a time when I was merely going through the same old motions year after year, Calarco broke through the grief-stricken haze and changed my mind. I decided to follow my dreams. I decided to seek help to get better. I decided that I was worthwhile and deserved to fight for myself. I chose life over survival. And while I attempted to explain that to her, I fear Calarco's impact on my life will never be known.

My dearest friend, Lexie, I know will be a part of my life forever. My cousin Johnathan never judges or needs an explanation for anything beyond "I don't want to talk; can we just hang?" Tyrell, my brother, whom I can never put into words. My aunt who took me into her life by choice and has spent every day since choosing to keep me in it.

I believe we meet wonderful people who will disappear sooner than we'd like, but will still leave a lesson behind. I think we meet horrible people and build stronger and wiser from their ruin. The pain is an unfortunate necessity. People are flawed and when we allow ourselves to care and accept them into our lives, we take a risk and hope for reward.

Contributors

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William Boggs grew up on a poor, rural farm, and the center of his life has been work of one kind or another: farming, construction, industry, and finally, academia. He is now retired and continues to write poems about work.

Carl Boon is the author of the full-length collection, *Places & Names: Poems* (The Nasiona Press, 2019). His writing has appeared in many journals and magazines, including *Prairie Schooner*, *Posit*, and *The Maine Review*.

Willy Conley, a registered biological photographer and writer, has photos and writings published in numerous books and magazines. Born profoundly deaf, he is a retired professor of theatre at Gallaudet University in D.C.

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Deborah H. Doolittle has lived in lots of different places, but now calls North Carolina home. A Pushcart Prize nominee, she is the author of *Floribunda* (Main Street Rag, 2017) and three chapbooks. She shares a home with her husband, four housecats, and a backyard full of birds.

Matthew Feeney is a prison poet. He has had 200 works published since 2017, all without using the internet while serving sentence in Minnesota. He has received several awards, including from PEN America, and was nominated for a 2021 Pushcart Prize in Poetry by Gival Press.

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Paul Hostovsky makes his living in Boston as a sign language interpreter and a braille instructor. His poems have won a Pushcart Prize and two Best of the Net Awards.

Akiva Israel, prison poet, is an artist doing time in a prison for men. She is transgender and believes that, in a previous cycle of incarnation, she did witness the first live performance of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

Erin Jamieson holds an MFA in Creative Writing from Miami University of Ohio. Her writing has been published in over eighty literary magazines, and her fiction has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize. She teaches at the Ohio State University.

Marilyn E. Johnston is the author of two collections of poetry published by Antrim House Books, *Silk Fist Songs* (2008) and *Weight of the Angel* (2009). Her chapbook, *Against Disappearance*, won publication as a finalist for the 2001 poetry prize of Redgreene Press, Pittsburgh. Her work has appeared in numerous journals and has garnered six Pushcart Prize nominations.

Beverly Rose Joyce lives in Brecksville, Ohio. She holds a MA in English from Cleveland State University. She was a high school English teacher for sixteen years. Her writing and photography have appeared in various literary journals.

Carlina Krajnik is just a girl writing poetry.

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Ian Marshall is a Kent, Ohio-based painter and photographer. His paintings depict a withering nature of industrial subject matter. His photography offers serenity through dramatic lighting and color. Ian graduated from Kent State University in 2017 in Fine Art.

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Jared Pearce grew up in California and now lives in Iowa.

Marjorie Power's newest full-length poetry collection is *Sufficient Emptiness* (Deerbrook Editions, 2021). A chapbook, *Refuses to Suffocate*, was published by Blue Lyra Press in 2019. She lives in Rochester, New York, after many years of residing in various western states.

Andy Roberts is the author of three chapbooks from Pudding House Publications and five from NightBallet Press. He has published in various journals, including *The Midwest Quarterly*. He lives in Columbus, Ohio.

S. Alexander Scott (pen name) is a prison poet whose authorial identity exists only right here. He was born in books, raised by stories, and always hoped he'd meet others in writing. If he were real, he'd wish most for another snowboarding run, a great cup of espresso, and some more time with his loved ones, both two- and four-legged.

David Sapp, writer, artist, and professor, lives along the southern shore of Lake Erie in North America. A Pushcart Prize nominee, he was awarded Ohio Arts Council Individual Excellence Grants for poetry and the visual arts. His poems appear widely in the U.S., Canada, and the U.K.

Marilyn Shaker works in original oil on canvas paintings. She has had a successful career in floral design, studying at the Cleveland Institute of Art, Museum of Art, and Lighthouse School of Art. She uses a loose realistic technique that produces vibrant expressions of nature's depth of color, light, and texture.

Larry Smith grew up along the Ohio River in the steel mill town of Mingo Junction. For 35 years, he taught at the Firelands College of Bowling Green State University. He is the author of eight books of poetry and five books of fiction. He co-founded Bottom Dog Press in 1985.

Jane Stuart is currently working on a small collection of poetry about Luxor. Her preferred forms are haiku, tanka, and haibun. Her work has appeared in various magazines and anthologies.

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Ellen M. Taylor teaches writing and literature at the University of Maine at Augusta. She has published in regional and national journals and has three poetry collections published by Moon Pie Press. She lives with her family in Appleton, Maine.

RC Wilson is a retired civil servant who lives in Kent, Ohio, with his wife, Camille Park, and two cats. He is part of a group that meets monthly to read poetry at Last Exit Books, and he is a frequent organizer of poetry readings and events in the Kent area.

