

Vol. 3, Issue 1 — Cycles



Vol. 3, Issue 1, "Cycles March 20, 2025

SAGE CIGARETTES MAGAZINE

LE Francis, Editor in Chief Stephanie Nunez, Creative consultant Nicole Yurcaba, Book Reviewer Mel Sherrer, Associate Editor Sadee Bee, Art Director Molly McGill, Associate Editor

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letter from the EIC

This is my first issue as EIC & it's been a challenge. I've mostly followed the same processes as last issue, but this time I'm the one coordinating all the moving parts & making the final decisions. Before, I was simply supporting my best friend's amazing project, but now everything feels heavier. There's no degree of separation offered by Stef



being at the helm of the masthead. & it doesn't matter how many times she has told me I'm perfectly capable of handling this, I've always been a background person & have grown comfortable & accustomed to that. So, these months of transition & the process leading up to the issue has all felt strange, liminal, uncanny.

& in that, *Cycles* is a special issue to me because it represents something— a continuation, a follow-through even when the world seems inconceivably changed. & there is faith there, a step into the darkness as a new version, believing that we can still make something beautiful even if it's no longer *my best friend's amazing project* & has become *my best effort to honor writing & art & the creative process that has always sustained me in hopes of supporting other writers & artists on a similar journey*. Well, that's the best I can conceptualize it at least — with all those superfluous words making my layout job more difficult. But I have always been an incredibly long-winded person when provoked, we can just blame the sun in gemini & moon in libra.

But despite the challenge of transition we remain a remarkable team — Stef Nunez remains on board as creative consultant, Mel Sherrer & Molly McGill as associate editors, Nicole Yurcaba as book reviewer, & Sadee Bee as art director. & if it wasn't for the generosity & endless talent of these women this magazine would not exist. I am incredibly lucky to have such a great crew & especially want to thank Sadee & Molly for their work on this issue.

Though I've always been the free-spirited, DIY, joke-of-all trades nerd of the crew, I remain committed to our initial mission. Sage Cigarettes Magazine has always been a safe place for marginalized voices & an advocate for justice. We remain in solidarity with the people of Palestine & encourage readers to support Operation Olive Branch, linktr.ee/opolivebranch. & again, want to direct our readers to our own Nicole Yurcaba (@NYurtsaba on Twitter & Insta) who is a strong advocate for the Ukrainian people & often posts opportunities to support those affected by the war.

Additionally, as we continue into an unprecedented era of history in the US, I want to encourage everyone I can to act with compassion within their communities & participate in mutual aid. In coming years, I suspect we are going to see unhinged levels of government austerity resulting in rampant poverty & disenfranchisement. If you can help, please do. If you need help, please reach out to those around you. I will always do my best to help where I can, I hope you all will as well.

Empathy is the most connective of human emotions & art is the most connective medium of human emotion. At Sage Cigarettes Magazine, we remain in deep gratitude & service to both.

With love,

IF Francis

Contributions

On the day of the new moon I am kneeling in the garden by LE Francis

& I make room for the *new* to take root, tendrils of long dead things wrap around my fingers like rings, like commitments, & I am obliged to shake free. A walnut,

black-shelled & spongy with bloat blooms out of the earth, insides ragged with dirt & decay. & as I toss it into the bin I wonder after the squirrel who planted it there

upon a faraway autumn & how the thing we hope will sustain us can get lost in the weeds. & the seasons change & time sends a root through

the heart & in comes the earth, in comes circumstance, in crawls beetles & deadlines & priorities & the fibrous whisper of mycelium

to transmute the nature of the thing which we planted in a season of belief & then the clouds move & the sun is hot on my back & I can hardly remember

the way so many things felt – good or bad. It gets lost in the soil of memory, rooted in a time when the weeds were deep & cold with dew. Now, wheals of rash raise

where the dead stalks lashed against my skin & I can never be certain what will cause me distress, what will bring the old up to be felt with a new heart, cracked

open by time & rooted into a body which sustains for now, whispers which are & aren't mine, the universe, the stars, the earth, within & without.



Maiden of Grays by Sadee Bee

The years have not been kind / each sunrise / sunset /

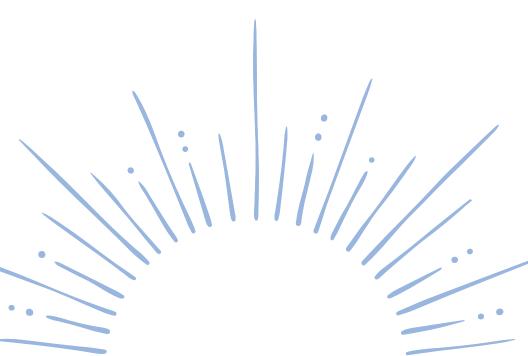
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arduously pushing me along / I longed to slumber the years away / to slip / into the sweet blackness of the abyss /
No afterlife / only quiet emptiness / peace /
The Maiden wore a cloak of melancholy / kept me company /
obscured my vision / from the years ahead of me /
Years I did not want / did not believe I would ever see /
Then the cloak of melancholy / finally slipped away //
So she silently / shrugged on the robe of apathy /
With her / existence / just was /
Alive but always a little numb / her company a waking slumber /
her hands / passed me little pills in many hues /
Only to dull the senses / to halt the tears /
to keep me moving / through a world that pained me so /
I saw the sunrise / and the sunset /
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But felt no warmth / no meaning / from either /

survive //

While this Maiden did not bring me joy / she helped me

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One morning / I rose with the sun / felt its warmth on my skin / I saw her in the mirror / Emerging from my widow's peak / she wore the armor of gray / There she was / Maiden of Gray / of time / of ages / ending and beginning / She smiled at me / offered her hand / and whispered / I'm proud of you / In that moment I felt joy / all those heavy years / a weight finally lifted from my chest / O', Maiden of Gray / Despite all that tried to keep me away / I made it to you / Stay by my side / if only to remind me that I am still alive //
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The screw cut into Mia fingers and her knees and slumped back ached from crouching down so low, but she still scraped the last groove into the metal wall of the dining room. Pain was temporary, and this was important work, the most important work of her life. Mia wiggled back and lay flat on her stomach for a better angle, pushing her lank greasy hair out of eyes. She would shower when her work was done.

All of Mia's notebooks ran out of space, the walls in Mia's room were used up, and what used to be Alma and Domonic's room next door was full. The fine dining room was much bigger and was easier to keep track of her work.

Mia's damn nails were making it so hard to grip the little screw, she impatiently lifted her hand to her mouth and bit and tore the nails off each finger, until she was left with jagged stubs. Then she grabbed the screw again and worried the lined divot deeper into the wall.

'Beep. Beep.'

Mia mouthed along to the morning message.

"Good morning, passengers! Breakfast is served. Please make your way to our fine dining establishment, and you'll be served shortly! While you wait, why don't you check out today's activities? Or take in that beautiful view?"

On cue, Mia turned her head to the large window. The kelidoscope of pinks and blues taunting.

'That view never gets old!' Mia pitched her voice to match the jovial female speaker. She turned her head back to her important work, noting its full, uniform perfection. Another day of work completed.

Mia carefully placed the screw back in her pocket and nodded proudly at her tally, wiping away the smear of blood from where her torn fingers touched the wall. She had to add a few this time. It took a few days to find her screw when her scissors broke and the lost, uncounted days were unacceptable. Her fingernails didn't and teeth didn't do the job at all.

Mia turned to Alma, propped up against the wall.

'Only two more years until we're rescued, Alma. Hang in there!'

Alma didn't respond since she was a corpse and not very chatty.

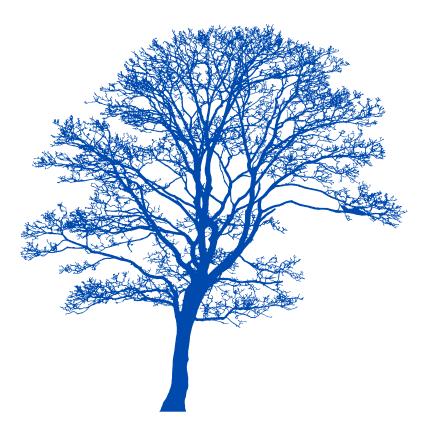
Prose

The Beech Tree by Geoff Sawers

She grew obsessed by something she hadn't wanted or hadn't valued when she had it. She'd seen faults everywhere, in everything, everyone, but perhaps they were all in herself, in her perception? Like looking at the world through a crushed pair of glasses. It was nauseating that she kept getting this feeling of it being too late for her, too late to start, to be anything new. But the sun rises every day, you have to do something. She gave notice at her job and to her landlord, gave away her furniture and most of her stuff; turned up back at her mother's place with just what she could fit into her little car, a big potted yucca plant strapped into the passenger seat. Well, what now? said her mum.

Maybe she could go on holiday. But I just quit my job. And maybe I'd just be sitting on a beach thinking well, what now? I can do that at home. Her mother sighs. I'm going to town tomorrow morning if you'd like to come, she says, to the bakery and then the hairdressers. You might find something at the library. No thanks, she replies, but in the morning she has changed her mind and tags along. At her mother's hairdressers she accepts a cup of coffee but doesn't join in the general pleasant chatter, instead she sits with one of her old college books that was up in the attic and reads about power dynamics in Foucault. No one asks what she's reading about. When a lady coming in trips over something she leaps up and halfcatches her, steadies her on her feet, then goes back to her book. She can sense everyone looking at her now, like they've just remembered that she exists. Her mum is part of this place, but she totally isn't. Her mother's friends call round, they all seem to assume she must have just broken up with a boyfriend. She feels more like she just broke up

with herself, but it's a lot easier to let them believe what they want than try to explain that. There are foxgloves coming up, putting up pale tall flower-spikes but not yet in full purple. It's hard being back in the country. Do you want to go and watch the hunt? No, mother. No I don't. I might fantasise about hunting the hunt myself though, in some way that doesn't hurt the horses. They didn't do anything wrong. She thinks she could be a tree, a tall, smooth beech tree and live out a solid life of a hundred and fifty years or so and then get cut down, sawn into planks or pulped, rolled out into long sheets, trimmed to size, printed on and bound as a book. And then she'd be back here once again but bearing information this time.



The New Librarian by Geoff Sawers

This place had once been organised, when it was first established, with the ambition of a bygone era that one building could house all the world's knowledge, with alcoves dedicated to particular countries, or disciplines, religious cults. Each held approximately the same number of volumes but accessions soon destabilised this neat scheme. A traveler returned from a distant land with a magnificent collection of illustrated codices and yet there was no room for them; the shelves were already buckling. The ornately painted headboards alphabetised everything but since the Emperor had annexed three new provinces the alphabet had grown too, to include all this extra literary material.

The new librarian found a solution. The Empress's magnificent rose garden was carefully uprooted and built over, all the bushes transplanted to a spacious roof terrace. But the old librarian refused to use the new buildings. She is an archivist of the past, she fears an invasion of termites, unsatisfactory modern plumbing, new ideas. For the new librarian the collection is a tool, a machine, an engine: constantly making connections, she introduces the scholar who is researching the printing of books to the one analysing the history of forestry, sure that a new book, a new perspective will emerge. Her library will be an octopus putting out tentacles throughout the city, throughout the world. She devotes a whole room to the catalogues of other libraries and supports all wars of conquest: one day everything will be hers.



it feels good to be alone. the apartment clean, all my energy my own again. a new altar for a new season: a tray of seeds. a reminder to the corner of my eye, the back of my mind that time has passed. i cannot go back to the past and choose a different path to walk down to try to make the sweetness last. time has moved. the days are longer now, i am not who i was then.

moonflowers. i will sit beside them as they open in the summer evenings, at many homes, including my home under the stars. this home will be like the one i had all those years ago, at the farm i worked at after i'd been living out of my car for six months. it was a shame i slept in my tent at that farm. that was the year before i met the sierras, before i learned the bliss of nothing between myself and sky at night. to sleep with the milky way.

i planted 12 of them. all those years ago that i am trying to flip back into in a new way, yanick and i planted moonflower seeds in sister woods, like the little girls we had not gotten to be, but they did not germinate. seeds the size of a child's biggest tooth may still be there in the black loam of the dark forest floor beneath the stained glass green of sun through maple and beech leaves. they are waiting in the soil for the sun's rays to shine down on them in the specific way that beckons the radicle to push through the seed coat, down into the dark soil, down deeper and deeper until its descent begins to push the top of itself up, out of the soil, to greet the sun. have i gone deep enough to greet the sun?

"germination" continued

or we, fresh from the city, still learning to see and move through a new dimension, a world with no sidewalks, no marked trails, trees and mounds as waypoints, could not find them again.

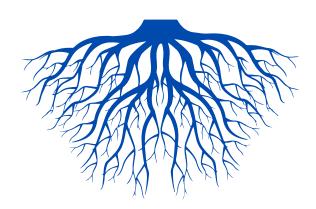
i'll sit beside them with beloveds, with my beloved, with myself. each way will be a delight. i will sit beside them and inhale their sweet fragrance and feel it travel down each side of the front of my neck to my collarbones, slowing my breath, distilling me into the moment.

i filled the 72 cell seed tray with the bag of potting soil that is always in my kitchen, that sometimes i sit on when i have two friends over and they are sitting on the two stools. i thought of how we used to fill the seed trays from horse troughs full of potting soil that the farmer bought pallets of. how we would press the soil down in all the cells at the same time by pressing another full tray on top of the one we had just scooped soil over in the trough. instead, i used one of the 6 packs i'd filled with soil to press the others down. then, like at the farm, i watered the soil before adding any seeds.

i cut open the packet of moonflower seeds and went back farther in time to the year before, the farm before to the seed room: cramped and crowded, dusty wooden floorboards creaking, shelves full of trays of seedlings stretching towards grow lights. to the seed room, where i learned how to tip the scales toward life sister emanuelle ended her lesson by telling me to pray over each seed as i pressed it into the soil. she padded down the hallway to her bedroom and left me to work i was happy to be alone and looked forward to working my way into the satisfying trance of repetition, the one thing holding me back was my frustration with her instructions to pray over each seed, i had just gotten free of god, i had just been excommunicated, i was never going to pray to that god again, she had

not, though, told me what to pray or who to pray to. these were the first seeds i had ever planted, and i was tasked with planting 20 trays of 72 cells, mostly cabbages and kales. i wanted desperately to walk up the stairs in a few days and pull back the curtain on the bookcase the trays were kept in and see little shoots of green poking up through the soil. i wanted to pull each tray out and walk down the hallway to place it under the grow lights. i wanted to do it again and again, and then i wanted to see their cotyledon leaves unfurl. sister emanuelle had explained those would fall off when the seedling's first two true leaves came in. i wanted to see the true leaves of red russian kale splay like purple baby fingers. what if the seeds didn't germinate if i didn't pray over them?

i stood at the wooden counter in my kitchen, looked out the window at the trees and the three-story redwood stairs at the back of the victorian next door, the late afternoon sun looked at me from the point in the sky where it could shine through the stairs, through the window, through the sun catcher, to splash rainbows on the seed tray, on me, there was soil under my nails and in the grooves of my hands again, there was soil on the floor, from my mouth came the echo of the prayer i had learned in the seed room: "may you become that which you are."



Poetry &

Caterpillar in a Wenth Spiral by Beulah Vega

Moving along scent tracks left
by the one before the
one before
the one before the
one before
we go. Writhing over
Asphalt, knowing we're
squirming in a circle, no
end only incomplete completions.
We will die on this track
Unquestioned pheromone breadcrumbs
lead in this endless loop.
The leader follows the lessers
who follow the seconds, who follow
the middles who follow me who

follows the leaders to

nowhere.

transformations
never spin warm cocoons
never obscure the voyeuristic world
from watching us dissolve and squirm
into a form they find beautiful.
Nothing but
spiraling,
spiraling hope
spiraling trust,
spiraling until one of us stops
or all of us die.

We will never reach our



"Trance" by Erin H.



It starts at the end

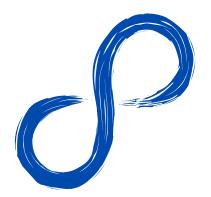
The last kiss remembrance of the untorn tapestry spun with our lives

The apathy filling the spot where longing used to live

The soft brush of rough hands freezing on skin, fire used to warm.

The last glance as something greater than the sum of us dissolves...

It starts at the realization that I no longer crave your name



It starts with releasing the dreams shared in hope

It starts with a suffocating rain of tears, a radiating pain of grief.

but at least It starts.

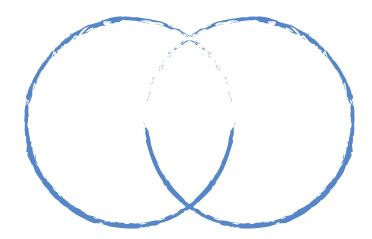


One of the small, humanizing things about me is that I take care of all flowers given to me, by myself or others, until their necks break, and sometimes even long after.

I have never not done this. I have never not gone to bed. I have never not woken up.

Even still, today, a small bouquet of purple heads hang purple-still on little brown-green pikes, as if warning whoever looks in my window and dare enter my home, that I will kill them with love.

I have never not done this.



REVERSE ENGINEERING

by L.N. Quinn

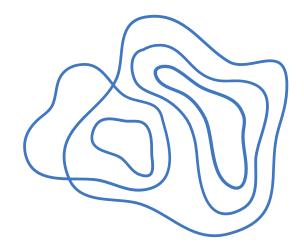
I practice breathing with the dawn wind. I can't take my eyes off the ceiling for at least half an hour. My neck screams into the pillow of my brain. I finally rest myself against the glowing spear of the morning that has fractured the barricade of my window.

Nights are spent navigating a labyrinth in reverse, wondering what it would be like to be someone else. I cultivate entire lives in my mind only just to cleave them open. Imaginary bodies on the slab of my skull. I am trying to decode joy through dissection. Reverse engineer happiness.

I retrace my steps to the drafting table, decipher my next move: wrecking the constellations. Pull them apart, realign their light with the gravity well of my future. What is it like to be a moth? Can angels offer their kisses for comparison? Unfold the new blueprint. As the past recedes, the problems should only wane. Instead, they cycle like the tides. From what water remains, the glaciers can't be reconstructed. If I am made of math how am I so unbalanced? Provisional fictions resolve into some derivative of a new day.

The meteorologists augur a storm is brewing. The rain will crackle, like my bones, against the rooftops. Right now the clouds are so far, so distant, so forgettable. They will learn in a few hours how to arrange themselves, to be seen, heard, felt, rumble. In the bedrock of my flesh.

I hazard no refuge from the tempest. I prepare the wingless hope of my ruined frame. I hold it in my hands. It is time to let go, to be more love than custodian. I worry about its disappearance. Where will it go? Who will protect it? What shape will it take?



Outside my Inside by David Hanlon

inside: winter: rainy, frigid, drab outside: a garden in springtime

sunlight drying any puddles, any osmosis of December sorrows

crocuses, purple and white, spill splatter generous over emerald banks

thick oak trees stand tall and resolute branches splayed into alacritous arms

shaded ferns staying evergreen fronds delicate as late-night touches

lake stilled by solicitous winds easing a sustainment of mallards gliding on top

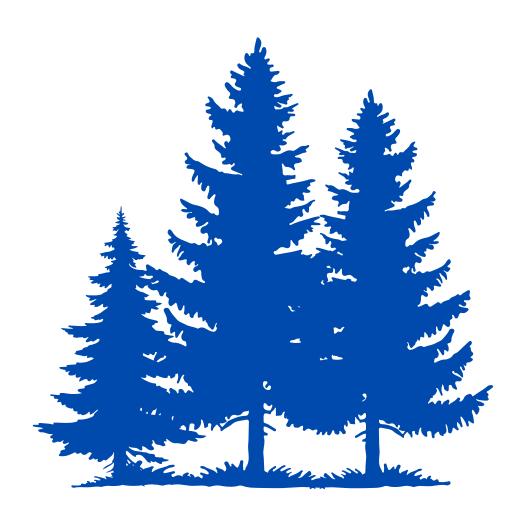
wooden park benches built and carved to rest upon: take in the vistas



of your devotion, for this is all you all that you give me: every day

you March my spirit, my inside you, soul-tilting, soul-spinning

superhuman season-changer of my once wintered heart





Remember how a bell would ring whenever you said her name?

She floats above the dinner table, her hair passes the saltshaker.

A wound of her absence: a silk napkin still folded on the good china.

Thank your lord the bullet didn't fall through your sunroof.

Curse your lord for leaving hers open that day.

At least you can still bring dessert to this year's dinner.

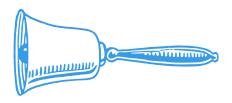
You're proud of the way you piped whipped cream in a rosette.

She always appreciated how steady your hands were when you were in love.

A piece of the tart will gather dust on her plate like it did last year.

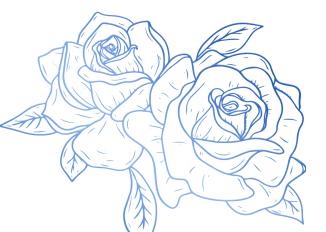
You'll hear dinner bells ringing throughout the day.

Even invisible, she's impossible to ignore.



Lenten Roses by Alex Carrigan

This year for Lent,
I will lay a Lenten rose
on your doorstep every day.
I know you've come to forget me,
but I hope that once you have a vase
of forty thriving and wilting roses,
you will have some idea of who I was
and why you found it necessary to let
the memory of me wash away with
the ash on your
forehead.

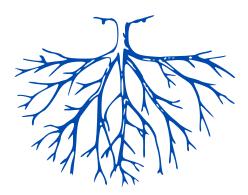




"Dudo Old Photo" by Giulio R.M. Maffii

journal (take #32)

dear diary, within me there is a self that has become obsessed with cycles and by extension, circles, rotations, velocity of spins, pirouettes both performed and in nature. was my first obsession not tornados—in a timeline where obsession and fear mean the same thing, at least—and did i not fixate the top of the treeline against the sky as it went blue and pink and orange and then blue again, all the spectrum a backdrop to the gentle tipping of branches in the wind, their very presence a surety of impending disaster? dear diary, never mind that i live in maryland, i'm still a little terrified when the thunder cracks too loud and dead limbs drop from treetops in the squall, and maybe that's also climate change talking but i am supremely justified in my terror, i believe. and that's to say nothing of the reverse effect a hurricane had on me—what started as your standard wikipedia hole turned into genuine excitement every time i read the words a tropical wave moved off the western coast of africa and understood exactly what was to follow. dear diary, i promise i don't have a deep unbridled love for destruction; i am just in awe that something so massive can develop so quickly, expire just as fast, and leave behind all that it broke as it dissipates into drizzle. when irene came to maryland, i wanted to watch it happen and set up a tripod. but then, when the storm woke me in the wee hours, i caught the backyard maple in a heavy breeze, the most of the maelstrom i'd see. dear diary, i know nothing but forces of nature—the tornado. the hurricane. the feeling inside my thorax when there is nothing to do but worry and nowhere to go but inside of myself, pacing circles in my veins.

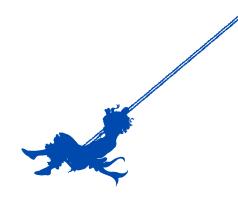


Nostalgia Ents My Henry Out by Victoria James

A seven-foot swing flag hides the past underneath it's red and yellow satin skin because the teenage nostalgia was greater than any halftime show.

Residue from vibrant velvety Lisa Frank stickers clings to bookcases no longer cuddling Little Critter or Snuffalufagus, but stacking textbooks, classics, and SJ Maas.

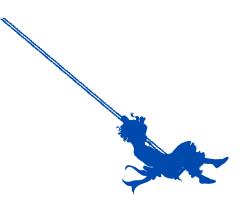
Swing the flag to a little emo Secondhand Serenade; a siren song because he didn't really love me, just my (then) skinny body (that he never got), just wished he had. The boy who got it swooped in, turned me on (to) Band of Horses, Hozier, The Beatles and into a wife that loves fearlessly.



The swing flag sits in his closet too, noting the memories of bus kisses, late night practice, a seafoam green '68 bronco under the stars — mimicking the one that laid on my childhood bed for years.

What a foreshadowing moment. Sun like the UV rays and tan-lines. Stars like the ones I saw when I found my worth and bloomed under the warmth and glowing light — finally.

One touch of the flag and my heart flip-flops, searching for air as I plummet into nostalgia — hard. Cocoon me in the soft embrace spinning into radiant butterfly fit to challenge, be loud, vibrant, leaving my own beautiful residue.





by Lydia Rae Bush

There is a seashore where we relax because the waves tell us to—

my fingers don't drum the beats of your breaths held, you don't rub my skull, and it is not so hard.

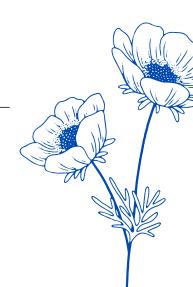
I don't even have to lie my body down to focus my mind, because your own is so calm

that your words are rolling out. So I meet you here,

and I don't feel so mad at you for only loving me this well in my mind once I see you here,

because here is where I see you most clearly—here is where you be you most clearly,

and if this perfection is you, then this ocean is heaven, and my reality is I could never stay mad at you at all.





What strange wind has brought these bees to beat wings on my flower bed

Heads strain for hot sun to warm each possible second The flower's unraveled full bodied perfume beckons a mass of stinging insects

Vigorous and gentle they pick through, speck by speck, brimming with instinct

They hardly harm a petal

The flower dips and rises in communion

With their legs and their legs like arms, the full weight of them They are sniffing like miniature winged pleasure hounds Every part of their buzzing bodies aiming to collect nectar that sticks to them

Full, they fly to the oozing honeycomb hive until the flower's next unfurling



The Haunted and the Hunted

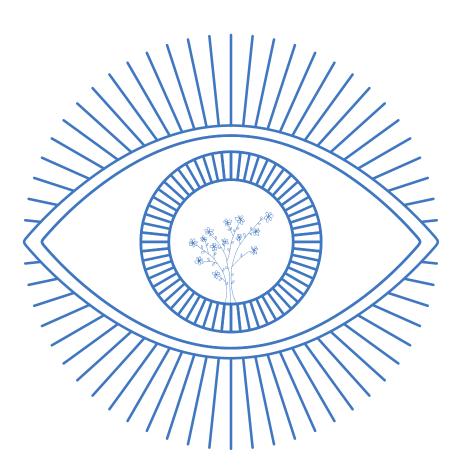
by John RC Potter

Shadows dance across the room as I walk upon this dusty floor, mere specters that come too soon and make soft noises on the door. In my eyes there are now reflected the elusive images of another lover and the reality of love deflected, with nothing left for me to discover. I am everyone, I am the haunted, knowing truths that were never spoken; I do not need what I've always wanted, with faith not shattered, just broken.

Mere silence is better than any lie, it only damages you and you alone; death comes not only to those who die, it is life that is the great unknown. Black on black, those eyes of yours, drawing in the body with the soul: eyes that have closed a thousand doors and threaten to consume me whole. You are the hunted, you are everyone, pursued only by your words, your past; if I can separate the doer from the deed, the future will be more infinite, more vast.

This poem was previously published in Juste Literary in 2023.

The haunted and the hunted are we, now inheriting our own sad legacy; change the ending before the ink dries, let love live, not experience its demise; and if love can take away the eternal night, I will lift you up to touch the forever light.



Tree Lings
by Rosalie Hendon

Round and round we go, measuring our lives by sunlight.

Within my journals, a stop motion film stutters.

Days are bookmarks.

I line them up, stretch back to 17 years old.

Assess the growth.

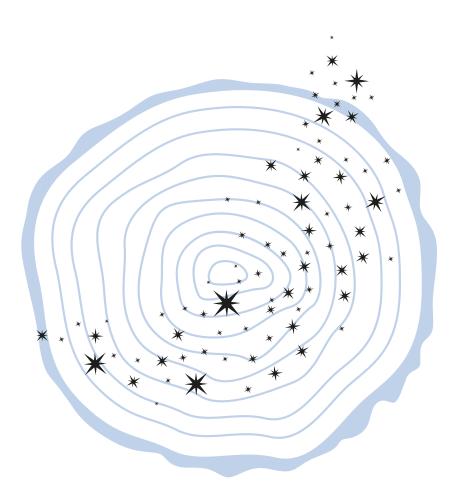
Drill for a core sample, bark to heartwood.

In thick or thin, richer or poorer.
Thick years of warm rain.
Thin for drought and cold.
Scars from fire and lightning.
Always ending in the same spot,
capturing the year under our skin.

To provide such service, even in death, that from our bodies whole ecosystems (dendroecology), climates (dendroclimatology), civilizations (dendroarchaeology) can be rediscovered.

To be a tree, and preserve the passage of time, root to crown (dendrochronology).

He wrote, Even the stars give up some of their secrets to trees.



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"Poem" by Alexandra Gall

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| 34. saw | 82. son | 130. to |
| 35. new | 83. tell | 131. i |
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| 40. watt | 88. yo | 136. a |
| 41. mid | 89. ere | 137. in |
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| 45. net | 93. ants | 141. no |
| 46. win | 94. ant | 142. lot |
| 47. wait | 95. at | 143. wont |

oblivion paiku series

re: poem by alexandra gall / cw: SA

ღ

say you saw it coming duo can be day won or loss, war waiting ready

ღ

dino mite gem shining dior an ode to well wishes so me say ego be gets woe

ღ

war owns a tag, dims west hem sewn in to tens ion for today; nets you on so & so on

ღ

shin raw, wet tit, oud d'gin today, eels out sin wishes becoming ewe-hog & nim

ღ

be for yes was don't law omits awe amid no, man now a can non

ღ

for get his nothing, tin-woe how will you owl on? ill thing; read his will & sew it on ო

get out–con tag ion day becoming lit thin DNA a waits

ტ

get it in bro, new toe tag reads dear today: loss was for coming. tub nits will mite, tell of toying

The Denth of an Old Dog by Patrick G. Roland

Strange, what stirs us from life's slumber.

A flicker, a crack in the dark of unconscious awareness.

For me, it was the death of an old dog.

Caring for her every need during her final days.

She became a baby of death.

I was holding her and cleaning her and hand feeding her,

but not to foster life and a future.

I was preparing for the after.

I was saying goodbye.

During that time, I became introspective.

I stepped inside myself and stumbled around.

I searched beneath ribs

Through the hollows of lungs

I checked the corners of my chest

And listened to the echoes of bones.

While looking for something

I thought I found nothing,

So I opened the shades

Inviting memories to spill in,

and I startled myself and refused Rip's fate.

I don't recall the spell, but I awoke to time's absence.

"The Death of an Old Dog" continued

Where have the years gone?

I recalled my goals,

Called my friends,

And called my own bluff.

I shut it all down and set my distractions aside.

I began streaming my life instead of strangers',

And I smiled again,

Wide, unworried, and real.

Not because I had to

Because I wanted to and needed to.

It's amazing when you find yourself sleepwalking through life.

For me, an old dog's eternal sleep was my awakening.







10.

This is the perfect place to start.

You were leaving for home but you crashed your car

Into our fence, wood between the wheel and it's smooth metal body,

Red paint scratched away. The wood is still broken away

To this day. Then,

We weren't sure whether to laugh or cry

But maybe it was a sign

That you would never fully leave us. That part of you would always be in that driveway.

9.

I still have that novel you got me, signed your name in,

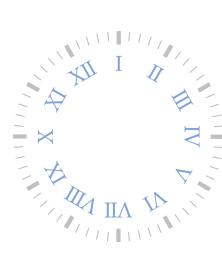
'Happy Birthday' curling around your tender, amber voice.

To be honest, the pages are beginning to yellow, it's so dusty and worn.

The

Cover is peeling away, tearing at the corners

But I can't let go of you just yet.



"Countdown To The Apocalypse" continued

8.

Some song about dreams plays over the radio and I sing along, Loud and screeching and lovely. My childhood is defined by car rides. By music.

By melodies drifting and half rhymes sighing, lulling my yelling mind to rest. Echolalia for

The undiagnosed to quiet those motors whirring. What I wouldn't give to let myself sing again, Feel no fear in the driver's seat, hands on the wheel, Ready to try.

7.

Your departure was doves to the wind. I was left behind, weak and shaking in your golden light,

White wings dismembered and bloody.

I never dare to let myself miss you.

6.

I lie and call this Strength but soon learn

Strength is the screams and sobs, the tearing of paintings from canvas Strength is the chaos I never let myself embrace. Strength is the lion's jaw clamping down

On my fragile hand, shattering bone.

Strength is the grief and I never admitted

I wanted to be the Emergency Room.

I wanted to be the lilies at your funeral.

I spoke with clarity then, without tears in my eyes

And my family called it bravery.

5.

Bravery is bullshit and here's why.

This is barely my story to tell. I am the antithesis of my younger self.

No confidence, crumbling identity,

No one to push me on the swings as I scream

"Higher! Higher!" not afraid to fall then because you were always there to catch me.

I don't want this poem to end, I'll admit

Because then I'm alone in my emotions and nothing scares me more.

This is how the autopsy ends, with me, left eviscerated,

An incomplete vivisection bleeding out on your living room carpet.

I am trying to admit that I miss you.

I am trying to admit to everything nowadays.

I am trying to cling to every part of my youth I should have cast away, I'm trying to tattoo it to me so it can never leave, branded on my skin in Ink-stains and harmonies.

Not like you.

I should apologise for being honest, I didn't mean to upset you.



"Countdown To The Apocalypse" continued

4.

I want to be everything I can't, everything you never knew me as-

The passionate one, more fire than ice, more fight than freeze.

'Handsome little thing, by god,

Who wouldn't want to fuck you up?'

Button up shirts and soft foundations, masquerade as a gentleman and get wrecked like a whore.

I've fallen from grace. I should apologise. I didn't want you to see this side of me,

Clinging to a rosary like it could possibly save me-

She never knew, She saw me as an angel

But he knows well enough that purity is a façade,

Leaves me feeling everything I've ever asked for.

Leaves me dying and dead and revived,

There to catch me in his arms should I fall.

I'm sorry I was never who you wanted or needed but I'm discovering myself and, sure,

This could be a metaphor for some shit or maybe I'm just that disgusting but I don't think that

matters

Anymore.

The author dies as soon as words reach the page,

As soon as the knife clatters to the pavement.

3.

It takes a while for any progress to rear its snarling head. It takes a while to want

Recovery. It takes longer to want to want it. I was never a princess in the castle, I was never

Defenseless or broken. Really,

All I am is a narrator

And I want to be able to tell you this story without admitting anything But relapse is a cliff-face, a steep and jarring drop and all I've ever wanted to do is fly.

2.

I'm learning breathing exercises to calm myself. They work, sometimes.

I'm learning to take up space and not feel guilt tear me into pieces.

I'm learning what I deserve and that's

Everything. Everything sickening and lovely and violent and graceful.

Every blue or grey or red or

Delight or horror.

I deserve care. Dumb and cliche as that is.

And I deserve it on my terms.

It's difficult, so difficult. But isn't the attempt enough?

The attempt to appreciate

That I have survived. That I have carved a name from bone.

That I have taken it with me to the sky.

1.

Maybe The Fall was always coming. Maybe we didn't realise.

Am I ready? I can barely ask. I can barely scream

Through the twilight.

I won't tell you about the bus rides, about listening alone,

About the world around us shifting and changing faster than we care to admit.

When did we become so oblivious? When did we stop noticing?

When did the sun crash into earth? Little heat death,

Bodies melting, an eldritch experience.

The trees flare up first, the oceans dry to dust,

Then

The lovers take each other in their arms, the friends too, and the families

"Countdown To The Apocalypse" continued

As their only child (their daughter, they think) takes to the sky,

Falls to the sea,

Falls prey to the gods and their hungry,

Gnashing teeth

But really, who notices?

[RESET IN...]

Do you want to know what comes after...

Oh, sweetheart,

My love and the light

At the end. All there is

Is this.

Repeating Infinitely Indefinitely,

Don't you want out by now,

Of this horrid, tiring, rat race...

Memory, honesty,

Self mutilation and above all

Being alone? Don't you want Out.

Well, let me tell you how...

10.

This is a perfect place to start.

You were leaving for home but you crashed your car

Into our fence, wood between the wheel and it's smooth metal body,

Red paint scratched away.

We weren't sure whether to laugh or cry

But maybe it was a sign

That you would never leave us.



There was the time it rained barely a drop for three long years.

And the cattle died, fields turned to dust.

But still the farmer's wife bore one more child.

The river resisted but the sun was too much.

Eventually its bed was baked clay.

Birds either died of thirst or migrated.

And then the family, in fear of the former, did the latter.

The land is bathed in floodwaters now.

Once the waters subside, it'll green up hereabouts, convince some other poor fool they can make a go of it.

But then the drought will return,

the same torturous cycle

that provides no leeway for dreams.

No rain for three long years.

Dead cattle, fields of dust.

And another child...

a sucker at the breast





The forked leaves of a silver maple were once as a foreign as Yiddish or junks on the Yangtse-Kiang. And now I live in tandem with their cycles.

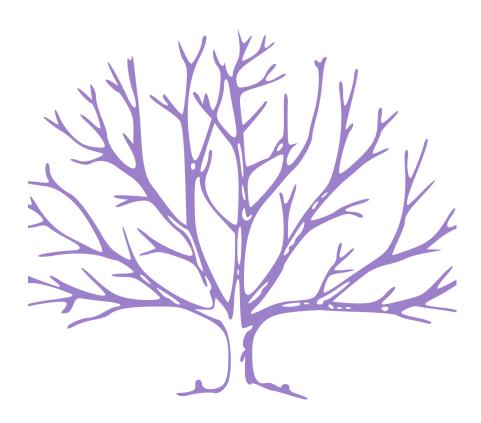
I've moved in with crabapple and American plum, the screech of blue jays and the cardinal's wait wait wait cheer cheer cheer.

I married a woman.
And bedded down with strange new landscape.
In May,
pink blossoms flood the lawn.
In January,
the grass is frosted white.

I surrendered so much of course: ghost-like eucalypts, brash lantana, rainbow lorikeets, the mad laugh of the kookaburra. And I've given up friends but this isn't about people.

An old permanence has been replaced by a new perpetuity. Trees change color from lush to pastel piquant and then they shed.

My first winter, I looked out on the death of every living thing. But now their skeletons work for me.



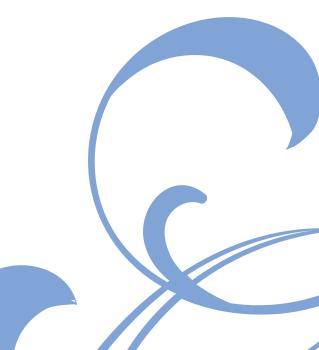


Those sweet days; young spring; the robin, like an adventure, sings his dull return.

Those sweet nights; your ruff of hair touched, wet with promise.

Beyond the call of blood, the stars rain down favor or disfavor; one. Tears after
sweet congress
distill drop by
drop,
touch my flesh
not like drops
of rain,
but the eternal tears,
blank heaven's
reward for the
living.

Listen to me, querida, sought and found; this sweet time a moment will last, and then pass you and me and all we were. So let us love these days; young spring's but a mortal time and no return for you or me will ever be.



Imperishable Infinitely

by Stephen Mead

For all it's just a matter of time each spirit knows so make the most of what's given as a fallen woman, centuries past,

black-swan swimming, upright in dark crinolines, her skirts textured purple paisley

crushed in velvet with fine filigree stitching, running like mascara through the wake

of the passed-through moors spreading their lavender heather, heavenly fragranced towards cliffs

aerial now over frothy waves bashing as she makes her way, chin up,

quietly not swallowing pride though ready now to turn around and wear the Scarlet A.

Make no mistake this is courage manifesting for future brides raising gauntlets to hawks

as well as veils of armor-sheen tossed off before compacts, the round mirrors

sending signals of light, above the compressed powder kept gun-residue dry as kegs

for tear-clear eyes never streaking the pancake beige of defense perfected

with an eyebrow pencil and lipstick case, though so human underneath, humanity itself

the feminine to masculine roles played so break the imprisoning

gender personas societies assign to keep in line everyone when really it's just another way

of being the indentured trade artisans who sketch and mold via paint, alabaster or clay

the Great Master's plan though given no credit for their anonymous craft

building Civilization's cultures from Temples to Sphinxes when each smallest detail

breathes a fingerprint's ingenious work, no two alike in the now-

Pow- how suddenly it is here good as brown paper, as useful as cardboard,

the honey-varnished boxes old clothes are lowered in as handed-on fabric scraps

for Quilter's Clubs, those magicians, earthy as wooden peg coat racks also of fantasy-flight-

clothesline-embarked-strays the flesh parades in rooms of snowbrightened light,

the Whitsun windows of industry in winter, the walls stretched as sheets

for that shadow play when no one is home, busy in the *out there* where the same sun comes

in similar slants, as long as there's glass, any greenhouse opening computer-screen lit

should one day we be only memes other emojis copy & paste like upon like

to speak for the soul's emotional lifetime as a relay of circuit sparks

in the hardware's wired motherboard algorithmically quasarpulsing.



"The First Mark" by Erin H.

Organic Recycling by William Doreski Whole continents of trash adrift

Whole continents of trash adrift on smooth planes of the planet. We've contributed our share

of aluminum cans, plastic bottles, cat litter, newspaper, corrugated cardboard boxes.

Certain powers recycle these, slowly, into subhuman forms, far more organic than we are,

that shadow us even at noon when we're scanning lunch menus or running to the post office

to collect our third-class mail. These creatures reek of landfill and dump, but accumulate

the discarded educations death shucks from the brightest of us. Now they control the nation

with seamless dark occluding our mirror versions of ourselves. Malformed grammars prevail. Words become words within words.

No one manufactures precision instruments, no one produces

sterile medical supplies anymore. We'll live frugally without visiting the coffee shop

or state liquor store. Our faces will slip inside us and leave only scar tissue showing.

The trash accumulates here and there and everywhere else, and the organic recycling

generates new vistas broad enough to house many sorts of beings: some rattling in metal shells,

some thriving on vinyl diets, some sporting corrugated smiles, and all of them sneaky enough

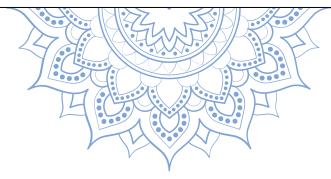
to overlap their shadows and ours, speaking through and for us before we can open our mouths to sing.

Spider in the Phen's Room Sink

by William Doreski

A spider in the men's room sink braces against the apocalypse. A nut-brown asterisk big as a silver dollar it sneers as I reach for the faucet handle. No, the drain is securely capped, and besides, I don't want to kill it, only banish it from the bright indoor space it dominates.

Upstairs in my office, comfy in my three-way swiveling chair, I assume that some dull student will crush the thing in a paper towel and trash it. Indian summer brews in the treetops. Airplanes scissor a mottled sky. Voices whisper from my laptop, crooning about love and longing, fast cars and slow-dancing women. Essays badly in need of grading sigh on my desk. I should shovel them into the recycling bin and pretend I lost them when flashes in the dawn suggested nuclear war.



The spider hasn't panicked, though.
When I return to the men's room
three hours later it maintains
its Zen detachment and pose.
A student combing his hair
ignores it. Another student
rushes from the room without washing
his hands at the occupied sink.

I wash at the other, safer sink and avoid catching the spider's prismatic gaze. By tomorrow it will be gone. If not, someone will have to lie on the tile floor and sacrifice self and ego to complete the spider's life cycle. Then its tiny but tragic spirit can abandon its papery shell and skitter up the brick-hard air and crown itself with stratosphere in the manner of classical gods.

The Hanb

by William Doreski

The Maya invented zero a thousand years before Europe did. Yet despite your troubled math attempting to prove otherwise, the Haab', with its eighteen months of twenty days, made no attempt to chart solar or lunar cycles.

We sulk over charts and worry that Wayeb', the five nameless days at the end of the calendar, has arrived. The underworld opens with a hydraulic sigh to permit the cruelest deities to riot and trouble the earth.

Swine flu breaks out in Mexico and coughs up the coast to New York, choking school kids and homeless men. A car bomb kills eighty people in Tikrit. A major league pitcher throws wildly into the stands and fractures an eight-year-old's skull.

We shouldn't have tracked this calendar so far into the future. Combined with the Tzolk'in, this calendar describes a fifty-two-year era, longer than Mayan lifetimes.

The recurrence of this cycle depended on the whims of gods.

We're hoping to span two cycles, a couple of calendar rounds, and like the Venus Cycle recur at regular intervals, peeping with the concept of zero over horizons so distant no one will note our approach.





"Dudo Stones" by Giulio R.M. Maffii

Contributor Eios

Geoff Sawers

Geoff Sawers's newest book is 'Widdershins Walk' (with Peter Driver, Peculiarity Press 2025). He lives in Reading, UK.

katie ferrari

katie ferrari writes personal essays, poetry, and fiction. her work traces the warp and weft of the personal and political and explores animism, relationship to the land, liberation, and community. she has been a public interest journalist, middle school english teacher, and organic vegetable farmer. her writing has been published in the bureau of complaint and nominated for best of the net.

Beulah Vega

Beulah Vega is a horror writer, political poet, and theatrical artist living and working in California's Bay Area. Her poetry has been published in Writers Resist, Walled Women, and Blood & Bourbon among others. Her first book of poetry 'A Saga for the Unrequited' was published in August of 2021 by Fae Corp Publishing. She is still amazed when people refer to her as a writer, every time.

Erin H.

Erin H. is a 17 year old artist who has a strong love for anything within the cultural arts. Constantly taking part in her community with performances and service through her clubs she sings, acts, writes, draws, and plays the trombone. In her free time she loves to drink coffee while listening to music and sit at home playing video games to wind down in the evening.

C.W. Bryan

C.W. Bryan is the author of two collections of poetry. His debut chapbook Celine: An Elegy was published with Bottlecap Press in 2023. His first full-length collection, No Bird Lives in my Heart is forthcoming with In Case of Emergency Press in 2025. He is currently writing with Sam Kilkenny at poetryispretentious.com.

L.N. Quinn

L.N. Quinn (they/per/pers) is an author, parent, and spouse in the Pacific Northwest of the United States. They draw inspiration from the diverse landscapes and experiences of time lived in the Great Plains and deserts of the Southwest. Per work has appeared in t'ART and Acropolis Journal. When not writing, they enjoy photography, composing music, and collecting vinyl. You can find them on Bluesky @lnquinn.bsky.social

David Hanlon

David Hanlon is a poet from Cardiff, Wales. You can find his work in many magazines and journals, including Rust & Moth, The Lumiere Review & trampset. His first full-length collection, Dawn's Incision, was recently published by Icefloe Press. You can follow him on twitter @davidhanlon13 & Instagram @hanlon6944

Alex Carrigan

Alex Carrigan (he/him) is a Pushcart-nominated editor, poet, and critic from Alexandria, VA. He is the author of Now Let's Get Brunch (Querencia Press, 2023) and May All Our Pain Be Champagne (Alien Buddha Press, 2022). He has appeared in SoFloPoJo, Cotton Xenomorph, Bullshit Lit, and more. Visit carriganak.wordpress.com or follow him on Twitter @carriganak for more info.

Giulio R.M. Maffii

He was born in Florence (Italy). His studies are dedicated to poetry (linear-experimental-visual) and its diffusion. He has published in many international magazines also as a visual artist. He collaborates with "Bubamara Teatro" Theatre Company. He teaches at the University of Florence. He plays with photos and collages.

nat raum

nat raum is the poet laureate of the void; their corporeal form lives in Baltimore. They're the author of *this book will not save you, random access memory, fruits of the valley,* and many others. Find them online at natraum.com or astral projecting inside a Royal Farms.

Victoria James

Victoria James is a high school English and Creative Writing teacher. She lives in Kansas with her husband, son, and dog. Her fiction appears in Choeofpleirn's Spring 2023 Magazine and Cow Creek Review. Her poetry appears in Cow Creek Review's 2023 volume, Empyrean Literary Magazine, Mindful Phoenix's Volume I, 1134's Archivist, and Choeofpleirn's Glacial Hills Review.

Lydia Rae Bush

Lydia Rae Bush is a poet exploring themes of embodiment and social-emotional development. Rae's work is Best of the Net nominated and appears in publications such as Vocivia Magazine and Corporeal. When not writing, Lydia can be found singing and dancing, especially in bed when she is supposed to be going to sleep. Her chapbook Free Bleeding is forthcoming with dogleech books.

Jessica Heron

Jessica Heron is an ability-queer pizza bagel poet and applied linguist from Staten Island living at the Jersey Shore. Her work has appeared in Hot Pink, BRUISER, Let's Stab Caesar!, Horror Sleaze Trash, Tiny Spoon, and other publications. Visit her at jessicaheronpoetry.com, xpsychoxlinguistx on bluesky, and @signature_trash on ig if the mood strikes you.

John RC Potter

John RC Potter is an international educator from Canada who lives in Istanbul. He has experienced a revolution (Indonesia), air strikes (Israel), earthquakes (Turkey), boredom (UAE), and blinding snow blizzards (Canada), the last being the subject of his story, 'Snowbound in the House of God' (Memoirist). His story, 'Ruth's World' (Fiction on the Web), was a Pushcart Prize nominee, and his poem, 'Tomato Heart' (Disturb the Universe Magazine), was nominated for the Best of the Net Award. The author's gay-themed children's picture book, The First Adventures of Walli and Magoo, is scheduled for publication. His website is johnrcpotterauthor.com. Find him on Twitter @JohnRCPotter.

jp thorn

jp thorn (he/they/any) is a queer, neurodivergent artist raised in & returned to the bible belt. advocate for destignatization & radically open communication, their work is inspired by humanness, reframing traditionalism, therapeutic processes, unlearning patriarchy, identity, & global patterns. you can find more of them at thorn.jp or on ig at jpeeperz.

Alexandra Gall

Alexandra Gall is a Minnesotan poet who writes about intense emotion and draws upon personal experiences while experimenting with narrative poetry. She explores themes around grief, relationships, food, and sex. She has fluttered between fiction, non-fiction, and poetry. Outside of writing, she enjoys baking, puzzles, tennis, and of course, reading.

Rosalie Hendon

Rosalie Hendon (she/her) is an arborist living in Columbus, Ohio. Her work is published in Ravens Perch, Quibble Lit, Sad Girls Diaries, Pollux, Blue Bottle, and Willawaw, among others. Rosalie is inspired by ecology, relationships, and stories passed down through generations.

Patrick G. Roland

Patrick G. Roland is a writer and educator living with cystic fibrosis. He explores life's experiences through poetry and storytelling, attempting to inspire others both in the classroom and through writing. He lives near Pittsburgh with his wife, who is his thoughtful critic, and their two children, who are his muse. His poetry can be found in the Eunoia Review, Willawaw Journal, Neologism Poetry Journal and several others.

Alex Cregan

Alex Cregan is a writer, poet and creative facilitator from Derry, Ireland. His work was most recently featured in Abridged and the engine(idling. Alex is a recipient of his city's artist and cultural practitioner fund, with much of his work being inspired by disability and queerness.

John Grey

John Grey is an Australian poet, US resident, recently published in New World Writing, City Brink and Tenth Muse. Latest books, "Subject Matters"," Between Two Fires" and "Covert" are available through Amazon. Work upcoming in Paterson Literary Review, Amazing Stories and Cantos.

Stephen Mead

Resident artist/curator for The Chroma Museum, artistic renderings of LGBTQI historical figures, organizations and allies predominantly before Stonewall, (thestephenmeadchromamuseum.weebly.com), Stephen Mead is a

(thestephenmeadchromamuseum.weebly.com), Stephen Mead is a retiree whom, throughout all his pretty non-glamorous jobs still found time for writing poetry/essays and creating art. Occasionally he even got paid of this. Currently he is trying to sell his 40-year backlog of unsold art before he pops his cogs, artworkarchive.com/profile/stephen-mead.

Jack D. Harvey

Jack D. Harvey's poetry has appeared in Scrivener, The Comstock Review, Valparaiso Poetry Review, Typishly Literary Magazine, The Antioch Review, The Piedmont Poetry Journal and elsewhere. The author has been a Pushcart nominee and over the years has been published in a few anthologies.

William Doreski

William Doreski lives in Peterborough, New Hampshire. He has taught at several colleges and universities. His most recent book of poetry is Cloud Mountain (2024). He has published three critical studies, including Robert Lowell's Shifting Colors. His essays, poetry, fiction, and reviews have appeared in various journals.

