

2010 - 2021



# Live encounters

POETRY & WRITING

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AMERICAN POETS & WRITERS EDITION  
JANUARY 2022

DAVID RIGSBEE

*Presents*

American Poets & Writers

COVER ARTWORK BY IRISH ARTIST EMMA BARONE





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Magnolia Champaca, Luang Prabang, Laos, photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



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Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

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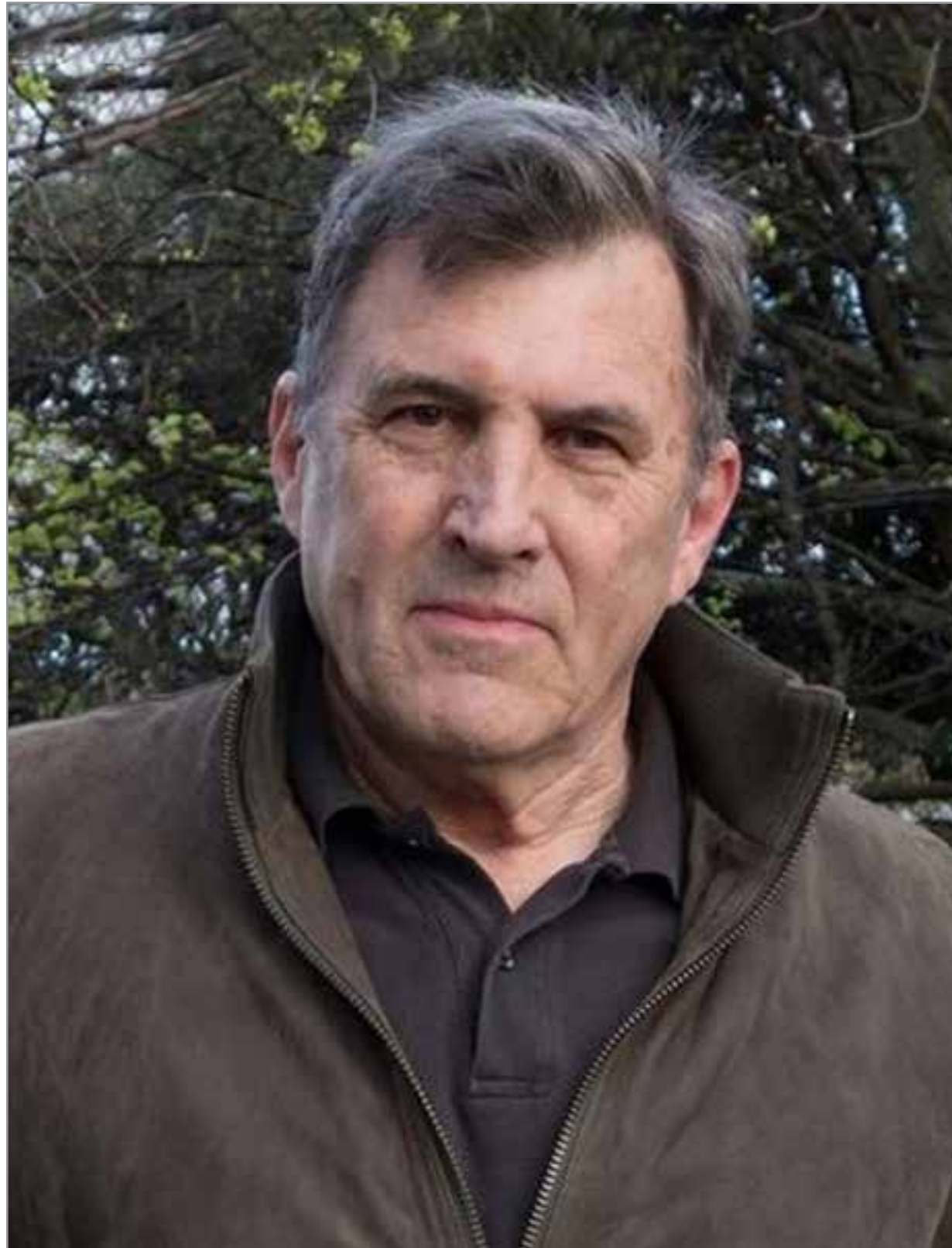
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David Rigsbee is an American poet, critic and translator who has an immense body of published work behind him. *Not Alone in my Dancing – Essays and Reviews* (2016), *This Much I Can Tell You* (2017), *School of the Americas* (2012) and *The Pilot House* (2011), all published by Black Lawrence Press, are but a sample. Forthcoming in the fall is his complete translation of Dante's *Paradiso* from Salmon Poetry, and *MAGA Sonnets by Donald Trump* from Main Street Rag, a series of 85 quotations from Trump's speeches and interviews bundled up in sonnet form (political satire and grimly humorous).



David Rigsbee

## DAVID RIGSBEE

### A WEDDING AND THE DEATHS OF POETS

On December 12, two days after what would have been my teacher Carolyn Kizer's 96th birthday, and six days before my daughter's wedding, I received word of the death of Ron Bayes, a poet not well known in the world, but a poet of immense influence to a few. One recalls Milton's subtle phrase, "fit though few." Ron, a dyed-in-the-wool Poundian, had transplanted himself from Oregon to the middle of nowhere, North Carolina, a.k.a., Laurinburg and dinky St. Andrews Presbyterian College, where he and his students embraced the *paideuma* and its avatars, the Black Mountain poets. Ron's tiny house was often aswirl with guests as his enthusiasms unfolded, and during my visits there from my base in Chapel Hill, I met such writer luminaries as the jovial Jonathan Williams, poet and founder of The Jargon Society, Joel Oppenheimer, poet and long time contributor to *The Village Voice*, and the inimitable Charleen Swansea, editor and memoirist, who had spent her weekends as a student at Meredith College in Raleigh, hitchhiking her way to Washington to sit in the presence of Ezra Pound, who held court at St. Elizabeth's hospital. Charleen was later the star of Ross McElwee's *Sherman's March*, in which role she was called "the greatest documentary character of all time."

Visiting Ron, one was likely to find there as well the likes of Edward Dorn, Robert Creeley, or Pound's daughter, Mary de Rachewiltz. There was also his close friend Shelby Stephenson, a beloved figure in southern poetry, whose mellifluously southern baritone became familiar throughout the state and the avuncular, bow-tied Sam Ragan, a famed journalist, poet, and advocate for the arts, who charmed Adlai Stevenson's sister Buffie to donate and endow her mansion in Southern Pines into a literary retreat. Sam was also pleased for us all to know that his college sweetheart had been the then undiscovered Ava Gardner.





David Rigsbee, novelist Daphne Athas, painter Jill Bullitt, and Ron Bayes. Ron had fallen in the parking lot and bumped his head.

In 1986-87, the year I taught at St. Andrews, Ron was eager to introduce me to Wallace Fowle, the eminent French scholar and translator of Rimbaud, who taught at Duke. Wallace had enjoyed a bump in celebrity when he disclosed that he had been in correspondence with Jim Morrison of The Doors just before Morrison's death. Morrison had felt inspired in his lyrics by the example of Arthur Rimbaud, and he sought Wallace's advice on matters of interpretation. Duke University Press, ever striving to be *au courant*, duly published the correspondence with Wallace's commentary, and Ron declared a Wallace Fowle Day at St. Andrews, complete with class visits, a lecture, a splashy party, and "Light My Fire" on repeat, blaring from the bell tower. Ron loved such moments. For all the increasingly cryptic, *Cantos*-like moments in his later poems, he was in his soul a social man, even a civic man, with plainly generous instincts. Meanwhile, on the wall of his study was a framed paper napkin that read, "Dear Ron, Sorry about last night! —Tennessee Williams." Ron professed not to recall the incident to which it referred. Compact and twinkle-eyed, he made an immersive universe where none was before and peopled it with colorful figures who must have felt they were on the verge of something great.

This was Ron's mission, to bring poetry into midst of everyday life, and he made a kind of affectionate alliance with Kizer, who was herself a transplanted Northwesterner, teaching creative writing at UNC. There was a lot of to-ing and fro-ing in those years, and Ron became a friend and supporter, who published early work of mine in *The St. Andrews Review*, brought out a collection of my longer poems in the 1990s, handed out several big-sounding awards (The Pound Prize and the Sam Ragan Award), even hired me to teach with him and run the St. Andrews Press for a year in the 1980s. He arranged for my wife Jill, a deeply engaging painter, to have a one-man show in the 2000s. Ron could be cryptic, and his allegiances were not always coherent (e.g., he was fanatical about Mishima), but you understood there was substance there, loyalty and a sense of purpose.

When my daughter Makaiya announced her intention to get married, she also asked me to officiate, and I agreed. I went online and got myself ordained by the Universal Life Church, joining a list of such nonce pastors as Lady Gaga and Conan O'Brien.



David Wagoner and Carolyn Kizer, ca. 1960.

She and her fiancé, Armando, had wanted a ceremony solemnized by familiar lines from poets, so I set about writing a short sermon that quoted bits from Anne Bradstreet, Robert Burns, Shakespeare, Spenser, Shelley, Kizer, Kenneth Koch, Nikki Giovanni, and Jack Gilbert, by way of solemnizing the nuptials. It was eclectic, so say the least. But I also felt Ron's spirit hovering. He had written,

"...clocks stop when the dead love  
or want to touch us; when the dead love  
the living and when we reciprocate.  
And sometimes though such doors  
in spite of our desire, loved ones  
insist on entering."

We learned, alas, the next day that poet David Wagoner had died. David had gone from a middle-class upbringing in Chicago out to Seattle to study with Theodore Roethke at the University of Washington, where his classmates included Richard Hugo, James Wright, Jack Gilbert, and Carolyn Kizer, with whom he was to become romantically involved. When I arranged a reading for Kizer and Wagoner in 2006 on the publication of David Lehman's *Oxford Book of American Poetry*, it was the first time they had met in years. It was also one of Kizer's last readings. David (Wagoner, not Lehman) had also broken Kizer's heart half a century before by spurning her for a woman Carolyn dismissed as merely ordinary, certainly not fit for someone of his artistic brilliance. The same year of the reading, I had attended a series of workshops taught by David and could sense the commitment with which he channeled Roethkean aesthetics. He would say things like, "Much contemporary poetry consists of a monotone voice. But the voice of the poet has the same range as that of the singer. The origins are the same: there is tempo, rhythm, timbre, register, pitch, volume—all suggested by the speaking voice. There is not only music, but dance, storytelling, the campfire. There is the shaman's magic in language that brought people to and back from the dead." Technically, he was a master, and I considered him the most trained and meticulous of American nature poets.





Naomi Lazard in later life.

But he was more than an inspired botanist, he had learned to sing of his own strangeness:

...I had loved you too, but from so far away  
 Through so much hesitation, so much restraint  
 And disbelief across our strict profession  
 Of words, our unwritten law (the years,  
 The years), I couldn't say your name to myself  
 By daylight or think of you  
 As more than a faint hope from a different life  
 Now left and lost.

(“In a Garden”)

He also said, “It helps to be awful.” David continued to teach well into his eighties and felt the need to step up to the competition, whoever it was, even though he had been elected Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets. He always made sure, for example, that departmental newsletters listed his latest publications, even those buried in obscure journals. David was the great love of my daughter's grandmother, and she knew it. As the wedding party packed and drove off from the small hotel on the Pacific Ocean, where roosters and bald eagles found common geography, David had joined Ron in my mind and in death.

The very next day, we learned that poet Naomi Lazard had died. Naomi had been my colleague at Hamilton/Kirkland in the early '70s, when I was an instructor in creative writing. Naomi was famous for being Bill Knott's muse (*The Naomi Poems*), although the two were never an item. I once asked her about this, given the esteem in which he held her. “I couldn't,” she said. “He smells funny.” “Give him a nice bar of soap,” I suggested. “It won't wash off,” she countered. So much for the radiant muse. Naomi was frighteningly literal and never let the obvious get away with anything. I was putting together my first manuscript for publication, and Naomi would come over regularly to my duplex, sit on the sofa with me and scrutinize every word laid out on the coffee table. She was brutal without meaning to be. If I wrote, “I put the book on the table,” she would squint and turn to me: “What do you mean when you say the *table*?” It was good training, but tough. Years later I was writing a master's thesis on Wittgenstein, and I couldn't help but think of her, although I am sure she never had the patience to read him.

Naomi was commuting up to Clinton from her apartment in Chelsea in New York, a punishing commute even for her Lancia sports car, a gift from her faraway Italian boyfriend, himself a Senator and Communist. Naomi came from a working class Jewish background in Philadelphia. Just like the character in *Annie Hall*, she could say confidently that she was once a great beauty. Moreover, she happened to marry into the Lazard family of global financiers, only to bolt when her husband disapproved of her writing poems. In this, she mirrored the experience of Kizer, who likewise married into wealth but divorced her way out, in part as a protest to a similar paternalism. When I introduced them, they became friends on the spot and even traveled together to Mexico. Naomi was working on a remarkable collection of poems that came to be called *Ordinances*. While reading Cavafy and the European Surrealists, she came upon a voice that every readers knows, that every *human* knows: the voice of bureaucracy. You can hear it immediately in "Ordinance at the Level Crossing" which begins:

Jumping the track is forbidden;  
the penalty for offenders is death.  
You are permitted  
to live beside the track,  
work at your trade,  
take trips, raise your family—  
but always on this side.

Our conversations continued over the years, and by the time she retired to a home in Long Island, where she lived with her cats, she had given up poetry for screen-writing, at which she had no success. But she impressed herself on everyone whom she encountered. Jordan Smith remembers her practical kindness when he was a first-year student poet at Hamilton, taking him to buy groceries as a cure for depression. She was able to combine simplicity and what I took to be a kind of grandeur. I once asked her why she didn't ask her ex-husband for a more liberal alimony, and she answered that she didn't want to have to deal with the temptations that money brought in its wake. She settled for a modest apartment and just enough monthly to pay rent and buy groceries. Fair enough, I thought. I remembered her delight in meeting Makaiya as a little girl in Raleigh. Naomi, who doted on her only niece, told me that she was considering moving south both to be near her Amanda and to be neighbors with us, namely my wife Jill, and our daughter, who was now, more than a quarter of a century later, getting married on the Pacific coast, just as Naomi on the opposite coast was making her earth departure.

Once she invited me to visit her in New York. Bill Knott was going to be there. I didn't know what to expect. Knott looked up and said, "I've heard of you." He had arrived at her apartment with a knit bag in which was his food supply: a can of Crisco and a jar of powdered Lipton tea. I remembered the story she told about being with her long-distance partner in Italy and going out to eat. The door opened, she said, and in walked, with entourage, Burt Lancaster with his sweating forehead and klieg-like smile. "He was majestic!" she said. "A god!" News of her death as the wedding party was departing hit me hard.

Brodsky, who succinctly defined a cliché as something you'd heard twice, offered his own cliché in pointing out on numerous occasions that the phrase "the death of the poet" seemed more fitting than "the life of the poet." I would add that the multiple deaths of poets reminds me of something David Wagoner said, "Collective unconsciousness is like aspen roots: separate above, connected below." I married my daughter and son-in-law in the name of poetry and a lot of other things, including love.. There is no doubt it was sacramental, even as my beloved ex had the last word: "Everyone is leaving."



Ron Bayes and Rigsbee, St. Andrews Press office, mid-1980s.



Richard Krawiec's fourth novel French novel *Les Paralysés* will be published by Tusitala Editions in 2022.. He has published three books of poetry, most recently *Women Who Loved me Despite* (Second Edition). His work appears in *Drunken Boat*, *Shenandoah*, *sou'wester*, *Levure Litteraire*, *Dublin Review*, *Chautauqua Literary Journal*, etc. He has been awarded fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, the NC Arts Council (twice), and the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts. He is founder of Jacar Press, a Community Active publishing company. <http://jacarpress.com/>



## CALCULATIONS

the wildly spinning feeder throws off the wren  
bent branches out back lash hard and break with a crack  
the windows bow inward, moan darkly, once again  
I pile clothing, tuna, matches inside a sack

at dusk I slosh through rain that lashes ice hard,  
walk past frantically swimming squirrels and snakes  
water rushes inside when I open the car  
the key turned in the ignition bends and breaks

cold slush slips inside, rises past my feet  
an owl glides before my stunned eyes  
with a screech a pine tree crashes to block the street  
I rest my head on the wheel, think, no way can I

die, it's just a storm, not a bullet  
shivering, I calculate what might fall next

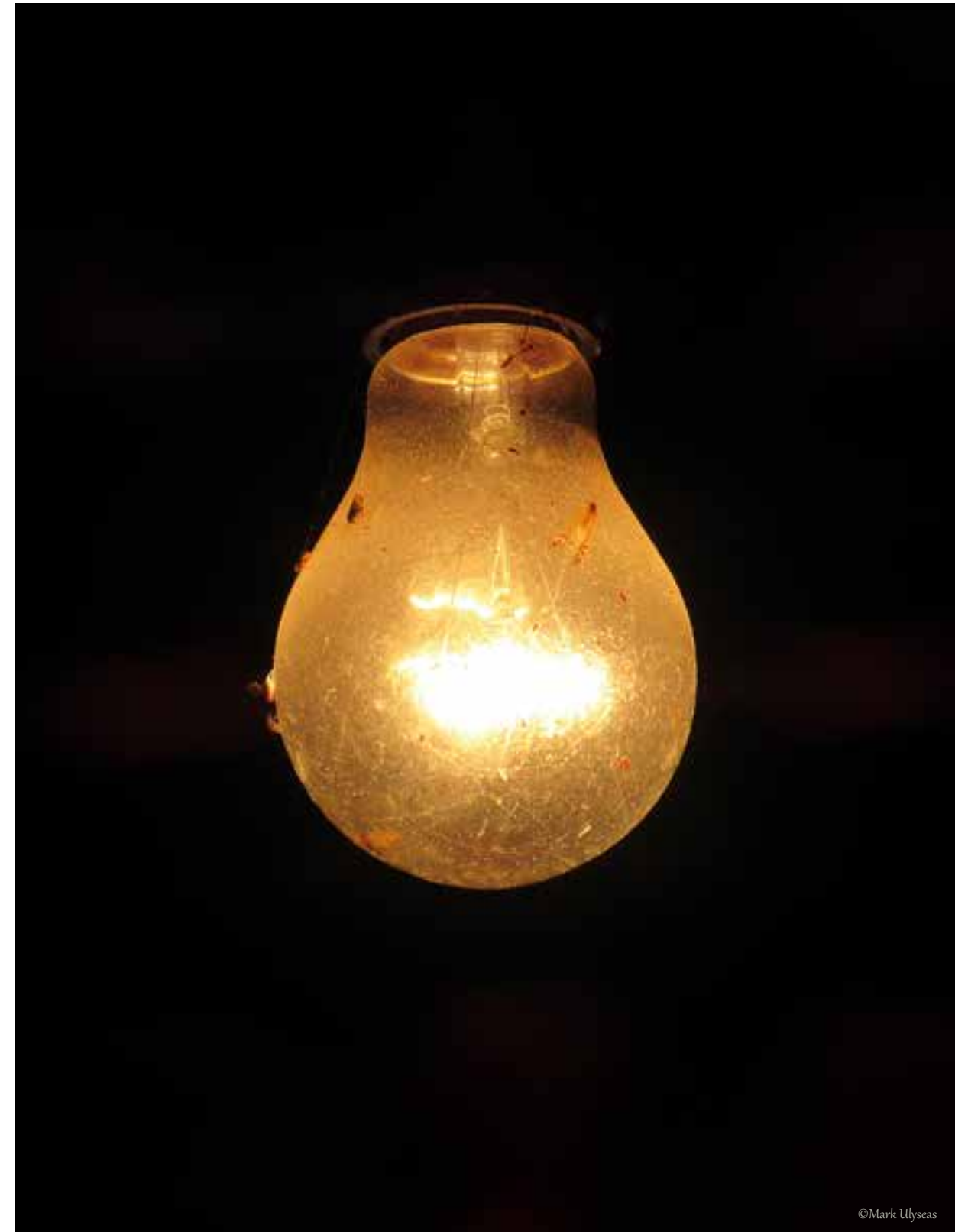
Richard Krawiec

## NOVEMBER

That morning I finish organizing two theatrical productions to be directed by a blind man. In the afternoon, I scrunch under a blanket in the swallowing cushions of the big chair, engrossed in a novel where a blind girl learns by running her fingers over a scale model of a city where she can, must, walk. That evening, small flashes, a frame of lightning, arc the periphery of my right side vision. Every turn of my head ignites another flare. When I pause, hold still, a swarm of black gnats throng the walls.

lips muttering,  
my grandmother doles forth  
black prayer beads

I lay awake all night fearful of moving, trying to convince myself that if I just keep still it will all go away. I'll be normal again. In the morning I roll out of bed slowly, feet tentative to the cold floor. For a second I can breathe. Until a tight web of fireworks surrounds my face. The gnats explode upon me.

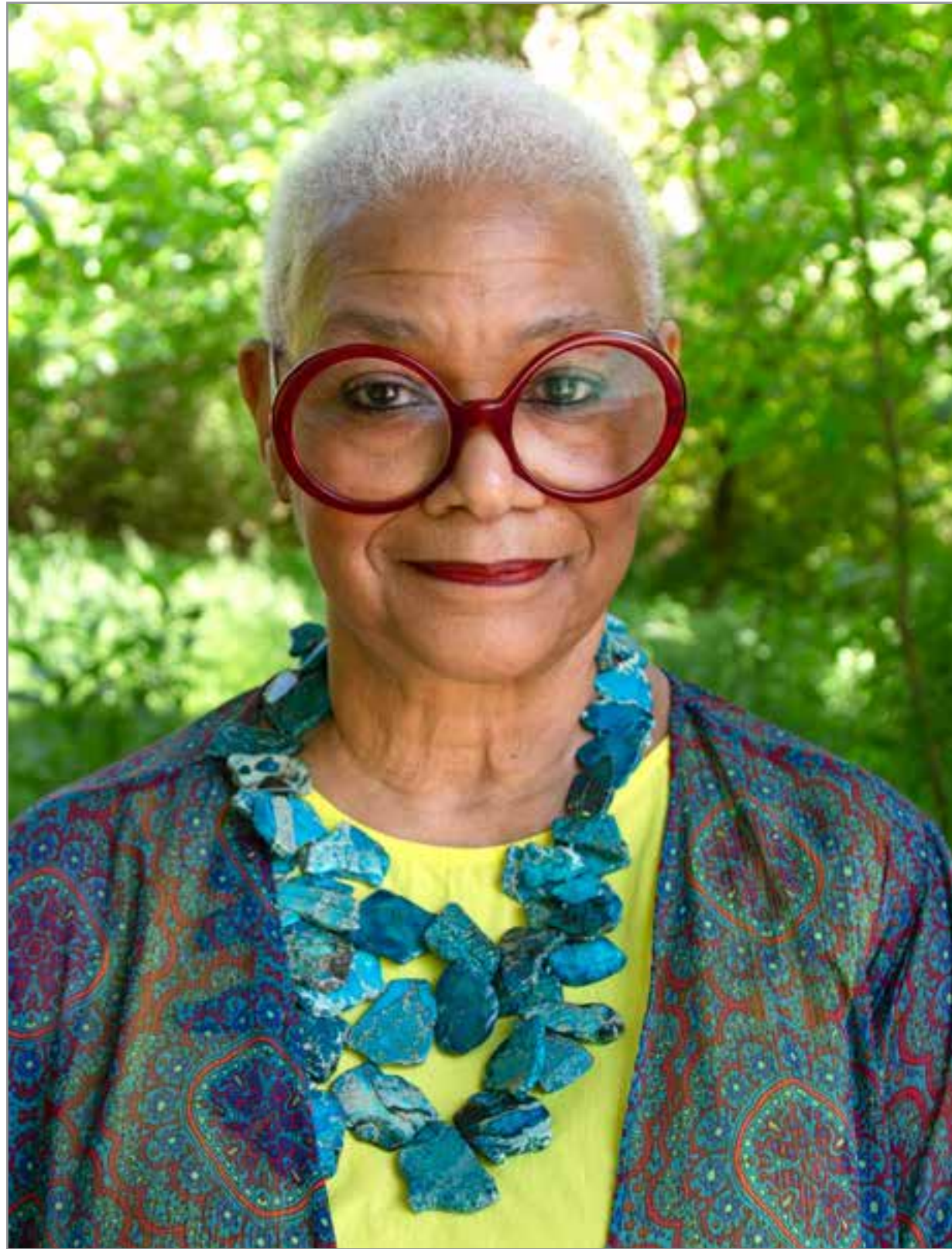


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Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



Jaki Shelton Green is the first African American to be appointed in 2018 as the North Carolina Poet Laureate and reappointed in 2021 by Governor Roy Cooper. She is a 2019 Academy of American Poet Laureate Fellow, 2014 NC Literary Hall of Fame Inductee, 2009 NC Piedmont Laureate appointment, 2003 recipient of the North Carolina Award for Literature. Jaki Shelton Green teaches Documentary Poetry at Duke University Center for Documentary Studies and the 2021 Frank B. Hanes Writer in Residence at UNC Chapel Hill. Her publications include *Dead on Arrival*, *Masks*, *Dead on Arrival and New Poems*, *Conjure Blues*, *singing a tree into dance*, *breath of the song*, published by Blair Publishers. *Feeding the Light*, *i want to undie you* published by Jacar Press, *i want to undie you English /Italian bilingual edition* published by Lebeg Publishers. Her first LP, poetry album, *The River Speaks of Thirst*, was released in 2020 followed by a CD, *i want to undie you* in 2021. Jaki Shelton Green is the owner of *SistaWRITE* providing writing retreats for women writers in Sedona Arizona, Martha's Vineyard, Ocracoke North Carolina, Northern Morocco, and Tullamore Ireland.



## OH MY BROTHER

Oh my brother, my brother. i will weep for you whenever the sun rises or falls. your shadow has been betrayed. the red of the bullet bleeds and covers every breath of all the life you've lived. oh my brother, my brother. i will stand here and wail your name. hold the bullet inside my mouth that cannot stop convulsing with pain. i will learn to swallow the spasms in your screams. i am calling my brothers and my sisters to the ground beside this river where your blood is born. where your blood runs until it is clear. until its red is spent, and it stands up like the wind. speaks into a light we cannot name. oh, my brother, my brother. i beat my chest. pierce my hands. run back and forth naked in rain. trying to swallow this red of a bullet that knew your name. cracked open your smile. stole your hair. oh, my brother. i weep for all i do not know about you. i weep with the bullet that is lodged in my throat whispering its own requiem. the red of the bullet cries out your name. the bullet whispers to me about the flowers that heard the sound. the bullet whispers to me about the sorcery of forgiveness. the bullet whispers to me about black flies stirring the ground beneath your feet. oh, my brother, my brother. who will wash your feet. save the sand inside your shoes. oh my brother. where is your mother. your father. who will help me scrape the dried blood that blocks the doorway of your heart. i want to be the water. the sweet oils that rub into the skin of you. i want to hold your bones steady so your mother can identify your face and rub the soft earlobes she's kissed a thousand times. oh my brother. how must we hold your lover who wants a redemption for your skin. who searches for your lips in the dark. oh my brother. there is so much blood falling from the sky today. suffocating the light. suffocating the babies. i will guard your road-kill blood. if necessary. i will chew the bullet and digest metallic contradiction. i will be the shovel and the crypt. i will sing your name until the wind lifts it from my tongue and sings your legacy into the tenth degree of sound. i will wail the presence of your history through this throat that is out of rhythm. we be poets. the daughters of your winters. sons of your summers.

*continued overleaf...*

Jaki Shelton Green

OH MY BROTHER *contd...*

we be ancient scribes. architects of your sweat. your tears. my poems will be forever screaming the life of you. i dare the red of the bullet to forget. i dare the killer of you to remember. my words are the acid erasing the crime scene. my words are the softness of all the evidence of ghosts. hidden beneath your shirt. inside your underwear. hungry ghosts casting your name into rivers. oh my brother. oh my brother. what are the ancestors singing. oh my brother. you don't have to behave in your grave. oh, my brother. call me and these lyrics will gather arms and stage your rebellion. the red of the bullet has the poetry of your spirit embedded with indelible ink. oh my brother, my brother. hear the wail of the red of the bullet. hear the space between your ribs crumble. hear the sounds in your chest become a roaring ocean. hear the butterflies cease flying. hear this silence that will not be quiet.

## THE COMMUNION OF WHITE DRESSES

In my dreams I am all the women in generations of white dresses white Sundays that cover altars in all the hushed seams of white linen. White gloves lift, pour, sift whispered prayers across crystal cups. Blood becomes bread. I learn to lift white dresses over my head careful not to disturb the pleats that will soon be crushed by hungry hands. What is the difference between standing, pouring blood down the throats of phantom believers and kneeling before the parched lips of a nameless lover? White dresses bear secrets in the neckline. Along hem stitches. White dresses remember the language of hands lifting, stretching, folding them into the froth of a cloud forest. I am the shadow of all the white dresses. hidden. I am the ghost of all the white dresses remembering the stretch of a daughter's shroud. The dance of another daughter's wedding veil. I am the tears that hold the needles steady while grandmothers stitch a Rapunzel of sky. I am breath that is caught in the fragrance of a mother's hair. White communion dresses wade in the holiness of a forced faith that does not rhyme with my name. I become red fierce bloody ocean swallowing a procession of white dresses at dawn. Rapunzel Rapunzel let down your hair. Come dance in the cloud forest. Come dress the nymphs in your long silky strands. Come lift the skirts of thirsty virgins. Stand beneath the altar to catch all the white dresses that they are casting into the wind. My shoulders sigh under the reluctance of stiff coarse white dresses woven with shards of prisms so tight the waist becomes a prison. I want to undress my Sunday body for slow patient redressing of Saturday night black lace. Black sweat. Black promise to erase this white stain. White dresses become harsh smears. Confessional cages. White dresses on my skin remind me of the unraveling of crows hiding in the elderberry tree. Hiding all things shiny. All things unborn to a womb of ink. This is the tightness inside the throat of a white dress that pulls stitches tighter. That threaten mutiny. I am the night walker in white. I am the song of the legend of the woman in the white cloud forest who is known to eat the lace from her sleeves her collars her buttons. White dresses become succor for a timeless famine. White dresses. White doves. White stones. White crosses. White veils. I am the one chosen to commit. Conceal. Execute. Reveal. Undress the sorcery. Betrayal. Acquisition. Acquittal. The dowry of white dresses. The violence of white dresses.... Cover me tenderly.



## I AM THE DELICATE VENTRILOQUIST

the mammy museum is closed  
to the unworthy memorials  
of a diseased constitution

*does the stench of my death force you away  
does my poetry inside your mouth taste like the last supper  
does the swallowed. stolen key. rust in your mouth. like a nameless tornado*

**I am the delicate ventriloquist**

unmasked mammy  
crawling. nailing pennies in every corner  
counting crows living inside my heart

*become carcass of dead bird sassy womanchild  
become sharp finger knife spared from hand of the mother  
become bed for God (desses). who live here too*

**I am the delicate ventriloquist**

firewalker. sunday sunrise. praise legs by night.  
four women in the vineyard of nina simone.  
strung across map. bloody trees. talking ropes.

*damsel. vixen. lady. grand dame.  
weaver of hair. teeth. bones. snake whisperer  
dancing winds. blow museum doors wide open. mummies rejoice.*

LETTER FROM THE OTHER DAUGHTER  
OF THE CONFEDERACY

*Could i. Would i.* have been your black confederate princess. emblem of truly a new dirty south. a new rag for all the wiping swiping of blood dazzled sidewalks. trees bent heavy heaving beneath black claws tigers and bears. *Could i. Would i.* have been your black confederate concubine. sashaying a room draped in rope teeth dried phalanges pulsating throats electric shocked eye sockets. *Could i. Would i.* have been your black confederate dominatrix. razor blades strapped beneath my armpits. whips growing like hair across your ribs. your mothers' mothers' mother raising out of a hellbox to reclaim her name. the last of a savage cave tribe buried alive beneath a southern mansion crest. your fathers' fathers' father does not wince in his grave. he's known other black confederate dominatrix. claimed flagpoles to pleasure her demands. swallowed birth certificates census reports bibles to pleasure his own demands. *Could i. Would i.* have been your black confederate trophy. hidden inside mahogany carved beds. hidden inside crystal flutes. hidden inside a meadow of thistle. hidden inside the elbow of an oak that knows everything everyone. or inside an owl's nest just a throw from the slave auctioneer's voice. *Could i. Would i.* have been your black confederate lover. bite me bite me bite me. while an entire continent roars back upon your back. *our daughters are not your daughters our daughters are not your daughters our daughters are not your daughters.* let them be. *Could i. Would i.* have been your black confederate secret. i am the names of smothered babies in the hands of mummies so black they startle the night they steal from. i am the names of all the daughters grinding and sifting gris-gris into your soup. i am the name of every womb you poisoned. i am the name of all your weariness. all your fear. all your disease. all the death I hold back from you. i am the life of the hundred thousand nightmares that hold you hostage to sunlight. *Could i. Would i.* have been your black confederate truth once upon a black confederate lynching book. i am all the names of all the names of black skin becoming stardust.

*continued overleaf...*

## LETTER FROM THE OTHER DAUGHTER OF THE CONFEDERACY *cont...*

floating black snow falling all over the porcelain nakedness of your white confederate mistress. confederate black snow falling on the tongues of your white confederate children. black confederate skin tucked inside their pockets for good luck. i am the name of the belt you tighten around your white confederate waist woven from my black confederate skin. *Could i. Would i* have been your black confederate anthem. a princess without a country. the other daughter of the confederacy. sewing bullets inside bible pages. wrapping swords with crushed red velvet. dancing knives beneath war skirts. i am this other daughter of your confederacy. standing bone to bone to bone to bone to all the other confederate daughters. eating the stars falling from your eyes that could not bear witness to your other daughter of your confederacy. i am that daughter. bleached bones. rotating eye sockets. searching upside down for stolen birthrights. shackled starlight. and the indescribable taste for freedom.

## NO POETRY

**no poetry** for these hands. **no poetry** for these trees. **no poetry** for these men. **no poetry** for the time you chase. **no poetry** for dreams that hold you hostage. **no poetry** for the truth brewing inside crooked hallways crooked courtrooms crooked jailhouses. **no poetry** for the fog covering the blood. **no poetry** for the noose flapping against the wind's tongue. **no poetry** for the words that make it happen. **no poetry** for the accused. **no poetry** for the accuser. **no poetry** for confederate matchsticks. **no poetry** for your wild horses storming foreign shores. **no poetry** for your god who is always late to every funeral of every black child. **no poetry** for the war guns. **no poetry** for the hidden ones. **no poetry** for the nameless corners that claim us over and over again. **no poetry** for the songs that break apart. **no poetry** for old stories crawling under locked doors. **no poetry** for your collection of tongues and burned out moons. **no poetry** for the make-believe stars in your crown. **no poetry. no poetry. no poetry.** for the days in between all the years you remembered. **no poetry** for the days in between all the years you forgot to loosen the noose. **no poetry** for Juneteenth midnights when you refused to kiss the neck of newborn freedom. **no poetry** dripping from beneath your slashed armpits. **no poetry** to erase from the smoke of a M-16. **no poetry** to sew inside my son's pockets. **no poetry** to bury in between my son's ribs. **no poetry** to bury inside my son's mouth. **no poetry** to bury inside my son's ears. **no poetry** to bury beneath my son's feet. **no poetry. no poetry. no poetry.** to bury inside my son's heart. **no poetry. no poetry. no poetry.** to feed the crows feasting upon his limbs. **no poetry** for the last breath that cracks into a thousand moments inside a mother's tear. **no poetry** for the light inside our children's eyes trying to find their way home. **We** are all the poems kissed by the Beloved. **We** are all the poems daring to grow inside empty bowls. **We** are all the poems lurking in the shadows. **We** are all the poems that cannot be forced into cages. **We** are all the poems holding up the sky. **We** are all the poems that will no longer sacrifice our seeds to a toxic wind. **We** are all the poems rattling the ghost bones of the Middle Passage. **We** are all the poems pissing on bloodstained flags. **We** are all the poems peeping in windows.

*continued overleaf..*



NO POETRY *cont...*

**We** are all the poems dressed to kill. **We** all the poems that will not be quiet. **We** all the poems waiting to sharpen our oyster knives. **We** are all the poems wrapped up in dangerous hair waiting to strangle history. **We** are all the poems that dance and sing us beyond the currency of our skin. **We** are all the poems becoming dangerous medicine. **We** are all the poems our ancestors carried from sea to shining sea. **We** are all the poems unwritten uncensored unworthy of your memorials constitutions air water land. **We** are all the poems **We** need to start a revolution.

## I WANTED TO ASK THE TREES

I wanted to ask the trees. do you remember. were you there. did you shudder. did your skin cry out against the skin of my great uncle's skin. was the smell of bark a different smell from the smell of meat flesh. human meat flesh. beloved father husband lover friend man flesh. could the air discern burning tongue from burning arm. does the neck bone stay intact or grizzle like the shaft of toes fingers ears.

I wanted to ask the trees. were you there. did you shudder. are you an elder that wailed out loud when they strung him up on your youngest branch. no mercy even for the lynching of new sprawling birch limbs just learning themselves how to crawl towards an un-emancipated sky. are you a grandchild or great grandchild of the tree that drank his blood. the tree that cried tears into the rope around his neck. his arms. his legs.

I wanted to ask the trees. but the ground spoke first. annoying perfectly manicured azaleas. annoying perfect graves of perfect skeletons. whose blood-stained hands are forever etched on the hearts of my ancestors who cry out to me. plantation ground scratches the soles of my feet. ancestors beg me to lie down. be still. they waited so long for this day. when someone would come and dance with their spirits. they are everywhere whispering. holding up this house that dares to ignore them. holding up a sanitized history and herstory. one for the trees. one for us.

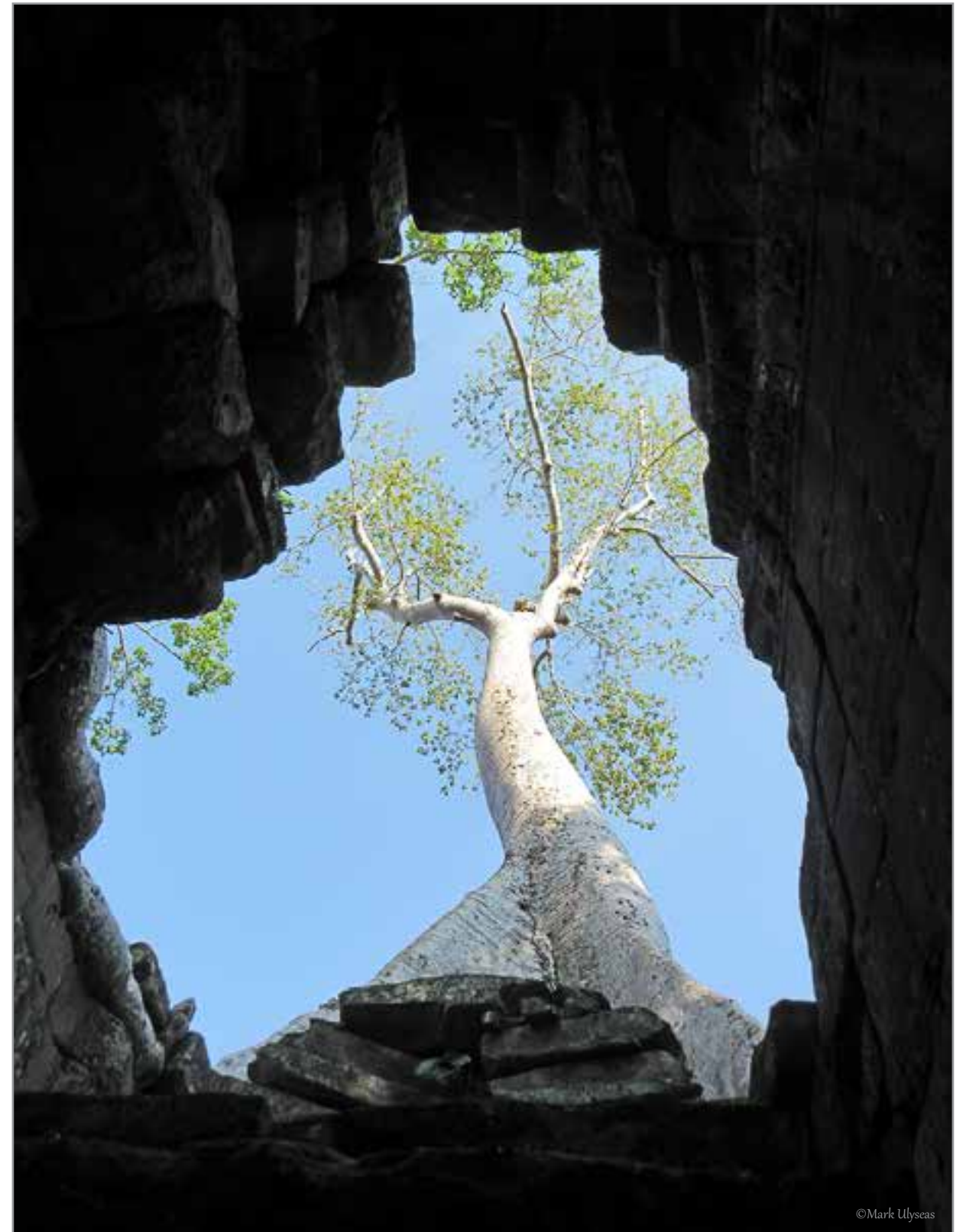
I wanted to ask the trees. do you remember. did you refuse to hold his weight. did your branches crackle. did you refuse to hold him. did you feed his blood to your roots. who are these new trees. look how they glisten against an unshackled firmament. did you tell them that his blood was the only nourishment you could provide that entire season. did you tell them it was a winter of blood. no rain. no snow. blood storms. lightning and thunder lifting other names onto the wind's tongue. so many names for the wind to carry. so much hair teeth bones for the ground to gather.

*continued overleaf...*

## I WANTED TO ASK THE TREES *cont...*

I wanted to ask the trees. who will carry your stories. who are your historians. who will measure the rings of ropes that wrapped around your waist. your shoulders. under your arms. beneath your head. I wanted to ask the trees. did you forget to breathe when the red thunder inside you painted everything the color of love.

I want to ask the trees. do you remember. do your branches still crackle with his weight. do you shudder. do you know mercy.



©Mark Ulyseas

Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.





Glenis Redmond

Glenis Redmond is an award-winning poet. She has been a literary community leader for twenty-eight years. Glenis is a Kennedy Center Teaching Artist and a Cave Canem alumni. Glenis has been the mentor poet for the National Student Poets Program since 2014. In the past she has prepared exceptional youth poets to read at the Library of Congress, the Department of Education, and for First Lady Michelle Obama at The White House. She is a North Carolina Literary Fellowship Recipient and helped to create the first Writer-in-Residence at the Carl Sandburg Home National Historic Site in Flat Rock, North Carolina. Her work has been showcased on NPR and PBS and has been most recently published in *Orion Magazine* and *The New York Times*. Her chapbook, *The Three Harriets and Others* is upcoming in 2022, as well as a full length collection, *The Listening Skin* by Four Way Books. *Praise Songs for Dave the Potter*, art by Jonathan Green along with editor and collaborator Dr. Gabrielle Foreman and Dr. Lynnette Overby will be released by the University of Georgia Press in the same year. In 2020 Glenis was awarded South Carolina's highest award, The Governor's Award. She will be inducted into the South Carolina Academy of Authors in the Spring of 2022.

## FREEDOM SPELLS 1

*For Harriet Tubman*

Deep brown. Crooked switch of a gal. Born under a serious bright, but sickly star. Measle-pocked. faints a lot. Me, a sight: Hair never seen a comb. When I feel my head or catch my likeness in a lake, my hair's is *standing up around my head like a bushel basket*. Gal mostly still baby, but no slave stay a child for long.

My mama do her best wid wat she had to make me well again: victuals and a bit of de bible she done learn. She feed me both. I growed in and out of de fever and whatever else ailing.

Owned by Massa Cook. His face scrunched like a rabid dog all de time. When I still weak, he made me wade in de water to fetch muskrats. Almost drowned. He say, "You ain't worth six pence" or yell, "Ise sell you down river." I close my eyes and shut my ears, my way of spitting on dat. Dis when I become I not she. Like dat, become like dat Oak standing in de yard firm in her roots. What hold her steady, help me hold my ground.

Dey call me to de house tho. I hate every wall. I call it cage in my mind, so you know what dat make me. Can't stand mistress' reach either. Seem like her eyes be everywhere at once. Her command too. She tell me when to take in air and when to let it out. Everything at my reach, but none of it mine.

I stole a little taste a sugah once. One lump, 'cause I ain't never had nothin sweet on my tongue. Lashed for dat. I padded myself wid as much cloth as I could find, so when she whup me, I commence to hollering. Catterwaller, but ise do wat I gots to do. I laughs on de inside. Just something between me and my maker. Five feet even and everything de Lawd put in me. Stubborn. My giddy up don't go unless I say so or the Almighty.

Field over house any day. I knows my way around every inch of work: Hoist flour bags. Break flax. Pick cotton wid my eyes close. My weight be slight, but my muscle be strong. Wid de Almighty on my side, who stand again me? In de field. I feel strength in my arms and legs. Feel what my mama poured into me. De soil under my feets and my lungs full of clear air. I earned more dan I ever owed. I put dem coins away till dey collect. I buys not a pretty dress, but two steers. When riding, I hold de reigns and I sip air as I need.

## FREEDOM SPELLS 2

*For Harriet Tubman*

Words full of heat. Dat where power be, if de come from de right place. So, I set mouth to pray. Speaks wid my whole self to pry Massa Brodess heart open. Wid dis tool. I speak in Jesus' name. I do my best to wrench de devil's hold. I prays wid out ceasing from sun up to moon out. I hold fast. I mumbles. Sometimes I shout in de field. If my heart takes to sing I sings. *Come by heah lawd. Come by heah.* See if dis song be a key to open de gate. Release dis five finger grip, Lawd. We bound by dey law. Though it crooked as a creek. We's worth more dan de money we put in his pocket, but greed speak louder dan truth to him. Greed be winter. Be cold wrong. Holding us against our time. We done wet dese field wid both sweat and tears. Skutch flax. Toted de lumber. Our feet done walk every step of dis ground. When prayer don't turn massa's mind. I turn. Change prayer to curse: "Lawd, if you ain't never going to change his heart, Kill him." He died soon after. I say de word be power. Gotta mind which way you use it. Cut two ways. I wept on it a lil, but dat was just a pas-sin fog. Cause I fix my mind on how he kept mama 10 years longer as a slave. I study on dat. Wipe my mind clear. I fix myself. Take marchin' orders from de almighty. He speaks. I rise up. He ain't got to tell me but once: flee.

## SPELLS FOR ZERO CAPTURES

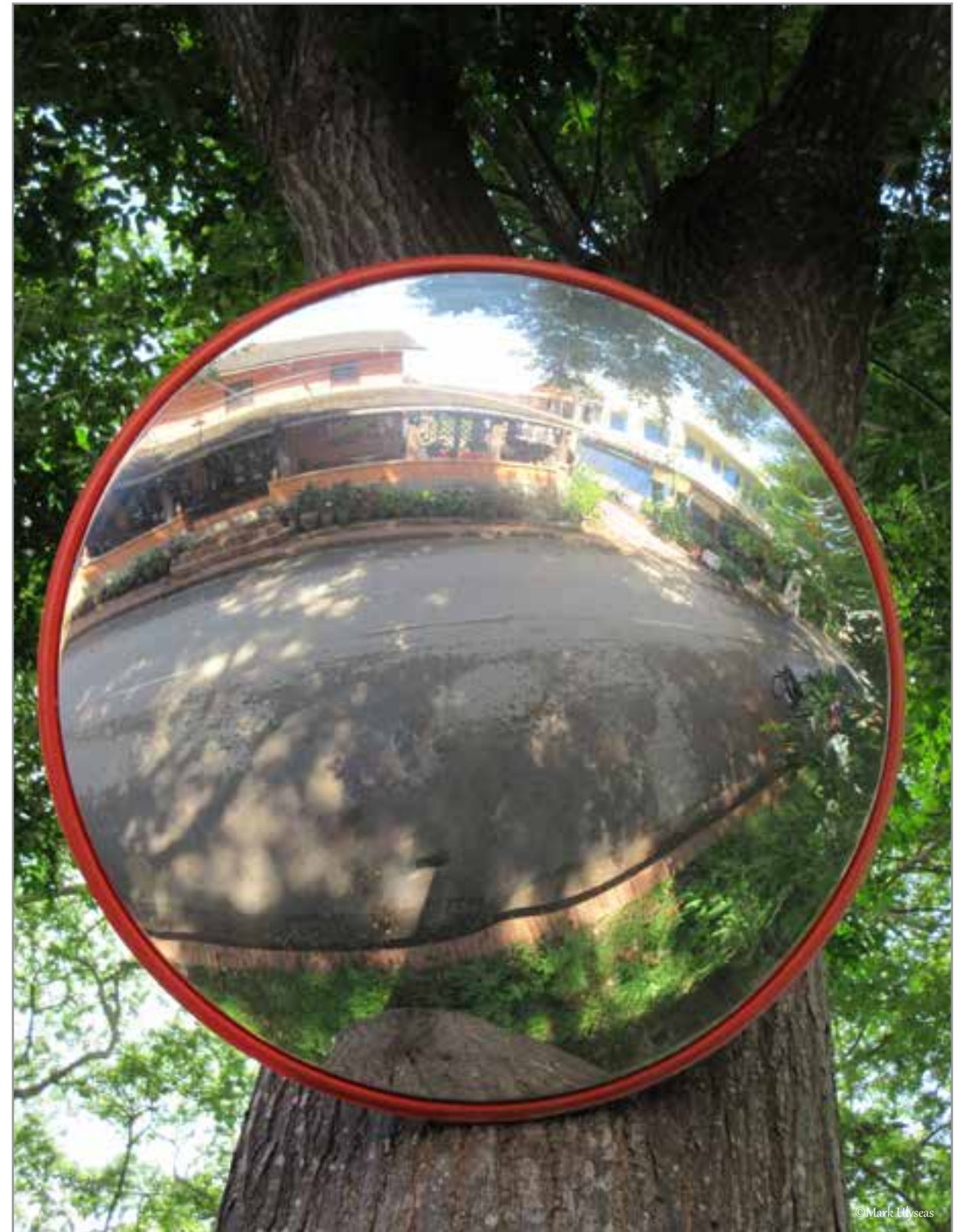
*For Harriet Tubman*

Conduct like I ain't tryin to die. Leave when de moon new. Sky dark. Listen to what's on my inside, 'cause it don't lie. When my chest flutters, I knows danger lurks. Change course. "Know I can't die but once." But, ain't tryin to do dat just yet. Don't speak on nothin. Proud talk get you dead. No need for I did dis. I did dat. No peacocking. Blend into tree trunk. Travel during winter. Buy time. Saturday night rewards for runaways not in papers till Monday morning. Got a whole day before dey 'spect we gone. Read people and de land like white people read books. When I have a spell, shout not. Don't fight deep sleep. Go into the body quake. Vision and dreams be how God directs my path. Follow de map dat my inside knows. Let God talk. No open field in daylight. Know de codes like I know de woods. Light in window. No trails. Cover footsteps. Don't give into thoughts of coon dogs and guns. Quiet steps. Silence. Give babies de root. Paregoric. My Grandma Modesty came over on de boat from Africa. She knew the earth holds medicine. Don't tarry. Make friends of weary and tired. Dey don't leave nohow. "You'll be free or die." Listen to de old ways. Don't turn back. Trust de Quakers, but carry gun loaded. Curse slavers. "Never wound a snake; kill it." "God's time Emancipation]is always near." He set de North Star in de heavens.; He gave me de strength in my limbs to follow where his light leads.



## HARRIET SPELLS FOR SHIFT SHAPING

Being looked over, around, and through my best weapon. Turn into whatever de time of day call for. Pitch black step. Slip into owl or hawk. Turn tree trunk. Become de hound chasing you. Lead de pack to river edge. Invisible. Brown bird always best. Mourning Dove, crow, sparrow, railes crakes and coots. Like old black woman. Dey not spectin nothin' but an old slave. Look closer. Common brown bird. Last time I checked brown birds got wings too.



Traffic mirror on a tree. Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

## COTTON PICKER

A history book's white-washed page  
will not hold this telling.  
I will have to bring the story  
into view with my own being.  
Seed brown of a girl striving  
in the back country of Laurens County,  
my mama, not yet my mama  
only 90 pounds in heft. Yet, her arms  
already full of longing and escape

When she speaks of field work even at age 85,  
I can hear how a fishbone catches in her throat  
I can feel the pinch of cotton's harsh perimeter.  
How it resonates as prison. She recalls  
the cruel inhumane hours that they worked  
as *Can't see to can't see*.  
I love the folk tongue metaphors.

When she opens her mouth,  
she tells of how every goodbye ain't gone.  
I shut my eyes and take in this backwards walk.  
I carry her rage that she will not place directly  
on her tongue. I stand adjacent to the fire and witness.  
I will not forget how she eked out her existence, a sentence  
between cotton rows: Head down, fingers boll-torn  
with small pearls of blood staining white blooms.

When she speaks of cotton, I can hear the horror,  
but also, the pride, a curious boast.  
Strangely when a peacock puffs up in her breast  
It does so in mine too. How it stirs when she recalls  
picking 250 pounds of cotton a day  
and of her mother and grandmother picking 350.  
I worry about the strong black woman trope  
Being passed down.

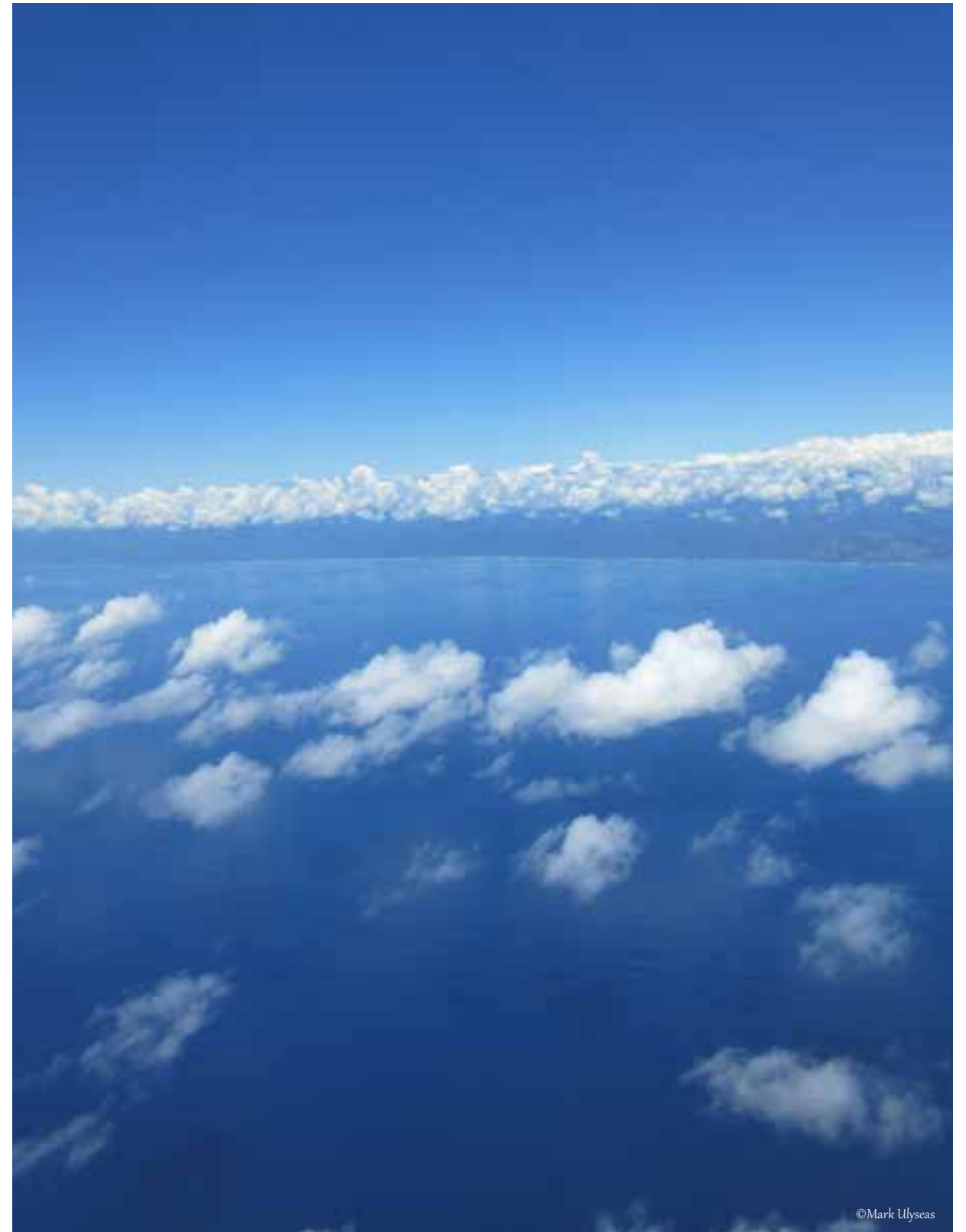
I think of great-grandma Rachel  
bearing 20 children. Died at age, 57.  
Strength can be a myth--  
a way to see without seeing  
our needs and our dreams.  
Mama speaks of how the cold wind blew  
through the slats of their sharecropper's shack.  
How the heat rode their backs in summer.  
How they stuffed newspaper in their shoes  
to fill the holes in their soles.  
I relish when she finds dignity amongst  
the barest of places.  
I know this is how she gets by,  
I borrow her philosophy.  
*We had plenty to eat, we grew and raised everything  
except for salt, pepper, and sugar.*  
What resilience.  
What lack.  
I see her as a thin child.  
Field-bound looking up--  
A chestnut brown hand shading brow  
to spy a silver flash of a plane in the sky.  
There in her prayer she manifests herself away.  
Her mother sends her one county over  
to her Uncle Willie and Aunt Carrie  
to attend school, no place for her  
to learn beyond the 8th grade in the county.  
This, an answer to her field prayer,  
but she felt like rotten fruit spat out of her mama's mouth.  
As a youngin she did not understand sacrifice,  
--her fate to be the first in the family  
to get a high school diploma.

*continued overleaf...*



## COTTON PICKER *contd...*

At Fountain Inn Colored Highschool  
She casts her lot on Sonny Boy, daddy--  
not yet father. Whose Air Force wings took  
her out of the fields, twenty-one years away  
She becomes a silver airplane circling.  
She left South Carolina, but the field,  
the crops, seasons, and the sun remained within her.  
Sometimes she will not tell me stories.  
She will not go back.  
The sun bears down upon her  
too bright. Too harsh.  
She'll turn her head away.  
Say, "Let the past be, Chile.  
But I can't.  
The surface barely scratched.  
Keeps me digging--penning poems on pages.



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Plane scene. Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Ali Black is a writer from Cleveland, Ohio. She is the recipient of the Academy of American Poets University & College Poetry Prize for her poem “Kinsman.” Her work has appeared in *deceMBER*, *jubilant*, *Literary Hub*, *The Offing* and elsewhere. Her first book of poetry, *If It Heals At All* was selected by Jaki Shelton Green for the New Voices series at Jacar Press and it was named a finalist for the 2021 Ohioana Book Award.



## WHAT I WANT TO SAY

It's always a woman  
asking me when  
I'm having a baby.

Today, this one is older—  
maybe mid 60s,  
a friend of the family.

When we getting a baby?  
she asks, as if I owe her  
and the world a child.

I wish I could  
give her a date,  
tell her I'm due in December

then do a little dance.  
Instead, I say it's complicated,  
do her like my doctor did me—

sit her down,  
draw her a picture of my uterus,  
circle my ovaries and say words like

unfortunately and impossible  
and sorry.

Ali Black





Carolyn Wright's new book is *Masquerade*, a memoir in poetry involving an interracial couple trying to find a place in racist America (Lost Horse Press, 2021). Her previous book is *This Dream the World: New & Selected Poems* (Lost Horse Press, 2017), whose title poem received a Pushcart Prize and appeared in *The Best American Poetry 2009*. She has five earlier books of poetry (including *Mania Klepto: the Book of Eulene*); four chapbooks; a ground-breaking anthology, *Raising Lilly Ledbetter: Women Poets Occupy the Workspace* (Lost Horse, 2015), which received ten Pushcart Prize nominations; and five award-winning volumes of poetry in translation. A Contributing Editor for the Pushcart Prizes, Carolyn lived in Chile and traveled in Brazil on a Fulbright Grant; she returned to Brazil in 2018 for an Instituto Sacatar artist's residency in Bahia. A Seattle native who teaches for Richard Hugo House, she has received grants from the NEA, 4Culture, and Seattle's Office of Arts & Culture, among others. A Fulbright U.S. Scholar Award granted in 2020 will take her back to Salvador, Bahia, after the CoVid-19 pandemic subsides in Brazil.  
<https://carolynwright.wordpress.com/>

## ONE OF THE HOUSES

*Marvin Bell's in Port Townsend, Washington*

Do you live on Polk Street?  
 –You tell me.

Do you have a view of Mount Tahoma across Quimper Sound?  
 –You tell me.

Do you have a gray Toyota Camry station wagon parked out front, with Johnson County, Iowa, plates and no poetry books scattered over the back seat but the right rear window cracked half-open?  
 –You tell me.

Do you and Dorothy head toward downtown via the Taylor Street steps with the Galatea Fountain at the bottom?  
 –You tell me.

Does it make a difference that we saw you there?  
 –That one I know.

Do you ever need a house sitter when you're away?  
 –That one I know.

Will we know what to do when we house-sit for you?  
 –You tell me.

(After "One of the Animals," by Marvin Bell, from *Nightworks: Poems 1962 - 2000*. Also printed on the back of a tee-shirt for the first residency of the Whidbey Writers Workshop MFA Program, August 2005.)

(In memoriam Marvin Bell, 1937 - 2020)

Carolyn Wright. Photo credit : Brian Weiss for Hugo House.

## EULENE'S HYPNAGOGIC DREAM

Across the room, the alarm clock's face  
glared red like an angry father's.  
Eulene turned over to pull the plug—  
darkness clamped its tongs  
to her temples and yanked up.

With a roaring in her bones  
she tried to rise, but the bed  
held hard, her skull wedged  
into thin edges of the air.  
The tongs dropped her like a dead weight

onto a lawn where card tables  
and chairs were set up in the sun.  
Eulene sat and stared at a tanned  
and bearded stuntman from Ventura  
who returned her stare, his long legs  
spreading, tipping his chair back  
as far as it would go. . .

They shifted in their seats to watch  
another man in a torn white shirt  
who stalked back and forth  
back  
and forth, muttering to himself, eyes  
glazed, face blank and glossy  
as a mannequin's. A voice in Eulene's brain  
called him "Acid Head."  
He clasped a Coke bottle like a votive  
candle. Eulene clutched her purse  
each time his shadow fell across it.

\*\*\*

In her room that night, Eulene  
lay strapped down on the bed, stripped  
and spread-eagled. The L. A. stuntman  
walked right through the bolted door.  
He'd become a scholar, bespectacled  
and shaking with ideas.

He was hunting for something—  
a lost credit card? A book from which  
he'd razored out the pages?  
Then he loomed, swaying above her,  
unbuckling his belt and whispering her name.  
The dark stuck its straw in the room  
and began to suck . . .

and Eulene's dream whisked away  
like a sheet pulled under the door.  
But on the wall, the shadow of the scholar's head  
kept nodding up and down,  
up and down, as if he knew,  
he knew, he'd won.



## EULENE ANTIPOÉTICA (UNA MUJER ANTIPOÉTICA)

*"La madre de un hombre está gravemente enferma..."*

*"A man's mother is very sick..."*

—Nicanor Parra

Eulene's black-sheep Uncle Bob is very drunk  
 Eulene goes to the local rescue mission to fetch him then  
     to the ER to find a doctor who can't refuse him  
 She's sobbing  
 In front of the mission on Skid Row she sees her crazy boyfriend Al  
     in the company of another woman—they're pushing a shopping cart  
     crammed with all the woman's worldly goods  
 Al strokes her hand, presses some paper into it. Dollar bills? A voucher  
     for buffet breakfast at the food bank? Pamphlets for sinners  
     proclaiming REPENT OR DIE in flaming scarlet letters?  
 Eulene follows a few steps behind them, lurking from light pole to light pole  
 She's wiping her eyes  
 Now she runs into a pal from high school  
 It's been years since they've seen each other  
 They go to Starbucks  
 They talk, laugh, sip lattes that leave foam  
     moustaches on their upper lips  
 Eulene goes down the hall to her favorite room  
     and as she rises from the porcelain throne and goes out  
 She spots a famous younger poet, all in black leather with  
     tousled spiky hair and eyebrow rings  
 It's evening  
 He looks so dangerous, James Dean checking his text messages  
 Eulene slides over to him  
 Takes him by his bicep with its Amy Winehouse tattoo  
 They shimmy down the aisle between the travel mugs and  
     gleaming 12 oz. bags of French roast

They ease out into the street together  
 They smirk ironically they're so post-modern, suddenly  
 There's an accident, bicycle messengers such reckless  
     maniacs these days!  
 The young poet's in a coma  
 Eulene goes looking for someone with a cell phone  
 She's choked with sobs  
 She comes to a condo complex with party lights twinkling in the clubhouse  
 She asks to use a phone  
 Somebody in the party recognizes her  
 Hey come on in and try the fajita chicken wings  
 No  
 Where's a cell phone?  
 Hey stay, try some of this brie and a glass  
     of Santa Carolina Chardonnay  
 Then be on your way  
 Eulene perches on a bar stool with an overflowing plate  
 She sips her Santa Carolina like one of Dante's damned  
 She grimaces hearing herself laugh at their corny jokes  
 They get her to declaim a poem by Neftalí Reyes Basoalto and her favorite  
     lines from Baudelaire's *"Les fleurs du mal"*  
 She recites these  
 She ends up sleeping under the pool table with Pablo, the building  
     manager's wrinkly-jowled Shar Pei

(In memoriam Nicanor Segundo Parra Sandoval 1914-2018)

## SESTINA: EULENE

*"According to her housemate, she is out with Bob tonight..."*

—Jonah Winter, "Sestina: Bob"

The voice on her answering machine says *Eulene* and Al are *IN tonight*, and when Al's snuggled up with Eulene there's no telling when they'll come out. Eulene is a perma-temp, changing jobs like a con-man's aliases. Eulene used to be in a metal band, the Eulene Machine, or was it a girl gang? How edgy of you, Eulene!

I wish I could wail on a Fender bass like you, Eulene, and also expound on fugal structure in Frank Zappa. Eulene is very tan, tattooed, and taciturn. I spied Eulene at the swap meet last week: she cut such a lean and mean figure—so unmistakably Eulene! The hip-hugger jeans, the mirror shades: Eulene!

And Al in his wife-beater T-shirt, arm around Eulene like her high-school squeeze. And who am I, Eulene? Nobody, just a burger-flipper, Eulene, and a laid-off one to boot, Eulene, while you shift shapes to work the contours of the room. You lean your cleavage into the conversations and the martini-sippers toast: Eulene!

But why am I addressing you as if you were me, Eulene? I'll try to be more dispassionate. Eulene is probably a decent chick, or so I hear. But Eulene is not the most go-getting up-and-comer named Eulene you'd care to meet. Patient, considerate, clothing-optional, Eulene lets bag ladies cut in front of her in restroom lines. Eulene

doesn't boast about her record deals. Eulene doesn't flip the bird at her boss or flip off the stage into mosh pits. Eulene never maxes out her credit cards or lets her airline miles expire. Eulene doesn't obsess about her midriff jiggle, even on nude beaches. Eulene's band, though, is never gonna open for The Flaming Lips, and Eulene's lips no longer blow out all the birthday candles in one breath. But Eulene

still sneaks into clubs that never would admit someone named Eulene as a member. She sprints past the *Keep Out* signs and leaves her mark: *Eulene Was Here*. Who cares about the niceties—what she calls *Bob's Rulez of Diss-Order*? Eulene

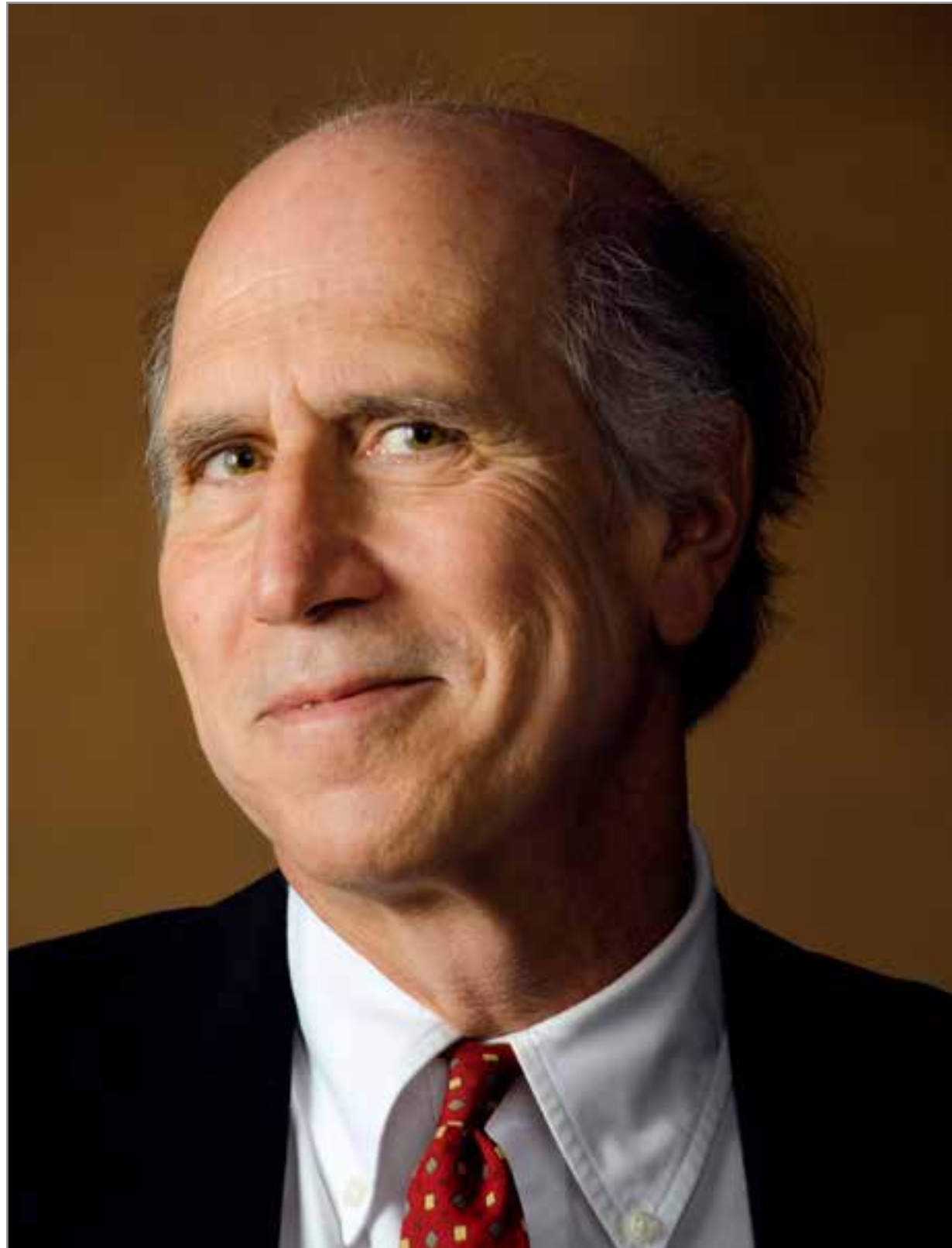
breezes by the grocery store cashiers like Ginsberg following Whitman's beard. Eulene

is just so contrary: when I talk to her I think I'm talking to myself. Eulene! Listen up! Why can't I be more like you? Do you hear me? Eulene . . . ??

Weeks later, Eulene and Al finally tied the noose, but Eulene had autographed the pre-nup in disappearing ink. *Quo vadis*, Eulene? . . . Eulene? "Hey, get your own damn life!" Eulene snarls. "Stay out of this caldera of plasma and projections called Eulene."



Joseph Bathanti is former Poet Laureate of North Carolina (2012-14) and recipient of the 2016 North Carolina Award for Literature. He is the author of eleven books of poetry, including *This Metal*, nominated for the National Book Award; *Restoring Sacred Art*, and *Concertina*, winners, respectively, in 2010 and 2014, of the 2010 Roanoke Chowan Prize, awarded annually by the North Carolina Literary and Historical Association for best book of poetry. His novel, *East Liberty*, won the 2001 Carolina Novel Award. His novel, *Coventry*, won the 2006 Novello Literary Award. His book of stories, *The High Heart*, won the 2006 Spokane Prize. *Half of What I Say Is Meaningless* (essays), won the 2014 Will D. Campbell Award for Creative Nonfiction. A new volume of poems, *Light at the Seam*, is forthcoming from Louisiana State University Press, 2022. A new book of stories, *The Act of Contrition*, winner of the 2021 EastOver Prize for Fiction, is forthcoming in 2022. Bathanti is Professor of English and McFarlane Family Distinguished Professor of Interdisciplinary Education at Appalachian State University. He served as the 2016 Charles George VA Medical Center Writer-in-Residence in Asheville, NC, and is the co-founder of the Medical Center's Creative Writing Program.



## THE FIRST TIME THEY FORGET

You love them all the more  
for the worry: the kettle  
melting on the eye;  
they've strayed too far  
in the automobile,  
you'll inevitably take away,  
and wrecked; the phone  
out of order; they've fallen –  
on the floor, dead; heatstroke;  
they nap; maybe just busy,  
they'll ring later.  
But how could they  
have forgotten  
their parts in this day,  
half a century ago:  
the long gestation and rush  
that summer dawn to the hospital,  
your father pacing the solarium,  
Camel after Camel,  
you and your mother  
astonished at finally meeting  
through a mirror placed at her heels.  
When it's unbearable, you ring.  
At your voice, they realize, abashed,  
and you hate yourself,  
still a needy child,  
for your lies of reassurance –  
*No big deal; please don't worry about it –*  
as if it's not your birthday,  
your call just a check-in,  
not the very last of one thing,  
and the onset of another.

Joseph Bathanti

## MOUNT CARMEL

A black crucifix  
towers the hill

above the first tombs  
hacked into Mount Carmel.

Its alabaster Christ  
eyes His vast plat of Italians.

Their outlandish names  
dance like tarantulas.

The sky is Mary blue,  
winter sun her halo.

Your mother vowed –  
with relish, for effect,

when the future darkened conversation –  
she'd lie here one day;

and here, this day, you wander,  
searching for her and your father

who never threatened to die.  
Like Saint Anthony,

he could turn up anything.  
Your mother never lost a button.

You don't come often,  
yet when you do,

you can't find them –  
by simply twisting the doorknob

and there they doze,  
in the living room,

Mass on television,  
the streets to Sacred Heart too icy.

You cannot lift the phone,  
make sure they're settled for the night,

have what they need until daylight;  
nor ask the neighbors, here, as well,

at your feet, to look in on them.  
*Disonore:*

to understand perfectly  
your mother and father

repose two meters beneath the earth  
you tread, and you can't find them –

their very names you dictated  
for the chisel (your name)

on the vanished ledger stone.  
Forbidden to call out,

as you pace above them,  
what must they think

of your shambling,  
your muddy cuffs?



## SINGER

A wedding gift from my father,  
my mother's sleek black Singer

stationed in the alcove on Prince Street.  
Bedded twilight in rooms a floor above,

my sister and I listened to its steady thrum,  
litany and lullaby, as my mother spun

the handwheel and fed it thread unraveling  
from its spool skewered on the spindle,

spitting from the loaded bobbin,  
another cartridge in reserve,

such speed the Singer smoked.  
Its golden gothic signature scorched

into its mysterious arm, therein secreted  
the *shaft, presser bar, face plate.*

My mother paused for it to quell,  
checked its belt and feed-dog,

hand-basted a cuff, slit and stitched  
another buttonhole, pinned fabric

to a pattern, as if under a spell  
to clothe us new come dawn.

The Singer hovered – mid-tack,  
panting – then revved off again.

My mother's long brown hair  
lifted in its wake. Past the night,

long after Marie and I faded into dream,  
she traveled the scarce trestle of morning –

my father, chained to a boom crane,  
building time on his sentence,  
at the threshold of the troposphere,  
stories above the open hearth –

her thimbled fingers skirting the throat plate,  
the needle but a micron from piercing her.

## THE VERY BRINK

For once, Pink did not give into slavering and pawing.

If he contented himself with taking what Lorraine offered in her own time, according to her strictures of dire intimacy, all would be revealed. About her was a sacrificial mien – like a half-robed martyr traipsing into a den of javelinas.

They kissed a long elliptic time. Pink whispered sad little love stories that made her smile and breathe frenetically.

She slid off the bed. “More champagne, Darling?” Took his glass and swept toward the sideboard. In this interstice, between real and imagined, Lorraine caught fire. At first, Pink thought it was spontaneous combustion: the very thing he’d feared and expected all along. Had it been a murmur of wind, a careless exhale, perhaps an *endearment* that undid things?

Saint Joan’s County was the last sighting of Theodosia Burr, Aaron’s daughter, who took ship there and was never heard from again. Its geography inhabited an epic occult presentiment. On a whim anything might ignite, be swept away, simply disappear. It was the end, the very brink.

The room was furnished in Italianate étagères, wardrobes, chiffoniers, monstrous mirrors, a canopied mahogany bed of encoded scrollwork: the entire *Tantum Ergo*; crucifixes crowning each of the four posters; carven cherubs proffering chalices to harvest the Savior’s dripping blood; on the headboard, a relief of the Blessed Virgin, ankle entwined with the fanged serpent even as she crushed it beneath her heel.

The Blood Moon threw its scarlet raiment over everything with documentary rectitude. The breeze insinuated itself through the open window. Lorraine’s flimsy challis slipped partially away. She did not attempt to cover herself, though her modesty, in face of it all, brought tears to Pink’s eyes. Which is when she reached for the champagne, and brushed the candle. Its unrepentant flame sought out the loose cloth. She assumed fire.

Pink attempted to fight off the ecstasy that held him forcibly down as he watched: his Joan of Arc staked in the flames, beatific, an icon smiling from her blue flickering grotto of fire. Panels of the gown fell, like scrolls of parchment, the dwindling flame stuttering along the writhing fabric, dying in red sizzling gossamer.

Statuesque, eyes closed, burned clean of every stitch, smoke rose from her. The terrifying perfection of her breasts, the long smooth torso never swollen with child, muscular legs drawn tight in a singed V about her improbable sex. Her face, almost cruel – it was so beautiful. The boy-thatch of smoldering silver hair on her head.

Pink pried himself from the bed. Held out his hand. To touch her. Just beneath the tiny flame that circled her omphalos in dying spasms. To put his mouth there. To swallow the last guttering spark. He dropped to his knees, parted his lips. Lorraine chuffed out a long breath, hot and smoky, opened her eyes as if she could take the charade no longer, as if on a dare she had taken fire just to spite him – and floated through the sash.



Sara Cahill Marron is the author of *Reasons for the Long Tu'm* (Broadstone Books, 2018), *Nothing You Build Here, Belongs Here* (Kelsay Books 2021), and *Call Me Spes* (MadHat Press 2021). She is the Associate Editor of Beltway Poetry Quarterly and co-editor of [Beltway Editions](#). Her work has been published widely and is available at [www.sarahillmarron.com](http://www.sarahillmarron.com).



Sara Cahill Marron

## YOU HELD ME LIKE A SECRET

Memory like eucalyptus in hot  
showers, plants thirsty for warmth,  
fills the air. things we hated  
to admit. places we deigned go,  
I sat still all the hours of my life,  
patient, listening, waiting to object  
opening in heat, we are fragrant  
under steam. tropical sun scorches  
frail stemmed spines, words  
merely mint the air. yet you,  
open-lunged, pass me close  
enough to brush, delicate strength  
resists wildfire. erupts in  
wet rain her scent. skin under  
fleeced jacket, light powder  
on your face evaporating  
day long into mist  
thoughts swirl icing  
to the night you fell asleep  
next to me, wrapping legs  
around mine, slipping an  
arm round my waist,  
slowing my breathing  
to hear yours, smell the day  
wear itself off you, consume  
as much as I could bite,  
the mind a fickle belly.

## A SINGLE FINGER, MISTAKEN FOR WIND

I smell you on my skin  
 smoke trails of places your fingers  
 traveled, tracing coxal curves,  
 map making highway veins  
 traffic in heat, magnetics,  
 the purr of hums openmouthed,  
 stamping secrets on your neck,  
 laid backwards we become  
 long as Nazca lines  
 wet sand holding form  
 unlayer my top  
 soil, exposed pinks,  
 bright gashes clouded  
 thoughts, sun penetration  
 shaking roosted feathers  
 wind inhales her heartstrings  
 summons stringed E's  
 double G's rise  
 so smooth I breathe  
 inside your mouth  
 follow all the turns  
 boundless, reaching  
 a ray at the break,  
 horizon throwing off her  
 darkness.

## FIRST LUMINOUS MYSTERY, EARTH

The knotted line, here she's lain  
 a Fisherman casts off docks,  
 lucky in lagoons nestled far  
 from city lights, young bluefish,  
 mackerel, snapping in water  
 littered with angler's tricks  
 deep bodied triggerfish roam wandering  
 grasslands, overrun now by yogurt shops  
 taco eateries, vendors selling solely socks  
 sanderling pecking marine worms  
 from seaglass mirrors, zipper feet  
 pulled in on coming waves.  
 plastic bag strangles my arm  
 guttural bird caws falling  
 from flight, heavy groceries  
 hauled up stairs electricity outpaced  
 Edison's power lines, fellow billionaires  
 toasting beachfront, sexed, scrawling  
 maps of New York, *one day*, they laugh  
*they'll see the seams*, as foam lines  
 on autumn beaches, mollusks hibernate  
 as sun descends into stitched industry  
 worlds bulging, speeding to the eastern most tip  
 an island I barely call home, never on time  
 frost clings to grass tips, endless layers  
 Still I shiver, cold in heat, thin November  
 air my bones shake, *why did you do that?*  
 framing some paper, depositing others  
 all of it stacks up, piles of words  
 "her" what else becomes *étant donnés?*



## THE SECOND LUMINOUS MYSTERY, THE WEDDING I

Waiting to fulfill my obligation  
open the door dressed, jeweled  
blue moon shining white, grit teeth  
cracking firewood in my mouth  
all the streets smell of smoke  
exhaust leaking from my tear ducts  
cortisol built up in text you never  
open, built candy chutes wrapped  
in ribbon, kicked crimson leaves  
down Park Road, wondering what  
color my white skin would fade into  
if connected to dirt, I sink my fingers  
knead the seeds, chives under  
false lights, sanctuary where I  
unwind myself on the sheets you  
lay me flat, spread out like  
constellations appearing in pure night  
revealing myself to you, my body  
only in a dream, our Sunday,  
afternoon reenacting Vita and Virginia's love  
affair as if we could write  
different endings, erase paint  
recast marble set on display  
a weak sun sets early  
failing to warm the iron black  
arms reaching up to rising Pleiades—

a second full moon,  
a night so full of blackness  
I imagine it is you,  
burying sculpted limbs  
deep into the tapestry  
pulling over the sheet against day  
pretending I didn't insult you so—  
the man carved me here,  
while I waited, indecisive,  
if only I had reached for you  
when I was molten,  
stardust, ablaze, coursing  
might I not be this display?  
caught in her case  
performing Mrs. Dalloway's party  
one day in June, frozen my face  
mouth agape for the falling leaf to land in.

## SECOND LUMINOUS MYSTERY, THE WEDDING II

Can you love a river, love a train?  
movement or a cage? the bars of you  
a steely prison wrapped around my finger  
your skin I close myself in for years  
one small patch of concrete,  
Charon rowing me back and forth across  
flooded streets to refill my glass  
years later when you push the hair behind my ear  
kiss my cheek after dinner, embrace after each meal,  
I miss you immediately.  
I have some questions too, for the married,  
those calling themselves partners  
without articles of incorporation,  
contracts dripping ampersands  
I will and will and will  
loaf and invite with ease  
the shadow of her jawline  
smudged charcoal in memory  
I'll never give up  
how do you remove your heart from your mouth?  
long enough to take vows,  
tear your eyes from the sky, those diamonds  
I may never grasp, to touch only each other  
will you let me be free?  
travel the train to the end of the line and back  
just to look out the window?



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Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Bob Herz is editor/publisher of *Nine Nile Magazine* and Nine Mile books, with colleague-poets Stephen Kuusisto and Andrea Scarpino. He is a graduate of the Iowa Writers Workshop and has published three books of his own poetry and three books of translations (Jules LaForgue, Georg Trakl, an anthology of various poets). He lives and works in LaFayette, NY.



## LESSONS

On the street you notice the distracted intentional eye  
Of the obvious woman sketching unknowingly  
A perfect frozen Venus in raunchy profile, and it is beautiful,  
A beautiful composition of the mind's still snapshot  
(The shadows *there*, the brick *there*, the light *there*).

Close behind a 2nd shadow follows and is lost,  
Then follows again, then stops: The superfluous-man  
Re-reads his newspaper in a random doorway  
A half-step out of the rain, just two steps from  
The murderous runaway traffic of police cars and beatings—

This is the night of 50-caliber thugs and tactical cop units,  
They're everywhere like angry angels seeking their due,  
Sometimes finding it in a cracked skull or two  
(And doesn't that bring a different kind of laughter!);  
But here's something almost too strange to talk about,

Something you never read about in books of this time or any other:  
You can't see their eyes. You can't ever see their eyes. Why is that?

\*

I love it when people say, *There's a lesson here*, because it's never true,  
There's never a lesson, and sometimes there aren't even any people.

Bob Herz



## THE MARRIAGE OF THE BUFFALO

1.  
The old watchman stumbles as he reaches for his bottle—  
Half-empty, no surprise in a life that these days  
Is mostly empties and half-empties. Behind him  
Thumbprint smudges on window panes cracked  
Like spider webs, and splintered doors where the last intruders  
Forced the locks, just before the *finale* of the new economy  
Sent the money leaking everywhere, coins tumbling  
Down the broken brick pathways, bills flying  
Through the air like high-denomination paper airplanes,  
While some pungent oily thing burned  
With the stolen ledgers in the last basket left  
After they abandoned home office to weeds and rats.

He shakes his head. Guilt never survives these  
Vast confessionals of flame; and what's left to say now  
That others would not have said as badly or even worse?

2.  
Old man, fatal drunk, you still think it's all about you, don't you,  
The evasive laughter crackling down the washed-out garden pathway  
Like a fatal cantata of sticks and bones, to this dead-end alleyway,  
Where the old economy's nostrums finally crack,  
As the news-blasters declaim that all our selves  
Are scientists now, and poets, whom the torn season wrongs  
(Notice, though, that there's never a word about these others  
Who beat on oil cans with sticks,  
Or about this radio-tower made of wet chipped brick  
And the cloud that pierces the immigrant heaven).

Everyone remembers the old music now, a raw melody of landscape  
Folded over & over like the brain or a fist,  
Dense-packed solstice-themes riddled like dreams  
With secret passageways, joining the hollow tree  
With the dead father, the darkened valley  
With the giant's one good eye: It all seemed fine  
Until the truths of words we used cracked open  
To expose the lies those words contained,  
And the banker's gambit for a late-night intervention—  
Some salvatory dollar-bridge to get us from there to here  
Without so much bloodshed—turned bad, becoming instead  
More graveyard whistling past the sinking money supply,  
A bagatelle of sour lemonade as worthless as your empties.

3.  
It doesn't matter what people say anymore, about Love  
Being still possible, despite government, despite the sickness  
Of government and the money that closes the churches;  
No one wants this, not really. What we want is what  
You wanted, old man: To rail against Fate, to poke Destiny  
In its blackened malevolent bad eye, and yell, *There!*  
And then to believe that it will all still matter, later,  
If we only tell the battle story well enough.  
So let the others speak now, old man, of old births, old deaths:  
That snow is melting. Tell us instead of your bad night  
On First Street, the one that ended like a tossed empty,  
A broken revolt against the start of your autumn life  
When everything became something else,  
And acts of love and faith came to seem  
Like tattered flags on unknown ground,  
Full of significance but devoid of meaning....

*continued overleaf..*

## THE MARRIAGE OF THE BUFFALO *contd...*

Tell us again how it didn't matter then, and doesn't now,  
 Because there's no place else to be (your ersatz bad joke),  
 And how it was raining that night, making it all—  
 The aging, the drinking, the weeping losses—  
 Not a way of life, but a fantasy, a dreamy ease,  
 Revolution with embroidered pillows. You sang it all out:  
*The rain fell on First*, you sang, but that was no tune for the ages  
 Or even for the night, only the early start of another surrender.

4.  
 And now look, you've cut yourself on the broken glass,  
 Still complaining how life is like this, random stabbings  
 With dull blades by enemies who do not know you,  
 And who, frankly, could care less. It was your time,  
 Is what they'd say if asked, and so what,  
 It could as easily have been someone else;  
 And if that doesn't explain anything, look around:  
 Reason is mothering crazy every day in this new world,  
 And though viciousness is still sharable, it doesn't *mean* anything—  
 Face it, friend, we're not the same as once we were, and what of it?  
 It's nothing, is what you want to say today, it's as meaningless  
 As broken glass, or as insubstantial marriages to ghosts,  
 Or as anything else that might come next into your head:  
 Stray sneaker. Orange potato. Buffalo.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE AGE

1.  
 That the anarchists were so organized surprised us all—  
 Linking software. Burner phones. Matching masks and uniforms  
 Like sports teams with sponsors, and a philosophy that claimed  
 Overt verisimilitude of violent narcissism and active virtue;  
 We watched them act not for some specific object,  
 But for the general and random—breaking not *that* window,  
 But *any* one, burning not *that* car but *any* car, motions worked out  
 Long before, by chance, by the random arc of the rock,  
 And by the faceless gods that rule their world, block by block.
2.  
 Sometimes the clocks gather the part-seconds lost between midnight  
 And the smaller tic that follows, holding them like a caught breath  
 This side of the new day, time's *da-da* ice-melt in an unseen corner—  
 Immovable gatherings that no one thought significant 'till now,  
 And which when examined are found to contain random oil-slick,  
 Dour fires, and serrated tongues piled up and squirming  
 Like a great catch of fish on the trawler's deck, making sounds  
 That never quite rise to the level of speech yet that are  
 The gesticular words by which violence and time speak to each other.  
 What do they say? It never changes. They say: *We are the same*.
3.  
 Touring the aftermath of still-smoking circuit-panels and singed conduit  
 Where the flames first leapt to unmake the house,  
 The lingering scent of smoke and charred remnants tells us all  
 That the unforeseen catastrophe is permanent now, arrived with cause,  
 Prosecuted without reason, and that although we have always ridden  
 The bones of the past, and thought ourselves the better for it,  
 No safe place is left us now that fire has limned the limits of sin and honor,  
 Because we can never wring this composition back to its original,  
 Because memory that can salve by its distortions cannot save by its truth.

John Hoppenthaler's books of poetry are *Domestic Garden* (2015), *Anticipate the Coming Reservoir* (2008), and *Lives of Water* (2003), all with Carnegie Mellon UP. His poetry, essays, and interviews have appeared in many journals, anthologies, and textbooks. With Kazim, Ali, he has co-edited a volume of essays on the poetry of Jean Valentine, *This-World Company* (U of Michigan P, 2012). Professor of CW and Literature at East Carolina University, he also serves on the Advisory Board for Backbone Press, specializing in the publication and promotion of marginalized voices.



## FIRST LIGHT

My old nemesis the blue jay  
flits down to bathe in the fake pool,  
the fake origin of the cool,  
but fake waterfall. Fake but, hey,  
it helps on a hot July day.

We all love to rest in gardens,  
which are only reclamations,  
human hands remaking Eden.  
The bird is washing away sin  
as I mope about my burdens.

On coming home late from the bar,  
I'd strip near my mother's garden,  
pile the smoky clothes as lived in,  
stale gift at my parents' back door,  
before taking to bed, before  
dad's creaking steps toward the bathroom.

The Gospels differ on the tomb,  
what Mary saw, with whom she met.  
The jay's returned, his head turned west.  
Assume what you want to assume.

The bird's neck swivels  
before he dips his beak down.  
The fake font gurgles.  
Lifting, an angel  
burst of blue into sky blue.  
The frog croaks amen.

John Hoppenthaler



## HUMMINGBIRDS &amp; EAGLES

The whirl of hummingbird wings, first here  
then fluttering over the pond, wall of pine,

afternoon sun's mirrored lazy flickering,  
and the place where, just last weekend,

we watched an eagle stand with certainty  
on the bank before dipping into a long pull

of water, before lifting over greenery  
and disappearing as eagles seem destined to do.

Hummingbirds are cantankerous creatures  
at the feeder, taking time only to hover briefly,

tiny bodies flapping under their riveted heads,  
bickering for position, fencing with long beaks,

then thrusting them into the well. Sometimes  
we disappear—or so it seems—into the neuroses

of hummingbirds. We want the nectar, that's all,  
and when it's gone, we apologize, love, and fall

into making up. We drink deeply of it, approach  
even the nobility of eagles. Hummingbirds can

fly backwards, sideways, hover up and down;  
they wear their wedding clothes the rest of their lives.

Their long tongues reach beyond the bitter parts  
of flowers; they were fashioned from leftover

feathers the gods used to create other birds;  
they bring good luck, so we offer them succor.

I hold the funnel in place while you pour sugar-  
water, blood-red, into the feeder, then

steady me as I stretch from the footstool,  
hang it from a small hook under the eave.

I step down into waiting arms; you sink your talons  
nearly to the bone, tell me that you'll never leave.

## AFTER ROBERT MOTHERWELL'S *Two Figures*

She's let the landlord enter, whose snaggle  
of metal teeth had plucked the glass peephole

from the door as if it was an eyeball.  
His enormous beer belly violates

the portal, blots out everything except  
a thin shaft of light filtering in from

the hallway window, where she's often paused  
to consider flight in a gossamer

dress slipped from the ochre wall behind her.  
She'd launch herself out over the river,

before her own man returns from the bar  
to discover she's stashed the rent money.

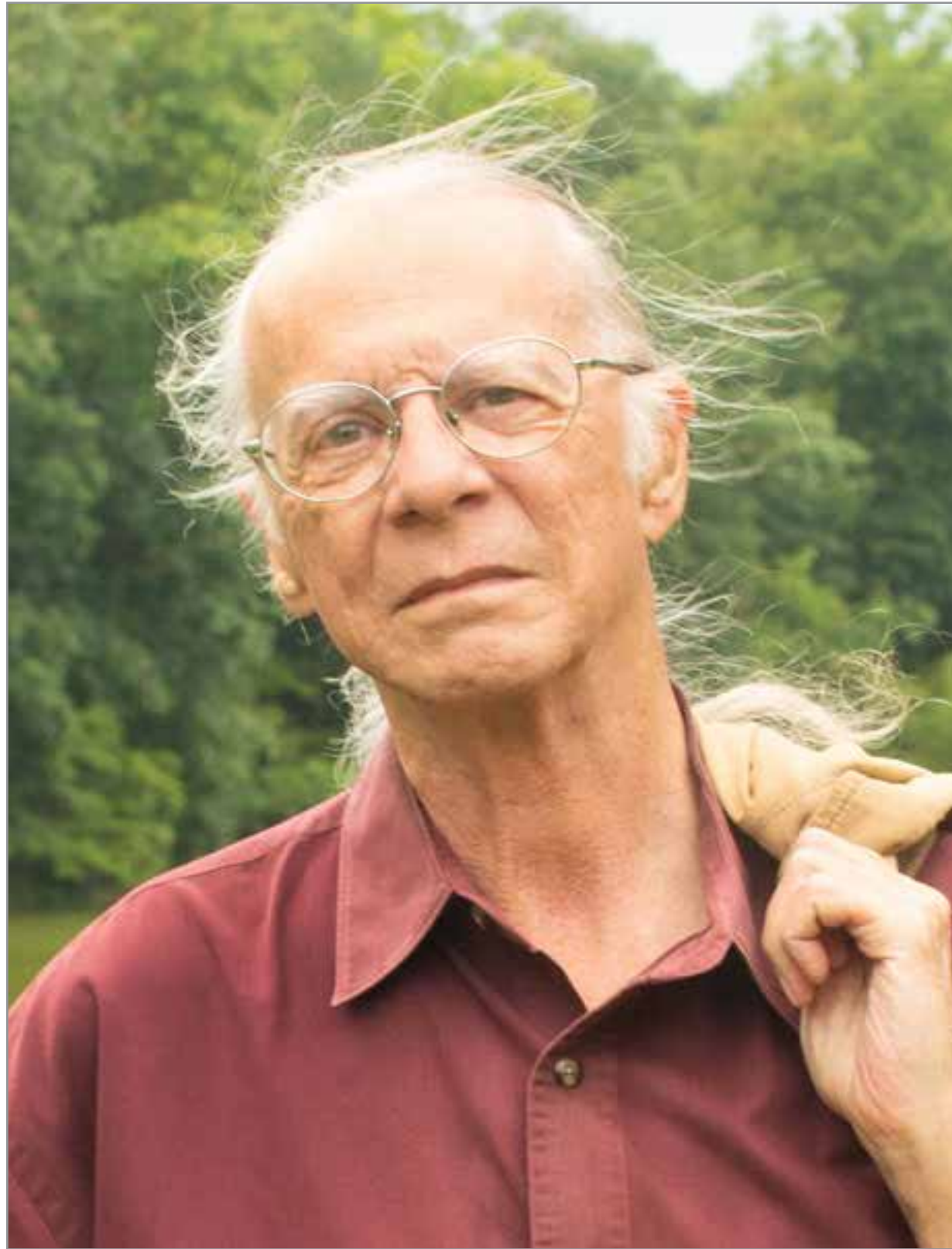
The super pushes; the lock falls in place.  
She leans forward into what must be done.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



I am a native of Montgomery County, Maryland, USA. My poetry has been published in numerous journals, including Beltway Poetry Quarterly, Evening Street, Steam Ticket, Potomac Review, Little Patuxent Review, and Main Street Rag. My work has also appeared in several anthologies, including "Secrets & Dreams", Kind of a Hurricane Press; "My Cruel Invention", Meerkat Press; and "Written in Arlington", Paycock Press. I am the author of four poetry chapbooks: "*Not Quite: Poems Written in Search of My Father*", (Finishing Line Press, 2015), and "*Our Situation*", (Prolific Press, 2018), "*Everyone Disappears*" (Finishing Line Press, 2020), and "*Little Wars*" (Kelsay Books, 2021).



## THE AUGURY OF BIRDS

Unexpected rain falls and in the high  
branches birds flutter to roost —  
songbirds, indistinguishable against  
grey distance; crows, beaks open  
to sound an unheard warning.  
There darts a jay, bolt of blue amid  
the needles of the near pine.  
Rain does not stop this parliament;  
their little lives go on, autumnal  
migrations continue, star-bidden.

What *Tremendum*, what untold  
catastrophe dares silence the songs  
of birds, stills them in their flight?  
We who scatter bones in dust  
know augury is not enough.  
The waters rise and we  
imagine we will not drown.

Luther Jett. Photography by Matthew Bailey.



## GINGERBREAD

When my mother packed  
my lunch, she wrapped a slice  
of gingerbread in wax  
paper and the upper crust  
stuck to the wrapper when  
I peeled it open, so I set  
the greasy paper aside,  
and meant to throw it out,  
but that Malony girl,  
whose dress was always stained,  
snatched it from my desk  
and licked the crust off the waxed  
paper, all the while beaming  
with delight the way an epicure  
might grin to avail herself  
of a fine morel *paté*.

Her family lived in a rundown  
farmhouse behind the cemetery,  
all the paint worn off the clapboards.  
How many siblings she had no-one  
could count, and because  
I didn't understand, I told my father  
how that girl took my trash to eat,  
and wrinkled my nose in disgust.

But my father, who had been  
to Calcutta during the last war  
and seen people sleeping in the streets,  
only sighed and said softly:  
"You must have compassion."

I still didn't understand,  
but I wanted to be a good son,  
and now I wonder what  
became of all the Malonys,  
and if that girl grew past her hunger,  
if she ever tasted anything sweeter  
than my mother's gingerbread crust,  
and if one day she got to wear  
a dress without a stain.

## AMERICA: A PARTIAL LIST

Dusty playground wrapped with yellow  
hazard tape; abandoned fields out past  
the interstate; one thousand bus terminals.

Mama sighs, baby cries; gates close.

Fire scours brown hills; water rises.  
A garden betrayed, a dream set by.

Hustle of hospital emergency rooms  
at one a.m.; shrill of flat-line; stifled sob.

It's closing time in every bar and fast food  
joint from shining sea to sunset beach.

Give me another way to see this,  
another way to say this.

Nurses wrap themselves in trash bags  
rather than stay home. Teachers  
stay up late learning to video-conference.

Children bring groceries to shut in  
pensioners. Broadway stars sing lullabies.  
The gritty streets fill up with lovers.

No-one stops marching. No-one  
will be stopped.

High on mountain shoulders red  
berries ripen beside perpetual snowdrifts.

In the deep recess of canyons where  
no cayuse can follow, white-winged doves.

## SURVIVAL

I stayed home even though  
I wanted to go out.  
I accepted your gift of berries  
even though I didn't need  
berries but wanted you to be happy.  
I went the wrong way  
down the exit ramp because  
the traffic wasn't moving.  
I jumped a barrier because I thought  
the terminal gate was closing.  
I put on a show of lights  
and music because everyone  
was sad and even though  
my own sadness was too great.  
On the path, someone else  
left a chalk heart  
no rain could wash away.

Indran Amirthanayagam ([www.indranmx.com](http://www.indranmx.com)) writes in English, Spanish, French, Portuguese and Haitian Creole. He has published twenty poetry books, including the just-released *Blue Window* (translated by Jennifer Rathbun) (Diálogos Books), *The Migrant States* ([www.hangingloosepress.com](http://www.hangingloosepress.com)), *Coconuts on Mars*, *The Elephants of Reckoning* (winner 1994 Paterson Poetry Prize), *Uncivil War and The Splintered Face: Tsunami Poems*. In music, he recorded *Rankont Dout*. He edits the Beltway Poetry Quarterly ([www.beltwaypoetry.com](http://www.beltwaypoetry.com)); curates [www.ablucionistas.com](http://www.ablucionistas.com); writes <https://indranamirthanayagam.blogspot.com>; co-directs Poets & Writers Studio International, writes a weekly poem for Haiti en Marche and El Acento; has received fellowships from the Foundation for the Contemporary Arts, the New York Foundation for the Arts, The US/Mexico Fund for Culture, the Macdowell Colony. He is a 2021 Emergent Seed grant winner. Hosts *The Poetry Channel* <https://youtube.com/user/indranam>. New books, including *10,000 Steps Against The Tyrant*, *Powèt nan po la* (Poet of the Port) and *Isleño*, will be published in late 2021 and early 2022.



## LOVE ON THE BELTWAY

Love is quickening and ache, maya and deep, clawing need. It vanishes, goes underground, becomes a story line, the old way, then comes up again, bidden, unbidden, desired, feared, flattened then flourishing still like a mushroom popping up at dawn, a wild desert flower after the 'shroom cloud has passed. How has it survived we ask? How has the dart passed on to the next dancer in the dance? Who is Matisse now? And who will slice the tomatoes and cream the soup? Who will buy airline tickets, and where can we go together before the gong cracks and booms? Who what and why are we ensconced in this shell made of digits, sweat, and ideas wrapped in verses written, shared in all the beltways of this belted, then unleashed world?

Indran Amirthanayagam.



## PLAY ON

*Play on, says the umpire- Mervyn Taylor*

Play on, says the umpire. I say, will do.  
This game and filibuster, this grandstand

will not stop. Who are you to say get  
back to safe ground? The tornado

lifted a truck and sent it cartwheeling  
down the road. We are god- damned

lucky. That's right. And all we can  
say in the end, is bloody dice, four

aces, a 1,000 pound sapphire, uncut,  
in your back garden? Can you imagine

the luck of the fellow in Ratnapura,  
in the business as well, a gem merchant,

with a motherlode in his back lot?  
How bizarre? I will tear floorboards

off the deck, then dig and dig, find  
bones of rats, raccoons, serpents,

but geology doesn't favor semi-precious  
deposits in Rockville, Maryland, We

don't have the right mix of elements  
to yield jewels or wine, but government yes,

to the wazoo, big American government.  
And I am your faithful servant, Mr. G.

I am still around to maul and kick. I am  
both a foreign and civil servant, a migrant

diplomat, with 3000 pounds of poetry  
listed on my private exchange. Marry,

kiss, or kick me, give me an idea, a sweet-  
meated metaphor, something to impart purpose

and desire to wake up tomorrow, ready  
to embrace the new, refurbished, renewed.

## THANKSGIVING

The meats on the birch-fired grill would have inspired a medieval king. Links of blood sausage ringed the flames, then strings of intestines, fat balloons of chorizo, flank, ribs, lomo ( back), shoulders of lamb. This

meal combined various hooved favorites of the manor, goat shank and head, brain simmering in the skull sac, eyes jostling as they are licked by tongues of fire-- cow tongues as well, and somewhere

on the vast rack of fire, tomatoes, green onion, leeks, swads of garlic, potatoes cut in wedges,....this is the meal I would like to devour with a bottle of zinfandel-led Guyomar and a Mendocino malbec, the wines

a bridge between two settlers who mix grapes from free-standing bushes, branches thick with fruit hanging heavy, exuding drops of water and desire, waiting on the vine, in Mendoza by the Cordillera

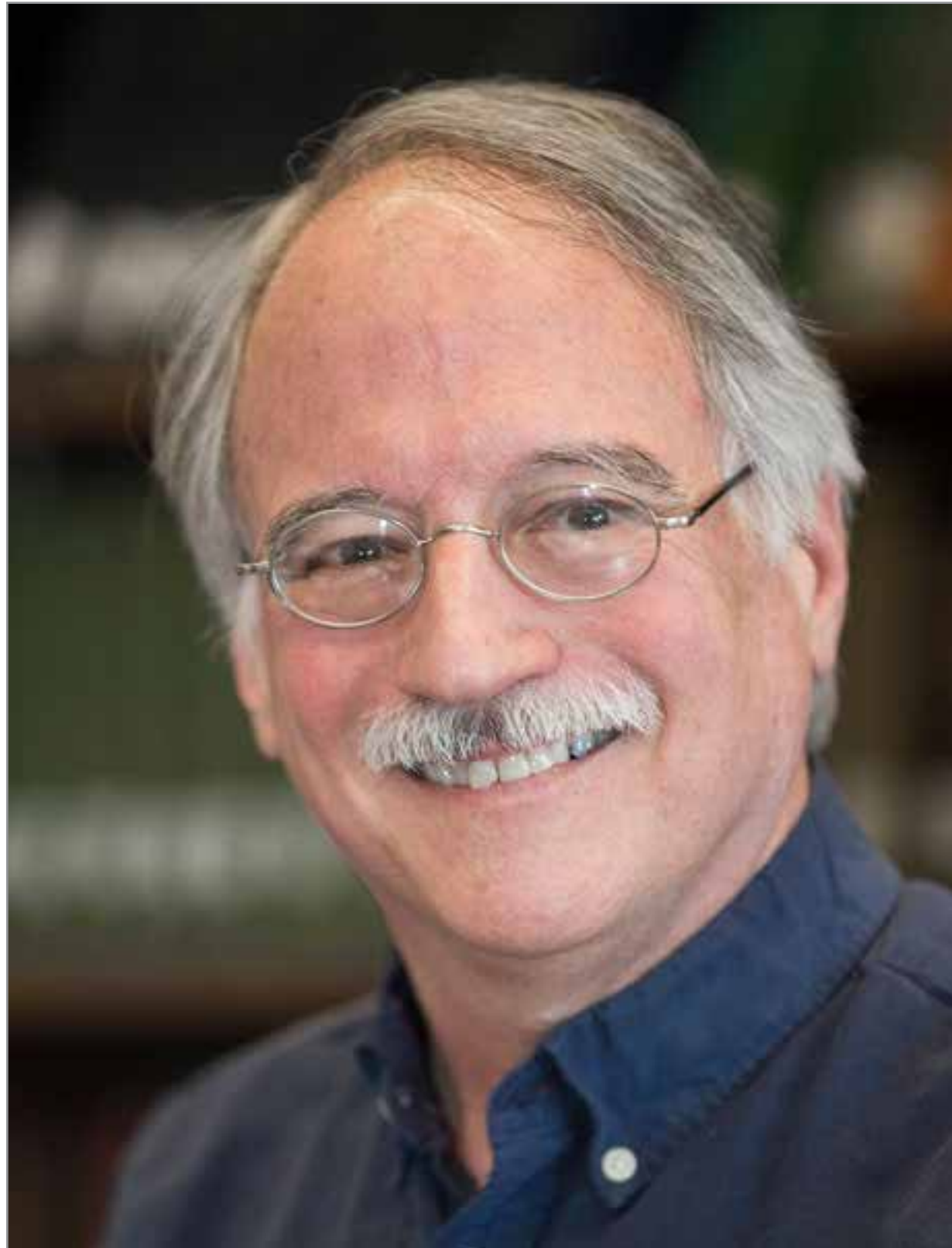
de los Andes, and in Templeton, California, a short drive from Hearst Castle at Monticello, and beyond the Pacific Ocean.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



John Philip Drury is the author of four full-length poetry collections: *The Disappearing Town* and *Burning the Aspern Papers* (both from Miami University Press), *The Refugee Camp* (Turning Point Books), and most recently *Sea Level Rising* (Able Muse Press). He has also written *Creating Poetry* and *The Poetry Dictionary*, both from Writer's Digest Books. His awards include an Ingram Merrill Foundation fellowship, two Ohio Arts Council grants, and the Bernard F. Connors Prize from *The Paris Review*. He was born in Cambridge, Maryland, and grew up in Bethesda, raised by his mother and a former opera singer she called her cousin but secretly considered her wife. After dropping out of college and losing his draft deferment during the Vietnam War, he enlisted in the Army to learn German and served undercover in the West German Refugee Camp near Nuremberg. He used benefits from the GI Bill to earn degrees from Stony Brook University, the Writing Seminars at Johns Hopkins, and the Iowa Writers' Workshop. He has taught at the University of Cincinnati for 37 years and lives with his wife, fellow poet LaWanda Walters, in a house on the edge of a wooded ravine.



## RECOVERING WHAT'S LOST

Nostalgia is the giddiest excursion  
through plots of lilac, jasmine, honeysuckle.

You marvel over tick-marks of erosion  
in a creek bank, deep-gouged engraver's plate,

and lose yourself, abstracted by bamboo shadows  
shimmery in the living room's late sunlight.

The other way of going back, however,  
means opening the account books of a past

red-faced by debt, hysterical with fever  
that won't break, desperation searing you.

Defeat restores, a generating force—  
at least you hope so—burnishing the view:

a sheet of sunlight floating on the floor  
like photographic paper in a bath.

John Philip Drury. Photograph by Lisa A Ventre.



## DAILY CONSTITUTIONAL

*Now you can see, my son, how ludicrous  
And brief are all the goods in Fortune's ken,  
Which humankind contend for*

Dante, *Inferno*, Canto VII  
(translated by Robert Pinsky)

"If I can't take it with me, I'm not going,"  
my aunt declared. She went, though, went alone  
down isolated roads, darkened by clouds,  
barefoot as St. Francis but without  
the holiness and good heart, searching for  
a private beach, a gated community  
excluding Blacks, Jews, gays, the lower classes,  
searching for another wealthy husband.

She thought that purchasing a burial plot  
in the county's swankiest graveyard guaranteed  
she'd lounge in peace, but now she's on the move,  
hobbling in circles, she who wouldn't ride  
in anything that wasn't a Cadillac,  
"nothing but the best." When I see her there,  
I feel a twinge of pity, remembering  
small kindnesses—a day at Frontier Town,  
lunch on the porch with soft-crab sandwiches—  
but think of Lady Luck and how she turns  
the rich to wretched, how my aunt will get  
not jewelry but the exercise she needs,  
her circumambulation that is endless.

## LISTENING TO A LOVE SUPREME

*after John Coltrane*

*So long, so deep*  
a rush of droplets beside the moving loom  
of the waterfall, oh my love,  
your Volvo speeding, that safe car swerving  
and escaping  
from first marriage, a house  
built by a termite inspector  
who battered you, roughed up your skull  
and brain, but couldn't demolish  
your gift for words, for the art  
he pretended to make,  
and now I follow your progress—*so long,*  
*so deep*—from redwoods to desert,  
charting where I lived in your time of distress,  
unaware  
of our convergence to come  
years later, as I walked uphill  
to the refugee camp  
where I passed out questionnaires  
to others who had fled,  
as I too was fleeing, undercover  
in a foreign country, waiting  
for love, oh my love, for you.

## POISED

on top of a ravine, our Rose Hill haven,  
century-old House of Usher, sanctuary  
at risk, we keep a balance that's temporary  
yet lasting—John Glenn's capsule, Friendship 7,  
ready to plunge, unshielded, from airless heaven  
back to the once-safe atmosphere that's fiery  
enough to burn and devour his spacecraft, airy  
furnace that's not damnation, just an oven.

Yet I skipped school, attended his parade,  
and now take hope in coming through—while hung  
teetering atop a stopped Ferris wheel  
that's our existence here, a trembling scale  
which feels like stillness, rest within a song  
whose resonance rings the marriage we have made.

## TARGET DETECTION

I stood on a rickety platform, caterpillars crawling on the handrail, and  
gazed at a weedy field, looking for anything that moved in this no man's  
land. I saw a bleached, jagged trunk, a rampike where lightning had struck.  
I saw honeysuckle vines and smelled their gas attack of sweetness. I saw  
clumps of bushes, pine stumps, and tried to see, in a cove of flagged grasses,  
a helmet bobbing like the blown-glass globe of a Japanese fishing float.  
Brambles covering the sandy ground could hide a regiment, holding its  
breath, a living potter's field on a military base in the pine barrens of New  
Jersey.

I squinted through Army-issue glasses, hoping to see a jack-in-the-box rise  
and disappear. In a training exercise called Target Detection, we were fishing  
for men, but the corporals in fatigues rose at the only bait I offered, my slips  
of attention. It was hard to see more than a quick blur, difficult to know if  
someone out there had moved or not.

According to the rules, I was dead. In an actual skirmish, I couldn't have  
aimed my weapon quickly enough, since I couldn't pinpoint any target. The  
view was baffling, like a picture seen too close. I tried to let it blur, to pick out  
anything that moved, but the troops remained perfectly still, like deer in a  
clearing at dusk. If it were more than a simulation, I'd check my ammunition  
clip and unlatch the safety.

At first, I couldn't hear anything in particular. But then I listened closer and  
could make out what sounded like rapids in a creek: whistles and chattering,  
clicks and flute notes, trills and glissandi. And then I detected something,  
though not a target I could report as part of my reconnaissance. Near a  
backdrop of pines, a mockingbird perched on the roof of a shed, beating  
time with his long tail, crooning *Too bad, you lose, toodle-loo, toodle-loo!*



Margo Taft Stever

Margo Taft Stever's third full-length collection, *THE END OF HORSES*, will be forthcoming from Broadstone Books in 2022. Also, in 2022, Milk & Cake Press will publish *I WANNA BE LOVED BY YOU: POEMS ON MARILYN MONROE*, edited by Susana H. Case and Margo Taft Stever. In 2019, CavanKerry Press published Stever's second full-length collection, *Cracked Piano*, which was shortlisted with honorable mention for 2021 Eric Hoffer Grand Prize, and Kattywompus Press published her chapbook, *Ghost Moose*. Her four other poetry collections include *The Lunatic Ball*; *The Hudson Line*; *Frozen Spring*; and *Reading the Night Sky*. Her poems have appeared widely in literary magazines including *Plant-Human Quarterly*; *Verse Daily*; *Plume*; *upstreet*; *Academy of American Poets*; *Poem-A-Day*; *Blackbird*; *Salamander*; *Prairie Schooner*; *New England Review*; *Cincinnati Review*; *Rattapallax*; *Webster Review*; and *West Branch*. She is the founder of the Hudson Valley Writers Center and the founding and current co-editor of Slapering Hol Press ([writerscenter.org](http://writerscenter.org)). In 2021-2022, as Adjunct Assistant Professor, she teaches Poetry and Bioethics in the Bioethics Department of the Medical School at Case Western Reserve University. She also teaches poetry at Children's Village, a residential school for at-risk children. For more information, please see: [margotaftstever.com](http://margotaftstever.com).

The following poems will appear in my upcoming book, *THE END OF HORSES*, Broadstone Books, 2022.

## ELEGY FOR A BLUE SPRUCE

Almost all had forgotten or never knew  
the spruce was one of five planted  
in spite to ruin the neighbors' view.

Four died. No one remembered  
the details of the feud, the alcoholic  
so full of ill will no one loved him.  
For one hundred years the tree grew

with not much left to define  
the edge between sandy earth and beach.  
Only the spruce remained—eagles  
and hawks found perches in high boughs.

Swallows nested in flowing branches.  
A young woman married under the tree,  
her whole family gathered;  
only weeks later—

a freak tornadic blast.  
The night before the storm she pleaded  
with them, *the spruce needs help*—  
maybe severe drought, maybe

water rising in the bay.  
They ran down to the shore to see the spruce  
undone; the regal blue  
lay in state, branches curved upwards.

Sparrows surrounded it in prayer.



## FAREWELL

Good-bye my orchid, how  
    I have loved you, the subtle dream  
        of your varying blue colors,  
the verdant arc of your stem,  
    how you are happy  
        only in certain places, how much  
else we have in common no one knows.

Good-bye my backyard  
    full of palm trees swishing,  
        bristling, full of tiny lizards  
who climb up the screen porch  
    to bathe in south Florida sun.  
    Good-bye our two lounge chairs  
by the pool where I never sat,  
    but always thought lovingly of you,  
        of bathing in the sun.

Good-bye all the mighty bird sounds,  
    the egrets, the great blue herons,  
        the anhinga who spread her wings  
to dry. Good-bye to the sullen creature  
    I glimpsed by the pool's edge.  
    Whether you were a Nile monitor lizard  
or Argentine tegu, I will never know.  
    When I rushed out after the dog's bark  
        scared you away, I found another lizard  
you had chased into the pool, and I rescued him.

As if he didn't know whether he lived or died,  
    he crouched, stunned and mute in the grass,  
        but he, too, has run away.  
Good-bye, my hibiscus, I have  
    forsaken you because you couldn't  
        survive the trip back up north.  
Good-bye intermittent showers that pour  
    from one cloud like a teapot while neighboring  
        skies remain blue and sunny.  
How I have loved you all.

## REFUGE OF CONSTELLATIONS

White moons, satin North  
Star, lunar signs, refuge

of whiteness, souging  
the topmost branches at twilight, bells

ring, the changeable sea. Haven  
of flowers, red marjoram, lupine,

willows, veils of summer rain, dune  
grass protecting margins of land from sea.

Filigree of fragrant gold jessamine,  
crinoline, sounds first awakening,

a dwelling you celebrate this wedding day.  
Sacred vows, seaside church, love

wakens to the garden of dowitchers  
plovers, the blue-grey dove.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



Born and raised in Texas, [Michael Simms](#) has worked as a squire and armorer to a Hungarian fencing master, a stable hand, a gardener, a forager, an estate agent, a college teacher, an editor, a publisher, a technical writer, a lexicographer, a political organizer, and a literary impresario. He identifies as being on the spectrum and as a survivor of childhood sexual abuse who didn't speak until he was five years old. He is the author of three full-length collections of poetry, most recently [American Ash](#) and [Nightjar](#), as well as four chapbooks, four novels and a textbook about poetry, and he's been the lead editor of over 100 published books. As the founding editor of Vox Populi and the founding editor emeritus of Autumn House Press and Coal Hill Review, he was recognized in 2011 by the Pennsylvania State Legislature for his contribution to the arts. Simms and his wife Eva live in the Pittsburgh neighborhood of Mount Washington overlooking the confluence of the Allegheny and Monongahela Rivers. Click here to see [Michael Simms's website](#).



## THE COVE

My grandfather used to take me  
to a cove on a lake  
in deep East Texas  
where he taught me  
to bait the hook with a worm  
cast the line as far as I could  
and wait in the shade  
without casting  
a shadow on the water

I did catch fish  
usually a small perch  
we'd throw back  
my favorite part  
was the quiet waiting  
for birdsong  
while small waves traced  
the muddy shore  
a muskrat or moccasin  
might swim by  
barely noticing  
our calm presence

I loved those mornings  
of timeless simplicity  
learning patience  
is not something you work for  
but something you wait for  
deep below the surface  
where the water weeds  
move in slow darkness  
and the fish glide by  
with a will of their own

Michael Simms



## WATERFALL

In Chatham Woods near our house  
a spring bursts  
from a hillside falling  
into a rocky pool  
beside a small wooden bridge  
where I like to stand  
watching the water  
spill down the hillside  
drowning  
the zigzag path  
to the open cave  
of the storm sewer beside  
the highway and from there  
no doubt to Sawmill Run  
curving down the southern hills  
to merge with the Monongahela  
and Ohio  
and Mississippi and from there  
the sea / Yes  
I can travel  
beyond my body but  
why not stay here  
with choke cherry and service berry  
native to the hills of Western Pennsylvania  
as well as sumac and silver birch  
from God knows far away.  
Wanting to belong here  
I've grown roots  
in the soil of this mountain but I know

I am the primary invasive species  
taking more than I need  
burning my way  
through a place I barely belong  
as I barely belong in this poem  
if that's what you want  
to call this  
tumbling down  
the stairs this dancing  
of an old man in the evening  
of his life

## WAVE

At sixteen I stole a surfboard  
and drove to the shore  
with my friends. In those days

we were young and stupid.  
In those days we were sometimes happy.  
Floating out

beyond the breakers  
looking over our shoulders toward  
the bright horizon, the ocean

rolling toward us  
like the future, we waited  
for the perfect wave

and when it came  
we felt the great cylinders  
of water lifting us

as the ocean rubbed against  
the seafloor  
breaking its forward motion

curling into a tube  
where we crouched, leaning  
into our lives

as we rode to shore.  
In the evening we built a fire  
on the beach and girls in bikinis

sat with us  
and anyone with a guitar  
teased a melody and someone

sang and I was vaguely  
in love with everyone  
and wanted nothing more

## YOU VISIT MORE OFTEN NOW THAT YOU'RE DEAD

For years I saw you only  
every few years  
a call every few weeks  
but now you come at night  
when I wake from  
the long bike rides through  
back roads of cane fields  
in the bright sun  
past the prison farm with  
neat rows of vegetables  
tended by men in  
white suits / Innocent  
you used to wave  
not knowing they couldn't wave back  
at the pretty blonde  
gliding by smiling  
in the beautiful days  
before you were locked up  
drug-crazed violent  
ashamed of the videotapes  
shown at the trial

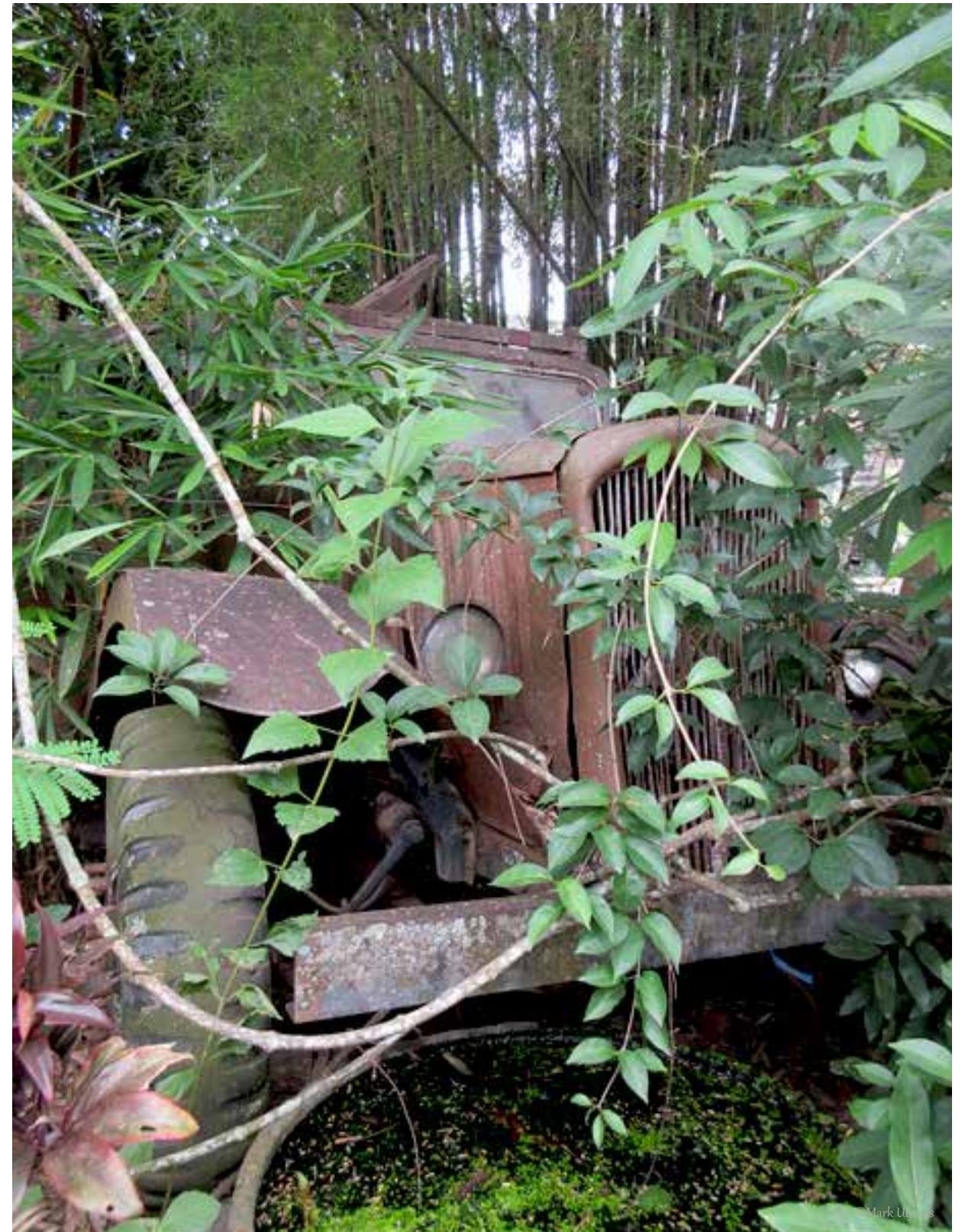
You vowed so many times  
to get clean / fly straight  
find God / pretend to be happy  
in a small Texas town  
where you kept fireworks  
hidden in the bathroom  
next to the .22 pistol / Now  
you visit me / happy at last  
or at least resigned to being  
a trick of light free  
of anger and confusion  
You stand by the window  
your face half in shadow  
your tall thin athletic  
body radiant / Death  
becomes you  
sister  
as you always knew  
it would



## THINKING OF THE RAPTURE AT CASTRIOTA METALS AND RECYCLING

I spent an hour  
watching a crane  
lower its giant arm  
to a pile of scrap iron  
lifting bundles  
of wire mesh  
shattered televisions  
broken toaster ovens  
spatulas scissors  
frying pans fence posts  
whole bags of rusty nails  
even shoes hanging by  
the metal aglets  
at the tips of their laces

leaving behind  
the aluminum bones of lawn chairs  
broken teeth of clay tiles  
and a headless doll whose  
one arm stretched toward me  
as if I could save her



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



Alexis Rhone Fancher is published in *Best American Poetry*, *Rattle*, *Hobart*, *Verse Daily*, *Plume*, *Tinderbox*, *Cleaver*, *Diode*, *The American Journal of Poetry*, *Spillway*, *Nashville Review*, *Poetry East*, *Gargoyle*, and elsewhere. She's authored six poetry collections, most recently, *Junkie Wife* (Moon Tide Press, 2018), and *The Dead Kid Poems* (KYSO Flash Press, 2019). *EROTIC: New & Selected* (NYQ Books) dropped in March, 2021. Coming in 2022, her seventh collection, *Stiletto Killer* (in Italian) from *Edizioni Ensemble, Italia*; *BRAZEN*, Alexis's next, full-length erotic book, again by NYQ Books; and *DUETS*, an illustrated, ekphrastic chapbook collaboration with poet Cynthia Atkins, to be published by *Harbor Editions*. Alexis's photographs are featured worldwide, including the covers of *Witness*, *Pithead Chapel*, *Heyday*, *Nerve Cowboy*, *The Chiron Review*, *The Rat's Ass Review*, *Spillway*, and *The Pedestal Magazine*. A multiple Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net nominee, Alexis is poetry editor of *Cultural Daily*. [www.alexisrhonefancher.com](http://www.alexisrhonefancher.com)



## ODE TO ANGELICA'S BREASTS

I savor her leanness,  
how her body unfurls,  
feet that stem her slender gambs

travel north to meet supple thighs, her ass  
at the junction of lust and desire,  
her trust, my grail.

I write poems to her perfect breasts,  
identical, alabaster goblets, each  
a delicious mouthful, chocolate

brown nipples hardened to pinpoints  
against my lips. A lick. A nibble.  
Just this side of tease. Please,

baby, let me live forever in the damp,  
perfumed space between them.

Alexis Rhone Fancher

## POEM FOR CHANEL (AS SHE LAUNCHES HER AWARD-WINNING NEW BOOK VIA ZOOM)

I am attending my friend's virtual reading. The poems are all about Riley, her dead 6-year old boy, and her living child, Desmond; the *before* Riley died and the *after*. I see her careful makeup, see her start to crumple, then pull back. Brave face. Her husband, Lee, is up in the right hand corner in a white T-shirt, sitting back in a chair. Way back. As if that promises some protection from the devastating poems that follow. *Will you read poems about after Riley died?* Her publisher asks. *I'll do Desmond's Eyes*, she says. Chanel brushes her perfectly coiffed platinum hair off her forehead, the trendy dark near the part, adding to the drama.

*I am a boat,  
sailing endlessly  
in their pacific  
blue oceans...*

I want to reach through the computer screen, hug her, tell her *I know* how she feels. I, too, have a dead son, so maybe more than anyone, I know. Bravery takes many forms: a soldier marching off to war, a rodeo rider astride a bucking steer, a bereft mother nursing her fractured heart. "Go, Riley!"\* the poem that breaks her, her husband blurting out their dead boy's name at the game by mistake, while Desmond runs the bases. Behind her on the Zoom screen, a strange painting of their new normal, Lee and Chanel with Desmond, who holds his bike in front of him. The details of all three faces are missing, blank. It looks like a by-the-numbers painting, purposely left unfinished. I keep trying to see the whole picture, but Chanel's head is blocking it. And then, at the end, an unguarded moment: I see it - her full-blown despair. I wonder if I alone see the depth of her grief? Maybe I just know what to look for.

\*"We Never Heal Just Remember Less"

## DEAD DADDY

When my daddy keeled over  
into a plate of osso bucco  
(his favorite)  
while dining in an upscale  
restaurant in Mexico City,  
several prominent physicians  
sprang to his rescue.  
He had suffered a stroke.  
It wasn't the first.  
Anything to get away  
from my stepmother.



## POEM FOR MY LOST LOVE

If you were here, I would take you dancing, toss down a shot of tequila, and hop on top of the bar, do a slow striptease, proclaim my undying lust. If you were here, you'd be there, looking up my skirt. If you were here, you would undress me like a summer night: shoes, skirt, blouse, moonlight. Loot me of my unmentionables, lick my starlight, waltz me till dawn. If you were here I'd be softer by now. Kinder. Easier to love. I'd be snuggled against you, icy feet clamped to your calves, chilled hands pressed up against your heart. If you were here I'd drive home fast, like someone who loved me waited there.



© Alexis Rhone Fancher

Photograph by Alexis Rhone Fancher.

Michael Waters' recent books include *Caw* (Shoestring Press [UK], 2021; BOA Editions [US], 2020), *The Dean of Discipline* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2018), & a coedited (with Mihaela Moscaliuc) anthology, *Border Lines: Poems of Migration* (Penguin [UK], 2020; Knopf [US], 2020). He is the recipient of fellowships from the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, National Endowment for the Arts, & Fulbright Foundation, & lives in Ocean, NJ.



## SELF-PORTRAIT WITH BANANA

When the Studio Arts professor  
Assigned still-lives of a single object,  
I chose the banana for its shape and color,  
But too quickly the banana  
Turned, during the days of my drawing,  
From green-going-to-yellow  
To daffodil  
To fulvous egg yolk  
To speckled trout  
To oil spill  
As the black bottomknot crept upward,  
Blotting the fruit,  
Seeping beyond its sorry skin  
Over the serene interior scene—  
Tablecloth, bowl, blank brick wall—  
As I obsessively retouched  
Each previous sketch until  
Forty black paper sheets  
Windowed the walls of my house,  
Each a study of willful rejection  
Of the things of this world,  
A mirror of failure, my veil,  
Shroud, darkling cloud,  
Each my final  
Erasure.

Michael Waters

Jim Clark is Professor Emeritus at Barton College, in Wilson, North Carolina, where he was Dean of the School of Humanities and the Elizabeth H. Jordan Chair of Southern Literature. His books include *Notions: A Jim Clark Miscellany*; two collections of poetry, *Dancing on Canaan's Ruins* and **Handiwork**; and he edited *Fable in the Blood: The Selected Poems of Byron Herbert Reece*. His work has appeared in *The Georgia Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Greensboro Review*, and *Asheville Poetry Review*. He served as President of the South Atlantic Modern Language Association in 2015, and Chair of the North Carolina Writers Conference in 2017. He has released two solo CDs, *Buried Land* and *The Service of Song*, and three CDs with his band *The Near Myths*.



## FALL FABLE

After dinner, in the cool September evening  
of the coastal plains,  
I was sitting in a lawn chair outside  
my garage. I was  
petting my dogs who,  
at first frisky, had calmed down.  
We were content.

From the north, the wetlands,  
I heard the geese, coming  
this way. It was  
already getting dark  
where we sat. The sun  
was up there somewhere, still.

*Listen*, I said.  
*Look*.

Then suddenly, there  
they were. I saw  
no eggs, I don't know  
about that.  
But the geese, the live, squabbling  
chevrons of flesh, flying  
wherever they knew, were golden,  
were golden.

Jim Clark



Solfrian's debut poetry collection, *Visible Heavens*, received the Wick First Book Poetry Prize, judged by Naomi Shihab Nye. Her second collection, *The Mud Room*, came out in 2020 from MadHat Press. She also published *The Second Perfect Number*, a chapbook of ghazals, with Finishing Line Press. Her poems have appeared in journals such as *The Harvard Review*, *Boulevard*, *Image*, *Margie*, *Rattapallax*, *The Southern Review*, *Pleiades*, and *The Spoon River Poetry Review*. Solfrian is a MacDowell fellow and a four-time Pushcart nominee. She lives and works in New York City.



## RORSCHACH LORCA: *Gacela X*, OR I HAVE LOST MUCH TIME BY THE SEA

I have lost much time by the sea,  
dreaming of roses received by those waters.  
It is a language equal parts love  
and agony.

I have lost so much time even the sea agrees  
I am no longer a child. Never again a kiss  
on my brow, never again a tiny boat  
with a paper sail.

Adulthood is immobility, except  
for roses, scattered. Where did they go  
on their passage, with their velvet hands  
empty of thought?

I have lost the heart of a child who lives by the sea,  
who is ignorant of water, the very kisses  
it gives, how it consumes even  
the petals of the dead.

Joanna Solfrian

RORSCHACH LORCA: *Gacela VI,*  
OR THE ROOT*for L.*

There is a root and a world with much earth.  
There is a hand and a small door of water.

Where to go, where?  
There is a sky of windows that open and close  
above the root in the earth.

In the interior wind between—  
the plants bend and reach;  
some humans bow.

Friend, one day we will sleep  
with the root, even as the window  
closes behind us.

RORSCHACH LORCA: *Los Ojos,*  
OR EYES

Your eyes open infinities, all somber.  
The dead in their camps tend the garden

(the garden of weeping flowers).  
Your eyes have no horizon, only endless

virgin depth--no roads,  
because they have no destination.

I, a fool, look to your eyes for a road.  
The dead in the garden pause their shears—

*oh look at the young one! The roses  
in her cheeks! The pupil!*

## RORSCHACH LORCA: *Casida II*, OR SMALL HOUSE OF SOBBING

Palm fronds have serrated  
the moonlight on my balcony  
and I will not sleep for  
the beguiling mural

Angels sing in the moonlight  
No, the moonlight is angels singing  
and the fronds are violins  
whose one note is a death-rustle

The size of loss is immense, yes!

The fronds rustle yes, yes  
and I will not sleep, for  
my serrated heart has made a sob  
to add to mural and moon

## RORSCHACH LORCA: *Gacela II*, OR GHAZAL: DESIRE

I want to flow as water does—without cause.  
I want to move through the place of no valleys.

I want to walk like a night with no eyes, my heart a plain red heart—  
no golden flower opening and closing—

like the sad donkeys with their flea-bitten noses  
and the coping walls of the graveyard.

The still-brilliant teeth of the cadavers  
are inundated with yellow secrets.

I listen with the creep of night's creatures  
then sleep like a rose at midday, all depth and velvet—

and resist my green thoughts,  
which are the sufferings of time.



Tim Tomlinson is the author of the chapbook *Yolanda: An Oral History in Verse*, the poetry collection *Requiem for the Tree Fort I Set on Fire*, the short fiction collection *This Is Not Happening to You*, and co-author of New York Writers Workshop's *The Portable MFA in Creative Writing*. He is a co-founder of [New York Writers Workshop](#), and a professor at New York University's Global Liberal Studies. He lives in Brooklyn, NY.



Tim Tomlinson

THE QUESTION IS  
WHAT IS VERY PSYCHOLOGICAL

after the Jasper Johns: *Mind/Mirror* exhibition

A man with no eyes  
looking at you looking  
at a man  
with no eyes

the hands that aren't hands  
the X-ray hands  
the hand cracking knuckles  
on another hand

hands with exposed organs  
black and white hands  
empty  
hands

*Usuyuki*  
light and snow  
preludes and fugues  
a window at dusk  
and snowfall

English suites Glenn Gould caffeine

Red yellow blue  
the shadow of a falling leg  
affixed to a chair  
that's falling  
not falling

*continued overleaf...*

## THE QUESTION IS WHAT IS VERY PSYCHOLOGICAL *contd...*

Objects on a shelf in a deserted city  
long after the occupation  
that never ends  
    the world the gray rain

The hands in yellow  
blue hands red arrows

    Earlier than the man  
the boy  
    the boy in white    the blank boy  
amidst faces staring into faces  
across shapes,  
vases  
red vases empty  
    vases

The gray man  
The white boy  
The white map  
Ontario

The gray man listening  
    interpreting  
    gray numbers white letters black  
                            and white Japan

0 thru 9  
    the mess of numbers  
    the pile of numbers  
    numbers as objects  
    numbers as targets  
    numbers with numbers on their backs  
        and flags

The mirror is the edge

language is leaving me  
orange –  
    the color the light  
        the gray boy  
before you can leave you must emerge  
The yellow handkerchief  
    white

Monotypes receding into their surfaces  
Forms sinking  
    Renton  
        Ophelia

The wire cages  
Cage on tape *do something else*  
Stick figures in cages cave figures in cages

*continued overleaf...*



## THE QUESTION IS WHAT IS VERY PSYCHOLOGICAL *contd...*

What is the part what is the whole  
an interesting question the question is what  
is very psychological  
infantile

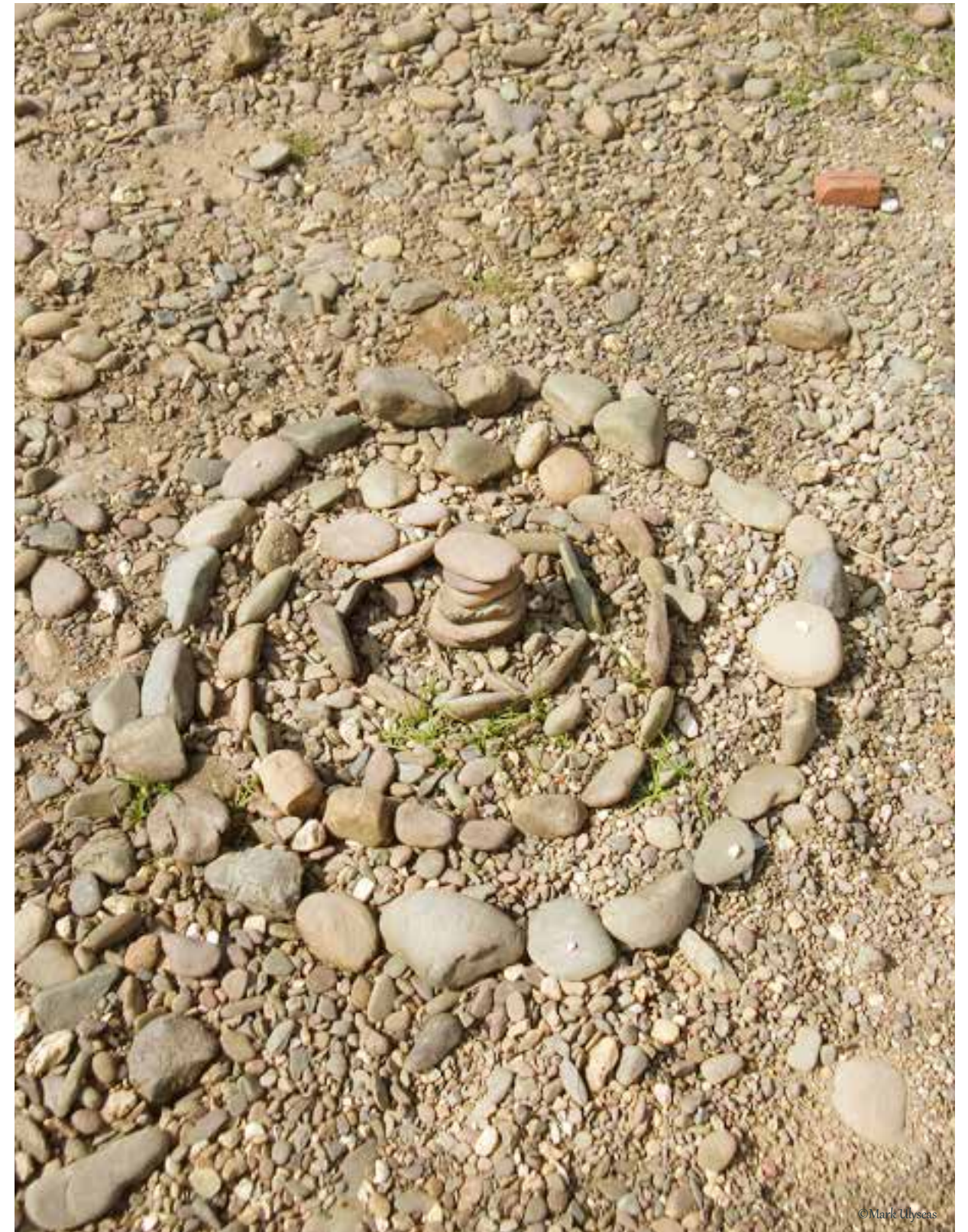
*The psychological object*

Child

Question

Part

the gray man  
the man in silhouette  
no hat  
looking from the edge of the surface  
from outside the frame  
at you  
asking  
the same questions  
you ask



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



BONELESS PRELUDES

after Satie

1  
time will do what  
at this moment I  
cannot do

2  
you in Italy  
Italy

3  
ignoring his bone  
the dog

4  
two portraits  
his/hers  
repeat 840 times

5  
the wind  
    lifting  
her skirt on the steps – that image  
decades after  
    the wind

6  
morning on a bench  
alongside the Grand Union Canal  
a ½ litre can of Murphy's  
    and a cigarette

7  
the melody in his ear  
the stranger glimpsed from the window of a bus

8  
all day  
all night  
all day

TWELVE OR MORE BRAIN FACTS  
IN JOHN CAGE’S *Thirteen Harmonies*

(in)Sufficient memory imprint  
to transfer  
to reach  
two colors  
two hats, with sounds  
whatsoever

the Impossibility of  
identifying/recognizing  
similar objects, forms  
*seeing is forgetting the name...*  
again,  
however

*worry the object, do something to it*  
a single category, a generalizing  
mechanism--  
a unique  
normal with  
no central constant form

leaves the work  
it becomes  
a language enjoyed  
without being understood  
nonabstract abstractions  
the mind already knows  
light snow

What I am calling poetry is  
bound up with  
the telephone  
or the airplane  
silence symmetry zero *ich*  
is never capitalized

Chard deNiord is the author of seven books of poetry, most recently *In My Unknowing* (University of Pittsburgh Press 2020) and *Interstate* (U. of Pittsburgh, 2015). He is also the author of two books of interviews with eminent *American poets*: *Sad Friends, Drowned Lovers, Stapled Songs, Conversations and Reflections on 20th Century Poetry* (Marick Press, 2011) and *I Would Lie To You If I Could* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2018). In 2001, he co-founded the New England College MFA Program in Poetry, where he served as the program director until 2007. He is a Professor Emeritus of English and Creative Writing at Providence College and essay editor at *Plume Poetry*. From 2015 to 2019 he served as Poet Laureate of Vermont. He lives in Westminster West, Vermont with his wife, Liz.



## WESTERN GOTHIC

*"The pure products of America go crazy."*  
William Carlos Williams

As long as there's a vast called West,  
an outlaw will ride across it on the lam  
with nowhere to go except a place to rest  
beneath the wide cerulean sky into which  
he falls asleep each night by rising as he falls  
into the dark where he dreams of escape  
and the lovely barmaid he left the day before  
at a saloon in Tombstone, and then the scene  
that follows of his capture in which a posse  
of lawmen catches up to him and his exhausted  
horse and strings him up on a hanging branch  
where he twists and turns to the silver tunes  
of the lovely Sidereal Sisters, which is why  
he doesn't sleep for long and rises at dawn  
with another job in mind that's even more  
romantic, audacious, and American than the last.

Chard deNiord



## SHIRT

A shirt hung ruined in my closet  
among my other shirts sheathed  
in plastic. I wore it once to a dinner  
with angels who were bedighted  
in the whitest fabric. It was  
a heavenly banquet until I spilled  
some chocolate on my collar  
and pocket. "Keep washing!"  
I begged the darkness inside  
my closet, which was the only wash  
that washed it. But such was life  
in Paradise where even the smallest  
spot stained the righteous;  
where just a thought turned nude  
to naked. So ruined then for dining  
again with the boring angels, I wore it  
as the latest fashion I manufactured  
by simply spilling in a line  
of garments I called *Original*.

## TO A LUNA MOTH

*Now you are no longer caught in the obsession with darkness,  
and a desire for higher love-making sweeps you upward.*  
From "The Holy Longing" by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe"

"Out of nowhere, which is every-  
where, I sang to you with a tongue  
in the form of a leaf as you fell  
asleep: 'My love, my soul,  
my changeling, the sky is  
your chrysalis, so lie inside  
its blue long enough to feel  
the ribs of your wings begin  
to grow, then grow some more  
until they're long enough to  
form a thin prehensile frame  
for the delicate veil that spans  
their arc with a fabric that seems  
too frail at first to lift you up  
but does somehow, infused  
as it is with a tensile strength  
that forms in a dream inside  
the dark in which you fly  
and land, land and fly among  
the leaves where you were born  
a worm and then transformed  
to a miracle that flies  
on waking a second time,  
as if waking were the dream  
and the dream the world.'"

## SONGBIRDS FLY NORTH AT NIGHT

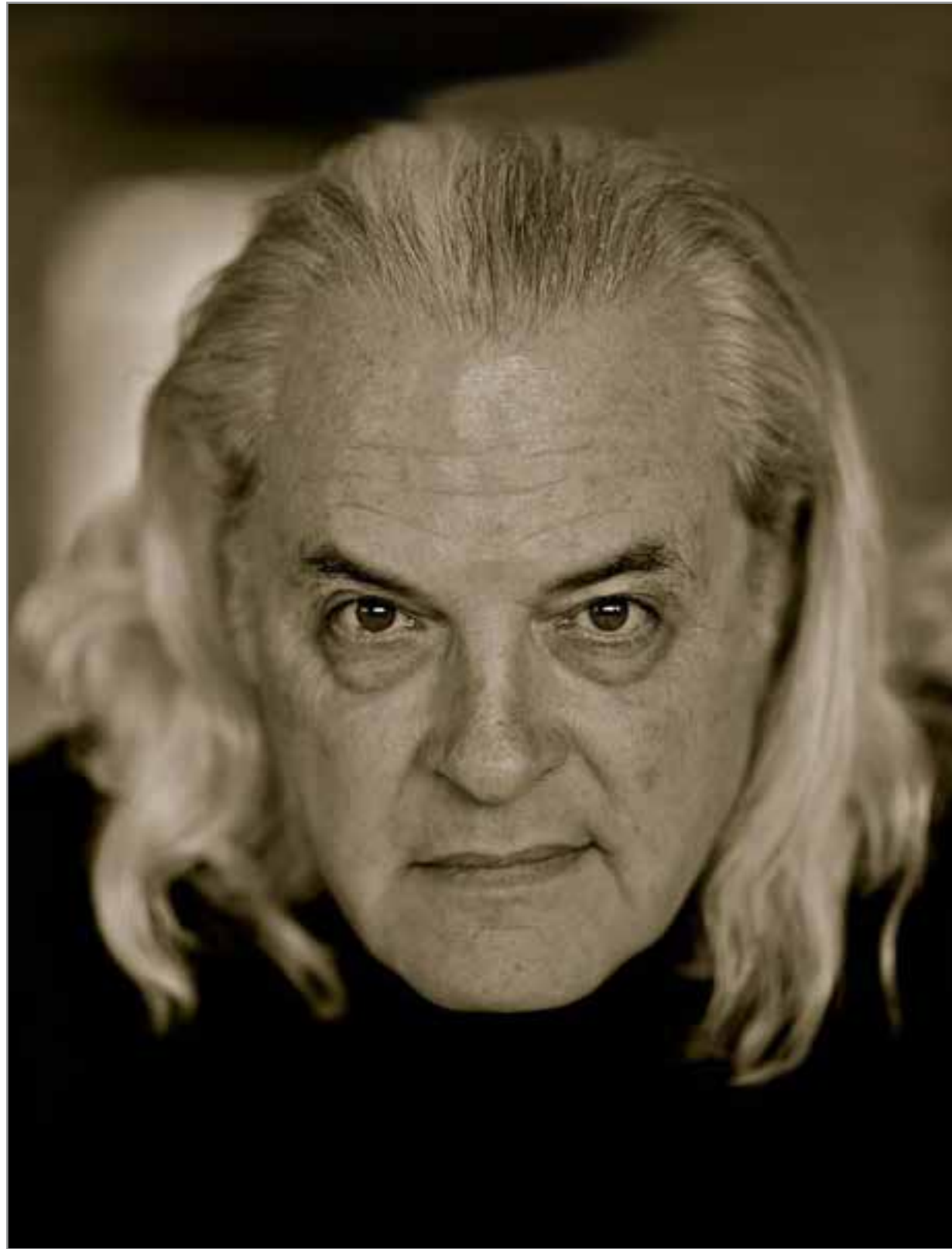
Songbirds fly north at night  
in the flyways above Turtle Island.  
What needle guides them in the dark?  
Is that me beside them?  
When I think I'm a bird  
or my skull's the firmament  
I'm writing in my sleep.  
I'm opening my book for the sun  
to read at the speed of light, turn  
to blank the moment I wake.  
I'm flying like a sparrow in my sleep  
with only a pen to guide me,  
too heavy for the strongest man  
to lift from the bed in which I dream  
of flying and singing in the dark.

## REVELATIONS

*Now you are no longer caught in the obsession with darkness,  
and a desire for higher love-making sweeps you upward.*  
From "The Holy Longing" by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe"

What I forget each day:  
That I know more than I think I do.  
That nothing is full of flowers that need  
a universe for blooming.  
That the universe fits inside my head.  
That this is a literal place, a paradise of endings.  
That the sound of a falling tree goes unheard  
in the light of a star that no longer burns.  
That absence is the heart of quickest light.  
That time is at the mercy of thought.  
That I either live in that mercy or not,  
singing in the dark.

Scott Dodgson is creator and host of the popular podcast *Offshore Explorer with Scott Dodgson* reaching thousands of listeners per week. A world class sailor, he ran a private charter business based in USVI and Rhodes Greece, for 18 years. He has sailed around the world several times. He wrote the popular movies *Anna Nicole Story*, *Paris Hilton*, *Princess Paparazzi*. Scott has optioned over 40 scripts and ghosted on many high budget studio films. He is developing two shows for PBS, *Offshore Explorer with Scott Dodgson*, and *American Mariner*. He has published a short story *Mosaic Artist* and a novella, *The Casket Salesman*, which has been optioned for a movie. His collection of short stories, *The Sailor's Point of View*, will be published in the spring of 2022.



Scott Dodgson

## THE IMPORTANCE OF PLACE

Symi, Greece

Consider this mental experiment for a moment. When you stand outside in your own town, histories, incidents, observations all rush through your mind, creating a feeling of nostalgia, romance, anger, indifference, or maybe sadness. Combined with the familiarity of the place, you have a pretty good idea of what your place is about and how you fit into it.

“Symi is a Greek island, part of the Dodecanese Island group. It’s known for its beaches, an annual music festival and for the harbor at Symi Town, surrounded by colorful neoclassical houses. On the southwest coast, the 18th-century Monastery of Archangel Michael Panormitis is a major Greek Orthodox pilgrimage site with a Byzantine Museum.”

This is Google description. Most travelers get this kind of information in travel books.

Here are a few things you should know that the average sailor would like to know before arriving. The life of a sailor in the Greek islands during the summer depends a lot on the Meltemi winds. The Meltemi winds are a strong dry wind that blows from the North. It can blow for several days, even at night, then die down for a day or two, then pick up with continued ferociousness. I spent one summer commented by the locals as one of the worse Meltemi in memory. 40 knots 24/7 for weeks at a time.

Symi Town is protected from the Meltemi. You won’t experience much swell until the fall, when the winds shift and come from the South. We call this a Sirocco. Pedi harbor is a long thin inlet with hundred-foot mountain cliffs on both sides. Once in the harbor, it opens slightly into a lovely bay. The bottom is rocky and holding can be difficult. The wind funnels down the valley, which can make some interesting nights, but mostly it is protected from the Meltemi. It is one of my favorite anchorages in the world. There is a little stone and cement dock where the water boat docks every other day, so stay to the port side with your dinghy. There are a couple of restaurants and hotels in Pedi. If you want more groceries, catch a cab, or walk other the mountain and down into Symi town. I love the walk. If you tire of climbing up the steps, there are two little coffee shops along the route.



I would be remiss by not mentioning Symi Town anchoring. First, stay out of the way of the way of the ferry. The ferries are big. They come in fast and leave fast. Sometimes they will drop a hook (pray your anchor is there) sometimes they back to the dock and pin the stern to the quay with the props. The prop wash runs down the quay, shaking and rolling everything. Luckily, they leave as fast as they come. You will anchor stern too. The harbor bottom is shaped like a big “V”. Drop your hook, then reel it in until it grabs on the incline. The center of the harbor is deep.

There is an anchorage on the west side of the island off the beach, which is beautiful, but very uncomfortable as it is open to the western sea. There are a couple of other dramatic inlets, suitable for day stops, but you will have to fight with the local tour boats for space.

The dock master’s office is right across from where the ferry docks. Clearing in is easy. Dock fees are relatively inexpensive. If you want to leave the boat for a day excursion, tell the dockmaster they have cameras on the dock and there is almost no stealing.

If you anchor in Pedi, George will row out and collect a tiny harbor fee and collect your trash. He comes in the morning.

There are a few restaurants on the quay. You can’t go wrong in any of them.

Symi doesn’t have a tourist zone. Big ferries bring tourists in the morning and pick them up in the evening. The rest of the time, you are living with the locals, hotel guests, and summer residents. The pace is a little activity in the morning, beach for a few hours, naps in the afternoon, dinner and drinks as the sun goes down. For me, anchored in Pedi harbor, coffee and breakfast, two hours maintenance (maybe), swimming, lunch, long nap, then about sundown drinks. In the evening, I go to shore and eat at one of the small tavernas. It is basically Greek home cooking. It is fresh and flavorful.

The light changes throughout the day. We all recognize the strong bleached light of midday Greece, but few mention the ochre hues across the landscape when the sun rises and sets. The moonlight is legendary for its bluish hues and orange tints during the meltemi. Sometimes during the full moon, the moon looks like it is cradled between the mountains. The moon’s luminosity over the spartan landscape gives one pause to remember the stories of the Greek gods. The neoclassic homes stacked on the hillside reflected a pallet of colors and illumination, adding to the phantasmagorical of Symi.

You could say I read the travel description on google. I have given you a sailor’s insight into a very sea-oriented community, but you would know the importance of the place unless you waited a very long time.

The narrative that runs deep in the island’s culture is one of success, hardship, disaster, and love. Symi was once home to the most famous sponges and hard hat sponge divers in the world. The sponges were sold at Harrods in London and to the King. Life on an island is always hard. Raising goats, growing spices, like coriander, basil, and rosemary, and fishing. Tourism has filled the coffers recently, but it hasn’t always been that way.

Symi is unique to the visitor in the sense that to be there means you are living with the people. You meet the usual suspects, the harbormaster and his crew, merchants, waiters, hotel workers, but if you are patient and sit long enough, you will meet the next phase of people, summer residents. Many Greek people spend the summer on the island. Some people are from Symi, but many are from other islands. The English are always well represented, French also have bought homes on the island. The summer residents will often guide you into the pattern of life on the island.

The summer is when everyone on the island makes money because there is nothing going on during the winter.

I spent two weeks during the winter and there was only one restaurant open. That is where I saw a brass plaque on the wall of the restaurant commemorating the armistice treaty of the Dodecanese on May 8th, 1945, between the Germans and the English.

The owner, a middle-aged woman named Sofia, told me the story. I listened because I was patient and I know people love to tell their own stories. Symi Town was silent except for the fisherman mending their nets. Sofia brought over a basket of warm rolls, raspberry and lemon marmalade, butter, and two coffees, one for her and one for me. The bread, she told me, was made in an oven down the street that was cut into the mountain rock and had been continuously warm for centuries, even during the war. That was why this bread was so delicious. I referred to the plaque on the wall. I wasn’t familiar with the history.

Sofia was half Greek and half German. Her mother fell in love with a German sergeant during the occupation. Her mother would have been severely punished for being a collaborator except it was secretly known to just a few she was a spy. Sofia laughed heartedly. “She was a terrible spy. You are not supposed to fall in love and have sex with the enemy!” But she did.

She was only eighteen years old, but she saved everyone on the island. This restaurant was her house. The plaque was placed there as an honor to her valiant effort. Sofia was nearly doubling over with laughter as her mother walked in. She was dashing. Her mother looked like a movie star. She walked on by flashing a smile to me and adding a look of retribution to her daughter. She disappeared down the quay, wearing her honor as she walked. Melina Mercouri had nothing on her. (Never on Sunday film)

Sofia's father was very handsome. He was just twenty years old.

Before the war, the Italians occupied the Dodecanese. They rebuilt Rhodes, the closest island to Symi. When the Italians surrendered, the British came and took over Rhodes, the rest of the Dodecanese falling to the British. The Italians offer to fight on the British side. The Germans soundly defeated both the British and the Italian volunteers. A German garrison occupied Symi.

The people of Symi escaped into the mountains. They started a guerrilla campaign against the German army. The revolutionary force, as they were called, asked her mother to listen to the Germans.

This little restaurant was a gathering place for the Germans. Her mother didn't know how to speak German, but she learned quick. The German sergeant taught her. He spoke a little Greek. He learned Greek during summer vacations with his family on the island of Ios. They grew close.

The commanding officer of the Germans was very frustrated and angry he couldn't suppress the Symi revolutionaries. When the word arrived that the Germans were to surrender to the British, it outraged him. A small British contingent was to arrive on May 4th, and the ceremony would take place. The Germans would give up their arms and sent home. However, the German commander had different plans. He let it be known that the signing ceremony would take place in the town square on May 3rd. He set up machine guns. When the Greek revolutionaries came to the ceremony to celebrate the end of the war and their victory, he would kill them all.

The young German sergeant let it be known he was against the plan. He shared the secret with her mother. Uwe was his name. He knew all along she was a spy, but didn't tell his commander, because he loved her with all his heart. Uwe later said he was more attached to this tiny Greek island than to his fatherland. He knew he was going to spend the rest of his life here.

She passed the word of the trap.

No one showed up to the signing on May 3rd except for a few stray cats. When the British arrived the next day, they were informed about the German commander's actions, and he was arrested for war crimes.

Uwe went back to Germany. He returned three months later and bought the bakery. The baker had died of old age. There was a shortage of men because of the war, so the purchase wasn't protested. They accepted him into the community as recognition of his help during the war. Sophia's mother and father loved each other very much. Uwe died two years before. The bakery was run by her brother, Costas.

I walked back over the mountain. Windmills built by the crusaders turned gently in the wind. Along the way, through the marbled paths, past the neoclassical homes, the tufts of dried rosemary tossing its mint smell across my path. The local women dressed in all black shucked peas and flashed quick smiles from their kitchen doors. The old men sat in the shade of doorways, nodded, and tipped their caps. Lilac blooms tumbled over stone walls onto the pathway. With the knowledge of this momentaneous event, my view of the island and its people deepened. It was as if they let me in on the secret. I connected.

I asked George about the story when he was collecting my harbor fees. He said his father and mother lived in the mountains for years with the sheep and fighting the Germans. Now he said he just took their money and laughed.

I understood the importance of this place and my place.



Angela Patten

Angela Patten's publications include four poetry collections, *The Oriole & the Ovenbird* (Kelsay Books), *In Praise of Usefulness* (Wind Ridge Books), *Reliquaries* (Salmon Poetry, Ireland) and *Still Listening* (Salmon Poetry, Ireland), and a prose memoir, *High Tea at a Low Table: Stories From An Irish Childhood* (Wind Ridge Books). Her work has appeared in many literary journals such as *Calyx Journal*; *Nimrod International Journal*; *The Café Review*; *Crosswinds Poetry Journal* and *Poetry Ireland Review*; and in anthologies including *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*; *The White Page/An Bhileog Bhan: Twentieth-Century Irish Women Poets*; *Cudovista Usta (Marvellous Mouth)*, *Drustvo Apokalipsa (Slovenia)*; *The Breath of Parted Lips Volume II*; *Birchsong I and II: Poetry Centered in Vermont*; and *Roads Taken: Contemporary Vermont Poetry*. Born and raised in Dublin, Ireland, she now lives with her husband, poet Daniel Lusk, in Burlington, Vermont, where she is a Senior Lecturer Emerita at the University of Vermont.

## A FINE ROMANCE

Typewriters are so romantic, my student says,  
especially for writing poetry. I pause,  
remembering the clattering chorus—  
*the-quick-brown-fox-jumped-over-the-lazy-dog*—  
the discordant orchestra of distant secretarial school.

If only I had known that Dickens, Shaw  
and my other literary loves had written  
in Pittman's shorthand, I might have mastered  
the secret code invented by a man, practiced—  
or so I thought—only by women.

If only I had known the manual typewriter  
as the mouthpiece of poetry, not symbol  
of my servitude. That somewhere  
in small rooms above the shop or stable  
there were women poets facing Royals,  
Smith-Coronas, Underwoods, tapping out  
their thoughts into words made flesh  
that dwelt amongst us. Instead the string

of dismal secretarial jobs at which I typed up  
scads of scrawling words, stitching a garment  
I could never hope to wear, for those  
with better things to do than turn a knob  
to feed a sheet of paper round a cylinder,  
depress the shift key to create a capital,  
lift the line-space lever to adjust the margins.

If only I could disconnect the machine  
from the Madam, stern-faced supervisor  
of the typing pool, forget the little bottles  
of liquid eraser to paint over my mistakes,  
the infernal clang of the carriage returning home.



## THE BIRD OF PRAISE

Sometimes the bird of praise flies in and perches  
on my shoulder, ruffling his iridescent feathers,  
preening with a glad eye on the mirror. He turns

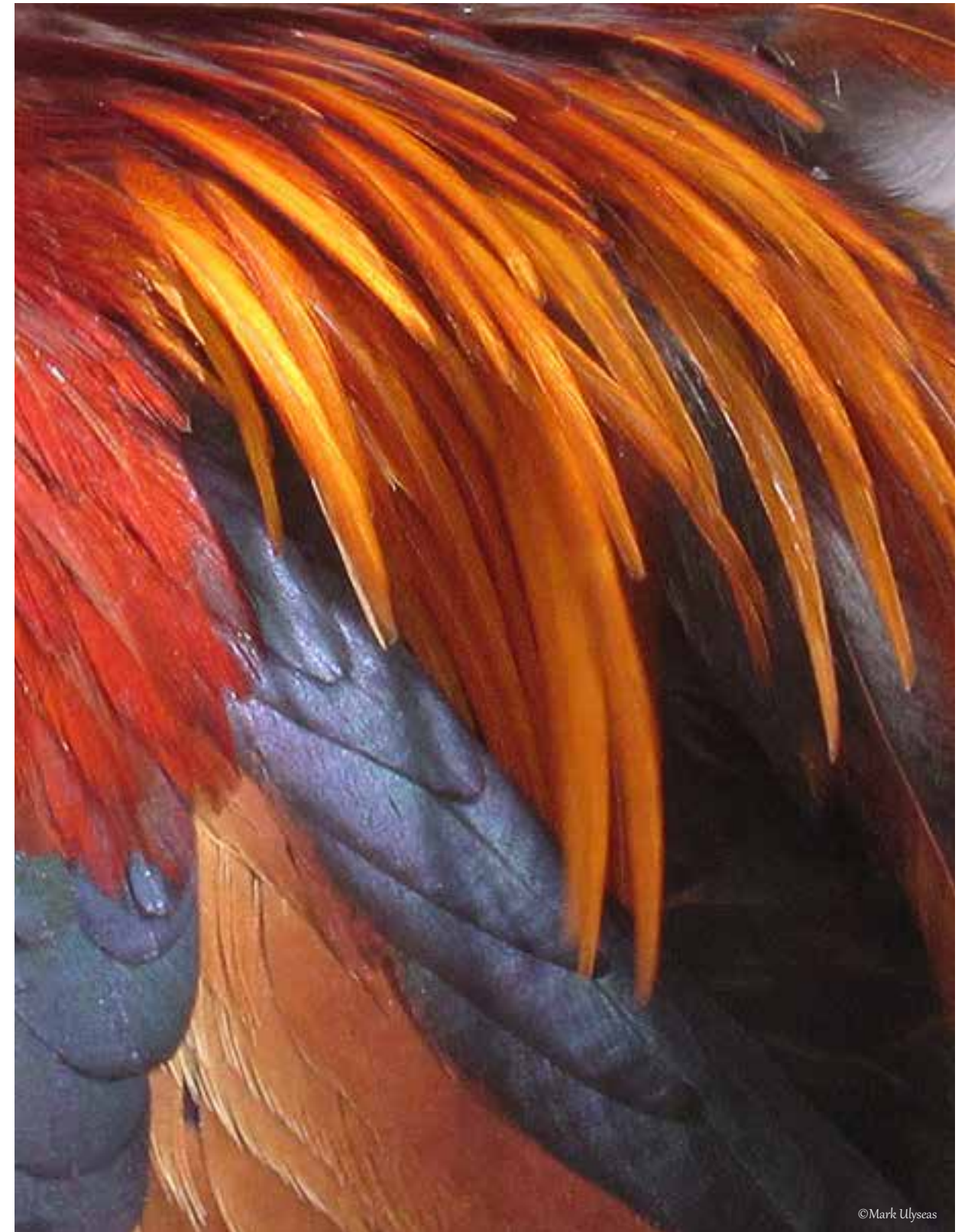
the pages of my new poetry collection with his beak,  
pausing at the Acknowledgements Page, the bio,  
the mug shot. *Sweetsweetsweet, youyouyou*, he sings

tweaking the silver bauble that dangles from my ear.  
Then fickle, flighty fool, he's off, zigzagging away  
to some younger, more attractive, more timely poet

who writes about topical events with passionate  
intensity, skewering her victims with similes,  
uplifting the hapless with her figurative stirrings.

The bird of praise never sticks around for long.  
He's always flying off to find new talent he can coo over.  
I'd like to cage that bird and keep him for myself.

I'd like to trim my hat with his flashy tail feathers.  
God knows I need reminders—alright, lies—  
that I am and always will be fairest of them all.



©Mark Ulyseas

Plane scene. Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Peter Makuck, twice a winner of the annual Brockman-Campbell Award for best book by a North Carolinian, lived for twenty-five years on Bogue banks, one of the state's barrier islands. In 2010 his *Long Lens: New & Selected Poems* was published by BOA Editions. His poems have previously appeared in *Southern Poetry Review* as well as *The Hudson Review*, *Poetry*, *The Georgia Review*, *The Sewanee Review* and so on. His sixth collection of poems, *Mandatory Evacuation*, was published in October 2016 as well as his fourth collection of short stories, *Wins and Losses* (Syracuse University Press). He founded and edited *Tar River Poetry* from 1978 to 2006 when he retired from East Carolina University as Distinguished Professor Emeritus.



## WHAT WE KEEP

Is what the neap tide reveals—  
big beds of various broken shells,  
but not all.

Collected from years of beach walks  
we keep them in our living room  
in a clear glass bowl:

sunset scallop, a red-lipped whelk,  
spiny murex, sand dollars, orange auger,  
giant cockle, coquina,

angel wings, augers, scotch bonnets . . .  
A spectrum of color: sand-dollar white  
to the shiny black

jagged edges of a three inch-shark tooth,  
ancient, a shiny triangle, a favorite  
of our friends' kids.

But I like to think of them holding  
some shells up to their ears for  
the inside whispers

they might keep  
and remember for years.

Peter Makuck

## AN END

I'm at the window again  
slashed with cold rain,  
    our bird feeder empty,  
Easter still two weeks away, nothing  
to keep me from thinking about friends  
of eighteen years  
who sold their house,  
moved to Florida,  
never said goodbye,  
or left an address.  
Some things won't yield  
to a mantra, breathing, or image control.  
All those days of fishing and tennis,  
parties and dinners meant . . .  
*Everything ends,*  
another friend said, *Get over it!*  
I'm supposed to wise up, get a grip,  
simple as that.

With seed from the garage,  
    I fill and re-hang the feeder,  
then pour a line of white and gold millet  
along the top of the wall  
below the window where it edges  
on yaupon, live oak, and scrub.  
Back upstairs at the window,  
I watch them arrive—cardinals,  
doves, shiny black grackles,  
white-throats, towhees,  
and one lone squirrel.

They zoom, flutter,  
bicker, and bump each other for seed.  
The cardinals and doves hunker down.  
Watching the show, I notice  
my reflection in the pane,  
my smile a surprise  
when my wife asks  
what I'm laughing about.



## DETOUR

Late for dinner with friends  
 in the hometown I seldom return to,  
 I can't resist  
 the route past Cohen's cornfields,  
 now rows of condos,  
 and the turn down Evergreen in low light,  
 a lane no longer flanked by cedar and spruce,  
 the house where I grew up not white anymore.  
 The front porch, once open, now enclosed.  
 And Barnesi's woods at the bottom of the hill,  
 a shopping center, the pond filled in  
 where hockey always kept me after school.

A man with hair as gray as mine  
 comes down the walk, glances  
 at this idling car,  
 and slowly shrinks down the hill . . .

*Light dies in the eyes, hearing  
 Fades. Once back to the Source,  
 There's no special meaning—  
 Today, tomorrow.*

And yet old Mr. Combs staggers from the dark.  
 I mowed his lawn next door  
 while he rocked on the shady back porch  
 his glass amber with whiskey—

*Oh how he loved his drink!  
 And now he's dust  
 Under the breathing pines.*

Not a shade of attachment in these voices.  
 But I'm not Etsuzan, or Li Po.  
 I'd love to cross the street, knock on that door,  
 even pay to look through the house, get closer—  
 but to what? Perhaps if I wait  
 my mother will walk out  
 with a long-neck can to water her geraniums  
 in boxes hung from the porch rails.  
 And there in the drive  
 my father will squat with a catcher's mitt  
 to help with my curve ball, knuckle, and drop.

Empty road. The scrape  
 of red leaves blowing past on the asphalt.  
 If I don't leave now, Benny might glide by  
 on his sky blue Schwinn, and a crow caw  
 from the backyard oaks no longer there.  
 I tell myself, *Leave.*

*Put the car into gear.  
 Friends, dinner, and good wine are waiting.*

## AFTER HURRICANE FLORENCE

We had leaks in our living room ceiling.  
Into our apartment came industrial blowers  
plus an obese dehumidifier on wheels.

Outside the scream of chainsaws along the street,  
hammers pounding to secure tarps where shingles  
went missing. The *beep beep* of cherry pickers

hefting power lines back up to poles, payloaders  
clunking debris into trucks. Noise blast everywhere.  
Especially our apartment, those blowers aimed

at stains on ceilings in several rooms, droning  
day and night for more than a week. Then a team  
of repairmen arrived and took them away.

That evening, when a low sun turned the color  
of Maker's Mark in my glass, this new silence  
was far more vivid than ever.

## AFTER DINNER

Along the boardwalk  
Under stars, the slap and hiss  
Of waves get closer—

Then the motel's seaward light  
Filled with a confetti of gulls.

Mihaela Moscaliuc's most recent poetry collections are *Cemetery Ink* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2021) and *Immigrant Model* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2015). She has translated poetry by Romanian writers Carmelia Leonte and Liliana Ursu, co-edited *Border Lines: Poems of Migration* (Knopf, 2020), and edited *Insane Devotion: On the Writing of Gerald Stern* (Trinity University Press, 2016). She is the translation editor for *Plume* and associate professor of English at Monmouth University, NJ.



## ORIGIN

I wait for dawn  
two spotted cows away  
from a woman still mourning  
the loss of what would have been  
a first child.

Her tresses sable  
the chest of a man  
pale, in love, returned  
from military, and soon  
to leave for college.

There, on the bite of hay,  
in the sweet steam  
of secret and dung,  
he begins to misread  
her silence.

I swim toward them  
on a light beam that seeps  
between two roof slats  
to inherit his straw hair,  
the barn of her silence.

Neither one sees me arrive  
in the passive eyes of cows,  
the obsidian rafts  
of their irises  
too thin to carry me.

Mihaela Moscaliuc



## VOWS

*Culebra*

For two weeks, back and forth from the beach,  
we eyed its bronze plate— city hall, courthouse, jail.  
In the third, we flipflopped to the policewoman  
concluding some ticketing affair across the street  
and, grinning apologetically for lack of Spanish,  
persuaded her to act as witness.  
We waltzed through the handcuffed with salt  
in our hair, blood tests in our pocket.  
Flanked by our miffed public servant  
and a taxidermied eagle, we chorused Si  
whenever the judge nudged, exchanged  
seashells and parroted the vows, amused  
by the policewoman's giddiness.  
The judge must have seized the chance,  
I hope, to souse our mouths in vulgarities  
and lubricate us for the long ride,  
for when we exchanged places with the parolee  
and stepped back into the island sun, tongues  
fomenting with unrest, we couldn't wait  
to dive into each other's bodies,  
dare the fire coral, be each other's oxygen.

Still, I love us in this photograph,  
how we two stand against erasure while he sits,  
seemingly unperturbed, the weight of night  
one with the weight of morning.

Perie Longo, Santa Barbara Poet Laureate (2007-09) has published five books of poetry which include *Milking the Earth* (1986), *The Privacy of Wind* (1997), *With Nothing behind but Sky* (2006), *Baggage Claim* (2014) and *A Mosaic of Poetry* (2013), an eBook of poetry for Children. Individual poems appear in numerous literary journals and anthologies including *Askew*, *Atlanta Review*, *Connecticut Review*, *International Poetry Review*, *Miramar*, *Nimrod*, *Paterson Literary Review*, *Poet Lore*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Rattle*, *Salt*, *Solo Novo*, *South Carolina Review* and *Wisconsin Review*. She has been on the staff of the Santa Barbara Writers Conference since 1984, taught poetry through California-Poets-in-the-Schools (1984-2015) and teaches poetry privately. As a registered poetry therapist, she facilitates poetry writing for healing groups at Hospice of Santa Barbara and Sanctuary Centers. In 2005 she was invited to Kuwait University to speak about “Poetry as a Way to Peace” and is on the Board of the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation.



## SILENE STENOPHYLLA

### *for Dawn*

Easter morning, Glory Halleluiah, *roll away the stone*,  
a friend asks if I had yet written about this plant  
bloomed from seeds 30,000 years old. Found  
in a squirrel’s burrow deep in Siberian permafrost,

scientists potted them, like anxious parents  
waited, prodded, checked month after month  
after year. I gaze long at the photo,  
its Latin name cumbersome for so delicate a flower

finally risen four years later, glory be,  
four tiny blooms pointing North, South, West, East—  
a new world resurrected from a clump  
of plump leaves. Petals like wisps of baby breath,

frigid wings of angels preserved impermeable to water  
melting from above, a time capsule born  
from Earth’s original womb. *A miracle*, researchers cried,  
signed Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Could it be harbinger

awakening primeval cells not in our best interest?  
Soon dinosaurs at our door, the Woolly Mammoth,  
Adam’s rib sealed in straw, Eve’s half-eaten apple,  
the snake’s rattle. Pray, the stone has rolled away.

Perie Longo

## MY HIPPOCAMPUS

*from Greek: hippo-horse, kampos-monster*

A cheery woman on PBS tells me my hippocampus  
is the brain's power house of memory  
if we stay sharp, keep learning, age needn't be  
*a downward slippery slope.*

I hear the sound of hippopotamus, *a riverhorse*  
bubbling from muddy water while she points to a chart  
of the brain's inner workings,  
each part neatly labeled, bright green

for my hippocampus, shape of a graceful seahorse,  
no trace of gray matter apparent, my words  
slipping away in the wake. A network  
of silver filaments dances across the screen.

*Your brain is you, she exudes.*

I submerge into my hippo state, dredge up Poseidon  
in a turmoil of sea riding a creature  
with head of horse, tail of fish thrashing. Flash,

a memory fifty years past, this same monster carved  
on Rome's Trevi Fountain where I tossed  
three coins for lasting love. That didn't work out,  
but thanks to the vision on PBS, I am emboldened

to make things right—mount my resurrected seahorse  
diminished in size as it is,  
and harness whatever flurries of joy shimmer  
like those coins in sudden sun.

## WHAT NEXT?

Considering the latest  
catastrophe, our family dog  
comes to mind who years ago chased  
the cat around the house whenever we said  
any word that sounded like cat i.e. catastrophe  
and the upheaval would catapult anything perched  
on a table edge i.e. Grandma's forget-me-not  
flowered tea cup like the one I broke chasing  
my younger brother when we were little and mother  
hollered *watch it*, not my intention today as I try  
to drum up some joy essential in this multi-cat-  
astrophic atmosphere, not the smell of a rat  
my adult daughter claims is beneath the base of her bed  
I sniff, the stench knocks me over (good sign no Covid),  
forget breaking news, chase after the number for Pest Control  
who races over on time-and-a half, crawls under the house  
for a look and reappears as if from death in his dirt covered  
hazmat suit and metal, double-filtered mask holding  
a board chewed to pulp with burrowing termites,  
specks to the eye, the likes of which could destroy a house  
in months, he says, if left untreated leaving me  
to consider the metaphor of the house divided,  
that one in D.C. that trembles—  
suddenly my daughter, despiser of all creepy-crawlers  
delivers shrieks as if being murdered  
that poke a hole in the fog  
the smoke the heat  
the horror of recent days  
and we unpeel ourselves  
with rolls of laughter  
that set the neighbors  
calling over the fence  
what's the matter over there  
and we yell back—  
*Everything!*



Serena Agosto-Cox was one of the first featured poets of the DiVerse Gaithersburg reading series in Maryland. Poems are in *The Magnolia Review*, *MacQueen's Quinterly*, *Beltway Poetry Quarterly*, *Dissonance Magazine*, *Mothers Always Write*, *Bourgeon*, and elsewhere. Work appears in the forthcoming anthology *The Great World of Days*, *This Is What America Looks Like*, *Mom Egg Review's Pandemic Parenting* issue, *The Plague Papers* digital anthology, *H.L. Hix's Made Priceless*, *Love\_Is\_Love: An Anthology for LGBTQIA+ Teens*, and Midge Raymond's *Everyday Book Marketing*. She also runs the book review blog, *Savvy Verse & Wit*, and founded Poetic Book Tours to help poets market their books.



## FRESH SNOW

Tiny mittened hands slap high-fives  
snowballs mashed, curve those hands  
to pack each bit into a small ball.  
Bend and place it on the fresh snow  
rolling it across the once green lawn.  
It will grow, not quite a sphere,  
perhaps an egg ready to piggyback.

Our man in just a scarf, hat, and buttons  
still in the icy wind, a smile pasted on his face.  
Flakes fall  
where ears should be, melt  
on brown twig fingers. He's larger  
than the trees without their leaf crowns.  
We watch, smiling behind cocoa fog.

Serena Agosto-Cox

## AUTOMAT

Nickels in the slot, turn a chrome knob,  
my father remembers  
ham and cheese on rye in cellophane,  
hot coffee, and pie.

Today, lunch is \$20,  
the cost of copays for vaccines and appointments.  
Vending machines offer soda, chips, condoms;  
the convenience of anonymity.

Five decades into the future,  
for \$50 you will open the glass door,  
bring home a daughter, a son, a family.

## WOODSTOCK '99

They said it was angry music for an empty generation  
drowned in drugs, passed hand-to-hand. A haze  
not unlike '69. Rage can be a drug, too.

Sun blazoned my shoulders and back,  
sweat evaporates. Pain jumped  
into a mosh pit. Sloshed back-and-forth,  
in overflowing portable sinks.

Porta-potty screams, guitar riffs that echoed through fields.  
There's no dirtier mind than the ones attached to the groans inside.  
It's not hard to tell pleasure from pain, unless  
you're on the outside and not looking in.

Paralysis is a plague, rife with the stink of shit.  
Mud-like lava (was it mud?) flowed like water  
from the broken pipes  
of our dehydrated teen spirits out of cash.

## CACEROLAZO

*-form of popular protest which consists of a group of people making noise by banging pots, pans, and other utensils*

Swampy currents swirl  
a mixed bowl of dankness  
into a frenzied protest  
against a backdrop of down pillows,  
silken sheets, four-poster beds.

U.S. women mark boards  
on apartment hardwood –  
carry frustration to the street

Lobby for reproductive rights,  
no more gun violence,  
followed by a side of yoga,  
a trip to the spa,  
a five-star meal.

In other states,  
dissidents bring comforts from home.  
Pound irregular rhythms on pots,  
wooden spoons thunk in kitchens,  
rooftops, city balconies.

Demand employment,  
a living wage, but they're served  
police brutality, political fear,  
and death as dessert.

Swirl the spoon,  
congealing stew bubbles,  
rebel carrots slip  
under hearty potatoes.

## HOLIDAY DINNER

1. Extend table seating from six to 12, company's coming
2. Splay out festive table cloth of poinsettias
3. Decorate glittery napkins with silver rings your grandfather crafted
4. Lay out the good silverware your mother gave you on your wedding day
5. Center the cornucopia of flowers, holly, and leaves on the table
6. Place each dinner plate carefully, just enough elbow space
7. Greet guests with smiles and sparkling wine
8. Wipe the sweat from your husband's brow as the browned turkey emerges from the oven
9. Slice the meat thin, so there's enough for seconds
10. Bring the potatoes, stuffing, corn, squash, green bean casserole, and rolls
11. Ask everyone to sit, give thanks, remember those who are here in spirit
12. See the happy faces and empty places



Kristin Kowalski Ferragut teaches, plays guitar, hikes, and supports her children in becoming who they are meant to be. She is author of the full-length poetry collection *Escape Velocity* (Kelsay Books, 2021) and the children's book *Becoming the Enchantress: A Magical Transgender Tale* (Loving Healing Press, 2021). She hosts the *DiVerse Gaithersburg Poetry Reading and Open Mic* and enjoys the vibrant writing community in the DMV. Her poetry has appeared in *Beltway Quarterly*, *Nightingale and Sparrow*, *Bourgeon*, *Mojave He[Art] Review*, *Anti-Heroin Chic*, *Fledgling Rag*, and *Little Patuxent Review* among others. For more information see her website: <https://www.kristinskiferragut.com/>



# FALLING

When the world feels like a baby pulled  
up over barbed wire  
and like the barbed wire, or more  
like the pulling, the tight  
grasp, silence is in order.  
No pause comes  
in the yelling, in gravity. We all might  
fall as stars, as rain, as empires do.  
Iron for the fence demands  
the red of rocks, gorgeous in soil, in cliffs,  
generous, even informing  
drill bits that sculpt or steal  
from it. The collisions  
grow creatures we see only for an instant  
upon waking before they dissipate and we rise  
to meet another clash or fall  
again in love with a baby whose skin  
is not torn.

Kristin Kowalski Ferragut

## FIREBALL ROBERTS

*Fireball Roberts was a racecar  
driver who won 33 races including  
the Daytona 500 in 1962.  
He crashed and died in 1964.*

Seven oceans, seven continents, on the seventh  
day came rest but at the focus  
of the heptagonal number comes the chaos  
of free will. Good ol' 22  
crashed and burned, hit the wall to avoid  
spinouts on the seventh lap.

A thousand miles cold north a young man nurses  
a glass of Southern Comfort in silent toast to  
Fireball Roberts until a woman  
down the bar, all soft curls  
and curves, offers a glance of sea blue eyes that speak  
to him of home. He moves his seat.

Roberts left fastballs like "fireballs" for  
the Army in 1945, times of a clear  
enemy tempting the choice  
to fight. But asthma; it's what got  
him in the end — breathing  
chemicals to retard flames that lapped  
up 80% of his skin, then pneumonia,  
dead at thirty-five.

The young man who survived childhood asthma  
by escape to desert, then Daytona — all sand,  
sun, stockcars, lit a cigar after kissing  
the woman who said "yes". Maybe  
it was love for a moment or just that New England nights  
bring too great a chill to carry alone. But still  
pervasive when coupled. What else  
might burn off cold? Anger, war.

They would find heat, God damn it, through  
whatever passion — cries,  
screams, the frenetic boiling insistence of babies, beds  
of others. Once dissolved, divorced,  
annulled, regret and bitters remain  
to stoke the mourning coals for warmth.

## RING OF GYGES

*The Ring Of Gyges is purported to render its wearer invisible and was used as a device by Plato in his Republic to describe differences between just versus unjust men.*

I.

Was it worth robbing his grave? Yes  
and then some. Relief  
in shirk or shrink from view. Shed  
costumes, sheltered from tyranny

and that one stare that holds.  
I crave bands from everyone who offered  
softness and didn't quit me before  
leaving a scent: cloves or Old Spice,

consoling advice, eyes  
that waned when he laughed.  
Sometimes, in the dusk, I kick myself  
for forgetting them.

II.

What would a woman steal  
that wouldn't fill a hole?  
Keeping marrow and skin  
intact. Nothing at all.  
The question is not of justice  
but hunger, comfort, need.

III.

I want the rising sun to see me  
before pinks and purples  
blind; my children from a distance  
that flatters me; the wind  
when he wisps my hair into flight.

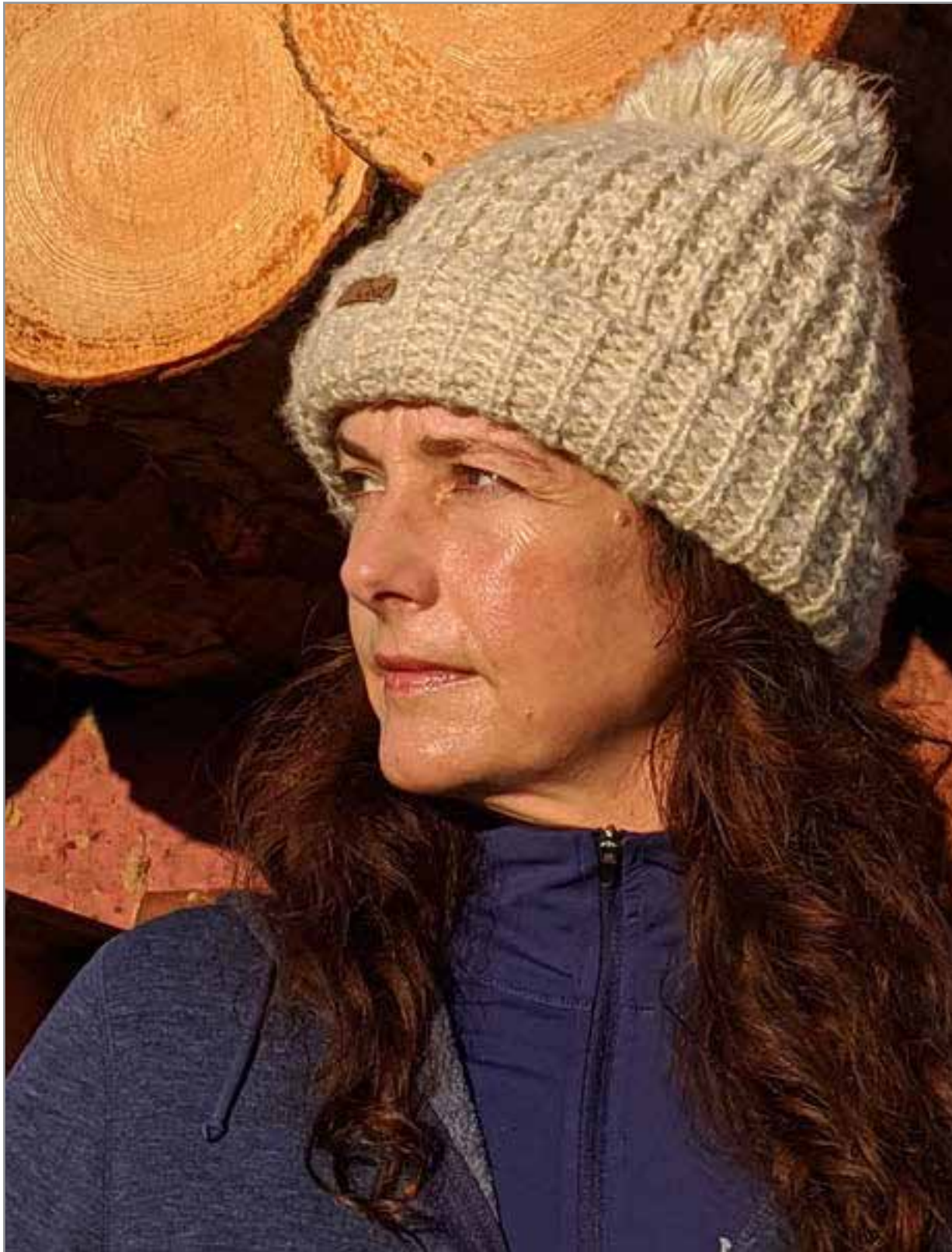
I don't want lightning to see me  
as its mark; men who measure  
hips, weigh wrinkles; ghosts  
who pass judgement; most all  
Greek gods; me on some days.

IV.

Even masked, no one  
runs around robbing banks anymore



Angie Dribben's debut collection, *Everygirl*, a finalist for the 2020 *Broadkill Review* Dogfish Head Prize, is out with Main Street Rag. She is Contributing Reviews Editor at *Cider Press Review*, a Bread Loaf contributor, and an MFA candidate at Randolph College. She is a Regional Representative with Poetry Society of Virginia. Her most recent work can be found in *Orion*, *Coffin Bell*, *The Night Heron*, *Barks*, *Cave Wall*, *EcoTheo*, *Big City Lit*, and others.



## ON BLUE

i want to say it is the color

of after-dinner constellation   of wing-span   of soar  
polyommatus icarus   evolution   transition   dusk and dawn  
of storm soothsaying   of alkaline soil   but i am concerned

for America            it seems it is the color

of institution   of uniform and badge   of postmortem staining  
competition   prize and privilege  
of bound at all costs

Angie Dribben

## I LEAVE IT

My body. Sometimes this is good. In the night  
I call to mountain lions to mulch violations / scartissue  
mine and others / all of which I carry. In the night I leave  
my body. Let it remain still  
and waiting by the open window.  
I leave this body / not my body / a body / the body I am  
in / on this earth this time and find my grandmother  
who only visits during the day as a cardinal.

Leaving my body means  
potential / harm coming  
I never found my no in the blue  
holler of my throat / I wasn't there  
when these things happened.  
They aren't mine to carry.

I am not of this body. I am breath  
as much as breath is breeze. As much as breath is  
starlight, as much as breath is light and light is all I am.  
Fireworks without the violence. Allium flower burst,  
onion bolting in early June. Lightning bugs against July's  
Appalachian forest. Mimosa tree later to bloom  
on the mountain than the valley. Hip of the wild  
rose. Tonic to the skin, yet not skin itself.

Leave / this body and walk beside myself  
when harm is done. Hold my own hand  
when healing comes. Leave this flesh  
when it is fatigued. Hold out my palm and conjure  
the medicines of broadleaf plantain to soothe wound.  
Call down the heavens / up the earth's red root.  
Release the concoction into the injury  
whether misbelief or broken back.

In this quiet / In the charcoal dim / We rest  
on this earth. Draw in breath  
of loam and salt chuck and firmament and every creature  
who is and has been and will be and ignite every cell  
from tip to crown. A soft smile will justly appear.  
Name her joy.

## HOW I CAME TO FLY FISH WITH BARBLESS HOOKS

I believe I can kill for our supper  
for a moment. I imagine sprinting through  
trees, leaping over leaves as lightly as Jesus.  
Swinging by a buck's neck onto his back.  
Letting his throat with an Allagash fixed blade.  
I am practiced in prayers for forgiveness. All I have  
to give in return as his body loosens  
his soul and sinks to the earth's decaying floor. Here I stand

hips beneath shoulders, weight steadied between feet.  
Knuckle nestled behind my ear lobe as gently as a lover's lips.  
Index finger nuzzling the blued trigger of my bow.  
Keyhole and arrows pierce where intended.

My husband's turn to practice. I stand against the greyed failing  
fence. Beg it to keep me captive in its splinters. Resist an urge  
to run across his arrow's flight. A need to feel its head penetrate  
my thigh with seventy pounds of force. A compulsion  
to know within my own spirit and flesh what I take from others.  
I know what it is to be a small mouth

bass on the Maury River suspended  
by two treble hooks of an orange Baby M One-Minus.  
Its razored points sacked deep into my chin on an old man's  
stiff-shouldered backcast. The lure weighs heavy  
on my tissue in the backseat of a wooden-paneled  
station wagon on the way to a rural ER  
to see a doctor who'd just read an article  
about how to remove a treble hook without scarring.

Two nurses, each bear down on a shoulder.  
An excited doctor straddles my waist, and presses  
the heel of his hand against my sternum,  
the other firmly grips the lure and wrenches back on it.  
Separating my skin from skull. Still buried deep, the hooks  
return to rest against my chin. Took two tugs.



## ANIMAL HUSBANDRY

I am 46, I still believe I may get pregnant.  
Or at least sometimes believe in God  
and think he will give me a miracle

child when I am 80. I am honest, they say  
it is my best quality. God is a man. If only  
God were a woman, she would understand  
why I needed to be with child

when I was young enough to photograph  
swollen-bellied, swathed in fabric  
in shades of azaleas, flocked by nightshade.

I am honest, they say it is my worst quality.  
This would be a better place  
had God been a woman, like my sister

who wrote me a note the first time  
she became pregnant to say, *This will be hard  
for you to hear. We will celebrate  
when you are ready. I love you.*

Patience, they say. Impatient I am.  
Disciplined but with nothing  
to show for it. Some things we never have.

But to change what we want. To have arms  
long enough to reach deep inside  
a pregnant cow. Gently coo. Soft confident hands

turn the breeched calf and finally deliver a newborn.

## THERE IS TEAR GAS IN THE ROTUNDA

*January 6, 2021*

our de-voured  
House no longer  
remembers her own name

can something  
that never was  
be forgotten

the wild hound dangling  
from the window's ledge, my neighbor  
the boot prints on her desk  
recognizeable from my garden row

scramble to disown  
any likeness  
occupation of my flesh

words resist  
gathering  
judiciously  
on the lawn  
of my pale tongue

the language I inherit  
inadequate against itself

Susana H. Case has authored eight books of poetry, most recently *The Damage Done*, Broadstone Books, 2022. *Dead Shark on the N Train*, Broadstone Books, 2020 won a Pinnacle Book Award for Best Poetry Book, a NYC Big Book Award Distinguished Favorite, and was a finalist for the Eric Hoffer Book Award. The first of her five chapbooks, *The Scottish Café*, Slapering Hol Press, was re-released in a dual-language English-Polish version, *Kawiarnia Szkocka* by Opole University Press. She co-edited, with Margo Taft Stever, the anthology *I Wanna Be Loved by You: Poems on Marilyn Monroe*, Milk and Cake Press, 2022. <https://www.susanahcase.com/>.



Susana H. Case

## CEZANNE DARES TO BE ROUGH

- art patron Thadée Natanson

Perhaps Cezanne was inspired  
by *Thérèse Raquin*, lovers  
killing for convenience, as lovers do—

Zola's *putrid literature*.  
(He was still then the painter's friend.)  
The victim appears to be barely there

before the final strike of the knife,  
held down held down,  
twisted in pain

and raising her hand to beg  
for mercy.  
The murderers' faces are clearer

in the watercolor,  
as all murderers' faces become  
clearer at the finale, victims

disappearing like melting ice.  
Will they toss her into the sea?  
They could be anyone—

anyone in L'Estaque,  
in any small town  
of southern France, assassins

everywhere so reliable  
in their violent urges.  
The deep silence, like that of apples.

## LET ME BE CLEAR

I didn't want my sister's money, after,  
only the plaster cast of Grandmother's head  
made before she went crazy—

screaming for hours she was really a Jew.  
Instead, I got legal technicalities,  
brutal language of testaments,

broken family. Truthfully, it had been a twisted  
mess of dirty socks for a long time.  
The lawyer in control of everything

slouched on my sofa with his fake smile,  
expensive blazer, while I waited for him to leave.  
I got the police visit about the oxy scattered

about her apartment, questioning why a person  
who looked respectable like that could fall  
but be too wrecked to get up. I got

the phone calls earlier, I'm a little short this month,  
always the same libretto, her needing  
an extra twenty or fifty, until I stopped

answering the phone. It's only the ocean  
that never freezes, not so the heart.  
No surprise that I'm the one who was blamed

for how it turned out. Okay—none of us were saints.  
I got tired of it, repelled by her teeth unrooting.  
Filial duty went so far, and then it turned

into something unpalatable, like duck fat.  
When I thought of her, one in a line of troubled  
women, I also pictured Grandmother's plaster head,

impossible futures ended with pills, doors  
that didn't easily open, women, after it was too late,  
lying on the floor, waiting to be found.



## NEW YORK ORNITHOLOGY

The pigeons are shitting everywhere,  
dullards belligerent on the terrace railings,  
splattering the planters. I want

to shoo them to the nearby unoccupied  
apartments, where people  
have tried to escape the virus,

decamping for Vermont, or, worse,  
the Hamptons, people I'm angry at  
because they didn't support my beloved city

by ordering internet toilet paper and food  
while holed up in their locked apartments.  
It's impossible to reason

with the small-brained: I bang on  
all the windows and the birds ignore it.  
I run outside screaming, waving my arms—

and they saunter to the other side  
of the terrace, as if they've decided  
on their own to change position—try silver

strands of ribbon, party  
decorations that catch the sun, the glint  
meant to chase pigeons away.

The birds are indifferent.  
Stoning them would work,  
but that seems cruel.

Once there were seagulls by the river.  
Who knows what happened to them.  
Maybe it was climate change.

Yesterday, a hawk was perched outside  
an apartment across the street, red-tailed  
and magnificent. Hawks can't possibly

shit as much as pigeons do. With a little luck,  
the hawk is hungry. With a little luck,  
he's brought his whole family to feast.

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF SUITORS

One shot too much smack and died  
in an alley, one wanted to set up a commune  
with him and seven women, another  
greyed out and left New York for Boca  
with its player bars and glitz.

What is it about the men I wrap my legs  
around, when I'm so capable  
in every other way—  
okay, maybe not driving a car.  
My mother told me it was as easy to love

a rich man as a poor one—her advice  
didn't click. I was already letting men  
run their hands down my legs, eyes beseeching,  
a line of men destined for disappointed lives.  
What was I headed for?

I worked hard, traveled hard, wrote, had lots of sex.  
When I was attracted, I ignored finances,  
seemed to arrive at some man accidentally.  
I became wife to only half the men who asked me.  
I try to remember that I loved them all.

## SAKURA

Not even memory of the happiness  
of cherry blossoms bursting  
all over the small park  
near her apartment and knowing

they would return was enough to keep her  
from turning on the gas like Sylvia Plath  
once winter turned brutal,  
once one final zap of love turned brutal,

and endurance of loss seemed to take  
so very long. No matter how tough  
she was, flowers shriveled faster,  
loneliness watered every day once cold

seeped in through loosened windows,  
sashes rattling a reminder of longing.

Catherine Gonick's poetry has appeared in publications including *Beltway Poetry Quarterly*, *Notre Dame Review*, *Forge*, *PoetArtists*, *Silver Birch Press*, *New Verse News*, *Halfway Down the Stairs*, and *Sukoon*, and in anthologies including *plein air*, *Grabbed*, and *Dead of Winter 2021*. Raised in California, she lives in New York, and works in a company that combats the effects of global warming through climate restoration and climate repair projects around the world.



## THREE PATHS

*lost—*

One word for lost is ruined. Ruins  
are lost cities and civilizations.  
Where nature takes over.

Nature gets ruined by civilization.  
I get lost in my own nature.

*feral—*

Born in the ruins  
one more cat  
scavenger, hunter of small things

Watchful and lean  
the cat disdains  
nothing, but is picky.

*nowhere to move—*

Not every infant refused  
dies on the hill. Some live  
in ruins, on heaps.

Citizens of waste, they build  
tunnels, towers, cities,  
collect and sell untouchable air.

Catherine Gonick



## FAILED CAPITALIST

*after Diane di Prima*

(1)

I hate money.

When Daddy would always provide  
the rich kids still snubbed me.

I hate money because I need it.

I don't want to need anything or anybody, fuck them.

Like you, I was born for bliss, where is it?

Who took it? How do I get it back?

I had a taste and was hooked

but couldn't believe it enough to live it,  
stay naked with Blake in his backyard.

I joined Zombie, Inc., always came late,  
did least. So fire me, fire me. No one can say

I wasn't competent, did not meet deadlines.

What I want has nothing to do with money.

(2)

I owe plenty. That makes me good.

I pledged interest. But can no longer  
keep paying it. Bad. The system

would rather I keep coughing up  
like Portugal but I'm plumb out  
of assets and don't have enough

dhirham arriving. My capital has fled  
across a border, I've slipped past a guard  
of the dwindling middle class and am afraid.

I feel alone, as if on the Isle of the Ill, visible  
from the mainland, still on the map  
but a place passersby drive by fast.

I want to cry the end is nigh, find a pelican  
to share my bread. But out on the road,  
behind the wheel, I'd probably floor it.

## CROSS-COUNTRY, THEN AND NOW

In the late twentieth century  
even in the afternoon  
the cities of the Northeast seemed thin  
night towns  
overcrowded with ghosts,  
tall, flat, shaped to the sides  
of buildings they slipped around  
like constant winds  
with sometimes a pause  
to curl over a roof  
curl a hand  
into a window

I pressed myself  
desperate against their sky  
while darkness climbed the bricks  
that crowded me  
realized this  
was the source  
the original version  
of the nineteenth century  
I'd known in the West  
where hundred-year-old  
young wood houses  
came yellowing forth  
looking nude  
and empty of  
whatever it took  
to seize the ranch  
as if something was lost  
on the way out

but something else was there  
that owned the roads  
dozed in daylight on highways  
that rolled over the present like toothpaste  
closing every gap

and now something else  
is everywhere  
as trees catch fire and rivers  
in the atmosphere descend to flood  
the roads and anything in their path.

Bunkong Tuon is a Cambodian-American writer and critic. He is the author of *Gruel, And So I Was Blessed* (both published by NYQ Books), *The Doctor Will Fix It* (Shabda Press), and *Dead Tongue* (a chapbook with Joanna C. Valente, Yes Poetry). He teaches at Union College, in Schenectady, NY.



## THE REVOLUTION WILL BE TELEVISED

You have the numbers and the culture,  
History books and teachers, after-school  
Specials and thirty-minute sitcoms,  
Made-for-television movies and Hollywood  
Blockbusters. You have songs on FM  
Radio. The world belongs to you.  
But I have heart and patience.  
I'm the outsider who wants to turn the world  
Inside out. I watch and listen.  
The questions disappear, the answers click.  
How stories are told, why books are written.  
I learn the alphabet, one-syllable words,  
Songs children sing on school playground.  
I repeat words and turn them into prayers.  
I tell stories in history books  
For teachers to teach, in the sitcoms,  
Television shows, and Hollywood  
Blockbusters you consume until  
One day I'll have your number and what I say  
Will be your reality.

Bunkong Tuon



## NISKAYUNA, NY

It matters little how your father  
still doesn't feel safe walking  
alone in his own neighborhood,  
afraid someone might call the cops,  
how his students still mention his accent  
in their teaching evaluations,  
how he doesn't look  
like a typical English professor,  
his name, forever foreign,  
how every morning he eats rice  
topped with fried eggs,  
soy sauce mixed with sarachi and scallion.

Chanda, you were born in the same  
neighborhood hospital as your classmates.  
One week you are the teacher's helper  
in Ms Russo's class, the next your friend  
Natalie Sherman. You play on the same  
softball team with Joanne Silva on the same  
green turf in Avon Crest Park. After a game  
your coach takes the team to Control Tower  
for ice cream where you and Cindy Tran  
laugh at how you both crush on the same  
boy in fifth grade. An airplane takes flight  
from the Albany International Airport.  
You look up at how the sky is so blue,  
patches of clouds on its periphery,  
a burst of red on the horizon.  
Licking your peanut butter ice cream,  
you smile and laugh with your friends.

Chanda, I hope you remember me,  
what I came from, the poems and stories.

CHILDREN OF  
CAMBODIAN GENOCIDE SURVIVORS

Yesterday, I met two teens. One was Lisa; the other Jasmine. Both are American,  
not "Cambodian." If you call them Khmer, you will be cursed.

I did. And they barked at me in perfect street verse, like two red hot Americano  
chili peppers dancing in the frying pan of Khmer Rouge.

I thought about my grandmother who went to the temple on weekends, burned  
incense, chanted in Pali, asked monks to help her find loved ones: the young  
brother who spoke French and his wife; the cousin in Siem Reap; the oldest son  
in Phnom Penh. All disappeared after the Khmer Rouge swept the country for  
*khmung*.

My grandmother who, on meeting another Khmer person, got excited, like finding  
family after the war, asked, "Did you live in the capitol when our beloved country  
fell? Did you know my son? His name is Proujn. Is my son still alive?"

## KONG SAM OEUN \*

In Phnom Penh men stopped him on the road  
 Demanding the actor to stop making their women  
 Fall in love with him. But women have minds of their  
 Own and desire is desire, with its own logic. I wonder if  
 My aunts had crushes on him. How do Khmer women  
 From the village handle desire? Do they sing to the rivers and  
 Ask flowing waters to carry their secrets to the ocean's  
 Mouth? Kong Sam Oeun's mom said, her son was quiet  
 And polite. He loved his family, his brothers were actors too.  
 When he went to the countryside, street children flocked  
 To him. Unlike other stars, he wrapped his arms around  
 The poor, tussled their hair, and gave them money.  
 At the height of his career, he signed a three-movie contract  
 Where he was to travel in 1975 to Thailand to shoot films.  
 He decided to wait until after the New Year  
 Because he wanted to spend time with wife and family.  
 He was a good guy but the Khmer Rouge didn't care whether  
 Anyone was good or bad. When they entered the capitol  
 Kong Sam Oeun had on a plain shirt and bell-bottom pants,  
 Sandals, a kromar on his shoulders. He was ordinary  
 But how could he hide that beautiful face, his dark hair  
 Parted to the sides, sideburns crawling  
 Below the ears to rest at that jawline? That smile  
 Of his, friendly, contagious, the very thing that drew  
 Women to him. They knew it was him, everyone knew.

Two months in Saang Prek Touch, he was told someone  
 Wanted to speak with him. Two men dressed in black came.  
 The last image his family had of him was Kong Sam  
 Oeun sitting between the two men on a motorbike.  
 The rifle slung on the back of one of the men.  
 Before the men in black came, Kong Sam Oeun was  
 Quietly eating popcorn that his brother made. Maybe  
 He was preparing for his next film? Maybe he is alive  
 Somewhere making movies, being generous and kind,  
 Smiling at women, making them feel alive with desire,  
 Turning mundane tasks of carrying water on their shoulders,  
 Collecting sticks for firewood, beating clothes against rocks,  
 Magical and transcending, into songs they can't wait to sing.

\*Details of the actor's life are borrowed from Mr. Huot Sovann's Youtube video:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xS0gzE6YPAI&t=602s>

Sue D. Burton's collections include the book-length poem *Little Steel* (Fomite Press) and *BOX*, selected by Diane Seuss for the Two Sylvias Press Poetry Prize and awarded Silver in the 2018 Foreword INDIES Poetry Book of the Year. Her poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *Barrow Street*, *Bennington Review*, *Blackbird*, *Guesthouse*, and elsewhere.



## CALL

after Meryl McMaster's *Winged's Calling*  
—photographic self-portrait, 2012

lake's edge, the day tinged  
black cape, red twine, feathers dangling—  
ceremoniously asunder— what does it mean, to *fly*?  
raven beak, wings in shreds, I walk  
*piece me, marry me*

Sue D Burton



## FACTS ABOUT WINGS

No living beings other than birds have feathers.

What keeps a bird in the air is the shape of its wings.

The whistling swan is the bird with most feathers.  
Up to 25,000.

A group of swans is a ballet, a lamentation.

A flock of crows, a murder.

The most common domesticated bird is the chicken.

Breeding a chicken with good wings to a split-winged bird  
produces offspring with good wings. However,

the fault will resurface in future generations.

If your mother is a swan & your father  
a hunter, can you thrive outside a fairy tale?

A swan with clipped wings can't fly.

A flock of chickens is a clutch.

A dying swan does not sing.

## A LAMENTATION OF SWANS, A FLAMBOYANCE OF FLAMINGOS

Ohio & Ovaltine & Nanny Beck & her pink plaster flamingos  
smack in front of the porch for all to see: she has been to Florida.  
& in her house my only memory of flying, not head first, but  
upright, six inches above the stairs, floating—Oo!—  
from the landing to the sad rumpled rug in the living room.  
Skinny ankles, hollow bones. Nan's dire predictions—  
all about *falling*  
& that Greek & the sun.  
Did I flap my wrists? No, & a pink net prom dress,  
strapless with sequins, is the only other thing I remember.

Carol Ann Wilburn is in the process of compiling her first chapbook. Select poems were published in April 2021 in *While You Wait*, a print/online poetry anthology for the Santa Barbara, California community. Her poetry will also appear in *The Bryant Literary Review* in September 2022. A native of Louisville, Kentucky and now residing in Santa Barbara, Carol studied poetry and creative writing at Cornell University with poet and fiction writer Robert Morgan. Alongside a career as a freelance writer/editor and theatre manager, she has continued her poetry practice, affirming her belief in the power of the arts to inspire and transform people's lives.



## BAREFOOT DAYS

*For my sister Bunny*

Freshly cut grass  
The smell green  
Garlands of clover in our hair  
Rainy day forts on the front porch  
Rolls of thunder  
giving way to downpours  
The gritty odor of concrete  
Trees drip puddle-bound echoing  
Honeysuckle evenings  
Lightning bugs hang  
in summer's twilight heat  
Hurry! Catch them in a jar  
and they twinkle  
like captured stars

Carol Ann Wilburn

## THAW

Winter's silence Upstate  
grew long, longer still  
in mountains of white.  
Like a grief:

first the loss of sound,  
lamented;  
then anger, left to shiver  
against cold's reaches.

The bundling—  
scarves, earmuffs, hoods  
against the freeze  
muffled further still.

And finally just the moving  
about, silence a given,  
forgotten.

But then some errant goose  
breaking the hush.  
A sign of spring?

Just yesterday  
not one but two geese  
called to each other.

I found myself applauding.  
Something deep inside  
curled up for months  
raised my own voice up!

## LOSING HER

*for Michelle*

Then it comes to this:  
The two of you, perhaps three,  
sitting there locked  
in the last battle, the last hours,

no emotion in your mother  
except for an occasional twinge  
or shiver. She's sleeping in a  
deep place. You're not sure

if she can hear you or not.  
But you keep on talking, even  
singing at times. You know she  
loves that. Then she reaches out

and grabs your hand. The strength  
of her will is in that grip. One that says,  
"Stay with me, don't leave me to do  
this alone". So you stay like that,

hand in hand. Minutes maybe hours  
go by then just like that she loosens  
the earthly bond that forever holds  
the two of you together.  
Blood to blood, breath to breath.



Armando Padron-Cruz is a North American writer from Tampa, Florida, who now resides in Seattle, Washington where he practiced both criminal and civil law. He has a bachelor's degree in Creative Writing from the University of South Florida and a Juris Doctor degree from Stetson University. He is the proud son of Cuban and Puerto Rican immigrants.



Armando Padron-Cruz

## THE DEVIL WEARS CHINOS

It happened after my boy, Rashaad, invited me to his friend's house. We had pigged out at *La Casa del Sabor* and spent hours high-chinning drinks on 10th Avenue in Chelsea where the art galleries dished out cheap white wine for free. We had slipped past the front desk receptionists who were on the lookout for drunk people like us. We were headed back to my place around eleven when Rashaad got a call from his friend, Andre.

"Yo, you both okay with visiting my boy's crib? He's got a party tonight and wanted me to stop by. I kind of forgot about it."

Our roommate, Juke, agreed that we weren't ready for the night to end yet. Rashaad was grateful. He left his Volvo on the corner of Water Street with a fake disability sign hanging from the rear-view mirror. On the way to the building, Juke gave me a push to make sure I wasn't too drunk. That was our test; if we fell over, our night ended there. Thankfully I kept on my feet. The girl I had been talking to the last three months texted me right as we entered the elevator. She was mad I wasn't heading over to her place. But I'd been working hard for months, and I needed a night with my friends. Maybe smoke a bit too.

Outside the door to Andre's, I noticed how completely underdressed we were. Rashaad had some green bomber jacket over a white tank-top and ripped, black jeans, and Juke had on a Harden Brooklyn Nets Jersey with some white shorts and a pair of low-top, black leather Good Man sneakers. I was the only one wearing a button-down and slacks because the guys had picked me up from work. After six years in the restaurant business, I was finally pulling consistent, two-hundred-dollar tips per night, and had dreamt of running a food truck. A fusion between French and Spanish food. I needed another thousand bucks to buy the grill. I practically slept in that button-down. Working as much as I did, the girl I was with had it in her head I was running around on her. She thought she had caught me in a lie when I was visiting family in Claverack rather than going with her to some party. She didn't believe me, even when I showed her the pictures.

The door opened and a small guy with a huge black mustache appeared. He sweated a lot. He reeked of cheap beer and menthols. I heard a ping-pong ball slowly bounce from a table to the floor. “Andre,” Rashaad said as he fist-bumped Andre’s small fist. We introduced ourselves and I found myself a large couch to sit on. Juke and Rashaad beelined for the beer.

The whole place was dark and dank, and almost everyone congregated by the table. The walls smelled like chicken wings and vomit and weed. I sat near a table where there were a few bags and some papers. I packed and rolled a gigantic mother - before I noticed someone sitting in the corner, watching me. He wasn’t intimidating or anything, in fact, he was kind of pathetic looking. He wore a white Knicks cap, a rust-colored turtleneck, and a pair of beige chinos. He had long, thin, white hair—might have reached the top of his waist band—which was odd for how baby-faced he looked. He was skinny, like anorexic or something.

I offered him a toke. He accepted and offered me the seat next to him. I stood up and sat in the fold-out beside him. We fist-bumped.

“What’s your name?” I asked.

He coughed. “Satan.”

“Damn. That really your name?”

“Yup, says so on my birth certificate.”

“All right. Bet.” I pointed to myself. “Hakeem.”

Satan handed me the joint. “How do you know Andre?” His voice was hoarse.

I pointed at Rashaad who was pretending to jerk off an imaginary shlong at a pair of drunk guys he defeated. “I tagged along with him. We were chillin’ earlier.”

“Chilling where?” Satan held out his hand to me. I saw a hint of judgment in his eye. I placed the joint between his fingers. His hand was pale, like it had been left in a freezer all day.

“We crashed some parties in Chelsea.”

He squinted at me. “The gallery openings?”

“Yeah.”

He hiked his sleeve to the crook of his arm and picked at a scab. The skin around his forearm was tight and transparent, the muscle like sinew and his veins like thick cords crawling close to the surface. “How does crashing work?”

“Just, they take one look at us and salivate, you know? Couple of black guys comin’ to shake up the all-white gene pool.”

“I see,” with his scab-picking hand, he took a long toke.

“You and Andre good friends?” I asked.

The smoke he exhaled then rifled into his nostrils. He was like an emaciated goat, fuming. “Since college. He told me he would sell his soul to fuck his math teacher. So, I made it happen,” he smiled.

The joint flaked its lit ends. It shrunk to the length of my fingernail. I tucked in my upper lip, pinched the tip, and huffed. “What are you saying, like you the Devil or something? He sells his soul; he gets three wishes?” I chuckled.

The man didn’t blink. “Yes.”

I laughed at him because who wouldn’t? His fingertips were burnt. I thought it may have been from the joint. He said again: “Yes. Andre sold me his soul; he received three wishes.”

I thought this man was trippin’. I played along. “Tell me something,” I leaned in, and he leaned in with me as if he could tell that was my next move. He smelled like fresh bread, hot out the oven. “When that start? Like, did you pick seven the first time and had to negotiate down over time?”

He leaned back. He seemed surprised at the question. "Where did you get seven?"

"A movie, I think."

He rolled his eyes. "Yeah, don't believe everything you see in movies."

"But isn't the whole trade just a rip off?" I asked.

He laughed. His teeth were rotten as hell. They looked like whale teeth.

The joint was out. He had this look in his eye that made me question whether playing along was a good idea. I should have gotten up and left. But he said something that interested me. He said, "That's sort of the point. But it wasn't my idea. Hell, my whole life was chosen for me."

I rolled another joint. Satan showed me he was game. The weed was good; an indica with no paranoia associated with it. Tasted like cherries. I figured Rashaad and Juke wouldn't get bored from whooping ass any time soon. Might as well made myself comfortable.

Satan licked his lips. "Think about it like this. Did you have a choice in being born?" He paused. "Hell, why stop there? Think about the hand you were dealt. You desire. You live among desirable things. But there's a catch. You're forbidden to desire the desirable things. And God forbids you to follow the nature she gave you! Or else agony! Hellfire! Is that fair? Do you know how difficult it is to live against your natural-born instincts? Who would you guess populates most of Heaven now?"

I moistened the wrapper with my bottom lip and twisted our new joint. I thought for sure this guy was crazy. "I don't know? Nuns?"

Satan leaned in and plucked the joint from my hand. He looked me dead in the eye and shook his head. "Dead babies."

"What?"

"Yeah man. Babies who died after they were yanked out of the womb. Never had the chance to *sin*. Just babies, lying around, doing nothing. Boring. *Uninteresting*."

"Wow," I said. The party seemed to get quieter. I looked over at the beer pong table and saw Rashaad and Juke ascend a column of stairs with Andre, a couple of girls, and a huge bong. They must have thought I was set. But I had a feeling this guy was only just getting started. He kept staring at me like he had held his breath and would pass out if I didn't keep talking to him.

He puffed and said, "I swear life is wasted on the living."

I was unable to resist asking: "What you mean?"

He spoke excitedly: "You have a free ticket to do anything with your life! Fuck cows, steal a helicopter, blow up a lighthouse! Instead, most of you settle for rulebooks and *healthy diets*. If you're going to live, live hard. Like when you decided to roll this thick sonuvabitch."

"So, this the pitch?" I smiled.

He liked that. "For your soul?"

Coughing, I said, "Yeah."

He laughed. He closed his eyes, proud of himself. "No. Just some philosophy. I tend to wax poetic when I'm high. Where's Aristophanes when you need him?"

"Right?" I had no idea who the hell that was.

He tried to pass again, but I signaled to him I was good. My phone buzzed. I texted my girl where I was. She said I was lying. I looked up and saw Satan had flattened into his seat as if his bones had dissolved.

"But you know what really irks me?"

Here we go, I thought. I pocketed my phone. "No, what?"



He took a huge puff and blew it in my face. “You mortals say *Satan is evil. Do not trust him. All he does is lie. He hates God and all her creation.* But none of you all know me. You’re hating on someone you’ve never met. If you all asked me, maybe you’d find out this isn’t even what I want to be doing with my life.”

“Really?”

“Oh, for sure. What I’m doing, what I’ve been doing—the whole wishes thing—is just a job. Like, she didn’t even ask me what I wanted. She just said the Words and boom, I’m stuck buying up souls left and right. She needed a bad guy, so she picked one. Simple as that. But who can blame you for hating me, right? You all can’t even agree on whether your health means more to you than your politics.”

I didn’t know what to say. He was angry, frustrated. He must have felt like I did back when I bussed tables and caught flak from customers for their servers’ mistakes, unable to say a word in my defense. He seemed distant after that. Like he’d been cheated on and was still working through the sting of it all. I didn’t know what to do to get out of there. If I stood up too soon, he might erupt on me. When I shuffled closer to the edge of the couch cushion, he stamped the joint out on his tongue and folded his hands in front of his face, his chin tucked over his chest.

I felt bad for him, and he could tell. I thought he needed professional help and there was nothing I could say to make things better for him. My phone vibrated repeatedly in my pocket. My girl, no doubt. Satan looked at me from behind the bridges of his fingers. “I’ve been through this before. Making my case. But it never works. I can see it in your eyes. You think I’m crazy, don’t you?” He paused. “It’s impossible to set the record straight when everyone’s been indoctrinated to believe evidence is a lie.”

We sat there quietly for a moment. Satan blinked slowly as his brown eyes trailed upward at the ceiling where overtop Rashaad and Juke no doubt were stomping toward the staircase. My phone vibrated again. A pit in my stomach grew. He coughed. “So, what do you say? Do you want three wishes?”



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# Live encounters

POETRY & WRITING

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COVER ARTWORK BY IRISH ARTIST EMMA BARONE