

stones beneath the surface

a poetry anthology

edited by andreas gripp

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# stones beneath the surface

a poetry anthology

Andreas Gripp, editor

Black Mallard

*Stones Beneath the Surface : a poetry anthology*

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**Renée M. Sgroi**

**searching for capelin**

over the sound gulls glide,  
searching for capelin

those silver-purple scaled smelt bodies  
that wash up on the shore,  
death as a consequence of spawning.

think of the strangeness of sex

its bargains, the politics of its selections,  
choosing which blouse to wear, which belt,

biology a school subject we're instructed in that sails  
on the kinds of rough waters we're willing to die on

we are the dividing line between love and expectation

in their baleens, the humpbacks don't hold  
closets full of missed migrations

they chase the capelins

whose dried-up eyes, wide as bobbins  
wind invisible threads that reel us in  
like gulls and puffins

while off the coast, whales

aquatic lovers who mate with sonar rituals

## **carbon**

dates me on a Tuesday like a boy a mother begs you not to bring home for the sake of her pride or her family. too old to protect feelings i forsake that forgotten solemn oath to reveal tree rings, how they wrap around the middle of me, like carbon's arms adding not bark but girth. in the run-down bar where carbon and i meet, we toast drinks, swap blue concocted stories in high balls and martini glasses neither of us believes. first there is a first kiss, then a last, the taste of vodka or gin or chewing gum masked into alcohol breath like freckles, or moles, those stubborn and cosmetic-immune features we rename beloved imperfections. i pay the cheque for us both, owning my adult responsibilities with plastic which carbon detests, preferring the roughened textures of dry bills, of flesh on the uncounted stitches, seams, sex that disturbs clean sheets, writhes within the folds of our mutual wrinkled surfaces. in the afterglow, our eyes are tired, our puffed cheeks sag into their bones like excavated melons, the fruit we'd brought to one another, eaten. when we will cease our dating, stars may still exist, or orbits, though the guarantees of such wobbling can't be certified. carbon and i comprehend we will be ash, floating into atmosphere, perhaps illuminated

## Michael Russell

### Jean Grey

“Out of the ash  
I rise with my red hair  
And I eat men like air.”

—*Lady Lazarus*, Sylvia Plath

I heard it's slow,  
the cigarette ash  
of winter, the cold

puddle of a body  
sugared in pills,  
snow. Tell me,

how long

until my blood  
flakes to crystal,  
bones cat-licked

clean by another  
suicide? Tonight,  
tucked away

from the street-  
lights, I feel alright  
with dying.

To be honest,  
I've never  
worked a day

in my life  
at anything else,  
this one art

holds my heart  
like a salamander  
caught in a pitcher

plant. The sub zero  
temperature chills  
before it blisters,

festers into images  
of my father,  
molester, rapist, ex.

The first time  
I wrapped a bag  
around my head,

I fed myself  
a mouthful of plastic  
then blacked out.

I was childish,  
fooling around  
with suicides.

I swayed and swayed  
the way tides sway  
in an angry ocean.

I imagine the motion  
a bit like drowning,  
like Jean Grey

sinking  
to the bottom  
of Jamaica Bay.

January's cold permeates  
my bones, my toes  
frost-kissed.

I dig my fingers  
into the birdcage  
of my ribs, crack them

open to a silhouette  
of myself singing



in this blue basement

body. Life—  
why do I always reach  
for the sour-

smelling flower  
on the windowsill?  
The photographs

of men who try  
and try to end me?  
I claw the park

bench with fingers  
the colour of lilac.  
My fingers,

sprigs of lilac  
peel and burn  
the paper lantern

of my skin;  
Lady Lazarus,  
Jean Grey

bursting through  
the snow, shouting:  
*I AM PHOENIX!*

**Note:** Final line “I AM PHOENIX” is lifted from the X-Men’s Phoenix Saga where Jean Grey emerges from Jamaica Bay unharmed and possessed by The Phoenix Force after the rest of the X-Men assumed she drowned.

## Richard-Yves Sitoski

### 23 Years On

In the dream I let go your hand  
as you lead me into the woods.  
I'm a grownup but you are pulling me onward  
and I can't keep up on toddler legs.

In real life this would be a grove  
I would try not to call a cathedral  
though I would want to, a place where  
I am destined to be lost in green.

Lost in the sense of *irrecoverable*  
as well as *abandoned*,  
now like a fly drowning in paint,  
dying suspended in utmost green,  
now watching as you flow away  
a cut-out by Matisse  
under sun-dappled leaves.

And just like that you're gone.  
But I am stuck in sassafras  
and fallen spruce, trillium fronds  
and moss, goutweed and ramps  
and roots for the tripping,  
and I give up and face a future  
bound to a throne of wet ferns.

This takes seconds but feels like hours.

At least I think so.

It's hard to tell

when there's nothing to do

but lie in bed, unforgiven

for not loving you,

as outside my house the wind falls

and rises, sometimes in gusts

that shake the trees so hard

the air startles itself.

## **à bout de souffle**

so much has been made of Seberg's hair  
not enough of Belmondo's cigarette  
the greatest ever in a city of smokers

a city that's in 1960 black and white  
with revolution eight years off  
& what passes for men walking alleys  
Gauloise-lipped  
with a hat slouched back  
& tie loosened

or basking shirtless on a bed  
limned in afternoon sun  
laconic & lean & a little dense  
with a *meuf américaine* three flights up  
from a landlady smelling of vinegar

but celluloid is no place to thrive

I rest in a tangle on the cutting room floor  
and done with aviators & snap-brims  
on a leading man bias

I want to trade this Kronenbourg  
on its zinc bar-top  
for a fishing rod & hockey stick

I want to know  
I've done right by my son  
by being his father

I have  
haven't I?  
I mean just look at him  
bold as a new year  
in saturated hues

watch him stride across bridges  
without false bravado  
casting beautiful shadows  
the way I never will  
for I run toward the screen  
but am undone by bursting lungs  
before finding freedom  
in a third unknowable dimension

## **An Enclosure is Another Word for God**

(after a line by Gary Barwin)

You're never through with the places you inhabit.  
That key on your ring from one house ago  
is not useless.

Slip in on a day the owners are gone  
to see what they have done,

what memories are affixed to your old walls:  
photos of a matriarch who sheltered a brood  
in a world that seems unpolluted from space.

She must be eighty, looks like mom at sixty.  
Your mother, whose embrace collapsed upon itself.  
Whose womb was no safer than a burning tent.

## **Botany**

at age five I made you a bouquet  
of decapitated peonies  
thinking you would be happy

for your service I ordered white lilies  
as if funeral homes  
smelled not enough of death

the new owners dug out your favourite maple  
upside-down lung  
from when you breathed for me



## **Insomniac Jacket**

I am awake in this house because of  
the chimpanzee violence of the murder  
that took place here a decade ago

and the sounds of sex from next door  
which are really fist fights

and the jump scare thumps on the roof  
of the Raccoon God

and I am awake because of a taste on my sallow  
tongue  
which alternates between Soviet chocolate  
and the Turkish delight from Istanbul  
which turned to rosewater sludge in my bag

and because of the blare of ship's horns  
summoning mermen to their deaths

but most of all because I need to piss  
irregular as a drunk town crier  
which offers me the chance as I sprinkle the rim  
to look through night's tattered scrim  
as clouds descend

and to think of men so sad  
they're angry

sleeping off arguments  
in the back seats of cars

and children dreaming  
in the blast radius of divorces

and vegetative shopping malls  
and defeated churches

and things on hooks  
in a basement I'm drawn to  
precisely because  
it's so damn scary with the lights off

## **April Bulmer**

### **Earth Signs**

I bury my mama by the river  
in the soft belly of the earth.  
The women gather  
and pat the mound:  
Warm in the spring rain.

All night I touch you, Love:  
The white moons of your eyelids,  
the horizon of your lips.  
My hands are rooted in another life.  
They bloom and fade and bloom.

My mama, too,  
is a blossom:  
Her new heart pale  
then red as a fruit.

I think of her now  
as I make love to you.  
I turned in her womb  
in an autumn morn:  
A new life,  
though apples rouged  
and fermented in the ground.

## **Living Waters**

My brother's pickup truck is blue.  
The sun is an old soul.  
He wears paint on his face  
the shade of canola blooms.

I empty my hurt into Lake Grace.

For a moment, I drown myself  
beneath the water but rise again  
through a little door.  
Jesus and his crowd on the shore.

My pain floats like a dead fish.

## **Fall On Your Knees**

Outside my window,  
Italians kneel.  
They harvest tomatoes.  
Flesh bleeds against their palms  
and cast-iron pots.  
September, and the women  
stir their sauce.

Their mason jars  
are open and clean.  
Beautiful, for they bear  
only light.

Father John, you do not visit again.  
You are on your knees  
making love to the Church.  
You have never entered a woman.  
You think that place is a wound.  
Yes, a red hurt.

## Silent Night

My humble flat  
was a quiet space  
save for my laboured breath.  
*I wonder, I thought, if Soulmate will call  
like the psychic predicted.*  
I would tell Old Love,  
“We reincarnated again  
as in China, Belgium, Ireland...  
I am the Chinese peasant,  
her feet bruised and bandaged,  
the Flemish queen, the Irish pagan.  
Do you remember me?”  
But the telephone was silent  
like the many lives we were trees.

## David Stones

### Origami With Scissors

Mother and daughter cut and fold  
scissor and scalpel  
the patient sheets

into the lace-worked papery poems  
of butterflies

and then a trellis for the cherry blossoms  
before the arcing river-song  
of swans  
and the snowflake  
to settle weightless  
on the daughter's laughing nose.

But now the daughter furrowed inward  
consumed, intense as flame  
to produce just a paper ball  
held there darkly in the trembling  
black-hole pull of her tiny hands.

It's daddy's fist she says his fist.

And mother holds in the warmth  
of her own mother hands  
the obsidian-heavy, deathsong-seething  
coal-dead clump of crumpled metaphor

knowing  
this is how life dies

how no love enters

but broken    even broken  
we must find a way  
to cut and fold the darkness  
into the latticed light  
that fuels the living  
and lifts our faces to the heavens.



## **Cleopatra**

My mother now so suddenly  
a Cleopatra propped against her pillows  
luminous and magnetically correct  
on her final bed  
eyes like  
bonfires blazing

She surveys the family  
gathered in that reflective mope  
that is the slow bleed  
before death and its steady scrape  
smooth a heart  
into silence

Never has my mother  
been predictable and even less so now  
with discovered words for everyone  
a language glazed with  
drugs and wisdom  
meted out

in cheerful glistening measure  
to three generations accepting  
of their final orders before  
their matriarchal captain gives the last  
salute and blends into  
the curvature of the earth

## Jennifer Wenn

### TRIPLICITY

#### Regarding a Housefly

Held in the close embrace of early July heat,  
birdsong serenades float from the oaks  
down to the patio where I meander through  
*Love Poems from God*,  
glasses propped on forehead and  
book held close in deference to myopia.  
Eyes flick up and are greeted  
by an alighting *Musca domestica*,  
a housefly doing a high-wire on the page edge.  
We tarried there a good ten seconds  
(four hours in fly-time),  
eyeball to ommatidia, while its back legs  
scissored together in fly-thian ritual ablution,  
a tiny embodiment of change  
semaphoring “take time to notice,”  
a strange forerunner preaching awareness.  
Task fulfilled she (I feel sure about that)  
zipped on her way, leaving me with the  
other seraphic poems.

## Death in the Afternoon

*With apologies and thanks to  
Ernest Hemingway and Seamus Heaney*

Summer's dénouement was the wasps' cue.  
In turn I had (cleverly I thought) baited a fancy trap,  
and started this sunny afternoon  
contentedly eyeing casualties.  
Next to the watering can, startled by a  
large arthropodic drowning victim.  
Per 2020 my thoughts raced to  
*It's a murder hornet(!)*.  
Per my more grounded Millennial son,  
it was a cicada.  
Then past skittering chipmunks grown  
smug since Marcus reached the canine beyond,  
and to the lower part of my haven  
for some quality time with a lawn chair  
and Seamus Heaney.

[...]

The imperious *floop* over my left shoulder  
startled me out of glorious poetic lyricism  
into conjunction with its material embodiment:  
not five feet away, base of the stairs  
down from the arbour, a magnificent red-tailed hawk  
glowing with athleticism and inevitability,

an artist in his realm bristling with  
deadly intensity in this moment,  
had swooped underneath the oaken canopy  
and was now clutching a formerly  
complacent chipmunk in his talons.  
I was well and truly seen,  
pinioned and humbled and  
yet comforted under his penetrating gaze,  
induced to remain basking in  
eloquent physicality until one majestic  
motion launched him away.  
Feeling the book again in my hands,  
swathed in Seamus' ethereal smile.

## Tierce

To the backyard, virtual employment left inside,  
mid-September glowing all around  
while I drifted off to a poetic confrontation  
with a ghastly shade haunting a dark literary mountain  
whose ascent required grappling with the lost soul  
responsible for monstrous evil, finding myself  
drifting in Blakean imagery as I searched for a route  
to portray an inhuman, warped psyche.

Filtering through the struggle, the gentle rattle  
of a small foot on the eavestrough, then a  
hopeful fluttering as I glanced up  
to find a young cardinal touching down  
scant inches away on the patio table.  
Startled back to sunshine,  
caressed by an inquiring, nascent look,  
I said hello, was answered by  
a wing-borne dancing spirit  
radiating little seraphs of light that  
illumine those dark crags winding upwards.

After an infinite moment of communion  
the herald was off to the cedar hedge,  
leaving me a path, discernible, daunting and destined.

## Mike Madill

### A Closer Look

—after Bob Hicok

Who do I think I am?

Maybe a man, but not a man,  
not done growing, nor finished grieving.

I'm a middle-aged fiancé and I'm lucky,  
but would you guess it from my thrift-store jeans?

My hand-me-down neuroses?  
The gravelly truths Johnny Cash still sings?

I could tell you I once jumped from  
a helicopter, 11,000 feet over the Caribbean,

cinched to a Cuban guide and his 'chute,  
but you don't have to believe anything I say.

How I swept more than a year away  
on a factory floor, dusted in dead-end fears;

or once baked an apple pie from scratch, the sweet  
aroma of hope escaping from the house I used to own.

When we meet now, am I still a stranger?  
Departing none the wiser to the path

each has crossed.

## **Ghosted**

—after Mike Barnes' *Let's Clear the Air*

I never had my day on the stand.  
Would it have mattered,  
given the smug looks and  
crossed arms of my so-called peers?  
Pleading my case  
to my sparse cellar space.

Nothing quite like  
a good brooding, re-hash  
for the umpteenth time,  
spurned for stuffing my closet  
into garbage bags, squabbling  
for the canoe,  
none of the antiques.

I dared venture past  
the ramparts, behind me  
their fear raised  
like a drawbridge.  
The danger of thinking  
for oneself, deigning  
to wrench free the ring  
and breathe.

Divorce far more  
than  $x$  minus  $y$ ,

bleeding through  
stashed photo albums,  
shirts I never wore,  
coffee stirred a little slower.  
Two to fail, all the rest  
keep a version alive.



## **Carrie Lee Connel**

### **Vyshyvanka**

An observer on a day of  
Ukrainian celebration of freedom.

On the outside looking in, again,  
not belonging an emptiness in my gut,  
a reminder of my own absent ancestry.

The matching black and red geometric designs  
worn by a matron and her husband.

A girl in a white blouse embroidered  
with red blooms and green leaves.

The yellow trident stitched on  
a young man's azure shirt.

A woman proudly wearing yellow cotton  
embellished with blue flowers.

I am jealous of their connection:  
to a homeland,  
to a community,  
to the threads that bind their history.

Intricate patterns of protective talismans,

symbolizing strength, courage, and unity  
when facing a war  
they never wanted.

(poem title pronounced Vee-shee-vahn-kah)

## **Novack's Messenger Bag**

In boredom on the bus,  
you read a memoir  
on the canvas flap  
of my vintage blue  
Novack's messenger bag.

You note the obligatory  
Canadian flag patch  
next to one from Ireland.

A newly acquired button  
proclaims my pronouns,  
free from the Fringe Festival  
(if I was forty years younger,  
I might choose differently).

Two orange buttons  
broadcast political leanings  
and support for survivors  
of residential schools.

Ten years ago, I affixed  
'Librarian by day,  
rockstar by night,'  
but haven't worked  
in either field.

Here, you see my interests:  
one from a Steampunk event  
where I bought a cameo  
of Sherlock Holmes, stating  
'No Shit' underneath.

I proclaim 'I (heart) Mr. Darcy'  
though I ignored the play at the Grand;  
and 'I read BANNED books'  
as every book dragon should.

Also, 'I (heart) New York,'  
my favourite place on earth,  
where I bought 'Cats' on Broadway  
and Warhol's Marilyn at MOMA.

Once there were buttons  
for every concert I attended  
(damn, that bag was heavy);  
now it's only  
Dylan and Petty,  
"alone & together"  
on tour in '85.

Just one remains:  
similar in design  
to a red sculpture by  
Robert Indiana,

snapped on a  
Manhattan street  
fifteen years ago,  
declaring LOVE  
in rainbow colours.

## Jordan Williamson

### Considerable Sum

Time gives back something of itself through distance,  
swells in the mind as trade winds blow  
through some cabana without mussing your hair.  
Life becomes mild and less weary, days quietly unspool  
and bulge from the page like a simple weather report.

The lawn is duly watered,  
the kids put away their thoughts of you  
and your blue laugh.  
Is this the dream I was having just now?  
The motion of the trees undressed by the falling dusk,  
set down on the dresser  
like a lanolin ointment, a packing case, a damp towel  
stepped over unthinkingly, the two of us laughing  
over everything time has forgotten  
to mention about love.

## **Carol Casey**

### **Naked Ladies**

(not what you think)

A whole frolic of them,  
bloomers up, virginal white  
tinged with saucy fuchsia,  
come hither frocks  
cupping the warm September sky.  
They catch my eye  
a tardy teenage generation  
giggling itself into  
this sombre harvest-scape  
glowing, unearthly, gaudy  
in the waning sunlight  
irresistible to pollinators  
who make their fervid way  
down the avenue of them.

There is the need, the novelty  
the nostalgia for springtime and youth,  
and some undefined impulse  
of reverence for a world  
of good, clean dirt.

## **The Night After the Day Before**

was just like any other night.  
The clouds parted, revealing  
a crescent moon on the wane,  
while life prodded,  
nestled into cracks,  
looked for any excuse  
to expand upon itself.

So it was,  
on that night like any other night  
when life was busy  
and full of itself,  
a young man contemplated  
a grim diagnosis.  
And an old woman wept for him.



## Mary Anne Griffiths

### Winter Garlic

The bread remembers  
salt mash, sting;  
rain on the shed roof.

By December  
the wall nails loosen  
with the weight  
of each head  
a lost god

full of the dream  
of earth's tension  
violet and veining  
the skin.

## Slaughter

Dawn  
and the men are coming—  
blood alike  
the same hook of nose.

Grey wool  
threadbare hats  
I can draw it over  
and over from memory.

The ketone stink  
of half-used whisky  
stock-potted on cheeks.  
Capillaries, the thin  
ruby lode within flesh

shines.  
They are carving up  
the swine, its quarters  
fallen away  
a blooming rose  
on the morning's  
hungry snow.

## **R L Raymond**

### **Crossing**

The fences aren't for them  
the deer  
the dead  
who prance or wander at will

In the cemetery  
the dead  
the deer  
rest under pine trees at peace

Until  
the outsiders disturb  
the still  
to leave apples and flowers

Then they hide  
under stones  
motionless  
behind boughs  
unnoticed

Until  
the outsiders depart  
at last  
and close the wrought iron gates

The graveyard is theirs  
the deer and the dead  
fed and remembered  
    flashes  
        white tails  
            ghost lights  
                in the tenebrous mist

## **Penn Kemp**

### **The Winter Widow (i)**

Sometimes I hear you speaking.  
More often you nod approval or  
shake your head to comment in  
replay, in dream, in small glimpses.  
You hover about at back of mind, at  
nape of neck, those startled rising hairs.

### **The Winter Widow (ii)**

The trick is knowing not to choose but to listen.  
The choice is made, already. You are wafting  
between up and down, between dimensions I  
don't as yet know. The indeterminate unknown  
prompts me to poetry, to remember you there.

## John B. Lee

### What's Falling Away

behind the girls' door  
in the gynoeceum of the village school  
with winter coats  
hung in a row on the wall  
and the water shadows  
shrinking on the floor  
like the light that crosses darkness  
on wet stone  
in that secret sanctorum  
of ever-evaporate youth  
with milk glass  
glazing the windows  
where our classmates  
came with their common needs  
to the similar soap pong  
of the lavatory sinks  
where voices mingled in a rush  
from fanning out  
and into the yard  
with skip-rope dreams  
or going in under the gender-carved lintel  
as a queue  
like sheep come in from grazing  
we were all of us  
obedient to those rivers of ordinary rules

learning in autumn  
what served us through spring  
from when the dogwood berry  
brightened on the bough  
till the bloodroot bloomed  
and the peeper frogs sang  
in the swale  
and the first thing  
our grandfathers built  
after their barns  
was a house with a bell for the child  
long since fallen away  
like the sound that won't last  
in a distance too far  
from the source  
we hear that calling of ghosts  
that clangor of mist in the wind



## **The Long Drift**

there is a sadness  
on the shore  
and we are watching  
a black breath dying  
with a slow darkness overcoming  
the remorseful cormorant  
coming in  
rocked by the rhythms  
of the water  
he or she it seems  
is almost cognisant  
of a great emptying outward  
into the blue loss  
as it is when beauty  
fails its own illusions  
this doomed bird  
climbs a grey stone  
where the lake swallows  
the rock in swells of algae  
and there he perches  
engaged in the effort  
of resting  
enervated by the big sorrows  
and the soft crashing  
of green slosh  
he yawns  
as though from the morbid ennui

of his own absenting

his thin-boned legs  
like sticks that stagger  
after they're snapped  
and the leaf tips  
have gone sere  
in the crooked shadows  
of a broken-branch forest  
crowned in fire

these are the cruel lessons  
of unlearnable things  
how often have I watched  
in lugubrious and hopeless wonder  
as life retreats  
in this slipping away  
of the light  
like watching the weight  
of a chain on itself  
snaking from an old pool  
to a new pool  
this gravity of elsewhere  
this link by link  
silvering of the deep-water anchoring  
where we are bottomless  
and given over  
to the long drift

## **The Last Parade**

at the last gathering  
of the ragtag scholars  
of the Highgate Fair parade  
that sad calithumpian  
of old children  
mulling like market steers  
in the parking lot at the side door  
of the abandoned village schoolhouse  
some of us  
were three-legged toddlers  
or seated in four-wheel walkers  
the sotto-voce elders  
their soft talk  
impatient to be going  
we lined up  
grouped by age  
following the swirling blue light  
of the slow to move cruiser  
like some lugubrious and mostly funeral  
ultra-obedient honouring the dead  
but we  
were the living memorabilia  
of the past glories  
of this dying community  
long since our ancestors  
built the first log school  
and deep-wood churches

the town halls  
and meeting houses  
gone to the ghosts  
like all fallen-barn fields  
and crushed down fences  
where the leafless oaks  
cast their crooked shade  
in the skeletal reach of a claw-handed darkness  
a bone's reach of broken branch shadow  
fallen over the fallow

we who walked that day  
dragging our youth  
in our wake lead-footed and easily lost  
tracing our way  
over the stone-clock sundial  
of that final hour  
we marched like refugees  
fatigued by exile  
missing the turn to the fairgrounds  
we kept pace with the cruiser  
to the very outskirts of the village  
over the stumble of the railway line  
by the grist mill  
as though we were leaving

meanwhile everyone waited

the mayor of the region  
stood biding her time  
checking her watch by the sun

send someone to find them  
bring them back  
to the centre of attention  
here to where the gates lie open  
for the letting out  
and the letting in  
where there's cider in the cup  
and winter's in the offing

## **Rhonda Melanson**

### **The Mould Growing In My Classroom**

Mould grows  
seen and unseen

in classrooms, behind bulletin boards  
primary red fadeless paper

an honour wall for student work, flowering  
accomplishments ripped down for the threat

of what lay beneath, the symbiotic union  
of moisture and the dark. The filthiest of fungi.

My students never questioned exposed brick wall,  
now resembling hardened tomato soup nestled

in stiff cream, nor its three rusted nails, erected  
at varying angles, an awkward uncomfortable stigmata

never resolved. It was expected their dull eyes  
would carry on—worksheets, recess, dodgeball

and fucking math, as C would say. Of all the things  
he hated, it was that. For me, it was the solutions

that could have been. For me, the harder fight.  
The fire I could have set. The blazing trail.

## **A Mother at the Foot of a Phone Pole Memorial**

She sits with her white sorrow. Her grief  
multiple streamers. How many Januarys  
ago did her daughter with the corkscrew  
curls come home for lunch (grilled cheese,  
tomato soup)? How loud was the one-two  
of brake-crash, even heard by her teacher  
a block away?

A grieving mother still looks like this—mad  
as mother steroids at all the uncurious folk, cruising  
by the crucified daisies, eye-level, on battered  
phone pole. Tomorrow, she will bring more—  
wield staple gun like assault rifle, surrender  
more submissive stems and petals to gods  
who believe in damnation for those who forget

about angels, still tumbling in magnified memory  
in the snow.

## Andreas Gripp

### Dinosaurs

I owe my grand  
existence  
to a jagged  
asteroid—  
to a circle  
that surrounds  
the *Yucatan*,  
the crater of  
Chicxulub;

to all the fossils  
who didn't adapt,  
had failed  
to be the fittest  
when it mattered.

I would surely  
not be alive  
if not for Hitler,  
my father staying  
put in a German town,  
my mother in a village  
of Ukraine,  
never crossing paths  
in an *English* class,  
in a London  
of another sort.



I have always  
hated Hitler  
for *Holocaust*,  
Dresden but a cinder  
because of *him* and  
his paintings *spurned*,  
Europe a steaming  
rubble felling millions.

My Italian friends  
don't realize  
if it wasn't for  
Mussolini, they'd have never  
cried at birth.

Look at Hiroshima  
standing tall—unscorched  
by Enola Gay,  
half a billion  
people that come and  
go, the interchange of  
faces, the names that  
disappear with sleight  
of hand,  
replaced by happy  
children  
we'll never know.

We are ultimately  
born of *tragedy*:

the driver just  
ahead  
taking the impact  
nearly *mine*,  
surviving by the  
*luck* of a random turn.

You say your  
*baby* owes her breath  
to a brutal rape,  
your dog no  
longer there  
because the first  
to tame a wolf  
had lost a hand  
to a famished bear—  
forty thousand years  
before the Christ.

This isn't just an  
anthem of the past—  
watch the *roll*  
of future dice, their  
crash against the wall:

the ocean-  
dweller *creeping*  
from the shore,  
the silence of the land,  
absent of beast  
and man,  
eyeing remnants  
of a city  
long extinct,  
relieved that we have  
*finally* disappeared,  
its initial step  
like a human's  
on the moon,  
still rising  
on the drapes  
of burning sky,  
a ball of  
nonchalance,  
its face of bleached  
indifference.

## Only Two Words

The answer to this  
question is  
*yes or no.*

That's *three* words.

Everyone assumes  
the *yes* is most important,  
the positive-affirmative  
of *yes, I'll be happy to help;*  
*yes, let's call it a date;*  
*she said yes when I asked her*  
*to marry me;*

that *no* is ripe  
with negative connotations,  
its signs of *no right turn on*  
*red; no exit;*  
*no, I'm already going to the*  
*prom* which you never  
forgot.

No one gives any credence  
to the *or*,  
though it's simmering  
on the stove of  
possibilities,

the middle door you  
take when making a *deal*,

supposedly vacant of  
worth,  
but flexible *enough*  
you're never trapped.

*Or* ascends  
the current of the  
late-day breeze,  
coming from the west  
and then the east,

the north when it is  
humid, the south  
with its winter respite  
from the ice,  
thawing  
your dithered brain  
like a Bunsen burner.

I learned  
from *Conjunction*  
*Junction*  
(*what's your function?*),  
an earworm from '73,

despite my knowing  
a schoolhouse  
never rocks,

unless it's filled with  
stones  
from the Moon  
or Mars,

that if given the freedom of  
choice I'd take the Moon,  
looking down on Earth  
while all the people made  
decisions—

who is saved  
and who is not,

who is *loved*  
and who is not,

that when it comes  
to *war and peace*,

we inserted the wrong  
connector;

that *or*  
would have laid the  
cards out on the table:

a Queen of hearts;  
a King of clubs;

and a Joker always laughing  
while you sweat.

## The Mona Fucking Lisa

After a single session,  
I already regret my *sign-up*  
for this ekphrastic poetry  
course, cursing to you  
the assignment I was given:

*Mona Lisa, the fucking Mona  
Lisa, like that hasn't been done  
a gazillion times*

and yes, I won't be able to fake it,  
that everyone and their mailman  
knows her visage,  
are well-versed in da Vinci's flair,  
and their lofty expectations  
will be something I can't deliver.

You ask me what our poet friend  
was given, the one who always gets  
the lucky breaks, and I tell you the  
*Voice of Fire*,  
three lines of blue-red-blue,  
vertically trite and prosaic,  
that no one's ever heard of Barnett  
Newman because he sucks,

that I could have scrawled a sonnet  
on my kindergarten days,  
on a pair of simple colours,



how the Gallery  
had been fleeced in '89,  
caught up in the avant-garde,  
how 1.8 million  
could have gone to help the homeless,  
paid for their chalets  
and pedicures, covered  
the cost and tip  
for their tortellini  
Bolognese;

but as it is,  
I have to *sleuth* my way  
behind that Delphic smile,  
invent a tale of Giocondo,  
that Leonardo  
tried to paint her  
minus mirth and maturation,  
in 1499,  
when his subject began to sob  
from pent-up grief, reliving the death  
of her baby daughter,

his *Moaning Lisa* a work of art  
the Renaissance ignored  
(bathing in their beam  
of erudition), that even Machiavelli  
said *chin up, she needs a grin*;

that when the *time*  
arrived to try it all again,  
da Vinci made a jest,  
a side-splitter, that Lisa barely  
smirked at his ill-timed droll,

that he hadn't a clue  
how it felt to love and lose,  
consumed as he was with  
innovation, invention,  
his maps and magnum opus,

failing to heed  
the red of blood and life,  
her blue, blue mood.

## **"me too"**

When I tell you *I love you*  
you answer "me too"

and perhaps I misconstrue,  
that you love *yourself*  
like the affirmations  
advise,

the ones we see on Instagram,  
that Rupī Kaur is full of them,  
churning them out like some poet  
in a fast-food window,

where you pick up a side of  
"you're better off without him"  
plus some platitude on the rain  
to wash it down;

or maybe "me too" is a memory,  
in the (not so) recent past:

an abusive ex, a diddling dad,  
the gymnastics coach who always  
held you snug, checked out your  
*ass* instead of your landing,  
after vaulting and parallel bars;

but then I've always read too  
*much* into your words,  
thinking there's some *story*  
below the surface,

a recollection  
that encircles like a shark,  
that you're afloat  
in a punctured dinghy  
awaiting rescue,

by an aqua knight who rides  
the seven seas, one who sees  
a kraken where there's not,

thinks "right back at you,"  
"ditto kiddo"

is the beast from a thousand  
fathoms he's come hastily  
to slay.

## Chatting with Death over Chai

I met Death  
for tea today,  
surprised by its  
invitation,

sent  
nonchalantly  
like a post  
from a Facebook friend.

It asked  
how I was doing,  
why I hadn't  
cared to call,  
or write,  
or even think  
of its existence  
in the days and weeks  
gone past.

I said  
I'd been  
too busy,  
that Life  
snatched all my time  
(being the  
possessive sort  
that it is),

telling me to hurry,  
to walk a little faster,

put my heart  
out on the line.

I confessed to Death  
that it nagged me,  
*Life* that is,

like a spouse  
that cracks a whip,  
grinds me to the stone,  
imploing me to reach  
for unseen heights,

failing to configure  
that from there  
I tend to fall,  
*bruise* and break  
on the ground,

that it seems  
to disappear  
in the aftermath  
of plunging,  
returning to rasp  
sweet nothings  
in the time  
I start to heal.

Life  
was once its friend,  
I hear from this jaded  
soul,

extra cream and sugar  
in its ever-steaming cup,

stinging  
from a throbbing hurt  
I didn't know  
it had,

treated oh so frosty –

like a neighbour  
that we see  
but never wave  
or smile at,

one  
we've heard  
bad things about,

lamenting  
its ostracism,

our blatant *hatred*  
of its name,

our avoidance  
at every cost,

our refusal  
to look it in the eye,

to hear *its* side  
of the story,

its claim it isn't  
so bad,

it's been  
misunderstood,

that it's here to shield  
and shroud us  
from the wounds  
that *Life*  
inflicts,

that breath  
is the ultimate villain,  
a hero  
of sham and spell,

Life's  
night of sleep—  
a *lie*,  
our pillows but a tease,



that only *it*,  
our scarlet-lettered  
Death,  
cold-shouldered to the bone,  
gives rest  
that won't be ruptured,  
time without a tick,

that its bond with Life  
was severed  
by assumptions  
that weren't true,

that Death  
was the cause of sorrow,  
we should flee it  
whenever we can,

and our lack  
of understanding  
that it keeps us sealed  
as seed,

buried,

safely *tucked*  
from the gales  
of living,

that it's calm  
and far more patient  
than this Life can ever be,

will wait for the ripest  
moment,  
a burst of solar swell,

before releasing us  
from its care,

to grasp at second birth  
and hope what blossoms  
will be kinder.

## John Tyndall

### Climb

Rising from dark  
basement to light-  
bathed doorway  
I think of Jacob's  
Ladder from the earth  
up to the heavens  
yet there are no angels here  
to guard me from a topple  
not illusory like a Jacob's  
toy but a deadly imbalance  
a fall without grace  
so I focus on each  
grip, every step  
and suddenly my body

feels young and free  
again I am back climbing  
my favourite apple tree  
at my grandparents' house  
the same effortless moves  
every ascent into its limbs  
with their mottled shade  
their fragrant flowers or  
their ripening fruit  
and although no-one else  
is ever in my tree

I always hope for someone  
who can climb  
higher

## **For a Little While**

*for David*

Will you lie with me  
for a little while  
I am tired of lone-  
liness and no touch  
upon my skin, my  
heart wants to beat  
in tandem with you  
before my fingertips  
fail to feel at all  
before my voice falls  
silent from grief

Will you lie with me  
for a little while  
and keep our care  
secret as I fear  
we will hear complaints  
against honeying  
and making love  
too soon, too soon

Will you lie with me  
for a little while  
we two greybeards  
who mindful wear  
the motley

hear a nearby toll  
and know our lives  
may end so soon

## **Burnished Lining**

*for Diane*

Oh, her mother meant well  
for this only daughter  
starting at eighteen months  
and years thereafter  
a coiffure of curls  
from home permanents  
laced with ammonia  
searing like a lava flow  
and even when the girl  
called a halt, the damage  
remained irreversible  
as her scalp erupted  
in psoriasis, the epidermal  
slough accelerated  
to maddening itch  
like mosquito bites  
on a summer sunburn

First, doctors painted her  
with gentian violet  
so school kids teased  
*Flying purple people eater*  
and then, for all her days  
they have prescribed  
hydrocortisone cream

suggested tanning lights  
for her Celtic-white skin

The affliction ran deep  
into her body, her joints  
swollen with psoriatic arthritis  
and doctors recommended  
anti-inflammatory diclofenac  
which relieved her pain  
while, a hell for a chef's  
offspring, it slowly stole  
the senses smell and taste  
or so she thought for decades

How much more torment  
can one endure in a single life  
you may ask and she herself  
will describe the tremors  
the slowness she now faces  
on the dexterous side  
of her body thanks to  
James Parkinson's disease  
the shaking, shaking palsy  
requires yet another drug



and in levodopa there is relief  
almost a wide awakening  
under cumulo-nimbus clouds  
her smell and taste returning  
as a burnished silver lining

## Sylvia Bosgra

### Euphoria

Looking hard for clarity, our lungs  
Distill this crisp mountain air, climbing  
Up to some alpine tarn, meditating, finding  
The quiet source of a great river.

Lacking enough oxygen can be  
An exultant kind of high.

Panning ways beneath us: dry prairie grasses  
Holding on to thin soil resemble coarse scouring  
Brushes in an open kitchen-clean  
Expanse of sky:

The sweeping scope of it all, taking  
One's breath away.

Here are no roads, less plough  
Ruts, the scrubbed lands pointing  
A route towards a fine  
River highway.

Mirror minds reflect a sun-bleached  
Empty, fill us with distances.

## **What's in my Jam?**

There's so much bottled up in the pantry  
that never makes it down to the table:

Juicy fruit, berries and pomes, crushed  
in the making of syrups and jellies,  
still smarting from their bruises . . .

Jams made from pears the orchard orioles  
had pecked, the wormy ones, yesterday's  
grounders. For certain, some of those  
got chucked out with the worms.

We boiled the rest. The paring and cutting  
never caused the fruit to smart: rather

The fall, the risks we did not take, not standing  
on the highest rungs of rickety ladders, not reaching  
for the tallest branches . . .

Sweetness never found its way  
into our careful preparations—  
Sunday's sticky discourse did—  
this caused the fruit to sour.

There's so much bottled up.

## Separation and Departure

Yellow leaves in her fingers  
She holds her arms like paper  
Birches

*Could I build a canoe?* she asks  
The river's lapping at the bark

Remember the fleeting sun  
Warm, and then absent  
How words fall

Like yellow leaves from her paper  
Fingers

Absences of her oaken family  
Dendritic connections  
The family crest: canopy

Roots and branches  
Of the family tree

She'll search for friends who are absent  
On city streets strewn with branches

Words fall like yellow leaves  
The sentences do not come

*Could I build a canoe?* she asks  
The river's lapping at the bark

## **Jenny Sorensen**

### **The Form of Snow**

The pale snow rests in the roadside ditch.  
Huddled, comforted,  
as if cradled by these arms of earth,  
holding such an icy child to her breast.

You see this bone white snow  
cracked and pockmarked,  
wind-whipped into its ragged form,  
held there like a miniature mountain,  
with its peaks and dirt.  
The snow has become hard:  
too much cold, too much sun, too much change.

Perhaps you shudder when you see it,  
you can feel its icy glint, the burning cold.  
Perhaps you turn your head in aversion,  
you see no comfort in those sharp lips,  
the frozen bosom.

I hold this crusted drift of snow like protection.  
Its sworded edge, its stiffened form  
tents me.  
It shelters me from the cutting wind,  
from too much sun;  
it slows down change.  
My thirst held still in its cold cup.

This snow once fell from the sky like soft confetti  
and I said "Yes."

I hold it to me, the frozen firmness of it all.

The years of accumulation.

The memory of sky in its hint of blue,  
in the weight of its white.

Time lies still in this frozen cup.

When it melts,

this snow melts into me.

The peaks, the dirt, the weight, the memory,  
they melt into me

and become the part of me from which flowers grow.

## **Teresa Daniele**

### **Déjà rêvé**

Wouldn't you rather be full instead of empty?  
and finally turned loose from the narrow lanes  
of misguided urban planning designs  
that wrongly traded a verdant crown of foliage  
for a sideways abyss,  
always destined for hungriness

Because here is the exact place  
that I remember from my dream,  
an unmistakable landmark  
pressing up against my sleep  
tangibly recreated with clapboard siding  
and corrugated metal  
that I recognize implicitly,  
and where I know I've already been

It's somewhere imaginary  
like a faded picture folded in half  
a distant scene or an August sunset  
cutting holes in the shadows  
with the retired light of day  
playfully within the hopscotch lines  
that form the borders of my expansive neighbourhood  
a territory so vast  
and imperceptibly unreachable  
now through closed doors

but so intimately and uniquely familiar  
as to have once been called my home  
over the nightly newscasts droning in tandem  
with the living room fan  
inside a one-bedroom apartment,  
listless with expired air  
and the faint sounds on the tube  
as the dial finds a US Open men's tennis match  
in-progress  
that stretches deep into the deciding, fifth set



## Patrick Connors

### Advent

My three-legged slow-footed exit from work  
not having made a single dollar that day  
despite thirty minutes overtime.

Three elevators are packed with strangers I  
see every day, their public faces under dull eyes  
on the brink of feeling, I get on the fourth elevator.

The bus seats are dotted with those wearing masks.  
Those not wearing masks bear oversized bags filled  
with holiday gifts and what might be pride or despair.

Darkness has fallen on the city.  
The flickering lights and honking horns  
of frozen traffic create a cacophonous nightmare.

On Saturday morning I wake up  
glad I don't have to go to work  
until I remember I have to go shopping.

To try and tell the people I love  
                  how much I love them  
even though I have no idea what to buy.

But at least I have people to love  
enough to go to a crowded mall on my day off.  
With a sigh of resignation, I get out of bed.

I open the blinds and look out the window  
see the squirrels climb the leafless trees  
and somehow know something great is coming.

## Roméo Desmarais III

### Middle School Synchronicity

Stuck at that stage between “kid” and “teen”, we play tag where “you’re it!” means you’re *hit* by an overhand hurl of a rubber ball, which

quickly gets confiscated by the strictest of all teachers, forcing us to await our bus with only boredom to bounce around.

As we hang at the chain-linked fence,  
serving our sentence in our schoolyard cage,  
we watch the witch walk to her car...

*I hope she falls off a building!!  
She’s so mean, I wish she’d die!!!*

(Idle threats from  
idle minds.)

The next morning, our classroom filled with tissues and tears, we are told that  
her car collided with a concrete truck,  
killing her instantly.

With soft eyes but a stern look,  
withdrawing her hand slowly from  
beneath the blackness of her habit,

our principal returns our banished ball—  
still round, but remarkably  
ingrained with dark slits—  
and we are left with the most  
difficult yet innocent  
guilt to swallow.

**the moment in  
your arms**

it is wondering what your parents think  
it's part of me held in an art gallery  
the drag queen prose I've read  
in a redneck bar

quick quiet moans  
*wha* you ask me  
*oh nothing* I say  
*just moaning*

it is pleasure leaking from my throat  
it's the climax after the climax when  
we cuddle so closely we can  
barely see each other

blank thoughts filled with  
the feel of  
you sleep nearing  
mind reeling

the kiss on my head brings me  
back I nuzzle in your  
armpit breathing deeply  
fully relaxed

it is the poetry between you and me  
it's my arm falling asleep  
so I apologize for getting up    but I  
     must go write us down

**Miracle On  
Huron Church Road**

He ascends swiftly into smoggy air from  
the roaring pride of passing trucks  
a parabolic rag doll in an arc so  
perfect so high I would  
not have believed

I rush to where He landed  
notice the purple sweater of our school uniform  
His body convulsing violently  
the foam bubbling  
out from  
His Mouth

I remove *my* purple cardigan  
and cover Him  
solemnly

On The Third Day  
later, *I am in shock for*

*I see Him  
walking down the hall  
like all is normal.*

## **Lynn Tait**

### **from Friends III—Laura**

Could we measure our friendship in dog years,  
your poodles and boxers to my golden,  
my plethora of cats?

Now it's your sheltie circling, corralling us  
into a heart-fence, leaving the gate open.  
Our love is crisp as frost,  
quiet as a blanket on a chair.  
We meld together—Cuba libre and chardonnay,  
hot peppered Havarti, bean salad and gummy bears.

Could we measure it in miles?  
On the backs of Harley and Honda,  
able to roar louder than the metal underneath us,  
we are lions overseeing landscapes; our country roads  
lead  
to cottage, motel, plastic chairs and Bud Lites.  
You have gone the extra mile for me.

When you ask how I'm doing I unravel,  
sing you songs to the beat of a tarnished tambourine,  
refrains that repeat, end in long crescendos.

When I ask you the same, it's work  
trying to chip off your thoughts with a chisel,  
you make me dig deep to find the bones you've buried.



## **Murmurations of Sandy, Shakespeare and Starlings**

*in memory of my son 1983 – 2012, fentanyl overdose*

When Sandy hit landfall  
she moved across the continent,  
towards the Great Lakes  
ignoring all rules of climate control.

Hazel, the last windbag to grace Ontario shores,  
claimed territory far beyond  
what was proper for any lady.  
That was before I was born.

But Sandy stormed through  
like a lady of the night gone wild.  
By the time she hit Sarnia,  
her noise and bluster became the backdrop  
for impromptu midnight madness.

Shakespeare at his best—  
tragedy, irony, comedic repartee:  
You call to inquire—  
*Pumpkin seeds, to roast or not to roast;*  
later—unanswered phone messages,  
text failing to reach the intended party.

The side plot—concern  
and worry for your father, the king.

*All was well, and ended well* for that red herring.

By Act III—tempest subsides,  
the shrew tamed. Starlings gather,  
perform their hurricane dance—  
settle on our lawn.

Last scene—the call arrives.  
I mistake you for the messenger  
until I hear without allegory,  
a woeful dialogue announce your demise,  
my beautiful Falstaff.

## Susan Wismer

### Oranges

Sky only blue and the light-fingered trees.  
Summer turns naked, autumn strips away green.

Outside the cabin, goldenrod's bristled fur falls.  
The tea pot is empty; the cracked cup will wait.

On the path oak leaves are silver-cloaked—hoarfrost.  
Stars grounded to glisten in morning's slow melt.

Pileated. The woodpecker's mad laugh wakes us.  
Another old friend can't remember my name.

Our ancestors yearned after oranges.  
Something to hope for, to imagine, to taste.

No light in here now but the woodfire's flame.  
Maybe that's why night has come.

## **My Body as Art**

I learn to love angles, sharp elbows.  
Straighter lines come with age. Crescent moon  
crook of the second finger, both hands.

I pay attention to spiders. A funnelweaver  
crawls on pale vellum, thinned skin. Black and gold  
legs crossing my arm. Afternoon in the garden.

Tendons, ligaments, veins are blue tattoos rising.  
Alive in my own slow dissolving, blurred lines  
through my eveningtime eyes.

My body becomes a starker art.  
Its dances a slow devoted descent  
toward Earth.

## Frances Boyle

### Kicker

There is always the sound of footfalls

echoing down long corridors, the tick  
of high heels, the gleam of black  
polished oxfords. Stoop  
to retie laces, knee hoisted to park bench  
pant hem lifting to reveal sock not ankle.

Scuffed sneakers comical  
or pathetic. Soccer goals. Leather soles  
worn through, the simmered brogue  
in Chaplin's soup. A single pump  
lost, its mate dangled insouciant  
from a finger  
above ambling barefoot  
pavement. The toes of boots  
applying pressure  
to fingers  
that grip stone ledges

Back in the corridor,  
the shadowy peril, the empty  
classroom footfalls come closer.

## Nautilus

A shell whispers silences, sometimes  
secret, sometimes just the hush  
as sleep approaches. A name  
I might spell out in small stones  
before current's roar and rush overtakes,  
rakes memory away. A grove at night  
awash with shadows, amnesia  
glittering, intermittent like fireflies  
among the trees. Over the lawn,  
their signals call you to a cut-out  
shape that looks like home,  
that might have been a place  
to return to in dusky time, never  
in daylight.

## **Kemeny Babineau**

### **That War**

i

This war has been sent  
This war is expecting  
This war said so  
This war has the scoop  
This war is filling in the details  
This war will be like that  
This war is running  
This war opened up about itself  
This war isn't telling the truth  
This war has an agenda  
This war is shirtless  
This war is in error code  
This war is full  
This war started it  
This war is amortized  
This war is about face  
This war is for sale  
This war does not return email

ii

This war is on a mission  
This war is not over  
This war will kill a million  
This war is going on

This war tanked  
This war is black and white and red all over  
This war is nyet  
This war is post-Putinesque  
This war is neither East nor West  
This war remains  
This war drones on and on  
This war is waterborne  
This war is big business  
This war is a total loss  
This war isn't horsing around  
This war lacks consent  
This war commits marital abuse  
This war sends you its love

iii

This war came out of the trees  
Out of the muck and flood  
Out of a metallic sky exploding  
Oh how I miss the cold war Darling  
Its cool brow and moue of regret  
Instead of this darkened clud of dread  
Where 2 countries fight each to their knees  
Drag the others in, brawl in raw shit this war



### **The Real Poem to Wllm. Berczy**

(after John Steffler)

The real poem to William Berczay  
Will dissolve and reform as a man of action  
At the head of the trail, blazing

The true poem to William Berczy  
Shall be thrice denied  
And nailed to the canon's door

The actual poem to Berczy  
May petition the Queen at 3.6 miles per day  
Through a blizzard's white rage

The cultivated poem to Berksay  
Will be wanting seed grain, potato eyes  
And hands aplenty to scatter its words

The visual pome to Wllm. Berczy  
Will require four hundred cubits of lumber  
To bridge the Don River at dawn

The accomplished poem to Berczy  
Will paint itself into a corner  
At the precise moment of completion

## **Alizon Sharun**

### **Columbine**

When fires have burned out,  
waters flowed back  
to where ice froze,  
wars parched into pity,  
wisdom will creep back  
in the lithe bright blood red flowers,  
springing up through our dead forest floor.

The tumid beach will again  
bear memories of our feet over worn stone.  
Grandmother wood will warm us in new fire.  
The triune leaves of Columbine  
teem with tiny creatures  
and the snakes and creeping things  
will shelter in peace, shaded in sepia,  
where the red flowers almost sing.

## Pujita Verma

### One Point of Contact

as we doze off, please,  
just one palm  
softly on this shoulder, an arm  
around your waist, or a toe  
traversing the flat sheet's  
sweeping meanders to meet mine,  
mend spaces with one string  
tied to your finger  
for when you crash on the couch,  
let me be the memory foam  
for all your landings,  
tell me which one god  
forms the worship  
of your midnight  
mumbles, I will rehearse  
that prayer until every one-  
rous day paves a road  
back to you,  
we don't have to hang  
up the call now, just one more  
minute until we fall  
asleep.

## How to Forget Someone

apologize  
block them, no  
call. wait for the  
dial tones and say  
everything you wish you could  
forget about them  
ghost their hovering memory  
how they touched you  
in the absence of daylight,  
just enough to  
keep you tethered  
lie; it meant nothing to you  
make a big deal of  
numerical anomalies  
on the birthday of someone you used to love  
photographs will make you  
question your  
recollection  
suspend the disbelief in  
therapy, think about when they've let you down  
undress for the closest star  
vivid hope of extraterrestrial existence  
when people ask, shrug. say.... we don't talk anymore  
xerox the DMs before you delete them  
years and years will pass  
zone out when they cross your mind

## Kathryn MacDonald

### Lapedo Child

I sit below deck on a small boat as if in a cave and read about the child's body found in a rock shelter in Portugal's Lapedo Valley, the place of Ice Age rock paintings created 23,170 to 20,220 years ago. The boy was very young—three-and-a-half to five years. When his bones were unearthed, it was noticed that his thick lower limbs resembled those of Neanderthal. Modern humans and *homo neanderthalensis* had not coexisted for 3,000 years, but traits had travelled across generations.

I live with the boy for many days  
snug below deck on a small boat

muse why the boy rests on rabbit skin  
over a burned branch of Scots Pine  
a rabbit carcass across his *robust legs*  
six red-ocher-stained amulets  
four red deer canines in a headdress  
two periwinkle shells

like a rosary  
polished by prayerful fingers

his skeleton carries traces of a *ghost species*  
lies undisturbed since the last ice age  
in silence in the green Lapedo Valley

this *morphological mosaic*  
a child once cradled in a mother's arms  
once laid with care in a shallow grave.

I lie stretched head to toe on my bed  
in the bow of the boat  
pale dawn drifts down through the open hatch  
lie haunted by the excavation while the boy  
floats away with the night.

## Love Your Hat

The joyful man who danced  
along the sidewalk in outrageous  
get-ups—singing greetings  
each time we passed, a songbird—  
now curls close to the brick wall  
of one of the narrow carriageways  
running between street and river,  
curls deep within layers of clothing  
layers of small blankets, all thin.  
Upon his head a summer remnant—  
a red kerchief tied pirate-wise.  
He looks up as I hurry home,  
night falling fast near the solstice.

This morning I grind coffee beans,  
put Coltrane on the cd player,  
pull a flouncy tropical plant from  
the cold windowpane, and gaze  
at snow swathing downtown's  
grime and grey. It falls sideways  
in the wind, falls heavy, dense,  
ghosts streets, covers pigeon shit,  
whatever vomit accumulated overnight.  
I wonder about the man in the carriageway.

All summer when we met  
he greeted me with buoyant  
voice—*love your hat*—  
always with a smile before  
prancing off as if the world  
was theatre and we players.



## **Dan Oudshoorn**

### **Deshkan Ziiibiing**

The river flows  
Not as it has always flowed but still  
It flows  
Brown and frothing  
Tumbling falls

In 1824 Europeans describe immense sturgeons  
Seven feet long  
One hundred and fifty pounds  
Here in this river  
In 1821 another European  
Described the river as  
Delightfully transparent

Today the settlers  
Whose houses line the banks  
Describe the river as peaceful  
Oh, so peaceful  
But me, I remember  
May 24, 1881  
The steamboat SS Victoria  
Her boiler torn loose  
Scalding some to death  
Crushing others on the way down  
The upper deck collapsing  
Onto the people below

Holding them underwater  
As the ship promptly sank  
And this peaceful river  
Oh so peacefully claimed  
One hundred and eighty-two settler lives  
On the birthday of their Queen

The river flows  
Not as it has always flowed  
Emptied of sturgeons  
Filled with sewage  
And pesticides from local farmlands  
Fields that once were forests  
Around this, the Forest City  
Brown and frothing  
Tumbling falls  
It bides its time  
And waits

## **I Sort Birds**

I sort birds by those I can eat in one bite  
And those whom I cannot  
On one side, chickadees, hummingbirds, and  
treecreepers  
On the other, pelicans, condors, and albatrosses  
I sort mountains by those that are small at a distance  
And those that are large close up  
On one side, Everest from far away  
On the other, Everest close up  
I sort things by those that I understand  
And those that I do not  
On one side, loneliness  
On the other, everything else

## CONTRIBUTORS

**Kemeny Babineau** lives in Stratford. Some previous publications include *After the Six O'Clock News*, *The Black Burn Files*, *Nurse Sing Home* and *House of Many Words*.

**Sylvia Bosgra** resides in St. Marys, Ontario and is a member of the St. Marys Poetry Circle. She has participated in open mics at Brch & Wyn, Stratford, and in several 'Circle' projects including collaborations with the St. Marys Station Gallery. Her poetry is represented in the Station Gallery's exhibition catalogues *Stone* and *The Minimalist Eye*. Sylvia is a graduate of York University, Fine Arts, and of George Brown College, Commercial Art. She is retired from working many years as a textile designer in Toronto.

**Frances Boyle** (she/her) lives in Ottawa. Her most recent book is *Openwork and Limestone* (Frontenac House 2022). In addition to two earlier books of poetry, she is also the author of *Seeking Shade*, an award-winning short story collection (The Porcupine's Quill, 2020) and *Tower*, a novella (Fish Gotta Swim Editions, 2018). Frances's writing has been selected for the *Best Canadian Poetry* series and for Poem in Your Pocket Day. Recent and forthcoming publications include *TAB Journal*, *The New Quarterly*, *Pinhole Poetry* and *Bywords.ca*. Visit [francesboyle.com](http://francesboyle.com) and follow @francesboyle19 on Twitter and Instagram.

**April Bulmer's** newest book is called *Feats of Weakness*. It is available at [amazon.ca](http://amazon.ca) and at [aprilbulmer.com](http://aprilbulmer.com) in both print and audio form. This collection of short prose explores illness in spiritual and religious contexts. It was a finalist in the Global Book Awards and in the Next Generation Indie Book Awards. April lives in Cambridge, Ontario where she won the Women of Distinction Award from the YWCA.

**Carol Casey** lives in Blyth, Ontario, Canada. Her work has been twice nominated for the Pushcart Prize and has appeared in *The Anti-Langourous Project*, *Please See Me*, *Front Porch Review*, *Cypress*, *Vita Brevis*, *Blue Unicorn*, *InScribe Journal* and others, including a number of anthologies, most recently *Byline Legacies* (Cardigan Press), *Oxygen: Parables of the Pandemic* (River Paw Press) and *All Shall be Well: Poems for Julian of Norwich* (Amethyst Press).

**Carrie Lee Connel**, MLIS, is a fiction writer and poet living in London, Ontario, with her husband, poet and publisher Andreas Gripp. She has published three books of poetry: *A Day in Pieces*, *Persona Grata*, and *Written In Situ* (all with Harmonia Press). Sixteen of her short stories have been collected in *The Bogified Manuscript: Weird and Ghostly Stories*, available from Beliveau Books. Carrie's poems have been included in the anthologies *Another London*, *Piping at the End of Days*, *Moon Shine*, and *Smitten: This is What Love Looks Like*. She was nominated for the Pushcart Prize in 2018 and 2020.

**Patrick Connors** first chapbook, *Scarborough Songs*, was released by Lyricalmyrical Press in 2013, and charted on the Toronto Poetry Map. Other publication credits include: *The Toronto Quarterly*, *Spadina Literary Review*, *Sharing Spaces*, *Tamaracks*, and *Tending the Fire*. His first full collection, *The Other Life*, was released in 2021 by Mosaic Press. His new chapbook, *Worth the Wait*, was released this past Spring by Cactus Press.

London, Ontario resident, **Teresa Daniele**, is the author of a short collection of philosophical essays, weaving together observations from her personal experience while examining the catastrophic costs emerging from the Anthropocene age. Printed in 2022, *The Arc of the Infinite Line* is Teresa's first published work.

**Roméo Desmarais III** aKa RoMeO-HoMeO ô£ tHę MâRtiÃÑS >{:} (t/he/y t/he/m) is a Queer, *Muskrat Métis du Grand Lac Ste-Claire* poet, artist, and singer-songwriter with 27 poems appearing on *Brickyard Spoken Word* (YouTube), in *Synkroniciti*, *Pink Disco*, and *Eavesdrop* magazines, and many more. Their folk song, "John McCauldron", about an unsheltered man, garnered attention from CBC-Radio. Roméo has also produced two multimedia textual art exhibits and holds degrees in both Sociology & Music Therapy.

**Mary Anne Griffiths** lives, gardens, and writes furtively in Ingersoll. Recently she has started to submit work again after a long period of indentured labour to a career in laboratory technology and a physician's assistant. She enjoys everything except foie gras.

**Andreas Gripp** is the author of numerous books of poetry, including his newest offerings, *Urban Burlesque* and *You're Dead After School*, both available from Beliveau Books. Presently, he is the director of the Black Mallard Poetry Series in London, Ontario, where he lives with his wife, Carrie. [andreasgripp.wixsite.com/andreasgripp](http://andreasgripp.wixsite.com/andreasgripp)

**Penn Kemp** has participated in Canadian cultural life for over 50 years, writing, editing, and publishing poetry and plays. She has published 30 books of poetry, prose and drama and 10 CDs of her Sound Operas along with several DVDs. Kemp was London's inaugural Poet Laureate from 2010-2012. Penn's new collection, *INCREMENTALLY*, is up as an e-book and album on [hempressbooks.com/authors/penn-kemp](http://hempressbooks.com/authors/penn-kemp) See also [pennkemp.wordpress.com](http://pennkemp.wordpress.com) and [pennkemp.weebly.com](http://pennkemp.weebly.com)

**John B. Lee** is a Poet Laureate of the city of Brantford, Norfolk County, and Canada Cuba Literary Alliance. The author of nearly one hundred published books, his most recent, *A School Called Normal*, was published by Mosaic Press in 2023. He lives with wife Cathy in a lake house overlooking Long Point Bay on the south coast of Lake Erie in the town of Port Dover where he is a full time author.

**Kathryn MacDonald** has published in literary journals in Canada, the U.S., Ireland, and England, as well as in anthologies. Her poem “Duty / Deon” won Arc Award of Awesomeness (January 2021). “Seduction” was entered in the Freefall Annual Poetry Contest and was published in *Freefall* (Fall 2020). She is the author of *A Breeze You Whisper: Poems* and *Calla & Édourd* (fiction). For more detail, please see the “Poetry” category on her website, [kathrynmacdonald.com](http://kathrynmacdonald.com)

**Mike Madill** has had poems appear in numerous literary magazines across Canada, including *The Antigonish Review*, *The Dalhousie Review*, *Devour*, *Event*, *Existere*, *The Nashwaak Review*, *Untethered*, *Vallum*, *White Wall Review*, *The Fiddlehead*, *Freefall*, *The New Quarterly*, and *The Windsor Review*. After his debut full-length manuscript was one of four winners in the inaugural 2021 Don Gutteridge Poetry Award Contest, he was awarded publication of his first poetry collection, *The Better Part of Some Time* (Wet Ink Books, May, 2022). When not writing, Mike pursues freelance editing, and has also taken turns as a social worker, computer analyst, and home contractor. He holds a B.A. in Psychology from York University.

A graduate of Queen's University Artist In The Community Education Program, **Rhonda Melanson** has been published in several print and online magazines. She is the author of two chapbooks: *Gracenotes* (Beret Days Press) and *My Name is Mary* (Alien Buddha Press). She also co-edits a literary blog, *Uproar*.

A formerly homeless youth and long-term frontline worker, **Dan Oudshoorn** writes from a lifetime spent pursuing mutually liberating solidarity with others who have been impoverished, oppressed, and left for dead. He has an M.A. from the University of British Columbia and is the author of four books including a work of autotheory entitled *A Magnificent Work*. Dan lives with his two children at the forks of the Deshkan Zibiing.

An Imagist, **R L Raymond** tells stories through fiction, poetry, and photography. He earned his Master of Arts in English Literature from the University of Western Ontario and has been published around the world in journals and hallways, on a bus and a few postcards. His work has appeared in journals throughout North America and Europe, including *Envoi*, *Grain*, *Carousel*, *Existere*, and *Descant*. Please visit [rlraymond.com](http://rlraymond.com) for more information.

**Michael Russell** (he/they) is coauthor of the chapbook *Split Jawed* with Elena Bentley (forthcoming from Collusion Books) and mother monster to chapbook *Grindr Opera* (Frog Hollow Press). They are queer, mad, and overflowing with anxiety. Currently, he has a craving for chocolate chip pancakes with bananas and thinks you're fantabulous. Insta: [@michael.russell.poet](https://www.instagram.com/michael.russell.poet)



**Renée M. Sgroi** is the author of *life print, in points* (erbacce-press, 2020), and her second poetry collection is due out in 2024 with Guernica Editions. Her poetry has been published in *Pinhole Poetry*, *The Windsor Review*, *The /tEmz/ Review*, *Poetry Pause* and numerous anthologies. A member of The Writers Union of Canada, the League of Canadian Poets, and the Canadian Authors Association, she is also a contributing editor for *Arc Poetry Magazine*. [reneemsgroi.com](http://reneemsgroi.com)

**Alizon Sharun** is a practicing poet who has worked in theatre, television and film as a stage manager, costume designer and scenic artist. Since 2019, she has presided over The St.Marys Poetry Circle.

**Richard-Yves Sitoski** is a songwriter, performance poet, and the 2019-2023 Poet Laureate of Owen Sound, Ontario. He is also the Artistic Director of the Words Aloud festival. He regularly collaborates with Grey Bruce Pride, SHEATRE and the M'Wikwedong Indigenous Friendship Centre. His most recent project is the semi-autobiographical stage show and accompanying book, *Butterfly Tongue*. He was the 2nd place winner of the 2022 Don Gutteridge Award for his full-length manuscript *Wait, What?*, which is out with Wet Ink Books. His newest collection, *A Current Through the Flesh*, is forthcoming with Mansfield Press. He won the 2021 John Newlove award for his poem "Air Kiss", and the resulting chapbook, *How to Be Human*, is out with Bywords.ca. In 2022 with Penn Kemp he co-edited *Poems in Response to Peril*, an anthology of poems in support of Ukraine. His poems have appeared, or are forthcoming, in many journals, including *The Fiddlehead*, *Arc*, *CAROUSEL*, *Prairie Fire*, *QWERTY*, *The Windsor Review*, *The Maynard*, *Barren Magazine*, *Bywords.ca*, in the League of Canadian Poets' *Poetry Pause*, and as part of Brick Books' Brickyard spoken word video series.

**Jenny Sorensen** was born and raised in Bramalea, Ontario and now lives in Guelph. She started writing poetry at the age of eight and it has been her compass and her guru ever since. She's been a member of the Brooklin Poetry Society, The Niagara Poetry Guild, and Tower Poetry Society. Jenny also started a writing club in St. Catharines, Writers Next Door. She has performed readings in numerous venues with the Wild Nellies in the Durham region, and in Guelph.

**David Stones** is an award-winning poet and performer with some 400 poems in print in Canada and internationally. His one-man show, *Infinite Sequels*, based on his inaugural collection of poetry, continues to charm audiences at festivals, theatres, and poetry events throughout Ontario ("brilliant and beautiful theatre"—London Free Press). His celebrated second collection, *sfumato*, has been a best seller in Canadian poetry and has led to a song series based on his poetic works. Show credits featuring David's performance poetry include *Expressions Of Love*, *Infinite Sequels*, and *WordSong*. David's newest collection, *Essays Of Light*, hits book stores in 2024. David lives in Stratford, Ontario, and is a proud member of the League of Canadian Poets, The Ontario Poetry Society, and Canadian Beat Poets. Website: [davidstonespoet.com](http://davidstonespoet.com)

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**John Tyndall**, first-place winner of the 2022 Don Gutteridge Poetry Award, lives in London, Ontario with an Angora tuxedo cat named Buddy. His latest books are *Mangoes from the Seventh Dimension* (Wet Ink Books, 2023) and *Listen to People* (Hidden Brook Press, 2020).

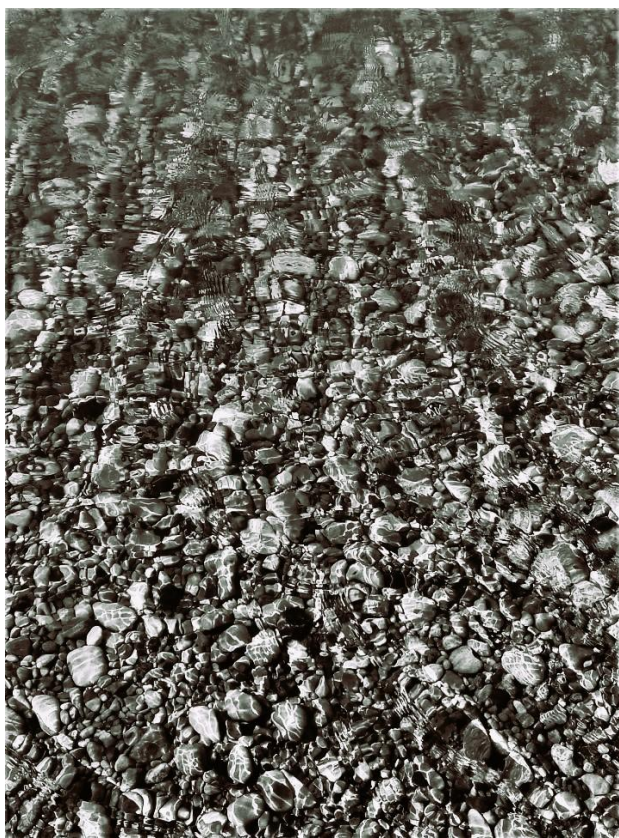
**Pujita Verma** is an Indo-Canadian poet and illustrator. She was Mississauga's Youth Poet Laureate (2018-20) and a runner-up for UofT's 2023 Janice Colbert Poetry Award.

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