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Fragile Descent

Sewit Mesfen

The withering fiddler crab barely clings
To the grayed cypress, rocking slightly
Yielding to the winds' suggestive pull.
Encouraging murmurs caress the shell
-keep crawling

But body turns to ash
Falls amongst the jumping fish
Letting sit, for spite of the alligators
Who once again
Will not get to feast on its flesh

Persephone

Terry Savoie

"I meant to write about death,
only life came breaking in as usual."
Virginia Woolf

Green with budding leaves is this goddess rising
in Nature's fulsomely abundant architecture.
from slime, from mud-sludge comes

an unraveling of the swamp's fiddlehead ferns, comes
the funk and the rank earthiness
of low-lying, moisture-sopping, stench-filled skunk cabbages,

comes a pair of bombastic, scarlet male cardinals
waging mock war to woo a solitary female
in the nearby red-bud tree, the lady reigning top-

most in their minds in this singular moment of life
as they scream
bloody curses, hurling them forever *till the green/ Sky*

ceases to quiver.
This is how Persephone, princess, emerges
and rises once more. Un-

fazed, undeterred, a singular robin –
sweet ingénue that she now seems to be –
freezes *in situ* somewhere in an evergreen yew's inner-

most reaches to wait for me to sidle on by at a safer and far more respectable
distance. Not far off, perhaps less than
a half mile down the road, a couple of lusty, blustering

bantam roosters are flaunting their orange-black tail
feathers for the benefit of no spectators at all
while they throw down the gauntlet

to bet all they're worth on which one will be the best
able to crow-call
horrendously frightful and discordant sounds ever dreamt possible,

flinging heart-rending salvos
at one another in the cool spring breeze
to mark this morning's misty duel only a few feet beyond

their mail-order, prefab, chicken coop nearby –
but not beneath –
a balloon-blossoming tulip tree at the rear end of some artist's suburban

farmstead where that sweet goddess,
Persephone, rises from last autumn's leaf rot, rises
with all her ledgers filled with verdant promises for this year to come.

Plot Arc

Gram Joel Davies

I'm telling you the nonsense
of my life. Like a wish
to press an ear trumpet
to a pylon and decode
a single, simple sinewave
across 400 kilovolts.
It wouldn't be truthful
to say I have been fuzzy
or have crackled. Nothing
so sustained. A set of pops
and disparate clicks. I'm telling
you. Cabling together,
if you will, lives like Plutarch's.
My juttersteps. Start point:
no. Except here is my teenself
stepping under structures
on the mushroom wold.
Checking melodies held
in 41.1khz of Techno bits.
Up to now, I emphasized
only the exceptions
in which to exist.
Here is a split-second
when the sparrowhawk
gripped my washing line,
its grey span sizing
up the garden. Here,
under a sky arched
by vaporous exhausts,
the day when a sheep's shout
came hurtling down

the field’s length
to greet us like lost friends.

A Grasping Spiral

(English Ivy, *Hedera Helix*)

Jackie McClure

Raising lobed and waxen face
toward what filaments of sun
can slip between
a shadowy canopy
and warm the leaf and vine,
soil so far below appears irrelevant.

Grasping – when all thought
turns to spiraling –
words as unknown as tongue
or lung to voice them,
and yet, the stem
knows a way to steer the climb,
streams of beams have paved the way,
threading host bark's marbled surface.

Encircling feels like
a kind of roadway
to synthesize an ache

for the luminous,

a yearning, if one could voice it,

one might call desire.

Days in Japan

Shoshana D. Kerewsky

Dark flashes of stone and crowded wooden uprights, a dense urban cemetery seen through my northbound train's windows and those of the passing southbound train, stroboscopic flicker shows the cemetery is both fast and slow. Shinto with its bright red torii is a gateway in life; Buddhism in soft rain is for the rites of death.

Loam and petrichor,
black pine forest umami.
Fuji behind clouds.

Even the priests don't have the keys to the sanctum. Even the priests can't see the representation of the bodhisattva. I know a hillside shrine where the pure white foxes hold keys and rice sheaves in their smiling mouths. Clap for purity and joy, clap to rouse the kami, wake up!

Osaka motorway—
Øm OMG Om
Om zero meters in Øm
—wheels exit the Wheel.

This Buddha appears bored, angry, ill at ease in spite of or due to his unnatural natural surroundings. Potted bonsai line the stairs, perfect cultivation. I can climb up inside this Buddha, represent ego as heart parasite.

This Buddha is draped in red cloth, so I am draped in red cloth. This Buddha is disguised.

Carp circle above.
Wet wind, white clouds and dark clouds.
We spiral below.

Hiroshima is not kintsugi, at least on its public face. Destroyed, remade, replaced. Smoothed away, its story reported but invisible. Not repaired, not showing the signs of its wounding. Only the Atomic Bomb Dome, shored up but not reconstructed, no tracery of gold, no shimmer of silver lacquer.

Don’t stand your chopsticks up.
Eat every grain of rice
to show respect.

Melted Buddha wabi sabi. This Buddha is repaired by framing, lit up in a glass display case. This slagged statue radiates more meaning, more poignancy, for having been blitzed and survived. Its hollow interior slumps. It is not fragmented. It is still a Buddha, not blasted Buddha bits. How much destruction, how much unmaking and decay, before a Buddha is not Buddha?

I lose the white gull,
Yurikamome splashdown.
Bay dazzle. Black kites
Screech and wheel, tsunami of
Scintillating scotoma.

Whole families toss lucky coins into mossy pools, write wishes on paper leaves and wooden ornaments, the inexplicable customs of supplication and desire. Are wishing and praying the same?

Rainfall to the west.
Calm sea here. Clouds hide the land,
obscure Kochi's shore.

We did not travel to the far northern interior, or by land, or to the north at all. Our ship sped us to major ocean ports with no effort on our part, most shrines and temples pre-selected and only nominally of our choosing. We were not dressed as mendicant Buddhist monks. It was not a pilgrimage. We made of it what we could in that regard. We did not collect more than a small handful of goshuin, vermillion stamps and loose calligraphic strokes in my fresh accordion-folded notebook.

I'm not the kind of
person who—hoo, hoo-hoo, owl
behind the temple.

Spider

Cynthia Yatchman

At Culver's Drive-Thru

Lauren Scharhag

Usually, teenage fast-food workers
are not so enthusiastic
when the drive-through line
gets backed up like this,
wrapped around the building
and out onto the street,
when they find themselves
forced to play carhop.
Today, not only
are they happy to do it,
they're looking for any excuse
to deliver butter burgers
and fried cheese curds
to hungry commuters.
Later, when the rush is over,
they will hang around
outside the employee entrance,
vaping and tilting their faces
up to the sun.

My own flesh recalls
the polyester caress
of my fast-food uniform
in spring, the relief of passing
from humid kitchen air,
full of smells and grease,
into the openness

of green-blue-gold afternoons
when the cottonwood down
drifts over the hoods
of Camrys and F-150s,
riding a breeze that
disperses the many fumes
and for a moment,
we can pretend that
everything is new,
from the maple seedlings
to the earth we have
attempted to smother
beneath steel and cement
and can’t, to us.

Carapaces

Richard Collins

1
Just before our daughter moved away to grad school
She and I were outside looking at the stars and marveling
At the carapace of space.
A rustling in the bushes
Startled me. She began to laugh and laugh at me, knowing
Better than I the landscape and wildlife in these parts
And what was coming.
A convoy of armadillos
Trooped right between us as though we were invisible
(Or they were blind), waddling with supreme confidence
Each in its nine-banded carapace
and the cloak of a summer night.
Three of them: a parent, I presume, and its offspring,
To judge by the protocol they followed,
Single file by size, large to small.
What focused insouciance!
The next day we packed up and caravaned to St. Louis,
Two cars and her belongings under the orange and
Silver-gray carapace of a UHaul trailer.

2
It has been the summer of death and beauty. Old friends
Have passed away. Or, yes, as we say of our appliances,
They died, malfunctioned, ran out of gas, went … offline.
The machine that hosted the ghost: kaput.
Unlike our automobiles, cell phones and computers, never to be
Restored, recharged, or reformatted. One by one, they've stopped working:
A grade-school pal, an elder brother, a suicide,
a friend too seldom met.

3
Back from St. Louis, I hike the trail behind the house
And come across the carcass of an armadillo
Lying on its side. Recently deceased,
unless it's napping.
I nudge it with the toe of my boot to see if it might be
Woken if not revived. But no, even though it has not begun
The quick process of summer decomposition,
it isn't coming back.
I assume it is one from the convoy the other night,
I assume it is the parent as would only be right
And leave it there for the coyotes, foxes, and raccoons
to recycle overnight.
It doesn't take long. In a few days, I hike the trail again,
And there it is, where I left it, hollowed out and clean
As a desert-bleached skull:
an empty, whitened carapace.

4
Duly noted: the nine-banded armadillo's carapace
(Or osteoderm) protects it from predators
(who prize its delicate flesh).
Duly noted: the nine-paneled kesa, the Zen monastic's robe
(Or okesa), is for teachers who are authorized
to ordain new monks on the Way.

5
My daughter, by the way, started grad school today.
Considering the fragility of carapaces,
I worry about her, but she says
O Dad I'm doing fine.

~

c_zientek

Sorting through his possessions after the eviction. He found his parents' 6th-grade reader from 1937. it spoke in rapturous, sugar-coated terms of America as a melting pot, a refuge for the oppressed, a place free of prejudice and greed. There was no mention of the trail of tears, the firebombing of Tulsa and other communities of color, backroom abortions, or religious and cultural oppression.

What he once believed to be true - turned out, in actuality, to be a work of fiction. a cruel propaganda and a simplistic primer justifying all white, male, anglo saxon privilege.

He snorted and threw it to the curb.

Living in a Feedback Loop

Bill Cushing

Talk is haphazard: we miss

each other's bandwidth

as if, frequently, our

frequencies try to

connect, but I hear cross

modulations. Perhaps it's all

static. I hear sound in the

distance: Bugs Bunny and Yosemite Sam

garble back-and-forth insults

while Joe Cocker gets "high

with a little help from my friends."

My son repeats these five-

second bursts of attention

that then repeat themselves

Happy Birthday Humphrey

J W Goossen

Windswept lookers, downtown hookers
They've all got someone to love
And I stand here waiting
Just deactivating
Looking for some long lost clues
It's the eighty-year-old Bogart blues.

It comes time and I make my way
On down to the midnight mass
And I sit there waiting
Just anticipating
Some Word that I can use
It's the eighty-year-old Bogart blues.

Another long, lonely sleepless night
Without you here by my side
So I lie here waiting
Just about creating
Pulling on some worn out fuse
It's the eighty-year-old Bogart blues.

It seems like years since you left me
That I've always been alone
I fall asleep waiting
Just slowly deflating
Bored with nothin' but bad news
It's the eighty-year-old Bogart blues.

Feline World Domination

Angela Zimmerling

end of days

Jennifer Pratt-Walter

at the end of the day maybe
we will find it's not the End of Days
but just the start of a different one

or maybe time itself is an illusion
and we're just a box of random chemistry
with a rotating light

may it not be the end,
but midnight reborn in its cozy lair

may dawn commence, may noon
be a light of such luminescence
it becomes sound,
a brilliant new brass instrument

never before imagined
or maybe we just have to get the fuck out
of our own way and step easily into
the waiting mystery, singing as we go

holding the pregnant night to our bodies,
stroking its fur, finding it profound and precious

Contributor Bios

in order of appearance

Jennifer Pratt-Walter (she/her) is a Crone who finds wonder and awe in the simple or overlooked daily miracles of life. She is a professional musician on the harp, poet and hobbyist digital photographer. She is fortunate to have both poetry and photography published in a number of print and on-line journals. Jennifer has three grown children and husband and lives on a small farm in Vancouver. Find Jennifer at:
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Facebook

Sewit Mesfen is an essay and fiction writer whose work has appeared in *I Am My Father's Daughter* and the graphic novel anthology *Black Lives Matter*. Inspired by nature and landscapes, her writing often explores themes of introspection, discovery, and the complexities of human emotion. She can be found scribbling poetry in her notes and posting essays on Substack.

More than 430 of **Terry Savoie's** poems can be found in literary journals, anthologies, and small press publications over the past five decades including ones in *APR, Ploughshares, Prairie Schooner, North American Review, Commonweal, American Journal of Poetry* and *The Iowa Review* as well as in recent numbers of *Pensive, Stone Boat, Chiron Review,* and *Tar River Poetry* among many others.

Gram Joel Davies lives in Ayrshire, Scotland, where he also works privately as a psychotherapeutic counsellor. His poetry has appeared widely over the decades, in places such as *The Centrifugal Eye, The Rat's Ass Review, Atrium,*

The Lake and *Poetry Salzburg.* He has two collections, *Bolt Down This Earth (2017)* and *Not Enough Rage (2023),* both from V. Press. You can find him at: BlueSky: @gramjd.bsky.social

Jackie McClure would almost rather always be swimming but when rooted on land she writes poetry and fiction striving to contextualize the commonplace. Her poetry has recently appeared in a variety of literary journals, including *Humana Obscura, Wild Roof Journal, Indelible Journal* and *The Bluebird Word*. She is currently working on a manuscript of poems inspired by plants. She lives in the Cascadia bioregion near the Salish Sea in the northwest corner of Washington State where Hedera Helix has been known to engulf Subarus, and, unfortunately, choke our native foliage. Finder her at:
Substack: Pouring Word Tea
Instagram: @pouringwordtea

Shoshana D Kerewsky writes poetry, fiction, lyrical nonfiction, memoir, and haibun. Her work has appeared in *fiction international, Which Lilith?, Sojourner, Crab Creek Review, Little Patuxent Review, 96th of October* and elsewhere. Her mixed-form memoirs are Cancer, Kintsugi, Camino and 50 Days in May: Reflections Along the Camino de Santiago.

Cynthia Yatchman is a Seattle based artist and art instructor. A former ceramicist, she received her B.F.A. in painting (UW). She switched from 3D to 2D and has remained there ever since. She works primarily on paintings, prints and collages. Her art is housed in numerous public and private collections. She has exhibited on both coasts, extensively in the Northwest, including shows at Seattle University, SPU, Shoreline Community College, the Tacoma and Seattle Convention Centers and the Paci:ic Science Center. She is, a member of the Seattle Print Art Association Artist Trust and COCA (Center of Contemporary Art)

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Lauren Scharhag (she/her) is an award-winning author of fiction and poetry, and a senior editor at *Gleam*. Her latest poetry collection, *Ain't These Sorrows Sweet,* is now available from Roadside Press. She lives in Kansas City, MO.
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Bluesky

Richard Collins lives in Sewanee, Tennessee, where he directs Stone Nest Zen Dojo. He has taught at universities in Romania, Bulgaria, and Wales, as well as Louisiana (where he was editor of the *Xavier Review*) and California (where he is Dean Emeritus of Arts and Humanities). His recent poetry, some of which has been nominated for Best Spiritual Literature and Pushcart Prize, appears in *Clockhouse*, *The Dead Mule School of Southern Literature*, *Marrow, Pensive, The Orchards, Think, The Plenitudes*, *Shō Poetry Journal, Urthona: Buddhism and the Arts,* and *Willows Wept Review* His books include *No Fear Zen* (2015) and *In Search of the Hermaphrodite* (Tough Poets Press, 2024).

c_zientek. a frustrated and disillusioned old man in denial about many of life's 3rd act revelations.

Called the "blue collar poet" by classmates after serving in the Navy and later working on commercial vessels before returning to school at 35, **Bill Cushing'**s work has appeared in anthologies, journals, magazines, even newspapers. Now retired after over 20 years, he continues teaching part time, living in Glendale, California with his wife and their son Gabriel, for whom his piece is written. Bill has four previous poetry collections: *A Former Life* (Kops-Fetherling International Award), *Music Speaks* (San Gabriel Valley Poetry

Festival Award; New York City Book Award), *". . .this just in. . ."*, and *Just a Little Cage of Bone* (American Writing Award finalist). He is assembling a new poetry manuscript for release in 2025.

J W GOOSSEN, born and raised in Vancouver, currently lives in Ladner BC and enjoys carving out time for writing poems and stories, and painting. Publishing credits include Rhubarb, Geez, Grain, Canadian Stories, Red Ogre Review and Alchemy. www.jwgoossen.com

Angela Zimmerling is a former journalist who works in poetry, fiction and illustration. She is passionate about human and animal welfare, and cares deeply about the environment. She lives on a small 'farm' with her husband, four 'rescue' cats, a dog, two ponies, and Indian Runner Ducks and Jersey Giant chickens.