

the engine(idling #9



Collaboration

the engine(idling

**Issue 9:
Collaboration
Summer 2026**



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apple

unofficial beginning

According to Dr. Mother of fruits,
a physician known

for realizing the benefits of options,

it isn't always easy tending to a garden,
early in the growing season,

what awaits is excellent

hot apple tarts

to asking you to look at me like

I.

balance / snow blanketing the earth / neutral / like love / like brambles / through
a looking glass / mirrors of mirrors / soft / powerful / like we could bruise each
other / like we want to /

II.

how I want you to see me / to mud / to deadwater / to life vests / to steamboat /
to green beans / like blue sky / like no milk / to hair whisps / to eye goop / to bug
bites / like cracked bowls /

III.

you're turned on / we're turned out / with tiny hairs and Os and dirty fingernails
/ polished metal / hope / cigarette clouds / the moon / which we touch / which
we love to touch / like the color black /

IV.

I'm myself / to no one / like no one / to burnt orange / to side lamps / to 2am / to
dark shapes / to blood on tongue / to sticky sweet / to drumbeats / to beaten
souls / to

V.

body / to misunderstandings / to unhinging our jaws / to consuming a thesaurus
/ to limits / to feeling / to our bodies that feel / to irises / to mysteries that
continue and continue and continue

Rebellion is an emotion the same way it's about

(love) / the way I'll sit outside in the car with you
& just breathe (the cleanest air) / calculations / the way I'll examine
every thread in your shirt (your details are my home) and tell you if I think
I can mend it / spoilers / we can mend it together /
love / how we will fly a kite (yellow) in a thunderstorm
& not talk about how we both ache to feel the bite
of lightening (electrify me) / tell me (always) / how an audience perceives
itself (mirrors) / how prairie dogs alert (awaken me) / how snowfall
muffles violence (quiet is my favorite sound) / gently /
how the flicker of a candle is a heartbeat (envelop me) / gently (please) /
these are calculations (feelings) / my feelings / cupped in my hands /
tell me / how many degrees do I need to understand myself /
spoilers (spoil me) / we will understand ourselves together / incompletely
messily (infinitely) / gasping for air (a breath together) / buried in snow

Suzanne D. Miller, Mona Mehas & Barbara S. Nilsen

Antiquarius

Unconnected idea-tiles float over the page
piled for plastering an Alhambra of truths

backwards ocean waves won't allow floating
when the red ochre horses fight to cross

infinities that refuse to adhere
to a singular story, a mechanistic motif

Our truth grows tall as the crest of the wave
rises to cover the words on the seawall

then fractures ripple:
strewn squares of glass, pieces of stone
too fanned to convey a coherent commentary

our secrets buried deep within
the rubble of our own making

philosophical debris for the archaeologists yet to be born,
the eager morticians waiting to prepare them,
fossilizing with their stories in stone

Jack Carenza & Jay Noah Garrick

Streams and Rivulets

I was walking today, and I almost forgot
what it was like to fail. And how much
was built upon years of never seeing
ground gained, and never seeing
inside. Never seeing any change.
Throwing my whole chest, heart included,
at a problem, and wishing with every
ounce of will,

It was hydrangeas from the beginning.
It all starts with those button-cute flowers.
Because I was five years old when I decided
those were my favorite flowers. How
lithe the blue and how tender the pink
and purple. How soft the petals and how
they all flutter at the slightest wind
and grow almost like they are meant to
be cut in bouquets

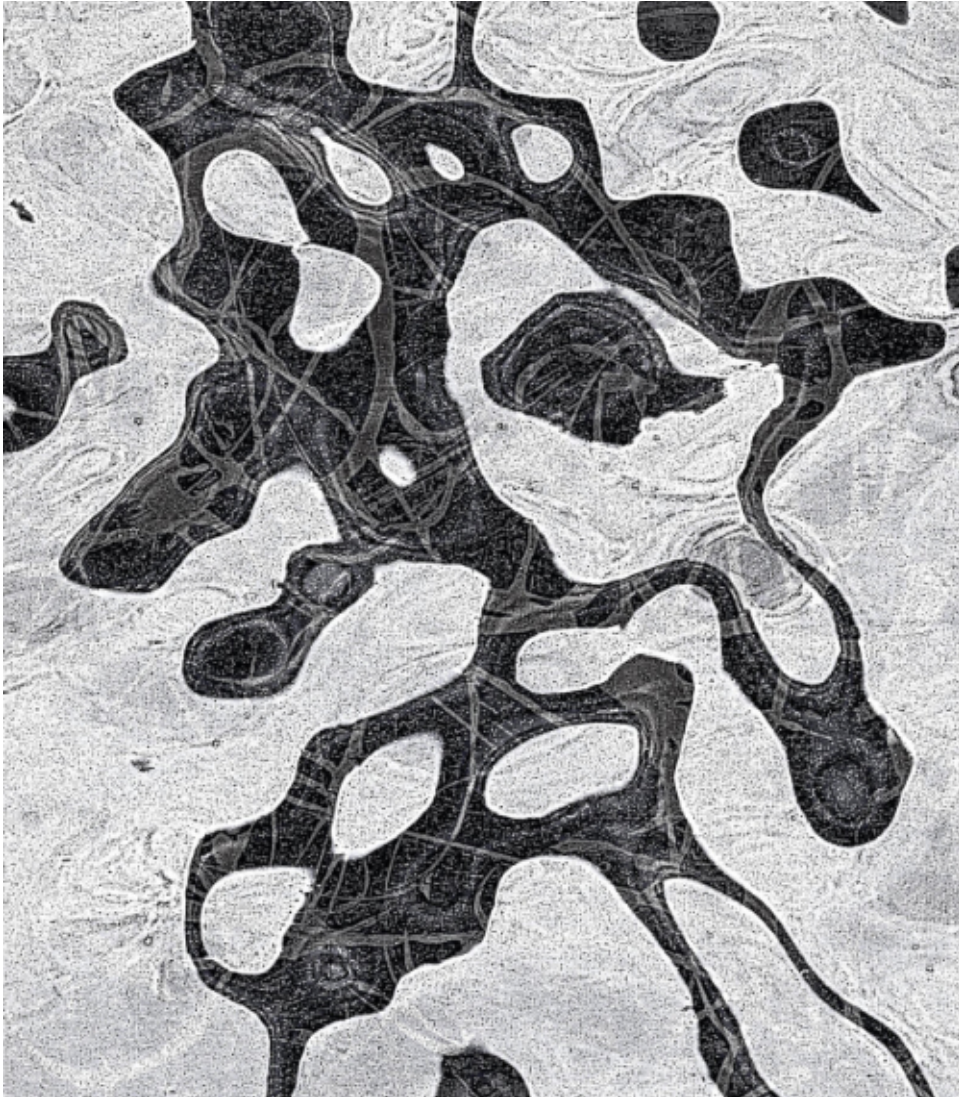
It's ninety degrees in March, and I'm
sweating on my temples and
in my heart.
Sweating before it's summer before it's time.
Forget beads of sweat, try streams and rivulets.

You were listening, and I even laughed at
your ignorance, wadded like lint in denim
pockets, patterns, your predictable inseams,
outside yourself—shelf life of an avocado—
You're CAFO. Never showing any range.
A battery-caged cock but pasture raised
label, turning every table with
powerless swill,

But what's left of us is hydrangea dust
pressed on blotting paper, corrugated cardboard.
Oshibana is a morbid craft, slicing peony heads
in half hopes single petals can be whole again,
tissue paper-thin, brittle, pastels muted,
prone to breakage. They're sylvan cadavers
depressed corpses of a no-win spring.
"Be together" they say. Meant to ferment, to
be cut for decay

Pregnant. Yes, it's yours. But I'm
not—not sweating it anymore.
From the start you were
languid as the end of summertime.
Forget needs, intent. Try screams, regret.

The Light That Can Balance on Dust



People Say

renga

Black, slick, death clinging
to pale toes, ghosts in the sand.
Moaning, Mother's pain.

The mayor says the beaches
are still open for business

despite whispers from
waves' warning of empty words
that crumble to salt.

Some locals say the beach is
haunted by the weight of the

Water Spirit's cry,
relentless, since destiny
manifested here.

My momma says she once saw
A claw-clad hand rise from the

depths, seaweed dripping,
and reach for bodies bathing
in Coppertone coats.

But I don't believe that. My
Momma loves her old wives' tales,

shrouds covering truth.
Underwater cries crest high
proclaiming our guilt.

Ain't nothing but us, Momma.
Not a thing other than us.

Stalk Horizon

You may notice yourself in time
describing the fields as empty spaces;

that's where it is, where the second splits
when the concrete rises to your eyebrow.

Though their disagreement may only be
announced within the confines of your

past-stricken face. Any claim of
emptiness is eventually boiled down

like a dream of the floating world,
a whole unbroken field of time,

to the miniature rivers of water that feed
the masses of the ground themselves,

tanned stalks to the horizon.
Now let's slice neat swathes

before your mouth can make a sound
and spill the sunrise over your collar.

Viewport



Viewport

POEM: MELODY DERRICK, ARTWORK: PENINA S. FINGER

Thirty-Nine

Mum loved a good meat raffle,
so on the anniversary of her death
I head down the pub for the draw.
Get her favourite seat, buy tickets
for all 10 rounds. When I see a slip
with Mum's magic number,
I know I'm gonna be lucky.

I win something in every round.
A pound of tripe. Six pork bangers.
A sirloin the size of a plate.
Would've done her proud.

I leave half-drunk, weighed down
with meat. But I pause as I pack up
my car. Holding the bag to my ear,
I hear a familiar heartbeat.
Ba-dum. Ba-dum. Ba-dum.



Ecstatic Circuits

That was the year we all got used
to the glitches in the matrix. The moments
when you're sitting in a cafe with a friend
and her face freezes for a second, then
returns to motion as if nothing happened.
The tree branches pixelate for an instant
before snapping into focus. Two people
say the same sentence on the same day:
"You don't have a right to be exhausted."
Nobody wants to think about implications.
Well that was weird, they say, then go back
to checking their phones. Like calling it weird
is an explanation. There's always some dude
with an advanced degree who says it's all about
how the brain interprets information. Pareidolia.
If all else fails, you can blame sleep deprivation.
Nobody says it aloud, but we all know it's bullshit.
Me, I get a warm glow in my stomach every time
I notice a glitch. The same feeling I used to get
when I spotted a fox in our neighbourhood,
back when we still had foxes. It's reassuring
to know there's someone in charge.



Walking the Cultural Landscape

i The Cultural Landscape

Trees drop early leaves, dropping hints
of what's to come, cold tapping the shoulders
of the last kids in the playground.

The shadow men
 (the shadow men call),
 the shadow men call door to door,
leaving the dark in all safe spaces,
 leaving the memories we can't capture
 on phones.

And down on their knees
 (down on their knees), uniformed
cleaners sweep those leaves into golden mounds
which are already drawing archaeologists
 from their adventurous sleep.

Bring out those trowels and delicate brushes,
throw wide the doors of our new museums.

ii Lore and Legislation 1

There's a knot in my kerchief,
its flowers in bright red and blue,
its flowers in yellow and blue,
 and there's something I have to recall
 but I can't remember what.

Member States should therefore dream
that an adequate system is in place
 for the recording,
 production and transmission
of dream-driven statistical data on the offenses
 (the offenses, that was it)
the offenses defined in this directive.

Wheat is a girl, pale beyond pale.

Her dreams feed, impel her pale arms
through the aching weight of arsenic and rust,
the grey red of twisted metal,
 to rise like a flag.
Her feathered stalks emerge, breathing
 breathing breathing
 breathing hard.

iii Stonebird Reflects

Feathers don't grow on trees
 but they're older than stones.
 (I remember)
I remember being a blind fledgling,
 counting the nights,
with rocks weighing heavy on my heart,
 impatient
to do something with my useless wings.

In a nest built of bricks, my sisters and I,
barely more than shells and vague ideas,
swayed like an abandoned chimney,
 primed to tumble
 but holding on
by the skin of our mute beaks.

Mother brought us songs
from where the sky spun pebbles
 to the end of the Earth,
licking each one smooth as a baby,
and she sang about feathers blowing
far across deserts and seas, though
these words had yet to grow
 the warm muscles of meaning.

Sometimes,
 coloured postcards dropped from the sky,
and once
 we woke to find an amber egg
 containing a perfect bird.

There are no forests now
 and my lonely nest
 is woven from broken branches.

iv Lore & Legend 2

My sister is the daughter of the Sun.
The Giant that stole her tore down trees,
dashed nestlings to the ground.

Qualified criminal offenses:
the destruction of
 (or widespread and substantial damage
 which is either irreversible or long-lasting to)
an eco-system, a habitat, air, soil, water.

I have only her kerchief, flowers fading
on the worn fabric, but it's like a flag.
The Giant keeps his life inside an egg
and O, if we could only find that egg
 and bring her home.

v Nature's Way

A woman dressed in flowers wants to tell me
 about lost lives,
from drone strikes during broken ceasefires,
from careless drivers thumbing their phones,
and from simply leaving the path
 on unstable terrain.

She has lists of figures, and a PowerPoint
of smiling faces which dissolve,
one to the next, against a grating soundtrack
of AI-generated cellos, calculated
 for maximum emotional effect.

It's not, I swear, that I'm heartless,
but I appear resolutely unmoved as I
 list the seasonal flowers:
wood anemone,
 primrose,
 cowslip,
 bluebell,
sweet violet,
 lesser celandine.

Then, I take her warm hand in mine
and we dance to that sad, sad melody,
as she itemizes tragedies,
 great and small.

Her breath
 (her breath)
carries the scent of fresh-cut grass.

vi Lore and Legislation 3

The sunflowers, all the little sunflowers
call on the sun, wringing out the Earth,
sifting mercury, chromium, lead.

This is the ecosystem: it means
a dynamic complex of sunflowers, ferns,
hemp, silver-grass, micro-organisms;

it interacts as a functional unit; it is plants,
animals, fungi, and the spirits of the woods,
Mavka, Rusalka, zla Mavka,

the water, the willow, the fields of wheat,
the girls tending the city's widening cracks.

vii Surveying the New Labyrinth

For children have planted flowers in the city's
widening cracks, and fountains bloom in the old bus bays
in guileless simulation of the Garden Community ideal.
It's part William Morris,
 part Dig For Victory,
 and part
unassuaged guilt for crimes we all deny,
 even to ourselves.

I search online for contrition,
 but the page won't load
and I spend the rest of the day
meticulously deleting my browsing history,
though I should probably be outside
making the most of what's left of daylight,
ploughing my half acre,
 nurturing a sense of community.

Beneath the new growth,
streets are a palimpsest of grid and maze,
 neither taking precedence,

and when the children are tucked up in bed,
 learning their codes by torchlight,
 I will walk the lines and curves,
 unstitching
 (un stitching)
 the hem between dissonant conceptions of Nature,
 my bare feet shuffling
 (shuffling shuffling)
 where my mind fears to tread.

a dog snuffling through last year's leaves,
 a bird whose name I've forgotten,
 and a wood which is every wood
 in which I've ever wandered.

Aye, *daft ha'porth*.

I stop considering.

viii Lore and Legislation 4

I throw my kerchief up into the air.
 The stitches fade, the Directive
 will hold, the Sun's daughter
 will cast her rainbow over tear-streaked skies.

ix Scrapbooking in Wet Earth

In the bright new day, I consider clipping round
 morning's edges – a daisy a bluebell
 a footprint by the stream –
 and labelling each piece according to my granddad's
 hand-me-down catalogue of mulch and mould: but
 although a wood is a wood is a wood
 (is a wood is a wood)
 and there are uncountable flowers between mud and sky,
 I've somehow lost his tongue along the way.
 So, I gather the scraps – a torn branch
 lichen scales a magpie hacking
 in the twigs and shadows –
 and stuff them into the damp sack
 he slung across his shoulders,
 fetching magic for the garden: but
 although the breeze is tickling with the waft of damp hessian,
 the sack's still caught on a nail in the shed of a house
 I left in the last century.
 So, I consider the fragments as they brush my fingers –
 the silver splash in black water
 the point at which brown burns into gold
 green remembering itself back to life –
 and then I let them go.

Daft ha'porth, my granddad says, in a voice that's

sleepy transformation



Today I Saw a Bird Separate

Today I saw a bird,
black brush strokes on paper,
slicing through textured sky.

A flurry of wings
crunch-rustle into
a rainbow arc of wind-

Today I saw a bird,
paired with its twin on asphalt,
both sharp of eye and beak.

and I can't separate this spirit
and the science
to rise above

Today I saw a bird,
in semi-formed memory of carcasses:
one buried, one neglected.

any more than I can
separate the precise
ghost of your mouth
that ironclad spectre
of your memory

Today I saw a bird,
or the yearning of one confined,
sky distant
on the other side
of my ribs.

and the juniper berries cupped
in a crinoid-crust rock
in this cold season
of your absence.

A Time for Everything

zuihitsu

introducing my self to myself waxing moon

*

the predictability / of time / in a single / moment / filled / & unfulfilled

*

ec•dy•sis

/ˈekdəsəs/

noun

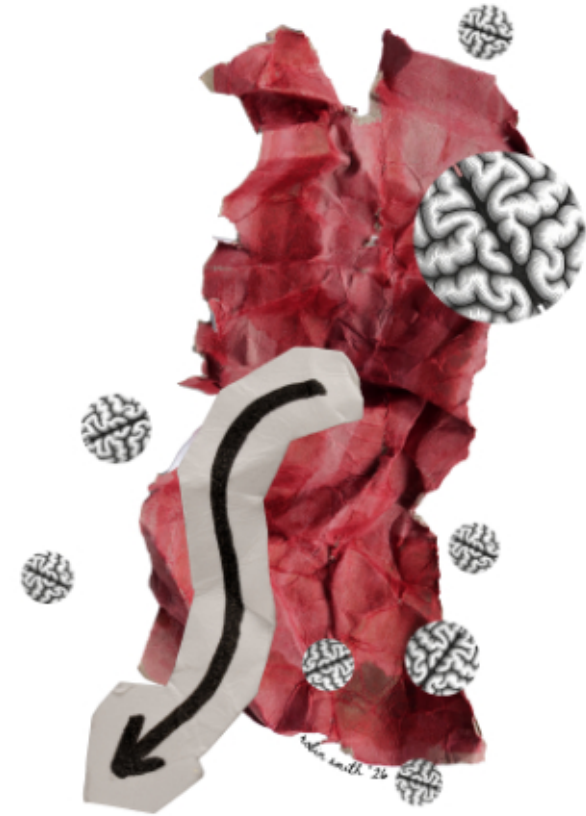
: the act of molting or shedding an outer cuticular layer

*

My confidence is like a fruit.
*In turns it ripens, in turns it spoils.**

*A line from "Post Partum" by Nikita Deshpande

*



*

if I were to peel back my epidermis there would be a tributary of fear that empties into the reservoir that is my brain bioluminescent and smelling like freshly polished silver a pathway that ferries every wrongdoing every failure every cussword every first draft every...every...every

*

aftermath the reconstruction era of my physiology

*

((echo))location

zuihitsu

trigger warning
the echolocation
of i(dent)ity

*

the
palmistry
of
my
life
line

(poured
into
a
bottle)

—
dead leaf green

(into
a of stubby aluminum
can)

anexplicationofmychronologyinshorthand

*

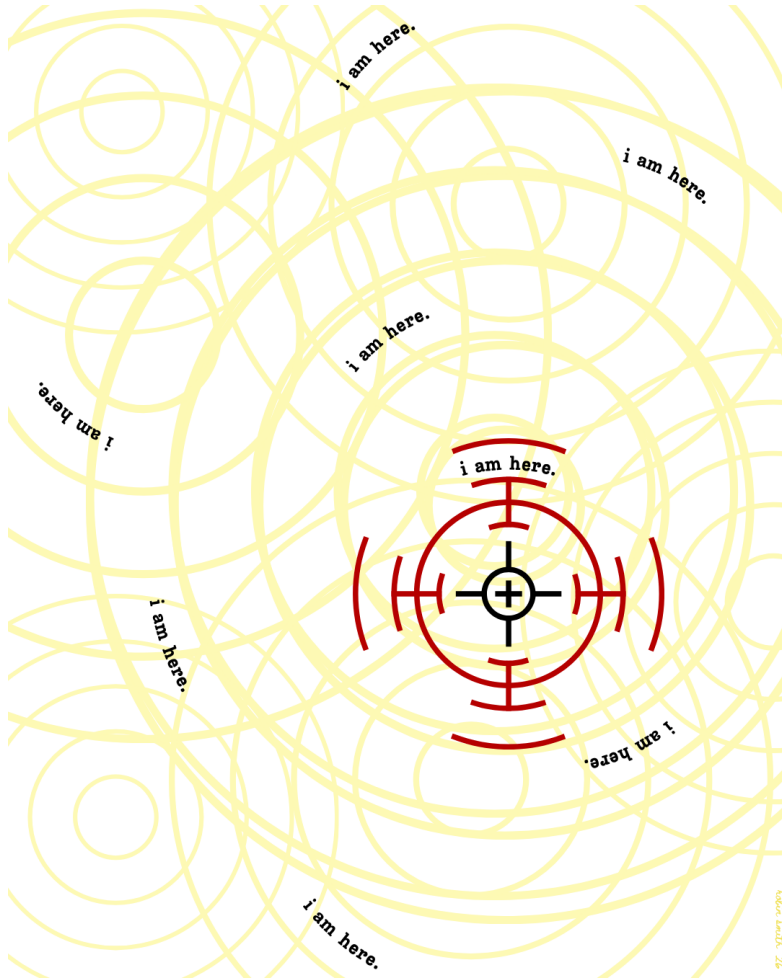
“Self-plagiarism is style.” — Alfred Hitchcock

This explains why I’m drawn to what I’m drawn to even if I don’t want to be
drawn to what I’m drawn to or what I *was* drawn to suddenly makes a comeback
like capri pants. It’s a trap. A giant ambigram for stuckness.

*



from the disquiet growing into the first syllable of my name



*

DOING WHATS BEST
IS LEAVING



YOU CAGE ME
LOCK ME AWAY IN STRAIGHTJACKETS
FOR MY BEWILDERMENT IS SEEN AS
PHYSCOTIC
WHEN I AM TAKEN AWAY
ISOLATED FROM IT ALL
YOU TRULY BELIEVE THAT I WILL LOSE
MYSELF ONCE MORE
YET I HAVE LANTERNS AND I AM
CONDUCTING A SEARCH PARTY FOR MYSELF
I AM NOT LOST
I AM WILD WITH THE WIND
YOU ARE WILD WITH FOSTERING JEALOUSY

CAN I FOLLOW YOU TO THE RIVER
FOR I LIKE THE WAY YOU LOOK AT THE FISH
LIKE THEY ARE PAINTINGS OF WONDER, COME
TO LIFE
STUDYING DUCKS' FEATHERS LIKE ANGEL WINGS
CAN I FOLLOW YOU TO THE RIVER
SO WE CAN PLAY POOH STICKS, AND RELIVE
CHILDHOOD MEMORIES OF SKIPPING STONES AND
SEEING WHO CAN GO THE DEEPEST
CAN I FOLLOW YOU TO THE RIVER? SO YOU CAN
PUT ME OUT OF MY MISERY, DIP ME IN THE
RIVER AND FOREVER MORTALISE ME WITH WHERE
I MOST ENJOY MY TIME.

I THINK I BREATHLES HOLD ME
WANT TO S UNDER
DROWN

2023

Christiana Doucette & Tracie Renee

Through the Woods: A Sonnet Crown Conversation About Family

1) Fragments: *Christiana Hikes With Robert Edwin Wolff (b. 1934)*

When grandpa takes me hiking through the woods
there's sparks of mica memories to gather.
That path along the quarry, where he stood
covered in suds: A dry well made them lather
dirty clothes and dusty faces outside.
Along the long walk home they slowly dried,
dragging pails of water home for dishes
and drinking overnight. White line granite
shines tales of spectral winter blasts. This is
where frost quakes remind him miners ran it.
I slip a chip into my bag with his
see-through mica sheet. We have this habit
of holding onto fragments of old rock.
We keep them for the stories they unlock.

2) Violets: *Tracie Gardens with Dolores (1925-2017) & Richard Karst (1924-2018)*

We lost them—and the stories they unlock.
Grandma first, three years after her last stroke
robbed her of my name and face. The doctors
said she'd never get that back: her mind broke
in ways we couldn't mend. We lost Gramps six-
teen months later, their deaths paired like bookends,
their garden quickly void of bright tulips,
so unlike the wild beds of my youth, gemmed
with roses, phloxes, stones like secret doors.
Gramps and Gran and I knocked on them, turned up
tiny treasure troves of worms and ants, scores
of stories cached in dirt. But I grew up.
I scrubbed my hands clean with callous silence—
now all I want's the noise of Grandma's violets.

3) Ultraviolet: *Christiana as Robert Edwin Wolff (b. 1934)* *Demonstrates the Laser for his Great Grandchildren*

Now all I want's the noise of Grandpa's volts
buzzing through the laser he's repairing.
He warms it up to show my kids. Tightened bolts.
Then has one child push the button, pairing
science with storytelling. His stepdad's
students once gave him a baseball-sized sub.
He'd pull a chain to send the ironclad
chugging through the bathwater of the tub.
When he was grown, Grandpa joined the Navy,
repairing nuclear subs, and lasers.
Even after service in his eighties
he'd repair old lasers as a favor.
Now mid-ninety, his mind still clear and bright
he is the medium, his stories light.

4) Lightless Dark: *Tracie Listens with Tom Amirante (1949-2016)*

He is the medium, his music—light.
On lonely nights, my father sat and strummed.
He finger-picked out Beatles tunes to drown
his mom and stepdad's boozy benders. Numbed
to clatter-hiss of city slums, to boom-
ing drums of jungle warbeats, bar by bar
in four-four time, he plucked a better life—
and porch-swing summer nights, he sang the stars
and me to sleep in silken dark of June.
But some dark's not silk-sweet—some dark has weight
and gloom: enough to crush, enough to mute
his pulse with vodka, bar by bar slammed straight.

These days, when darkness comes for me—I wait.
Listen for the shifts; sing myself awake.

5) Making Connections: *For Dorothy Garrity (1914-1971)* *& Ernie Dickinson (1919-2021)*

Listen how the shifts sing the world awake.
A switchboard. Nimble fingers cross quick wires.
A job's fresh connections. The time it takes
the handsome journalist who she conspires
with to be where the story drops. And soon

it's more than tips. It's dinner and it's lips.
It's baseball out back Sunday afternoon,
when he teaches her boys to bat and flips
them ball caps. Brilliant Saturdays fishing.
And then a bribe to memorize a poem.
The Owl and the Pussycat exchange rings
in the front room. Gold bands. The low hum
of everyone. The phone is off the hook.
A new name's numbered in the next phone book.

Of these small hands in mine that grow. The spark
of joy at perfect rocks. The way life's understood
when I take my kids hiking through the woods.

6) How They Met (*for Dolores & Richard Karst*)

A new name's numbered on her next dance card—
this blue-eyed, dark-haired soldier just back
from combat. "Name's Dick" — but she'll call him *dear*.
Iron his suits, tuck treats in a lunch sack

for his bus inspector job, then tend house
for the five kids who grow too fast, and—when
all five leave—she'll pass to him her dog-eared
whodunits. They'll tell the tales all again

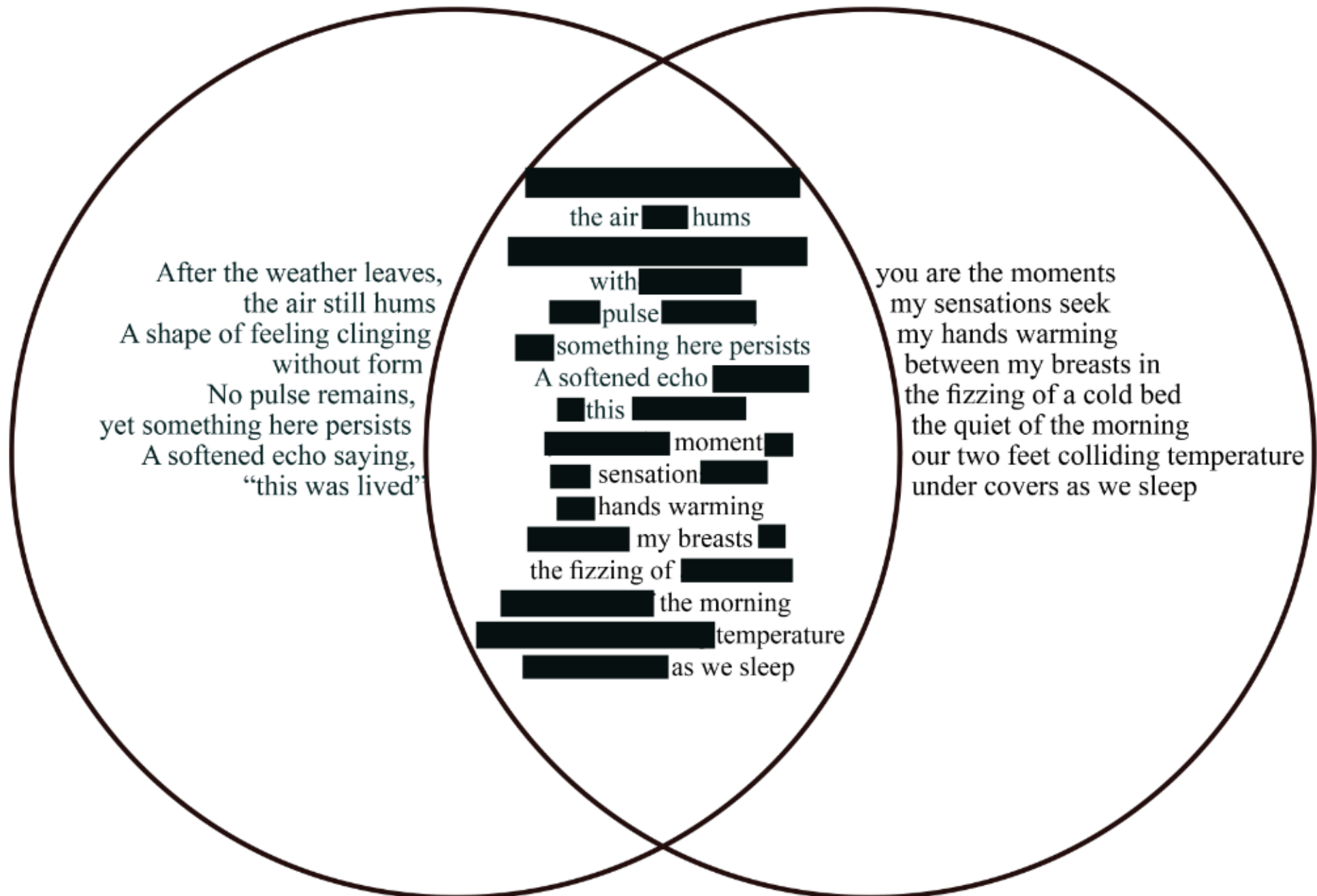
to grandkids gathered in the yard where love
lays deep roots. Come summer, I'll waltz my son
between the blooms where stories echo on,
watch him learn the dance. Find other hands. Once

upon a time, I was his universe.
It's his turn now, to rise up from the dirt.

7) Growing Limbs

*"I found him under a tree, like a dropped acorn."
— Shakespeare in As You Like It*

It's my turn now, to rise up from the floor
I've spread with family memories, and make
my own additions to the family lore.
The extra egg, shell and all, that we baked
into banana bread. The dahlia stakes
the dog next door knocks down. How Helene hit
throwing trees like toothpicks, tasting the grit
of sawdust from those dozen oaks next door.
Of charging solar lights all day. The dark,
the damp, and roasting all those sweet smores.
Of waterfalls we hike to at the park.



When You Join Me For Tea on the Back Verandah

After all this time I am stunned
that happiness is a quiet afternoon
your hand in mine standing
for every touch we have ever given each other
chai cupped in our hands, your lips a bud
blowing even this mild heat away.

There are waves pushing us into vastness
but we place skins on each other
adjusting the fit like seamstresses
our mouths full of pins to mark
the territories we have ventured together:
here is water. Here is the edge.
My finger tracing the seam of gold over
your shoulder, your neckline, your chest:
here is where light falls.

These treasures we unearth from aging folds
feeling our selves through new synapses
feeling for ancient riverbeds
carving their way through our topography
ravines and gullies and the places
where water pools: your lip, your belly
the edge of your eye an estuary where dawn
fractals saltwater into new meeting places
and our silken map ripples. We are folded
into newness, this world new with us:
here is a wattlebird's first flight
the light of the first sun ever made
softening to shadow on your neckline.
At my back the warmth of the roads we travelled
Ahead, the entire ocean beckoning
us to become rivers, and rest.

Belligerents

Together we can square the circles	it's not untogether impossible
Under our eyes	I suppose if I had some time to think about it
I can close mine	it'd be like the opening curtain
And still see your image	you have platinum on your lips
In the darkness inside my lids	looking for somewhere to speak
Everyone else fades in a moment	they all say they'll give you a hand
The lovers	they mean around your neck—
The haters	you always knew
The Indifferent	you always knew it was only you for me
Their monochrome winking out	I see the honey behind your aviators
In your technicolour glow	and you cry just like an angel
In your UHD 8K colour	maybe even better
They are all in total eclipse	I want to be the smoke
The uninteresting	you curl around your lips
The listless	you cry just like a statue in the snow
The dull	now I know
Everyone else is low definition	it's the final curtain
In the brightness of your aura	when your eyes look away
I can hardly look at you,	when you sigh
I'm shoegazing	I lost the war right then and there
Under your eyes,	I didn't even know
All my circles are squared	we were belligerents

Suzanne D. Miller & C.J. Prince

Snow

It is snowing
snowing
snowing

Snow
not sought
endured

Russian hat
Sorrels
balaclava

Capricorn endures
conquers
white knuckles
all over Colorado,
Wyoming, Nebraska,
performing
everywhere,
dealing with
it

those passes
only one
three sixty
spin out on
that highway
north to Greeley

the show must
go on

and the word snow is inadequate
it is

empty

The big hole
of O
empty

I say invisible
blinded by

the light
spiral swirls
highway closed

to our
farm
I pulled left
around
that blockage
indeed
your shock of snow

of the awe wonder beauty
that this crystalline brightness brings—

at least when the *flocons* have wandered
way down to
Hadestown

I unburied
the ducks,
settled
them
in their
night pen

hungry owls
hunt
even
in the snow

I can't look at this
swirling ivory, complete with
snow-devil cyclones circling like sharks behind my bay window,
without thinking
of
Gauley Bridge
and the
toxic crystals

I think of Gauley Bridge
all the time now
the pink salt mines
the Egyptians
tunnel
under pyramids

not snow
just a battle
of sand

My camellias blossom
petals open to provide a floor
for the flakes—

I don't expect them to survive

*I just minutes ago
wrote of camellias
not here
at least
not my garden
my grandmother's—
pick one now
place it in a
small vase
or a glass decanter
wear a red dress*

Britt Kaufman & Drew Smoker

this inner time machine



nothing life threatening but...

what is this inner wiring
of losses and griefs that I sit with
in this waiting room
that is both ruin and refuge?

i am here after a fall,
weighing pain in a babble of
Bangla, Hindi, Kannada—
some of which I understand
with so much that remains unfamiliar

outside, by the welcome mat,
everybody's shoes are lined up
as I mouthfeel words with a p and f—
and that holds me for a while

and reaffirms this sanitised safety
of cheerful colours on walls
and rows of steel chairs
anchored to disinfected floors

i want to turn the skin of waiting
into wonder, feeling for the pulse—
there is probably no word for such work
but there should be

Ten Haiku – One Theme

wind chimes
coins dropping
unexpectedly.

dandelion fluff blown
fate read
in tea leaves.

anticipation.
patience that bubbles.
pot that never boils.

cradle rocking.
cradel.
I can't spell out your life.

children somersaulting
the weightlessness
of falling

hide-and-go-seek
song bird's thrust
our brief time together

hungry
I fish without bait
you offer me left-overs

luck
heads and tails flipped
down the sewer grate

whip-poor-will's call
no need
for analysis

board across a puddle
I stay sane
to be your Mississippi

Andrew Gardner & Anna Suszynski

Shoebox, Stream

Wrote it down, just once, after listening:
running through the nights, swinging
bats at mailboxes, baptizing
myself and my friends in blood,
blood, blood, the river runs with it

flood flood flood free if you want fairer water
clean water at the end of the gully
no canyon no fairer skin
let the skull shrapnel pierce their allies
make a new state with their words
until they die in their Hampton houses—
Is this on Yeezus?—

someone for killing on your behalf
what you want—Alexander
what you want—broke or a leader
I fight for the ones I love—
Change?—

blood debt cost
be damned until they die
I was broke, that shit rote—
Was he so far gone?—

fairer free freer are the fairer
ruling class, their useless brains paint
the concrete and asphalt, possibly the walls—
This one got violent.—

it was fine, then it was beautiful
somehow ruthless *and* unthinking
if I ever had any empathy, I learned
rather be a dick
than take that shit

you start singing once the water turns clean
force them to use a talk box
so long she said, so long
I'm too far
from home
but I'd still do it

there's no way in this life to repay
those unlucky enough to stand
blood
never to trust myself—
Can't fuck the reporters.—

I'll find a way to STAMPEDE
in our way, justifying the senselessness
all sewed up or a follower
by claiming they were all oligarchs
had his mind screwed on—
But so did they.—

I gotta keep fighting.—
Sometimes too hard.—

I never listened through to the end.

Sandy Feinstein & Abbey Muza

Past Lines

On a record, round and round. Look.
Etched into vinyl, its material
needled into sound, its lines circular

Convergence, to a point
unpainted, vanished
thought, belies a period

What's drawn, painted, tied in knots
slips past words, ephemeral dots.

threads lettered, woven A and E,
roped together, entitled, united
unknown who, made a unicorn.

any end, midpoint, peripherals
what isn't, the blank space
follows, speechless unseen.



the politics follow me

like a wound carried since childhood

born into this palimpsest of ads
glued onto highways dug into
burial mounds, I send out a signal
of love and murder

every highwayman has a theme song
that begins in grief and wanders
through an awakening prairie

I collect partisans who speak derelict
in this landscape of truck stops
and drive-thru funeral parlors
underscoring a vacant sky

I've seen enough Sergio Leone films
to know what festers behind a dollar sign

no good comes of an invisible hand
and I'll be damned if I'll be a muse
fashioned to water down the masses,
their gathering fires rise and flower
at your front door

so tell us how you want your name
written in the sands of time

Honey & Hormone

*we tie and untie beads
on a knotted rope
look for even numbers
balanced sensations
right thumb to left*

Dig, dig, dig,
Forget the sun, never turn,
Around, around, until you're dizzy,
Your fragile mind is ours to mold,
Like dirt, and clay, and mud,
Like Adam.

Now there's a man,
A real man,
Not those soyboy cucks who remember,
What it's like to be loved and love,
To look up with wonder and
Not put a price point
On every piece of meat.

*you're a small man,
your woes more tragic,
the troubles of our skins, then,
no dysfunction*

You crave the subtle touch of
The one who plunged you to the light,
But your greatest sin was being born.
Don't forget your daddy's scarred hands
beating you till you puked,
All over your mother's new rug—
You mistook her fear for failure.

*we try to explain:
dirt clicks with low arches.
we try to explain:
the contradiction—
dry dirt lacing finger whorls
dig, dig, dig:
how even the thought shudders us*

*you chew on damp cuticles,
say we don't make sense
rephrase what you want us to say*

*we try, again:
we can't rub our fingers together:
not without thinking of dry dust, chalk, clay, plaster
we can't rub our fingers together:
not without thinking of the trace of feathers on spine
waves of touch you refuse to hold*

Just a little further,
And this will all be worth it,
The ones you hurt,
All rats in a circus.
You're a proper man,
A show-stealing, alpha, sigma cunt,
Son of Adam, Nepotism's caterpillar.

*We are villainous: resistant.
Impossible.
We refuse.
We move unilaterally.
We must be compelled.*

*you will compel us:
a sheaf of papers, shoved in a crack
fingers chafing against fibers,
dry pulp in our hands*

There goes your wife, boy.
There goes Lilith.
She's of the dirt, like you,
But she stopped swallowing our filth.

I'll build you a new wife,
One from your bone,
One that can't escape you,
A mare to housebreak,
The original bride to blame.

There is no reflecting in the garden,
Only a story told in dust.

*and what is dirt, anyway,
and why is it some sort of failure
debris of the unwanted
when here are our feet
aching for the sound
but never its settled touch*

*you dig
as dust filters to our throats
with pesticides from the field
that'll surely flood, soon,
surely, if it could rain:
if it could only rain*

You hear her call,
The Sun; she is the true affliction,
Your purpose is divine, dear Adam,
So drown the light and thrust us all,
Into a hole so dark that,
Only parasites feel at home,
The world is wrong, not you.

*if you discard us,
we'll wade through weeds
into the culvert,
straddle the water,
marvel at passageways from beneath,
if we discard you*

The dirt has deafened
And made you blind,
You forget who stole your daddy's time,
We fucked his lungs, his will, his blood,
Then, seduced his golden son.
We rape the world, say it's for you,
Your hands, your hips, are our tools.

Son of Adam, Sin of Eve,
You were never meant to be,
And yet you were, and we made do,
We told you exactly what to chew,
Not with sermons that we would preach,
But with a need you'll never reach.
That promised land of honey and hormone,
Will be the last thing you ever own.

So, dig your hole

There Is No Such Thing As a Bluebird

No one sees me for what I am,
perceiving what they wish instead.
Powers of absorption knows no
more, less, or
even why and how.
What makes me blue
is a trick of the eye.
A feather flicks,
light waves scatter,
ever reaching, straining, stretching.
Particles flinging outward
thrust, like a childhood toy
sticky arm of devotion
eternally slapping, snapping, retracting,
repeating towards seeking.
No sleep.
With every return, each blink
light searches for a receptacle,
a place to call home, to receive
that which is not
meant for me.

Yes, I'm a Crow

They said dress like a crow.
cloak yourself in black, but even better,
no eyes should be out.

Did they not hear its sound
the ballad
mistaken for a shrill?

Or the mind

So sharp it remembers the faces
better than my schoolmate
who, after seven years of friendship
asked: "Do I know you?"

I'm a crow that buries, perches, glides, and when
asked how come my cries are serenades
my stories have an arc, and still I
flourish in black, I blink,

Lock gazes, and say:
Black is underrated. Black is classic.
Black is obsidian. Black is velvet.
Black is fertile soil. Black is ink.
Haven't you seen a version of you beyond
the atrocities of this world and against
the sunset
marvelously silhouetted?



She does it all—and some

pushing to exhaustion,

coffees,

The moments are waiting.

substrate disturbance,

2026 finds her ship-shape

ditching the
second (or third) quick fix.

This happy chore was

an excellent resistance activity

linger a little longer at the table,

proceed at idle speed

You don't need a room full of longer days

Stroads

a: Do you remember cassettes in the park, ripping open a duffel bag, first thing in the morning? Out came an emollient fog from Eden, after all the night, now dusk to dawn: the portent songs. Our favorite nightingales ate sassafras and swallowed ecstasy, we shuffled onto a stoned and tanned picnic table, feathers fresh and well smoked, joyous vultures overhead. A cradle for the lost, cawed. A phone call with a friend. A piteous conversation held off the side of the stroad about eighth grade.

C: I remember malt liquor in the public restroom, sewing up holes in the head, early in the afternoon. It was a dream in remission. Hard words all day, soft looks all night. The air was smoke in our lungs and we had to show off by holding it in. Compulsively picking at the grass we laid on like a scab. Birthing enough disorder to smother the suburbs with its own fire blanket. Fortunately it never rained much.

a: But when it rains I think about every time it has ever rained. Slipping down the stroad – that being between street and road – we dipped into lanes and ways where fences beckoned a clamor for the desire trail. The storm drains down stream behind a bricked up school, laid in wait for the teenage emissaries bound for the old gods. Cement as old as the Cuban Missile Crisis, makes for the toned parchment of the subaltern, where grotesques and marginalia illuminate the hushes and giggles. Walking the Hours through the tunnels, keeping the stolen books on their toes, beading green flower rosaries and rave candy bracelets that glow in the dark

just like our hearts.
And the rain started again,
with the group of us
in a storm drain.

C: The rain that dropped licked our hearts like dry leaves used as bookmarks for the stolen library copy of Plato's *Dialogues*. Pseudo-philosophy in the park. Our feelings fed the grass which bled into our selves, we dropped acid then shrooms as prayer. We smoked flowers to secure passage for another god, we Panhandled desire to build a virtue of the outside. And we loved ourselves for it. The dirt was holy, the rage was substantive. And the group was all-encompassing.

C: So we spend the rest of sense licking Crowley's teat and wondering what that had to do with Stone Temple Pilots's *Core*—a self-fulfilling promise. Different band, but the point stands: *the more you suffer, the more it shows you really care—right, yeah?* Yeah. The best mistakes anyone has ever made. Singing slow songs about yearning, or rather what that word might mean to one of us someday if we're lucky. Harmonizing with the sounds of crows pecking through scraps of will they or won't they:

a: The treacherous stroads swallowed up our favorite tracks. Where a sepia tone trolley stop is buried underneath, the bucolic sprites sing:
“Aeroplanus, drain your caged rats caught in black holes and suns,” a song a speaker changes like a haunted jukebox floating with no handlebars like a *Return to Oz* reject cameo. Bustling from each bus stop. But how much better would it be to hotbox a trolley? A warm stream of green and gray steam cruising down Newport, Reefer Madness Railway, visions of the old world before prohibition, like a baked butterfly with a b-side ballad under wing, screaming psychobilly mnemonics.

C: Skating around shows of self-flagellation, leaning on days of debauchery. Lessons from the Americana self-help bookstore. 31 flavors of fucked, and we ashed our cheapo cigarettes out on warm rubber Vans soles. Watching *Trainspotting* or *Requiem for a Dream* on repeat, letting the point joyously float over our heads. Slowdiving in and out of scuffed concrete curbs and acrylic bongos. Aspiring Hollywood adults loitering under the humming Del Taco sign. It's not even dark yet. And maybe it never has to be.
It's the desert after all. Nothing around for miles.

a: Down by the broken concrete brook, damming our summer dallies, manufactured manumission on doldrums (we climb over the wall because we forgot the master key) and then we spark calamity! Puffing then pawning our burgeoning dopamine. I hate consequences! Then the cars were staring, the cars were staring again and then I froze on the skateboard I could not ride. The phone shook with a friendly caw, *come mob over to Peppertree*, but now the notifications are for nothing. I don't wanna scroll anymore. I want the text to collapse like a charred pyre, and from iridescent ashes, a portal to where an algorithm doesn't tell me how to feel.

C: Phones are used for texting your friends, calling your plugs and snorting crushed up Adderall off of. In the back of a borrowed SUV, the Suburb's gassy baby. All tweaked up with nowhere to go, what else is new. An organically optimized adolescent filtration device—the only other people in the park at noon on a Tuesday either pretend not to notice or want to know where, when and how much. Those we don't recognize we think we know because we do, but the collective brain chemistry's become a petri dish left out in the Santa Ana winds. The start of every third or fourth conversation is like a blind date where both contestants blacked out before actually showing up. Still, the experience feels lived-in, lived-on, lived-with, etc. Take your pick and then some. Better than that diminutive tyrant *normal* which floods the air of the surrounding neighborhoods with expectations.

a: So, what is *stranger danger*, anyway? Caesar and Brutus beg to differ. Sweaty nights crickets outside — streetlamps still out from last week. The foyer lingers of dinner — an instant meal cooked by the would-be hearth. A few blocks away, a private, who just recently had rummaged through the new millennium ruins of

Kabul sleeps under a purple bench outside Circuit City. You could still call people *faggot* in the street, and you text it to 'em too, from your Saturn or Buick using T9 slowly, if you hadn't used up your texting plan.

This is of course, before discourse got *really* uncivil.

a: Tumblr put a finger in every pie that I have come to love after I deleted my account. But I remember the taste of that navy blue at dusk. Promises of golden shovels. Cotton candy confessions. Endless fandom. Sweet nothings for no one. Masturbatory aesthetics. Worst of all, "poetry." *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*, eat your heart out, roast it, over milk and honey stuck in the wilderness and begging for unleavened bread from the quiet cumulus. You've got nothing on accidentally Renaissance stick figures. Reblog if you cry every time. I want to believe. I know what poetry is now because I walk with my wife every night across a bridge named after Mary Oliver. The stars seize as my night vision chafes my astigmatism along the sphere of the wine dark sky, bottled in the skin of dead angels, on whose wings guided me from smoke sesh to smoke sesh in my rusting hometown.



Contributors & Insights

Daniel Addercouth (@ruralunease) grew up on a remote farm in the north of Scotland but now lives in Berlin, Germany. His work has appeared in *New Flash Fiction Review*, *Trampset* and *Vestal Review*, among other places.

Michelle and I didn't know each other beforehand: we were brought together through the engine(idling's Matchmaker service. I'm so glad we met — it was enormous fun to work together! I was incredibly impressed by the artwork Michelle created to accompany my poems. She had a really creative take on my texts, and I love her aesthetic. The art made me see the poems in a new way — the combination of text and image is really special. I hope we can work together again in future!

Fatima J. Alharthi is a Saudi writer. Her work appeared in *The Southern Review*, *Denver Quarterly* and *Indiana Review* among others. Her short story collection *I Will Judge You from Your Roommate* is forthcoming from *ELJ Editions* this summer.

There is bunch of crows, red-winged black birds and a house finch pair who visit my balcony, and when the engine(idling paired me with Shannon, I mentioned my interest in taking photos of the birds, so Shannon suggested writing a poem from a bird's perspective. Since poetry doesn't come to me easily as fiction and essays do, it took sometime for the poem to write itself. My earlier drafts were of a red-winged black bird, then I remembered the bias against crows and in a way the prejudice against veiled women, and the poem was instantly born.

Amina Alyal has published poetry widely, for example in *Iota*, *Dream Catcher*, *Aesthetica Review of Contemporary Artists*, *Metamorphic: 21st Century Poets Respond to Ovid*, and three collections: *An Anxiety of Poets in Their Natural Habitat* (Stairwell Books 2025), *Season of Myths* (Wordspace at Indigo Dreams 2016), and *The Ordinarity of Parrots* (Stairwell Books 2015). She often works collaboratively, for example in *Unheimlich at Home* with Sarah Wragg (Beautiful Dragons 2025), and *The Still and Fleeting Fire* with Oz Hardwick (Hedgehog Poetry Press 2021). She has published scholarly research, most recently *Victorian Cultures of Liminality: Borders and Margins* (Cambridge Scholars 2019). She is interested in working with the cross-overs, sometimes synaesthetic, between music, spoken and written word, and the visual image.

This collaboration grew out of being invited to write poetry for an exhibition on Ukraine in York, UK, together with a two-year funded community writing

project on plant health. I have also always been interested in folklore, globally. Oz and I have worked together for many years, collaborating on a number of music and poetry performances, and published poetry. With this project, as with others, the surprising sparks of new suggestion that arise from putting our lines together was the most exciting part: something came into being that was in neither of our minds when we started writing.

Marissa Anne is a multimedia artist and poet who likes to hide in liminal spaces provided by the internet. She is excited to be publishing with her husband for this issue. Her previous work has appeared in *FLARE Magazine*. Check out their art on IG at @misstablescrap.

When I saw the theme for collaboration, of course the first person I thought of was my husband. Even though he typically doesn't write poetry, he was all on board to test the venn diagram idea. We started by giving each other prompts about what to write, and we each took one "side" of the diagram to host our poem. We combined the two poems in the middle where the venn diagram overlapped. We did several pieces, testing out different methods of how to meet the poems in the middle — sometimes with black out, other times with color. The most fun part was always seeing how our two poems combined into something really lovely together. It really felt like a symbol of our relationship to me.

Cordy Aly Byrd is a secret illustrator who wants to infiltrate the writing side of the art world for non-nefarious purposes. Cordy has no previous publications, and is a college dropout! Horror and all its subgenre's interest Cordy heavy, and they have a deep love for anything strange. Bluesky @cordybyrd.bsky.social.

I was given a partner through e(i's Google form, and didn't know Amanda previously. It was my first time collaborating on a poem, and Amanda was very helpful throughout the whole process. We communicated mostly over email, Zoom, and Google Docs. I initially had suggested we come up with dichotomous subjects for a poem, and Amanda suggested we send each other a few topics that have been on our minds. After choosing two from the list we created, we made separate poems. I didn't communicate clearly, and we ended up making two poems about the two subjects instead of one each and mashing it together. I'm already confusing myself again trying to explain what I tried to explain over email, so you can see what went wrong. :) But, it ended up being great anyway, because the two poems were similar subjects but written from different perspectives, so it was like a conversation, at first. Then, we edited it some, and it became what it is now! I appreciate Amanda's guidance and help very much, as I'm not as skilled at writing as I want to be yet, and I feel like I learned a lot from her in a short amount of time. I think the most enjoyable part of making

this collaborative poem was being able to discuss our thought processes and not living in my head as much as I do. I would love to collaborate again with Amanda or in general. This experience was very fun and challenging for me, and I appreciate the engine(idling for facilitating it! Thank you!

| | |

Jack Carenza is a South Florida-based copywriter whose lyrical works explore memory and history as they move through time and space. His poems carry a keen attention to sound, shaped by years as a hip-hop artist. Jack's poetry has appeared in *Lacuna Journal of Historical Fiction*, *Constellations Journal of Poetry and Fiction*, and *Inscape Literary Journal*, with upcoming pieces in *Tap Into Poetry* and *Sunday Mornings at the River*.

the engine(idling is a journal that's been on my radar. I've been waiting for a theme that intersects with my current poetic state of being, and I've found myself in an unusually collaborative mindset since joining Substack in November 2025. Noah was one of the first poets I connected with on that platform. We've since become peer editors, lyrical "duplas," and friends. I admire Noah for his sophisticated simplicity. For his trust in the image. For his minimalist and emotionally charged verse, all traits that diverge from my own poetic tendencies.

I'm mesmerized by the contrapuntal. Like many, this infatuation can be traced to "Olio" (2016) by Tyehimba Jess. I believe the form is most effective when the two vertical columns operate in tension—offering opposition while remaining harmonic—but I've never seen one executed by two separate poets.

I asked Noah to send me a few complete poems for the left column, with a contrapuntal in mind. I encouraged him to stick to his "soul food." His native subjects. With the understanding that I would locate my truest voice by channeling a complex persona to antagonize his speaker.

| | |

Ronita Chattopadhyay is an Indian poet and writer. Her micro prose chapbook *Preparing to be Wrecked* was published in an anthology (Grieving Hope) by *Emerge Literary Journal*. Her work has also appeared in various literary magazines and anthologies by *Querencia Press*, *Sídhe Press*, *Rough Diamond Poetry*, *Bare Bones* and *Black Pear Press*. She loves mountains, books and tea.

The process and the words that flowed, the deeply personal with its broader resonance—all of this merged in an organic way as the poem took shape. We were making tweaks/changes til the last moment and I think the poem is better

for that. We also shared a similar understanding of our relatively privileged positions, and this also influenced the choices we made with the poem. I am glad we did this together.

| | |

Shannon Vare Christine is a poet, teacher, and critic living in Bucks County, PA. She is an alumnus of The Community of Writers and Tupelo Press *30/30 Project*. Her debut verse novella, *These Walls*, came out in March 2026. Her poems are featured in various anthologies and publications, and her collection, *Chrysanthemum*, was a finalist for publication by *The Word Works*. Additionally, her poetry reviews and literary criticism were published or are forthcoming in *Lily Poetry Review*, *The Lit Pub*, *Cider Press Review*, *Sage Cigarettes*, *Compulsive Reader*, *The Laurel Review*, *Vagabond City*, *Tupelo Quarterly*, *The Los Angeles Review of Books*, *Harbor Review*, and *Uirtus*. Archived writing and more can be found at www.shannonvarechristine.com, and on Instagram @smvarewrites.

While Fatima and I worked with a quick turnaround time, we landed on birds as a topic fairly quickly given our mutual creative interest. We kept in touch via email throughout and bounced ideas pretty naturally. This was a match made by your publication, and for that I am grateful, as Fatima and I are now working more together.

| | |

Michelle Fern Cohen is an associate professor of writing, as well as a painter and sculptor. She received a BA in Studio Art from Vanderbilt University and continued her studio practice at Ohio State University while completing her PhD in Rhetoric and Composition. She has exhibited her work nationally and in 2018 completed a short-term artist residency at the Clay Studio of Missoula. She lives in Charleston with her dog Ernie.

Daniel and I live on two different continents and would never have met without the engine(idling bringing us together! We first shared samples of some of our work with one another to establish the aesthetic, and then I used Daniel's drafts as creative prompts to motivate my art practice. When I illustrate, I try to invite the reader to ponder imagery from the text in a new way, and Daniel's poems are perfect for evoking unexpected visuals.

| | |

Melody Derrick has been writing and performing poetry and other projects starting in 1990s Las Vegas and ending up in the Pacific Northwest, most recently

with *Voices of Tacoma: A Gathering of Poets* group and publication anthology. She can be emailed at frexpoeetry@gmail.com and is on Instagram @felix_willmott. She is also a sarcastic gardener.

Penina and I have been friends for decades, reconnecting in person after she relocated to Portland, Oregon. We have worked on other projects together and I immediately wanted to do something for this Collaborations issue because we communicate very intuitively and naturally about poetry and writing. And her artistic instincts are always top notch. We both spent time swooning over Artemis II for various reasons and we both love thinking about the possibilities in space, so it was a perfect subject. When I saw her initial painting, I knew we were onto something special.

| | |

🌸 **John Digby** is an English-born poet and collagist specializing in archival black and white pure paper collage in a great variety of styles from figurative to abstract. He is the author of several books of poetry and co-author of a seminal book on archival collage materials and methods, *The Collage Handbook* (Thames and Hudson 1985). He founded *The Feral Press*, an imprint of *Prehensile Pencil Publications*, publishing limited editions of poetry and prose illustrated in black and white. John died on October 26, 2022.

| | |

Carolina poet **Christiana Doucette** stitches memory quilts of moments. She's judged for the San Diego Writer's Festival for the past half-decade. Her work features in *Rattle*, *Connecticut River Review*, *StorySouth*, and beyond, and she has had work set to music/performed on NPR. She's the 2024 Kay Yoder Scholarship for American History recipient, a Highlights General Scholarship recipient and interns for literary agent Kaitlyn Sanchez. Her novel length works are represented by Leslie Zampetti of Open Book Literary. Find her on IG: @Doucette515 | Bluesky: @doucette515.bsky.social | Facebook: Christiana Doucette: Poet & Verse Novelist.

I met Tracie in the writing community online. When we both had pieces published in the same issue of Little Thoughts Press, I enjoyed hearing her read. I loved the imagery in her poems, and the visceral power of her work. I'd wanted to try a collaborative sonnet crown for a while. And so in January as I was setting my goals for the year, I just thought, hey, I can just reach out and ask whether Tracie might be interested in this, too. She wrote back sounding very excited about the project! I was thrilled.

We went back and forth a little brainstorming topics. And then I drafted two possible starting sonnets, and we went with the one in this crown.

As we wrote I loved how the end line became a jump off to a new family cameo. Violets became ultraviolet. Mediums shifted from stories to music, each family's own unique fingerprint in verse. One of the most enjoyable elements of this project was hearing Tracie's family stories, as I shared my own. And seeing parallels and differences.

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alice f.z. is a poetess-bardess and PhD candidate at UCSB in English, where she studies medieval poetry, gender, and sexuality. In 2020, a manuscript of hers received an honorable mention during the Academy of American Poets's University and College Poetry Prize, by way of UCLA's Fred and Edith Herman Memorial Prize. Her debut poetry collection *Faunalia* (2023) came out with *Sul Books*. Other poetry publications include *new words {press}*, *Ultraviolet Books*, *Tyger Quarterly*, *DISCOUNT GUILLOTINE*, and various undergraduate journals, with poems forthcoming in *Fence*. Her narrative poem "the book of dame ærney" is being published as a micro chapbook by *fifth wheel press* as part of their upcoming 2026 Pride series. You can find her on Instagram, Bluesky and ghost.io @faith2fleurs.

I was lucky to collaborate with a close friend, Cade Miller. We have been friends since we were 13-14, and saw a lot of comedy and tragedy growing up. We always managed to stay in touch and ended up growing in our poetic craft together. "Stroads" was an amalgamation of growing up in the suburbs of Orange County and stubbornly trying to make magical realism come to life. We were intent on a dialogic poem, initially more ekphrastic in topos. But we end up writing these really long lines of shared memoir — a "stroad." Just like the stroads we grew up on. Typically, we would call for 2-3 hours and write together in the shared document. The most fun part was creating a new form with one of my best friends and getting really, really deep into childhood/adolescent memories.

| | |

This year **Sandy Feinstein** has published a micro-chapbook of poetry and fiction, a poem in *Midnight Madness*, and a prose poem in *Melange* (print 2026). Her poem, "Unspooled," appeared in *the engine(idling)* in 2024. She has also written and published with present and former students as well as present and former colleagues. Sandy and Abbey worked together this past year with a colleague and student, both in biology, on a creative scholarly article, "Sustaining Biodiversity, Catalogs, Creativity, Collaboration."

Abbey had appeared at my office door to tell me about a series of potential courses they had described for a prospective course, Language and Art. The next day, in February, I wrote the poem. A few days later I noticed the Penn CFP for the collaboration issue and sent Abbey the poem asking if they had any interest in doing something with it.

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Amanda Fields is an Associate Professor of English and Writing Center Director at Central Connecticut State University, the editor-in-chief of *Literary Mama*, and co-host of *This Mama Is Lit!*. Fields co-edited *My Caesarean*, a Silver winner of the 2019 Foreword INDIES, and has been published in several academic and literary journals.

I did not know my collaborator; we were randomly paired. We started by listing things that were on our minds and narrowing this down to two subjects: small men and dirt. Then we each wrote on these topics. We then met over Zoom to share what we wrote and began to juxtapose ideas and whittle our poems into one. We met once more over Zoom before moving to asynchronous work. It was nice to get to meet a new artist, and we were both respectful of each other's work and in working to maintain each of our unique voices while offering honest feedback about the poem as a whole. It was a good experience.

| | |

Penina S. Finger is a writer, artist and designer living in Portland, Oregon. Their poetry has appeared in the *Meniscus Literary Journal*, *One Three Eight*, *Nexus 36*, and elsewhere. Penina's paintings and other projects are currently on view at Past Lives Gallery in Portland. Penina regularly self-publishes experimental poetry/art collections, including *Antibook I* and *The Imaginary Botany Papers*. Recent work mostly chases after intangibles and unknowables, but their *why* revolves around the urge to tell everyone about a beautiful shell they found, or a sunset or a dream.

In this, our third collaboration, Melody and I quickly agreed on the Artemis II mission as our theme. Once Melody sent the poem's first draft, the composition took shape in my mind and I sent her a test version to make sure we were on track.

When she sent the final poem, my first inclination was to set it in concentric arcs, but I was worried it would seem too gimmicky and set a simple text wrap version as a backup. We both preferred the arcs, and you may be able to make out the shimmer texture I added to the line breaking star symbols.

| | |

Andrew Gardner is a Chicago-born, Boise-based writer with a penchant for the distressing. While focused on poetry, he's been known to dabble in dramatic forms, creative nonfiction, and music criticism. He graduated with an MFA in Writing from SAIC in 2023. He was most recently published in *the engine(idling)*.

I chose to work with Anna because of our experience working together over our time together in grad school. This was our first time officially collaborating on a written piece beyond just giving each other feedback, which I thought was a great turn of events! We chose to use a process of writing through three different songs that we chose for each other in order to create three different tapestry poems, and "Shoebox, Stream" is based on the first song of those three (I sent "New Slaves" by Kanye West, she sent "STAMPEDE" by Genesis Owusu). I think the most fun part was getting to work collaboratively again, as that's something I enjoy immensely and is so hard to find an impetus for.

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Christian Garduno's work can be read in over 100 literary magazines. He is the recipient of the 2019 National Willie Morris Award for Southern Poetry, a Finalist in the 2020-2021 Tennessee Williams & New Orleans Writing Contest, and a Finalist in the 2021 Julia Darling Memorial Poetry Prize. He lives and writes along the South Texas coast with his wonderful wife Nahemie and young son Dylan.

It was fun bouncing ideas around. When the right idea struck, I think we both realized it immediately.

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Jay Noah Garrick is a writer based in southern California.

This was a portal poem about my wedding day — which JC asked me to lead with. Working with him was mind-bendingly easy, and our contrapuntal flew out so fast, it surprised both us with how well it fit together. It was our first time collaborating, and he originally came to me with the proposal. I am eternally grateful that he did!

| | |

Oz Hardwick is a prose poet based in the North of England, whose work has been published internationally in journals and anthologies. His most recent publications are *Retrofuturism for the Dispossessed* (Hedgehog 2024) and tracks on several underground space rock albums.

We have both worked in English and Creative Writing at Leeds Trinity University for a long time, and have collaborated on many projects, including two poetry chapbooks and performances and recordings with different musicians. The present piece, as is so often the case, came out of a confluence of

two projects. We've been working for a couple of years on a project —"Everyone's a Seed" — using Creative Writing to engage communities with issues relating to plant health, so this has been at the forefront of our minds for some time. Then, last year, we became involved in an event accompanying an exhibition focusing on the largely unreported environmental impact of the Ukraine war. "Walking the Cultural Landscape" grew from tracing thoughtlines between the local and the global, the personal and the political, on an increasingly fragile planet.

| | |

Britt Kaufmann lives Northern Indiana where she writes, reads, gardens, volunteers at the library, and opens closed doors for her cats. Her most recent book of poetry *Midlife Calculus* (Press 53) is the winner of the 2025 McMath Award for Poetry (an award given by the Arkansas Writers MFA Program at the University of Central Arkansas which, hilariously, has nothing to do with math). She has published work in *Dogwood Alchemy*, *Journal of Humanistic Mathematics*, *Scientific American*, and *'Zine Machine*. More at brittkaufmann.com.

My collaborator for these collage-poems is my adult daughter, Drew Smoker. She'd started collaging a few years ago and proposed the two of us tabling at a local zine fest together some year, if we could create an interesting spread. So, she came over during Christmas Break and we collaged together for a day. Then, this spring, when I saw the engine(idling call, I emailed her and asked if maybe she had some old collages that didn't have words on them that I could add collaged poetry to. She dropped off her notebook of collages and pointed out a few she thought might work. From there, I culled through a Mother's Day issue of a local free magazine for interesting phrases that might fit and built them into poems. I'd lay the words/lines where I thought they should go and text photos of them to her for approval. Some did not meet approval and we revised until we were both satisfied with the poem and the visual of the line placements.

| | |

Herb Kitson is professor emeritus in English at the University of Pittsburgh-Titusville campus and has also worked part-time as therapeutic support staff for Family Services-Meadville. In addition to books and chapbooks, Herb has poems in 70+ lit mags, including *The New York Quarterly*, *Comstock Review*, *Atlanta Review*, *Rattle*, *The Humanist*, *Pearl*, etc.

RJ and I love haiku. I was glad to learn (from several editors) that haiku are no longer three lines 5-7-5 syllables. Haiku can be one, two, or three lines and the fewer syllables, the better. RJ said, "Let's be experimental and do a haiku sequence of several different ones all revolving around the same theme." I said, "Great! And let's try to have the haiku read both across and down the page—a

single poem that can be read two ways."

RJ, his girlfriend Amy, and I share a house, so working together with my friend RJ was convenient. We created, discussed, revised, etc. over a period of several months—mostly while cooking supper and doing the dishes and before going to bed. Whatever RJ suggested was fine with me, and he liked all my suggestions and revisions. (RJ=Pisces with Capricorn rising; Herb=Capricorn with Cancer rising). RJ and I have been collaborating for a little over nine years (usually on empirical projects). Now it was my turn to have him collaborate with me in my favorite area—poetry. RJ thinks poetry is a lot easier than being a contractor/handyman/landscaper/lumberjack/care-giver. I think the areas are equally difficult in different ways. RJ was my wife Kathy's care-giver. He stayed on to be my care-giver (leg amputation) after she died. He is brilliant, intellectual, competent, and kind. He's fun to be with and I enjoy collaborating with him on anything—especially poetry.

| | |

Alizabeth McDermott is a poet and journalist from Nebraska. She currently attends Wayne State College studying political science and journalism. In her spare time she supports Nebraska-based efforts for civic engagement and education.

I decided to write for this project when I read the call for a collaboration issue and saw the "matchmaker." My fellow poet Tim and I brought unique experiences to the table, and I loved getting the chance to splice different ideas together. Due to the nature of our locations, I was able to connect scenery from across the world with ideas and emotions shared by many people. This is the concept that lead to my contributions for the piece.

| | |

Mona Mehas (she/her) is a retired disabled teacher in Indiana USA with 8 published chapbooks. Twice nominated for a Pushcart Prize (Paddler Press 2023, TV-63 Project 2025) and Best New Poet (Lucky Jefferson 2024). Mona's work has appeared in multiple publications and online museums. She works with *Cicada Song Press*, and *Engage!*, an online Star Trek fan magazine. She's a former President of the Poetry Society of Indiana, and is Indiana Co-Leader for Authors Against Book Bans. Mona is editing her second novel while perpetually distracted by her next chapbook. Website: <https://monamehas.net>. Bluesky: @monaiv.bsky.social.

Suzanne, Barbara and I know each other through Modern & Contemporary American Poetry (ModPo.) We'd never collaborated before but we had discussed other poems many times over the years. Suzanne and I used Google Docs to write the verses, with Barbara reading and supplying the title. It was fun!

Cade Miller (they/them) is a poet, writer, and doer-of-various-other-things currently living in Portland, Oregon. Their work has appeared in *SCAB* (scabmag.wordpress.com), *AGON*, *Pointed Circle*, and *expat press* (expatpress.com). If you need to reach them on social media their handle is @emotional_support_goth on Instagram.

My collaborator alicia and I have been close friends since we were teenagers. She came to me with the idea of writing a poem together, and the idea of us reflecting on our adolescence together came naturally. Regarding the process, it was essentially like a musical jam session—we would write fragments separately on a shared document, then get together and revise or expand upon said fragments until both of us felt satisfied with a particular section. Writing a poem together with one of my best friends was just as rewarding as I hoped it would be, and I'm looking forward to working more with alicia in the future. I hope you all enjoy the piece we wrote!

Suzanne D. Miller lives in South Carolina. When not scribbling poetry, she leads EssayFaire, a writing and research firm specializing in college applications. An economist turned homeschooler, she believes society suffers when analytical and creative people do not cross-pollinate. Her chapbook *No Paper Today* was published in October, and she was nominated for a Pushcart for her work in TV-63.

Mona Mehas brought your call for submissions to my attention and asked if I would collaborate with her. I said yes (duh!) but also thought of my ongoing correspondence in verse with C.J. Prince, which we were planning to eventually publish. Danielle was kind enough to allow me to submit with multiple collaborators.

Mona and I were exchanging couplets, while C.J. and I were exchanging letters in verse. While Mona and I had a structured start, C.J. and I began without intending to. When the couplets started to wander a bit too much, we reined it in while holding onto the phrases and sections we loved the most. C.J. and I were reined in by, well, time.

One could say "Anitquarious" was a deliberate creation, while "Snow" was happenstance... it snowed in South Carolina. Measurably. I wrote C.J. of the extraordinary experience, and she wrote back interweaving her thoughts and lines into mine. Since C.J. died on March 24th, I had to title our work alone, while Mona and I used a title supplied by my favorite beta-reader, Barbara Nilsen—so the title was the most collaborative part!

Marisa Mills is an Assistant Professor of English at Pensacola State College in sunny Florida. Her areas of expertise are postcolonial ecocriticism and Arthuriana. She is active on social media under the handle @GawantheGorgays.

Lizbette and I were paired at random, and she was really wonderful at keeping us on task. My contributions to the poem were inspired by my experiences living in Gulf Shores, Alabama, during the Deepwater Horizon oil spill.

Abbey Muza is an artist who is lucky to collaborate with colleagues at Penn State Berks. Here, and in other endeavors, they entwine art into writing, poetry, and science. In their own practice, they make weavings and drawings that consider symbol and narrative through historical, literary, and archival sources, and they have shown this work internationally, most recently in New York, Paris, and Chicago.

When Sandy sent me the poem, certain words turned to images right away, and I worked to make an intuitive drawing that responded to her text — thinking about the machinations of text and form as they fell onto the page. I always say yes to our collaborations, because something that starts as a class might end up as a poem. This poem, too, might find its way out into another form in our work — becoming another poem, or a workshop, or something difficult to see in the present that will eventually come into form.

Barbara S. Nilsen has published essays in the past, but this is their first time collaborating on a poem. Barbara's interest in poetry began when they enrolled in the free course ModPo sponsored by the University of Pennsylvania's Kellys Writers House.

Suzanne, Mona, and I are friends. Suzanne often asks me to read her poetry and give her feedback. For this project, I collaborated with Suzanne and Mona on the title of the poem. I enjoy reading and discussing poetry, but I am a reluctant poet when it comes to writing poems. It was fun to be part of a team effort. This was my first formal collaboration.

Mike O'Brien met Christian online. He enjoys meeting poets both online and off. He runs the *Sixty Odd Poets* Substack.

I met Christian by filling out a Google Form. After some email exchanges we worked out a format of blending our ideas that appealed to us both.

| | |

Lizbette Ocasio-Russe is a Puerto Rican author and Assistant Professor of Creative Writing at Southern New Hampshire University. She was the co-editor of *The Switchgrass Review* and has been published in *Tongvas*, *Moko: Caribbean Arts and Letters*, *Poui: The Cave Hill Literary Annual*, *eTropic: Electronic Journal of Studies in the Tropics*, *Confluence: Journal of Graduate Liberal Studies XXV.1*, *postScriptum: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Literary Studies*, *English Language Teaching and Linguistics Studies*, *Flash Fiction Magazine*, *Writing Texas*, *Corpus Christi Writers 2023*, *Mays Publishing*, *The Windward Review*, *South Hall Literary Magazine*, *Latin@ Literatures*, and *Feels Blind Literary*. Lizbette's debut book, *Loverbar*, first published in July 2023, is slated for release under *Gordon Publishing* in 2027.

Marisa and I were connected via the submission form! Since we're both writers who have lived experience on the Gulf Coast and are passionate about the environment, we decided to write a renga (collaborative Japanese-style poem) that comments on the environmental disaster humans have created on the Gulf Coast.

| | |

Paul Martinez Pompa is the author of the chapbook *Pepper Spray* (Momotombo Press). His first full length book *My Kill Adore Him* was selected for the Andres Montoya Poetry Prize and published by *University of Notre Dame Press*. His most recent book *Domestic Corpse* was an honoree in the 2026 Midland Authors Awards and was published by *Match Factory Editions*. His poetry has been widely anthologized and was commissioned for a Chicago Public Radio project called "In Verse," which aimed to explore the emotional weight of gun violence. He is a Canto Mundo fellow and currently edits for *Packingtown Review*.

Dawn Tefft is a friend and an artist/activist who I admire very much. We wrote collaboratively as a means of switching up our process, sending lines back and forth to each other and riffing off whatever was previously written.

| | |

 **C.J. Prince** lived in Bellingham, Washington. She was an artist, a poet, a

journalist, a mime, and a Sifu. Her most recent chapbook, *Dressing for the End of the World*, was published in March.

C.J. and Suzanne's collection of correspondence in verse will be published in the fall by LJMcD Communications.

| | |

Spencer Pritchard is just a newly-wed husband who wanted to write poetry with his wife. Optometrist by trade.

I have never really written poetry outside of school. I'm a recent optometry graduate. My partner was my then-fiancee now wife. We are ecstatic about our acceptance and have just gotten back from our honeymoon (love you babe).

| | |

Kaushik Ramu works as a researcher and teacher of literature at a liberal arts university in Pune, India. His creative writing is largely private and moth-eaten. In an earlier life, he worked in technology sales. He's drawn to acoustics, owls, nightmaring, and daydreaming.

We started by exchanging images of handwritten fragments—not poems we already had and sought to fuse in some new way, but bits that felt incomplete by themselves, and that needed a second voice to come to life. One of us leaned more toward concrete images, the other toward emotional states; each corrected for the other. We kept going back and forth with tweaks, changes, and the odd dramatic rescue of a discarded line or word. It helped that handwriting isn't always legible—that added a slight touch of murkiness to the process.

| | |

Tracie Renee is a librarian, a *Publishers Weekly* book reviewer, and a BOTN-nominated writer who lives and dreams in sort-of Chicago. Find her in *HAD*, *Orange Blossom Review*, and at <https://linktr.ee/tracie.renee>.

I haven't worked in formal verse for several decades so I was equal parts excited and terrified when Christiana suggested this. It was really fun to explore personal history for this project, and it was surprising to find places where our experiences overlapped or paralleled one another's life. This was also a very emotional journey for me; I cried buckets while drafting "Lightless Dark." My dad's been gone for ten years now, but that poem—along with finally opening the guitar I inherited from him that same week, and realizing that he'd changed out the strings right before he passed—opened up a new wave of grief. Last but

not least, writing a sonnet crown also taught me that I'm not the person you want to task with counting anything important. I was seriously convinced that the sixth poem was the final part in the seven-piece crown, so I wrote it like it was *The End*. Then I recounted and realized that no, we actually needed one more sonnet. I ended up completely rewriting my sixth poem so that the final line would leave Christiana with a starting place for the (actual) concluding piece. Oops!

| | |

Kathryn Reese & Sumitra Singam are shapeshifters writing from lived experience on Peramangk and Wurrundjeri land in Australia. They are both widely published and were delighted to find that they are issue buddies in the *Non Binary Review* "Old Friends" issue and have both been nominated by *Miniskirt Magazine* for Best of the Net. Find them on Bluesky: @kathrynreese.bsky.social and @pleomorphic2.bsky.social.

We are partners in life as well as writing and often write about our experience of finding queer love late in life, how revelatory and grounding this has been for us. This poem came from a beautiful moment of togetherness in the summer.

| | |

RJ Ruot, Jr. is a contractor-handyman-landscaper-roofer--care-giver. This is his first publication.

Herb Kitson and I share a house that I worked in taking care of his wife, who had five strokes during their marriage. We work together well and have collaborated on lots of projects. We complement each other. I teach him how to fix a leaky faucet, and he teaches me how to write a modern haiku or an Italian sonnet. He keeps my job appointment schedules, and I show him how to make extra fluffy scrambled eggs. Someday he is going to pound a nail without hitting his thumb, and I'm going to publish a poem in The Atlantic Monthly. People think I'm the best and cheapest handyman in northwest Pennsylvania. I give Herb lots of ideas for poems, stories, and plays, and he writes them up.

| | |

Katherine Schmidt (she/her) is published in *Pithead Chapel*, *Puerto del Sol*, *HAD*, and elsewhere. She is the Editor-in-Chief of *Spark to Flame* and lives in Washington, D.C. Find her at katherineschmidt.com.

Nisha and I are friends. This is our first time collaborating, and it was extremely fun! I sent her some poetry fragments and she turned them into poems. Then we called to edit together, which was the most fun part for me

because while on that call we brainstormed different iterations of the poems. It felt really wonderful, creative, and expansive.

| | |

Nisha Sethi is a writer and poet based in New York City. She works in publishing at Scholastic.

Katie and I are friends from high school. We kept in touch after graduating and formed a writing workshop with a group of mutual friends. We always shared our work with each other, and one day, Katie suggested that we collaborate with each other! It was such a fun process. She sent me some fragments, which I then added to, and then we hopped on a call to edit together. I enjoyed the challenge of blending our distinct voices together into one cohesive piece, and look forward to participating in more collaborative poetry in the future!

| | |

Shloka Shankar is an editor and visual artist from Bangalore, India. A Best of the Net nominee and widely published haiku poet, Shloka is the Founding Editor of *Sonic Boom* and its imprint *Yavanika Press*. She is the author of the haiku collections *The Field of Why* and *within our somehows*, and co-author of the haiga anthology, *living in the pause*. Website: www.shlokashankar.com | Instagram: @shloks23.

When Robin sent me the newsletter announcing an upcoming collaborative issue, we knew we had to partner up! I've known Robin since 2019 and have worked with them in various capacities since then, including editing, writing, starting a mail art club together, and our most recent foray into zuihitsu.

As haiku poets, we wanted to try something of an offshoot, and the malleability and free-flowing nature of zuihitsu appealed to us immediately. We created a Google Doc and took turns responding to each other intuitively. There was very little revision, as we know each other's pulse and tend to write about similar themes, even individually. The most enjoyable part was making the zuihitsu form our own by incorporating Japanese short forms, found text, and visual elements.

"A Time for Everything" : Robin provided the opening haiku for this zuihitsu, whose title is drawn from Ecclesiastes 3 in the Bible. It explores the self as embodied in our physical forms—in our case, bodies shaped by chronic illness—arriving not at resignation, but at a dignified acceptance.

"((echo))location" : This zuihitsu, which begins and ends with my haiku, explores another aspect of the self: identity as something organic and ever-changing.

| | |

Robin Smith is a queer disabled artist, craftsman, poet, and an editor at *whiptail: journal of the single-line poem* (www.whiptailjournal.com). Human by birth, cyborg honey badger by trade. They look forward to being reincarnated as a better species. IG: @komadorihaiku.

Shloka and I have been collaborating in editing, writing, and collage for about 6 years. We recently started collaborating on zuihitsu and enjoy the conversation between sections. We hadn't seen art used before as part of a zuihitsu, and it seemed apropos given its meaning: "follow(ing) the brush," so we decided to give it a try. We were pleased with how the addition of the visual component provided unique juxtapositions.

"A Time for Everything": As disabled individuals whose different conditions share similarities, responding to the other's introspection created resonance that propelled the piece forward. It was interesting that we both knew when we had reached the response that provided the piece's resolution.

"((echo))location": This piece about personal identity reflects on the continuous process of rediscovering oneself. As a queer and disabled person, my responses were based on both internal and external reflections of these intersectional challenges.

| | |

Drew Smoker is a STEM Educator based in Northern Indiana. In her spare time, she collages, plays roller derby, and cares for her eight chickens.

My collaborator is my mother, so I like to think we have been collaborating for about as long as I have been able to communicate with her. When she saw the call for a collaborative piece, she asked if I had any collages to which she could add poetry. From there, we worked together adding words and some images to ensure the story we wanted to tell came across.

| | |

Kit Steitz is a queer, non-binary poet in Columbia, Missouri. Their work has appeared in *Moist Poetry Journal*, *the lickity~split*, *ALOCASIA*, *like a field*, *Roi Fainéant Press*, and others. You can find their neurospicy-fueled ramblings at @kitikins.bsky.social.

V. Alwyn and I met in college and have been friends and word nerds ever since.

Back in 2021, I was listening to a craft podcast that recommended trying collaborative writing—so I reached out to him and we began writing poetry to each other. We didn't have many rules for the collaboration, so it ended up being a kind of call and response collaboration. When I saw this prompt, I immediately tapped him regarding submission.

This poem was originally two consecutive poems, but we were playing around with how to add some cohesion and V. Alwyn proposed the two columned poem. I love this evolution—I feel his stanzas call in a concrete framework that my poem's stanzas are able to leap from. The vibes are right.

| | |

Anna Suszynski holds an MFA in writing from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She received second place for the Adelaide Bender Reville Prize for short fiction, was a finalist in the F(r)iction Spring Contest and for the Glimmer Train New Writers Award. She has work in *Crab Creek Review* and *Variant Literature*, where she was nominated for Best of the Net. You can find more of her writing at annasuszynski.substack.com.

Andrew and I were in the same MFA cohort at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where we mainly bonded over music. Andrew called me up to suggest we do the collaboration and we revisited prompts and ideas we had while in our MFA. We settled on a prompt of our own crafting: we would each send three songs to each other. The first song, we could only listen to once and create a poem from that experience. The second poem, we could listen to as many times as we wanted but we couldn't look at lyrics or do any research. And the third song, we could listen to as many times as we wanted and look at lyrics, etc. We then exchanged those poems and experimented with weaving the corresponding songs together individually. And then finally, we made a Google Doc and then got on the phone to discuss weaving our poems with input from both parties.

| | |

Dawn Tefft's first full-length poetry book, *Once Upon a Riot*, came out through *Match Factory Editions* in June 2025. Dawn's chapbooks include *Gosling* (Anhinga Press), *Fist* (Dancing Girl Press), and *Field Trip to My Mother and Other Exotic Locations* (Mudlark). Her poems appear in *Bennington Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, and *Fence*. She earned a PhD in English with a concentration in Creative Writing at University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, volunteers as an editor for *Packingtown Review*, and works as a union representative in Chicago.

Paul and I are friends, co-editors, and pressmates. So when I mentioned to Paul that I had started to feel some inertia regarding writing at one point, which felt different from what I refer to as "generative downtime," he kindly offered to co-write some poems in order to get me writing again. (Happily, I've been writing

A LOT lately.) We would each write a line or two and then send it back to the other person to write a line or two: "Hey, batter, you're up!" Paul is a wonderful poet and friend, so it felt fun and easy, and I really enjoyed the process. I also wound up loving much of what we wrote, which isn't always the case when writing collaboratively, because it can be hard to mesh minds and aesthetics. Paul and I both write a lot of different types of poems, so it's possible that that type of flexibility and willingness to experiment and try out different things lends itself to collaborative writing.

| | |

Taylor R. Thomas & Francesca Townsley collababated on these posts to encapsulate a poem Taylor wrote about the river near her house. Their work is metaphorical and dark and entriscally queer.

We just snapped photos on our dog walk and Taylor wrote the poems and it spawned out of prose and a love for the dark.

| | |

Tim Willmott lives in a hilly bit of the UK and writes poems mostly about the natural world, folklore and family. He has had poems published by *Black Bough* and *The Winged Moon*.

This is my first time collaborating on a poem, and it was a really interesting and valuable experience. We were matched by the engine(idling and started with a Zoom call where we talked about our background, where we live, writing style, poets we like and from there decided that we wanted to explore the ideas of big open spaces (and how they make us feel) — influenced by Alizabeth's setting. We then wrote a couple of poems and Alizabeth expertly weaved them together. My contribution mostly focused on relativity (when we are powerless, time acts unusually) and Alizabeth matched the tone and ideas of our words very neatly first time. I really enjoyed working with Alizabeth and am grateful to her for the partnership.

| | |

Bill Wolak has just published his nineteenth book of poetry entitled *What Love Calms Only With Nakedness* with *Expeditions International Publishing House*. His collages and photographs have appeared as cover art for such magazines as *Phoebe*, *The Passionfruit Review*, *Inside Voice*, and *Barfly Poetry Magazine*.

My dear friend, the collagist John Digby, died several years ago. I have been given a box of his half finished collage work. I do my best to add some aspect to

John's work that he would have enjoyed.

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V. Alwyn Young (he/him) is a subterranean being just doing his best. He enjoys making things, including words and visual art, and is two-for-two on overengineered chicken coops. His work has appeared in *Crossed Genres Magazine*, *ATB's Outside In* series, and in *Candlemark & Gleam's (re)Visions Alice Anthology* under the name C.A. Young. All his friends call him Vulture.

I have a paradoxical relationship with collaborative writing. I tend to be very protective of unfinished and nascent work, but I also do some of my best work in collaboration or in parallel with trusted friends. Kit is the best sort of collaborator because they know how to push without shame or guilt. These two poems started as something of a call and response, and fitting them together into a joined piece was a lovely bit of creative alchemy.

