

The Awakenings Review

Spring 2023

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Cover art: “Native American Bustle” by **Robert Lundin**. Robert took this photograph at an electrifying and colorful Native American Pow Wow at the University of Illinois at Chicago in 2009. While he is the editor of this journal, Robert also has delved into photography since his youth in Tennessee. Robert, who lives with a psychotic disorder, still treasures the thrill of buying his first SLR camera, a Pentax SP500, at the age of 16.

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Submission Guidelines

Editorial Policy

The Awakenings Review publishes original poetry, short stories, dramatic scenes, essays, creative non-fiction, photographs, excerpts from larger works, and cover art—all created by persons who have had a personal experience with mental illness.

A writer for *The Awakenings Review* (AR) need not have a mental illness—we are open to submissions from family members and friends of people with mental illnesses. We do prefer that a creator have a mental illness of some type, and be willing to write about it, but that does not have to be the focus of the writings.

In most cases, at least three members of The AR editorial board review each submission that makes it beyond the initial yea or nay. We strive to give this preliminary review of a submission in as short a time as possible.

Contributors selected for publication are not paid for their work. However, they will receive a complimentary copy of the journal in which their work is published when it becomes available, and additional copies are available at a discount.

Needless to say, do not send The AR the original or sole copy of a submission. The AR does not accept responsibility for lost or damaged submissions.

Submitting Your Work

Submissions are accepted on an ongoing basis. Email submissions should be in a .doc or .docx format attached to an email sent to AR@AwakeningsProject.org and the word “submission” should appear in the subject line.

Cover Letter

Authors should include a cover letter describing their relationship with mental illness: either self, family member, or friend of someone who struggles with mental illness. While this information is voluntary and its absence will not preclude your work from being considered, if your work is accepted for publication you will be asked to submit a short biography where we would like you to supply this information.

Prose Requirements

The maximum length for fiction, creative nonfiction, interviews, dramatic scenes, book chapters, or essays for a given issue is 5,000 words. We do not review short pieces or flash fiction less than 500 words in length.

Pages should be numbered, and the writer’s name, address, phone, and email address should appear at the top of the first page.

Poetry Requirements

The AR is looking for a representative body of work from a poet. This may be 3-5 poems that would fill several pages of the journal (followed by the poet’s biography). We do not review single poems sent to us.

Authors should be aware that an individual line of poetry that exceeds 60 characters in length cannot be printed as a single line when published.

If you are submitting more than one poem by email, they should all be grouped together into one WORD file, not sent as individual files. Please do not send PDF files.

Again, the poet's name, address, phone, and email address should appear at the top of the first page of a submission.

Biography

Upon acceptance, we request that a writer or poet submit a biography of no more than 150 words to us. We ask that they at least mention their relationship with mental illness.

Artwork and Photography

The Awakenings Review reviews photographs, ink drawings, etchings, charcoal drawings, paintings, and graphics. We place color photographs prominently on the cover of the journal and black-and-white work in clusters of inside pages attributed to an individual photographer or artist.

Color pieces for the cover should be landscape in orientation and at least 300 dpi, but not exceed 5 megabytes in size. An individual black-and-white piece to be considered for inside the journal should be portrait in orientation and at least 300 dpi. Please limit your submission to 8 pieces per email. Send it to AR@AwakeningsProject.org in .jpeg format (we do not accept .pdf or other file formats). Include "submission" in the subject line. An artist or photographer should follow other requirements in these guidelines vis à vis their connection to mental illness and including a cover letter.

Rights

Writers, poets, and artists retain the copyright to their material. By submitting work, they agree to assign to The AR one-time rights for publication.

Material must be offered for first publication. In most cases, we do not accept previously published work. Simultaneous submissions are allowed. However, if a submission is accepted by another publisher as well as by The AR, the author should notify The AR of their preferred publisher.

Privacy

By agreeing to allow their work to be published in The AR, writers whose work is accepted agree to allow The AR to publish a brief biography of them in the print copy of The AR, and to permit The AR to publish their names and titles of their works on The Awakenings Project web site. With the author's permission, the work itself may also be published on The Awakenings Project web site. The Awakenings Project will take measures to protect writers' names from access by Internet "web crawlers" to ensure, to the best of its ability, the writer's privacy. Access to information published on The Awakenings Project site cannot, however, be guaranteed to be inaccessible to all web crawlers.

Manuscripts can be mailed to:

The Awakenings Review
P.O. Box 177
Wheaton, IL 60187

Upon a positive initial review, most authors who reach us through the mail will be asked to email a copy of their works to AR@AwakeningsProject.org. No correspondence will be returned to the creator unless their submission is accompanied by a self-addressed stamped envelope (SASE).

Foreword

The question has arisen “What is the relationship between mental illness and writing?” Are writers really more prone to suffering from mental health issues than others? Without pretending to be an expert in this matter, let me simply point you in the direction of an answer. In his essay, *The Writing Life: Writing and Mental Health*, author Joseph Jaynes Rositano reminds us of Socrates’ argument in *Phaedrus*: that poetry is a divine form of madness. That madness has led to the loss of many poets and writers in the literary world including Sylvia Plath, Virginia Woolf and Anne Sexton. Others, like Dylan Thomas, have succumbed to alcoholism and died at a young age. There seems to be something about the writer’s temperament that draws it like a moth to the flame of insanity.

Many writers who suffer from bipolar disorder, myself included, romance the onset of mania, forgetting the awful devastation that a full-blown episode can create. They chase the illusive butterfly of creativity that enables them to produce without recognizing that often what comes from this manic state is pure gibberish.

When I was in my 20s, and writing under the tutelage of Andre Dubus and Richard Yates, among others, I was under the illusion that I was going to be the next greatest thing on the American literary scene. Of course, I was drinking alcoholically at the time and never could get beyond that first paragraph of my Great American Novel. But what a paragraph it was! When I stopped drinking alcohol and doing drugs, I experienced a severe writer’s block that lasted for decades. I was convinced I could not write unless I was under the influence. I have since proven that belief to be wrong. As a sober woman who treats her bipolar disorder with appropriate medication, I have published a number of books, chapbooks, a memoir and screenplays. All without mania, without alcohol, without disease.

It is true that, according to a Swedish study (Kyaga, Simon et al – January 2018 – “Mental illness, suicide, and creativity...”, *Journal of Psychiatric Research*) writers have more than twice the risk of schizophrenia and bipolar disorder compared to, say, accountants. Writers wrestle with depression, anxiety disorder and substance abuse. But does our writing, our best writing, come when we are caught up in those diseases? I think not. I like to think that finding appropriate help to deal with mental illness can result in a balanced life that leads to true productivity and honest creativity. With clarity, we can judge our work, accept criticism where due, and perfect our craft.

As JB Phillips remarked, “In quietness and confidence shall be our strength, not in frantic efforts and hysterical challenges.”

In this issue we are pleased to present the work of several professionals involved in academic careers including: Alan Sugar, poet, who tutors writers and poets at Perimeter College of Georgia State University, Carol Lee Saffioti-Hughes, poet and a retired college professor, William LaPage of Missouri State University, poet Lloyd Jacobs, a retired physician who taught surgery at the University of Michigan, and Jane Marston who has taught literature and writing at Vanderbilt University. Also in this issue we feature contributors who have both lived with their own mental illness and supported family and friends with these disorders such as poets Hugh Anderson, Kate Falvey, and Rabbi Benjamin Shalva. Katherine Szpekman, also a poet, writes about the phenomenon of anosognosia, the devastating unawareness of having a mental illness. Of interest in this issue is the work of Valerie Wardh who spent years living in Southeast Asia, Linda Logan, a poet who has spent years as a wilderness guide/naturalist in the polar regions of the planet, and C.M. Mattison who courageously shares the fact that she has dissociative personality disorder and tells the grim truth about the emergence of one of her eight personalities, Eddy Styx.

As we continue this enterprise of publishing the works of people with mental illnesses and those close to them, we become more and more aware of who we are and what we do. Clearly, we are discovering how this journal is a catharsis for many of our contributors, a vehicle through which the pains of mental illnesses can be expressed and healing can take place. Works such as C.M. Mattison's poem "The Birth of Eddy Styx" are grueling and disturbing, but I speak for the editors of *The Awakenings Review* when I say that we believe we have a place for poems such as these, perhaps we are one of the few places where they can find a home.

Hope Andersen
Assistant Editor



Preface

I had lunch recently with a friend and former colleague from the University of Chicago, and in the course of our conversation, he said to me modestly, but with a sliver of pride, that he had written twenty books. Moreover, his professional articles had been cited thousands of times in various psychiatric journals. I can only dream of being able to write with that level of productivity. I asked him how he did it. He said he works at his word processor and churns out pages of work until the urge leaves him, then he puts his work away, then he comes back to it. While they are flurries of activity, these sessions cumulatively produce books and papers. Without a computer, he said, he couldn't possibly do it.

Conversely, Hope Andersen, the assistant editor of *The Awakenings Review*, who's published a string of books and volumes of poetry, told me she gets up in the morning and goes to her writing "job" for three or four hours a day. Over the course of weeks and months, this adds up to chapter after chapter in her books. It's a daily task and routine for her. Unlike my former colleague who writes in spurts, she writes according to a daily schedule.

Said Hope, "After a forty-year long writer's block, during which I wrote very little—ghosted a few books, wrote some screenplays, penned a few poems—I had a sudden outburst of creativity when I turned sixty. Some might attribute this to the new decade in my life. I like to think it was divinely inspired, in direct response to my plea that the Universe show me what I was supposed to do with my life now that I was no longer a mother, a caretaker, a teacher. Since 2015, I have written and published countless poems, published two chapbooks of poetry (*Taking in Air*, *Postcards from a Loving God*), and participated in numerous poetry readings including the Ledbury Poetry Festival in Ledbury, England, for which I was a featured poet. I have also written and published three novels (*The Book Sisters*, *When the Moon Winks*, and *Where the Wind Blows*) and a memoir (*How to Remodel a Life*). I am currently at work on the film adaptation of one of those novels. I have a completed Middle Grade novel waiting in the wings for submission to publishers and another Women's Fiction/Thriller on stand-by waiting to be written."

"Where did all this writing energy come from? How have I managed to produce so much in so little time? Simple. Discipline. Katherine Hepburn once remarked, 'Without discipline, there is no life at all.' This is especially true for writers. I can have all the good ideas in the world, but if I don't show up at the page on a daily basis, nothing gets written. So, that's what I do and have done

for seven years—shown up and written, even on days when I didn't feel like it. (Of course, there are some odd days off, but I get back to work as soon as I am able.) I have learned to be patient with myself and not to expect perfection on the first draft, if ever. This frees me up to keep going even when I know I am going to have to rewrite, a lot. I have become engaged in writers' groups where I can receive feedback and support for my work. I have allowed my skin to thicken and take criticism, constructive criticism, as it is offered, knowing that there is much to learn from seeing my work through others' eyes. Mostly, I have adopted the philosophy that I am but a channel for stories and poems to make their way through me. This helps me to stay open to the Creative Force."

There is another friend and former contributor to *The AR* who has the gift of the prolific writing of novels, Bruce Colbert. He said, "Writing to me is a rather natural process. Though getting started, finding the right story or character takes time, and often a lot of soul-searching. Those stories circulating around in my own brain or others I've heard maybe in conversations, require a sort of gestation period. Over time, maybe a month or six months, I'll ruminate about them ending up as the written word, and finally decide exactly what to do. That process generally means, I'll put them in long-fiction form like a novel, or maybe a poem, or a series of poems. I did that series thing this past year with a memoir poetry collection, based on my recollections of growing up in a small coal town in northeastern Pennsylvania, a place that unfortunately today is a part of those half abandoned and depressed communities in this country. But those memories of my childhood and adolescence, are fresh and real, and I can convert them to the printed page through either interpretation, or just plain remembrance."

As much as I'd like to see volumes of my work in print—essays, chapters, plays, novels, books—or even just on my hard drive, compared to these writers I live a life of relative literary scarcity. I shouldn't completely underestimate myself; I'm being too modest. I went through a period in life, which curiously has since left me, when I was absorbed with playwriting. I wrote play after play, perhaps six full length plays all together. I would go after each scene or act with zeal. There is gratification in seeing a lengthy dramatic work through to its end, just as there is satisfaction in seeing any lengthy undertaking come to fruition.

I was raised in an academic household. My father was a professor of psychology at Hamilton College in Clinton, New York and later at The University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee. He was a prolific writer of textbooks

on psychology. As a child, I remember him isolating himself in a cubicle office in DuPont Library at Sewanee and spending hundreds of hours researching and writing his books.

He had the opportunity to study under B.F. Skinner while a graduate student at Indiana University in the 1940s; the acclaimed behaviorist made an indelible impression on my father. In some intangible way, he really never expressed to me how Skinner motivated him to plunge into a career of research and writing. But, had he not been influenced by Skinner as an impressionable young adult, it would seem likely that my father would have found other outlets for his ambition. For there seems to be the presence of drive in people who do many things prolifically, or who do anything with dedication and commitment. Though guided by the force of Skinner's personality, I believe it was my father's disability that accounted for his drive. He was born with a visual impairment; his entire life he had to cope with poor vision. The magnitude of his disability may have given rise to fundamental feelings of inadequacy that in later life led to determination to achieve. Skinner simply gave him direction.

Different in scope from *The Awakenings Review*, in my experience with the Awakenings Project I have come to know dozens of artists with mental illnesses who have become involved with our shows and exhibits. Of this number, there are several who I have observed with a genuine drive to produce. These are artists—some seemingly obsessive—who generate their work simply for the need to create. They have no clear market for their work, they are not preparing for a specific show or exhibit, they simply have an insatiable need to produce art, often permutations of the same concept. It is remarkable to see dozens of their pieces of work accumulate. When they finish a painting or a work of art, they turn to another, to the next, without giving mind to the collection of pieces that accumulate in their studios.

How do these artists and writers develop drive? Is it in their constitution or is it learned? This is an impossible question to answer but I would conjecture that drive is an innate attribute to their personality, perhaps arising from deeply located feelings. The choice of a field in which to excel is certainly a result of environmental factors, often the presence of a mentoring figure: a teacher, a coach, a friend, a colleague, or a role model. Sometimes, as in Hope's experience, there is divine motivation, if not God or the Universe some would call it the muses. With writing and poetry, the environment is the world of letters. You'll see in the pages of this journal the fruits of driven people, especially people contending with the presence of mental illness in their lives. Add this motivating condition to skill in the form of literary arts and you will behold the work

of single-minded people in these pages. Like my former colleague mentioned above, in driven people there is innate motivation combined with intelligence, creativity, persistence, and sheer skill. What a precious combination of factors!

Robert Lundin
Editor



W. Barrett Munn



KATIE ON THE CORNER

I'll call you Katie,
Katie sounds Irish, happy, a fine fit
for your dazzling green eyes, pale skin, and
red wayward hair, matching red
mouth that smiles up at me from
my morning paper.

I never expected you would be big news. A stick,
reed thin, dropped into a creek (or thrown?)
washed by the current, clipped edges
from rocks, no reprieve from eddies,
a constant rush downstream, always down,
never up,
never
up.

Baloney sandwich on cheap white bread,
mayo, no cheese, tomatoes like flat red
rubber mats with seeds.

Piccadilly Square dreams in daylight,
feigning foreign accents, and likes, at night,
at times simply jumbling sounds into
a private language,
understood by the humped sidewalk,
beats of drumming feet, and the same third step
of the house by the road out in front
sitting, watching a red
Chevrolet Malibu, headlights hungry,
rolling slowly past.

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Feral cats in black and white, ducking,
dodging, then utterly composed
beneath the silver Hyundai,
paint faded and peeled.

Quite contrary Mary, (I'll call you Katie),
you're feral, too,
watching, watching, back and forth,
waiting, whiling, wasting, willing until
that late, late night, 3:00 a.m. at 12th and St. Louis,
when right there on the corner sidewalk,

someone fired that bullet into your head.



MODERN LIFE OF A STRIPED BASS AS LAKE MEAD DISAPPEARS

My house, my yesterdays
have been repossessed,
the world reduced to apartment sized
by a wandering powdery white,
this white line high on the limestone cliffs
higher today
than the false hopes of rain,
my world, downsized another thirsty inch.

Nooks and crannies
I once used
now hide high in the facing rock
trapped inside those miniature worlds
is whatever life is left.

Fleeing feast I sorely need, are
bones
lying on caked cracked mud
brittle now and bleached.

W. Barrett Munn

I search the deeper water,
I search for longer life,
I search to quell my hunger
a phantom that chases itself.

Cold is lower, lower still
only rise when sunlight dies
circling to follow the path
that attracts
laid out by the bright moonlight.

A nibble here, a small bite there
nothing to satiate or sustain,
it won't be long
until I lie on the caked cracked mud
of the white line world
bleached and brittle
Bones.



THE TV OVER THE BAR

It's raining when I duck into Freddie's,
and I'm met with my nightmare theme: above the bar,
above the bottles of bourbon, brandy,
and beer,
the television is talking about some tragedy, terrible,
another shooting scene.

"Turn it up, Joe," booms a voice to the bartender.

I've lived this nightmare before, but can't do anything
but stop.

I hear the news, another mass shooter, but I don't listen to
where or how many died this time,
all I'm thinking as they continue to talk is that

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someone somewhere watches,
and while he waits he picks his place,
and soon he'll strike, and
when he does the news will say
the who, the how, the what,
they'll keep score of how many died, and how many
walked away. And just like before and just like now, it'll be broadcast
on the news, right here above this bar.

And for a while we'll grumble, and for awhile
we'll bitch, but Joni won't ever be back.
Already I hear clinking of glasses and rattling bottles of beer,
while the volume of conversation is increasing, drowning in
the mundane the talk of murder coming from above the bar.

But some sorrows can't be drowned. I can attest to that. I turn around
and step outside where rain melts tears.

I hail a cab.



SALVAGED DIRT

The capacious aged Terracotta planter
sits suspended between life and death.
The late afternoon sun, a jasmine river,
cascades over swales and climbs the hills that rise and fall
through the soil between old bits of cellulose
and dried up splinters of wood.

The planter waits, round mouth agape, a fish
that gasps for water.
A broken stem rises from deep in the dirt,
a headstone for a marigold's grave,
while the soil itself is sad and worn, the loam
washed from its belly but it's still too heavy to upend.
It needs decay for nitrogen. That addition won't be easy.

It takes a week of daily work to get the soil just right,
then time to wait to see nature's magic of turning the old and useless
into paradise.

This trail often I've traveled before, to a place named Rebirth,
a destination reached by melding time and temperature,
seeds with the succor of water and this
old and salvaged dirt.



THE HARDEST EMBRACE

Don't turn away, don't turn your back,
I know it's hard to hear
but right now this is what you need, and me,
I'm all you've got.
My message isn't about harmony,
it's about the dolorous discordance of death.
I have no salve to offer you
no promises, no dilution of distress. All I
can tell you right now is this: Don't try
to stop the crying; stopping is a mistake.

It all has to come out.
I know. I know.
I lost someone, too,
I had to learn what you must learn,
that when there is grief there is pain,
and a reach for false relief
only increases your loss;
so don't avoid agony yes, agony, it's crucial
that you feel.

I learned that hope to meet again is but a
patch on a woeful tire, the tread is shot, the wall
collapsed, I had to toss it out. When you've
loved, you cannot hide from those memories.
She is not here. She won't return.

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When I looked up it wasn't her, it was just a cloud.

And as I loved I felt the woe;
it surrounded like a quake, an avalanche,
a landslide, an endless sea of grief. I couldn't
hide from that hurt, hurt is how I healed.
If pain I had not allowed at all, death would have
been faux Carnival, an eternal masquerade.

Now and for your time ahead, know she is a was, not a hope to be;
the elixir of love can only be drunk from cups of agony:

Drink, drink, drink
your fill.
Feel, feel, feel.

Embrace the tears.
Embrace the heartache.
Embrace the emptiness.

For memory to live requires your heart with all
its woes and tears,
If you shun pain and bury it, she will have never been.
To you she'll simply disappear,
a ripple on a pond.





W. Barrett Munn is a graduate of The Institute of Children's Literature where he studied writing under the mentorship of Larry Callen. Many of his short stories for young readers have been published, but those were some time ago. He now concentrates his writing on poetry, and his poetry has been published in Copperfield Review Quarterly, Volney Road Review, Speckled Trout Review, New Verse News, and others. He has had his own battles with PTSD after a shooting and high-speed chase incident in Pahrump, Nevada in the mid-1990s. His wife and his wife's sister have both been diagnosed with bipolar disorder and both have had multiple hospitalization due to that condition.

Benjamin Shalva



PORTRAIT OF DR. GACHET

The doctor is sicker than I am, I think ... Now when one blind man leads another blind man, don't they both fall into the ditch?"

- letter from Vincent Van Gogh, 1890, two weeks before his death

“Eyes slim chips of sky
stained by a later hour,
later than the brush-stroked day

just past your cap – as if
the eyes, impatient
with the watched pot

of a tepid mind and blushing
blood, lunged to dusk –
these the painter paints,

seeing what we assume
you see: a madman mocking,
mocking from behind

his lime green, black
and blue; leaving you,
the doctor, nobly dethroned,

with foxglove – pretty
poison – pouring
from your humble cup



Benjamin Shalva

THE CUP

The cup each morning that I kiss
its belly glazed
with marching fish
a midnight blue
the fish
the lip
the handle
of the cup I kiss.

How do I know
they're marching fish
I hear no beat
fish have no feet
a single solemn line alone
may sink
or swim
or surf the Rhône.

I know
they march
because I turned the bottom up
and there was burned
the maker's mark
the killer's script
In Poland Made
the cup I kiss.



HUNGER

My hunger
for you is an ocean
sometimes, other times
a tantrum. I wait

for the weather
to settle, like the cloud
that swallowed the Israelites:
wretched, sun peeled, saved. In Miami,

today, it is overcast. I walk
to the sea, dip my toes
in fury and froth, asking:
Will today be the day we split?



CEMETERY, LATE FALL

Money
may not grow
on trees, but diving
leaves, flat stabs
of paint upon
the lichen slickered stone,
betray
the dash
between the dates,
the only other growth
we know, until
all that we see
is gold.



Benjamin Shalva



***Benjamin Shalva** is a poet, writer, and rabbi. He has lived with mental illness—specifically, bipolar disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, and panic disorder—for decades, and it is his mission to explore the contours of this struggle through poetry and prose. His writing has appeared in such publications as The Washington Post, Image Journal, Peauxdunque Review, Ponder Review, Kveler, and Spirituality & Health Magazine. Recently, his short story, “The Thistle,” won first prize in Hazon’s Creative Arts Prizes, judged by Anita Diamant. Benjamin is also the author of two books of nonfiction, *Spiritual Cross-Training* and *Ambition Addiction*, both published by Grand Harbor Press. Benjamin lives in Baltimore with his wife, two children, and two hound dogs.*

William LaPage



NOT FOR NOTHING

the nothing that happened last night
nor early this morning—no rush,
no stillness, no thoughts
not without thinking. Nothing about to.

I didn't go out today or yesterday,
or the month before or after.
Nowhere to go, nothing to do,
neither to wonder nor wander.

I was not then, nor am I now
nor am I I-am at all. Not then,
no will to be without will.
The nothing that happened, not ever.

No matter how free not to be
there's no mind to be paid, it is darkness
from nothing. I am not the nothing
that did not happen, god willing.



GHOST STORY

When the TV turns to static,
and the evening has gotten away from us,
when the dishes are left to stew in the sink overnight,
consider how the children are too young to be up
so late, watching movies. A sitter somewhere unawares.
There was something I meant to share with you,
some pearl, some antique adage I read
in a pamphlet from the doctor's waiting room.
Consider the children, in their beds, frightened
of a gnarled oak, while outside their bedroom window
lightning flashes crystalline auras across the closet door.
Consider some disturbance wakes us, like
a radio alarm tuning without agency,
like a backfire cracking the night wide open, or
the neighbor's newborn crying, brings us close
to the rim of waking life, far from the diagnosis
of waking-dreams that sound like, look like,
feel like cold displacement in the dark.
Consider the children, when they're old enough,
how we might explain it like a brainstorm, like
an electromagnetic impulse, a freak misfire,
like two tangential brains discordant.
Not the thunderclap outside, but the lightning
calling from inside your head.
Consider the past is all *c'est la vie*.
Consider memory is an ancient burial ground for language.
The way men and women drown in their love.
The way they pull each other under fighting to rescue the other.
How butterscotch-sweet fear is going down.
How it's like being eaten alive by an oak,
but also like swimming in a pool of skeletons.
Consider the ceiling is a black portal full of voices
we stared into the night you dropped the glass in the sink.
How the last major episode was years ago.
How the long estrangement after still haunts us.
What would happen to the children ten years from now?
A lifetime extracting blood samples to test liver enzymes.

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Upping and downing. Milligrams and microdoses.
Consider the mind is a noisy ghost of distractions.
The homunculus run amok.
A conditional déjà vu, if-then equation:
if only we could sleep a full night,
if only it was the alarm, if only there were words
to explain how this works, and I could remember
what I forgot, we could settle if settling is what we wanted.
Take solace in the quiet. Maybe then have children
who stay up past their bedtime watching movies.



UNDER THE INFLUENCE

Outside a varied many people
standing, in a line 1AM
on the street, a means of gleaning
work from others who can't
afford to lose the holiday bonus,
and violent and theatrical,
human to a fault
in an executive error, America
surprised by an infant
new cries understood, internal
standing, legs crossed together
at the edge of the gutter
where they wait wishing on coins
stand frigid still alone with each other
for the winter holiday sale,
and talk on their lips.



William LaPage

HERON

Institutional shadows calibrate
an unusually warm winter gray
out of the fluorescent green tile late
in the afternoon reclining on the chaise
staring at the cutout of a tropical beach
pasted over the leaded glass pane
at a gulf horizon of flaking grout,
nails cut against the grain glean,
ricocheting sound. A moment later,
registering, by force, nothing else
during those sleepless nights pacing
in the night's motion across the far wall,
over a painting, a landscape, that prattles on
the foamheads from the winter gray,
and a heron rolling in the chop,
heron being a bird of prey.



ALSO KNOWN AS

These rooms were empty this time last year,
now sacked in plastic bags, now cluttered
with boardboxes and odd old things.
They resemble another time. Somewhere else,
on the far end from here. I don't know this room
from another. Not these things, they don't belong
to me, column-long along column to Babel.
What do we recall of old epochs?
A circling company of counterpoints from which
these rooms surge on a place, in a time
I never could have been. You see, before my time.
Consequence of circumstance, no opportunity or
motive place and restricted at the center
by a self-same pattern, encompassing passage

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to familiar territories, to collective hallucination.
We continue to assimilate our bone relics,
two at a time, into those piers and alcoves
like the kings of contention we are.



***William LaPage** is the author of several chapbooks and a fiction collection. Most recently his writing has appeared or is forthcoming in Flock, the Bangalore Review, New Note Poetry, and others. He currently teaches at Missouri State University. He is a long-time advocate for mental health awareness, an issue important to the poet personally. His work recognizes the many dimensions of mental illness. While some are visible, others are not. His writing broadly represents his encounters with mental illness, focusing on the various ways in which persons with mental health concerns struggle with displacement and homelessness, addiction, hospitalization, and the language we often use to talk about these issues. For example, “Ghost Story” imagines a conversation where a couple discuss mental illness through the lens of popular culture.*

Carol Lee Saffioti-Hughes



PLANTING FLOWERS IN A MINE FIELD

the nothing that happened last night
Children are dying
ensnared by the mines
half buried under the kudzu vines
on the road from Laos to Vietnam
still.

I read news
of a man who would heal those wounds
bring soldiers who survived
their own past furies
to retrace their steps
venture into those fields
to remove those mines
enemies once, allies now for the children
who are still falling in the fields.

This news stirs me from a whirlwind
as I pass a familiar aisle in the grocery store
hack through the fluorescent tunnels
I have not machete—
gripping the handle of the shopping cart
my only defense
I push on with eyes closed.
I cannot shut out
cavernous walls on either side
Heinz bananas and pears
Juicy Juice in pristinely wrapped little boxes

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Gerber's second foods
the sweet scent of baby's butt
oozes from the Johnson's Baby Oil.

*....these traps can explode
at any moment
glass shards
strained peas, apple sauce
vomiting into the aisles.
My feet are taking root
through the linoleum
I can go nowhere
someone is screaming
a child's name
dying in the minefield daily
just down the street.
How
can they call it
the "Pick and Save."*



NOCTURNE FOR VAN GOGH AT
THE SAINT-RE'MY HOSPITAL

No "iron barred windows"
to belie this yearning:
freedom is a brushstroked sky
nothing but the morning star
Venus, and a moon
turned crescent in his mind
as letters to his brother flowed
waving fields of wheat
real, and unreal
transmute to drowsing villagers
there, not there.

Carol Lee Saffioti-Hughes

The cypress trees join earth to sky
“reminiscent of the north.”

His fears:
“failure”—

Endings transform:
“we take death to reach a star.”

Yet ah, those stars-
spiraling nebulae of hope
joining with a moon
wrong for the season
but who questions
the aureole of imagination.



YAD VASHEM

for Sharon

Against night walls
a candle burns
placing, naming, remembering
the children lost—each flame a promise
so fragile to be
burnt, spent.
Each flame a name
daughters, sons.
to take away the children
is to take away the breath
the memory of the people.

These flames, yahrziet
for a millennium—
who was there to recite their kadish
a candle lit
in that cavern of night

sing so many lullabies.
Each reflected flame a name
daughters, sons
To take away the breath.

Who is there
each time to rekindle
the light
in a night that knows no day?
I hear names I do not know
in a language I do not speak:
Moishe, Dina, Miriam, Sorah
a litany of loss
in hovering stillness
the flame inscribes another
among all those
that should not be there.
Yet we breathe, grope
wrestle the angel who
will not bless us.

And in that night's passing
some hand hovers
to keep the candles that should not be.



EYE OF THE WIND

Hampstead, England

A glass star
nestles this corner
framed in heath and sky
cast in shards, recast
for a new role:
8 points on a cosmic compass
the center, opalescent
a transforming lens.

Carol Lee Saffioti-Hughes

No children's children
to bless this heaven
yet it is there
when we have left the room
illuminated, alone.

The window shoulders this light
a mother-comfort we cannot see.
The child's face framed
in the shimmer center
the hope of some sun
on rain shadowed days:
a thing we must feel, not see.



Carol Lee Saffioti-Hughes is a retired college professor, and a former librarian in a log cabin library in the north woods of Wisconsin. Poetry is her 911: she suffers from depression and PTSD after the tragic and traumatic death of her daughter, in a car accident which was her own fault. Her work has been published in Canada, the U.S., and England. Numerous publications of her work include appearances in Ekphrastic Review, Rosebud, Moss Piglet, The Malahat Review, Poetry Hall, The Greensboro Review, and Artery, among others. She is also an amateur photographer with showings in several galleries. Poetry has been anthologized in Root River anthologies, and Unsettling America (Penguin Press). She is a member of the Spectrum Art School and Gallery, Racine Wisconsin.

Jesse White



SOUNDING THE WINTER

An almost black brown wooden tower
fills up the space in the living room
between the stairs and the wall
with the poster of winter-
people enjoying winter.

You are the piano
I abandoned early when
your theories confused me
when I couldn't swiftly succeed
when I would memorize
 the pattern
 of the notes
 pretending
 I was reading them
as my fingers followed the pacing
of my kinetic memory.

Now
I play
each note
with slow
deliberate
connections
of fingers to keys
of hammers to strings
losing myself in a music
that rises up from deep within

Jesse White

finding myself in a music
that is all my own.

You wail my song
expanding up and out
to every crack and corner
of this small brick home
resonating my pain
sounding the
winter
in minor key
making me less scary
to myself. I've returned to you
while people are enjoying winter.

I've retreated into the noise
just under the surface
bruising me under the skin.
I'm knowing that the darkness
will continue to expand within me
bloating my body until I think I will explode
and I make me small and
secret cuts
to let the spoiled air
out.

Sometimes
the sullied air within me
screams as it snakes free—the way you can force
air from the lips of a balloon.
I hurt me
to dampen these sounds (first harsh
like the wind, then quieting
like the snow).

But this winter, you
are a more acceptable release.
I play my pain
my pollution,
my spoiling self
over and over
composing a story

I dare not speak with words.
In you, there's no shame
just sadness for myself.
You cry with me
then for me
when I am
dry of water
but filled
with
air.



SAND.

cool moon blue-yellow sand.
there is something hungry,
longing in the way that the sand lies, in ripples.
frozen wind in matter. i see the invisible.
i feel the cold in this warm night.
i feel the lonely in the vast.
and something shivers. and trembles. and is excited.
and there's this desire for sex. heh. here in the sand.

i laugh at myself. the way i fall into the predictable:
here's the ocean, the water. the woman.
she works like waves,
riding on the pushpull moon
turning turning in and noticing how the water
both smoothes the stone and leaves the shell.
here. in the sand.

here's the rub:
the heal of the palm, fingers turned under, wrist bent back and
slow and down the side, kneading the pillowflesh.
now thighs, pressing together, knees bending and shoulder
dropping bending down over and around
this slippery direction.
the mouth must open and out comes a pained breath
and hint of voice. the ear drops up to the other shoulder

Jesse White

and feels the scratching as i nuzzle in and an “oh” and a
pause—no breathing—
and a short gasp. the hand falls to the neck and travels it.
i look up and do not see the sky and i look down
and i do not see my feet. i open open to the water, rushing out
and flooding the surface, teaching the container to seep.
and i fall, forgetting distance.
and i feel. and i grasp at the sand. weeping.
until the falling pieces whisper their name. and i hear.
i watch the sand sifting through my fingers.
i squeeze and i let go.

and i sigh.

and i move back to the streetlamp.

and the shoes.

and the composure.



CANON

i didn't remember driving to the office
except for the stoplights i willed to turn green.
they asked me to sit in a conference room.
vulnerable and confused
i sat on the floor, in the corner.
they wanted me to go to a hospital.
they would find a surrogate family for my cat.
i was not to drive.
i gave them my key.
i don't remember the ride there.
maybe it was dark.
certainly, i was.

what i do remember are the people—
depressed and lust-filled, lost and scared.
i kissed one. i made friends with another.

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they sat us down in the fishbowl.
they wheeled him down the hall while we watched.
his other personality made him steal the sheets—
made him tie them around the toilet
and around his neck.
between checks his other personality
twisted him until
he was

gone.

the nurses paled to green.
the doctor wouldn't let me leave.
he gave me diagnoses that did not match me
and told me i had to stay.
he didn't tell me my insurance refused to pay.

my mom came
all the way from philly
to release me.
we collected my cat,
who brought my mom pencils to throw and retrieve.
we threw pencils. for hours.
we watched the one movie stuck in the vcr.
we listened to the mice take over the house.

why didn't you tell me?

for months i looked for work.
i ate one candy bar a day.
i never opened the oven.
it became harder to leave the bed.

i had a daily mission of three:

1. take shower or brush teeth.
2. feed cat.
3. get mail from mailbox.

calling her wasn't on my list.





Jesse White is a narrative expressionist writer and artist from Philadelphia, PA. She lives with bipolar I disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, numerous physical health issues, and a traumatic personal history. She credits her gentleness, resiliency, courage, and creativity as equal tools to medication and therapy in her mental health stability. Jesse believes that visual art and writing can be powerfully effective means to influence social change and to inspire spiritual transformation. With an employment history that includes the roles of Expressive Arts Therapist and LGBTQIA Anti-Violence Advocate, she now serves as the Director and Spiritual Arts Doula for Pigeon Arts and is clerk of the Board for the Fellowship of Quakers in the Arts. Jesse's writing and art have been published in local and national publications including: Pendle Hill (pamphlet series), Friends Journal, Philadelphia Jazz Stories Illustrated, Young Ravens Literary Review, Senssexual, and Quaker Life.

Lloyd Jacobs



FATHER'S GARDEN

My Father spent at least a part of every day from May to October on his knees in our vegetable garden. He loved the soil, from spring mud to midsummer dust.

He would become voluble about how near was the garden to our bounteous table: We eat this dust, we are this dust, he'd say and sift a handful through his fingers.

That we are rooted in dust is inescapable whatever idealists say. It's not the flight of spirit frightens us, it's the dissolution of the body, the entropy of these granules of dust that is our destiny. I can see him still on his knees, reared up, declaiming.



FATHERS

It must have been theater, jest. How could God not have known they would eat of it. Omniscience was excess, mere clairvoyance would have sufficed, and she so constituted that the lingam serpent was undeniable, he created with the image of globular apples already imprinted on his emerging mind.

Lloyd Jacobs

My own father too was blithe and playful
about sin, like a circus juggler or fencer.
His hands were joyful in uprooting thorns
and thistles, he gloried in the sweat
of his brow. He loved the fertile cursed soil
from which we all have come and returned
to it with willingness and grace.



BASTARDY

We are all bastards
Cymbeline
Shakespeare

Ineluctable bastardy is predestined
by the sins of the father, accident,
or God's unknowable design.

The spermatazoan's chain of custody
is tenuous, its passage precarious;
fatherhood is based on testimony

But may not bastardy also be conferred
by a father's desertion or acquired
through a son's repudiation?

In that spiritual form of bastardy
alienation and brokenness prevail.
God's fatherhood trope breaks down
leaving humankind dreadfully free
able but afraid to create himself.

