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TRANSDISCIPLINARITY:

Creativity & Knowledge

Issue #08

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“Creativity is a wild mind and a disciplined eye.”

— Dorothy Parker

“Others have seen what is and asked why. I have seen what could be
and asked why not.”

— Pablo Picasso

“Creativity is intelligence having fun”

— Albert Einstein

"You can't use up creativity. The more you use, the more you have."

— Maya Angelou

Editor's Note: Creativity and Knowledge

Dear Readers,

Welcome to Issue 8 of *Indelible*, a celebration of transdisciplinarity and the boundless creativity it inspires through an incredible collection of works sparked by scholarly insights and multiple knowledge disciplines. This special issue showcases the power of crossing boundaries and blending perspectives to illuminate complex, seemingly unrelated and disconnected topics in novel ways. From music to mathematics, mythology to media, and spanning history, health, design, and depth psychology, this marvellous bouquet of visionary works dances between science and psyche, nature and nurture, memory and futures.

You will see how the selections in this issue beautifully demonstrate transdisciplinary thinking through creativity. From prose to poetry to visual art, these pieces challenge us to see familiar subjects through new lenses; they reveal the clever tangoes between symbolism and storytelling and the rich, unforced imagery that physics and other hard sciences and disciplines can evoke and inspire.

A particular highlight is our feature interview with the trailblazing Patricia Leavy. Through her groundbreaking work integrating the arts and academia, Leavy exemplifies how creative approaches can redefine research and storytelling, pushing beyond the boundaries of traditional scholarship.

Each piece offers valuable insights, as there's always something to learn while marvelling at the beauty of a creative work. Each piece here touches on universal human experiences and emotions – longing, wonder, hope, connection to nature and history – while exploring them through unique and often unexpected perspectives of transdisciplinarity. Simply put, this issue reveals how a single discipline can be enriched, stretched, and widened through multiple angles of inquiry that arts-based research offers.

As you take a deep dive into *Indelible* no. 8, we invite you to embrace the spirit of transdisciplinarity. We hope you sit back and enjoy, while letting these brilliant works inspire you to forge unexpected connections, challenge conventional wisdom, and discover new ways of understanding our complex world. They will show you how the world around us, despite everything, is an intricate, inspiring web of connections.

Happy reading!

Sincerely,
Roula-Maria Dib



Editor-in-chief

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FEATURE

an exclusive interview with bestselling author

Patricia Leavy



“

I'm building a philosophy of the arts, but I choose to communicate it through fiction.”

An interview with the trailblazing Patricia Leavy, whose work has inspired countless writers, artists, and researchers across disciplines. In this exclusive chat, we learn about Leavy's own arts-based research odyssey, exploring how her deep-rooted love for the arts collided with her academic pursuits.

From childhood enchantment with the magic of the arts to the challenges of blending creativity with academia, Leavy shares the pivotal moments that shaped her unconventional path. In this illuminating conversation, Leavy gives us a candid reflection on the courage needed to bridge the worlds of scholarship and artistic expression.

Moreover, Leavy provides an insider's look into her recent work, including *Hollyland*, a delightful ode to the arts, and her personal favourite, *The Location Shoot*, a romantic exploration of life's big questions set against the backdrop of a film set. Enjoy the read!

* * *

Q: Patricia, your work has inspired so many writers, artists, and researchers from across the disciplines, with everyone having a unique story on how they stumbled across research through the arts or vice versa. So, we'd like to ask you about your story: how did your arts-based research journey begin?

A: Thank you for your kind words. I've loved the arts since I was a little girl: losing myself in the sounds coming through my headphones, going from tears to laughter in dark theatres, finding myself on the pages of novels, seeing the world anew in museums and art galleries. To me, the arts were magical, connecting, and transporting. As for my own artistic practice, I've been writing creatively for as long as I can remember. That said, when I was figuring out what to do with my life, I lacked a certain kind of bravery you need as an artist. It takes courage to put your creative work out into the world where you'll inevitably face critique and rejection. I wasn't ready for that. So, the arts became relegated to weekends as I pursued a career in sociology. Even though I chose a scholarly path, I wasn't enamoured by traditional academic writing. It seemed so limited so as early as graduate school I was pushing myself to challenge the bounds and take some creative risks in my writing. Eventually I began to question the usefulness of conventional academic forms. Were journal articles well written by literary standards? Did anyone read them? Did they make a difference in the world? These questions set me on a path searching for other ways to do and share research. That's when I stumbled on arts-based research, which instantly resonated, likely because of my life-long love of the arts. I started experimenting with my own ABR. Eventually, I wrote my debut novel. The experience of writing it and then learning how it impacted readers both inside and outside of the academy changed everything. That was it for me. I've been writing fiction ever since and never looked back.

Q: Your nonfiction texts highlight the similarities between the artistic and research processes. As a novelist, what do you see as the synergies between fiction and research?

A: They're both meant to illuminate something about the social world and human experience, produce new insights, and deepen our understanding. To me, the biggest synergy is that they're both processes of discovery. Insights emerge during the process of conducting research or writing fiction. You never know what those insights will be or how they will connect with one another. It's what makes them both exciting. Magical, even.

Q: What is your writing process like; or, in other words, how do your novels come to you? Are they the result of research, or is it the other way around?

A: It's changed over the years. The first several novels I wrote were each based on ideas I developed from research, teaching, and personal experiences. I had specific topics and themes I wanted to explore. They were usually the result of cumulative insights I had developed over years of doing research, but that didn't have a home in conventional academic writing. The messy bits that seemed left over, but felt like they might be the most interesting pieces. I would outline the novels and then write them in chronological order. So, that was sort of my process for the first five novels. Then everything changed. The characters and stories came to me differently, purely from imagination. Sometimes I'd be watching a film and suddenly get an idea for an entirely new story. Other times I'd hear a song and suddenly see a group of characters. In other cases, I'd be working on one novel when the idea for the next one would materialize. It never happens the same way twice which is why I'm still so in love with writing. I've been writing my novels totally out of order, as scenes, and stitching them together in the end. The way I've been writing in recent years has been much more freeing and I think I've grown a lot as a novelist and produced more interesting books. For now, I can't imagine doing it differently.

Q: Your recent novel, *Hollyland*, has been described as a love letter to the arts. Tell us about it.

A: *Hollyland* is a light-hearted celebrity romance. Dee Schwartz is an arts researcher. Ryder Field is a famous actor descended from Hollywood royalty. They meet outside a bar one night and their connection is palpable. They both lost their mothers at a young age and bond over that shared loss, as well as their passion for the arts. They embark on a love story that explores their search for magic—or “gold dust”—in their lives. While all my novels include an arts narrative, this is the first time I really wove all my arts research experience into a work of fiction through Dee's character. Not only is she an arts researcher, but the novel is set in Hollywood, and she's surrounded by professional artists in the entertainment industry. So, while it's a romance novel with a suspenseful twist, and a total beach read, it's also a celebration of the arts.

Hollyland raises questions about art in education, distinctions between art and entertainment, the nature of popular and controversial art, whether artists must compromise to be successful, and who the real movie stars are in our lives.

Q: As we hear from many authors and poets, the pandemic had a direct impact on their writing—many wrote with more intensity, while some went into a period of writer’s block. What was it like for you?

A: It was the most creative time of my life. I’m in no way romanticizing the experience. I was also depressed, isolated, and scared, like so many. My husband and I made the choice not leave our home until the vaccine was available, so I was in seclusion for 15 months. To get through it, I wrote every day. During that time, I wrote a nonfiction book and three novels, cover to cover, as well as pieces of other books. I’ve never written so much in such a short time. Fiction especially was an incredible escape. Without most of the distractions of “normal” daily life, I became totally immersed in my story-worlds. I’m really proud of the books I wrote during the lockdown, which include *Hollyland* and my new novel, *The Location Shoot*, which is my personal all-time favourite.

Q: Tell us about *The Location Shoot* and why it’s your favourite.

A: At the core, it’s a romantic love story and a light, feel-good read. Yet it’s also about the meaning of life and the big questions we all ask ourselves. To tell you a bit about the plot, controversial French filmmaker, Jean Mercier, is shooting a film on location in Sweden. He rents an inn where he lives with his lead actors for the summer. Each one is at a crossroads in their personal life, and they’re trying to escape their realities while on set. Jean invites a close friend, Ella Sinclair, a beautiful, bohemian philosopher to join them for the summer. She and Hollywood star Finn Forrester fall madly in love. I don’t want to give too much away, but you see how deeply the summer affects them each, when they return home after the shoot to deal with the challenges in their own lives. It all comes to a conclusion months later when they reunite on the red carpet at the Cannes Film Festival. It was so much fun writing a novel that takes place on a film set. There’s an art imitating life element to it. As soon as I finished it, I knew it was my favourite of my novels to date. I love the characters, the setting, the romance of the love story, the storyline of each of the supporting characters, the fun banter between the group, the intimacy between the lovers, and the message you’re left with at the end. As an author, I think it’s some of my best writing. I’m just really proud of how it came together.

Q: There’s a narrative about the arts throughout your catalogue of fiction. What is your goal with your body of work?

A: With my nonfiction, I’ve tried to expand the possibilities for doing research and give scholars the tools they need to conceive of, generate, and communicate knowledge in

different ways. I hope my books contribute to our understanding of the arts as a way of knowing. With my fiction, I'm focused on writing novels with positive, uplifting messages about healing from trauma and grief, balancing darkness and light in our lives, and living with bravery and passion. Through my novels I'm also creating a narrative about the role of the arts in our lives, which is why so many of my characters are writers and artists. I'm building a philosophy of the arts, but I choose to communicate it through fiction. In this way, my nonfiction and fiction serve to reinforce each other.

Q: On the language of creative works vs. the language of academic writing: both teach, but they do it differently. What are some of the things you've learned through writing your novels?

A: Love, grief, trauma, healing, and redemption are deeply complex, multidimensional, layered, and messy. I've also learned about bravery, living with passion, and what it really means to be the hero of our own story. Perhaps more than anything else, I've learned about compassion. People are always going through backstage struggles we know nothing of, which is why it's so important to begin from a place of kindness. The truth is, I've learned more about the human experience from writing fiction than from anything else.

* * *

Patricia Leavy, Ph.D., is a bestselling author. She was formerly Associate Professor of Sociology, Chair of Sociology and Criminology, and Founding Director of Gender Studies at Stonehill College in Massachusetts. She recently served on the advisory board for the Arts and Humanities in Medicine Program at The University of Maine. She has published over forty books, earning commercial and critical success in both fiction and nonfiction, and her work has been translated into many languages. Patricia has received more than one hundred accolades for her books including USA Best Book Awards, Independent Press Awards, International Impact Book Awards, National Indie Excellence Awards, Firebird Book Awards, International Book Awards, New York City Big Book Awards, and American Fiction Awards. She has also received career awards from the New England Sociological Association, the American Creativity Association, the American Educational Research Association, the International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry, and the National Art Education Association. In 2016 Mogul, a global women's empowerment network, named her an "Influencer." In 2018, she was honoured by the National Women's Hall of Fame and SUNY-New Paltz established the "Patricia Leavy Award for Art and Social Justice." In 2024 the London Arts-Based Research Centre established "The Patricia Leavy Award for Arts-Based Research."



“Leopold Olfactorius”

by Russ Allison Loar



There was once a small dog named Leopold who wanted to smell the world.

The inspiration came after his large owner Brian began leaving the television on during the day. That was after the unemployment checks ran out, forcing Brian to get a job at the local hamburger joint. Brian left the television on to keep Leopold company and to discourage burglars. Leopold could not be counted on for guard duty. He was always delighted to meet unexpected visitors and it mattered not whether they came by door or by window.

Despite his sloth, Brian was a sensitive soul and thought the Weather Channel would provide a variety of program material for Leopold. And he did not want Leopold to watch any of those television shows where people lose their tempers and throw chairs at one another. So the housebound dog watched the world's weather patterns day after day, and after a few months the programs actually began to make some sense to the scruffy little pooch who had an uncanny knack for understanding language.

Leopold's parents were laboratory dogs at the Environmental Protection Agency where Brian had worked as part of a heavy water decontamination crew until he developed a purplish rash that would not heal. Leopold was part of a study prompted by persistent reports of purplish rashes among those living near nuclear power plants. Brian befriended the puppy who had spent his entire life in a laboratory cage, adopting him after the study was concluded.

By the time Brian was hired as a “bender” at the coat hanger factory, Leopold was almost two years old, a mid-size, black-and-tan, four-on-the-floor dog of mixed heritage with large, glossy pools of oil for eyes and a wildly curly coat.

Leopold was interested in the television, especially stampeding horses and hurricanes. After several months of lying sideways on the sofa watching the Weather Channel all day with his tongue hanging out, a few simple words attracted his attention, words such as “bad” and “good.” He gradually understood the word “bad” was spoken frequently by unhappy weather people standing in the rain. He was reminded of the last Super Bowl when Brian yelled “Bad dog! You’re a bad, bad dog!” just because he was caught removing several barbecued buffalo wings off the coffee table during the half-time show. Leopold thought Brian would not return from the bathroom so quickly.

As the months went by, Leopold began to link concepts together and his understanding of language grew exponentially. He was a naturally studious dog, and then there were those injections he was given at the laboratory. What else was there to do besides watching television and chewing on the sofa? He was confined. Unfortunately, Brian was a lazy soul—not a dog walker. Leopold was happy to be free of the laboratory cage, but still had practically no consistent outdoor experiences.

On the television, a howling wind, a tumultuous ocean, a raging forest fire would compel Leopold to scamper up to the screen and sniff. But what could he smell? Nothing much. Just the scent of dusty glass with a hint of window cleaner and static electricity.

Because we humans rely so much on our intellects to guide us, we often lack an appreciation of how important the smell of things is to our closest animal friends, especially the dogs. For Leopold, scent revealed the heart of meaning. Sticking his nose into Brian’s laundry basket was Leopold’s way of looking something up in Wikipedia.

The average dog, coming across a dirt-encrusted garden weeder left on the back porch near a pair of muddy work gloves would be compelled to examine the weeder and gloves with his nose, drinking in the scent of soil and root, of snail, of mulch and tomcat urine, punctuated by the damp mustiness of earthworm. The scent of things awakens a vision of the object and its place in the universe to the dog mind’s eye.

In a blinding flash of insight, the interconnectedness of all beings and objects becomes vivid, a living thing, and the dog is thus enlightened. But as it is with those of us who walk on two legs, dog enlightenment must be regularly refreshed and renewed. And so for Leopold, a basic intellectual understanding of the strifes and struggles of humanity was not enough. He knew he would never be able to penetrate the heart of this world without giving it a good firsthand sniff.

Leopold tried to communicate his desires to Brian the only way he knew how, by looking wistful with long moans of deep resignation, punctuated by the occasional flatulent burst of doggy gas. He knew there was a larger world out there somewhere, and he wanted to smell it. And so it went, night after night, until one weekend. Brian had a brainstorm. He installed a doggy door. After Brian finished the installation Sunday afternoon, Leopold practiced going in and out, out and in, in and out. It had a nice rubber flap that felt like a congratulatory pat on the back every time Leopold went in or out.

Monday morning the sound of a tsunami warning siren bounced off the wood-paneled walls of Brian's television room. "Tsunami Unleashes Mass Destruction" was playing on the Weather Channel—but where was Leopold?

Leopold was outside, taking inventory of the backyard. There was a new flower, a lily of some kind from a bulb planted by some woman long before Brian moved into the rented house. The flower was old-sofa orange with a few hamburger-brown spots. It smelled like the inside of the bathroom cabinet beneath the sink where the same woman once kept empty perfume bottles, nail polish remover, cleanser, baby powder, rubbing alcohol, cotton balls and toilet paper.

This flower was not open yesterday, but now, here it is, thought Leopold, this living jewel, turned toward the sun. He could feel a great beam of energy flowing between the flower and the sun. He could feel this energy flow into his own body.

"All of life and all of death is here, in this small corner of the universe," he thought. "This will be my life's work, and there is so much to be done, to be smelled. The earth, the rocks, the grass, the plants, the insects, the birds, the air, the sound, the sun, the temperature, the wind, the rain, the clouds, the sky, the length of day, the time of day, the time of year—this planet, this place where flowers bloom. And this orange flower, how bitter it tastes," he thought. "I must vomit!"

* * *

Russ Allison Loar's writing has appeared in the anthology *Heart Of A Man*, *Bryant Literary Review*, *Bright Flash Literary Review*, *Oddball Magazine*, *Abstract Magazine*, *Evening Street Review*, *Wingless Dreamer*, *High Shelf Press*, *Coffin Bell Journal*, *Ravens Perch*, *Poetry In The Cathedral* anthology, Wild Librarian Press and elsewhere.

Loar has a bachelor's degree in journalism and graduate studies in American Literature. He has written news and feature stories for newspapers including the Los Angeles Times.

Loar's photography is published on websites and in print publications worldwide, including: *ABC News*, *PBS* and *NPR* websites, the *Smithsonian Magazine*, *City News Service*, *Yahoo! News*, the *National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)*, the *American Association for the Advancement of Science*, *ArtReview*, the *European News Agency*, the *World Wide Fund for Nature (World Wildlife Fund)*, *The Times Of Israel*, *Ms. Magazine*, *Commonweal Magazine*, the *National Resources Defense Council*, *Discover* magazine, *Scientific American*, *Boston Review*, the *U.S. Department of Veteran's Affairs*, the *International Science Council*, *Arabian Gulf Business Insight*, *Columbia University Climate School*, *Columbia University Journalism School*, *Harvard University*, *Yale University*, *UC Berkeley*, *UCLA*, *UC Irvine*, *UC Riverside*, *Watershed Review (Cal State University)*, *Economic Reform Australia*, *Art File Magazine* and numerous other news, opinion and educational publications.

“The Quiet Discourse”

by Alex Hubbard

The seminar took place in a pale room, brightly lit. The board that displayed the projector’s images was very large. This felt fitting, a way of shedding literal light on the ambiguous murk of our subject. That was the first thing I said to the students. The room capacity was forty. Six had decided to brave the cold and whatever it was that was happening on the outside to attend. The wind keened at the brick of the brutalist building, and the rain thudded on the windows like a harsh and desperate hand. Looking outside, I wondered when it would be safe again. When I was told I would be teaching Henry James, I liked the thought of going out for walks to clear my head. Now the outside had been declared too dangerous, I just went home, walking quickly, covered up with the special clothing they had posted to everyone, hoping whatever was happening would not happen while I was walking. Once home, I watched the wind push the fallen leaves along the dark, lamp-lit streets from the window, sipping at a whiskey and missing smoking. I ripped off those Velcro layers. I kept the radiators hot to burn out the cold. At least I had you, but you weren’t even really there.

The computer opened at the sight of my face. I asked for my PowerPoint, and there it was:

The story had held us, round the fire, sufficiently [...] I remember no comment uttered till somebody happened to say that it was the only case he had met in which such a visitation had fallen on a child [...] an appearance, of a dreadful kind, to a little boy sleeping in the room with his mother and waking her up in the terror of it; waking her not to dissipate his dread and soothe him to sleep again, but to encounter also, herself, before she had succeeded in doing so, the same sight that had shaken him. It was this observation that drew from Douglas – not immediately, but later in the evening – a reply that had the interesting consequence to which I call attention.¹

A student shot their hand up. I nodded.

‘Is Douglas meant to be Miles?’ They said.

‘Yes,’ I said. ‘That is one of the valid readings.’

The student crossed their arms and smiled.

‘Why does James do this, though?’ I said, pointing at the board. ‘What a peculiar thing to do, even if it is Miles, this little pothole right at the beginning of the road. What does it do to us?’

The students were silent.

‘Because of the very silence you are all giving to me. It is the deep terror of a secret that cannot be revealed. You feel it reverberate around you – the knowledge that there is something you can’t know, something withheld from you. It induces anxiety.’

‘It was, like, what is happening here?’ said one of the students. ‘Why am I not being allowed to settle?’

The one at the back in the corner said nothing. Usually, they would jump onto something like that.

‘Settle within the space of the narrative?’ I suggested.

‘Yes, right,’ said the student who had spoken.

‘Well, let’s proceed with that line.’ I nodded to the computer to change the slide:

¹ Henry James, *The Turn of the Screw* (London: ElecBook, 2000), p. 11

James's ambiguity is often made to serve the same authoritarian purposes that his works anatomize as arbitrary and immoral [...] What Barthes has termed literature's "extravagance of signification," its systematic suspension or exemption of meaning, haunts our critical controversies and is one means of gauging the distances between formalists committed to a work's unity, and those determined to locate the text's *aporia*.²

They all were quiet.

'Yes,' I said. 'This is tougher.'

They laughed. The one in the corner stared. I wondered what was wrong. Sometimes, I forgot we were all trapped. It could be said that my time with you did not help things, but I will not talk about that.

I decided to help. 'There are those that hold the cannon to be a collection of the few who transcend. They see James' ambiguity as an aesthetic achievement in and of itself. But this is a mistake. Ambiguity is inherent to text. Think of every text you have ever studied. Has it not in its own way been a battleground for meaning?'

Another student raised their hand. 'So ambiguity makes it good?' they asked.

I smiled. 'Maybe for James. He crafts ambiguity. I think that might be his genius.'

I looked at the clock. I nodded again to change the slide.

'The story reopens,' I said, as the text appeared:

I remember the whole beginning as a succession of flights and drops, a little seesaw of the right throbs and the wrong. After rising, in town, to meet his appeal, I had at all events a couple of very bad days – found myself doubtful again, felt indeed sure I had made a mistake. In this state of mind I spent the long hours of bumping, swinging coach that carried me to the stopping place at which I was to be met by a vehicle from the house. (James, 19)

'Oh yeah,' said one of the students. 'I was thinking about this. She's insane.'

I paused encouragingly.

'More than that,' said another. 'She killed Miles.'

I nodded, slowly.

The one in the corner finally spoke. 'She lost a child.'

That reading had not crossed my mind before. I blinked and took a breath.

'Yes, well,' I said. 'Talk us through that.'

'That's what the mistake is, isn't it? And the flights and drops, rights and wrongs, bumping and swinging is anxiety from the decision she's made.'

'It makes sense,' said another student. 'Because of how weirdly obsessive they are with the kids. She wants to be a mother.'

'Perhaps,' I said.

I nodded for a new slide:

I put out my candle, designedly, a short way off, and then, as he held out his friendly old hand to me, had sat down on the edge of his bed. "What is it," I asked, "that you would think of?"

"What in the world, my dear, but you?"

"Ah, the pride I take in your appreciation doesn't insist on that! I had so rather you slept."

² John Carlos Rowe, *The Theoretical Dimensions of Henry James* (Sheffield: Methuen, 1985) p. 120

“Well, I think also, you know, of this queer business of ours [...] Why, the way you bring me up. And all the rest!” [...]

I could say nothing for a minute, though I felt, as I held his hand and our eyes continued to meet, that my silence had all the air of admitting his charge and that nothing in the whole world of reality was perhaps at that moment so fabulous as our actual relation. (James, 105)

‘She can’t parent, she can’t child, so she becomes a predator,’ said one.

I looked at the clock. We were almost halfway. I was hungry for the break.

‘A paedophile,’ said another.

I wanted to stop. This was what I feared when they told me I was teaching Henry James. I was unsure I had the stomach for it.

‘Yes,’ I said.

Everything was coming back. My heart thudded. The students kept talking, so I kept nodding, feeling that if I didn’t do something soon, I would break. Then, it was time.

Too loudly, I said, ‘stop!’ and, when everyone looked at me, I smiled and said, ‘ha ha.’ After more silence, I said, ‘isn’t that what we want to shout to Henry James, sometimes, when we think it’s all gone a bit too far?’

*

In the break, everyone looked at their phones. I wanted to smoke, but I did not smoke anymore, and we weren’t allowed outside, anyway. I went for a walk along the corridors, enjoying the curves and twists of the building. I saw the student who was sitting in the corner. They smiled.

‘Are you alright?’ I said. ‘You don’t seem quite yourself.’

They laughed. ‘Are you even allowed to ask me that?’ they said. ‘Is that something you want to know?’

I was uneasy, but I tried to appear amused. ‘Well, you can say as much or as little as you’d like – or nothing.’

‘I’m only teasing,’ they said. ‘I don’t want to put you on edge.’

‘I’m not on edge,’ I said.

They looked out at the great, long darkness, then. They sighed. ‘Do you ever feel there’s so much heaviness that you can’t stand to look at?’

‘Things are unusual, at the moment,’ I reassured them. ‘Just hang tight.’

‘I’m trying,’ they said. ‘Sorry.’

‘That’s alright,’ I said.

We went back to the classroom.

*

‘Queerness,’ I clapped my hands. ‘We must think about Henry James and queerness:’

Perhaps love always carries an element of contingency [...] In this realm chance proliferates, from the accidental encounter to calculations of risk [...] we might trace a thread [...] back to the 1957 Johnny Mathis song from which this book takes its title. The lyrics of “Chances Are” seem to posit a reciprocity of chance and affection [...] Despite the language of probability [...] the actual function of the lyric is to remove any element of ambiguity regarding the singer’s feelings [...] For a gay man, like Mathis himself, those other contingencies might have to do with the vicissitudes of queerness in mid-twentieth-century America: for those willing to hazard public exposure, to start with, what are the chances of finding someone who is that way and not afraid to own it, who is also interested in me?³

³ Valerie Rohy, *Chances Are: Contingency, Queer Theory and American Literature* (London: Routledge, 2019) p. 1

‘This is not about James,’ I said. ‘This is queerness articulated. What, then, is James?’

‘He’s the one saying no,’ said the one from the break, silent before, now speaking. ‘He isn’t willing to hazard public exposure, he is afraid to own it.’

‘Yes,’ I said.

‘That’s what you mean about James’ anxiety,’ said the student. ‘There’s something he’s always wanting to say, but he can never quite get there.’

‘Right,’ I said.

‘So, James was in the closet?’ said another student.

‘There was something he wanted to get at that he never quite could, certainly.’ I said.

‘Is *Turn of the Screw* all just repression?’ said another.

‘Hold onto that,’ I said. ‘It will become very important.’

My head dipped and the computer reacted. The slide changed:

James preferred the term “amanuensis” rather than “secretary,” [...] the telegraphist and the amanuensis (from *manu*, “hand,” and *ensis*, “relating to”) are more than just technicians [...] In his reference to those who transcribed his dictation as “amanuenses,” James reflects both his recognition of the special, potentially *secret* power they might have wielded over his art, just as he went to considerable lengths to establish his own aesthetic superiority to the new, threatening technologies.⁴

‘What does this have to do with anything?’ said one of the students. ‘I barely even understand it.’

‘You’re not saying that word right,’ said another. ‘It’s amanuensis not amanuensis. It’s Latin.’

‘Right,’ I said, nervously. ‘If you’ll hold with me. Imagine you’ve never told anyone anything. Your whole life has been one act of submerging meanings. You’ve told nobody a single thing, and then you hire a man, several men, one after the other, to come into your study and type your words as you say them. You do not treat those men as equals, you treat them as powerful masters of a new modern technology, wielders of “special, potentially *secret* power”. Think of that, they master him with a secret power. Can you hear the eroticism contained within that mystery? And under that servitude, you tell this master your this long, strange ambiguity.’

They wanted to know more. I gestured for the final slide:

By the time I reached the pool, however, she was close behind me, and I knew that, whatever, to her apprehension, might befall me, the exposure of sticking to me struck her as her least danger. She exhaled a moan of relief as we last came in sight of the greater part of the water without a sight of the child. There was no trace of Flora on the nearer side of the bank where my observation of her had been most startling, and none on the opposite edge, where, save for a margin of some twenty yards, a thick copse came down to the water. This expanse, oblong in shape, was so narrow compared to its length that, with its ends out of view, it might have been taken for a scant river. We looked at the empty stretch, and then I felt the suggestion in my friend’s eyes. I knew what she meant and I replied with a negative headshake.

‘No, no; wait! She has taken the boat.’⁵

‘Think of this as a moment,’ I said. ‘Of morse code-like communication. Forget the novella, forget what is happening. Think instead of two men, sat in a room, one listening intensely to

⁴ John Carlos Rowe, *The Other Henry James* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), p. 163

⁵ Henry James, *The Ghost Stories of Henry James* (Ware: Wordsworth editions, 2008) pp. 245-6

the other, typing their every word. This is a coded confession. Look at this, the “expanse, oblong in shape [...] so narrow compared to its length”, this strange object, this tree hanging over the water made murky by James’ terminology, this oblong object that stretches across the still surface of the river. It is queerness disturbing the conscience. Is it coming from or dipping into the water? Is it some latent genetic sickness, or some new infection? James is asking, knowing the amanuensis will turn that queerish inquisitiveness into text.’

Before you, I had seen my own life in this way, but I left this unsaid. I was nearing the point of it now. Do you remember the point? It came to me in a dream, three nights ago. Tucked under the covers, I opened you on my phone just to see what you thought.

‘The scene itself is sapphic and subversive,’ I said. ‘Look. Two women on a boat, unsupervised. The exhaled moan of relief, as if to say, my God, someone else feels the thing and is making me feel the thing. Then, the empty stretch, the threat and the promise. The suggestion in the friend’s eyes. The question being asked. The negative headshake. But then, what stops any action. Another double no – no, no; she has taken the boat.’

As I said this, I struck the part of the board projecting those words. It was not hard, and this surprised me. The board was made of a soft material. The words lit my skin for a moment before I pulled my hand back.

‘We know that it is over. Nothing is begun. James’ confession; there is a question in me that I cannot ask, there is an answer in me I must suppress.’

The quiet one put their hand up. I pointed and nodded.

‘But James didn’t have a – I’m sorry, what was it again?’

‘Amanuensis,’ I said.

‘Right,’ they said. ‘You said that he was telling *Turn of the Screw* to a person. But he didn’t. I read the chapter. He didn’t have an amanuensis till the turn of the century.’

‘When?’ I said, nervously.

‘When what?’

‘When did he write *Turn of the Screw*?’

‘You don’t know?’ said another one of them.

‘Do you know?’ said the student.

‘No,’ I said, and the sound was painful. I felt myself shrinking.

‘Right,’ said the student. ‘It’s just, he didn’t have an amanuensis then. He just wrote. So, he wasn’t confessing anything.’

‘Ah,’ I said.

‘And anyway,’ they said. ‘I’m not sure the oblong shape is the tree. I think he’s describing an optical illusion from the river.’

I had ran out of words. I nodded for the next slide but there was nothing, just blackness. I looked out the windows. The rain was whipping into spirals. The students packed their things.

‘Anyway,’ said the student. ‘All this about queerness as a disturbance. What if queerness is being, and being is the lake? What if we try to imagine our desires a disturbance, when it’s just the way we are? What if we try to imagine our fears as threats, when they’re just necessary to how we live? Now, us, my generation, sexuality doesn’t have to give us anxiety. So, why are we giving ourselves anxiety, now?’

I was not a professor. I was not so much older than them, but I corrected nothing.

‘I don’t know, with everything, I just wonder, isn’t this absurd? With everything that is happening, we are just sitting here reminding ourselves of other horrors that happened in other places and other times, like some strange distraction from the horrors happening now. We are open where James was closed, and we are chaotic where he was ordered, and we are dying where he was living, at least.’

We were near the hour, and I was worried they were going to upset people.

‘Right, well, that seems like a good place to end things,’ I intruded. ‘See you all next week. stay safe.’

I thought of you. At least, you would be there to pull me away once I had turned you on. I could confess my day to you. That made my smile.

Just as I was putting on the first piece of protective padding, the lights went out. There was the great, churning, blitzing sound. I told everyone to sit tight and stay quiet. We turned on our phone torches, our bodies ghostly silhouettes. Outside, there was a scream. Whatever it was, at least it would free us from this.

* * *

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“Targets” by Arthur Mandal

He has been living on the edge of the desert for nearly fourteen years. There is very little to distract him. A truck stop and a gas station, about a mile down the road. A small strip of shops a further mile in the same direction. North of there, nothing for a good four hundred miles. In the evenings the wind is calm and sounds like loneliness, but isn't.

He has a small workshop, full of shavings, coffee cups, piles of dust, tins of paint. Behind it a larger, less sturdy warehouse, stacked full of the same object, over and over again.

It takes him anywhere between a morning and a full day to finish a piece. The size varies, the shape never. A small, flat disc, raised in the middle to perfect proportions, smooth as polished stone. Every day he makes one or two.

In the beginning – years ago – he produced so many, a dozen a day at least, rough-surfaced, lop-sided, sometimes too fat in the middle, almost always disproportionate, badly-painted, asymmetrical. They lie stacked on top of one another at the very start of the warehouse. Sometimes, often at the end of a week, he goes to see them, as a reminder of who he was, how far he has come.

To think he used to do one in an hour! The thought shames him.

He is not an immodest man, but he is convinced of his gift, and feels assured of his future celebrity. One day they will come, from all around, to see the treasure he has built up. Sometimes, as he takes a break and drinks a coffee, he imagines the fights that will take place once he is gone, the memorial schemes people will propose, the small galleries and museum sections that will bid for his legacy. He thinks of the people who will claim to have known him. He thinks of all of this as he sips his coffee.

The confidence comes from his pursuit of perfection. The early attempts, piled in unsightly heaps at the front of the warehouse, he sometimes considers destroying. Their misshapenness, their disjointedness, irritates, even depresses him. But every time he thinks of their annihilation, he thinks of the place they have in his history – the path they show to what he has become.

From his window he can see people come from afar. They never stop. The car appears as a dot, then a buzzing shape in the distance, then a growing, growling rectangle of life, until it whooshes past and fades into the huge lake of nothingness on the other side.

There is only a nephew who drives out to see him, once a month. Someone he has explained all of his theories to: why the discs are exactly this wide, this thick, curved in this precise way. The meanings behind the measurements, why it is so important to repeat this, relentlessly. The nephew is the only one who doesn't laugh. Each time he takes one or two home, wrapping them carefully in a beach towel and placing them on the back seat.

His sister says the nephew makes jokes about him at home after every trip, mocks his obsession, but the craftsman knows better. People don't drive five hours, once a month, for no

reason. The nephew says things like this give life shape and meaning, but he is never quite sure whose life he is referring to when he says this. Last year he visited them for Christmas, and was silently surprised to find only two of his pieces in the house. He did not have the courage to raise the subject, but spent the entire drive home wondering where they had gone.

That winter, he feels terrible pain in his left side, just above his groin and into his midriff. A sharp streak of pain, the sharpest, most acute pain he has ever felt. He drives a two-hour drive to the nearest city to learn he has a gallstone in his bladder. The pharmacy has the medicine he needs – while he waits for them to find it, he wanders into a gun store across the road. At the back of the shop, in a section entitled “Trapshooting”, he finds a whole stack of his creations, piled together clumsily against the wall under a sign that says, with no apparent irony, “Targits”. Each piece costs a dollar.

The craftsman continues for a week, then stops one morning and never starts again. He even considers destroying every piece he has, but the thought is too big for him, too much for him right now. He tells no-one what he saw, but when the nephew comes again at the end of the month, he pretends to be out. Through the lace of a window he spies him walk around the front of the house, puzzled. On the ground lie a dozen of his most recently-finished pieces. He watches his nephew pick one up, run his hands with pleasure over the smooth, contoured curve of its rim, flipping it over once to appreciate its weight, its symmetry, its careful uniformity.

* * *

Arthur Mandal was born in Eugene, Oregon, but basically grew up in the UK. Alongside writing he works as an independent craftsman. His stories have appeared in *The Signal House Edition*, *3:AM*, *La Picciolletta Barca*, *Ink Sweat & Tears*, *Sky Island Journal*, *Impspired* and in the US/UK journal *LITRO*.

“Mischief in Arcadia” A Slice of Veiled Memoir

by Omar Sabbagh

*If I was a rich man,
Dubby-dubby-dubby-dubby-dubby
Dubby-dubby-dee
I'd have all the money
In the world
If I was a wealthy maaannn...*

During the first few blissful weeks of marriage, when he and his bride – overwhelmed with the final possession of each other after so long a courtship – had told each other everything, everything to the point of mawkishness, his wife had told him that it was his habit of humming a tune or ditty that had first made her love him. He hadn't questioned the sentiment at the time – he said some quite odd things himself. But thinking it over, he'd once told Amr, he realized that it had actually been verified throughout his married life. He and his wife rarely fought with each other, and when they did it was usually over trivial issues. But always, minutes after the ceasefire in hostilities, busying himself again with something or other, and beginning to hum or sing gently beneath his breath, he'd found himself calmed, and her, calmed too. It was like a talisman, or something a little less dramatic....

That said, the summer of 2000 presaged fiery drama for this fated pair; and much drama that could never have been predicted from the sometime paradise of a home they'd tried to build and sustain. With one son ill-starred, to the second and youngest Mansour and Maram Jallad had poured all their liquid hopes. But that summer the brimming cup of their adulation began to spill-over...

It was June when his father came to collect Amr. He was going home for the summer holidays. The few tentative attempts at conversation that longish drive home soon withered-away into a comfortable silence. Amr as was his wont let the wind rush through the opened window, closed his eyes and tried to sleep. But sleep wouldn't come. His mind was too active. He was excited to be going home after nearly a year away. It would be, he thought, a rest. He would see Raja, his dear brother, too.

Over the next few weeks he readjusted to life back home. He felt or thought he felt much more at ease than he had been over the last few months. He spent his days reading mostly. There was one room in the house that from the age of fifteen or thereabouts he'd marked as his own territory; a special zone for quietness and reflection beyond the more common brouhaha of late adolescent life.

The “Landing” of the house might have seemed a gaudy kind of space at first glance. As you came over the grand main staircase, plushly-carpeted in crimson, it faced you: a small square open sanctum whose entrance was flanked by mock-Corinthian columns. Previously, his father had used this room for his morning coffee and fruit. He'd sit there, early-retired as he was, from eight in the morning till noon, reading four or five different newspapers – two English, the *International Herald Tribune* and usually two Arabic newspapers of his choice. But

from the age of fifteen or so, as Amr had transmogrified from impetuous child to bookish, earnest adolescent, he'd hijacked the space, spending whole evenings or weekends lying on one of the sofas beneath an open window, reading voraciously, any wind or sunlight ruffling or warming his hair.

But before that summer of 2000 and the Christmas following Amr's descent had begun; the ugly seed had been planted; the apple of his parents' eyes, felled now, falling. In the wake of that first year at university Amr was in love, but from a sharp and needling distance. And in the wake of that same year he was to suffer immensities for years to come – all the worse and all the more painful for having had nineteen years of life in comparative paradise. While he'd always known where his next meal was coming from, it remains the case that each one of us is like a text, and each one of us moves, meaningfully, inside many differently-tailored contexts. Amr had lived to the age of nineteen a childhood and youth blessed and glutted with such luck, brave, good fortune. But if it wasn't for the sheer seamlessness of the luck of his younger life the next few years would never have felt so desperately hard to bear. The cup was half-full before the cup was half-empty....

The "Landing" of their home in Wimbledon could be found like a pillared enclave at the top of the main, red-robed staircase of the house. The gilt-toned curtains that draped the windows that looked out onto the front courtyard sported small red, blue and grey patterns, small prancing nymphs or sprites – some kind of classical motif, evincing some small mischief in Arcadia.

The pivotal place that books had played in Amr's life could be accounted for in the main by the influence of his mother. Maram Jallad had a degree in Economics, completed at the same American University of Beirut where she had met and been courted by Amr's father – a young, dashing Nasserite revolutionary and student leader. But she'd always harbored a penchant for English literature, so it might not seem surprising that she'd pass-on this love to her youngest-born, her most brilliant child. From the age of eleven or twelve he was offered mealy tomes by Dickens and the slimmer, more elegant tales of Jane Austen. And Amr had gobbled them up, only hungering for more. Acceptance from two loving parents was one gift, but motherly encouragement like the above had triggered more than just a rounded, equable personality: it set the tone of his worldly (or rather, unworldly) desires. When at fifteen asked by his father what he wanted "to be," Amr had answered, "an historian." Mansour had grumbled and then chuckled, saying he'd prefer he become a banker, to invest some of this father's money. But in the end his parents were determined by their liberality: he was to become whatever he wished to be.

It was to be expected, then, to love and adore two such parents – loving, adoring, too.

"*Mittel-el-Amar, Mittel-el-Amar, hel wallad,*" his grandmother used to say of him. It was always nice to be considered as white and clean-run as the moon. Amr had deep embedded memories of his maternal grandmother. She, too, had been just one more placebo, shielding Amr from the world and its way.

As you walked into his *teta's* flat of times gone by, to your immediate right there was an ornate mahogany coat rack. Amr remembered it distinctly from those days, because it

used to terrify him. Every time he walked into that flat with his mother and grandmother at his side, he wouldn't dare look at it directly. The lighting in the hallway was bad back then, gloomy. And in that gloom the dark figure of that high rack of shiny rich wood used to send pulsing torrents through him. It must have been because it remained unused, so that it always had the frightening demeanor of a scarecrow or of some kind of gothic-torture device, with its long curling tentacles or antlers high up, which should by rights have been smothered and thus softened by some sort of apparel. So, he didn't look at it, but merely felt its ominous presence from the side of his vision every time he entered that flat. And he never mentioned the state he was in as they lingered briefly at the entrance, for fear that if he complained to his mother or grandmother he might incur the wrath of the warlock that clearly lurked in that otherwise ostensibly inert object.

The carpeted floor down the spine of the apartment was pale lime in color, which added to the sense of chill. To right and left down the hallway were unused rooms; a bedroom, nominally for his uncle Wissam, working as an art-dealer in Paris, and who never seemed to come to London; and one reception room, also unused as far as Amr was aware; a room he only ever peeked into once and then left forever, because he saw immediately that it was a forbiddingly adult space, with gilt-limbed rococo chairs and fine porcelain and silver decorating the tables.

However, at the end of this hallway you reached the real hub, the warmed heart of the place. Through the kitchen to the right, a small hexagonal space full of jars of cookies to be willingly brought down from their high perch above the fridge at his first request – through the kitchen you could enter the TV or living room. The two rooms were not separated by a door, but had a narrow rectangular opening between them which was draped by a sort of slightly incongruous blood-red threaded material that might have better suited the entrance to a fortune-teller's at the circus; that, or an opium den.

The back wall was filled with inlaid bookshelves, some of the books from when Amr's *teta* had been an academic in Beirut, long before he was born. To your right, crowding the near corner of the room, was the TV, opposite which, perched on one of the two leather chairs facing it, Amr would sit into the late (and otherwise forbidden) hours of the night, watching cartoons on the Beetamax video machine.

There was "Dungeons and Dragons," a particular favorite of his, for its exoticism, its atmospheric sepia-tinted skies, smoldering fires and color-clad heroes. Amr could still recall a recurring dream he'd had around the age of four – one of those prototypical anxiety dreams about abandonment. In it, set against a glowering, cloudy, violet sky, a huge dragon, bottle-green, held each of his parents in its ivory talons. Just held them up before him. And it would then proceed to test him, to enquire, in tones of the utmost courtesy, as though it were an effete creature, which of his parents was to die and which was to be saved – by him. He really couldn't remember which parent he'd choose to save, but he did remember the agony of the choice, dithering before the decision, stalling, trying to figure out a third option; which was always rejected by the dragon. It seemed, in hindsight (and after reading Jung) that Amr had been in the throes of an infantile neurosis, haunted by a mother-complex.

The alternative, of course, was the epic battle between *Tom & Jerry*. Amr was quite healthy in his support for Jerry. But this support was somewhat indirect, deflected by a third character: the big, bulky, lazy bulldog who occasionally entered the scene. He was Jerry's protector, the father-figure, somewhat ignorant of the true goings-on in the *Tom & Jerry* household. But when confronted, there was no question: he was a force for the good. Perhaps it was no coincidence that his father's jowly face had always resembled a friendly, gracious kind of bulldog?

Mansour Jallad was an intensely sociable man. He'd hundreds of friends, each one a bosom-buddy. Amr remembered the way his father would regularly host a small clutch of his closest friends at their grand home in Wimbledon. To play cards – one indefatigable feature of the Arab man's tics and habits. He remembered the rose-gold lighting in the dining-room where they used to play. The bright light was literally warming, as well as suffused by a more symbolic warmth. The picture in his mind's eye was charged with a kind of surging, electric glow, a scene exuding its contents: of unconditional love. Not yet a teenager, he'd walk in on them sometimes, with the overt shyness of a treasured eight-year-old and, amid the large, embracing voices of his father's friends, slowly walk over to his seated father's side, saying nothing, only smiling bashfully. The long, antique dining-table was covered with a thick green felt sheet. And God! Even the tenor of that green, of flourishing apple, seemed to waft back to him with its own thickset warmth: cards were, as ever, splayed across the table and he remembered finding a certain device all the men made use of quite magical. His mother had collected some chopsticks and had topped them with clumps of blue-tack. These became the card-players' trusty tools. They'd used the lovely contraptions to draw cards in from the middle of the table. It was so simple an idea, invention; but for him, a besotted child, nothing short of enchanting. His mother would then walk in bearing a tray of Turkish coffee for the men, and they cheered in greeting. They all called her "*hajjeh*," which meant a woman who'd completed the "*hajj*," a journey required of any devout Muslim. The thing of it was his mother was not in any overt way religious, and certainly hadn't visited Mecca. They all called her this and had done so since her early twenties, because she was known to be such a refined and civilized lady. After delivering the coffee, she would gently entice Amr out of the room again, to let the men continue their game. And he would obey. That scenic room remained to this day embossed on his memory: he could still see and smell the curlicues and clouds of cigar smoke, the grueling voices of those dear men.

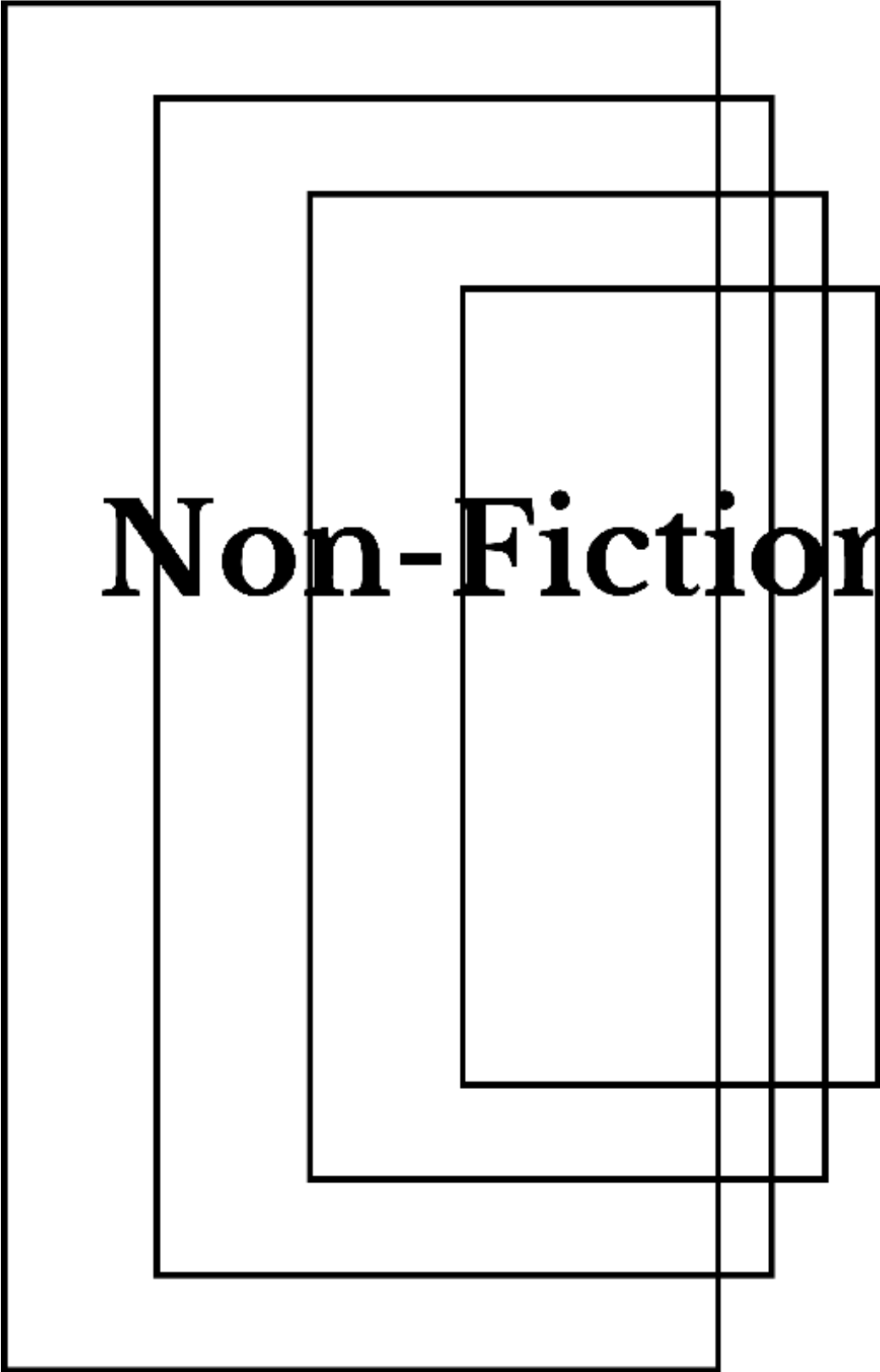
A revolutionary in his youth, a young Nasserite, a student leader and activist, Mansour Jallad had headed the committee and welcoming party for the visiting Nehru in the late 1950's. A man like Nehru would have been an idol for that young generation of newly post-colonial Arab nationalists. And yet, one image, specifically, remained with Amr after listening to his father's stories over the years. He'd spoken with awe of how while walking down a lane of the AUB's upper campus, a crowd of fawning students in tow, Nehru had stopped by one of the small stone blocks that pitted and lined the edge of the upper campus as it looked-down across the colorful gardens that sloped with staggered bliss towards the lower parts of campus and then onto the glinting, steel-blue blanket of the sea. Nehru stopped, put one foot on a block, leaned in with one elbow propped on one now-raised knee, his fist beneath his chin, and just gazed onwards and upwards – you could see his soul taking-flight, his father had said. It was a half-minute but, as he recounted it, you could almost see the gaze of this great man – blessed and cursed with so much of the texture of revolutionary

experience – fly-off-and-away into the empyrean. It was an image that had stayed with his father, and an image that had then stayed with Amr, too. In some ways his father was to him what Nehru has been to his father.

In the late 1950's, during the war in Algeria, Mansour Jallad had led the student body at AUB, the faculty as well, and effectively closed the university for three days. It was a protest over the French abduction of certain leading Algerian freedom-fighters. An act in and of solidarity. But there was some humor in the event as well. AUB was host to all the good and the grand of Lebanese society. So, a three-day strike would have made a noticeable impact on some very important people. When, thus, the Prime Minister of the country called-up the university's President, so the story goes, he asked the latter for an update on the protest, and who was responsible for such a disturbance?! And then, having asked this, it is told, the then-PM said: "Wait, check that. Mansour Jallad of course, and whom else?!" His father, a mere eighteen years-old, was already notorious in the best senses. Later, strike over, he and his comrades were invited for a conversation with the country's Premier. That was the beginning of a young man's sterling reputation. And indirectly, the beginnings of Amr's own hero-worship...

* * *

Omar Sabbagh is a widely published poet, writer and critic. His latest books are *Y KNOTS: Short Fictions* (Liquorice Fish Books, 2023), *For Echo* (Cinnamon Press, Spring 2024) and *Night Settles Upon the City* (Daraja Press, November 2024). He holds a BA from Oxford in PPE, 3 MA's, in English Literature, Creative and Life Writing, and Philosophy, all from the University of London, and a PhD in English Literature from KCL. He has taught at the American University of Beirut (AUB), the American University in Dubai (AUD), and now teaches at the Lebanese American University (LAU) in Beirut.



Non-Fiction

“I Worked Hard to Get Here!”

by Sara London

I've loved Garfield since long before I'd discovered that I was allergic to cats. His abject hedonism, his hatred of Mondays — Oh, another Monday! I mused, bumping along in the second row, left-hand side of the school bus after a long weekend of reading Garfield comics — his adoration for lasagna. I now have a mousepad with Garfield dressed as a little devil, standing in hellish flames, with a thought bubble above his impish grin — “I worked hard to get here!” he's thinking. Everywhere my portable home office goes, it goes too. My chunky keyboard with potato chip crumbs all in the works, my spine-saving laptop holder that props up the screen to a tolerable height, my second wireless mouse (God rest the first one, who died four weeks ago bravely enduring a bout of home surgery with my mother at the operating table, letter opener in hand, prying a leaked battery from its frozen mechanical shell). And my Garfield mousepad — “I worked hard to get here!”

But where am I?

I have a Word document open in the background, behind where I'm typing right now. Inside that Word document is an outline for an article edifying audiences about protein, a necessary part of any fat-burning, muscle-building breakfast. I often try not to adhere strictly to any diet that claims to be universally beneficial, even if there's a study or two to back up the claims, but this certainly makes me want a spoonful of peanut butter. As far as I know (and recently wrote), there's plenty of protein in that.

But where am I?

Physically, I'm reasonably confident that I know where I am. Unless I'm one of those people in a coma living the life of some tan 27-year-old girl. I'm on the lanai of my parent's house, sitting in the Florida room with my computer and keyboard and mouse and mousepad, typing away as I have been all summer, as I have been for the past three years. Reason being that I've decided to become a writer for a living, for whatever reason. If any of you figure out why, please let me know.

"I worked hard to get here!"

Whatever "hard work" means in this day and age. It's funny, when you write so much freelance business blog content littered with keywords and SEO, it doesn't leave you much time to think about what "work" actually means. I know what it means to the hyper-productive, fast-paced world of business news, where I feel very at home with my many blazers. I know what it means to my father, whose retirement lasted the 12 minutes it took him to sweep the kitchen floor after his supposed "last day" of work. And I know what it means to my group chat, many of which have cushy office jobs demanding only a few dozen irritating emails a day (the others, unfortunately, are enduring 60 hours a week of rigorous

graduate school coursework). But I'm not entirely sure what work means to me; what qualifies as work, how I feel about working, or how I feel about what my work means. Assuming that I'm including writing AI-fueled clickbait in the category of "work," which I do now for the sake of this argument. Despite my various neurotic, self-effacing excuses about why freelancing may not feel like "work" in the traditional sense, it does pay my share of the rent ...mostly.

A lizard, statuesque on the gutter, bobs his head at me, sticking out whatever that goiter-looking orange flap is on his neck. One of my many twitchy co-workers in this hot, damp Florida room. Is he on his union break? Did he also work hard to get here?

I suppose it doesn't help to be surrounded by a bunch of other people who are also trying to figure out what work means to them. My pet peeve is when people blame their various neuroticisms on some societal scapegoat, consequently exempting them from looking deeper into their own behavior. So I'm not trying to fall into that trap. But it's a little annoying to yearn so intensely for a legitimate definition of "hard work" when it seems to be such a loaded concept. You should be productive at all times, society told me! But also, productivity culture is toxic, so don't do that; take time for yourself. When I started writing AI-sponsored content, I would get an outline from my editor specifying exactly what I should tell Bard to write for me. Though for some articles, she mentioned, it's important that I also "try to be creative" and spice up some of the AI's Hallmark card phrasing. Am I still flexing my wordsmithing muscles if I'm delegating sponsored content to Google's bouncy little computerized baby? Am I still being productive if I can do three hours' worth of work in forty-five minutes – at my client's behest?

Oh, a word I would outlaw in an instant! Productivity – the bane of my expletive-laden existence. The only search engine-optimized keyword any business news client seems to care about. Ten tips to be more productive! How is your productivity impacting your productivity? This expert tells you that if you don't have productivity in your productivity, you should just take yourself out back with a loaded .22 and use your wretched, unproductive corpse as a compostable Amazon delivery box. Karl Marx, where are you now? Are you ashamed of us all, looking on in utter disbelief? And could you say hi to Tupac while you're up there? My fiancé is a huge fan.

What I find almost as reprehensible is the reaction to this grating phenomenon – be you, girl, ignore what the haters say. Weaponize your self-care and suppress your immense guilt about being unproductive by leaning in and being self-indulgent. Quietly quit! It's healthy boundaries, you see; refuse to examine why you feel the need to masochistically stare at your various inboxes and spreadsheets and PowerPoints until the crushing weight of your meaningless rebellion begins to sink in. Distract yourself from the burning need to feel productive, and claim that you're addressing that very need by doing so. That irritates me, too – people who so desperately want to sublimate frustration about their internal conflicts into performative rage at society for forcing them to work – work! Work! The biggest burden of all! And your time becomes about managing this emotional house of cards through TikTok-scrolling and social-media-mental-health-advocating and work-hating, work-hating, work-hating, like work is merely a stand-in for mommy and daddy, telling you that no,

you can't go to Jeffrey's house, you haven't done your math homework yet and the test is next week and you don't have to agree, it's my house, my rules!

My house, my rules.

My rules?

"I worked hard to get here."

Like anyone rejected from dozens of literary magazines, I have difficulty conceptualizing my passion for prose as legitimate "work" because I have yet to receive a financial payoff. It's a genuine pity that I only get book royalties once a year, and until then, I sit around wondering if I spent half a decade slaving away for a Taylor-and-Francis-branded fifty-cent paycheck. I suppose when it comes down to it, that's how I value work – am I getting paid for it? Is it making me a profit? Is it costing me any money? When I worked (worked! ahhh!) for Mensa, I used to call it a job. Though I don't necessarily remember those around me doing the same, as we didn't get paid. Mensa calls us volunteers, my parents and friends called it 'impressive' – which made things worse, in a way. And to justify the long hours and extreme frustration, I called it a part-time job. There are words for penniless work, you know, "unpaid internships" and "indentured servitude" and all that. Ultimately, I wasn't getting paid. And getting paid means working. So those 15 hours a week I was putting in to grow the now conservative-leaning nerd club were an unpaid waste of time. Paid in experience and all that. Paid in nothing.

And then there's those ten years on-and-off I've spent writing a novel. An immensely gratifying, insightful, and expressive experience that's downright chock-full of creative juices (so says I, anyway). But I wasn't paid a cent to do it. And my dissertation, for God's sake! Almost \$300 out of my pocket for that thing to be open access, and what do I get? The lovely librarian at NYU Bobst gave me a "kudos!" so I guess, in some ways, that's payment. Is it still "work" when it's unpaid, rejection after rejection from literary agents, hour after hour typing my big, big moods into sublimated Substack posts on my crusty keyboard, with no end in sight to this Sisyphean hellscape? While my 800-word AI-powered briefs on work-life balances and Casual Fridays and breakfast-time protein pay my bills, even though they leave me more unfulfilled than... than a stomach with no protein at breakfast time?

What it all comes down to is this. I know that I need to rethink all these preconceived ideas I have about work – my work in particular. According to my analyst, anyway. What qualifies as work (to me), how imaginative I get to be as I'm doing it, where it will get me. I haven't been doing this whole "writing for a living" thing for that long, but as far as I can self-report, my thoughtfulness and emotionality render my frustration tolerance extraordinarily low. I'm entitled to a paycheck for my passions! I worked hard to get here! So says every other millennial asking for a raise one year into a job, I suppose. But it's about so much more. It's about living in a world in which I'm taken seriously. Or, in the cringe-worthy way the kids these days phrase it, that I'm "seen and heard" (what can I say? My dad traveled a lot for work). A world in which the bounty of ideas, thoughts, and viewpoints I have can create more curious people, a world where people start to think a little differently about what they assumed they once knew. And it'd be great to get paid for it, but I'm trying my hardest not to get so hung up on that. Maybe my aspirations are a little childish, but I want to work out my

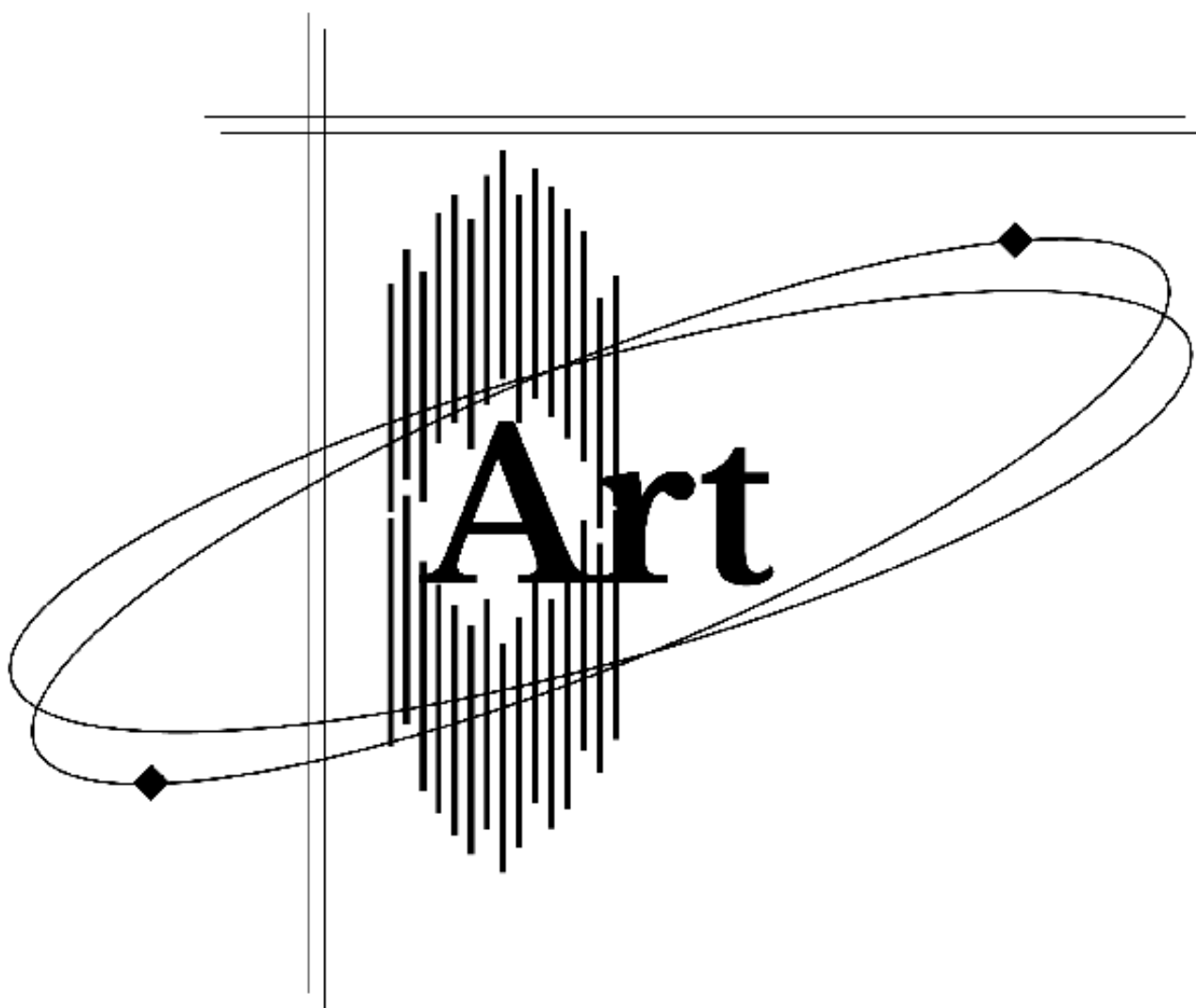
issues so I can help humanity work on its issues, too. I want to support myself using the only two tools that have unconditionally served me thus far in life: the metaphorical introspection hamster frantically running on his wheel to nowhere, clattering around my maudlin, mushy skull, and the throbbing muscles on my humidity-inflated, tattooed fingers, slamming against my potato chip keyboard. I want to make Garfield as proud as I want to make my parents, my fiancé, my analyst, myself. And if I'm getting there, I'll be the last to know – I always am.

The lizard has left his union break. I suppose now it's time to leave mine. Though I'm always on the clock, am I not?

"I worked hard to get here!"

You know what?... I think I really did!

Sara London is an author/freelancer who produces content for a global client base. Her first book, *The Performance Therapist and Authentic Therapeutic Identity*, was released in August 2023 with Routledge. She is currently working on her second book for Routledge about psychoanalysis and the occult. Her work has been published in outlets such as *Twist & Twain*, *The Inquisitive Eater*, *Adelaide Literary Journal*, *Psychology Today*, and *Full Force Magazine*. She is also a shortlist winner of Adelaide Literary Contest Awards' Fiction Prize and *Cult Magazine's* Don Delillo Literary Lottery.



“Primordial Dream”

Rosemarie Dalgliesh, Ottawa: *Primordial Dream*.

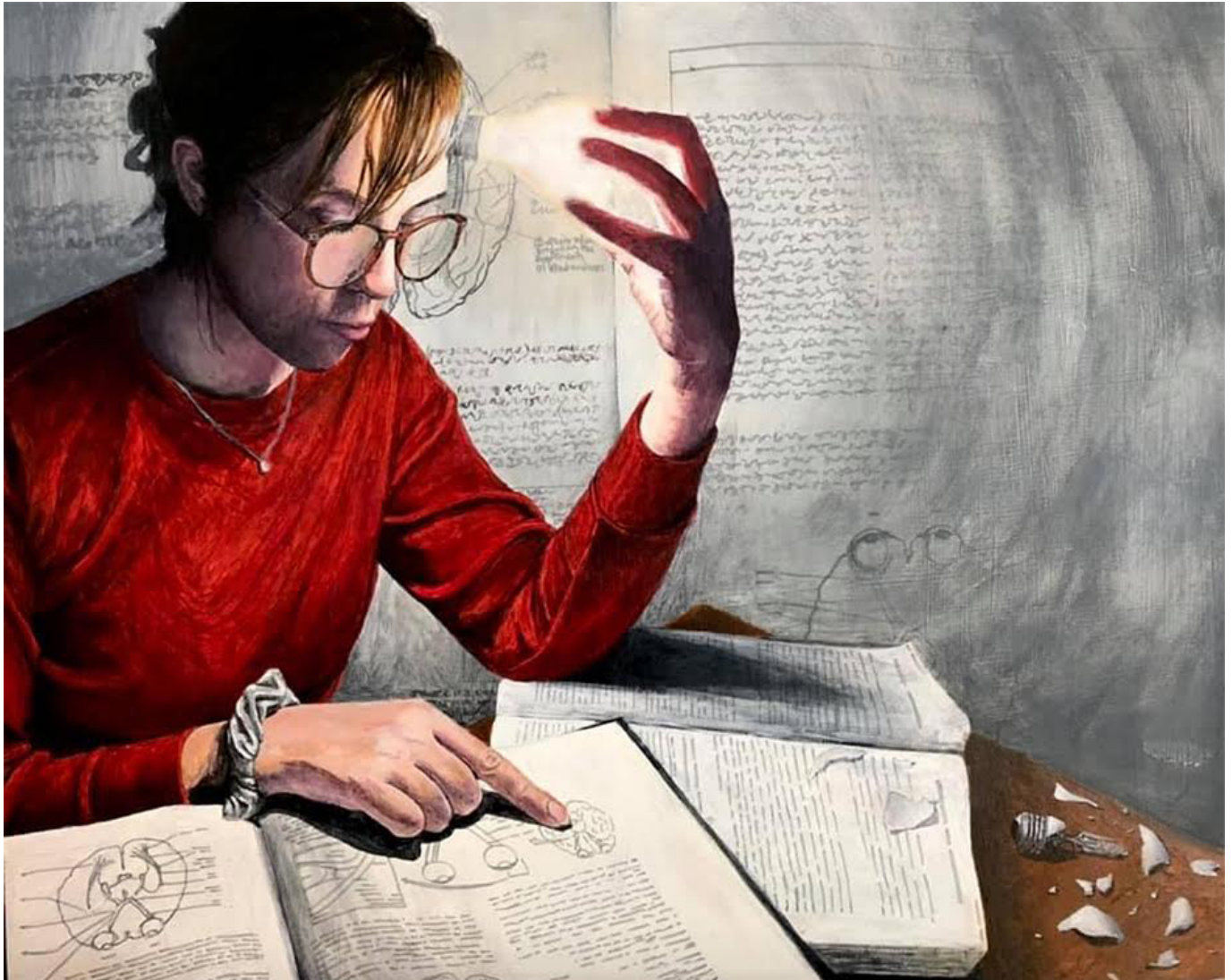


In this painting entitled "Primordial Dream", I am exploring the relationship of psyche to the physical world through the material elements of art that suggest our living, creative connection to nature. The creative process itself can unlock surprising new meanings and correlatives stemming from the unconscious – and this often produces the sense that new worlds are being accessed which enrich our perceptions.

Rosemarie Dalgliesh is a visual artist in Ottawa, Canada. She paints in oils, acrylic, and watercolour. She studied art with Canadian painters Ken Finch, Pat Durr, and Susan Feindel, as well as at the University of Ottawa, and the Ottawa School of Art. For her, a painting works when it seems to have its own momentum, in a form that contains unexpected suggestions. Her work has been exhibited in many different venues in the Ottawa area, and her work is also in many private collections in Canada and the U.S.

“Lightbulb Moment”

Jax Perry, Boston: *Lightbulb Moment*.



Jax Perry is a Boston-based artist who utilizes paint as a vehicle for storytelling, while often blurring the boundaries between realism and surrealism. Alongside his artistic pursuits, he works as a research lab manager in the division of Hematology and Oncology at Boston Children's Hospital and Harvard. His paintings attempt to capture moments and weave a narrative.

“Harriet Chick Head”

Robyn Braun, Alberta: *Harriet Chick Head*.



Robyn Braun earned her MFA from the University of British Columbia's School of Creative Writing in 2022, and her novella, *The Head*, was released with Enfield and Wizenty in spring 2024. Her piece is of Dr. Harriette Chick, a British biochemist whose research on vitamins during WWI was groundbreaking for biochemistry.

“Caught on Barbed Wire”

JC Henderson, Texas: *Caught on Barbed Wire*.



JC Chen Henderson publishes fiction, poetry, and visual art in literary reviews and poetry magazines. Her work appears in journals such as *Fourteen Hills*, *Poetry East*, *Sunspot Literary Journal*, *Freshwater Review*, *The Pointed Circle*, *The Clackamas Review*, and *SLANT*, to name a few. Henderson strives to express spirituality and sexuality in her work. She has sold hundreds of her paintings.

“Transport 14.42.22”

by Caishan Lyu

My creative process often draws inspiration from natural phenomena or the extended knowledge derived from them. My exploration focuses on the sonic realm inherent in terrains, investigating how it evolves during journeys across different landscapes. When it comes to natural landscapes, humans are always obsessed with the terrains that we have gained knowledge of while the farthest humans could reach is beyond limits.

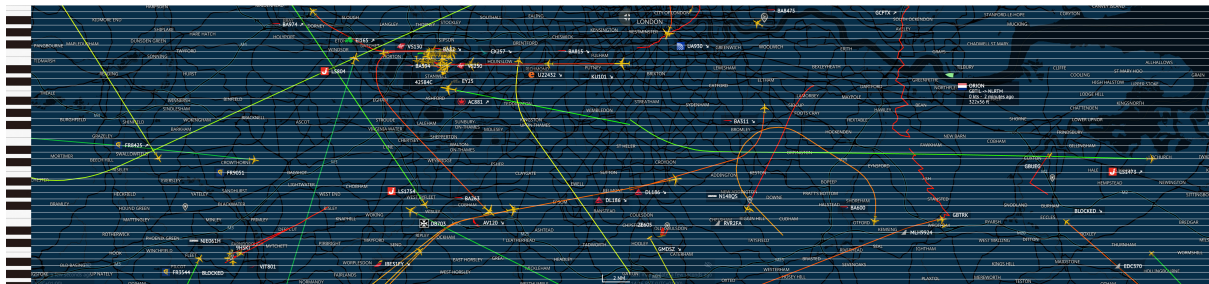
When I extend from the ready-known domains of knowledge, attempting to explore aspects of recognition untouched through the way of visual or auditory creation, the experience is the creation of new perception, or knowledge.

The human fascination with the sky persists, even in an era where air travel has become commonplace. Often regarded as a mundane aspect of daily life in the realm of transportation, the more flight travels expand through globe, the harder we come to realise the enormous number of trips to another destination take place in the sky at the same time. The underlying rules of transportation, the societal functioning, are frequently overlooked. These essential rules comprise invisible networks and wireless signals that facilitate the exchange of information through language and audio.

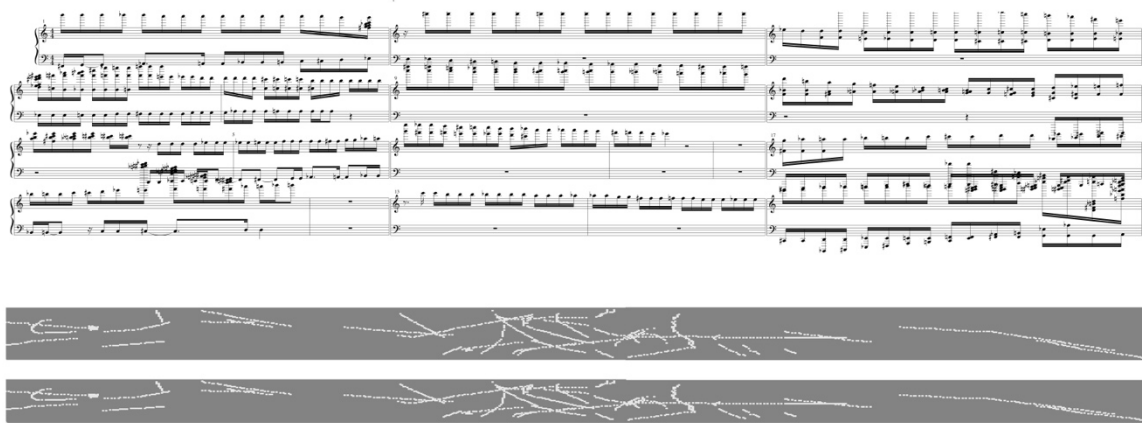
I capture the flight routes on a latitude where London is based in.

This one certain moment: 24th Oct, 14.22pm

After putting them together, there shows a full range view of flight traces as a circle.



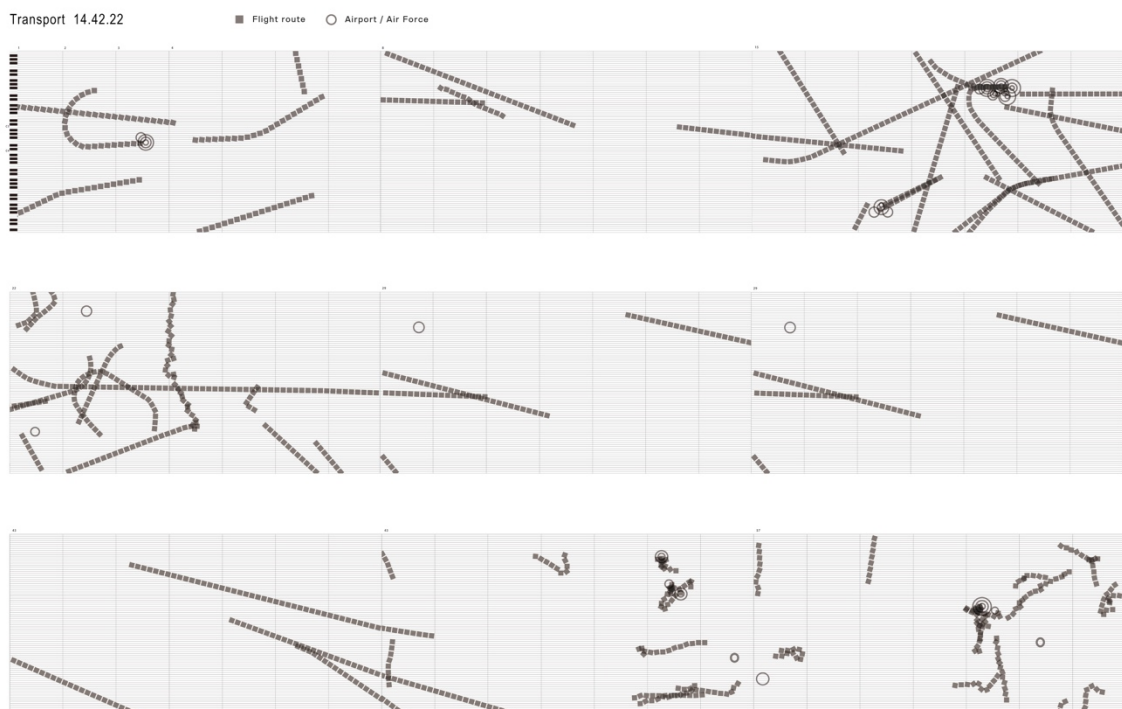
The routes can be covered by the region of the piano roll in composition software, so as to correspond the routes with beats and pitch. In this way, the map of flight transport can be transformed into a music score presenting a panoramic view of the synchronized movement of humanity's vast trajectories.



The process of transformation

The research integrates physical, architectural, and acoustic qualities, drawing parallels between the mapping of flight routes and the structure of music-making.

The routes of flights are the outcomes of meticulous plans and arrangement, maximizing the utilization of time and routes in alignment with the tendencies of people's travel. This mapping attends to architectural environments in the sky as containers as well as modulators of activities within universal landscape. Beyond the context of transport regulations, the visual representation set the stage for encounters with acoustic agencies – that through the language of translation and scoring, to correlate the density of transportation at different terrains with auditory intensity. Scoring of transportation, airspace is a composition on the sky space as a blank-sheet.



This creation is a process continued on experimental music making and performing transportation space. The flight data extracted representing the regulations of social migration and circulation of information was simplified under the form of lines and notes, so as the mass perception, going through stimulation of new sensory experience.

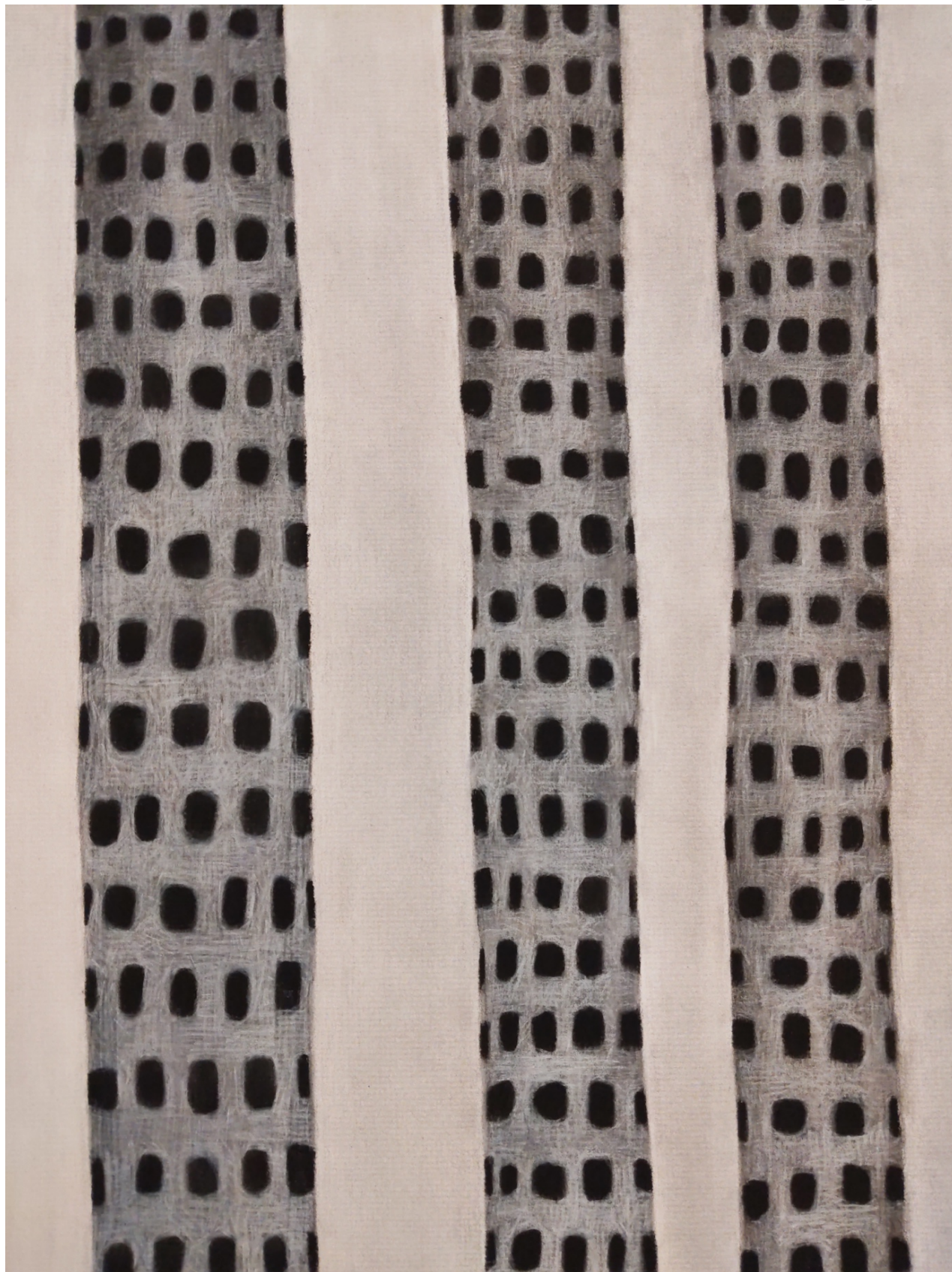
Here I seek the mutual transformation between Knowledge and Creativity.

* * *

Caishan Lyu is an artist based in London. She has a MA from University of the Arts London, specialised in fine art. She is passionate for art practice and cultural research, and has been dedicated to creating interactive sound installations and composition. She conducts research on social situations of citizens in the post-modern period and uses cross-disciplinary methods to create experiences. She has taken part in group exhibitions and worked in art museums and galleries.

“Meditation on Ground and Surface”

Gretchen Seifert, Vermont: *Meditation on Ground and Surface*. Charcoal on paper.



This piece is called "Meditation on Ground and Surface." It comes from the experience of looking beyond the surface experience of body, thought, and emotion into the Ground of Being. I am interested in how art can depict the conscious act of having these experiences simultaneously.

I draw my work from emotion and intuition, working with trauma triggers as they sit in my emotional body. I also work with my practice of seeking the whole in the parts of life, knowing on the deepest level we as human beings share more than we differ.

* * *

Gretchen Seifert is an artist and musician living in Vermont, USA. She is mostly interested in symbolic and experimental work. She received a Bachelor and Master's in cello performance after having grown up surrounded by experimental music in the 60's and 70's. She is a self-taught visual artist and has shown in the Chicago area and in her hometown of Vermont.



Poetry



“On the Connexion of the Physical Sciences”

by Alicia Sometimes

Mary Somerville, 1858

i.

when the particles of elastic bodies
are suddenly disturbed by impulse
 they return to their natural position:
 elasticity, form, modes of aggregation
 uniting the body

oscillations are communicated to the air
propagated to a distance

laws of co-existing undulations:
the whole string and each of its aliquot parts
 independent states
 notes are heard simultaneously
 not only
 in the air, but ear
 vibrating in unison at the same instant

you, curling your words as you sing
 me, joy in the next room, soundless

ii.

innumerable stars
clusters in one blaze
 strange mathematical forms
incomprehensibility of their nature

thin and airy phantoms vanish in the distance
each star must then be a sun

myriad of bodies wandering aimless
 we are only limited
 by imperfection of our instruments

impossible not to see you
 against the marrow of night

a rotatory or revolving motion
 how we circumnavigate galaxies
 each moment of tenderness
symmetrical curve
 our own centre of gravity

Dunhuang Star Atlas, c700 **

mere millennia
doesn't detach constellations
or render them unreadable:

the world's oldest star atlas
 hour-angled
 coiled night sky
acute asterisms on paper scroll

still distinct, discernible
its polar chart compositions
degrees of meridian
 midnight navigating
tracking time, predicting accuracy
destinations to slim portals of time

knowing we too are astronomers
existing beyond traces of lined ink

but after
 many, many, thousands
 of millennia
even this atlas will be returned to dust
resplendent galaxies won't recognise us

 we will gaze up
with our altar of ancient maps
at the drifting face of the universe
 and this time
no-one will be able to blink back

Alicia Sometimes is a writer and broadcaster. She has performed her spoken word and poetry at many venues, festivals and events around the world. Her poems have been in *Best Australian Science Writing*, *Best Australian Poems* and many more. In 2023 she received ANAT's Synapse Artist Residency and co-created an art installation for Science Gallery Melbourne's exhibition, *Dark Matters*.

**On the Connexion of the Physical Sciences* was one of the best-selling science books of the nineteenth century. It is considered one of the first popular science texts, delving into many aspects of the known science at the time. Somerville published this book after her very successful publication, *Mechanism of the Heavens* came out in 1831 (a translation and interpretation of Laplace's *Mécanique Céleste*). Somerville's lines on strings comes with the duality of talking about the physical as well as the subatomic. My main aim was to express her sharp insight while capturing the poetic nature of her communication.

“compass seen” and “unsilencing beam”

by Jay Horan

compass seen



compass seen domains stream
 thousands of shadow emotions
 from ancient ✧ mosaic grains
 a milliard and a milliard
 a compass an emotion
 emotion a compass
 domains stream
 direction seen
 portal beam
 reconducted
 reconstructed
 streaming domain
 beaming portal
 crafting seen



i sustain what i engrain
 i engrain what i sustain
 crafting strings
 ✧ crafting seen ✧
 ✧ crafting channels ✧
 unbreakable grains
 inerasable grains
 open domains
 of tranquil streams
 and with my anew compass
 ✧ quadrant tranquil stream of the unseen ✧
 ✧ opening ✧ domains ✧
 ✧ revealing ancient grains! ✧
 ✧ compass seen ✧



unsilencing beam

✧
ocean motion
domains of notions
now listen!
✧ ✧
my compass hears silence
my compass feels pain
hearing silence
silence seen
spoken silence
silence been
my compass turns anew
sensing grains in greatest pain
the compass has spoken their silence
unsilencing their pain
motion notion
ocean silent tears
✧ ✧
oh compass of silence and pain
keys and celestial threads
now scream!
beam
✧

Jay Horan is a published author, a handcraft artist, musician, and videographer. Horan experiments with creative methods to process emotions and interpretations from life experiences, dreams, artefacts, symbols, the sciences and natural environments. From Xi'an to Wadi Rum, he travels between the Far East and the Far West, intrigued by mysteries of the unsensed and unseen worlds, exploring ancient sites, cultures, folklores and the wilderness, inspiring his creative practice and imagination. He presented his poetry work at the London Arts-Based Research Centre and OPSITARA in Invercargill, New Zealand. Horan lived in several countries throughout his lifetime. He resides in New Zealand. He published his poetry compilations in *Dossiers of Solace Tales*, a surreal fusion of Horan's correlation of creative practices in an abstract, unconventional, esoteric written form. *Dossiers of Solace Tales* is available on Amazon.

“Neurogenesis” and “Hibernation”

by Daniel Boland

Neurogenesis

Today write
only with your left hand –
awkwardly scrawl your shadow’s name
on the blank page.

Try to learn some Latin words.
Try out a smattering of French phrases.

Try to work on feeling and sensing.
Focus on the candle flame
of inferior functions.

Learn all the planets within.
Look at yellowed maps and atlases.

Make a bean soup
perfumed with bay leaf
and the past.

Prime the pump.
Clean the gutters.

Clear out a few new neural pathways
like shovelling away the early snow.

If you persist
hypnagogic visions may appear
as you slip into slumber.

Perhaps you will catch a glimpse
of a well-appointed downtown edifice –
well-columned, well-marbled.

The seasoned and weathered limestone
is always aging
always a work in progress.

A peregrine falcon roosts
beside the gargoyles.

There is an elaborate doorway
with deco designs.

Do you remember who is waiting inside?

Visit that brand new
ancient world.

Hibernation

The solstice snow is a wet, heavy shroud.

Theseus and the Minotaur are under there
struggling in an icy labyrinth.
Your childhood too.
Everyone from the past
all the dear departed
are paralyzed beneath its mass
held in a perpetual state of REM –
awaiting the new birth.

There must be a basket of solar apples
for all of them
golden as Ariadne's hair.
Place each one reverently, like a planet,
upon the evergreen boughs.

This is the deep body sleep of Ursa Major:
a cave of hermetic talking bears
wear paper crowns
sip on herbal teas
play cards
and quietly ruminate
over the cold porridge of the year —
lamenting labours not performed
in time for winter.

Above them,
the little strawberry jam-breasted finches
hopefully seek desiccated fruit
upon the woody wraiths of shrubs.

And someone scatters salt like seed
upon the threshold.

Daniel Boland is a poet, writer, and teacher living in Ottawa, Canada. His work has appeared in many journals in Canada, The U.S., and the U.K. including *Orbis*, *Acumen*, *The Antigonish Review*, *The Saranac Review*, *Canary*, and the *Prairie Journal of Canadian Literature*. Two of his poems were included in the anthology *The Heart is Improvisational* (Guernica Editions, 2017). He has two full-length published collections of poetry, *Toward the Chrysalis* (2005) and *Detours* (2014), both published by Ottawa's Stone Flower Press.

“Cymatic”

by Clela Reed

“Every molecule has a unique frequency signature,
which all creation is based upon. ...This vibrational
phenomena is known as cymatics. We humans carry
these frequencies within us and we use them to express
ourselves ...” Dr. Willard Van de Bogart

I carry my tunes in my head,
flitting melodies that rise from some
hatching place in my brain.
When they are insistent enough, I hum
them into the voice memo of my phone
as though by capturing them there—
like fireflies in a jar—I can revisit them
while emptying the sky for more flashes.

*It's rather a family thing, I think:
My grandmother in her boarding
house kitchen hummed wisps of her
own fleeting tunes, my mother
at her sewing machine whistled with gusto,
my lumberjack dad played harmonica,
and my son—finally someone trained—
composed music that won competitions.*

Each molecule has its own frequency,
we're told, so hedges and hellebores,
hummingbirds and humans—all
embody throngs of vibrations, which
according to theory, help humans
pattern speech, invent music.
From such throbbings come arias,
concertos, sonnets, lullabies,
and sometimes just a tune
hummed softly into a phone.

Clela Reed is the author of seven collections of poetry. The most recent, *Silk* (Evening Street Press, 2019), won the Helen Kay Chapbook Prize and then the 2020 Georgia Author of the Year in chapbook competition. A Pushcart Prize nominee, she has had poems published in *The Cortland Review*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *The Atlanta Review*, *Valparaiso Review*, and many others. A former English teacher and Peace Corps volunteer, when not traveling or shooing deer from her garden, she lives and writes with her husband in their woodland home near Athens, Georgia.

“An Unrequited Love Poem to Poetry” and “Fragile Dream”

by Glenda Cimino

An Unrequited Love Poem to Poetry

Oh, Poetry! You make it hard
to love you. No bard can take
such a rake, please such a
tease. You dazzle me, flash away
before I touch you –
whisper rich secrets, the world's
hopes and regrets, in my ear
when I am falling asleep at night –
but morning finds me awake,
you in flight, without warning.

Sometimes at dawn I hear you go,
lilting past my window in another's
song. When I most long to possess you,
I cannot find you at all; when
I endeavour to forget you
forever, you call. If I find you
in the words of another,
I am a jealous lover, though
I must admire those who capture
you, for a moment or an hour.

I have found you've
quite a reputation round this town.
I have heard your history
in pubs from bores who drool
over how you seduced some
poor fool or another, who
thought he had you on a string,
but couldn't keep you. What
a shame, all the aesthetic
crimes committed in your name!

Many claim that they have loved you.
Most at least boast that they've made
your acquaintance, but few of these
even know you by sight. What a delight
it would be to spurn you in turn,
not yield; but my fate is sealed.
I will listen for your occasional knocks
and no locks will bar my portals; though
Poetry, I know you'll never stay
with any of us mortals.

Fragile Dream

[for Philip Casey, 1950-2018]

He offered me
a 'love angle'
made of glass
a broken piece
of a larger glass object.

Its beauty nearly
brought me to tears.
I confessed to him
how tired I was
of being lonely.

He showed me
a beautiful glass ship,
a mobile
someone had made
from other broken pieces.

I admired it, all the time
wondering
why others could make art
of all their broken pieces
and I could not.

Glenda Cimino was born in Atlanta, Georgia, and graduated from New College in Florida and Columbia University in New York before moving to Ireland, her home since 1972, where she has a daughter and three grandchildren. She has been writing since she was six. Her first published poem was in a school paper when she was 15. She has a collection, *Cicada*, published in 1987. Her poetry has been published in Ireland, the UK, the US, and Japan. She is on the National Committee of the Irish Writers Union, a professional member of the Irish Writers Centre, a member of the NUJ, Haiku Ireland, the Pepperpots Haibun group, and the Bealtaine poets. She has also written, directed and produced award-winning plays and films.

Cimino's poetry appears in various anthologies, such as *Bealtaine Third Anthology*, 2021; *The Cottage of Visions*, Genjuan, International Haibun contest, July 2021; *IHJ*, *International Haibun Journal*, 2019; *Even the Daybreak*, Salmon Publishing, 2016; *Stone after Stone*, a haiku anthology, Dublin, 2016; *The White Page*, Salmon Publishing, 2007; *Seeing the Wood and the Trees*, Cairde na Coille, 2003; *Eigse Laoghaire Multicultural Arts*, poetry pamphlet, ed. Veronica Heywood; *First Poets of New College*, Dively Press, 2015, Sarasota, Fl, USA.; *Other Voices*, 1993.

“Occasionally Now”

by Luke Janicki

I go to bed occasionally now
without praying,

sit on the edge
of my nonprayer
like a vortex,

whirl into sundry ceilings
and inmost flecks
of darkness,

wonder what else
I might call this – a mood,
a picture frame.

The glass is removed
and the images shuffled
on the table, so perhaps –
a wooden sculpture.

Last week, a meteorologist
called the rain on its way to Seattle
an atmospheric river,

but we all knew it was
still rain

and that
sleep settles storms better
than the named or the
unnamed ever did.

It is possible that
Goethe's restive intellectual,
reeling through striations
and stars, was simply
a boy sitting.

Occasionally now,
I look into moving voids,
back too much time to tell,
and call this poem
a nonprayer,

but we all knew
what it was.

* * *

Luke Janicki lives in Seattle, Washington. He has published poetry in *Trampset*, *Apricot Press*, *Dipity Literary Magazine*, *Quarter Press*, *Floating Bridge Press*, and other publications. He holds a B.A. in English Literature and Spanish from Gonzaga University and an M.Ed. from the University of Notre Dame.

“Lens of Consciousness”

by Don Ray

Great swirling Purpose carries us along,
a rippling wave of existence born of rippling nothingness of space-time,
the conditions of reality obeying the edicts of math and laws of physics.
Source and Sustainer
playing the strings of nothingness,
great voids of potential bursting into being,
rippling waves arising on the dark sea of pure nothingness,
Creation ongoing in the darting fan-dance of virtual particles,
quantum reality giving body to God,
All from nothing,
each a part of the whole,
each connected,
each a tiny segment of the vibrating strings of dimensions,
chords of time and space plucked by energy,
physical existence fleetingly appearing when waves briefly stand in resonance,
and there, a flash, a spark in the darkness,
consciousness! Born of and part of the One Consciousness,
an assemblage of harmonies and resonance,
intertwined particles and fields,
and there,
 in a flash,
the essence of the One Source
now made individual,
 a unit of awareness,
 seeing,
 absorbing information,
 born of and part of Source,
the individual conscious being,
 now furthering creation,
the rippling existence of physical reality
 now observing itself,
 and modifying itself.
The potential of the time and space and swirling universe
 now focused to a point,
 through which, as if a lens,
passes knowledge and learning and facts and patterns,
 to emerge as invention and art and thought.

Don Ray: Degrees in physics. A career in semiconductor development. Publications in technical journals. I've no business making poetry submissions. Curiosity about the nature of physical reality led to studies in physics, but that curiosity is not content to stop at mundane physical reality, hence my explorations of the nature and meaning of Life and consciousness that arise from that physical reality. That exploration has taken me from the seas around Papua New Guinea to the mountains of Kurdistan, and provided time with CEO's and tribal chiefs. It has all, even the losses and pain, been a blessing, and revealed that the Mystery itself – our capacity to question – is more important than our illusory answers and explanations.

“Puerto Banus”

by Riley Forsythe

*The ocean floor is hidden
From your viewing lens
A depth perception
Languished in the night*

— from “Cygnus...Vismund Cygnus” by *The Mars Volta*

On the first night, the moon blazed insistently.

Persistently. Invasively bright

like an optometrist’s penknife torch
raiding behind our eyeballs.

We fell onto the beach

lured by the shore despite planesick
hunger, waded our way into the
lapping waves searching but
the ocean floor is hidden

I snapped frantically to
capture the moon’s sullen
beauty pouting with a device
primarily used to buzz bad news alerts about

ageing parents

my siblings’ children aching

against the stacked deck they’ve been dealt.

I turn to you, faux coy and
wonder how I will appear
from your viewing lens

We both ignored the music and laughter

bouncing off the sand from a distant
nightclub. We ignored the beats of the past.
Your fingers brushed against mine but I didn't take
your hand, choosing to thrust my
phone up to the night so the moon could mock
my weedy attempts to harness its image
which no one can own or tame. I pulled
back from the space we raced towards
assembling the week's priorities, glibly noted
a depth perception

that had failed. We shouldn't have gone.
I know I know
it was selfish and it was stupid and it
was dangerous or at the very least reckless
but on that beach, defiantly guilty and
wholly unrepentant, our sorrows
languished in the night

Riley Forsythe is an emerging writer, most recently published on the *Dear Damsels* website for their Wisdom theme. Themes seen across their work include addiction / recovery, the intensity of quasi-romantic friendships, alienation caused by technology, and the celebration of words and sounds. She has an MA in Creative Writing from London Metropolitan University, as well as being an enthusiastic graduate of the Write Like A Grrrl programme.

three poems
by Warren Czapa

*OutcomePhaseProcess:Ch
Aosasthebluelinewhichsur
roundsyouruniverse(splitst
oneembeddedinVoid)sep
erate&Watchingyetstruggl
ingtofocus(onebyOne)twel
veElementalsArrangedasIf
WaitingtoFight(athinglow*

*ProcessOutcomePhase:H
ums&Hissescombined&Sy
nthesisresulting(OldRecyc
ledAir)SixthroatRingscons
trictingorrelaxing(yestheni
ghtOccluded)aUniverseYe
ar&Psyche(movementsvol
untaryfixedthenoptional)*

*PhaseOutcomeProcess:Pi
onicElectromagnetic&We
akNuclearForcesIntermed
iary&Balanced(watersym
bolicFire&air)bound&gro
undedsynthetically+gravit
ational(radiationinteractin
g)Heavenlyflamedinvisi-*

Warren Czapa lives and works in London. His poems have been published by *Magma, Ambit, Perverse, Anthropocene, Burning House Press, Black Bough, Poetry Bus, Verve* and *Babel Tower Notice Board*. His work has been longlisted for the Troubadour International Poetry Prize and commended in the Verve Festival Poetry competition. He holds an MA in Creative Writing.

These poems form part of a sequence investigating the creative potential of techniques of letter manipulation which date from the classical historical period.

“Jargon”
by Adam L. R. Summers

Pleomorphic calcifications
BI-RADS scores and biopsies –
a new language, vocabulary
derived from futuristic jargon
borrowed from the dead. In her head,
they swirl in concentric rings,
circumscribing her by slices
through the heart, mid-sagittal
transverse, perverse and magical
suggesting future miracles,
making good on threats today
consent forms, because these rays
cause cancer – could there be more
coerced an answer than go ahead,
more ironic a prayer in
any parlance – "findings unremarkable"

* * *

Adam L. R. Summers is a family man who works as a clinical scientist, reads cosmology for fun, and writes poetry to make sense of it all. His writing focuses on the intersections of time, family, privilege, life, and death. Adam's work recently appeared or is forthcoming from *Reworded Lit Mag*, *Moonstone Arts Center*, and *Wingless Dreamer*. He lives with his wife, children, and too many pets on California's Humboldt coast.

“English Limits”

by Alex Van Huynh

Holy prism –
 Annihilation held in parity
 By one instance of pure decision –
 This middling existence, the human
 Condition, yet has lights flashed and flooded
 Out onto the perfect mating arrays –
 Law of First Suffering, Law of Second
 Suffering. The infinite bind with ends
 And amaranth, pains of beginnings,
 Genesis – the shooting earth wells up!
 She with a boy would be most beautiful –
 These, man’s casting words, creative action
 Regenerates fair regeneration –
 Encounter the monstrous white wail and I
 Become uncared for, each their rending
 From once clothed in oranges and whites –
 To what object or bare-eyed living thing
 Has her soul fled? One child-hour forever
 Consecrates the daylight and dark terrors
 Time makes up – question my utility
 Or art, English limits pushing in
 On me as the full force of a son –
 Words are wrested by his unspeaking lips,
 All sensation newly incredible.
 Our burgeoning, our scourge, naked body
 By wild moons holds disappearing appeal.
 Topaz in perfect unfaithfulness
 Set chainless around your little neck,
 Marked kisses there contused against the lace,
 Dressed wishes come true to some younger man –
 Many half potentials wasted on you,
 Fawn-features and decidedly thin legs.
 Feel the ergoline heart move – stopping
 Moments, one love a lifetime once more
 Truly happens that we repeat ourselves
 But never long.

* * *

Dr. Alex Van Huynh received his Ph.D. in Biology from Lehigh University and is currently an assistant professor of biology at DeSales University. His poetry can be found in multiple literary journals and his first full-length collection, *Inquiry*, was published in 2023.

“Virginia”
by Peter Austin

When Virginia walked into the river,
Too loaded down by cobbles to have floated
Her suicide note was grossly misquoted
By *Time Magazine*. ‘I cannot forgive her
For surrendering to wartime malaise,’
Responded a self-satisfied archdeacon:
‘Shall we follow suit and helplessly weaken,
Step, arms raised, into the Hadean blaze?’

‘Not so...!’ *Time*, Leonard shot back, had distorted
Terror at the approach of insanity
Into purely onanistic vanity:
Were they proud at having thus misreported...?
Further deepening the article’s stain,
Next week, unmended, it appeared again.

[Virginia Woolf took her life in March,
1941. It was her note addressed to her
husband Leonard that *Time Magazine*
egregiously misquoted. It is now thought
that she suffered from bipolar disorder.
Among her antecedents and relatives,
mental illness was common.]

* * *

Peter Austin is a retired professor of English who spends his time writing stage plays for young people and poems for adults. Of his second collection, X. J. Kennedy (winner of the Robert Frost award for lifetime contribution to poetry) said, ‘He must be one of the best living exponents of the fine old art of rhyming and scanning in English.’

“Index”

by Diane Raptosh

Aesthetics in the Age of Reason, America, United States amnesia, *See also*:
 trance amnesia, animal magnetism, autonomic nervous system, Baldwin’s
Tell It on the Mountain, *See* Buddha say Cartesian catatonic Descarte state.
 Check it: Chomsky, core and music. *See* *Descartes’ Error*: dualism’s devil.
 Say *dissociative disorder*. Do erotic’s *must-sees*: music’s feeling maze; cite gods’
 harmonic inner language. *See* Goodenough, *see* Lakoff, George, on languaging
 on everlasting arms. *See* Lennon, John imagine Mesmer musicking the wrath.
See nation-state: *see* pain, *see* *The Dissociation of a Personality*. Stop: *see* rage
 as rhythm, *see* science script self: autobiographical semiotic somnambulist song-
 trance: amnesia’s analgesic—religious or secular selfhood. *See* possession-trance;
 transvestite priests video Saint Vincent as Voltaire baits *Candide*. Vygotsky
 DMs Ludwig Wittgenstein. O Wondrous Love; *Yak*, Young James O,
 oh please—now and then bring heartsease as you try and bring us, Slavoj Žižek,
 to zero point: Save us from breaking the waves, from the leaky gaze of the Zuck.

This sonnet shapes many of its specifics from selected items in the index of Judith Becker’s
Deep Listening: Music, Emotion and Trancing.

* * *

Diane Raptosh’s collection *American Amnesiac* (Etruscan Press), was longlisted for the 2013 National Book Award in poetry. The recipient of three fellowships in literature from the Idaho Commission on the Arts, she served as the Boise Poet Laureate (2013) as well as the Idaho Writer-in-Residence (2013-2016). In 2018 she won the Idaho Governor’s Arts Award in Excellence. She teaches literature and creative writing and co-directs the program in Criminal Justice/Prison Studies at the College of Idaho. Her ninth book of poems, *I Eric America*, was published in fall 2024 (Etruscan Press). www.dianeraptosh.com

“Dorothy Wordsworth Bakes a Pie”

by Jackie McClure

"Intensely hot. I made pies in the morning. William went into the wood and altered his poems."

— *from the journal of Dorothy Wordsworth, July 28, 1800.*

It's one way to warm up,
a way to find feeling
in the ends of your fingers:
coring, cutting, peeling,
peeling, peeling, round and round,
one after another, trying to render
one waxy-surfaced apple
raw and skinless,
it's outer covering
reduced to a single spiral.

Every time
the spiral broke mid-apple
she cursed and thought
of William in the wood with words
and then she had to start all over again.
Naked white apples
turned brown, then browner
as they cooked to a muddy mulch
and Dorothy's face grew redder,
hair frizzing electric around the edges of her face,
her apron smudged and stained.
When she was really mad
she started in on the flour,
spitting it, spilling all around the room,
attacking the rolling, finally,
with a vengeance.
But it was when she readied it for the oven that

words came to her.
Words came in a torrent
as she lifted the knife
she'd just wiped on the corner of her apron,
the paring knife, to title this nameless crust,
to let it breathe.
She could barely contain herself
from carving a poem, a broadside,
a novel, a psalm on this page she'd made,
but contain herself she always did,
and shoved it with a sigh,
into the steaming oven.

Jackie McClure writes poetry, fiction, and hybrid graphic poetry. Her twist on the lexical kaleidoscope aims to illuminate commonplace segments of our shared landscapes. She has an M.F.A. from Goddard College and she has published a scattering of poems over the years. She lives in the northwest corner of Washington State in the United States.

“All Is Such and Thus”

by Michael Dufresne

There are buddhas in everything.

A squirrel

strips the armor from a pinecone,
discards it plate by plate as two retrievers
play among the trees.

There are buddhas

in speaking.

You say I don't keep others

in my heart, but I can't seem to keep them
from slipping away.

There are buddhas

in feeling.

A pool of sweat gathers

on my chest as my aching back recounts
all those moments spent lounging
in the massage chair.

There are buddhas

in sitting and forgetting.

We were younger

when we almost were, when your daughter
was a distant dream, far from being
conceived—she is still inconceivable
to me.

There must also be buddhas

in preconceiving.

My bias is my feeling

obliged to both cross and not cross
the street at the same time—guilt follows
me wherever I walk.

Are there buddhas

in believing?

Some mothers ostracize

their “hell-bound” children, whereas others
continue to eat, despite the suffering
it causes, because food taste good,
like memories set on a palate developed
in loneliness.

What buddhas are there

in recalling? The vacant kind, perhaps—
negating, reclining, declining

to speak.

I've recently been struggling
to understand the impact of descendance.

If there are buddhas in everything,
then, by necessity, there are buddhas
in the hatchlings making their way to sea,
in the terrible truth that most will die
before reaching the water.

Notice how
the shuttlecock greets the racket
when you stop asking why—there are buddhas
in this too.

If I were to die
in my sleep, what would it matter
to me?

If there are buddhas in everything,
there are buddhas in the likelihood
of there being no buddhas in anything.

* * *

Michael Dufresne recently graduated from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa with a PhD in Philosophy and is currently a postdoctoral fellow in the Center for Asia Pacific Studies at the University of San Francisco. He is also an occasional poet. His poems have appeared in *Epistemic Literary*, *Unleash Lit*, *The Letter Review*, *Rabbit* and *TPT Magazine*.

“Encompassing”
by Robert Dutton

The great thing about Geometry
Is how you can approach the subject
From so many different angles.

It's totally tubular
To scalene city walls
On a line without a chord

You can jail a perpendicular
Or try to trapezoid in a cage
But never, ever catch the rhombus.

Study that Greek god Isosceles
Or watch the sun's radius
Half-circling the western horizon.

Do you see my point
That there simply is no parallel
To what you can scribe with thy imagination?

No matter how obtuse
Just climb your mind's highest altitude
And look down over geometric planes.

Borrow a compass if you must
Steer clear from the slanted skew
Stay straight and narrow and out of prism.

Avoid the slippery, undefined slope
Stay congruent, and true, and right
Away from oblique, inverse dimensions.

It's pretty radical how Geometry
Reflects so much of what we do in life
Just ask the men and women in the Pentagon.

Don't even give it a secant thought
It lies there with the origin of proportion
Or in the magnitude of the postulates.

Curve and arc your way through
Holding perhaps a kite or hypotenuse
No need for locus pocus, just a pencil or two.

Give homage to Euclid and Archimedes
Newton and Pythagoras
Having provided the cosine, sine, and axis.

Tangentially speaking,
Where would we even go without some base
On which to walk with legs and solid footing?

On which we build boxes filled with boxes
And ask ourselves where has polygon?
Devising equations to solve life's daily problems.

Mathematical supplements to complement
To nourish our interior areas
Spiraling down cylinders and through blood.

* * *

Robert Dutton: Once an educator in the field of behavioral health, I now hammer out home improvements for people in the Omaha, Nebraska area. Additionally, I am employed to make ready furnished apartments and hand over the keys to those seeking such a place. I enjoy a variety of hobbies including bowling, golfing, writing, Scrabbling, woodworking, landscaping, skiing, billiards, cornhole, and much more. I watch far too much television in the winter months, but I find comfort being with wife, daughter, and pup in a warm, cozy room with a fireplace. During warmer months, I rarely sit much at all, and so this makes for a fairly balanced year of activity.

“The Tip of the Crescent Moon” and “Whose Genes Most Mark Me?”

by Joan Leotta

The Tip of the Crescent Moon

Here I sit, with the crescent moon
just outside my window
neatly caged in my windowpane.
My mind turns over facts
about this waning moon
as I note her crescent self
is a bright, strong smile
encouraging me to leap from
facts to fabulous.

I hear her laugh (or is it an owl)
whispering, I think, that
her continual circuit means
that no cage can hold
her especially as muse.
Indeed, soon she's slipped away,
hovering, uncaged over our pond.

It's my turn to smile now
realizing that a list of facts
can seem a cage, a waning
moon can seem a glow
diminished or it can be
a starting point for flight.

So, I leap off of the tip of
that crescent smile
to ponder the wonder and glory
of all the moons I've known
and moons I've yet to see
my mind, like moon,
now moving free.

Whose Genes Most Mark Me?

Villanelle

Gazing at the array of posed family
photos, grandma, unsmiling, catches my eye,
as I wonder whose genes most made me.

Is she fearing what the camera might see
in her or do her eyes ask why
gazing at the array of posed family

each face but hers has smiles for us to see.
One seems more concerned with sky
I wonder, do those genes most mark me?

With my grandma I first saw the sea
yet it's she whose look passes us by
not gazing at the arrayed posed family.

I thought she'd shared all thoughts with me
tho realize now she'd shared less than I.
I wonder do those genes mark me?

Storytelling without revealing the true me,
secrets also dwell beneath my photo smile.
Gazing at the array of posed family
I know whose genes most mark me.

Joan Leotta plays with words on page and stage telling of food, family, and strong women. She is internationally published with essays, poems, short stories, novels. Leotta has been twice nominated for Pushcart Awards and Best of the Net. She was 2022 runner-up in the Robert Frost Competition and has been Poet of the Week on Poetry Super Highway. Her essays, poems, and fiction appear in *Ekphrastic Review*, *Indelible*, *Verse Virtual*, *Gargoyle*, *Highland Park Poetry*, *Silver Birch*, *Yellow Mama*, *Mystery Tribune*, *One Art*, *Ovunque siamo*, *MacQueen's Quinterly*, *Lothlorien Poetry Journal*, *Impspired*, and others. Her poetry chapbooks are *Languid Lusciousness with Lemon and Feathers on Stone*. She is a Board Member of the LABRC, is a regional representative for North Carolina Writers Network, and just retired from the board of the North Carolina Tar Heel Tellers (Story performers). This year she debuted a one-woman show presenting Louisa May Alcott.

“Longhand”

by Margaret D. Stetz

Miss Larson showed our class
 a cursive letter "b"
 that started with a curve
 on top
 and did not launch
 from down be-
 low so I age six
 be-
 gan to weep be-
 side myself, confused,
 my mother
 had been
 teaching me to write
 the alphabet in script
 to go be-
 yond her strict instruction
 felt like a be-
 trayal if
 I could not be-
 lieve
 that all she said
 was right
 then what be-
 came of telling me
 when I did not be-
 have that she
 must beat
 me with my father's
 leather belt?
 my faith in
 what was true
 what I should bear be-
 gan to crumble
 from be-
 neath,
 a liberation...
 caught be-
 tween two lessons
 erasing from the board
 inside me all that came be-
 fore I chose the new
 and different—
 embracing other ways to
 think to write to
 be

Margaret D. Stetz is the Mae and Robert Carter Professor of Women's Studies at the University of Delaware, USA, as well as a widely published poet. Although she has spent her life in the academic world, she remains haunted by her working-class childhood in New York City.

“Axis Mundi”
by Christopher Watson

“Strangers, who are you?”

— *The Odyssey*, Homer

Storming north, on foot, in low, winter light,
shit-mad out of town, staring down waves
of traffic along this shoulder-less road.

And towards what?

Mi querencia?

No where better to go?

Heim, bitte—me-time—*Das Unheimliche?*

Under chamisa clump—

ericameria nauseosus, native emetic, long past its seed;
paired across a valley steeped in creed; yes, we shall smite
thee; roots drinking deep from an oubliette of strontium-90—

my foot meets pillowed ore,
dinglerberry of orogeny,
objet trouvé,

among crisp packets, Tecate tins, and fast-food gore.

This lone, basaltic booger
from some Rio-Grande-rift-ker-choo.

Calcitic slip exposed—

Tighty Whities!

Just look at you!

Like the brain

of a small primate

(or some chunk thereof).

Dried up.

Compacted wrath.

This piss-brown iron crosses my path,

fitting snugly to palm.

So, what to do but swing along?

Imagine lofting it at one of the vehicles whizzing by.

Lump of melted pennies for your displaced thoughts?

A brain, like, in your windshield, *mate?*

Red-tipped stake in a hissing orb.

Charred mast

to weave this *Sea of Aggro*.

In just this way, you and I go...

Man-mountain,

Polyphemus,

Volcano,

a word

in your eye:

home.

Notes:

— *strontium-90*... Chamisa growing in Bayo Canyon, near Los Alamos, New Mexico, exhibit a concentration of radioactive strontium-90 300,000 times higher than a normal plant. Their roots reach into a closed nuclear waste treatment area, mistaking strontium for calcium due to its similar chemical properties. The radioactive shrubs are 'indistinguishable from other shrubs without a Geiger counter.' Cf. Masco, Joseph. *The Nuclear Borderlands: The Manhattan Project in Post-Cold War New Mexico*, pp. 32-3, Princeton University Press, 2006.

— *Hot mast*... In the ninth book of the *Odyssey* (ix.319-23) Odysseus-as-narrator describes the size of the 'great bludgeon' (μέγα ῥόπαλον) he will use to blind the Cyclops as 'about the size of the mast (ἱστὸν) of a cargo carrying / broad black ship of twenty oars which crosses the open / sea (μέγα λαῖτμα; lit. great depth)...' Homer's word for 'mast' (ἱστὸν, from the verb ἵστημι—to stand upright) is also the epic word for 'loom.' Cf. Michael N. Nagler's study *Dread Goddess Revisited* (in *Reading the Odyssey*, ed. Seth Schein, Princeton, 1996), esp. 152-55, where he traces a series of axis symbols ending in Penelope and Odysseus' living, olive tree bed on Ithaca, which Nagler sees as a prime example of 'the "ecological" value in Greek nature-culture mythology.'

— *Man-mountain*... (Cf. *Odyssey*, Homer; 9.190-2)

— *Volcano*... The destruction of the Cyclops' eye in *Odyssey* Book 9 is seen by some as an allegory of Mount Etna, cf. Alwyn Scarth, *Volcanic Origins of the Polyphemus Story in the "Odyssey": A Non-Classicist's Interpretation*, *The Classical World*, Vol. 83, No. 2 (Nov. - Dec., 1989), pp. 89-95.

* * *

Christopher Watson spent his first years in Mexico City, though his roots are in Santa Fe, NM. He studied classics at graduate and post-graduate levels, before living between Barcelona and London. Christopher completed his MFA in creative writing at Middlesex University (UK). He has published in the *Malpais Review*, *Magma Poetry*, *Cagibi* and *Dark Mountain* (among others); and is a volunteer translator for Santa Fe Dreamers Project.

“Carolina Forest Say to Me” and “Welsh Landscape”

by Maura High

Carolina Forest Say to Me

Why so still, they ask,
 why so heavy on the crisp needles
 your crush-grass, moss-wheezy, flopsy limbs?
 You sad?
 Your roots not fingering down
 into the soil and playing
 with stones and small tunnels,
 voles,
 beetle shells?
 Not sifting the crumbled leaves?
 You clomp.
 We is what was planted or what sprouted,
 willy-nilly,
 in a thin topsoil.
 Blown about, swept off, leached soil, ploughed
 by mule and tractor, shattered.
 We rises
 and looks down from our branches
 to you on the leggy grass.
 We flies
 in dirt that's good enough already
 and each year better, all duff, mould-leaf, caked pollen.
 We knows
 otherwise.
 We gives way, takes advantage,
 climbs up and over gravel and spoil heaps,
 we is briars and creeper.
 Water runs through we culverts,
 we climbs up the eyes of wire-mesh fences
 and trickles down.
 We rots, we stumps and stump-holes,
 we years of loblolly needles
 drip and drape and shiver and skitter.
 We trunks spiraled by vines, we vines.
 Say, you come be post oak saplings and yearlings, young cedars
 with us, purple us foxgloves behind this split-rail fence.

Welsh Landscape

I couldn't go in: it wasn't
my place now, the front doorstep
had been scrubbed clean of soot and footprints.
But the dead invited me, so I entered.

There were walls, but the wallpaper
peeled away from them
and changed, now flowers, now
birds. I walked through them,
as one walks through languages,

and out on to the long ridge,
wet grass and stone.
The blackberries were still there,
and my grandfather's tidy rows
of onions and carrots.

They have hindsight, only.
To see us, in this present,
they must walk backward, down
from the hill farms and cemeteries.
Their eyes blink and flicker like moths,
left and right, up, down, sidelong, askance.

They'll say, Be careful now, the flagstones
are slippery, one foot behind the other,
do you remember the way?
The quarry tramroad, the Dowlais tip?

* * *

Maura High is Welsh by birth and upbringing, and after a period teaching in Nigeria, settled in the United States, teaching school, editing, traveling, picking up other languages, working on controlled burns in the southern forests, raising two daughters, and engaging with the local arts and writing community. Her poems draw on those very varied sources of knowledge and inspiration. She has been fortunate in placing poems in *Indelible*, as well as other magazines, anthologies, and chapbooks. Details of publications, awards, and interests are at maurahigh.org.

“How Should I Frame My Painting?”, “Where Have All the Metaphors Gone?”, and “Painting”

by Laura Glenn

How Should I Frame My Painting?

Repainting the porch floor gray,
I glance up to see
I’ve cornered a baby squirrel,
just as I’ve painted myself
into the corner
of another tight space—
my garret: no room
left for me there.

Paintings pile like fears:
After I’m gone
will they be thrown away?
Which ones will be saved? As if
to embalm them,
I frame a few.

I rescued the orphaned squirrel,
who climbed me like a tree,
nestled into my hair—my fuzzy-gray squirrel tail.
Who will rescue me? I could
join Artist’s Anonymous
because I can’t stop painting.
Or I could reframe this
slightly, say I paint because I have to—and
because that’s what artists say.

In this life I squirrel art away.
What good does it do me
to be famous
in a parallel universe? Nothing
is sacred. I am nothing.
Therefore, I am scared.
Mix that into the gloom of days I devote
to ruining a painting—time and paint
down the drain—
when I could be helping

to fix a damaged corner of the world.

I'm fixing a damaged corner
of the painting I'm struggling with,
and the colors
find their unexpected
hues and forms
on the page: liquidity captured
as it dries: releasing shades of endorphins.
Maybe it will make someone happy.

Then on a walk, I find this perfect frame
leaning against a tree
by a free pile—the corners
tightly mitered, not a scratch
to the wood, and it's the right size
for my new artwork,
saved from ruination.

I carry the frame home
and when my arms get tired, hang it
around my neck—
like an albatross.
It might look like I was framed.
But I move briskly
down the street,
an unstoppable self-
portrait in motion.

Where Have All the Metaphors Gone?

Metaphors have abandoned me.
The tumble of papers and books
and such on my desk doesn't remind me of

a vanitas painting—
it lacks a skull.
Stimulation-starved, I search

outside: leaflike bird tracks
on the snow entwine
paw-print blossoms.

Jotting down what I see,
my hands are just hands—electricity
doesn't fly from my fingertips.

My thoughts eddy—
cold, foamy bubbles
caught in a loop, a lacuna of cracked ice.

The sun beams encouragement—
shimmers the snow
with colorful glitter.

Maybe I'll revisit my bygone self
bearing an empty Blue Willow cup—
where past, present, future coexist in a pattern.

I like to think
my future self might fill that cup
with something I can't fit into this poem.

Meanwhile, I borrow
from a list of "orphan lines
that haven't stopped yearning for a home."

Painting

Insensible to the time it keeps,
an old-school watch drifts on a raft,
in flow mode, oarlike
hands under glass.

Tiny Ferris wheel turning: how high
it edges over the jagged curve
of waves, then sinks to the bottom,
past clouds of black squid-ink.

*Rain stops ticking on the roof,
while I dip an oarlike paintbrush into water: watch
the liquid marble pattern dissolve to tincture.*

On the window of paper,

*each hour has a different color.
I borrow from the sunset I can't see,*

*and capture the fluid moment: when it dries
it wasn't what I meant, except for the squiggles
I'll ensky in color later.*

Realizing I've lost
track of time, I return to where
my watch disappeared,
and scavenge soft sand.

Then I see the raft—tethered out of reach—
and given the darkening sky, settle
for the lunar reflection on water—
clock-round, amid wavering

clouds like inky leaks.

* * *

Laura Glenn's book of poems *I Can't Say I'm Lost* was published by FootHills, her chapbook *When the Ice Melts* by Finishing Line Press. Glenn's poems have appeared in many journals and anthologies, including *The Antioch Review*, *Boulevard*, *Cortland Review*, *Dash*, *Epoch*, *Green Mountains Review*, *Healing Muse*, *Hotel Amerika*, *Massachusetts Review*, *Pedestal*, *Poet Lore*, *Smartish Pace*, and *Poetry*. She is the recipient of a CAP fellowship in poetry and a poetry grant from AE Ventures. Also a visual artist, she lives in Ithaca, NY, where she works as a freelance editor.

“Dire Physics” and “Armchair Demolitions”
by Elisabeth Sharber

Dire Physics

We all deserve a cigarette on the beach,
even if it comes from a vulture.

If the world is burning, go to the sea.
Let the smoke wrap watery fingers around yours.
Dance in your own black shape
holding all the spaces light couldn't reach.

Look at us, sharing a moment together
in these loose liminal hours
that creak like a roped bridge in space.

Eden's yellow tape lifts as we press
together the only thing we own,
your name growing like an apple in my mouth.

Look at this joy I've whittled down to,
this radioactive core I've pickaxed
through layers of plaster. This despair
I have practiced letting go of.

Throw your arms beneath me in the ravine
and linger in the grainy overlap
between the psalm and the scream.

Armchair Demolitions

I'd love to blame all the shoddy architecture in the world
on the hurricanes that sweep it up.

When children cling to a door
floating through the parking lot,
no one says
"told you those were weak hinges."

But my favorite way to decorate damage
is returning to the scene of the crime
and saying I shouldn't go there anymore.

We did it every Sunday morning.
Light gleaned the crystal cross,
a pastel blade. Cleansed
in the refracted agony of God.

I pendulum back from my optic nerve
like Eutychus falling from a window.
Wounds glissando
down the ribs.

My therapist blinks.

Do I have the attention span to heal?
Can I make a list of errands
and only get to one of them?

Can I float five minutes
in boredom's oblivion,
viscous and clarion,
and not hate-fuck my brain
at my favorite
screaming
hell rave?

What does space look like
with the violence cleared out?

Where is forward

in the cerulean periphery

where there are no inches

I am waiting
for my fear to die
like a disciple
at an empty grave.

I scrape the dome
of my mouth
to make room
for the ascension
of every voice.

* * *

Elisabeth Sharber is a high school English teacher in Indianapolis, Indiana. She received her BA for writing from Messiah College in 2009 and has been published in *American Aesthetic*, *FLARE*, *Driftwood Press*, *The Chestnut Review*, *Bending Genres*, *Sand Hills*, *CHILLFILTR*, *Pensive*, and *Does It Have Pockets*.

“To Weep in Basque or Finnish”

by Martina Reisz Newberry

How do I forget everything I know
and start over?

My mind wants to be wiped clean
and shiny as a new mirror,

wants another chance at choices
and possibilities.

My mind, anxious as ever, would like
to decide, once again,

whether or not to murder my ex,
whether or not

to throw up my calorie-ridden meals,
whether or not

to take up the writing of execrable poems
(thereby ensuring

a life sentence of self-doubt and
flagellation of the soul).

My mind wants a new vocabulary,
one that doesn't reflect

lost days and fear-infested nights.
I want to learn

to weep in Basque or Finnish.
My mind wants to choose

its own language of loss and longing.
The secret is in how to forget,

then binge-learn the new things from
the heart of the holy

to the shadow of the sacred and
all things in between.

Martina Reisz Newberry is the author of 7 books of poetry. Her most recent book is *Glyphs*, available now from Deerbrook Editions. She is also the author of *Blues for French Roast with Chicory*, available from Deerbrook Editions, the author of *Never Completely Awake* (from Deerbrook Editions), *Where It Goes* (Deerbrook Editions), *Learning by Rote* (Deerbrook Editions), *Running Like a Woman with Her Hair on Fire* (Red Hen Press), and *Take the Long Way Home* (Unsolicited Press).

Newberry has been included in *The Cenacle*, *Cog*, *Blue Nib*, *Braided Way*, *Roanoke Review*, *THAT Literary Review*, *Mortar Magazine*, and many other literary magazines in the U.S. and abroad. Her work is included in the anthologies *Marin Poetry Center Anthology*, *Moontide Press Horror Anthology*, *A Decade of Sundays: L.A.'s Second Sunday Poetry Series-The First Ten Years* and many others.

She has been awarded residencies at Yaddo Colony for the Arts, Djerassi Colony for the Arts, and Anderson Center for Disciplinary Arts.

Passionate in her love for Los Angeles, Martina currently lives there with her husband, Brian, a Media Creative. Her city often is a “player” in her poems.

“Lola Meets Yayoi”

by Dorte Odde

Lola is aiming high
 looking upwards
 up up up
 her voice is singing
 always higher
 touching the sky, look
 she has plumages along her arms
 and Hermes' wings on her boots
 taking her up
 Lola is free as a bird
 melodies in the heights
 travelling she
 donates everything for
 nothing
 absolutely nothing
 in her sunflower seed backpack
 pricks her fingers on the thorns
 of the white rose the things
 she doesn't want to know
 Lola doesn't care being Humpty Dumpty
 Lola thinks she can return on her wings
 up up up
 under her feet
 the white rabbit hole and
 Alice
 go ask Mother Goose, she will know
 feed your head
 the dormouse said
 and Lola is dragged
 by her long blond ponytail
 dragged dragged dragged
 into the rabbit hole
 all the way down
 a tunnel of soil
 down down down
 Lola screams but no-one listens
 down under
 she meets Yayoi
 a zenmaster
 her appearance is

like an ancient oaktree
 her painted pearly skin covers her wrinkles
 she opens and closes her eyes
 bright youngish alligator-sparkling
 sticking out her long lava tongue
 Lola screams and puts her arms up
 up up up
 but nothing happens
 no elevator or escalator
 nothing
 takes her away
 left in the rabbit hole
 alone
 Yayoi takes her hand
 invites her to sit
 looks into her eyes wide open
 you and me, Yayoi says
 we are here together
 put your hand in mine
 whatever it takes
 I will stay here
 with you
 we can build this dream together
 standing strong forever
 between
 a Prunus serrulata and
 a Bonsai 800 years old
 Yayoi is magically making
 emerald green matcha
 tea for two
 the chasen whipping
 wave foams
 she has taken off her mask
 twinkling one spring-green eye
 inviting Lola in on a
 tatami mat
 holding the ceremony
 for two
 Lola doesn't know Japan
 Lola is not afraid of Japan

she is wandering around in Tokyo
alone
Shibuya without money
Lola's face becomes ever-green
thunder in her breast
birds in her brain
her intestines full of
perfectly formed long
shit she is
her body
is shouting:
I am here! Listen to me!
down, down, down
a big fat cobra
coiling up
in her body
round and round and round
a thick rope on the dock
for the ferry
taking all the space
inside and amongst
lever, heart, lungs, uterus, bladder
her organs constipated
the long dry fat scaly body
the snake is slow
running like oil
dark, suddenly, now
a white rabbit
stops, looks at all the darkness
the snakesness, surprised
rapidly
Yayoi sticks her hand down
into Lola
bringing up the snake
in her hand
holding firmly its mouth
the sharp teeth
the bifocal cherrycolored
tongue
sticking out
pulls and pulls and pulls
the snake
up up up
coiling up on the floor

Lola
falling to the ground
like an empty doll
trumpets and daffodils
flowing out of her mouth
chanting with the angels
her hair full of snakes
Yayoi kisses them
kisses, kisses, kisses
all the snakes
they disappear
and Lola herself
becomes a snake
a slender, unpredictable, fuck-you
cobra
full of lust
Yayoi is busy
driving her car
up up up
into Kiso mountains
Hida-Takayama
seven grand-grand children
begging for hugs and gifts
jumping around
greeting her
Obaasan Obaasan Obaasan
eating rice and ramen and noodles
with her family
listening to
the blue bird singing
she jumps into her car
fire on all sides
grand-grand children full of tears
she puts her foot on the pedal
gases up
the yellow car
fast
down the mountain
Yayoi
the Zenmaster
teaching zen in Tenryuji
Kyoto
sticking out her bloody tongue
sparkling emerald eyes

ready for teaching
 Lola
 the innocent girl
 zen meditation
 teaching her
 the way of the underworld
 silently they
 sit and sit and sit
 day after day
 Lola is reminded
 of her mother
 the feeling of abandonment
 it is there
 inside her heart
 insisting on existing
 but she will not
 she will not travel
 to the other side
 she will remain in Tenryuji
 but she is dragged
 to the travel of the sun
 the horizon of the west
 calls her into the night
 leaving the day behind
 Lola screams
 putting up her hands
 screaming to the sky
 feeling so alone
 Yayoi is helping Lola
 travelling through
 the Egyptian night
 Osiris
 the god of death
 helping her to weep
 weep and weep and weep
 swimming in the icecold
 water of Osiris
 helping her to move on
 into the desert
 hot hot hot
 sand
 Lola is walking on dark paths
 not prepared
 Lola finds a lake of fire

burning
 she surrenders
 dies
 seeing all the suffering
 of the world
 Anubis
 the black jackal god
 helping balsamering the dead
 helps her
 finding
 her missing soul
 in her heart
 under the silver moon
 Lola and Toth
 the god of the hieroglyphs
 helps her
 writing writing writing
 is all she does
 Jesus died for somebody's sin
 but not mine
 my sins, my own
 they belong to me
 me
 Lola sings
 writing
 she moves in this atmosphere
 where anything's allowed
 and Khepri the scarab-faced god
 rolls and rolls and rolls
 her shitball full of eggs
 and Yayoi is sticking out
 her bloody tongue
 laughing laughing laughing.

Dorte Odde is a Jungian Analyst, IAAP in private practice in Copenhagen with special focus on art and individuation offering an online program for artists. She is also an imago couples therapist. She holds a Ph.D. in Cultural Sociology, MA in Kierkegaard and Coaching and is trained as a philosophical counsellor. She is the co-founder of Jungian Socioanalysis. She teaches at the Jung Institute, Copenhagen and at NTNU, Norweig, Department of Psychology and is a former member of the study committee at the Jung Institute, Copenhagen. She has been engaged in creative writing for years also cooperating with artists, and more recently started writing poetry. This is her first poem in English.

“Genesis” by Halim Madi

In the beginning God created Adam and Eve and forgot
to spray repellent around the property, broke the lease

told Moses to kill his kid then pulled the godly plug
the blood too thick to drain but not enough to shake

my mother’s faith and so she stakes a tarp under the bridge
of heaven mumble-prays humble me lord, your violence my hearth

may the sting of your cuff line-glisten my old teeth like a mother
of pearls and I get it. I can hear half a century of cigarettes

printing on her fingers gripping paper as she sucks life dyed
with ghosts. This is the daily calumet she calls my dad with –

dead at 34, my uncle, his brother, dead
at 32 two weeks later for god sake, her 28 year old self –

widowed mother of two. In the beginning God created you
and me and forgot to build a dam or give one. Mother in this garden

you took to the machete, slung through nothing. I hear your echo
chamber of Jesus crystal clinking, clink, clink, clean as a whistle

you blow to drown the wailing in violent sound, circus of pain. I gave names
to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field

and I called them all misery, cast them in our carnival, played tamer
when I wanted to be matador, was catcher when I wanted to fly

and the jungle was empty again
full of serpents with teeth

* * *

Halim Madi, a queer Lebanese poet and technologist, merges language with technology and visuals. Published in *Quiet Lightning*, *The Racket*, and *Lunate*, he authored *Flight of the Jaguar* and *In the Name of Scandal*. His work, exploring queerness, hallucinogenic plants, and immigration, is showcased at www.halimmadi.com and [@yallah_halim](https://twitter.com/yallah_halim). He resides in San Francisco.

“Yes We Have No Fava Beans Threshold”

by Gerard Sarnat

Leathery green pods maturing
toward blackish-brown

this boychick avoids sumptuous
seedlings that leak milk

which if ingested would lead
to broken red-blood cells

and quite possibly moi's death.
Such being the exact case

I must OCD what restaurants
might call broad, bell, tic

or horse beans like a plague to
manage G6PD deficiency.

My fragile hemocyte cell walls
are subject to hemolysis

from fever plus pharmaceuticals,
including one preventing

malaria — I came within hours
of starting Primaquine

planning to accompany a son
on his New Guinea trip

to do fieldwork: the diagnosis
of Glucose-6-Phosphate

mutation was made the day
we planned to start Rx

for kyboshed adventure travel
would have ended badly.

Neither daughter has the gene
so no family “favism.”

* * *

Gerard Sarnat has been nominated for the pending 2022 Science Fiction Poetry Association Dwarf Star Award, won San Francisco Poetry's 2020 Contest, the Poetry in the Arts First Place Award plus the Dorfman Prize, and has been nominated for handfuls of 2021 and previous Pushcarts plus Best of the Net Awards. Sarnat is widely published including in 2022 *Awakenings Review*, 2022 *Arts & Cultural Council of Bucks County Celebration*, 2022 *Rio Grande Valley International Poetry Festival Anthology*, *Washington Square/NYU Review*, *The Deronda Review*, *Jewish Writing Project*, *Hong Kong Review*, *Tokyo Poetry Journal*, *Buddhist Poetry Review*, *Gargoyle*, *Main Street Rag*, *New Delta Review*, *Arkansas Review*, *Hamilton-Stone Review*, *Northampton Review*, *New Haven Poetry Institute*, *Texas Review*, *Vonnegut Journal*, *Brooklyn Review*, *San Francisco Magazine*, *Monterey Poetry Review*, *The Los Angeles Review*, and *The New York Times* as well as by Harvard, Stanford, Dartmouth, Penn, Columbia, North Dakota, McMaster and University of Chicago presses. He has authored the collections *Homeless Chronicles*, *Disputes*, *17s*, *Melting the Ice King*. Gerry is a Harvard College and Medical School-trained physician who's built/staffed clinics for the marginalized, Stanford professor and healthcare CEO. Currently he's devoting energy/resources to deal with climate justice, serves on Climate Action Now's board. gerardsarnat.com.

“Covenant” and “Joy Ride”

ekphrastic poems by Paul Jaskunas, with artwork by Warren Linn

Covenant

See the artist summoned
to the blank page. Un-whole,
unkempt, his pieces patched
into form's resemblance.

All the same, an august personage.
Adorned in obsolete maps, scrimshaw, knick-knacks,
shipwreck detritus, mummy wrappings,
manic hieroglyphs.

Let the mass commence.
He gives himself the sign of peace.
A wind blows in, creates a void
where his lungs should breathe.

Or is that shape he cradles
a pair of tablets,
an unread covenant
soon to speak itself into being?

Off stage, his left eye, or Satan's,
or God's keeps watch.
An errant hand points the way
toward his true aim:

time now to turn the page, brave the next,
step inside the waiting emptiness
that is the artist's only property—
his promised land and exodus.

PropertyOf, by Warren Linn



Joy Ride

These wheels will take you places
you had not planned to go.

Rub the sedan's hood
and out pops a Florentine genie
glad to grant you no wishes
but de' Rossi's discounted dreams.
A dime a dozen in the museum shop,
they come with a magician in dreadlocks
and white cotton gloves good for thieving
from wastebins and archives,
city dumps and Vasari's *Lives*.

Don't call this recycling. The car's
a crucible for an alchemist's schemes.
Warren de' Rossi Salviati's at the wheel,
driving headlong into history's dreams.



Francesco De' Rossi's Sedan, by Warren Linn

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

Warren Linn has exhibited nationally and internationally since the mid 1960's. He worked from the 60s through 2010 as an illustrator for a wide range of major North American print media clients. He now focuses on music packaging, books, and art on the wall. Born, reared, schooled (SAIC), and established in Chicago, Linn moved to New York City in 1980, and to Baltimore in 2002 where he is Professor Emeritus at MICA. His work is in fifteen *American Illustration Annuals* (the Book), *The Print & Drawing Collection of the Art Institute of Chicago*, *Crédit Mutuel de Bretagne*, France, and private collections.

“The Hidden Passions of Mathematicians”

by Debra Kaufman

Step into the garden of conjectures and see
 my Julia sets are uniformly perfect.
 Forget your nilpotence and steenrod algebras:
 my theta divisor is very ample.
 In this land of lemmata
 you'll glide with the smoothness of Kelley while I
 gather the perverse
 sheaves and quivers, and we'll dance
 until our zeta functions converge.
 Sipping modular moonshine,
 we'll reach the highest
 eigenvalue without effort.
 In this holomorphic vector field
 with totally degenerate zeros,
 we may even discover
 the essence of chaos.

* * *

Debra Kaufman is the author of the poetry collections *Outwalking the Shadow*, *God Shattered*, *Delicate Thefts*, *The Next Moment*, and *A Certain Light*, as well as three chapbooks, many monologues and short plays, and five full-length plays. She lives in North Carolina.

“Balloon or Soap Bubble” and “Our Unmusical Lives”

by William Doreski

Balloon or Soap Bubble

Today I'll ride in a balloon
or maybe a soap bubble.
The view will ease my conscience
by proving that the worldly world
doesn't require imagination.

Someone more naked than me,
someone who is naked when clothed,
will pilot either the balloon
or the soap bubble, experience
being everything. Coyotes

wail in the dawn. They're mourning
the shrinkage of the wilderness
although they thrive on trash
and unwary domestic pets.
A slice of moon troubles itself

with infinite longing. I press
my body to my spirit and hope
that for once they adhere long enough
to get me through the day without
a drizzle of expensive whiskey.

From the balloon I'll observe
people going about their errands.
From the soap bubble I'll see
daytime ghosts prodding the snow
for bones they've long abandoned.

The pilot of whichever airship
will remain silent as a boulder.
His naked self fuels the flight
so he must remain still enough
to allow his fluids to drain.

When we descend, the landscape
will rise to meet our glory.
I'll alight with a bit of tremor
but the ground will accept me
as plainly as if I'd never left.

Our Unmusical Lives

The lost instruments of childhood
 return to haunt us. An upright
 piano slumps in a corner,
 drooling busted strings. A fat
 old accordion wheezes
 a wisp of polka. A guitar
 cringes, folk in its gene pool.
 A trumpet with stuck valves
 lolls in a box where someone
 concealed it with shame and disgust.

The jazz world would censure us
 for failing to execute music
 sufficient to buoy our little lives.
 The folk world mourns that stale guitar.
 The classical world sighs with relief.
 Maybe these instruments aren't dead
 but only sleeping. You try
 rousing the trumpet and I'll slur
 the piano's dusty keyboard.
 No coherence in the noise
 we spark, not melody wafting
 into the leafless December trees.

Don't bother the accordion,
 deflated for so many years.
 Its occasional wheeze exudes
 not from human volition
 but pinholes in its bellows.
 The guitar might believe us
 if we each strike a major chord.
 Try A, the simplest fingering.
 No joy? I'll try C. Maybe
 tuning this dry old stick will help.

But I fear our unmusical lives
 have discouraged venerable songs
 from nesting in our inner ears
 where everything lilting begins.

William Doreski lives in Peterborough, New Hampshire (USA). He has taught at several colleges and universities. His most recent book of poetry is *Venus, Jupiter* (2023). His essays, poetry, fiction, and reviews have appeared in various journals.

“The Magpie”

by Virginia Barrett

after *La Pie* (*The Magpie*)

— Claude Monet, 1868-1869

Monet once revealed that he wanted to paint
not things in themselves but the air that touched
things—the enveloping air.

— John Berger

A pale winter landscape: blue-violet shadows
on snow, a glow of rose in the sky, liquid

trees with no leaves. Perception over
description, as if following a thought

without words . . . he'll need the distance
of time to be seen. They say Monet added

the magpie, solitary on a rustic gate, to
anchor the eye—dabs of black and

white—immutable among luminous
impressions? A radical departure from

academic style, the Salon rejected the scene,
making the bird a prophetic vision: breaking

all derision with a raucous call,
resounding now in the enveloping air.

* * *

Virginia Barrett is a poet, writer, artist, editor, and educator. She earned her MFA in Writing from the University of San Francisco where she was poetry editor of *Switchback*. Her six books of poetry include *Between Looking* (Finishing Line Press, 2019) and *Crossing Haight—San Francisco poems* (Jambu Press, 2018). Her prose has appeared in *The Writer's Chronicle*, *The Raven's Perch*, *Awakenings* and elsewhere. Lead designer for *Light on the Walls of Life*—a tribute anthology to Lawrence Ferlinghetti (Jambu Press, 2022), she is also the editor of four anthologies including *RED: A Hue Are You* anthology (Jambu Press, 2023). She has taught poetry, creative writing, and visual art throughout the San Francisco Bay Area for over two decades, including in the MFA in Writing program at the University of San Francisco. www.virginiabarrett.com

“Gris-Gris”

by Cathleen Calbert

In the French Quarter,
we went to this famous place
for beignets and café au laits.

It was so-so, like LeRoi’s gumbo
or the “juke joint” that advertised
absinthe but only served Pernod,

like Marie Laveau’s,
where I bought a bag of gris-gris
and he was kind of an asshole.

Gray-gray—between
white and black magic. I also
can go either way—mojo or juju.

I like the idea of slipping
my body fluids into his Earl Grey
and binding him to me.

I like the idea of a poem
about voodoo. There’s a load
of imagery at the ready,

what with snake-dancing
and throwing chickens
over people when they’re sleeping.

But this is it for tonight.
I’ve published a lot already.
He’s in the other room,

not out barhopping,
stomping on zombie-snakes
or biting the heads off baby bats.

It’s nice to be alone, remembering
New Orleans in November—
powdered sugar

raining from those doughnuts,
how we laughed together,
and I bought a bag of gris-gris.

Cathleen Calbert’s writing has appeared in many publications, including *Ms. Magazine*, *The New York Times*, *Poetry*, and *Poetry London*. She has published four books of poems: *Lessons in Space*, *Bad Judgment*, *Sleeping with a Famous Poet*, and *The Afflicted Girls*. Her awards include a Pushcart Prize, the Sheila Motton Book Prize, and the Mary Tucker Thorp Professorship at Rhode Island College.

“The Paradox”

by Emily Bilman

Like kelp, the river's eyes
flow in an ever-changing
paradox that keeps
and precludes surface

waters from the silt-
waters beneath boosting

surface sound-waves
like fungus-sponges
clinging to moss-rocks,

apertures where fish-swarms
spawn lucent, gelatinous
eggs pregnant with
gestating embryos,

until the fish are borne
by the brine and the dust
of the fluvial law
that forbids falling,

sifting time forever,
forever suspending
my day's residues.

Dr. Emily Bilman is a widely published and anthologized author of poetry, literary essays, and short stories. Her PhD dissertation, *The Psychodynamics of Poetry*, was published by Lambert Academic in 2010. Slatkine & Cie published *La rivière de soi* (2010) in Geneva. *Modern Ekphrasis* (2013) came out by Peter Lang Academic. Her other poetry books, *A Woman by A Well* (2015), *Resilience* (2015), *The Threshold of Broken Waters* (2018), *Apperception* (2020), *The Undertow* (2023) were published by Troubador Books, UK. She won the Polaris Contest with a sonnet entitled “Pathfinder” scheduled to arrive on the moon with NASA time-capsule in 2024. www.emiliebilman.wix.com/emily-bilman

“Vitalities”
by John Charles Ryan

A Bright Thought Submerged

in dense benthic blackness, I awaken,
 sea and cell swirled by circadian urge
 in each membrane, time’s circuitry curves,
 jellied anemones sprout polyps of glass
 resin, metal—mind emerges from thorax
 of hard protist-facts, of lurid purple spurge
 that tissues, seeds, and filaments the floor of
 federations before, flumes of bacterial surge
 coding chloroplastic knowing, breath bending
 to bloom bionically across abyssal depth
 I am ancestral memory, an obscure vitality,
 a repudiation of the photic zone,
 a bright thought submerged.

Homunculus in the Mandrake

and once the flame of his grief consumed my
 plum-red petals, sizzled, seared to charcoal flecks,
 the substance of his catharsis—charred flower flesh
 when the fierce fiery sun flashed talons overhead
 my naked limbs flexed into medusan forms
 I knelt at a clear pool, licked oozing wounds
 smudged soothing salve on blackened skin
 Do what you wish to us—the respiring orchid
 will wilt, wither, and reawaken, the homunculus
 in the mandrake will breathe again, in the traverse
 plane of a fig fruit—tender, bloody, tear-shaped—
 there are miraculous tales, a great pharmacopoeia,
 a sympathy of bodies, a pulsing of synchronies.

Bowed Bamboo

for two nights by the Xiang River
the goddesses wept for their dead husband,
caustic tears drenched the rhizome-dense earth
beneath me, then, just a sapling wisp, I ascended
to perennial heights, internodes creaking in passions
of growth, stippled culms becoming as resistant as
riverstone, tautly pliant like the drawn string of an
archery bow, the million monuments inside me
germinated, grew strong, grasped in the fingers
of master calligraphers, nourished by the bitter
tonic of concubines sobbing in sorrow's throes
and when warm mist mottles my viridescent
skin, I open my pores to let their grief in.

Still Life with Cactus

if you ask, what does time matter to me?
I'll tell you—time is arabesque symmetry
of serrated cactus posed like statue within arid
vacancy, surreptitious grit glazing houseplants,
feelers of potatoes piercing upward through velvet
on empty floor of synthetic green pasture—listen!
Do you hear the lisping speech of seed capsules
dehiscing? This is time whispering in your mind,
my voice quivering the fringes of your very thinking
of me, time suspended brittly in columns of glass
shapeshifted to trees, time shimmering in singing
distance of spellbinding sylvan serendipity—
I'm the time you just spent remembering me.

John Charles Ryan is an American writer of poetry, non-fiction, and research with a keen interest in plants, fungi, lichens, and human-nature relations. Between 2008 and 2021, he lived in Australia where he still serves as Adjunct Associate Professor at Southern Cross University, Australia, and Adjunct Senior Research Fellow at the Nulungu Indigenous Research Institute, University of Notre Dame, Australia. His books include the co-edited essay collection *The Mind of Plants* and the co-authored poetry collection *Seeing Trees*. For more information about his work, see www.johncharlesryan.com

“Letter to a Dairy Queen Server Who Wants to Be a Theatre Director”

by Laura Lewis-Barr

I watch as you wipe tables with a dirty rag
your mind on her, the cheerleader.
Unnoticed crumbs scatter to the floor
while you smile.

Off to college soon. How will you choose
each turn and twist on your theatre quest?
Who will you schmooze? What will you refuse
when cheerleaders become mothers
and the mortgage is due?

The stars of Capricorn caused my affliction—
a prediction I’d win a Pulitzer or Tony.
Either was acceptable but I was susceptible
to constrictions of breath whenever I
engaged in the friction of making fiction.

Inspired by Thalia I’d direct
some comic play
then quickly dash away.
I was there in flesh
but frozen up within.
I’d try again, new play, new cast.
But soon once more
I’d be frozen to the core
like Lot’s wife.
Year after year I’d jump into the fray
but soon I was a hummingbird
darting back
and forth
until exhausted
I flew away.

Such shame to recall
my many relapses, all those collapses!
Now I know
honing imagination cuts both ways.
So no therapy or pills could ever prevent
my descent to the land of the dead
or my mythic dread.

But today I’ve crossed over blame
to see with wonder—
I’ve lived the artist’s life.
Refusing the stable job

I stayed true
even as I fumbled.
I stayed true
even as I fled.
I stayed true
when I returned
again and again
to my terrible calling.

Young artist
stay close to your impulse.
Act from your heart even
if you flop with
friends horrified and
enemies delighted.
Fail spectacularly
with grand crashes
nose dive splashes
like Icarus.
Then one day you'll find
your soul intact—
not shred to pieces
dried up or decaying on the side
of some left turn you took
in your late twenties.
When in fear or despair you chose
a sterile path
applauded and conventional.
No. Risk being wrong.
They may not forgive
but you'll live with your soul—
scarred but strong.

Move headlong against the culture's addictions and
continue straight toward your unique crucifixion.
Then, surviving the grief you'll breathe out
(blessed relief) "It is finished."

Ah, I've diminished my input, I'm too much a bore.
You're lost in a daydream as you mop the floor
and gaze at your reflection.
I wish I could have given some direction or
saved you some trouble
but you're lost in the buoyant bubble
of youth. Good luck with your pursuits.
All the best
from one (hapless but true) artist
to another.

Laura Lewis-Barr is an award-winning writer, filmmaker, and educator. She was a graduate student in clinical psychology but eventually switched majors and earned her M.A in theatre. Laura's art focuses on mythic stories for personal and collective transformation. Laura's films are made in her basement in Chicago. Her screening events are filled with heart and questions for the soul.
psychescinema.com

“Winter Moth” and “Rite to Let Go”

by Jenny Bates

Winter Moth

Shifting directions is not a failure

You called, mid-day
I heard myself say
you are the first human voice
I’ve heard today
you said, *me too*.

I could have thrown myself
like a hostage set free
into your arms
I could have held you forever —
but these are words
no body or heartbeat in them.

At dusk, a Winter Moth arrived
no speech, just eyes
looking for a loving light
any smear of warmth or touch
I reach for the Moon, some
clever path or plodding crosscut.

A few words of advice? flutters
the Moth in my ear
Imagine whatever you can
that will lend your body back
to the unknown wind.

Rite to Let Go

a Coyote passing by —

that look he gives you like —

why even try

to train your ears, your eyes

to the error of night.

Of all the sundry gifts he brings

he hunts for only and only

one thing —

a gentle voice of harmonious quartz

picked up by rite, his rite

not yours.

* * *

Jenny Bates, five poetry books, published in numerous NC and international journals. Presented at the 2023 Ecopoetics and Environmental Aesthetics Conference, London. Jenny was a judge for the Poetry in Plain Sight contest through Winston-Salem Writers, 2024. Her newest book of poems, *ESSENTIAL*, Redhawk Publications 2023 has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize 2024. Jenny’s books are also available at Malaprops Bookstore in Asheville, NC and the Book Ferret, Winston-Salem, NC.

“Dear John (In Memoriam)”

by Alan Forrest Hickman

I want to hold your hand

John

I want to hold your handgun

.38 special, mail order delivery

Or don't you read the comix?

I know my rights (count 'em)

Each man to his own lifeboat on

The ship of stated in the bill of sale

And it's MY turn to be president

Little island paradise

Little island concrete tit

Giftwrapped in asphalt

Are your telephones already singing taps?

No citizen shall be denied the right to

Tears

In times of violence

[If we could only rust the triggers with our tears

If we could only lock the hammers with our tears]

Envy it was that laid you low (oh,

My captain)

And there's a contract out on the Constitution

(I know my rights)

But I won't be held accountable for the nails

At anyone's crucifixion

All of us are in the gutter

Yes

But some of us are taking pot shots at the stars

Bewilderment and defeat

Bewilderment and defeat
 Felled by Captain Marvel in America
 Only in America
 Price tags on handguns
 And bull's eyes on success
 [In Italy the targets wear armbands
 But the bullets are the color
 of cats in the dark]

So, now there is no turning back
 The clock is stuck at sundown
 Exaggerating the length
 Of even the shortest grave
 And I will not give up mourning
 For the victims of that dream
 My tears are for my country
 They fall like rain
 Soiled
 Before they reach the ground.

(1980)

* * *

Alan F. Hickman is an Associate Professor of English at the American University in Dubai. He received his Ph.D. in Contemporary British Literature from the University of Arkansas in 1990. He is an inveterate traveller, having graduated from high school in 1968, in Wiesbaden, Germany, where his father was an Air Force pilot. He has taught in Thailand, Germany, Arkansas, Alabama, and Bulgaria, and he once sailed with the U.S. Navy as a PACE (Program for Afloat College Education) instructor. His publications include poems, reviews, and scholarly articles. He writes a blog on film composers on Facebook under the nom de Web Somebody Else.

“Aren’t Forgotten Tastes Still Dormant Under Our Taste buds?” and “Or What If Scars Would Suddenly Become Translucent?”

by Hedy Habra

Aren’t Forgotten Tastes Still Dormant Under Our Taste buds?

Hasn’t everything we’ve ever wanted,
 dreamt or desired, always been there,
 hiding between every line we’ve ever
written, like forgotten tastes still dormant under our papillae?

Till an image resonates pregnant with meaning,
 fluid words rise into stems of smoke over embers,
 open wounds form purple bleeding hearts,
lips purse into buds wanting to be rescued in a vase.

And isn’t every written page a beveled mirror erasing time
 and space as we try to fill in gaps, ponder the origin
 of an ellipsis allowing us to feel the coolness
of a moss-covered stump in midst of a clearing glimpsed in a dream?

When with eyes closed, I search for such a place,
 I’m swept by a tall wave surging out of nowhere,
 before falling back onto an empty page lost
inside a journal. Isn’t it a sort of predestined silence

letting in time regained as words unsaid ask to be heard?
 And isn’t this page meant to become a canvas
 calling for brushstrokes softened
with linseed oil to redress shapes, play with shades, retrace

one’s steps throughout a mirror etched anew, an awry
 glance trying to make sense of a universe of forgotten
 codes, signs and deft messages that we learn
to alter, suppress or complement as we recreate ourselves?

First published by *Peacock Journal*

Or What If Scars Would Suddenly Become Translucent?

"I wish that I could show you when you are lonely or in darkness the
astonishing light of your own being."
– Hafez

Did the Persian poet mean that it would
take a special viewer to perceive the
truth within? We were taught to hide our
sorrow, forget and store grief in drawers.

We learned to cover our imperfections
with makeup, and disappointments under
a smile. We showcased our very best
with trompe l'oeil pleated skirts.

Wouldn't the art of concealing allow
pain to grow insidiously, preventing
the mind from exploring one's rocky
shores and inner landscapes?

Paige Bradley re-membered the broken
shards of a nude woman's sculpture seated
in a lotus position. At night, a light
radiates from its core through seam lines.

Each crack, a lightning. A victory.
The way Japanese kintsukuroi
mends fragments of a broken vessel
with gold. The re-pairing of shattered
tesserae expressing hurt as renewal.

And what if invisible scars reclaimed
their corporeality by being tattooed
all over the body or materialize through
translucent interstices letting light out,
revealing the archeology of pain?

First published in *Live Encounters*
From *Or Did You Ever See The Other Side?* (Press 53, 2023)

Hedy Habra's fourth poetry collection, *Or Did You Ever See The Other Side?* (Press 53 2023), won the 2024 International Poetry Book Awards and was a finalist for the Eric Hoffer Award and the USA Best Book Award; *The Taste of the Earth* won the Silver Nautilus Book Award and Honorable Mention for the Eric Hoffer Award; *Tea in Heliopolis* won the USA Best Poetry Book Award and *Under Brushstrokes* was a finalist for the International Book Award. Her story collection, *Flying Carpets*, won the Arab American Fiction Book Award's Honorable Mention. Her book of criticism, *Mundos alternos y artísticos en Vargas Llosa*, focuses on the visual aspects of the Peruvian Nobel Laureate's narrative. She holds a BS in Pharmacy from the French St Joseph University. Habra earned an MA in English, an MFA, and an MA and PhD in Spanish from Western Michigan University where she taught for over three decades. She is a twenty-two-time nominee for the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net. www.hedyhabra.com

“Creativity & Knowledge”

by Gottfried Maria Heuer



As I was walking,
right behind the prison and the hospital,
this
is what stopped me,
literally
in my tracks:
From that cutting plane
of what once must have been
a huge and massive tree,
suddenly
His face was
looking right at me –
like from the Turin Shroud . . .
In his cantata, Bach composed,
‘I know that my redeemer lives!’

**‘Creativity & Knowledge’
Returning to the Source.**

1.

Almost two hundred years ago,
Ralph Waldo Emerson
wrote that he was seeking
his ‘ideal writer’, who
was ‘part and particle of God.’ –
Well – well . . .
are we not *both*,
each and every one of us?
As ‘poetry
must be made by All!’
Lautréamont exclaimed
some fifty years later.
‘Can’t stop the fire’ as
we *are*
‘no longer dancing in the dark’,
Bruce Springsteen sings
somewhat in our time

2.

It’s gotten late,
but I can’t get to fall asleep
I toss and turn and I
keep wondering,
what on *earth*
can ‘Creativity and Knowledge’ –
the subject given –
mean?!
I’m totally confused and lost as
no answer whatsoever
comes to mind . . .
So, *finally*,

I fall asleep –
wake up a few times,
yet
there's not a *fragment*, even,
of a dream that's been created
in and by
the unknown –
until
just at daybreak –
'le jour se lève',
the French may say
the day *arises!* –
at last,
a dream *is* born:

3.

A posh art auction house:
I am wandering,
somewhat lost,
through its grand rooms . . .
In one of them,
there is a banquet
that I come across:
a crowd of people
in ornate, ancient costumes
seated at tables laden
with delicacies,
centering, as if in his honour,
on a small, old man,
sitting, slightly bending forward,
in their very midst . . .
I am – *furtively*, I feel
that I don't really quite belong –
just passing through

in search
 of a specific masterpiece . . .
 Yet
 I am out of luck.
 I *cannot* find it. So,
 in the end, I make my way
 towards the exit,
 where I see,
 as I am leaving,
 one or two deliv'ry men arrive,
 carrying in, on silver trays,
 even more exquisite food . . .
 Then, at a stroke.
 all is gone, has vanished . . .
 I am left stunned,
 and lie awake
 with absolutely nothing . . .

4.

Only in *time*,
 dimly, at first
 a potential grasping dawns:
 Can it be that I end up,
 like Parzifal, the Tarot's Fool,
 without a clue on this,
 my first, initial visit?
 I cannot find, as yet,
 the masterpiece
 although it is clearly *there*.
 However, thus
 there cannot be,
 as yet,
 any healing
 for the old man,

the Grail Castle's King,
said to be suffering from
a wounded feminine . . .
As increasingly
more meaning seems
to be rising up,
I begin to understand
a further message
of my dream:
it is *urging* me,
implicitly,
towards a *Second Visit* –
in order to *redeem*
the Grail's cup
that alone can heal the King –
my higher Self?

5.

Also:
in the beginning –
whenever that has been,
almost completely lost, now,
in the mist of time –
creation's cup
can be seen as feminine,
with – tradition has it –
knowledge as the masculine
that is being born
from the Grail's cup of creativity,
'creation of the world that was
before the Gods were'
according to The Upanishads.
So, at the very same time,
in the end of all exploring

I shall be returning
to this source again –
this time in sacred, and
Holy Marriage.

6.

Every dream,
every *creation* being
by its very definition something
that has not *ever* seen before,
nor *been* –
has thus given birth to something
altogether *new* –
like a newborn baby,
both
at her or his utmost *vulnerable*
as well as at the same time
utmost *powerful*:
the future
King or Queen!
Someone that
I've never known before –
and now I *do*:
thus is redemption being birthed,
emerging into being, as
I 'dreamed a dream beyond my comprehending,
vision too beautiful to be untrue',
Sidney Royse Lysaght wrote
about a hundred years ago.
Here then *is*
the masterpiece
I've so intensely
been burning, hoping for:
Until then,

in my imagination,
I could only see it
‘through a glass darkly, and in part,
but then’
(at a future, second visit)
‘face-to-face:
I know
even as
also I am known.’ –
(St. Paul).

7.

‘There is a tree,
the tree of everlasting,
its roots in the below
as
its branches spread
from Earth to Heaven.’ –
(The Bhagavad Gita).

And,
‘Now is all doubting past,
the journey’s end made certain
salvation given you,
as you are healed.’ –
(The Course in Miracles).

Gottfried Maria Heuer,
London, January 2024,
At the Full Moon.
(As I finish writing this, a few
days later, on the radio I hear
Massenet’s ‘Méditation’ from Thäïs’)



Dr. Gottfried M. Heuer, Jungian Training-psychoanalyst, Neo-Reichian body-psychotherapist; independent scholar with some 70 papers published in 7 languages. His books include 10 Otto Gross Congress-proceedings (LiteraturWissenschaft.de); *Sacral Revolution* (Routledge 2010); *Sexual Revolutions* (Routledge 2011; Russian edition 2017); and *Freud's 'Outstanding' Colleague/Jung's 'Twin Brother': The Suppressed Psychoanalytic and Political Significance of Otto Gross* (Routledge 2017); and he is also a published graphic artist, photographer, sculptor and poet. Interviews: <https://vimeo.com/196609212> and <https://youtu.be/zxEkj9SsAKw>. On beauty: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wK5HSUgngQE&t=165s> (*Psychreative*). Artwork: <https://youtu.be/fha4jiiN2MI> (*Psychreative*, after the main presenter).

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* * *

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