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VerbalART

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POETS AND POETRY

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April – June 2021

Chief Editor:

Dr VIVEKANAND JHA

Associate Editor:

Dr RAJNISH MISHRA

Review Editor:

Dr CHANDRA SHEKHAR DUBEY

Assistant Editor:

Prof. SHASHANK NADKARNI



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POETRY

ACHYUT SARKAR

Old Stories

Their father sits before them
When evening descends,
One or two dark lamp is lightened
One or two tired bird
Before going nest, join them,
One or two evening star.
When mother blows conch shell
Before Tulsi tree in the courtyard,
Father begins his old stories.

Night darkens, breeze gets chilled
They come closure, they hold hands
Old stories continue, old stories descend
On the room, courtyard, distant road
Horizon...they become ethereal.
They are the old stories, old church
A medieval garden, a roadside market
Selling under the peepal tree
Old hope, old dream.

ACHYUT SARKAR

Palm Line

I lay my hands on her morning face
does she treasure palmistry
does she know the
palm lines are desolate stream
anchoring two oceans nautical apart

ACHYUT SARKAR

Spinach and Mother

Rain does not remind me of my mother
She now lives in the grey cloud
and sheds silently in every morning
on green spinach at rail gate market
I squat before the shop
pick up the best leaf, green
bargain with the devil
and wipe out from spinach
the rain drops...her tearful eyes.

ALAN COHEN

Primeval Battle

That week
Just before adolescence
There was a battle over my future
I could feel it taking place
Though I could not participate
One god had planned that I'd be a singer
Plotted that life
But lost me

The other altered my voice just a touch
It clearly mattered to him desperately then
He wanted me free
Tied to nothing
I've never known quite why

ALESSIO ZANELLI

Native Place

*La chiesetta là in collina
legge al mondo il suo destin.*

Pino Ruggeri

The unease it may elicit
from those who searched
into the name – only a few do
know it comes from “morbid” –
appears disproportionate to such
a nothing of a creek I’m old enough
to have had the chance to bathe in, a
young lad so scared of streaming water.

The belfry, jutting from the hillock, lures
the visitors from afar – looking higher
than it is – a harmless trick devised
by what once was a teeny clot of
houses, today an aging village
that’s long lost its pristine
innocence and is vainly
reclaiming its soul.

ANDREW SCOTT

Red Rock Road

This little road can be deceptive,
beautiful yards and timeless homes.
The typical suburban picture
for the ones in the outside world.
They do or do not know about Red Rock Road.

There are travelers of all ages,
skipping in for a visit,
looking for a higher place
in the dead of the day.
Down the scenic Red Rock Road.

The invisible welcome sign flashes
for newcomers of any gender.
The host do not discriminate
from the festivities
paved on the Red Rock Road.

Strangers become friends,
coming here together
for the joys of the high
until they are buried.
Leaving the unforgiving Red Rock Road.

ANDREW SCOTT

The Storm

The fast, dangerous lightening
is crashing into earth.
From the swirling winds
you feel the anger
as it enters you.

The clouds are making
our hearts grey and damaged.
A thick mist from the storm
that is drowning us.

Souls and spirits
are being sucked out
by a taking tornado.

The storm feels
like it is washing
our collective away.

We have to remember
that there are sunny days
that is behind the storm
as it is temporary.

We will emerge
from our shelters
when this all clears
and embrace the damage
in order to heal.

We are to hold
our heads high
as we march
out of this storm.

ANDREW SCOTT

The Road

Hope and dreams
travel on smooth
and broken roads
that the carrier must travel.

There is inspiration
drawn from the Road
with the trips
that may take place.

The mud may slow you down.
If you keep your dreams in sight,
one step at a time,
hope will take you there.

The heart will fall,
almost broken.
Grip your hope
as a compass
to lead forward.

No matter how murky,
never stop believing
in hopes and dreams
as you travel life's road.

ASHUTOSH SHARMA

It's Not the End

Is it me or the wind which has stopped
Stopped in the stagnancy of worry and fear
Fear, rush and confusion, which once ruled the streets
Have now squatted my conscience and crippled my feet.

I can walk, but it has restrained my strides
I can hear, but all I hear are wailing sirens and people dying
I can see, but all I see is darkness and people crying
But now when I think, maybe it's us who have dimmed the
lights.

Many conversant say we are on the verge dying
An end which we don't accept but certainly condign
But I, wish to live, this time with the unlearned norms
And all I hope, is a way to break the cage of mourns.

AVDHESH JHA**The Forbidden Life**

An afterglow at the gaze of past and agile like the Milky Way
Altruistic like the tree, without any aberration in whoop de do
Once amiable with environment and an arable land of thoughts,
Today, hardly amicable with myself, I am the forbidden life.

Although ephemeral, once I was a beacon for humanity and mankind;
An effervescent bedizen in fests with beauty to entice and expatiate,
Although a Brobdingnagian, without any life, I am just a bunglesome,
As if a benumbed behindhand flaneur, I am the forbidden life.

Once an exquisite and front-runner but today an enigmatic byzantine;
As if a busticate; today I am flinty and an ad absurdum even to love,
Being no more gawsy and gemutlich, I have nothing to kvell
With canting social reformers around, I am the forbidden life.

Sometimes back an unflappable quodlibet and tabernacle;
The demonym for the denizen, I am the witness of defiance to the deity;
Once featly esculent for life, today I am the denouement of the past
The silent vatic guardian of the time, I am the forbidden life.

Neither a halcyon nor heartsome, without anything to hobnob
Lagging the lenity, I am no more an art or moira but a menace
Without any perspicacity, I am philippic with palpitation
With the sagacious history and legacy, I am the forbidden life.

AVDHESH JHA

If I Were You

With the galloping mind gazing in that world of promising excitement;
The fascinated eyes full of affinity hardly hesitated to have a grandstand
How original and charming! Ah! That joy of repetition of rhymes and toys
Away of riddles, life would have been full of innocent pranks, if I were you.

Holding the wall with hands, I would have raised myself to feel the world and
To restrict the sun rays peeping within, I would catch them to show my might;
With hideouts in left hand, I would show the right; Ah! That stone in mouth
Enchanting would have been the life with chocolates spread on face, if I were you.

Innocently playing with human or animal and bursting in ocean of joy,
Being drowned in the efforts of making of the sand houses and yelling;
The joy of climbing, hiding, and swinging, Ah! That keenness for cookies,
Cute would have been the try holding that cake in small little hands, if I were you.

The merry time of hide and seek; that cheating; and running for no reason;
Being kittle and awaiting to be coaxed, the fake crying for acceptance and;
The caring hug; Ah! That still I would have the hand to hold and walk along
Being strong and confident, life would have been bold in that company, if I were you.

Those small but great plans of defiance, the fear of wrongs and thus hiding;
Hiding underneath bed or behind the saviour; the wandering for friends;
The questions of curiosity, touch and feel; Ah! That still I had the innocence,
Building the Rome in a day, luxurious would have been the life, if I were you.

With all pleasures that money can buy, now I know, you were the treasure of life
And that while I was hunting for life, life hunted me; having you as pinnacle of life,
I treasure you, for with you, I treasured love, Ah! That still I would have been with you,
Loving, caring, and adventurous would have been the innocent life, if I were you.

BEVERLY MATHERNE

The Gift

(For Roger)

That morning, you awoke thirsty. You couldn't drink
enough water. You tried to stand
At your bedside but collapsed. Prostrate, you stared
At the ceiling, your eyes glassing over.

The EMTs carried you out the front door,
Down ice-glazed steps, one stone unstable,
Throwing them off balance a second. Truck doors swallowed
Your body. I didn't know whether I'd see you again.

I hold you in a meadow of trillium, in Munising,
Marsh Marigolds ablaze along the narrow country road,
Kiss you in the tenderest way I know.

BISHNUPADA RAY

Melting

ripples are lapping the shoreline
the sky fondling the distant waves
clouds sleeping away in far off land
the symmetrical palm trees bowing
gracious to the all-perfect harmony
and sobriety of afternoon ragas
but in no time a dundubhi sounds
a storm to brew, light, camera, action
thunderbolts, high wind, hail lashing
mercurial, sending calm to smithereens
the demon of rage bull dancing mad
shaking the earth to wake to quake
to rouse a bitter volcano, melting
and to break; break, break, break
is there someone watching over?
is there someone seeing through?
like a guardian fond, to his child
helpless with tense anger to repel
ask, someone whose life is swapped
for silence, whose love is aborted
halfway, or suspended in an arrest
the difference between beautiful
and sublime, why draw this picture
when all meanings are bracketed.

BISHNUPADA RAY**Defeated**

defeated is a strong word is always back
emerges from the sand dunes of memories
nails sticking out of ground where we tread
like something mightier than all the time
when she walked away, still young soul
in search of pleasure, to make merry, joy
was an act of revenge, she crossed the road
talked over phone from the other side
a diminutive figure, perhaps hungry in soul
the dead gods are unable to figure it out
she drew up energy from mother nature
the flower that bloomed in earnest, droops
the colour that was flying in victory, fades
defeated, emerges like a society of despair.

DEBRA AMIRAUT CAMELIN

Holy Island Pilgrimage

Rooted in ever changing blue seas,
rolling waves lapped and crested to tidal rhythm
around Iona's shores.

Her mantle was pleated and mushroomed with grassy
tors and glens in greens across the continuum,
and dotted with grazing sheep and highland cattle
corralled by rocks and sand and seaweed flotsam.

A chorus of communal birdsong was carried in the air,
crooning distinct melodies:
caw of crow,
screech of gull on the wing,
call of cuckoo at dawn and evening prayer,
and raspy crackle of corncrake as it skulked
and darted in grasses surrounding its hollowed-out lair.

Walking ancient paths,
we pilgrims traversed this 'thin' place
combing coastline for shells and smooth white pebbles
known as St. Columba's tears.
Cairns commemorated lives once lived –
stones were stacked and stood as silent sentinels
over labyrinth set in grassy vale
where tiny blossoms of purple petals thrived in crevices.

We sat on stones
in the crumbling remains of the Nunnery
and sipped Abbey whisky distilled by monks.
Imagined the holy sisters' vespers
as we raised glasses to toast the sheela-na-gig
fashioned over a tiny pink-granite window.
This primeval figurative carving of a naked woman
displayed an exaggerated vulva.
"Sláinte!"

DHRUV SOMAYAJULA

Song of the Times

There is a song in all of us.
A song that we used to sing
loud and bright as children.

A song that used to annoy,
prickle, and confound the grey
monotones of adults.

Someway along the road of life,
we start going to school.
We meet other people, hear other songs.
We try to sing along, join a band,
instead of sticking to our songs.

That's alright, we say.
What we lose in our singing,
we make up for it in the feeling
of being in tune with others.

We add dulcet tones to
these songs when we fall in love.
We pass out of school and go to college.

If we still remember singing,
we decide to sing, sing out our hearts.
Until we remember that
singing our songs do not pay.

We learn new songs.
Songs someone else would pay to hear.
We do not sing too shrill,
nor tap our feet to these songs,
because that's not what a singer does.

We remember the pitch
others want to hear,
the tone that pays and
the voice that is not mercurial.

Pitch, pitch, pitch.
Rhythm, rhyme, no reason.
We marry, and foster children.
We learn to sing along with our partners.

Every song we learn to sing
becomes less annoying.
Every group we sing with
becomes less raucous.
We sing to feed our family,
hum to please our partners,
and we do not whistle,
lest it becomes too radical.

We tone it down.
We make it universally acceptable,
and with that, our songs are
universally pleasing.
Offend no one,
cause no brows to lift.

There is a song in us alright,
but the orchestra plays deafening
silence when we are alone.

In singing cover after cover
of songs that pay and
songs that please,
we have forgotten our songs.

We sang these songs to fit in,
finally sit and work on our hit.
But after all this time,
we can't remember our song anymore.

DJ TYRER

Heatwave

Heat burrows into the soul
An all-consuming tick
Hungry for life
No escape! No escape!
Existence is flawed
A cruel joke of an abstract kind
Committed by an absent-minded god

DJ TYRER

Painting by Numbers

A puffy cloud of threes hovers
In a sky of vibrant number fours
Twos dapple the ground
Between trees one and seven-y
And blooms of five bobbing in the breeze

How much more I prefer colours

DONNA PUCCIANI**Phantasm**

A ghost has appeared
in the sunset sky, her robes
of hibiscus whispering love
in endless loops of harvest cloud,
then vanishing into an orange moon.

She cannot be my Italian grandmother,
who dressed only in black, but perhaps
my Creole auntie from New Orleans,
her dimpled smile turning to raucous
merriment over platters of raw oysters,
jambalaya, and crawfish etouffee.

Is that you, Betty Nan, sailing through
the cosmos, your muu-muu flashing coral
among the autumnal stars? You invent
a new astrology, sprinkling the orbits
with tabasco, while the Milky Way is blinded
by the colors of your bright laughter.

DOUG TANOURY

Conversation with Grandma

She is so beautiful
When she talks to her grandma,
Sitting on a corner edge
Of the hospital bed
As she listens intently
To grandma's broken
English, nodding her head
At certain statements
Which causes her hair tied
In a ponytail to wag
Cutely up and down,
Sometimes side to side, and
Sometimes it spirals in circles,
Some of them round,
Some more elliptical.

She is so beautiful
When she talks to her grandma,
Sitting on the bed absorbed
In conversation, with animated hair
Tied back in an expressive tail and
Like a conductor's baton it
Seems to set and moderate
The pace of conversation,
And at that moment I want only
To study all the aspects of
Pony-tail physics,

To steep myself in the
Small details of the science
Of silent motion
That accompanies and punctuates
A conversation with grandma.

DOUG TANOURY

Nocturne

In the early hours of the morning,
At 2:30 and sometimes after,
I would hear my father,
Unable to sleep, couching,
His footsteps moving about,
As he transformed the kitchen
Into a concert hall,
With refrigerator doors closing loudly.
Jars could be heard opening.
Their vacuum seals hissing,
Lids rolling, spiraling and strumming
Across table or countertop,
The sound of him rummaging
Through the silver for knife, fork
Or spoon, and the glupp-glupp of him
Pouring a soda, the fizzle of it
In the glass.

Some nights now I wake up
At 2:30 or sometime after,
Unable to sleep.
In the summer, I sit out
In the quiet on the front porch step,
In winter, in the darkened living room
At the rolltop desk, but always
Avoiding the kitchen.
Indeed, I tiptoe through it, for the

Silence there has grown
Into a monument to him,
And I fear that if I click the
Glass of the pimento olive
And the sweet pickle jars
It will disturb his peace,
And any slight rattle of silverware
Will conjure his spirit.

E. MARTIN PEDERSEN

The Realize Tree

a well-trimmed poplar
in a field of green grass, alone 100 yards
from a damp whitewashed stone house
a stone wall, red tile roof, a leant bicycle, trellis & vine
chairs outside in the soft rain, a rough mud path

the poplar doesn't need visitors
knows it's admired worldwide
painted on the cortex of every passerby
and every movie aficionado

yet it has no peace
looking over its shoulder at the road
at the far-off rival trees
all beautiful but different
worry of dry-rot and mistletoe

small birds are welcome as they
add a soundtrack
sometimes a chatter fest
damn kids, no, they break branches

this tree has been the center of the world
axis mundi, centrum mundi, caput mundi
although it seems harmless
realize
since the Roman Empire's rise.

GARY BECK

Resources

The lame, the halt, the blind
only survive in a city
if they have services
that let them function,
despite disabilities.
The homeless are neglected,
abandoned on the streets,
survival questionable
as the rich feast
without a care
for the needy.

GARY BECK

Urb Tune

The rhythm of the city
sometimes hard to feel,
throbs incessantly,
a beguiling pulse
flows us on our way,
frequently unnoticed,
moves us along,
keeping a beat
unless interrupted,
will see us safely
to destination.

JAMES G. PIATT

Wondering

An ancient grandfather's clock chimed away the shifting hours of wearisome time, as an iron horse vanished into the soot covered hours. Hearing the strident bird-songs of a mocking bird, and the raucous voice of a mourning dove, the moon sighed and I heard fading chords dancing to the singing of an ancient harp, causing me to ponder on the inexplicable questions to life and death.

JAMES G. PIATT

A Poem In A Dream

Words of sadness were whispered into my mind from a poem in my dream, and stars echoed the esoteric meanings of the words into my soul. I listened to the translation of the whispering words in the clouds, and found they were asking where is mercy, where is love, where is integrity, and I wept.

JAMES RAGAN**The River in the Tree**

In the hollow where the dark spits up
cat's teeth in white and alder green,
I hear the wind click down along the willow spars
like crackling leaves in chimney fire,
and know the river in the tree.

It is May always and the same willow
sprays its haunt of lilacs down the watercourse.
All month the dozers sweep the hillside up
and toss it down in puddles. It is said
the stream is swamp and old for rooting.

In sleep I hear its false voice calling
like the dance of air when the crickets sing.
All night the swish slag pours into my ear,
and sparks of evergreen and potato pokes
drip in mud pouched like melting butter.

Above the iris path I hear the once quiet passing
of the swing rope slicked by finger oil.
With bony child's feet I served the sky,
and in a gentle glide, crossed the stream
to the solid slag and greater good of the city side.

I know the past needs leaving like the river
my body makes to root all grounding leaves.
Today my neighbor tilts his finger to the air,
and praising axe handles, fells the windless willow.
He says, it lies old for rotting, the good for nothing.

JAMES RAGAN

Backward Years

These are backward years.
Dogs are not always dogs
or what they seem
to drunks or graveyard walls
who, merged in sleep, pose for low
whimpers of midnight's passed wind.
Dogs, like grave diggers, hunt bones for reunions.

And whales are not always whales
or what they seem to fish or fishermen,
who riding the tooth of a Jonah jaw
are spewed aground
like hunks of meat, beached rot-backs,
spawning worms with instinct.
Whales, like worms, control the spot they breed.

We over-estimate our powers
of memory, the mind's dark tree,
hatchet, wind, stump, the swift slice
of a brain cut to size.
We leave such little proof of ourselves.

We thrive on amnesia –
forgetting men, like presidents and kings,
are only men, no matter what they seem
to all themselves or privately.

Even gods lose their minds
like children's toys and are misplaced
as simply, and as often
as they seem to matter.

JEFFREY ZABLE

The Tank

A guy I'd known for several years passed away a few weeks ago,
and running into a mutual acquaintance, we started talking
about him:

that he was only 70 years old, that he was always at the flea
market
playing his conga drum, and that he lived in the same apartment
for
at least 40 years.

While we were talking, all of a sudden I had this strange feeling
he was listening to us, and wanted to explain the circumstances
around
his passing. That he had no idea he was going to have a heart
attack
while lying on his bed fully clothed, reading a newspaper.

When his best friend found him lying there, with the paper
spread across
his chest, it must have come as quite a shock.

And when the guy I was talking with said that at least he didn't
suffer
from some painful and drawn out illness, I concurred, and added
that
hopefully he and I still have plenty of years left in the tank.

JEFFREY ZABLE

When I Consider

If I don't write it down right away I lose it,
but then I've been losing stuff all my life, and saying,
"What difference does it make anyway!"

I've often said this to myself about life in general
even though with regard to mine, I've tried to better myself –
seldom being satisfied with my progress.

For the most part, what I've accomplished would make me
a candidate for an average guy award, which isn't a hell of a lot
to brag about when I consider all the shit that I've been
through...

JOHN SWEET

Fortune

or else you wake up easter morning in
some stranger's bed and try to
remember her name

try to remember what comes between
the past and the future or
how to explain tanguy's theories on these distances

his unexpected death and then cobain's suicide
and all the reasons your father has
given up on you

all of the roads you could take to
get back to your wife,
your children
your house full of tiny fires,
or maybe it's just time to walk away

to maybe just pull your lover closer
and breathe

and no matter what happens,
this moment has already become
the beginning of some slow
and crippling end

JOHN SWEET

I am the Sky, we were the Rain

the trick is fear
mixed with sorrow

the trick is despair held up
to the warm spring sun

your lover, naked,
wrapped in cords of light

and i sat there in the
falling house and thought about
writing a poem, but
i couldn't even breathe

i had no idea where the money
for the mortgage would come from

had no idea why peace could
could only be achieved
through war

couldn't begin to think of
howi'd explain my
failures to my children

JOHN SWEET

The Holy Age

these overgrown lawns in the
last bitter days of summer

this cold white sun in its pale blue sky

dogs tied to trees in
front of abandoned houses

prayers on the
lips of luminous ghosts

drove north past the trailer park where i
saw you for the first time 25 years ago
then 80 miles further to the water's edge

sacred ground in some small way and
when i'm tired of the
truth i still have my memories

when i forget your name
i can still imagine your body

can still believe in the
promise of redemption

JOSEPH HART

Prosody

Once when I was young –
I was once, was I not? –
Poetry and lyrics
Were my chosen lot.

What is verse? I wondered.
I thought and thought and thought
About it, and it seemed
It's rhythm, rhyme – and what?

JOSEPH HART

Lines

My poems are a window on the night,
If the window's ice and night is empty.
I'd rather be Millay or Johnny Keats.
Who am I? Or what? Personify
Nothingness. And that is poetry.
Though not with the indifference of a tomb.

MATTHEW JAMES FRIDAY

Kaleidoscope

I think I was four
when I first picked up a kaleidoscope,
carefully – it was a cheap one.
Same family car for eighteen years.

Like most children,
I was awed numb by the cutting
collision of colours, sliding,
shattering, reforming with just a turn.

It was more than colour.
It was looking down the rabbit hole
of the universe seconds
after the Big Bang, everything rushing.

It was the first hint
that the life ahead of me was one
to be filled with hues
of light cut by the rotation of darkness.

MATTHEW JAMES FRIDAY

Marble Constant

He was my Anthony for most of my salad days,
supporting my cause, to adore Eng. Lit.,
awarding A's, the occasional disappointed Bs
making me work harder to keep his support.
His great soliloquy was announcing my candidacy
for a scholarship to Oxford or Cambridge.

Hardly the heroic general, this grey bearded,
ruffle-haired, one eyed squinter who spoke
with excited scuffs out of the side of his mouth,
glass eye fixed forward, same tweed jacket.
Rarely moved to anger or discipline. His love
for the subject, for us, was his sword and eagle.

Until one day, he turned Octavius, held up
my essay on the play, and threw asps into my eyes
in the form of stinging condemnation. My essay
had *Anthony* spelt wrong. *Three* times. He spat
out onion tears and stabbed: such stupid mistakes
barred me from being an Oxford or Cambridge boy.

Saw him when I was an usher at Epsom playhouse.
He shambled down the aisle and mumbled
recognition, unaware of my scars. I should have been
in Oxford or Cambridge but instead I was helping
this former demi-Atlas see Am Dram, a year away
from being diagnosed dyslexic, marble-constant.

MATTHEW JAMES FRIDAY**Warped Fairy**

Gran, you were wheeled in without
warning. My heart snapped when
I saw you, shriveled up like a dry
potato. You held onto my hand so
tightly, afraid life would let go. This
was your hell, in my terrible hospital,
where you were left for rubbish
by your cancer, left to rot. You sat
there, so small in the big bed, swearing
like a slut, seeing the very worst
in people – you always saw the best.
I was appalled that you could change
so much, now a warped fairy waving
your sick wand, casting suffering.

MICHAEL KESHIGIAN

Recognized

He stood there,
staring back at me,
odd expression upon his face,
smiling after I did
from the other side
of a huge pane window
on the newly renovated office building,
appearing a bit more disheveled
than I remembered.

More wrinkles
supported his grimace
and receding hairline,
acknowledging me
when I nodded hello.
I use to know him well,
athletic, sculpted, artistic,
a well-defined physique,
but his apparent paunch
negated any recent activity.

This window man
I thought I knew,
musician, writer, runner, dreamer,
now feasted off the stale menu
of advancing age,
aches, excuses, laziness,
failing eyesight and an appetite
for attained rights

decades seem to imply.
Yet I accepted him,
embraced him for who he was,
aware that he would be the lone soul
to accompany me
toward the tunnel's light
when all others have drawn the blinds.
"Walk with me," I say.
He stays close.

MICHAEL KESHIGIAN

Home Again

Abandoned house, are there
only spiders and rodents
residing amid your rooms?
I see my distorted image
upon the fogged glass
of the old storm door,
and feel like a prowler,
appraising the value of items
upon your walls
or tucked in your corners,
when, in truth, I seek
to rekindle precious memories,
revisit my departed parents,
and reconstruct pictures
the recent days
have begun to obscure,
events the rain of years
are washing away,
remembrances,
trickling indiscernibly
through the pitted window
of my mind's eye
as I rap my fist
against the glass,
hoping the ghosts will answer.

MICHAEL KESHIGIAN

Synergist

All day
I've listened to the song
of a single cardinal

ripple stillness
just outside my office window.
An opera in red tux

his throat is a spring
stretching an aria
through the cluttered house

of sound, awakening memories
of events since past.
The timbre enlivens my heart.

I can almost touch
what once was
as it floats between

song and wind. An inflection
so crisp, that I'm convinced
the cardinal sings for more

than to merely texture
the commotion. His tune
incites another gift.

He performs daily,
tireless and without hoarseness,
to make sad hearts flutter.

MICHAEL LEE JOHNSON

Cold Gray (V2)

Below the clouds
forming in my eyes,
your soft eyes,
delicate as warm silk words,
used to support the love I held for you.

Cold, now gray, the sea tide
inside turns to poignant foam
upside down separates –
only ghosts now live between us.

Yet, dreamlike, fortune-teller,
bearing no relation to reality –
my heart is beyond the sea now.
A relaxing breeze sweeps
across the flat surface of me.
I write this poem to you,
neglectfully sacrificing our love.
I leave big impressions
with a terrible hush inside.
Gray bones now bleach with memories,
I'm a solitary figure standing
here, alone, along the shoreline.

NATALIA FERNÁNDEZ DÍAZ-CABAL

Travel

I travel through your blood
to my origin,
to the point of the constellation
where the law of gravitation
pushes us to fertilize
every cell
with a hummus made of
sap and hope
in equal parts
– that point where love
purifies and redeems us,
arisen from an era, a gesture
prior to time and rhythms-

In your ubiquity
you fill the horizon
of germinal water,
complete inventories
of what we were
walking to exist
from the TOGETHER radiating
its inexhaustible light.

NELS HANSON

Rain Story

Weekend of steady, indifferent
rain after Friday's deluge soaked
raisins drying on khaki paper
trays down flooded vine rows.

Early September, a storm they
named *Belinda*, from off Baja
a Mexican hurricane, swerving
north and settling three days as

we waited to save what could
be saved, the silver bars at each
window. Sometimes hail fell
on Spring plums, once April

frost scorched grape leaves to
a crisp. Another year, the day
we left the farm, it rained too,
hard, as it often does in stories.

NELS HANSON

Camouflage

At noon the yellow butterfly
casts the shadow of midnight's

sable moth across green grass
turning white with moonlight

as butterflies the color of butter
dream of roses and big moths

with black wings white-dotted
for a monster's face sip nectar

of ghostly flowers that bloom
in darkness and close at day.

NELS HANSON

Interview

In dark glasses I met them in
their garden, famous liberator
who led the army never firing
a shot or suffering a casualty,

conquered swelling the ranks
in triumph. Leaning to a coral
flower, he lifted his dazzling
gaze to the folding shadow of

a butterfly. Why did a shining
hero give so freely to everyone
the way to send like telegrams
scent of four o'clock, lupine's

tart sweetness, taste of clover
or mint by a gracious thought?
In ivory gold in morning light
she touched his hand and their

aureoles flared a moment with
softer flames, sky's final pale
blue into white, hers that rose
before the yellow sun returns.

NILAMADHAB KAR

Don't Look Back

When it's time, you get up and go
Like a hero, a conqueror
You have done your bit,
You have given all that's possible
Probably more, a lot more

Don't look back. There are many
Who wish you stay, and you may too
But curtains are drawn, show ends
Sun sets, every evening.

When the time comes
Let your steps not waddle.

With your glory in the battlefield
Or on a usual, normal day at home
Remain forever dignified

Let your steps not waddle
When the time comes

PANKAJAM KOTTARATH**Self Portrait**

The portrait of my father hangs precariously
like a weaving bird's nest, unglued from one of the nails
Is it obsessed with an identity crisis
or does he want to observe things from a different angle?

His skin was similar to that of freshly reaped wheat
Mom's, a tint darker, mine in between.
He mocked at my vain ways of bleaching skin
'Can fairness creams defeat genetics?'

It seemed he was staring at me
tired of my waywardness, my mad ways,
my way of skipping ropes, messy hair,
licking elbows to palms of my drenched hand
dripping with juice of over-ripened mangoes.
He seemed to tell me, 'you are not a kid now'.

Had he been around, I was sad,
he would see that I learn things.
I'm not skilled at holding a hammer, yet set it right
but had a fall on my back.
He smiled at me, patted my back and hugged me.
Now I am in the portrait, everything upside down.

PRAMOD RASTOGI

A Life of Serenity

Laid low by the moment's grouse
She said she would not escort me
But as soon as I took a step out
She was all set to go with me,
Smiling as if nothing had ever been,
Her bruised ego forgotten.
She was my sponge of love
That wiped the misery from my life.

"Live the moment with the wind
But be ready to drop the sails dead"
Was the form of magic
That bonded our eclectic lives.
We never converged on a project
With perspectives in the game
But still reached the consensus
Without a hiatus put to shame.

Shades of many blooms mingled
To define her life framed
Both in turbulence and in peace.
She was a star that shone in naiveté
And resilience, like a peacock
Sitting in a peaceful state on a tree
Of thorny branches, ready to fly out
As if nothing had ever been.

PRAMOD RASTOGI

Rain in the Desert

Rain and thunder visit the desert.
The sand grains are scorched to the core
To an extent that all thirst is lost
For the sweetness of this pure nectar
Whose incessant fall is still not in vain.

The swamps are formed in shame
As the rains roil the sand.
Bedouins have searched the skies for ages
For even a scant smell of consoling clouds.
Their eyes are now ablaze with joy

At this bounty of water falling in fanfare
On their sunburnt land,
Yet in this spark lies the seed of their woe.
This largesse will tomorrow be history
And on its path will still be life on this land,

Always on cue to foil the mirages
In its search for an oasis of its dreams,
To quench its thirst in the searing dryness,
And fate consenting would live on its grace
To lay eyes upon another such gift.

PRAMOD RASTOGI

A Painter and a Poet

A painter with a pound of colors
Is like a hurricane at its landfall.
He pours out colors on a canvas,
And, with paintbrush in hand,
Tears apart colors in a frenzy.

A poet is never short on words,
Pouring them out on paper
And making a boat from the sheet,
Throwing it out on a swamp
Of emotions to let it float away.

The painter has this colorful craft
To explore the mysteries of life
And the flow of the universe
In a life which has lonely footfalls
But which recites the dark in colors.

The boat, left on its own, drifts away
To the wind's sweet music.
A hurricane builds up. The sun sets
As the storm devastates the coast,
Yet the poet's hand twitches to write more.

The brush is relentless in its strokes.
In the haze of meditative music,
The poet cannot let the boat capsize
As it ferries his last verses, unbridled,
For the legions to bow to his devotion.

ROBERT L. MARTIN

The Allurement

That poem with its perfumed arms
Its graceful lines and magnetic charms

Its silky skin that glows in the night
Its mysterious ride 'til the early light

Its sultry language that embraces the dawn
Its sleepy sonnets that make the flowers yawn

Its honeyed fingers that wrap around the heart
Its rhythms in cadence with the haughty skylark

Its power that pulls us deep down to the core
Where words come to life for evermore

Where stories are chariots taking to the skies
Among the silent bustle and poetic sighs

Where words are melted down to a quiet bliss
And the spirit rises up for a heavenly kiss

The story grows wings and takes us for a ride
Through the quiet air as we lie still and glide

Oh, for that breathtaking journey
To exotic lands that bestir my passion.
I give away my riches for a glorious ride

With that alluring language that
Brought me through the story
That I wished would never end.

ROBERT L. MARTIN

Poetry and Beyond

Informative phrases laid down,
words etched in granite and stone,
unadorned in black and white,
prose machines pumping out prose,
rhetoric flying out of
mechanical pens,
no visions up ahead,
no wind beneath their wings,
no inspiration to lead them along,
standing alone in the cold,

vulnerable to the touch of beauty
with wings of orange and blue,
to feeling its presence in the midst,
the softening of its smile,
the scent of the air,
the flavor of its breath,
the sweetness of its prose,
and how it files down
the jagged edges of rhetoric
with love and finesse,

words in their poeticized state,
moving from the hard to the soft,
the pale to the colorful,
the bland to the sweetened,
the elaborated to their abridgement,
the abridged to their epitomic state,

rhetoric into poetry, words into sound,
 sound into silence, silence into Brahma,
 religion into love, love into more love,
 love in the air of poetry, the silence,
 the feeling of being lifted, floating,
 and drifting out in deep space,
 the home of the
 new poetry and beyond.

ROBERT L. MARTIN**Mere de Vie**

Mother of life, I live from you,
Your eternal throbbing, your tears,
Your milk, your blood, your gardens,
Your central strongholds, your arsenals,
The hub in the middle of life,
Your heart of flesh and steel,
Of weeping giants,
With vessels of bread and water,
The blood forever surging ahead,
You, in the middle of man and woman,
The ruler of love and death,
Throbbing, racing with the sun,
The fragile, the firm, the reliable,
Throwing out your fertile arms,
Forever sowing and harvesting,
Running through thorns and thickets,
Along bright familiar avenues,
Away from and back home again,
A journey of goodwill and concern,
Mother of compassion and mercy,
Of giving, giving, giving, giving,
Heart of life and joy and sorrow,
Of pain and convalescence,
Of wisdom, courage, and silence,
Of maternal instincts
And reciprocal deeds,
Churning with the winds of time,
Mother of Life, Mere de Vie,
Always on the move until the very end.

SARAH BROWN WEITZMAN

The Leaves of Fall

When they might shrivel
 directly into brown

instead they turn
 scarlet, orange

or yellow as flowers.

What benefit is this
 beauty to birds

or a rainbow
 to a rabbit

this flamboyant protest
 against dying

but, oh, to us, to us.

SCOTT THOMAS OUTLAR

Phase Shift

Lyrics have more sting in a crisis
heart craving extra oomph

I'll weep with you for us and this
but only while the moment's passing
because promises of beauty still
hold ships afloat from the far side

Mourning doves herald the light
wear your secrets close to skin

I'll sing with you through thick and thin
babble across the darkest chasm

SOHAM BHATTACHARYA

You

As I walk through this path of hypocrisy,
Reality reaps me up and pulls me under.
You are the sole that stands behind
And make me feel for a track to find.

As I write all of these songs of beginning and death,
It's just an awful and a broken step.
While you came to my spirit, it's a place to visit.
Sometimes its warmth, sometimes it's despised.

If I offer you my soul, will you take it away?
It's just my sanity which won't stop thinking about you.
If I offer you myself, will you meet in another life?
It's just my desire which won't contemplate you.

Through this route full of darkness, I step up and down.
It's a feeling of virtue and sin.
Forgetting my inner strength that makes me drown,
You are the one making your commitments clean.

Spreading the belief that is real.
This world is so much cruel.
I don't know about future, I don't know about past.
My love for you will forever last.

If I offer you my soul, will you take it away?
It's just my sanity which won't stop thinking about you.

If I offer you myself, will you meet in another life?
It's just my desire which won't contemplate you.

I can't live without you, as I can breathe with few.
Forcing my power staying without you, can make my life blew.
I don't want to be lost; I don't want to pay a valuable cost.
I just need you and it's only you.
Forever!

If I offer you my soul, will you take it away?
It's just my sanity which won't stop thinking about you.
If I offer you myself, will you meet in another life?
It's just my desire which won't contemplate you.

SUSAN P. BLEVINS

Cosmic Dance

There is no doubt. It's been proved.
We all are one. We share the molecules
of saints and sinners alike each time we
breathe in and out, Jesus and Gandhi,
Hitler and Stalin. They are us and
we are them. No escape.

And we come together now with
Science as our heavenly father,
Spirit as our divine mother,
and their troublesome offspring,
the Universe, expanding and flourishing
just like any other growing thing in nature.

SUSAN P. BLEVINS

Cosmic Thoughts

I know that there's another world beyond the dark mantel of
night sky,
I know because I peer through the moth-holes in the black velvet
fabric
which allow light to stream in from other worlds. We call them
stars.

I study the cracks in the night sky, that allow the music of the
spheres to
stream down upon me to fill my head with heavenly tones, the
original
sounds of our creation, the universe both instrument and music.

They allow us a glimpse of where we go when we die, a return
to whence
we came into this world as new borns, with wisps of heaven still
clinging
to our innocent forms, composed of the same elements as the
stars.

Call me crazy, but I have the insane desire to swallow the night.
The next
clear, star-filled night we have, I'm going outside, opening my
mouth, and
swallowing the entire firmament. Ultimate oneness with
creation.

TIKVAH FEINSTEIN

Child Unharmmed

The child I was will feel again
young feet touching wet, smooth clay,
slippery beside a mountain stream,
where water runs clear and cold,
blades of new grass sprout, and
moss grows green on its bank.

She will look up at the blue of sky
blending with white of clouds, once again
believe in beauty and truth,
as a child believes.

She will see colors of spring flowers,
their petals and shafts, violets in tiny bunches,
white lilies of the valley, wild rose vines
climbing blossoming trees.

She will stand where seeds fall and grow,
watch cows eat apples uninhibited,
meditative moods on their long faces,
utterly lost in the chewing.

And hold a grasshopper, feel its brown spittle
freckle her palm, the soft tickle of a caterpillar,
buzz of a moth, cool ribbed texture of an earthworm.

Again she'll taste a sweet stock of wild wheat
picked from fields where shafts sway on bare legs.

She who dared to reveal her silenced voice,
to tell her story, hold to truth through to the telling,
with eternal eyes will behold: herself once damaged,
new and unharmed.

TODD SULLIVAN

Mating Algorithm

My reason for wanting to chat with you
Was really quite innocent, of late I
Interview those around the world, quite new
To me, asking them questions like who, why
Where and How, and I thought that if I could
Speak verbally to strangers I know not
We could catch up, since we met in childhood.
A mistake, I'd given it little thought
Set in motion, mating algorithm
You ran and I was supposed to follow
But I, confused by your mannerism
Stood still and watched you go off with sorrow
Now you are far, past communication
Making impossible, conversation

TODD SULLIVAN

Upon a Pedestal

In streets awash in neon lights, I came
Upon my past, she peered at me and spoke
My tongue, she prayed this was all just a joke
For up so high she'd placed me once, my name
She'd said with reverence, now she felt such shame
To see me walk amongst late night drunk folks
Her ideal view of me she soon revoked
My human behavior she quickly blamed

But I have no wish to stand on pedestals
Though past classes I taught her my strange tongue
There is no fun in being impeccable
With so many late night drinks left undone

CONTRIBUTORS

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16. **James G. Piatt**, a Best of Web nominee and three-time Pushcart nominee, has had four collections of poetry; "Solace Between the Lines"(2019), "Light (2016)," "Ancient Rhythms (2014), " and "The Silent Pond" (2012), over 1480 poems, five novels, and thirty-five short stories published in over 200 journals worldwide. He earned his BS and MA from California State Polytechnic University, and his doctorate from BYU.
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21. **Matthew James Friday** is a British born writer and teacher. He has been published in numerous international journals, including, recently: *Dawntreader* (UK) and *Lunch Ticket* (USA). The micro-chapbooks *All the Ways to Love*, *The Residents*, *Waters of Oregon* and *The Words Unsaid* were published by the *Origami Poems Project* (USA).
22. **Michael Keshigian** from New Hampshire, is the author of 14 poetry collections, his latest, *What To Do With Intangibles*, released in January, 2020, by *Cyberwit.net*. He has been published in numerous national and international journals and has appeared as feature writer in twenty poetry

publications with 7 Pushcart Prize and 2 Best of the Net nominations. His poetry cycle, *Lunar Images*, set for Clarinet, Piano, Narrator, was premiered at Del Mar College in Texas. Subsequent performances occurred in Boston (Berklee College) and Moletto, Italy. *Winter Moon*, a poem set for Soprano and Piano, premiered in Boston. (michaelkeshigian.com)

23. **Michael Lee Johnson** lived ten years in Canada during the Vietnam era and is a dual citizen of the United States and Canada. Today he is a poet, freelance writer, amateur photographer, and small business owner in Itasca, DuPage County, Illinois. Mr. Johnson published in more than 2,013 new publications, and his poems have appeared in 40 countries, he edits, publishes ten poetry sites. Michael Lee Johnson has been nominated for 2 Pushcart Prize awards poetry 2015/1 Best of the Net 2016/2 Best of the Net 2017, 2 Best of the Net 2018.
24. **Natalia Fernández Díaz-Cabal.** Professor, Ph. D. in Linguistics and Ph.D. in Philosophy. Essayist, poet, traveler, nomad, translator of 7 languages. Author of several books of essay (intercultural communication, gender violence) and poetry, among them: "The tree looking at light", "Sarcoma offspring", "The white statue of your absence", etc. Translated into Italian, English, Arabic and French.
25. **Nels Hanson** has worked as a farmer, teacher and contract writer/editor. His fiction received the San Francisco Foundation's James D. Phelan Award and Pushcart nominations in 2010, 2012, 2014 and 2016. His poems received a 2014 Pushcart nomination, Sharkpack Review's 2014 Prospero Prize, and 2015 and 2016 Best of the Net nominations.
26. **Nilamadhab Kar**, MD, DPM, DNB, MRCPsych, writes poetry, and occasionally stories and short essays, in English

and Odia. His poems have been published in magazines and anthologies in USA, UK, and India. He has published three poetry books (*Tama Paainin* Odia, selected poems; Reverberation and Tomorrow's Morning Sun - translated poetry anthologies). He has edited a few literary magazines and is on the editorial board of some. He is a psychiatrist; besides clinical work he is actively involved in clinical research and publications.

27. **Pankajam Kottarath** retired from BHEL as Deputy Manager/Finance is a bilingual poet and novelist (writing in English and Malayalam), settled at Chennai. She has twenty-three books so far published, including fourteen books of poems, a translated poetry collection in French, three fictions in English and six books in Malayalam and a couple of books in the pipeline. She is the recipient of many awards such as Rock Pebbles National Literary Award 2019; Cochin Litfest Prize 2019; Essay competition award conducted by ISISAR, Calcutta in the World Thinkers and Writers Peace Meet 2019; Literary Excellence Award from Gujarat Sahitya Akademi and Motivational strips on the eve of India's Independence Day 2020, etc. She can be reached at kp_bhargavrag@yahoo.co.in
28. **Pramod Rastogi** is an Emeritus Professor at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (EPFL) in Lausanne, Switzerland. He is a Member of the Swiss Academy of Engineering Sciences. He is the 2014 recipient of the SPIE Dennis Gabor Award. He is currently a guest Professor at the IIT Gandhinagar, India. His poems have been accepted in Indian Literature, Borderless journal, Muse India, etc.
29. **Robert L. Martin** is the author of two poetry books; *Wings of Inspiration*, available on Amazon now and *Rhymes of the Joke Machine*, currently in production, by *Cyberwit.net*. He is published in many anthology books including *Universal Oneness*. He also wrote two chapbooks and won two "Faith

and Hope” poetry awards. He is a pianist and the organist at First UMC of Wind Gap, PA <http://www.firstumcwg.org>. His main writing influences are Kahlil Gibran and Pablo Neruda. You can reach out to him at robertlmartinpoetry@gmail.com.

30. **Sarah Brown Weitzman** was a National Endowment for the Arts Fellow in Poetry and twice nominated for the Pushcart Poetry Prize. She has had poems published in hundreds of journals and anthologies including *New York Quarterly*, *North American Review*, *Rattle*, *New Ohio Review*, *Verse Daily*, *Mid-American Review*, *Poet Lore*, *Potomac Review*, *Miramar*, *The American Journal of Poetry*, *New York Quarterly*, and elsewhere. Her fifth book, *AMOROTICA*, is forthcoming from Main Street Rag.
31. **Scott Thomas Outlar** lives and writes in the suburbs outside of Atlanta, Georgia. His work has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net. He guest-edited the 2019 and 2020 Western Voices editions of *Setu Mag*. Selections of his poetry have been translated into Afrikaans, Albanian, Bengali, Dutch, French, Italian, Kurdish, Malayalam, Persian, Serbian, and Spanish. His sixth book, *Of Sand and Sugar*, was released in 2019. His podcast, *Songs of Selah*, airs weekly on 17Numa Radio and features interviews with contemporary poets, artists, musicians, and health advocates. More about Outlar’s work can be found at [17 Numa.com](http://17Numa.com).
32. **Soham Bhattacharya** is an Engineer and writes lyrics and poetry as a passion towards literature. As a careerist goal, he is looking for a Doctoral Position in the field of Electrical Engineering. He pursued his Masters as well as Bachelors of Technology from Heritage Institute of Technology, Calcutta, India in the field of Electronics and Communication Engineering. His passion for writing came

while he started to work as a vocalist in some bands. That encouraged him to write some lyrics as well as poetries.

33. **Susan P. Blevins** was born in England and moved to Italy when she was 20, where she lived for the following 26 years. While there she had a weekly column in an international newspaper. She moved to the USA and spent 16 years in Taos, NM, where she wrote about gardens for various magazines, and is now living in Houston, TX, writing about her interesting life and travels. She is published in various literary journals in the USA and overseas, including New Verse News, Scarlet Leaf, Chicago Literati, Qutub Minar, The Ekphrastic Review and many others. She loves classical music, gardening, reading, writing, cats and intelligent, stimulating conversation. She also enjoys reading for the blind.
34. **Tikvah Feinstein's** poetry is widely published in the USA and internationally, including The BeZine, Verbal Art, Loyalhanna Review, Boston Poetry Magazine and others. A graduate of the University of Pittsburgh, she has worked as staff writer for a daily newspaper, is author of 4 books, and edited and illustrated others. Editor and publisher of Taproot Literary Review for 25 editions, her story "The Purpose of Tears" won the 2017 Westmoreland Short Story Award from Westmoreland Arts & Heritage Festival. She received the "Albert Nelson Marquis Lifetime Achievement Award" for 2019.
35. **Todd Sullivan** currently lives in Taipei, Taiwan, where he teaches English as a Second Language. He hosts a YouTube Channel that interviews writers across the publishing spectrum.

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