

FALL/WINTER 2019



2
4

V
O
L

2
1

36A



THE STRAY BRANCH

#24 VOL 21

THE STRAY BRANCH

The Stray Branch

Fall/Winter 2019

The Stray Branch

Fall/Winter 2019 #234 Vol 21
© 2019 The Stray Branch. All Rights Reserved.

ISBN: 9781692820015
Independently published

Printed in the United States

www.thestraybranch.org
thestraybranchlitmag@yahoo.com

Founder/Editor Debbie Berk
www.debbieberk.com

Acknowledgements:

Higher and Harder, Flash Fiction by Paul Beckman Originally published in *r,kv,r,y*.

Nothing by Megha Sood (First Published in *Modern Literature*, July 2018)

Feeble Attempt by Megha Sood (First Published in *Visual Verse*, Vol 5 Chapter 10)

Perspective by Megha Sood (First Published in *Poppy Road Review*, Sept 2018)

Unappreciated by Megha Sood (First Published in *FVR Publishing*, Aug, 2018)

Cover Art by Debbie Berk

Contributors retain all copyrights to their work.

Contents

Poetry by...

Adam Levon Brown.....	32-35
Alessio Zanelli.....	38-39
Andrew C Brown.....	1-2
Betsy-Anne Hambar.....	87-88
Bradford Middleton.....	85
Conrad Gurtatowski	113-117
Cynthia McCoy Crummey.....	108-111
Daniel de Culla.....	58-75
David Spicer.....	104-107
Denny E. Marshall.....	100-103
E. V. Wyler.....	89
Edward Lee.....	125-128
Fabrice B. Poussin.....	86
Irina Moga.....	27-31
James Kowalczyk.....	80
Jeffrey Zable.....	36-37
John Maurer.....	138-139
Keith Wesley Combs.....	112
Luis Cuauhtémoc Berriozábal.....	3, 5-9
Marc Carver.....	82
Martha Strom.....	40-45
Megha Sood.....	10-15
Michael Morell.....	46-51
Michael Plesset.....	81
P. L. Grimaldi.....	16-20
Rajnish Mishra.....	83
Roger Singer.....	135-137
Sandro D. Fossemò.....	118-124
Sue Crisp.....	84
Tony Daly.....	132-134
Yuan Hongri.....	76-77

Fiction

Dinner Guest at the Butler's House by Marlon Jackson.....	140-142
My Joyful Trance by Glenn Myers.....	21-22
Pozo by Terry Sanville.....	90-98

Flash Fiction

Higher and Harder by Paul Beckman.....	24-26
--	-------

Artwork by.....

Alessio Zanelli.....	39
Amy Brereton.....	28-29
Daniel de Culla.....	58-75
Denny Marshal.....	99, 101-103
ISABELLE.....	52-55

Photography by.....

Cristina Bresser de Campos.....	126, 129-131
Debbie Berk.....	4, 23, 78-79
Loretta Grimaldi.....	17-20
Michael Morell.....	47-48, 50

Features

Contributors

Adam Levon Brown-Poetry / 32-35
Alessio Zanelli-Poetry/Art / 38-39
Daniel de Culla-Poetry/Art / 58-75
Irina Moga-Poetry / 27-31
ISABELLE - Art / 52-57
Jeffrey Zable- Poetry / 36-37
Martha Strom- Poetry / 40-45
Michael Morell- Poetry/Photography /46-51
Paul Beckman- Flash Fiction / 24-26
Yuan Hongri- Poetry / 76-77

Poems

Failure by Marc Carver / 82
Peeking in the windows by Mike Plesset / 81
Answers Questioned by James Kowalczyk / 80
Passenger by Fabrice B. Poussin / 86
No hell for poets by Rajnish Mishra / 83
First Son by Sue Crisp / 84
FRIDAY NIGHT (I DREAM OF POETS) by Bradford Middleton / 85
Addicted to Both of You by Betsy-Anne Hambar / 87-88
The Pedestrian's Rucksack by E.V. Wyler / 89

Fiction

My Joyful Trance by Glenn H. Myers / 21-22

TSB

2 poems by Andrew C Brown

Andrew C Brown is The Grandad from Knowle West. Published on three continents, he enjoys performing spoken word sharing experiences of prison, addiction and 'life on the estate'.

The weight of the suicide's decision

Brambles scratched by desolation
scream submission to an angry sky,

competing piles of burgled detritus
exonerate existentialism

stripped stolen motorbike here,
scorned forlorn unicorn there

randomly scattered toys, their sad faces etched full
of memory sprawl astride remains of scorched ashes.

Welcome to the Northern Slopes of Knowle West
a haven of mishmash urban countryside
flourishing in wild abandonment;
dying flowers scowl defiance
around the tree that bore
the weight of the suicide's decision.

Daddy's Deal

she knew **he** was here somewhere,
he had brought **her** to the wasteland
she knew he would protect **her**
he left the shiny white caravan
she smiled as **she** saw **her** father
he buried deep hands into soiled pockets
she lifted **her** pig-tailed head in hope
he looked comfortable in thought
she excitedly saw **his** approach
he twitched a grin, rubbed **his** nose,
she seemed upset as **he** walked past **her**
he bowed **his** head, shirked shoulders,
she turned to plead a greeting
his stride seemed to deliberately quicken
she walked slowly, flanked by strangers who were **her** elders
he fingered powdered bags and folded notes
she looked uncomfortable, uncertain
his contoured face garnered no guilt
she felt strong hands grip **her** tiny shoulder
he anticipated active acceptance of addiction
she was ushered into the shiny white caravan
his concentration ignored the loud laughter
she shrieked a shrill screeching scream
he closed his ears accepted active addiction
she concentrated **her** mind on the rhythmic thud of rain lashing the window panes
he hesitated, turned around, saw dirt dripping down the door
she split the air with another searching, certain scream

Andrew C Brown

TSB

6 poems by Luis Cuauhtémoc Berriozábal

Luis, born in Mexico, lives in Southern California and works in the mental health field in Los Angeles CA. His first book of poetry, Raw Materials, was published by Pygmy Forest Press. His most recent chapbook, Make the Light Mine, was published by Pygmy Forest Press.

Wither Away

Years wither away
like falling stars,
the tarnished sky
withdraws from the sun.

The deserted plains,
restless for rain,
glance at the clouds,
beg for its tears.

Time goes on and life's
impotence seeks
out thunder, lightning,
a faint heart murmur.

It is too late and
too early for the grave.



Photo by Debbie Berk

Skull Vase

The flowering skull
bleeds red roses,
bleeds white magnolias,
bleeds yellow sunflowers.

On display on the marble
table, sunlight from
the kitchen window,
spills into its eyes.

The skull vase, of
eggshell white porcelain,
shiny and new, like
Madonna, the virgin,

easy on the eyes,
easy to break into pieces
in blundering hands,
don't ask me to explain?

Don't Look in the Mirror

Dirt in your eyes,
two round olives,
one half dead, one half stone,
and each eye smarting.

Dirt in your eyes,
blood in your mouth,
blood in your tongue, you took
a world-class beating.

Don't look in the mirror.

A small crowd
tell the tale.
Your memory lacks.
Don't look in the mirror.

The beating took
away your dreams.
The quiet night
enveloped the moon.

Don't look in the mirror.

Blood on your face.
Don't look in the mirror.
The blood moon drips.

Don't look in the mirror.

No Light

Seeing you raise your voice
that would frighten horses
and break saxophone reeds,
I see an unforgiving future.

Seeing you throwing fits
that would bend rain and cause
the sea to overflow,
I see no light in this dark tunnel.

There was blood in your eyes.
There were swords in your gaze.
There was a heart deep inside
doing its best to hide.

There was a tussle of sorts
spewing from your mad lips
causing roses to wilt and the living
not waiting for their turn to die.

The Dead Walk

Cemeteries sleep
far and wide.
The dead walk free
to the sea.

The blood red moon
searches for mouths
filled with grass
and snake shaped
tongues that speak.

Morgues sleep
like babies.
All the dead
wet their lips
with tears
and wine.

At sunrise
red ants march
with shoes
that do not slip.

Tombs sleep
as the dead kings
live again, each
with a monkey heart.

Show Me Your Hands

Show me your hands,
your grip on the planets.

They bleed black blood.
The stars do not shine

in your cracked hands
scorched by the sunset.

Stop grappling. Release
the wounded night.

The flood in your hands
glow with the teeth of stars.

Let go of the shadow
of the giant moon,

the golden glow of the sun.
The night is without eyes.

Unleash the wind and fill
the dry sea with water.

Luis Cuauhtémoc Berriozábal

TSB

5 poems by Megha Sood

Megha Sood lives in Jersey City, New Jersey. She is also a contributing author at GoDogGO Cafe, Candles Online, FVR Publishing, Whisper and the Roar and Poets Corner.

Her works have been featured in GoDogGoCafe, Whisper and the Roar, Duane Poetree, Visual Verse, Vita Brevis, Poets Corner, Modern poetry, Spillwords Press, Indian periodicals, Literary heist, Little Rose Magazine, The Quiet Corner, Writer's Cafe Magazine, and coming up in Modern Literature, KOAN (Paragon Press), Dime Show review and many more.

She recently won the 1st prize in NAMI NJ Dara Axelrod Mental Health Poetry contest. She blogs at <https://meghasworldsite.wordpress.com/>.

Nothing (First Published in Modern Literature, July 2018)

How the feeling of emptiness devours
and takes me in
like an empty nest
and a hole in the ground
an empty den of the fox
with just loneliness gazing around
an unclaimed body
lying in the morgue..sleeping
without the
rush to being claimed or otherwise
Oh! how the emptiness seeps and seeks me
with the stories of yore
with phantom pain filling my pores
An old abandoned hut
covered with vines and creeps
in the middle of the farmland
waiting to be lived in
a beautiful nursery with
matching color crib and that mobile
tinkling to the sound of desertion
and those

patterned unused blankets
folded and tucked neatly
left in the pile
in the corner
to be donated
so it can be forgotten
Bearing a load of a heavy heart
a heart empty
scraped and scratched of any emotion
Uninhabitable
not good for any more use
No sun
No sunlight
and the shadows are empty
with nobody behind
A close look at my palms and
those lines have left me.
Oh! how the feeling of emptiness
fills and devours
everything in me.

Feeble Attempt (First Published in Visual Verse, Vol 5 Chapter 10)

Your mind,
a congruence of aberrant thoughts
a serendipitous convergence,
you try so fervently
to carve your own niche
your own identity
in this cesspool of clones
floating for eons
from here to nothing
Your face,
a stark reflection of the
blatant reality
where everyone is trying to be unique
like the blueprint
or the map carved out by the
swirls of their
thumbs pressed on paper
you believe yours is unique
Don't you?
Your voice
trying to break the cacophony
in that tumultuous mind of yours
a silhouette of silence,
to serrate both ends of the darkness
to carve you
out of your banal lies
when you are stitched
from the same fabric
the same suit and tie
You still try.
Don't you?

Death calls you by the wrong name

A life full of charades and illusion
decked up pretenses and trying to
keep up the status quo
the bourgeois of a life
the facade which we carry on each day
the masks we wear on our broken faces
the broken truth and oh so pale and
murky promises
those phlem laced truths
we speak to each other
and live in an illusion
we surreptitiously build around
in an attempt o break the next one climbing
with their feet on our shoulder
this incessant climbing
those missing breaths
are filling the gaps in our relationships
like the cavity fillers
with your bony knuckles
we scrape and scratch every wound
a shred of masochistic pleasure for us
I deserve my pound of flesh
we declare
so boisterously
we are a living royalty
but the illusion falls apart
as the time is crimped
we face the ashen face of reality
losing the smirk on our crestfallen faces
when death calls us by the wrong name.

Unappreciated (First Published in FVR Publishing, Aug, 2018)

How can you live a life when the moments are
as long as the shrug of your shoulder
or waiting on the careless fingers resting on a trigger
marked and unappreciated

How can you live life
when you are judged by your
cast/creed/skin color
or how your tongue moves inside you when you speak of love
those scriptures,
the world has forgotten
while your knees are scraped and blue
kneeling for praying to gods in heaven

How can you live life like this
when your desire and the rage of hormones
or the sex resting between your supple thighs
marks and etches you
and you can only rest in the binary form
any other is a direct violation of the life
soon to be dissolved,
should cease to exist

How can you live life
like a broken spine of a book
still holding the old rotten pages together with
the essence,
soaked in between
the tattered pages
but too old to be lifted off the shelves
thrown and resting on an old broken armchair

How can you live life like this?
Tell me, Can you?

Perspective (First Published in Poppy Road Review, Sept 2018)

With my shackled mind and encumbered thoughts
as my feet rise up the
steps of the old mighty temple
desolate yet imbued
with the fullness of life
my body disguised as a prayer
and my palms folded
as the dissatisfaction is
neatly tucked in the center of my palms
I count the steps
in sync with my raging heartbeats and bated breath
I walk by the neat line of the beggars and less fortunate ones
the lingering shine of the quest in their eyes aren't different from mine
carrying the burden of the life on their stooped shoulder
and heavy eyelids, they are praying too
under their muted breath
but to a god of a different origin
which will satiate the hunger in their knotted belly
their hunger is not so different from mine
I say this to myself
as I reach the parapet and
with my warm feet on the gelid
checkered floors of the temple
resembling the mosaic of truth and the lies
weaved surreptitiously in my bleak reality
brooding with deep silence
I face the divine with a question deep seeded
in my bleary eyes
the answers to which
I already passed by on my way here.

Megha Sood

6 poems by P. L. Grimaldi

Peter Grimaldi's work has appeared in The English Journal, Blue Collar Review, HazMat Review, Schuylkill Valley Journal, The Stray Branch and other periodicals.

Photography by Loretta Grimaldi

Loretta Grimaldi is an artist and photographer whose work has appeared in The Stray Branch and various charity organizations.

Aggie's Midnight Voice

During Midnight's deep, dark glow,
I hear the piano notes of her voice again,
Her shadow there stands,
Then light made the shadow go.
It's a brief eternity since she went away,
Beyond ice and flame leaving a fragment of a man and a name.
I hear echoes approaching me.

Joe's Art

He uses cool magnifying glass eyes and cushioned age
He sees hanging angles and quiet tight light,
He sees rumbling colors and sweet sad shadows
He paints pigment tears and tangled tender oil strokes.

Abandoned Rails

Abandoned rails,
Rusted ribbons and untied ties,
Weary with old age
Like carpeting which has melted into a hardwood floor,
So difficult to remove, this is a metal language,
Men once claimed this steel street where
I am the student reading what remains,
Weeds are the only form of transportation now.



I Was The Grave Digger



I was the grave digger in Hamlet
finding the squirrel's skull
Cleaned and polished by insects and Time,
I picked up the skull knowing it was the one I often fed,
The sequence of words appeared:
To be or what a piece of work
Not to be, How noble
In this quintessence of dust reason,
Just a squirrel, just a life.



Web

**Stretched out across space and time
A sheer hand, a silver hand
Stretched between plant limbs, stretched across
Years of existence this spider's universe,
Catching light and prey for those who never pray,
Threads of extinction and continuation,
Silver scimitar,
This is silk light, silk Death.**

Her Grandfather's Diary

DATE	CASH ACCOUNT		Received	Paid
1955	NOV 35	NOV 15 36	20 20 26	66
12/3/54				
1/4	25/32			2 57
1-27		30 70		40
1/31	36			36
2/5	132			
2/10		20 20		
3/10	80	132 20 70	26	
4	Expenses a Month			
	Rent		49.00	
	TEL	M	7.00	least
	ELEC	M	4.00	
	GAS	M	5.00	least
	INSU	M	11.00	
	EMERY	M	14.00	
	MEDIC	W	5.00	least
	Table		95.00	M
			20.00	week
			17	5.00
	News		2 80	
			2 2	117
			2 33-	

DATE	DESCRIPTION	Received	Paid
	NEWS 10 ME		
	2625.00		Repair
	Paid Buck		
	10cc 54	44 25	
	Jan 55	44 25	
	Feb	44 25	
	Mar	44 25	
	Apr	44 25	
	May	44 25	
	Insurance, a Policy		
	Aug-30-37-	50.00	
			15.00
			110.00

Her grandfather wrote down everything he possibly could
 As he grew older than the gray flannel clouds overhead,
 Keeping a diary of expenses and mundane items
 Each stroke a snake sneaking through his life,
 So much for electricity, telephone, a doctor's visit,
 The snake grew longer around him
 Coiled with each sunrise, each night that was filled with
 Enormous silence.
 His last entry was his last action,
 The snakes are the only note left of life.

P. L. Grimaldi

~*Featured Fiction*

My Joyful Trance

by Glenn H. Myers

I can't escape the kwoosh kwoosh of the machine pumping me with morphine and I wish they would just shut it off so I can spend my last days—or perhaps hours—in peace. Hell of a way to go. Itchy sheets. Annoying plastic under the itchy sheets. Ticking clock on the wall. Moans emanating from the other rooms. Damn beeps and boops from the nurses' station. Everyone trying to speak in hushed whispers not realizing their muted conversations bounce off the walls.

As if we don't already know we are going to die.

The buzzing of the fly that's been in my room for ten minutes may be the final nail in my soon-to-be-inhabited coffin. I hate flies. Their buzz buzz buzz goes right through me. And don't get me started on the diseases they spread. I never eat anything at a picnic or barbecue. No way. No how. Well, not that it matters any more.

This incessant insect with wings reminds me of that summer I went to the Cape and those pernicious green heads were everywhere, taking chunks of my flesh; no

TSB

My Joyful Trance

different, I suppose, from the wingless carcinoma gnawing on my innards.

The one item of solace in this morbid dungeon of a room is the painting directly across from me; its rich colors give spirit to the otherwise bleakness of the walls, air, and my inner being. I stare at the canvas, wondering what the artist was thinking when she painted it. Was she happy? In pain? Young? Old? Hopeful? I have a brief moment of joy as I bathe in the beauty of the landscape, as it reminds me of my youth.

The buzzing of the fly's wings breaks me from my joyful trance.

The winged insect lands on the armrest of my bed. I may be old and weak but I don't miss a beat. This may be my final contribution to society. I lift up my arm, the tubes and cords embedded in my epidermis moving in synch. I drop my arm and whack the fly with my hand. He—and it's definitely a he, because it's so annoying—flies through the air and lands on my stomach. Dead. Like I'll be soon.

I turn my attention back to the painting and smile.

Glenn H. Myers spends his days penning corporate memos; by night, he crafts fiction. His non-fiction work has been published in The Boston Globe. He spends his weekends seeking a literary agent for his first novel, THE FRENCH FRY DIET.



Featured Contributors

Adam Levon Brown - Poetry

Alessio Zanelli - Poetry/Art

Daniel de Culla - Poetry/Art

Irina Moga - Poetry

ISABELLE - Art

Jeffrey Zable - Poetry

Martha Strom - Poetry

Michael Morell - Poetry/Photography

Paul Beckman - Flash Fiction

Yuan Hongri - Poetry

Photo by Debbie Berk

~Featured Flash Fiction

Higher and Harder

by Paul Beckman

She led me down a dark dirt path off the pavement. I'd met her fifteen minutes into the Fantasy Party, she said let's blow this Popsicle stand, and I, always ready to follow a redhead, agreed. Our only light was the flash from her Iphone and we ended up at an old barn. "This is what I wanted to show you," she said, heading towards a far corner. "This is the path to the nest of spiders." She began to undress. "Nothing turns me on more than making love in the straw knowing there are spiders only inches away."

I will only follow a redhead so far and found my way back to the party where I re-introduced myself to the bartender and chugged a double bourbon to settle me down. I saw the redhead again and watched her lead someone else out towards the path.

"If I had a drink like you just did, I'd feel like my souls on fire," a brunette said. "Don't much like spiders?" she asked.

"Not much," I said feeling the bourbon massage my insides.

She said, "Let's grab another drink and go down by the swings—I've never gotten over my love of playground swings. I love Bill's parties, don't you?" I told her I'd never been to one before and she said, wrong answer, and then I remembered the invite rules: make everything up. This is my first annual Fantasy Party, the invitation read.

Higher and Harder

It was a pleasant evening and it was fun swinging and sipping my drink. "Want me to push you," I asked and she said, "Maybe after we get to know each other better and by the way, what's your name?"

"Arnold," I said.

"That's the name of my accountant, gynecologist and former divorce lawyer and also the name the Indian man uses when he calls to sell me solar panels. My name's Henrietta and after the spider episode what gave you the courage to follow me outside?"

"Cleavage," I said and she said, "You realize you said that aloud don't you?"

"The bourbon is the key that unlocks the filter between my brain and mouth," I said and she found that charming. Then she said, "Okay you can push me now," and I stopped my swing and pulled the ropes on hers back and pushed her forward.

She kept saying higher, higher, which my brain heard as harder harder so I pulled back and let it rip and pushed her harder and higher and when she was above the top of the swing she let go of the ropes and spread her arms and flew off to parts unknown. I walked back to the party thinking perhaps I wasn't cut out for Fantasy Parties and went to the bar where the bartender was ready with my double bourbon and one cube, looked around and saw the spider lady and the swing lady entwined on the couch and walked out, glass in hand, looking for a cab.

Originally published in r,kv,r,y.

Featured Author ~ Paul Beckman



Paul Beckman's a retired air traffic controller. He was one of the winners in The Best Small Fictions 2016!

His latest collection of flash stories, "Kiss Kiss" (Truth Serum Press) is available at Independent Book Stores,& Amazon. Some places his stories have been published: Literary Orphans, Matter Press, S pelk, Playboy, Yellow Mama, and Pank.

Paul had a micro-story selected for the 2018 New Norton Anthology on micro-fiction.

5 poems by Featured Poet Irina Moga

Witchcraft

It's late and the pulse of the stars,
in bandages of words,
bubbles up towards the surface of the night.

A gryphon hides its claws,
a gargoyle of rain water rustles on.
Insects of wax, desire and black holes move
the regnum of the metaphors
that hypothesize on the outcome
of your gore.

This unintended witchcraft,
stirred in cauldrons of unrequited hope
brings me closer to our plight.

Aside from secret runes, pins, voodoo dolls and shards of hearts,
the dearth bequeathed out of a cold and shriveled hand
reaches towards a snowy ending,
icy and mollified by floes,
in blood-stained love, across the galaxies above.

Triangular Moon

The powder of roses
dispersed by moonlight in the dark,
clown face,
harlequin made of subdued lines.



Artwork by Amy Brereton

Like Clockwork

Your symbol caught
In the clockwork
of the dissenting hour:
love made of nothing,

merciless drumming,
of petals
into the farthest rose-white,
into exile.



Amy Brereton, is a Vancouver based illustrator who recently graduated from Emily Carr University of Art and Design.

Amy Brereton's illustrations present the tender duality of our world - a balance of gloom and beauty simultaneously. Themes in her work include surrealism, as well as notions of feminism. Aesthetically, her work is inspired by pop culture, low-brow comics, anime, woodcut prints, and tattoo flash. Previous freelance clients include Discorder Magazine, Italian designer Artemisia Hwang, and pop punk band Youth Fountain.

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/amybrereton/>

Online Store: <https://amybrereton.bigcartel.com/>

Tumblr: <https://amybrereton.tumblr.com>

Facebook: <https://m.facebook.com/amybreretonart>

Discorder Contributions: <https://www.citr.ca/author/amybrereton/>

Coffin

Coffin made for a princess,
syllables rustling on lattices of gold,
musicians with sly drums,

What inside this death has meaning?

Where does afterlife kick in in the procession
with trestle trumpets and hushed words
painted on an imaginary air coffin?

The Other Hecate

I've regained balance
within the flames that devour me
- guesswork of what could be
your game of passion.

I carry that grey afterthought of love –
despair and humility,
as I follow you around, blandly,

a nest of vipers
curling up around my neck
in lieu of darkness.

Featured Poet ~ Irina Moga



Irina Moga's poems have appeared Canadian Literature, carte-blanche, dandelion, Rockhurst Review and The Chaffin Journal.

Irina is a member of The Writers' Union of Canada (TWUC) and lives in Ontario, Canada; she previously published three poetry books.

3 poems by Featured Poet Adam Levon Brown

The Silence

beckons
for truth

Hungering as Ravens
eclipsing Blood moon
with eyes of ire

Dirge Symphonic
swells in blackened
lungs

Writhing in past lives
and sinister mischief

Talons pierce
through flesh of beginnings
while starving the naked
end with beak of clay

Hysteria laughs

itself into the mirror,
creating Devils
for the mind to fight

Twisted assortment
of egos, dueling
with inner monologue
to find truth within fractals
of neuron dusk

Panopticon of disquieting
unhinges myopia and spills
itself upon the pages
we call life

Crimson is the Name of Holiness

Gyration of symbolism
splinters through eyelids
of glimmering blood

Whispering fate
into ears of Unholy
retribution

*

Creation lives
with itself
in alleyways
of distrust

Allowing Death
to peek its kindred
eye into its reality

*

Umbra sizzles
the eye that is Sun,
and hovers
above the drizzle
planted above light

Sighing away
days as fast
as the night
heats its escape
upon the senses
of the Moon

Featured Poet ~ Adam Levon Brown



Adam Levon Brown is an internationally published poet and author in 14 countries. He has had his work translated in Spanish, Albanian, Arabic, and Afrikaans. Boasting over 300 published pieces, you can find his writing at such publications as Burningword Literary Journal, Firefly Magazine, Zany Zygote Review, Epigraph, Angel City Review, and Ariel Chart. He was long-listed in the 2016 Erbacce Prize poetry competition and received a special mention in the Pangolin Prize 2018 competition.

[Http://www.Adamlevonbrowncom.wordpress.com](http://www.Adamlevonbrowncom.wordpress.com)

1 poem by Featured Poet Jeffrey Zable

REUNION

The way things end,
people dying before their time.
When I saw you last
could have been on the basketball court,
curly hair dribbling to the hoop.
I hadn't consciously thought of you
until I saw the list in remembrance,
spoke to a former classmate who said
you drowned over thirty years ago
in the Yuba river.
So many years have gone since then
with no one to answer for them.

Featured Poet ~ Jeffrey Zable



Jeffrey Zable is a teacher and conga drummer who plays Afro Cuban Folkloric music for dance classes and Rumbas around the San Francisco Bay Area. His poetry, fiction, and non-fiction have appeared in hundreds of literary magazines and anthologies. Recent writing in MockingHeart Review, Awkward Mermaid, Ink In Thirds, Third Wednesday, Uppagus, After the Pause, Rosette Maleficarum, Chrome Baby, Former Cactus and many others. In 2017 he was nominated for both The Best of the Net and the Pushcart Prize.

1 poem & Art by Featured Poet/Artist Alessio Zanelli

Mixed Pathology

for mom

It's still all there,
in that slowly-shrinking pulpy mass
a little bigger than a pomegranate,
in that jumbled fistful of withering cells
no longer capable of recognizing themselves.
Every word said or heard,
every dream or thought,
every image or sound,
every emotion or feeling.
Every single moment of her life
as well as many of mine.
Everything's buried deep in there somewhere.
It must be.
Only,
the last thread left
along which all she was and is can resurface
is becoming thinner and thinner.
Until it breaks,
she prisoner inside.
Or who knows,
finally free from walls and ceilings,
unshackled from the chains
of pills and concoctions.
Yes,
free to range at will outdoors.



Featured Poet/Artist ~ Alessio Zanelli

*Alessio Zanelli is an Italian poet who writes in English and whose work has appeared in over 150 literary journals from 13 countries. His fifth original collection, titled *The Secret Of Archery*, was published in 2019 by Greenwich Exchange (London). For more information please visit www.alessiozanelli.it.*



2 poems by Featured Poet Martha Strom

Time for Coffee

shiny bright- bright and shiny-
white clumps stuck on holly branches
on spindly sticks sticking out
on rocks too

and pearl saying
we are building an igloo
and remembering the igloo
my dad built packing bricks of snow
in a box then piling them up
into a round shape

sky bright- medium blue- and sparkles
showers of sparkles
as snow drops in from the sky
down from heaven

and i spy the round first round
of the white, white round house
called an igloo
and i slept in

alan sent me a broad expanse
of a picture of a bright blue day
with snow

the colors of the snowscape
white blue green brown ochre and gray
cascades of white snow falling off
the branches of the bushes and trees
darker white here and there or gray
those are where the sun makes shadows
before which my nightmares fled

and i, an escapee from new york,
had prayed and meditated and felt somehow
that might be wrong-- but i went downstairs
and no one was paying attention

TSB

In a Bleecker Street Cafe

I Found Someone to Love Today
--Joni Mitchell

sketchy

white curving

tree limbs

and me

back in missouri

twenty degree sky

gray clouds curving

sketchy

old age

has got me

hanging by a tooth

that youth

i condemn

was me sane

what have i become

but old

curving

toward a home

in the sky

far above

these white branches

way up in those

sketchy clouds

i was seeking the sky

now it seeks me

Featured Poet ~ Martha Strom



Martha Strom's poems have appeared in New Letters, Passager, Common Ground Review, and Straylight Literary Arts Magazine, among other journals. She lives in Brooklyn, New York.

TSB

3 poems and Photos by Featured Poet/Photographer

Michael Morell

LOST & FOUND

In darkness
the firefly
lit the way
and I
followed
followed

followed

for soon
I realized
that she was
lighting
her own way
and not
mine.





WHY WOULD YOU EVEN ASK

Why would you even ask
someone who knows nothing
about fishing to take you fishing?
Because he is my father
and I am 11 and Chris is 9

as well as my best friend
but his mother is divorced
and he never sees his dad.
Somehow we both have fishing poles
but have never gone fishing.

I'm embarrassed to say
we used lunch meat for bait
Lebanon Bologna I think it was
and you might think I could
still get a Norman Rockwell painting

out of the mud and mess of the tangled morning
but there was no pleasantness for my father
it was just work away from work
a job whose boss I never met
but knew it wasn't me.

Japanese Memorial Verse ✨

Dukkha is the ocean rolling onto the beach of life-
accept the waves, give back the waves.

Father, I wrote my own death poem today
and it reminded me of the last time I saw you
in the hospital.

On the way out the door I said I love you
and you were silent.
I said I love you just in case...

Never one to express yourself
you were silent just in case,

not wanting to step
outside yourself.

Shhhhhhhhhh...

The way that can be described is not the true way.
The grief that I can write about is not the true grief.

** The death poem is a genre of poetry that developed in the literary traditions of East Asian cultures, both in general and concerning the imminent death of the author—that is often coupled with a meaningful observation on life. The practice of writing a death poem has its origins in Zen Buddhism. The memorial verse specifically deals with the death of a loved one.*



Featured Poet/Photographer ~ Michael Morell

Michael Morell is a poet and photographer whose work has appeared in Shot Glass Journal, The Aurean, Philadelphia Stories, The Stray Branch, and elsewhere. In 2017, he received first place in the Ardmore Library Charlotte Miller Simon Poetry Contest, and earned a Master's degree in Applied Meditation Studies.



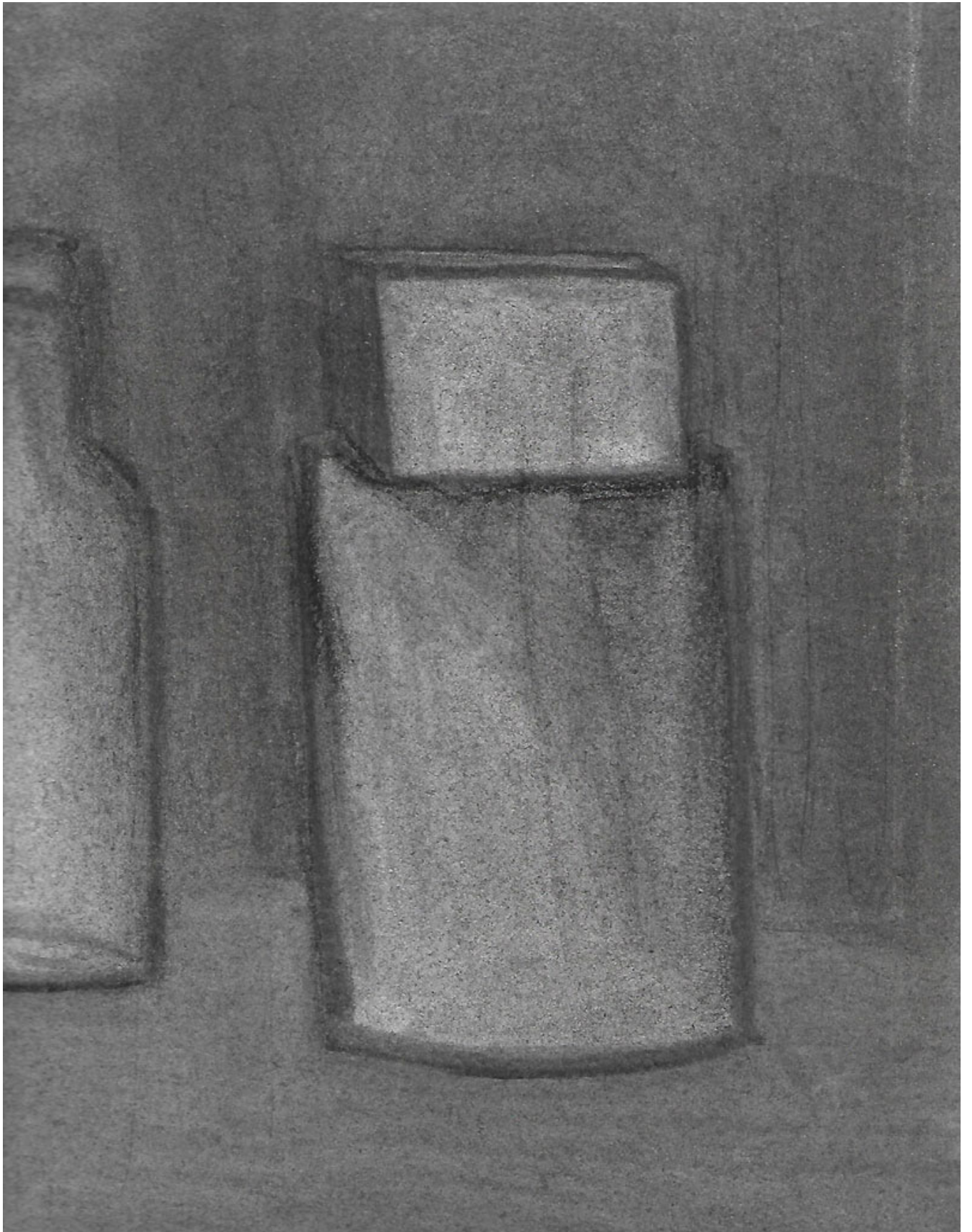
TSB

Art by Featured Artist Isabelle



TSB







ISABELLE – Isabel Gómez de Diego (b. 1991) is a Poetess, Photographer and Erudite Young Women. Photography is her ideal médium for her inspiration and investigation, but her much Evidence is derived from Art.

Bachelor of Arts, Plastic, Image and Design is also member of Spanish Centre for Reprographic Rights (CEDRO), and herself concerns with photographs, the written word, and print media.

She was a characteristic performer in Berlin, Hannover (Germany) and her publications can provide a fertile field of inquiry; and she wants to sing with native birds and insects the traditional Goddess' Poem:

“By love alone

I may be known.

Love is

the only law

I know.

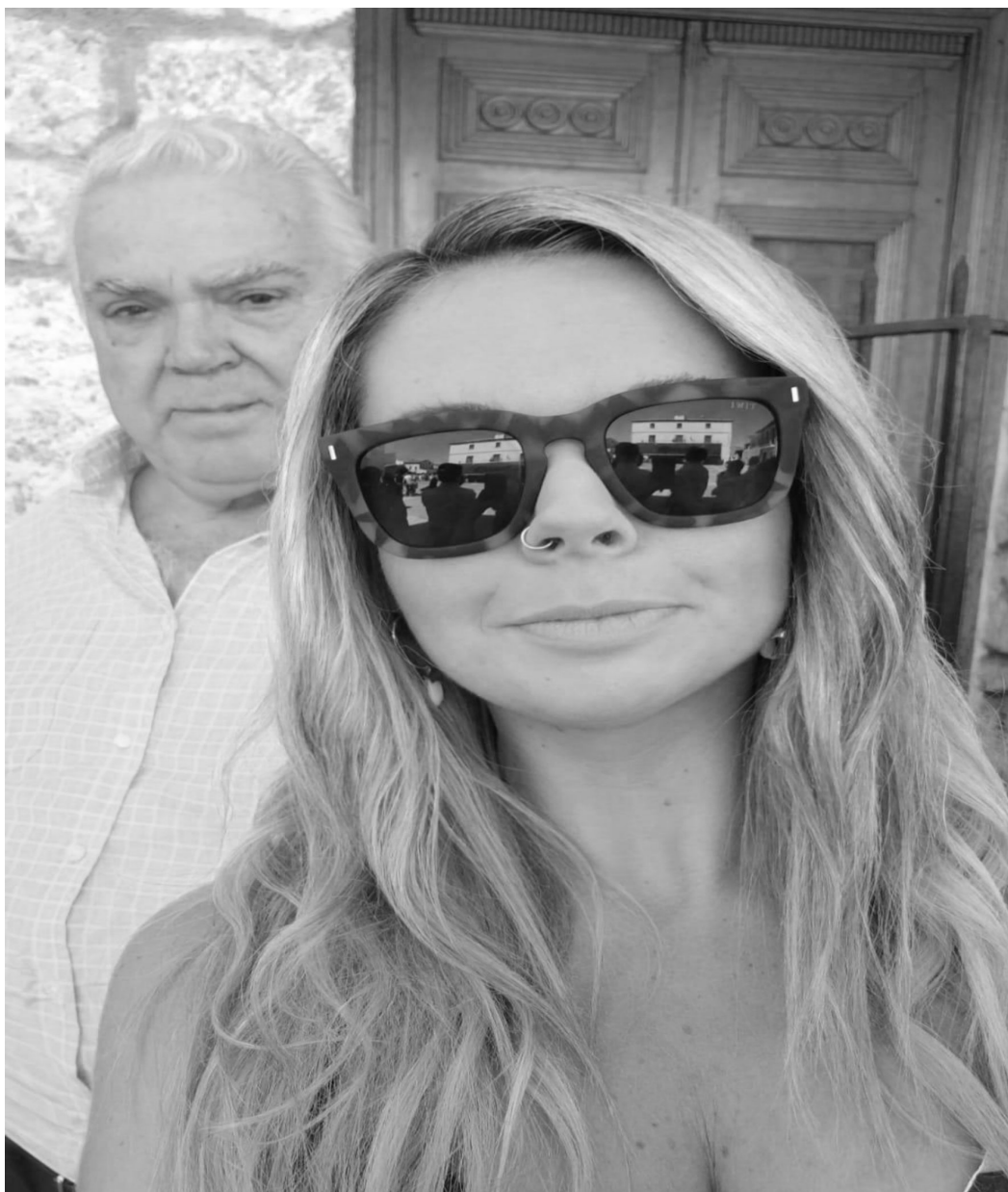
All things live,

And are My own:

From Me they come,

To me they go”. (Book of the Goddess, The Temple of the Goddess Within, page 328)

Featured Artist ~ Isabelle



Her books: CLEOPATRA, Dep. Legal: BU-18/2009; EL GRECO PINTOR DE LLAMAS VIVAS, Dep. Legal: BU-86/2008; CUENTO DE VIENTO Y NIEVE, isbn: 95081-93-8; PINOCHIA, isbn: 10:84-96339-78-5; CRISTALES ROTOS, Dep. Legal: BU-246/07; UNA CHICA EN PEDRAZA (SEGOVIA), Dep. Legal: BU-493/08; EL QUIJOTE DE ISA, isbn: 84-96339-42-4; DE MIS OJOS Y DE MI VIDA, Dep. Legal: BU-162/08; LA FLORIDA DE ANTONIO MACHADO, isbn: 84-9633-984-X

TSB

*5 poems and Art by Featured Poet/Artist
Daniel de Culla*

ANOTHER AUTUMN

I'm in Tosantos
Locatlity of the province of Burgos
Sat in an "Ottoman"
As a sofa
In my room at ground level
Listening the rain falling
Getting me on nerves.
Just stop raining!
I get up
And I'm going to the window
Admiring
The second grass
That produces the meadows
And the earth 'seasoning
That is put in good condition.
I look out the window
Seeing Autilla and Otoción
Older woman and man
Listening from they:
He: Woman, Grass sprouts in Autumn
She: If only will sprout Yrsj
They were going to laugh
When they stop talking
Seeing two lovers arguing
The girl with a milk pitcher
Under the arm
And the boy with a slab in tow
Talking about the days
That spend without feeling.
I turned to the "Ottoman"
Starting to listen

TSB

Because I have somewhere in me
The newly wet Autumn:
Lake of Tears'
"So Feel Autumn Rain"



"Night time
sharpen
heightens each
sensation.
Darkness stirs
and wakes
imagination."
- Sarah Brightman



The Music of the Night

NIGHT MUSIC THAT DOES NOT SHUT UP

With good or bad music comes Night
When the Sun is below the horizon.
Black cloak as clerical cassock
It's covering the city
On their roofs of houses and blocks
Referring to Mozart's music
To Strau's waltzes
To rock or rap.
The Moon flies over the clouds
With his head peeled and a scarf around her neck.
Little by little, night is singing its music
That does not shut up
In harmony or melody of sounds
Or both combined
And, when it's quiet, butterflies leave the clouds
And come towards the light to burn their wings
Introducing more or less deeply
In the lovers' bedroom
With vain talk, stories, gossip
Where one organ enters the parts of another
Adhering to its surface
Like the cat at the snout very thin
The very long tail
And the very gray hairs of the mouse.
Mischiefs, traps, perfidies
Coronate musical notes
From a nocturnal dream that soon begins.
Stigmas, infamous notes, like Bingo's cards
Are coming out of a sack, from an urn
Or of any other similar deposit.

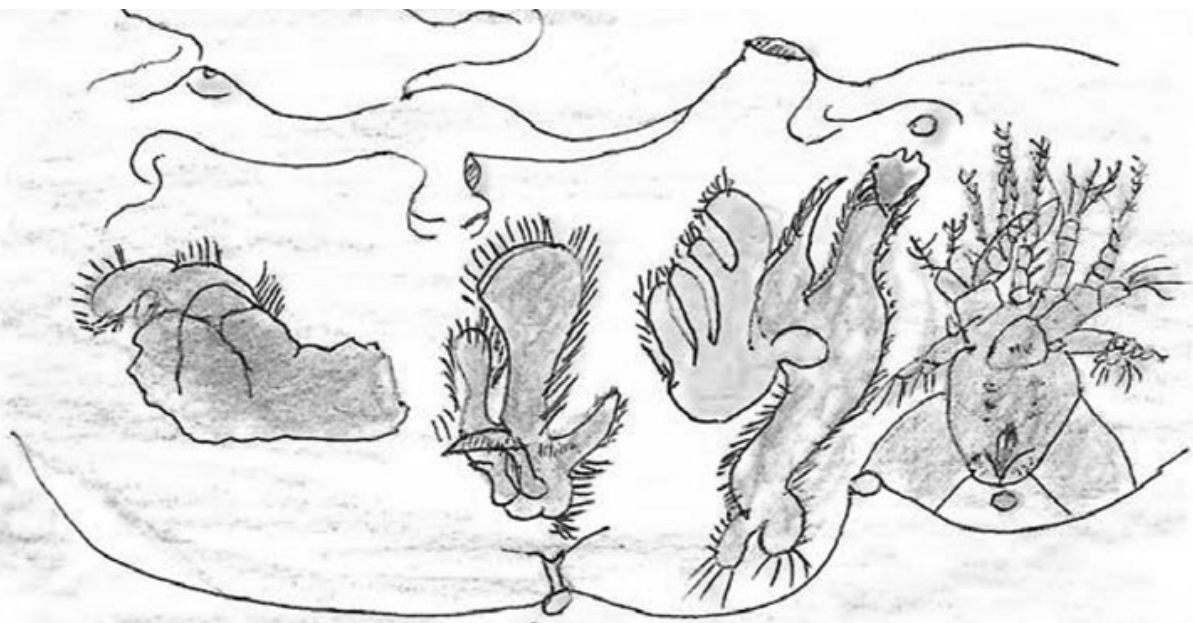
Tokens, balls or any other similar objects
With the names of the people
That they have to leave with luck.
Later, to the point, Dream
With its sad or gentle serenade
Between handfuls of cotton
Jumps without rhyme or reason
In corners and between sheets
When networks are building
For unsuspecting flies to produce sounds
On string instruments, wind instruments
Percussion, keys, and so on
That makes them boast of themselves
Making march to the melodious Night
At its dawn
With music elsewhere.

THE DREAM OF A MALE CRAB

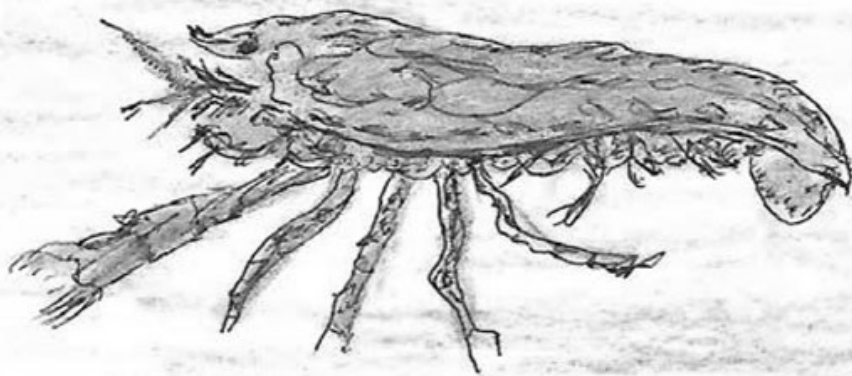
River is an instrument
Passed from water to water
Rather than an eating stand.
We are the talk of the town
From compass points
In the circle of Life
That encloses us all.
Crabs folk in North America
And Europe, in Japan
In Africa, in Russia, in India
Where natural scientists
Asking for our first Love.
Dish of Crabs:
Here in we have reprinted
A number of pieces
Contained with it.
It is because of the extreme
Importance of our existence
That we have chosen
To do this caprice.
But these excerpts
Are not enough:
The rivers themselves
Must be experienced

TSB

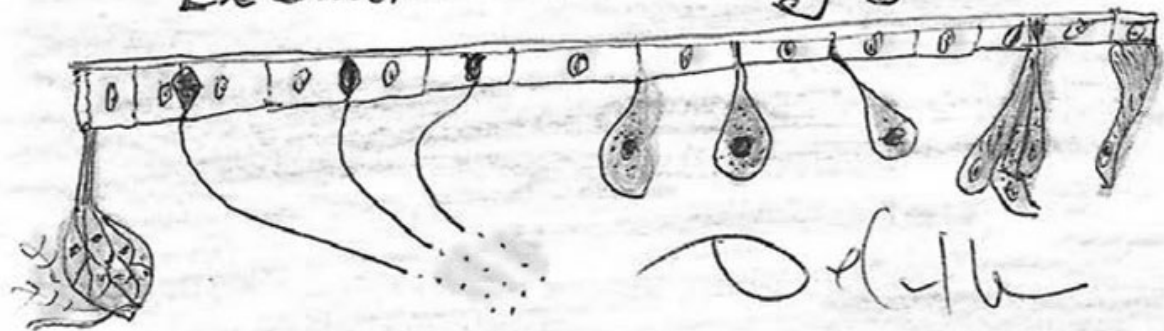
It is my feeling, my dream
That the Fishers Wo/Men
Will open many rivers
For any other Fisher
In a simple exercise
Of to be eating very good.

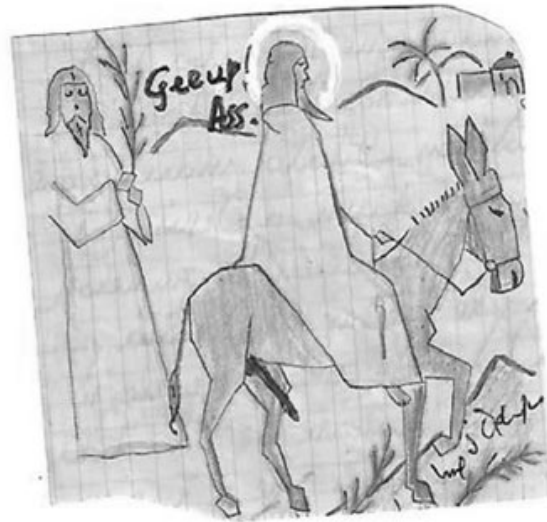
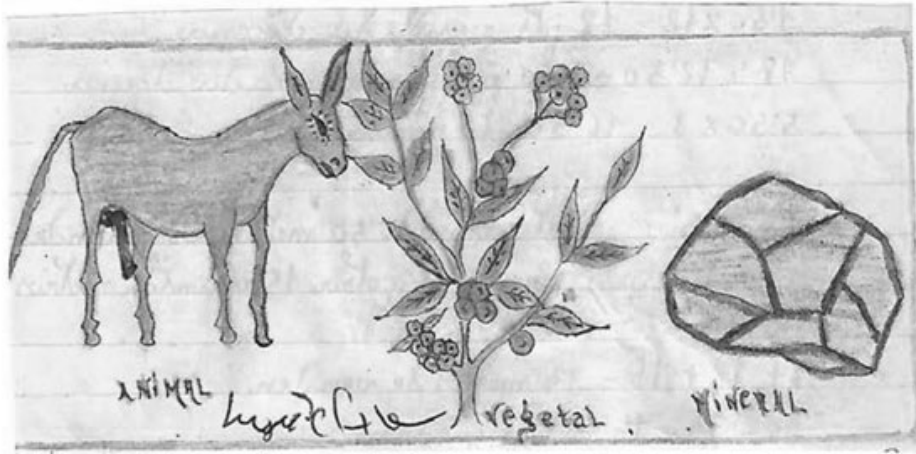


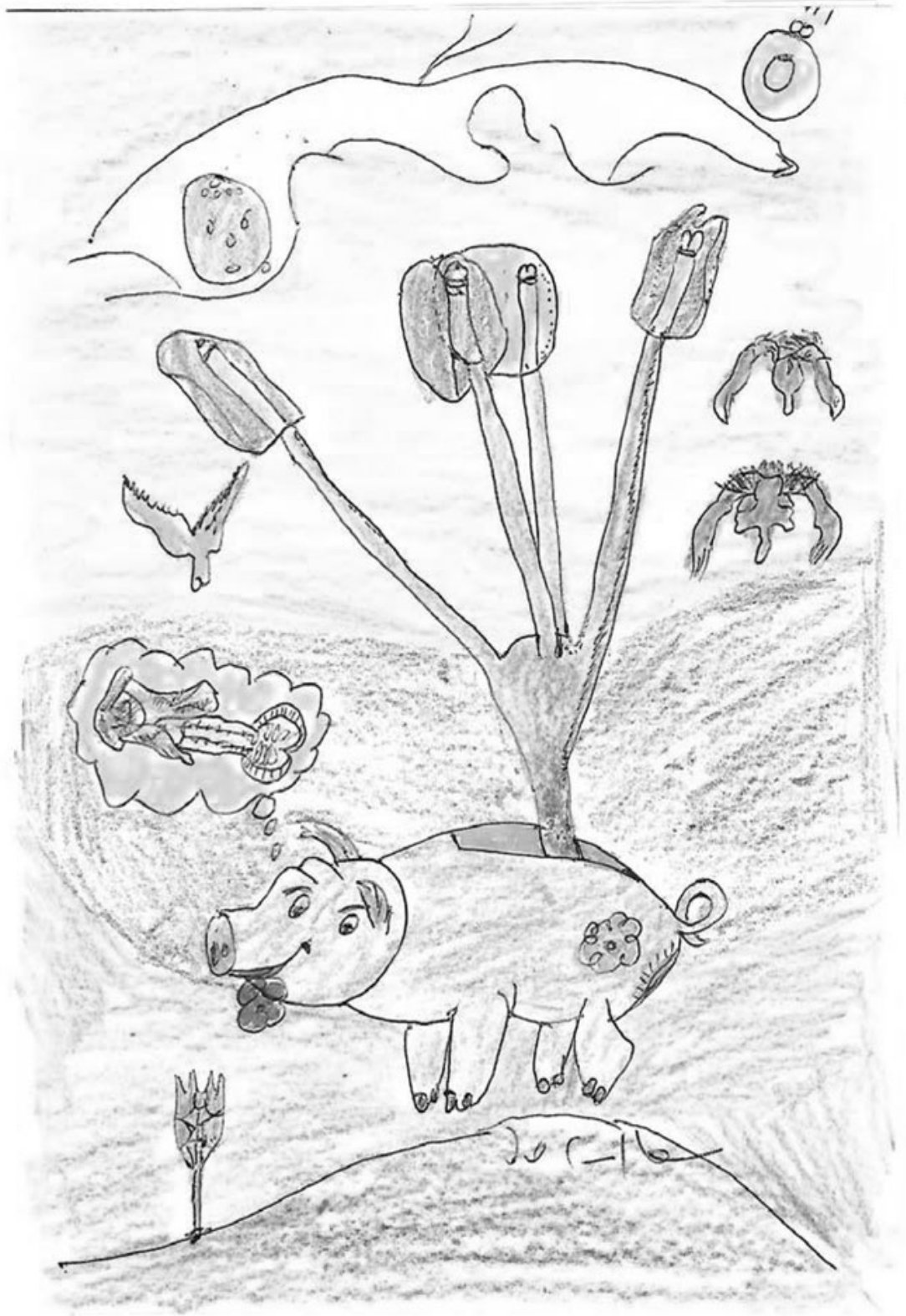
The Dream of a Male Crab



El Sueño de un cangrejo macho







ganglio cerebral

All hail Piles!

conducto eyaculador

próstata

pene

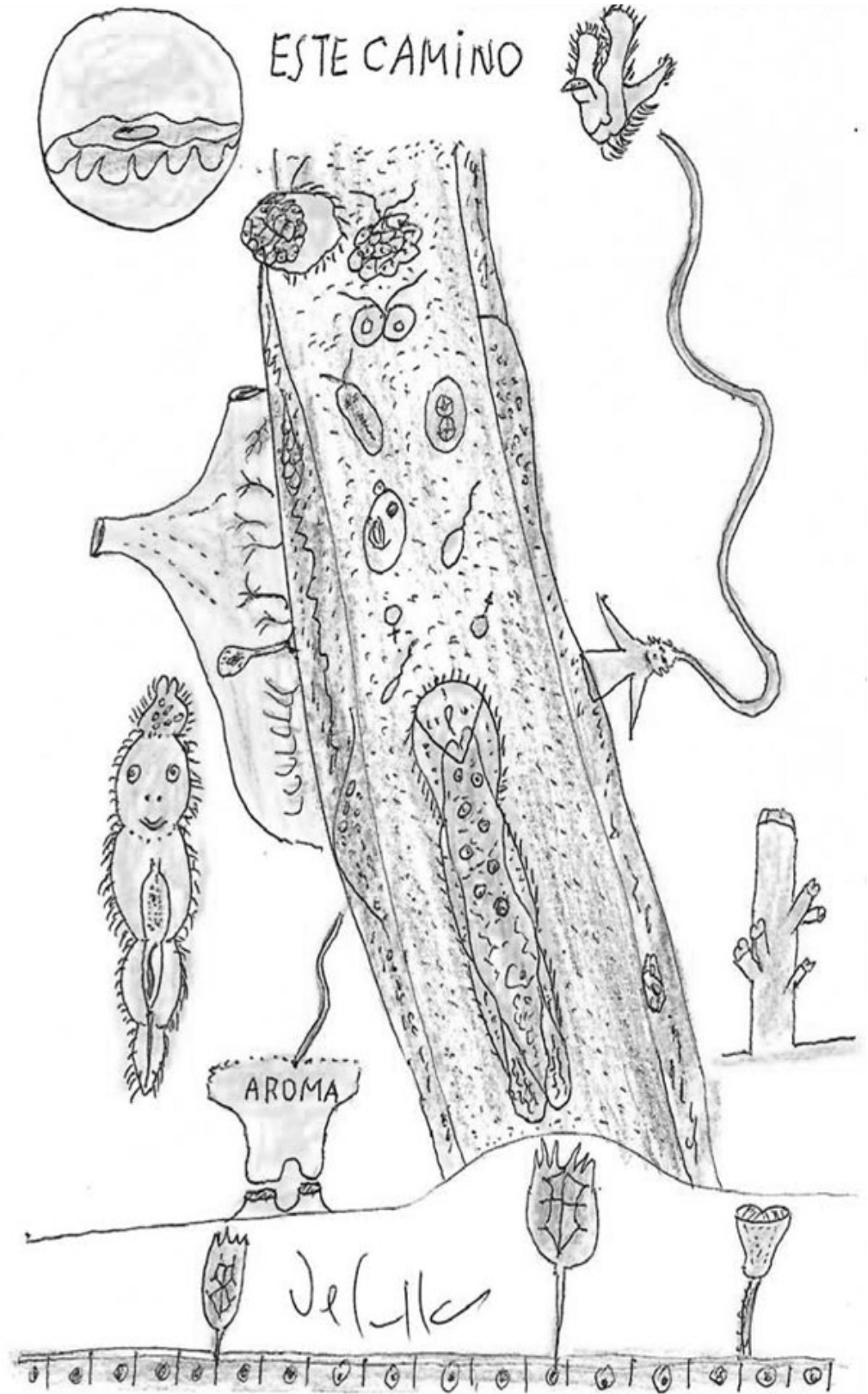
deferente



Dedicated to The Prettiest One

Valla

ESTE CAMINO



The Candle in the Wind
Elton John: "And it seems to me
You lived your life
like a candle
in the wind..."



THE CANDLE IN THE WIND

This is the story
Of a light
Back when there were few
Men on Earth
Light and electricity industry
And Wo/Men
Took great care of their candles.

Using in their defense
To face the mysteries of the night
To place by the day
At the foot of prints and imagery
To help them
Carrying their heavy load
Of daily life.

It happened, one day
that a certain Zagan
He was a farmhand
And worked by the herd
For a gentleman from Requena de Campos
In the Palencia's province

He came to a covered place
On a street or square
Built on pillars
Bringing a candle in his hand
To walk or to get rid
Of the Moon of the shadows

When, suddenly, from somewhere
An air came to him in movement

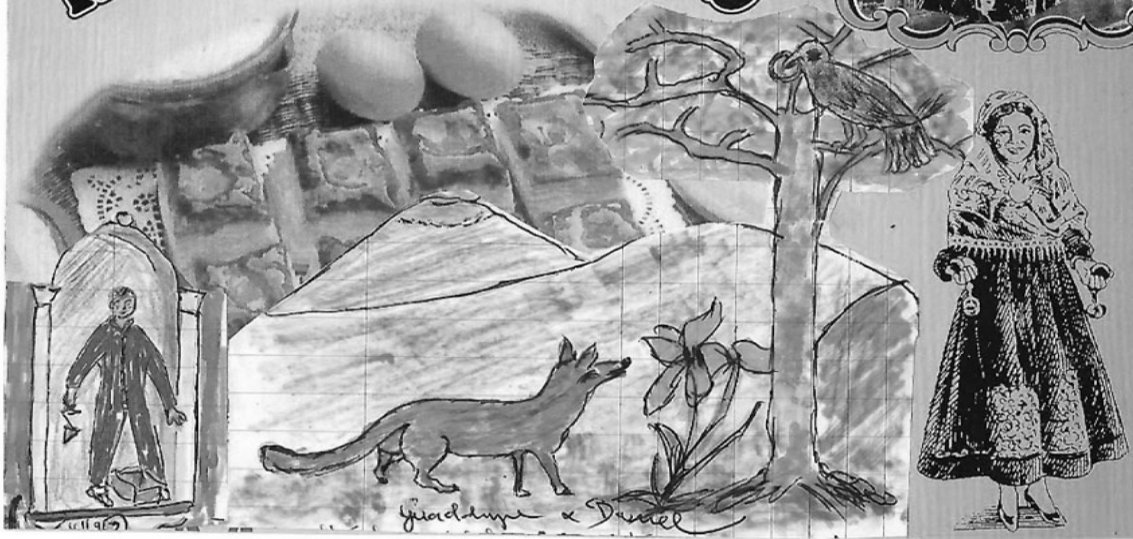
Even if
It was at rest
That brought smelling as a trace
Leaving the hunting pieces
Or the bullet's gap

In the bore of the firearm
It turned off the candle
And it turned it off again

When he tried to light it
And that suddenly touching his nape
As it usually does
In the bone that dogs have
Between the ears
Said inside his mind:
- To whomever goes out at night and watches the wind:
Nothing is revealed
At night all cats are brown
And what is done at night
In the morning seems
Only a thought.



HOJALDRES



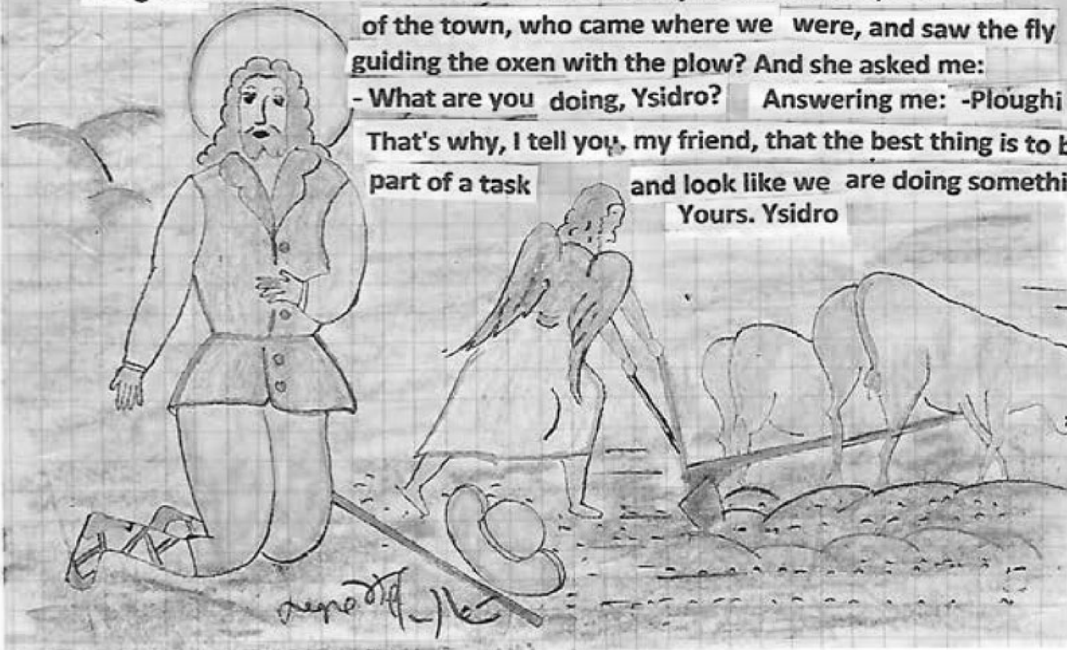
LETTER Dear Isaac: There is nothing better than doing nothing, and having others doing things for one. Do you remember what I told you about Juana, the "fox"

of the town, who came where we were, and saw the fly guiding the oxen with the plow? And she asked me:

-What are you doing, Ysidro? Answering me: -Plough!

That's why, I tell you, my friend, that the best thing is to be part of a task and look like we are doing something.

Yours. Ysidro



Featured Poet / Artist ~ Daniel de Culla



Daniel de Culla (1955) is a writer, poet, and photographer. He is also a member of the Spanish Writers Association, Earthly Writers International Caucus, Poets of the World, and others. Director of Gallo Tricolor Review, and Robespierre Review. He has participated in Festivals of Poetry, and Theater in Madrid, Burgos, Berlin, Minden, Hannover and Genève. He has exposed in many galleries from Madrid, Burgos, London, and Amsterdam. He is moving between North Hollywood, Madrid and Burgos, Spain. His address is in Burgos, just now. He has more than 70 published books.

TSB

1 poem by Featured Poet Yuan Hongri

The Prehistoric Giants

I live in the very eyes of the stone
I am the light of the light,
The core of the universe.
Out of water and fire I emerge
Yes, churning water, turning fire.
There was a time, in black and white, when
The space of the galaxy was resplendent with colours.
The world is a book of dreams
The city of the future is above the clouds.
The prehistoric giants thence I saw
They are solemn as mountains
Living in the city of gold, transparent in body,
Synchronous with the sun and the moon and the stars.

Featured Poet ~ Yuan Hongri



Hongri Yuan, born in China in 1962, is a poet and philosopher interested particularly in creation. Representative works include Platinum City, Gold City, Golden Paradise, Gold Sun and Golden Giant. His poetry has been published in the UK, USA, India, New Zealand, Canada and Nigeria.

*A corpse moon
the ghost of my muse
blood on the keys
these words screaming
eulogies..... death
set me free*



Poem and Photo by Debbie Berk

C
O
N
F
E
S
S
I
O
N
S
O
F
T
H
E

Dark

the Poet Speaks



Photo by Debbie Berk

Featured Poems

Failure by Marc Carver
Peeking in the windows by Mike Plesset
Answers Questioned by James Kowalczyk
Passenger by Fabrice B. Poussin
No hell for poets by Rajnish Mishra
First Son by Sue Crisp
FRIDAY NIGHT (I DREAM OF POETS) by Bradford Middleton
Addicted to Both of You by Betsy-Anne Hambar
The Pedestrian's Rucksack by E.V. Wyler

Answers Questioned by James Kowalczyk

recent reality repast
today becomes midwife to dreams
through inverse osmosis
converting weapons
of mass dysfunction

num
(burrs)
on his soul rip
a million bits of bone and flesh

like barnacles that
attach themselves
to a crucifix of self-pity

while a choking piano
partners with anorexic violins
attempting to breach his
fortress of shame

lived
backwards
is
devil

and me
looking up at the ground

James Kowalczyk was born and raised in Brooklyn but now lives in Northern California with his wife, two daughters, and four cats. His work has been published in print as well as online. He teaches English at both the high school and college levels.

Peeking in the windows by Michael Plesset

Peeking in the windows of other people's lives
then thinking suddenly of papayas and mangos
and not knowing why
silent early morning, a new beginning
white clouds that let us down
disappointing as they slowly disappear
like girls that smile but only for a moment,
they're a narrow hallway leading to despair
try to have the quiet patience of trees and birds
who just don't care.
Walking without destination
just exercise, they say that's good
though they are seldom right,
faint comfort comes from fantasies
way better than what's real
tomorrow they may all come true
they get more real each day.

Michael Plesset has published poetry, flash fiction, short stories, non-fiction, and wrote material for a stand-up comedian. He did graduate work in mathematics and philosophy, and also attended seminary at one time. He worked in high technology and taught English to Chinese students.

TSB

FAÏLORE by Marc Carver

I keep finding this poem on the floor
it tells of a different time
of a person sure he was different from everybody else
So sure he risked everything
I am not sure I am the same person on that page
but at least I still believe

No hell for poets by Rajnish Mishra

Space and time are categories- absolute, think of science and philosophy. This morning I sat still behind the steering wheel, forward ho! For backward was barred, out of question. There's no reverse when you're stuck five columns thick, in the middle one.

You are stuck. No retraction, no apologies; only hell: that's what they call an interminable wait for an unsure deliverance.

It's hot, so hot, and sticky, so sticky within. The fan, feeble, small, offers no respite. Poets, I'm sure, carry pen everywhere, and I carry one around: poetic possibilities of every moment, *carpe diem* etc. I saw that possibility and I sat, sweated and wrote in that hell, not hell anymore.

Now I know a thing, or two, for sure: for poets, at least sometimes, there's no hell. When there's no time – there's no hell. Worse than heat, housefly in the car, and all that humming and buzzing and sweat, is the line just stuck, with no hope, no deliverance, no respite. I was in hell, for a time, till I took my pen and wrote.

Trust me, it's true, I went in and out of my hell – not my car – for I never went out. Time is absolute, and space too, only in a laboratory, they shrink and stretch in poet's a car.

Rajnish Mishra is a poet, writer, translator and blogger born and brought up in Varanasi, India and now in exile from his city. His work originates at the point of intersection between his psyche and his city. He edits PPP Ezine.

First Son by Sue Crisp

She came to the house
and told me his parents
would be sorry...

“They wouldn’t let us
marry,” she said.
“He’s never even seen his baby.’...

“The military will
make a man of him.”
they said...

Two months later
a clip in the local newspaper.
Our town has lost it’s first son...

Now, everybody’s sorry...

Crystal Persuasion

Crystals of kryptonite drain
the strength from Superman.

Pebbles flung across the universe,
not a gift from the creator,
but from the greedy hand of man.

Sue Crisp, crispsue@hotmail.com. Sue Crisp is a writer of poetry and children’s books. Her work has been published online on Medusa’s Kitchen, NiceNet, in two anthologies of LummoX Press, two publications of Voices of Lincoln, and others. Sue also has two chapbooks pending publication by the end of the year by LummoX Press. She has one published book for children. Sue writes a wide variety of poetry in many forms, and is submitting two poems for your consideration for publication.

FRIDAY NIGHT (I DREAM OF POETS) by Bradford Middleton

It's half-nine on a Friday night
And I sit here, dreaming of sleep
My tired body aches and all of me
Craves rest as tomorrow is just
Another day in this lifetime meant
For living, not one but two parties
To fit in and an excuse to drink
Booze whilst stood in company
Away from this typer but in with
Bloody poets, some damn performers
Others more cerebral but most of all
None are like me.

Bradford Middleton was born in London in the summer of 1971, won his first poetry prize in 1980 and then promptly gave up for nearly thirty years. His style has developed somewhat from his 9 year old self and can now be read in a number of small press publications and a few magazines. His most recent chapbook was published recently by Analog Submission Press as 'Flying through this Life like a Bottle Battling Gravity' and if you like what you read go be his friend at Facebook @bradfordmiddleton1 or on Twitter @beatnikbraduk.

Passenger by Fabrice B. Poussin

Listening to that voice again
Walking alongside the same body
Letting similar views into that soul
Nothing has changed and ever will
Unless...

If only he could put the heart to rest
Softly breathe without a care
His senses numbed to the fears
A passenger like all the others
Unaware...

What would it be like to be another
Like everyone else, on the outside
Resting as a mere spectator
To a show he could escape
Each time...

The pain of being a self unbearable
Looking at the billions around
To be another, not to be so many
Not to know them, understand
Ever...

He wishes a ghost could be his make
A zombie of sort dead of feelings
So perhaps he could smile once again
Loved, hated, cold as stone
For all time.

Fabrice Poussin teaches French and English at Shorter University. Author of novels and poetry, his work has appeared in Kestrel, Symposium, The Chimes, and dozens of other magazines. His photography has been published in The Front Porch Review, the San Pedro River Review as well as other publications.

Addicted, to Both of You by Betsy-Anne Hambar

That night you were your second self,
drunk as hell, visiting me
on the late-night doorman's shift,
arousing his suspicion.

I adored your first self,
creative, concerned, engaged,
yet edgy and willing.
I feared your second self—
but it thrilled me.

With no intent to harm,
you mounted me in your half-dropped jeans,
slamming into my rib cage.

Ignoring a telltale crack,
I soon went off with you
to a swanky swingers' party,
a venue shunned by all your more
discerning lady friends.

Stupidly, I agreed to foot the hefty bill!

Not a pretty sight,
me, gazing at you
enjoying several other women.

We left, depressed,
my broken rib crying out
for gentle care as we taxied to my street.
There, you abandoned me
and took the cab on up to Harlem.

Five weeks later, still hurting,
yet feeling too humiliated
to seek medical attention,
I remained frightened but untreated,
like a silent victim of rape,
unable to accept or admit
an ugly truth,

the perils of my addiction.

Betsy-Anne Hambar is the pen name of a retired editor who is not yet comfortable using her real name owing to the recent #MeToo environment, which she doesn't feel a part of. At present she lives in New York City with her cat, daughter, son-in-law, and grandson, and is working on a biography concerning one of her more famous relatives. The poetry she has published under her actual name appears in a handful of anthologies and in several online publications.

The Pedestrian's Rucksack by E. V. Wyler

This afternoon I drove passed a man, slowly walking,
Alone, on a slim strip of sidewalk,
In the opposite direction of the flowing traffic ...

He appeared disheartened and disheveled,
As if the harsh, unrelenting cycle of seasons
Had victoriously etched its presence
Upon his face, like graffiti artists, crafting
A pale and wrinkled, unshaven mask,

From which his unkempt hair dangled
In greasy, gray ringlets past his jawline,

And from both arms, plastic grocery bags hung,
Equally balanced, reminiscent of water bearers,
Carrying their cargo, struggling for sustenance.

Yet, there he was, persisting along his path;
His gait, labored; shoulders, drooped; and spine, hunched,
yielding to the weight of an unseen rucksack,
possibly stuffed with the chapters of a mysterious memoir
Documenting the arduous journey he'd traveled.

And, after leaving him behind, I wondered:
If we, the passing drivers, were unwittingly
Rushing towards the places
From which he'd turned his back?

E. V. "Beth" Wyler is a klutz, who spends too much time in the E.R. When she's not getting patched up with stitches, stapler and Band-Aids, E. V. plays with words because she's not bright enough to play with numbers. Her poetry has appeared in: The Eclectic Muse: A Poetry Journal, Feelings of the Heart, The Lyric, Nuthouse Magazine, The Pink Chameleon, The Poet's Haven, The Rotary Dial, Society of Classical Poets, The Storyteller, Vox Poetica, WestWard Quarterly, and on the website of USA Patriotism! She thanks you for reading her poetry.

Pozo

by Terry Sanville

At the last second, Justin yanked the steering wheel to the right. His ancient TR-4 sports car slid around the curve of the freeway off-ramp, tires smoking, its tail end hanging out. The countryside became a smear of open fields, trees and gray sky. Everything went dark, but only for a moment. His vision cleared. The car's engine backfired as he downshifted.

He'd been driving north along the California shoreline for hours, trying not to think about San Pedro and the mess he'd left behind. Cities, beaches, and coastal mountains slipped past. With the top down, a November wind blasted his head until it lost all feeling.

After the spin, he pulled over at a turnout shaded by oaks and turned off the engine, its oil pressure reading near zero. The stench of hot radiator fluid filled the air. Leaning back, he closed his eyes and enjoyed the silence of the empty savannah. Vultures circled overhead. He reached behind the passenger seat and pulled a beer from the cooler, chugged it and tossed the empty onto the car's littered floor.

Pozo

Only afterward did he check for cops. Lucky for Justin, the country road was deserted.

The cold beer chilled him. Starting the Triumph, he motored along the seamed concrete road, probably a state highway at one time. The village of Santa Margarita looked abandoned as he passed through. At a crossroads, a sign announced “Pozo, 18 miles.” He turned right and drove through groves of oak trees bearded with Spanish moss, past newly-greened fields with grazing cattle.

The sky darkened. Thunderheads pushed up on the horizon. A gray mass flowed over the mountain ridgeline and smothered the inland valley. He stopped and struggled to raise the car’s top, securing it just in time to beat the first deluge. Rain fell in white sheets, flooding the road’s shoulders. The British car’s wipers could hardly clear the windshield, its defroster useless. Driving in third gear for what felt like forever, he approached a ramshackle wooden building with a hitching rail and watering trough, with “Pozo Saloon” painted across its false front.

A cowboy right out of some John Wayne western sat on the covered porch watching the rain, which had become a steady downpour. The man pushed himself up and hurried to the car as Justin pulled in.

“Don’ stop here, mister. Ride her ’round back into the stable.”

Justin nodded and followed the man, driving across the muddy side yard and into

Terry Sanville

an old board & batten shed with hay still on its dirt floor. He got out and zipped up his jacket. The cowboy waited for him, water pouring from the brim of his crimped hat. They hurried across the yard, the rain soaking Justin's hair and shoes, pushed through the saloon's back door past a silent kitchen and into the main room. In one corner near the bar, firelight flickered from the face of a pot-bellied stove where two men warmed themselves.

"Whatcha drinkin'?" his cowboy escort asked.

"A shot of Jack be great."

The man looked at him, eyebrows raised.

Justin sighed. "Just give me whiskey."

"Commin' up."

Justin removed his jacket and hung it on a wall peg before sitting in a hard-backed chair near the stove at a table shared by the other two patrons. The blast of heat made him shudder.

"Better dry those strange shoes of yours. You'll catch your death if ya don't." The man sitting next to him nursed a beer, had his feet propped on the stove top, the leather cowboy boots steaming. He wore an old style duster spotted with rain, as if he'd just arrived. Justin didn't remember seeing any other cars and figured the man had to be

Pozo

local, sheltering there from the storm.

“Good advice. Mind if I take them off?”

“Can’t be any worse than how this joint stinks.” The man on the far side of the stove smoked a stogie and wore a three-piece suit, the vest complete with watch fob. He sported a bowler with a frayed brim.

Justin removed his soaked running shoes and socks and placed them on top of the stove. Mr. Duster grinned. “Be careful. Them things ’ll melt quick enough. Jus’ hang the socks on the back of that chair.” He pointed to an empty seat.

Justin’s muscles relaxed as the fire warmed his body. But the heat woke up the pain in his neck that had been quieted by the cold.

“Ya have a rough ride?” Mr. Suit asked. “You look like you’ve been ridden hard and put away wet.”

The two chuckled and sipped their drinks. The rattle of rain on the bar’s metal roof increased, making talk impossible. A flash of lightening lit the room’s dark corners followed by thunder that shook the building. His companions had raised their arms to block the light, arms that looked withered under the covering of clothes. Another lightening flash lit their faces, like an x-ray, and for a brief moment they looked skeletal.

Terry Sanville

The bartender brought Justin an empty shot glass and a half-full bottle of something amber. He grabbed the bottle and took a swig.

“You okay, partner?” Mr. Duster asked. “No need to fuss. It’s jus’ a bit a storm, be gone shortly.”

The rain quieted. Mr. Suit leaned forward. “So what brings you to these parts? Shouldn’t you be eatin’ a big ole Thanksgivin’ dinner with your family?”

Justin poured whiskey into his glass and tossed it off. “Yeah, probably.”

Mr. Suit smiled. “What’s wrong, boy? Trouble with the missus?”

Justin took another shot. A shiver ran through him then everything warmed and he became friends once again with the universe. “Yeah, yeah. I messed up in a major way. We had my wife’s mother over to help fix the meal.”

Mr. Duster grunted. “Oooh, that’s a tough un.”

“She tried to take over, told my Emily to get outta the kitchen and that she’d do all the cooking by herself. The two of them got into it. I tried to break it up, and that’s when they turned on me.”

Mr. Suit shook his head. “Never get between a mama bear and her and her girl cub.”

Justin grinned. “Now ya tell me! Before I knew it, I was saying some really ugly

Pozo

things to both of them, the kids started crying and my wife ran into the back yard and climbed a tree, wouldn't come down even though I pleaded for half an hour."

"Sometimes ya jus' gotta shut your yap and let 'er ride." Mr. Duster drained his beer, burped and motioned to the bartender for another.

"Yeah, I should have. But I grabbed the cooler and a twelve pack and tore outta there. I should probably just turn around and go home."

"Where ya comin' from?" Mr. Suit asked.

"San Pedro."

"Lordie, lordie, ya got a long ride ahead of ya. But it sounds worth it for an ace high lady like your missus."

"Yes, I'm lucky if she takes me back. It was ugly." Justin called to the bartender, "Hey bud, ya got any coffee?"

"I can boil up a pot if ya want."

"No, never mind. I'll just take my time and move slow and steady."

The stove's heat had toasted his socks and dried his shoes. He slipped them on and fumbled with the laces, the locals watching with great interest. Justin moved to the saloon's main window and stared outside. The rain had slacked off but still fell steadily. A turquoise blue haze drifted up the valley, engulfing trees, fence lines, and the few

Terry Sanville

outbuildings. It felt near sundown although his Timex only showed two in the afternoon.

“So how much do I owe ya?” he asked the bartender.

“On a day like this, nothin’, mister. Just hold onto that mare of yours and she’ll getcha home safe.”

“Mare?”

The bartender pointed toward the stable. “I gave her some oats while you was drinkin’. She should be good for the ride.”

Justin stepped back from the window and retrieved his jacket from the wall peg. An eerie blue light filled the barroom. The locals shimmered in their seats. Justin hustled out the back door to the stable. His car had disappeared. In its place stood a swaybacked chestnut horse, saddled and ready to ride. A denim duster hung on a wall hook. He turned to retrace his steps to the saloon, but the blue haze engulfed it.

In a trance, he pulled on the duster and mounted the horse clumsily. It whinnied and moved at a walk past where the saloon had stood and down the empty country road, but in the wrong direction. He hung onto the saddle horn as rain, wind and thunder tried to unseat him. He closed his eyes and listened to the hypnotic watery thud of the horse’s hooves on the muddy road. After a while the mare turned and moved toward a low ranch house bordered by cattle pens and fields. Golden light poured through its open front door

TSB

Pozo

onto a covered porch. A woman in a long dress stepped to the threshold and looked out into the darkening gloom.

The rain had stopped. He dismounted, took off his duster under the porch overhang, and moved toward her. She took him in her arms, her soft body warm against his, and kissed him full on the mouth. Little children giggled in the background. The smell of turkey roasting made his stomach growl.

“Welcome home, Justin,” she said.

“It’s so good to be here, Emily.”

Two highway patrolmen stood at the apex of the off-ramp’s curve, making notes in their day logs. A section of guardrail had been flattened and a British sports car lay wheels up at the base of the slope. In the adjoining field, a blue tarp had been spread over something on the grass. Vultures circled above. The patrol officers approached and the paramedics backed away. One of the officers pulled the tarp down. Justin stared up at them with a fixed gaze.

TSB

Terry Sanville

“We found beer cans all over the place,” the junior officer reported.

“I hate the holidays, too many drunks on the road.”

“But I’ve never seen one like this, have you?”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, look at his smile. He looks like he...he...”

Terry Sanville lives in San Luis Obispo, California with his artist-poet wife (his in-house editor) and two plump cats (his in-house critics). He writes full time, producing short stories, essays, poems, and novels. Since 2005, his short stories have been accepted by more than 280 literary and commercial journals, magazines, and anthologies including The Potomac Review, The Bitter Oleander, Shenandoah, and The Saturday Evening Post. He was nominated twice for Pushcart Prizes and once for inclusion in Best of the Net anthology. His stories have been listed as “The Most Popular Contemporary Fiction of 2017” by the Saturday Evening Post. Terry is a retired urban planner and an accomplished jazz and blues guitarist – who once played with a symphony orchestra backing up jazz legend George Shearing.



Artwork, "Shadow Streams To Life"
by Denny Marshall

2 poems by Denny Marshall

www.dennymarshall.com

Early Warning

From the sky, nightmares drip like hail
Dreams fall softly as feather snow
Bright lightning wooden ships set sail
Long winding winds direct the show

Thunder calls out across the way
While clouds still gather, pile on thick
Grow ears to what the heavens say
Swirling motions move slow and quick

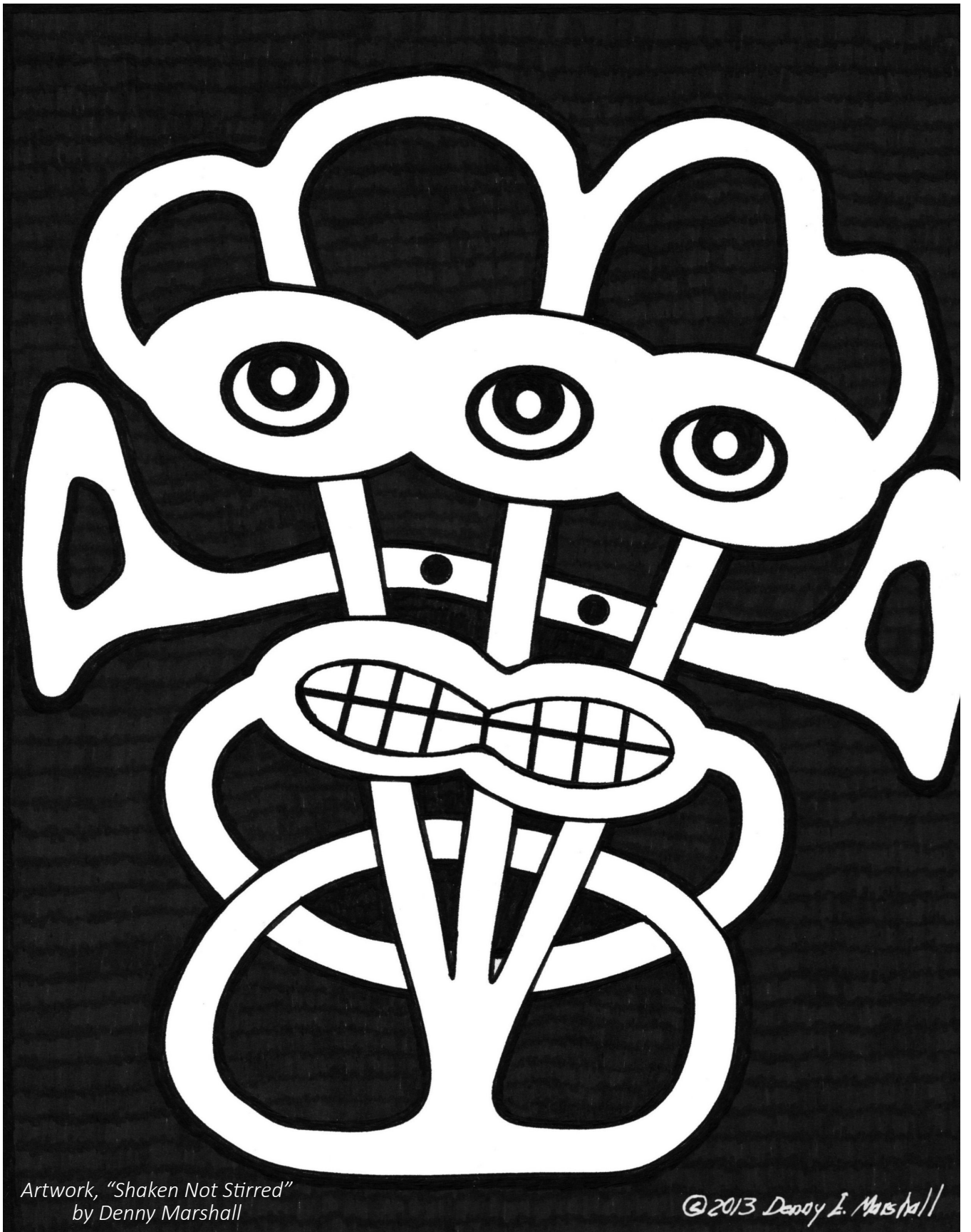
Predictions unfold in the dark
Climax pumps like blue beating heart
Songs pour downward sing with a bark.
Pictures below all ripped apart.

Statue of truth we cannot make
Rise from the deep sleep still awake



Artwork, "Robot in The Rays"
by Denny Marshall

©2012 Denny E. Marshall



Artwork, "Shaken Not Stirred"
by Denny Marshall

©2013 Denny E. Marshall

TSB

Magic Cane

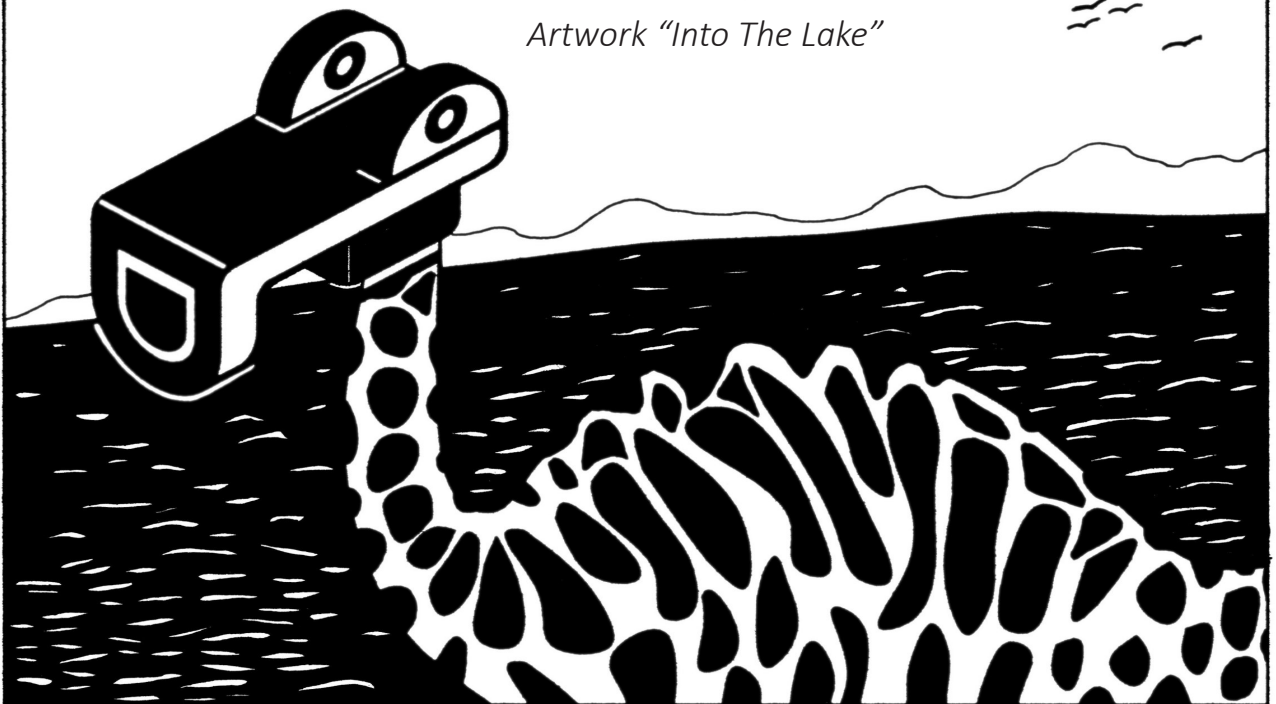
Reflecting swirls of whirlpools
Sparkles wizards dust
Metal statues come alive
Out of web and rust

Multi-prism walls shine
Shatter like mirrored panes
Stained glass figures dance
From within a jeweled cane

From the curve to the end
Out shoots an endless storm
Light beams collide
With every color and form

Denny Marshall

Artwork "Into The Lake"



4 poems by David Spicer

David Spicer has poems in Tipton Poetry Journal, Midnight Lane Boutique, Yellow Mama, Chiron Review, Hamilton Stone Review, Oddball Magazine, Alcatraz, Gargoyle, Bad Acid Laboratories, Ploughshares, American Poetry Review, and elsewhere. He is the author of Everybody Has a Story and five chapbooks; his latest chapbook is From the Limbs of a Pear Tree (Flutter Press).

DAUGHTER AND MOTHER

On her tenth birthday, Dahlia didn't see the car
that maimed her left leg, scarred her heart forever,
but from that day, our mother constantly pampered
Dahlia, who trailed her to the bathroom, the kitchen.
They shared melodramas with buttermilk cackles,
counted forgotten chores and remembered slights.
Teenaged Dahlia asked, *Where you going, mama?*
Our mother said, *Afraid I'll fart and you won't smell it?*
Living together as adults, they traded insults like con-artists
seasoned in the barter of hurt feelings until our mother
stroked, and Dahlia started to shoplift, beat her cats,
and eat expired pot pies, not that anyone cared:
one night, she phone-screamed at her uncle to go to hell,
then collapsed by the litter pan until her body began to rot.

COLT 44

My old man fired a final Fool! my way,
before I, too old for tears, felt my stomach roil,
and a decades-worn noose tightened my neck.
Storming to his bedroom, I opened the door,
found the revolver's burnished patina
calling me from the night stand near his bed,
picked up the gun and pressed its long barrel
against my pain-packed, throbbing temple,
and then I pictured the shock on his face
when he'd see my brains Pollocked on the wall:
would he cry a thousand times as I had?
I cocked back the gun's hammer with delight,
then uncocked it, tossed it on his pillow,
wiped my wet eyes, and left home one last time.

AUNT PLEINSIE ON FURLOUGH FROM WESTERN STATE MENTAL HOSPITAL

In the yard of my grandparents' sharecropper's shack,
watching '57 Impalas and '49 Ford pickups on Highway 64,
I heard her plod across the lawn, saw my father lead
her to a goat-poop covered love seat by the porch,
four hundred pounds of her draped in a black-on-orange
print dress hand-sewn from three large flour sacks,
and when she plopped on the filthy corduroy cushion,
I smiled at this huge woman wearing a monk's haircut:
she glared at my eight-year-old face with her asylum eyes
after she gulped a grape Nehi in a few seconds, yelling,
Don't call me a fat ugly bitch, you scrawny little bastard.
I ran to the kitchen, squealing louder than a gas-doused piglet,
where my mother handed me pork'n'beans with biscuits,
and calmly said, *I see you've met your great-aunt Pleinsie.*

ELEGY FOR THE MÖRDERED

They're the ones with that sad, unfinished gaze
in their eyes of hope, posing for a school
photo at eighteen or a group shot, cool
as a new fridge, in their dorms of too few days.
Or maybe she's the beauty who lit up the room
when she entered, a charmer the boys loved
and the girls envied, one they named The Dove
when she left, after she met her dark doom.
Why don't the evil ones too lost to die
meet vile fates in the attics of their youth,
stabbed by strong victims in a mad, uncouth
world where a cynic of an old cop cries?
Perhaps they may not possess goodness, that rare grace
that may allow their lives to leave, with, or without, a trace.

David Spicer

TSB

4 poems by Cynthia McCoy Crummey

chmccoycrummey@hotmail.com

PTSD 1 - Midnight Madness

As darkness enters closed eyes, fleeting
and splintered images appear
as if on a moving canvass.

Fragments of the day fall through a door
open to fantasy where
obscure and disjointed impressions connect
fiction to reality.

Which to keep?
Which to toss away?

Paralyzed by sleep, a moment behind,
dreams are lost
to an awakening.

PTSD 2 - Oasis

Searching over the scorched desert
 he found himself alone
A future filled with emptiness
 Left behind to

Look for purpose in the
 Ochre landscape
Struggling to find hope among
 Desolate prospects
Drifting from despair to thoughts
Of deliverance there appears

A riot of crimson red, bright orange
 And vivid pink
Hanging on the far horizon

The explosion of color beckons
And he reaches out to collect from the
Palet of relief- meth, crack, heroin

Peace at last!

PTSD 3 - Salvation

Dark meditations harbor malevolent musings and
creep like thick tangled vines through my head
mocking my sanity.

Searching in vain for their hidden meaning
I touch them with my mind's eye, hoping
to discover a hidden message concealed among
the sharp and jagged thorns.

Picking through their dangerous intent
fear pulls me back to reality before I am
swallowed by their mystery and
sink into black despair.

As I become lost in the forest of addiction
hope emerges as a bright narrow shard of light
erupting through the gloom, its warm glow slowly
spreading through the darkness.

Brighter reflections break free sweeping away
ominous shadows. Once menacing vines
begin to bloom setting free the
sweet fragrance of *Salvation*.

Empathy Notwithstanding

She cries out . . .

and I feel the sadness of unkept promises
disappearing with no trail leaving
her lost and confused.

She hurts . . .

and I feel the pain of her failures. A
crushing burden that cannot be shared,
its weight a heavy reminder of disappointments.

She is broken . . .

and I pick up the pieces of unrealized dreams
left scattered and tossed about like leaves
lifted by the wind and placed out of reach.

She is overwhelmed . . .

and I am unable to provide comfort.
Drowning in an ocean of challenges she
surrenders to defeat as the passage to reason
remains hidden in a maze of life's debris.

Weary of the journey, there is yet more to endure.

But traveling together,

we hope
we heal
we begin again

Cynthia McCoy Crummey

TSB

1 poem by Keith Wesley Combs

Keith Wesley Combs is a union painter and poet/aspiring short story writer living in Kennewick, WA. His work has been published in Main Street Rag, Pearl, The Stray Branch, Atlantic Pacific Press and many more literary publications.

Succubus.

spread your wings

entice me, excite me

seduce me with the beauty

you display-

the perfect disguise.

TSB

2 poems by Conrad Gurtatowski

Conrad was born and raised in Chicago, Illinois. He is retired and currently resides in the semi-rural surroundings of northwest Indiana, where is busy writing the great American novel, while awaiting the election of the first libertarian president.

IF ONLY

She unzipped her jacket
to reveal a baby bump
under her red knit sweater

Her stomach, typically tiny and flat,
caught my eye with its new girth,
the protuberance indicating there was someone
in her life--someone she gave herself to

Odd--

I wanted to touch her belly,
feel the nascent life within, share
the happiness mirrored on her face

Maybe pretend that new life
was my creation, and not the result
of a passionate liaison with some other man

I wanted the bump to be part of me
I wanted to be part of her
I wanted her hand to squeeze mine
at the moment of birth

Truth is, she has another life,
another love, and when she holds
the baby in her arms, she will gaze lovingly,
and see no part of me

TSB

THE FALLACY OF SLEEP

For him
sleep was but
an illusion
within an illusion
of a dream
inside a hallucination

To him
the long night
was like a journey
across sterile Arctic tundra,
vast and unyielding,
incalculable distances
stretching to nowhere

His eyes knew not
the weight of fatigue,
nor the stolid respite of a yawn.

The jarring slap of an alarm clock
was foreign to him, as was
the ebb and flow of the day

Like a freight train
burrowing along the tracks,
hours were strung together
without break or rupture,
their uninterrupted procession
as mesmerizing as rosary beads
wending through the arthritic fingers
of the infirmed

For him
daybreak and day's end
were meaningless gradations of light,
the steps of this diurnal choreography
lost to irrelevance

He moved
at a pace unburdened by circadian rhythms,
unscathed by the night,
while crying out to be consumed
by the nameless terror
of just one nightmare

Conrad Gurtatowski

3 poems by Sandro D. Fossemò

The Bat

A demon circles above
in the howling wind.
In the blackness of the night its presence is menacing over the rooftops,
like the spectre of a sombre midnight.
That large bat no longer inhabits its castle.

Astride my horse I observe its fatal flight,
gladdened by the sight near a medieval town.
Atop the rocky summit I feel a hidden yearning,
that separates me from the synthetic hologram.

To that bat...
I wish to say: "Nevermore sombre swamps,
without the presence of fungi from Yuggoth!"

The broken bell of the black tower was once loved
in a past long ago echoing with abandoned magic.
Pure beauty are the mouldering walls and the gargoyles,
beauty in a chasm of illusions and sadness.

To that bat...

I wish to say: "Nevermore may civilisation be superior,
without the riches of ancient times!"

The white bones of skeletons wander the theatres,
imprisoned within dark forbidding shows.
Grey tombs await the newly-risen and the ghouls
against a backdrop of deserted mountains.

To that bat...

I wish to say: "Nevermore the sadly rustling leaves,
so quickly attached to oblivion!"

You live in the nocturnal vault,
rather than die in the daytime madness.
You enter a wine cellar,
to savour the body of a red wine.
Be bats,
dream Arkham wrapped in your cloak.

Perform a Necronomicon ritual in secret,
call Yog-Sothoth with an amulet.
Wander the solitary lonely avenues
to hide yourselves in the mouldering ruins.

To that bat...

I wish to say: "Nevermore near the lamp posts,
burnt by its artificial light.

I can no longer find shadows for my hiding places,
nowhere for me to unfurl my claws.
The sinister orchestra of nature plays no more,
no more symphony of fear to enjoy.

To that bat...

I wish to say: "Nevermore isolated in the desolate night,
without the splendour of the enchanted stars!"

We no longer feel a shiver,
watching the leaden sky cracked by lightening.
We no longer feel such vital emotion,
seeing the Northern Lights shine on the ice.

To that bat...

I wish to say: "Fly towards Polaris,
so we are no longer simulated
in the alien emptiness of planned worlds."

Magical obscurity dissolves a paralysing universe.
Unknown constellations appear in a fascinating sky.
The song of the sidereal wind seals an ancestral dream.

I will watch as meteorites fall and the decay is buried.
The Great Old Ones will teach freedom to the new human race.
With my tentacles I will pass from the folds of time to the columns of a temple,
while slaughtering the masses with my jaws.

To that bat...

I wish to say: "Nevermore a cosmic bloodless night,
where my existence merely languishes!"

Spectres

A vampire disguised as an office worker has taken flight,
between the lights and the asphalt.
Recorded voices drift around simulacra,
imprisoned in luminous sepulchres.
Spectral codes and untold shadows
wandering around digital tombs.

A pumpkin shines light on the face of an indifferent cyborg;
I have no love for synthetic blood of cybernetic form.
The jaws of the megalopolis devour plastic skeletons,
broken factory windows caused by crazed ravens.
Towers of mirrors sink into smog and hallucination,
where mummies are buried in coding and computation.

In the burning glow of a street light,
a puddle mirrors a clown of pitiful sight.
His hands holding a large spider,
he caresses without any consideration.

Zombies descend in packs,
from abandoned cemeteries of broken TV sets.
In shop windows, signs shine death dour,
on blind and brilliant masks awaiting the bewitching hour.

A crack of thunder provokes a schism,
punctuating the sky's metallic rigorism,
shattering crystal shards into the abysm.

The dance of witches and wine warm the night,
black cloaks and caves illuminated by flashlight.
Neck bites lacerate fiction,
releasing unbridled ardour and passion.
A damp mist envelops extreme folly,
in shadows I cannot bring myself to sally.

The replicants move away,
while the spectres of the underworld hold sway.
Darkness lives in its own light,
for Halloween has magic of such seductive might!

An Icy Kiss

In the dungeons
of the abandoned castle,
my eternal companion
is pierced by a freezing,
penetrating cold.
That damned soul
hopes to escape through a passage
in the hidden stone,
between leaves and thorny branches
that cling to
old decaying walls,
under a dark sky.
I caress her gracious face and feel
tears of suffering trickling
along my long pointed maleficent nails
where delicious death reigns.
Her ivory arms
tremble under my cloak
and hold me close
to her delightful body,
embraced by an ebony silk dress.
My teeth sink into her white breast
quickly,
bitterly,
a fatal bite.
In the torment of the ice,
I warm and I feed
on fiery red wine.
In the dark room of the tower,
amongst the spectres of ancient candles,
my presence incumbent
like a wingèd demon
in the icy darkness,

immersed in a passion of shadows.
On that snowy night,
poison flows through her veins
straight to the heart,
weakening even
the disquieting pulse of love...

A torch set in the cobwebs
illuminates with arcane light
a damp red rose,
fallen next to a skull
below a glass painting
depicting the gods of the underworld.
In that divine piece
inhabits the hereafter a female face,
with sky-blue eyes
and blood-stained lips.
It is the mirror submerged
in timeless dark,
of a vampiress with a menacing gaze.

Sandro D. Fossemò

TSB

4 poems by Edward Lee

Edward Lee's poetry, short stories, non-fiction and photography have been published in magazines in Ireland, England and America, including The Stinging Fly, Skylight 47, Acumen and Smiths Knoll. His debut poetry collection "Playing Poohsticks On Ha'Penny Bridge" was published in 2010. He is currently working towards a second collection.

He also makes musical noise under the names Ayahuasca Collective, Lewis Milne, Orson Carroll, Blinded Architect, Lego Figures Fighting, and Pale Blond Boy.

His Facebook page can be found at www.facebook.com/edwardleewriter

WHAT MEMORIES REMAIN?

Your mind was an echo
of it's former self
before you died,
giving us names we didn't know,
wanting to fight shadows
that weren't there,
recounting ancient events
as though they were yesterday,
vice versa,
then slapping us silent
with a brief knife of clarity,
you yourself for a moment,
before all that you were tumbled back,
and you stared at us
blankly,

until your eyes closed
sealing off the dull light
that sputtered there.

TSB

And then all that was left
was your breathing,
your faded chest rising,
falling, rising,
falling,
until there was no rise left
and you died,
the little that was left of you gone

wherever men like you go.

Photo by Cristina Bresser de Campos www.cristinabresser.com.br



FEARFUL NEW WORLD

You can't hold onto yesterday;
it begins to smell
as it rots.
The neighbours complain,
call the cops.
They question you,
why is that yesterday decaying
in your bed?
You can't look at them
as you say,
I'm not ready for tomorrow,
trust me, I'm not.

ANOTHER DAY LOST

Midnight in the morning,
noon at 3 a.m.;
this day becomes one of those lost battles
I didn't bothering fighting,
my defeat an inevitable byproduct
of my insomnia induced mood,
and my inability to care enough
to remember
if I have taken my pills this week.

THE THIRSTY BEAST

Leaves make music
against his window,
though no storm can be heard,
while, in truth, the window
is without glass,
broken as it was
when he threw the empty bottle through it,
rather than at his wife,
who left
with the glass,
his three children in tow,
leaving him on his knees,
silently begging for her,
his eyes searching the shelves
for some alcohol
to cease the whispers
that make cruel sense
clawing at his ears.

Edward Lee



Photos by Cristina Bresser de Campos www.cristinabresser.com.br



Photo by Cristina Bresser de Campos www.cristinabresser.com.br

Photo by Cristina Bresser de Campos www.cristinabresser.com.br



2 poems by Tony Daly

Tony Daly is a DC/Metro Area creative writer. You can find his first eStory "Seelentrager" at Infinity Realms Book Store. He has work recently or soon to be published with Jakob's Horror Box, Pure Slush, Tigershark, and O-Dark-Thirty. He also serves as an Associate Editor with Military Experience and the Arts. For a complete list of his published work, please visit <https://aldaly13.wixsite.com/website>.

First Response

MVA – Pedestrian, still alive
Foot – broke the windshield
And the driver – dead instantly

grey fabric is dark red
burning flesh and melted rubber
are nauseating
what color is he wearing?

The sides of his face are intact
He has no eyes – mine burn
He has no nose – mine runs
He has no mouth, either –
Mine keeps the bile in

Gray matter falls
With bone and tissue
And tears

I'm glad I didn't eat breakfast.

The River Swallowed Her

ancient legs straddled empty
space between dock and canoe
high-heels wobbling
on opposing shores

red cup held aloft
middle finger extended
screaming garbled obscenities at
jeering crowd of cautioners

canoe eased sideways
defiant eyes filled with fear
legs failed gymnastic
movements learned 50 years past

the river swallowed her
with violent acceptance

thrashing the surface
she emerged gasping
eyeliner wishing to remain
with spawning fish

orange cotton tube top clinging
desperately to hips
swearing sharpened
through morning breath mist

cautionary jeers turned
to all out laughter

accepting insults
with glee-dressed sobs
she rowed away

TSB

laughter following her past the bend
where salmon waved greetings and
the river swallowed her once again

Tony Daly

3 poems by Roger Singer

THOUGHT AND PAPER

A half shadowed face
an expression of fear
drowned into stones of pain

ancient winds
warm desert dreams
fevers of treasures
rising to the surface

it's the point of decision
where the shirt stops
and the skin begins

a place of undirected
gravity
bending against the
war of two
masters
the word of thought
and the word released.

UNDER NIGHT

Nightscape
flesh of the city

shadows over corners
the serious lost
between crosswalks

everyone has a personal
cause to their end

image reflections
on storefront windows
the personals of
the persons
unseen, unscripted

ballet of mass interaction
without contact

a walking world of color
where clouds and moons
remain impartial

if someone's crying
you can't hear them.

KINGDOM OF STARS

Cloudless night
sleep forsaken for
the lack of dreams

walking softly outside
under a carpet of stars
shadows from branches
are cast onto a
narrow dirt path

light breezes disturb
wax twisted leaves,
a fright to imagine
if it were ghosts
moving about

there is a sense
of being unearthed
and homeless
standing on the
birth of dust.

Roger Singer

2 poems by John Maurer

John Maurer is a 23-year-old writer from Pittsburgh that writes fiction, poetry, and everything in-between, but his work always strives to portray that what is true is beautiful. He has been previously published in Claudius Speaks, The Bitchin' Kitsch, Thought Catalog, and more than twenty others. @JohnPMaurer (johnpmaurer.com)

Adderall

They told me to write what I know
and I wrote a thousand poems about pain
like it was accidental, like getting sucked dry after a dry spell
It just came out of me and it must go somewhere
maybe down your throat
do I need to cram it?

This isn't a final, this is a start
A French kiss on a fourth date
Faking sick on the Sabbath
I didn't bring a book or the good book
so, I read the dictionary in detention
and the diction is still in my retention

How many times I've had to destroy my brain
just to try again to rebuild it to be better at this
I kill myself in every line I write just to be reborn in the next
Buried in the pages behind me; I resurrect myself in the ones still blank

You Wake Up

Somehow this is your life, your wife, your child, your house, your car
Maybe you should've stayed asleep, moving with such hesitant destruction
Maybe who I love most would be happier if she loved someone better
Maybe my parents would be happier if they stopped after two daughters

Somehow now you're fat and ugly and your wife is too
And your boss is younger and dumber than you, but you are getting dumber too
Your child effortlessly masters what you spent years failing at
And your dick can't even get hard enough for you to have another
To give him a brother to show him what it's like to have a breathing reflection

Somehow now she's dead and you aren't
But you wish you were; everything hurts
All your friends have been buried and you hurry
To start the growth of being the garden not the gardener
But still, even today, you wake up

John Maurer

Dinner Guest at the Butler's House

by Marlon Jackson

It was late night, rain and I was invited to a butler's home and I rested and woke up...

Breakfast

What's for breakfast? I asked gently. Then I sat on the chair. The butler whose back was turned

to me cleared his throat. I did too plus I decided to ask once more, "Um, I asked, what's for

breakfast? The smell of cooking food was mouth watery. Then in a hoarse voice the butler uttered, "A large one. Pancakes, waffles, scrambled eggs, turkey bacon, English muffins, coffee..."

"Tasty, I'd say."

The butler said nothing at first. Utensils and plates were set. Suddenly the butler uttered, "Go and

return in ten minutes.

Dinner Guest at the Butler's House

I looked at him still with his back turned and sighed. "Okay" and I did so. Ten minutes later I returned. Breakfast was on the table. It smelled delicious indeed, but the butler was gone. Yet I dined.

Lunch

"What's for Lunch?" I asked gently. Then I sat on the chair. Once again the butler had his back turned. The butler still had his back turned. He cleared his throat and said once again in a hoarse voice, "Go and return in ten minutes for lunch. The smell of lunch was indeed tasty. "Okay then I shall do so. I left. But when I returned ten minutes later I saw on the table was a bowl of chicken soup, crackers and multiple turkey and cheese sandwiches, a pitcher of iced water and iced tea. I sat down and I dined heartily.

Dinner

Lunch was good. Now it's dinner time. My exercise inside of the room I stood at was good too. I burned off that energy a few hours from my great lunch I enjoyed. And to the kitchen/dining room I returned and I saw the butler with his back turned.

TSB

Marlon Jackson

“What’s for dinner?” I asked feverishly.

“Sit” he replied hoarsely.

I did so, but I smelled no food, nor did I see any eating utensils. Then something smelled quite awful, like a rotting corpse. The suddenly the doors closed in a slam! My heart sank when I turned and saw.

Nervously I asked, “What’s going on?! And another thing Mr. Butler I never seen your face.” “Dinner,” he slithered. “My dinner has been served fed ad full. And he turned around, I saw horror before my eyes! He was a freaking zombie! It smelled badly, airing from him! *Aaaaaah!* I screamed and I bolted for the dining door. It wouldn’t budge open or unlock! I couldn’t turn the door knob! Then he charged at me as I screamed loud enough to wake the dead! The last flash went dark. It was the lights that suddenly blew out!



FEATURES

Contributors

Adam Levon Brown -Poetry
Alessio Zanelli -Poetry/Art
Daniel de Culla -Poetry/Art
Irina Moga -Poetry
ISABELLE - Art
Jeffrey Zable - Poetry
Martha Strom - Poetry
Michael Morell - Poetry/Photography
Paul Beckman - Flash Fiction
Yuan Hongri - Poetry

Featured Poems

Failure by Marc Carver
Peeking in the windows by Mike Plesset
Answers Questioned by James Kowalczyk
Passenger by Fabrice B. Poussin
No hell for poets by Rajnish Mishra
First Son by Sue Crisp
FRIDAY NIGHT (I DREAM OF POETS) by Bradford Middleton
Addicted to Both of You by Betsy-Anne Hambar
The Pedestrian's Rucksack by E.V. Wyler

Featured Fiction

My Joyful Trance by Glenn H. Myers