

UNION SPRING  
LITERARY REVIEW

*Toward a Better Future*

Union Spring Literary Review

Issue One

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For inquiries, contact [editors@unionspring.org](mailto:editors@unionspring.org).

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Summer 2025

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## Commentary on The Work, or, How Nietzsche Taught Me to Love Cancer and Live Again

Brian Eckert, editor

Over the last two years, and probably even before that, there has been a phrase bouncing around inside my head incessantly: “do the work,” you must be “doing the work.” While this phrase is likely familiar, its significance is what I can’t seem to get around.

For many, this phrase refers to the mental work of self-improvement, being aware of negative thoughts, balancing pleasure and indulgence, and other active efforts to improve personal health, both mental and physical, as a requisite step to academic and professional achievement. We need to be firmly within our own minds and bodies in order to reach our highest potential. And as someone who has struggled for years with mental illness, addiction and substance abuse, and physical illnesses, I know the best thing for my art is my health, the ability to actually sit at my desk for several hours and put some thoughts down. So what makes the “work” of artistic longevity? What of maintenance? Of the mundane domesticity necessary to keep working?

I started reading Friedrich Nietzsche extensively throughout my initial battle with leukemia. This was 2019 and it felt like the right place to start as these questions were put to the existential mantle.

Nietzsche can be difficult to understand because his writing lacks organization, linearity, and is often closer to poetry than prose regarding how much figurative language he uses. But Nietzsche’s poetic aspirations are exactly what makes his writing and ideas so important and resonant to me, a poet.

There are several tenets of Nietzsche’s philosophy that apply directly to doing the work of art as well as the work of being an artist. These include “Brief Habits” (S295), “Amor Fati” (S125, S276), and most importantly, “to give style to one’s character” (S290). These appear in the Walter Kaufmann translation of *The Gay Science*, where Nietzsche writes, “I love brief habits and consider them an inestimable means for getting to know many things and states, down to the bottom of their sweetness and bitternesses” (S295). He writes that these brief habits fully satiate his needs and desires, physical and mental, without the need for further stimulation:

But one day its time is up; the good thing parts from me, not as something that has come to nauseate me, but peacefully and sated

with me as I am with it—as if we had reason to be grateful to each other as we shook hands to say farewell. Even then something new is waiting at the door, along with my faith—this indestructible fool and sage!—that this new discovery will be just right, and that this will be the last time. That is what happens to me with dishes, ideas, human beings, cities, poems, music, doctrines, ways of arranging the days, and life styles. (S295)

I believe this is vital to continued productivity, whether that be creating art, studying art, or even finding inspiration through daily tasks. Brief habits encourage a buffet-style approach to life. Try many different things and enjoy them as long as they are enjoyable. Read your favorite poet over and over until you find a new favorite poet, and repeat.

It's exactly when things get their hardest that our ultimate desires for life at its fullest emerge. The rapturous miracle of being alive is captured in Nietzsche's *Amor fati*, or love of fate:

I want to learn more and more to see as beautiful what is necessary in things; then I shall be one of those who makes things beautiful. Amor fati: let that be my love henceforth! I do not want to wage war against what is ugly. I do not want to accuse; I do not even want to accuse those who accuse. Looking away shall be my only negation. And all in all and on the whole: some day I wish to be only a Yes-sayer.

Nietzsche is referring not to a political “yes-man” but instead to someone who authentically affirms all aspects of reality, all of the pain and difficulty and ecstatic joys the same.

I came across this principle while undergoing intensive chemotherapy for my leukemia and I embraced it. I came to love my time in treatment when all of my time was my own. I could read and write and watch classic films all day, every day. I also developed a serious opioid addiction for a couple of years and nearly died multiple times, but I wouldn't change any of it for what I was able to achieve. I took my diagnosis, moved back in with my parents, and went on to read the rest of Nietzsche's work while completing my Master's degree even as the Covid-19 pandemic began. *To do the work*, it's imperative to maintain some level of the love of fate. Love the challenges and setbacks, and embrace the adversity because that in itself is part of the work of an artist, to persevere and continue creating and finding inspiration.



We look some more to Nietzsche:

To “give style” to one’s character—a great and rare art! It is practiced by those who survey all the strengths and weaknesses of their nature and then fit them into an artistic plan until every one of them appears as art and reason and even weaknesses delight the eye... In the end, when the work is finished, it becomes evident how the constraint of a single taste governed and formed everything large and small. Whether this taste was good or bad is less important than one might suppose, if only it was a single taste!

It will be the strong and domineering natures that enjoy their finest gaiety in such constraint and perfection under a law of their own; the passion of their tremendous will relaxes in the face of all stylized nature, of all conquered and serving nature...

Nietzsche associates self-control, self-discipline, and self-awareness with “strong and domineering natures.” These individuals are not ‘domineering’ others, but themselves and their own qualities. This is a blueprint for the artist. The artist must have self-control and self-discipline to maintain an artistic practice, but also an artistic lifestyle. It is important to balance artistic practice and lifestyle practice, to “do the work” of making time for art while reserving time for self-care, friends and family, and decompression, and all of this balance requires strong self-discipline. This ‘balance’ of life and art becomes more a dance than anything resembling sound planning, like finding time to write during a commute or discovering new sanctuaries within a mandated schedule: a secluded park, a formerly unknown coffee shop, new bookstores, new brief habits. And as artists, we must learn to love this chaotic styling of our non-traditional lifestyles.

The work of being an artist is not easy, but it’s still art, and that makes it all worth it. The goal, or the “work,” of being an artist is to have that artistic spark permeate every aspect of life. To approach your commute and employment and household chores and every “have to” in life like it’s an artistic prompt. How clean can I get these dishes? How efficiently can I enter this data? What kind of trees are those that I pass every day? Does my favorite author have a podcast that I can listen to when I can’t read?

Probably. Turn what you can into art and embrace the rest anyway.



**TURN  
WHAT  
YOU  
CAN  
INTO ART**



## Keeping the Doctor Away

Caleb Cheadle

Keeping the Doctor Away

I bought a bag of apples today and they asked to see my ID  
Said I'd been buying too many apples  
But my wife needs apples  
My dad needs apple  
The whole family is on them

They say the trees aren't producing what they used to  
Can't meet the apple demand  
So they rotate the same stock across the nation  
Load the apples on trucks - cartage to and fro  
Fossil fuels to fuel the apple transport  
Anything to avoid an outage

Is it any wonder that apples are in demand  
A society pushed to the brink  
Productivity is salacious  
Whispered about in back rooms by the rich  
Tucked in the palm in the alleyway  
Party apples a thing of the past, even for the collegefolk

Galas, honeycrisps  
The delicious siblings and cosmic  
They make them in all colors  
So you can pick your poison variety  
                  can be up on the latest trend, nurse the zeitgeist  
Mealy or firm the result is the same  
Efficacy the same  
Onset, duration the same  
But not the cost

I declined to show my ID and they asked what they should take a picture of  
I showed them the bird with the early worm  
And they said  
                  Keep that the hell away from our apples

## Holding

John Cullen

Parkinson's hand, my uncle slurred  
 and shivered so badly no one understood.  
 After appointments, we circled  
 the lake to kidnap him from himself,  
 then back for dinner he could almost swallow.  
 On the ambulance ride to hospice he fumbled  
 his key so we could clear the last belongings.  
 Refusing treatment, he sipped drips,  
 and that last Sunday, sucked gin and tonic sponges  
 with hallucinations of service in the Pacific.  
 Watching my father, I wondered what he felt  
 as his brother faded. When he returned from the war,  
 his brother's sign read "Here's your ride home,"  
 a kid's red wagon at his side.  
 The freeway curled. We counted exits  
 so as not to circle the city. I reminded my father  
 we needed to speak. Beyond the windshield,  
 I looked down the driveway, where the slider  
 to the garage door I'd pitched against as reliever  
 for the Twins stalled halfway open by a skirt of weeds.  
 Out the car, up the steps, he pulled the front door  
 closed without looking back.

## “footbridge”

Grant Moser

this will become a thing like  
when mushrooms find a shady  
place. a path means bonds and  
binds and birds in my palm.

the river goes where it wants;  
boundaries are fluid & sedentary  
like moths in the summer night.

suddenly there's different trees  
& your name has changed and  
everything retains a charge, &  
you cut your tongue out of your  
mouth and sew it back with tinsel.

i am not in control and the wine  
berry will choke out the sun if left  
unchecked; like when all those birds  
died along the shore because of the  
pollen carried on their feathers.

chasms are the safest; moats are  
breachable. i will feed you with a long  
spoon, you will throw scraps into the  
shadows hoping i finding them.

**“Every.wav”**

Nate Castelletto

+ more mopping / like aphid in your vein / on sunday / go with football  
helmet / or a migrant's melody / never mind the fumes / our colleague who  
pulls / an e-cigarette / between the teeth / of heartland on the radio / in diploe  
even / rapping detailed orders / you've got a fist / full of basil / with lemon-  
lime soda / necklaces + hamsa / out to bathe / somewhere in the mud / kick  
rock / a puddle dripping / late + soon / it is only water rising / will the exodus  
be / apologue too

## Sonnet of the Rain

Lorena Freed

The rain is falling, falling hard and quick.  
The rain is falling and it falls some more.  
It falls this fall. There is no way to flick  
a thing this thick into a metaphor.  
Phone-cameras want to bring the city's sluiced  
outline into the eye. Cloud tramples down  
land, slaving definition. I've deduced  
that they were lying to me in the town  
of childhood. There is nothing much to say.  
Cities have always shown their bleary way  
in gas lights and the psychotropic view  
of skylines. But they have not meant or said  
anything. Nor does this rain have to do  
with tears, my boy or anyone else dead.

## Apology

Lorena Freed

I know. I am the parasite. I pulled  
those weeds. I tore out shrubs where the skunk slept.  
My hominid ancestral violence crept  
the ancient earth and culled and culled and culled,  
its muddy mouth still burbling bitter heat.  
Now I apologize at autumn's feet,  
waking remorseful for the young milkweed  
I slaughtered before it could even seed.





## Neixin's Visit

Ihor Pidhainy

They were waiting for me at the door. I was nervous and opened it quickly. Neixin had phoned the day before and told me why she was coming over. She stood next to Gao Di, who was as handsome as usual, but frightened and masking this fright as best he could. I invited them in.

They were uncomfortable in my family's living room, although none of my family was present and none of them knew why they were visiting. It was a secret that only the three of us shared.

Neixin was the bravest, but it was she who was facing the knife and it was she who was going to suffer.

I offered my guest tea and oranges. Neixin ate sunflower seeds, I thought how happy we had been.

‡

The Hospital for Women and Children was located half-way up Hospital Road. It appeared after the shops for Spring Festival Decorations and books, stalls for flowers and sweets, peddlers of fruit and chestnuts. The three of us entered and Gao Di lined up to purchase a ticket. Neixin and I stood off from the line. She looked over at Gao Di and humphed.

'He gets me in this trouble,' but she paused and then didn't finish her speech.

Gao Di purchased the ticket and came over.

'Gao Di, you wait outside,' Neixin commanded in a strong voice.

I was surprised but Gao Di only shrugged and went outside.

'Zhuli, I'm scared.'

We hugged tightly and then let go. On the bench across from us a woman was nursing her infant. She was in her mid-thirties and looked like she came from the country outside the town. Neixin's family was also outside of Daoyuan, my hometown. They lived in Zaozhuang which was almost an hour by bus from Daoyuan and was only a village by comparison. It was too small a place, everyone knew everyone and this would have shamed her family deeply. So she came to visit me in the city of Daoyuan.

‡

The doctor called Neixin and both of us entered the office. There were a few other woman seated on the chairs and benches against the wall. Neixin and I were the youngest. We were the only ones who were under twenty-five in the room. The doctor motioned for Neixin to have a seat in the chair across the desk from her.

‘What’s wrong with you?’

‘My period’s late.’

‘How late?’

‘Two months.’

‘Well, come with me.’

The doctor led Neixin to an area that was partitioned off from the rest of the office. They were there for a few minutes and then returned.

‘We’ll call you in a little while.’

Neixin and I left the office and walked about the hallway. She told me what the doctor had done in the other room. I listened in, drinking all of this information down.

‡

The doctor recalled Neixin and gave her the news. It was official. She was pregnant. The doctor asked and assigned a time for her operation a little later.

The three of us sat outside. The sun was warm and the weather nice. The operation was scheduled in an hour. I wanted to leave Neixin and Gao Di alone, but she didn’t want and I stayed. We didn’t speak very many words.

‡

The operation was to be performed down the hall from the room where Neixin had been examined. I walked over and purchased the ticket for the operation. It was not a long wait, so I lingered near the counter after I had made the purchase. When I returned to Neixin, she and Gao Di were very quiet.

‘Gao Di, you wait outside.’

Gao Di left, reluctantly. I could see that he wanted to stay, wanted to be with Neixin, but it would be easier for her with him outside.

Neixin and I walked down the hall and turned into the room. We waited for the doctor. We didn’t talk - what was the use of words at this point?

The doctor called Neixin. I wanted to go with her, she looked so frightened and so small. I sat as the doctor led her into the operating room.

‡

The operation lasted more than half-an-hour. I sat quietly in the room adjoining and heard Neixin’s moans and groans. It sounded horrible.

Neixin came out of the room, pale as a ghost. I jumped up from my seat and held her up. I brought her over to the bench and helped her lie down. I then returned to the doctor’s table and took the prescription for the medicine the doctor wrote out. The doctor was a kind woman, but a little angry and frustrated by the passing of so many young women before her. She looked at me and I believed there was a warning in her eyes, but all she said was regarding the medicine. I went out into the hallway and ran smack into Gao Di.

‘I’m going to buy the medicine,’ I said, knowing nothing else.

Gao Di took out a large sum of money and put it in my hand. I tried to refuse, but he wouldn’t let me. He went directly to Neixin. I walked down to the medicine counter, purchased tickets and lined up for the medicine. I bought the medicine and returned to Neixin. Gao Di had helped Neixin to her feet and supported her as we left the hospital. I ran outside and called a pedicab. The driver peddled over and helped Gao Di place Neixin in the seat. Gao Di got in beside her. I took another pedicab.

We reached my apartment block in a few minutes. Gao Di paid both drivers and we helped Neixin through the courtyard, past the offices and to the building of my family’s flat. We lived on the fourth floor and Gao Di carried Neixin up the staircase. I opened the door and Gao Di brought Neixin over to the sofa.

‘Let’s take her to my bedroom,’ I said.

‘I can walk,’ Neixin insisted.

She rose and, with Gao Di's help, stumbled into my room. I quickly prepared the bed and placed extra pillows down for her. Neixin lay quietly.

I left them alone in the bedroom.

‡

My mother arrived from work around six. I explained to her that Neixin and Gao Di were visiting for the day. My mother and I set about making dinner. A little later, Gao Di came out and helped with the preparations. Soon my younger brother came home and he was overjoyed with our guests - Neixin was one of his favourites among my classmates. He went to purchase some beer for our guests.

Dinner was a little strange. My brother, father and mother were very happy that my classmates had come for dinner. My mother made a lot of food and then sent my father out to order some other dishes. My brother breathed in with intoxication Gao Di and Neixin's stories of University and city life. But the three of us felt glum and downhearted. We hid this best as we could and played our parts with bitter relish.

My parents generation is strict. My father made sure that Neixin and I shared my bed, while Gao Di bunked with my brother. Neixin and I talked for a long time into the night, in whispers, and I felt truly sad for her. My father rose a couple of times in the night and walked about the flat. We fell asleep to his comforting footsteps in the hall.

In the morning Neixin insisted on going home. My mother and I attempted to detain her, but she was adamant. I accompanied my classmates to the bus station and saw them off. After their bus set off, I walked home and I cried. At home, I read a book, put it down and thought about Neixin.

‡

My mother understood something, something that I don't know how she did. She would tell me there was a connection between the heart of the daughter and her mother and no matter where I was, she knew when I suffered or when I was happy. I do not know how - perhaps one day I will. It took a few days, but one day when a friend of my father's visited our flat and stayed over, my mother and I shared her bed and talked into the night.

'Daughter, what is bothering you?'

'Nothing, mother.'

‘Tell me. I know.’

I told her.

My mother was very angry.

She told me that Neixin might have died because she had lost a lot of blood as a result of the abortion and we should not have allowed her to travel in that state. And she cursed my youth and our generation’s folly. And we talked late into the night. And I held my mother tight, as I had as a child until I fell into sleep.

I was afraid my mother would tell my father, but she didn’t. And after the Spring Festival, when I returned to University, Neixin and I never spoke about it. And we went on with our lives as students, no longer young nor innocent.

‡‡

## My Dad's Second Neighbor Named Robert

August Edwards

A gun shooting several shots outside woke up my dad. Alarmed, he went to the back balcony. Balcony makes it sound like a certain kind of way. The view is of an alley and a parking lot. Actually, multiple parking lots—one which belongs to his apartment, one belongs to a bank, and a few adjacent municipal lots. So it looks like one big disjointed lot. Plus, this is in Turlock, and if you've been there, you might understand how at 3AM, the humid manure smell is at its summit. That farmland smell is so strong it wakes me up if I've fallen asleep with my window open. This is the balcony ambiance. Now I've set the scene. After the shots, my dad saw a man on the ground fighting for what would be his final gasps of breath, of life. This year, similar to the year before, and the year before that, California would have nearly 1,500 gun homicides. My dad yelled—*David! David! David!* He thought the dying man was his neighbor, David, who's a young guy, and at around this time on weekends David moves cones from the apartment parking lot. David has to do that because Robert—the property manager and property resident—doesn't want anybody to park in his parking lot. So, dad has this image of David losing his life all because he's doing Robert's bidding. Robert: shirtless year-round; can't hardly walk much less trek the stairs; doesn't have any teeth; sexually harasses his caregivers, asks them how they feel about oral sex, sends photos of his genitals. Robert has cameras all over the property. He sees everything that happens around the complex. He knows when I am walking up the stairs to visit my dad before my dad knows. He sees every person who passes by his truck in the parking lot. He saw the man shot, fall over, gasp for life. He knew what happened before the bullets even came out. While my dad called for David, thinking it was David, dying, Robert exerted every ounce of strength he could to shuffle out. All that evidence on his monitors. The murder he just watched. In happier times we joke about his monitor setup. Like he's living out his TV fantasies. On watching the shooting, Robert would say it was just like watching a Western, his favorite genre. So. David had been sleeping in his apartment and heard my dad calling for him. Woke up, came out. "Call the police, David," my dad said to the ghost.

‡‡

## Signs

Birch Wiley

I'm seeking signs from god again –

*shyness steals  
your life*

WARNING: THIS BUSINESS IS ORDERED  
TO STOP ILLEGAL ACTIVITY  
ILLICIT CANNABIS SEIZED

END  
WAR  
CRIMES  
IN GAZA

EAT MY WET PUSSY FREE  
917- [REDACTED]

I'm hunting down divine truth in SoHo

ARMANI

BURBERRY

UpWest is Closed  
(visit us online!)

*Seeking a Wealthy Husband  
(serious inquiries only)*

and a prophet balances on the subway  
railing, shouts *y'all don't give a fuck about black artists*  
and kicks trash at passerby and

*strawberry Modelo: 2/\$4*

and I'm afraid of death, more afraid  
of all this living left to get through.

*Don't be someone's subway story.*

*when it reigns, I'm poor*

*say "I Love you"*

I am on the train to perdition, I am on the C  
train to Brooklyn, I am talking about myself  
too much, not saying much

*Make  
Celebrity  
Economics  
Your  
Business.*

*Calvin Klein*

*Kratom Sold Here!*

*If you see something,  
say something.*

*say something.*

*say something.*

*say something.*

*say something.*

*say something.*

*say something.*

Please won't somebody say something? Won't you  
make up my mind? Won't you tell me  
what to do? Won't you tell me what I mean?  
God or someone send the signal – I'm ready  
to be told – I'm ready – I've been practicing  
my whole life to believe. This whole time  
I've been trying to believe you knew  
how to speak.

## The Other Sappho

Birch Wiley

I'm walking on neon Hudson shore when the truck  
pulls up onto the sand, gravel, stones, driftwood.  
Teal paint peels in bright sheets from rotted wheel wells  
chrome shines through rust lace

headlights salt veiled. Behind the wheel my other  
body rolls the window down with a blunt nub  
of a finger green water sheets down the door  
He smiles through holes

in his cheeks wet cigarette in his lips.  
*Got a light?* Muscle strips off bone may pole.  
I put a Cheyenne in each mouth, light up, lean  
against the hood. We shoot

the shit the engine idles we talk about  
this river's bottom all the washing machines  
and freak fish my college degree he neve  
finished lovers who

ruined his life lovers I don't remember.  
I didn't drive off the Tappan Zee Bridge so  
I figured I'm better now at least better  
enough. Our laughter

shakes walnuts and acorns out of treetops.  
Maybe I'll weight my pockets with sobriety  
coins follow behind wade into the water  
trailing his exhaust.

## Affair with the City

Gary Fox

It started with my Mom  
long straightened Italian hair  
cut abruptly  
a stranger that left  
me in tears  
after that she took me  
so I would never forget  
the green bumpy 20  
bus to Bridge and Pratt  
rusting olive trestle broken  
windows up the stairs onto  
the platform where  
the wind and the El  
took us over  
Frankford then Kensington  
the clang and shrieks of turns  
bobbled our heads  
she pointed over the big  
fan the stops her and my dad  
boarded as kids when we  
passed Mom-Mom's  
then we pop up next to 95  
then into the tunnel  
where the lights would flash  
into darkness which seemed  
forever to downtown  
I would count the stops  
2<sup>nd</sup> St., 5<sup>th</sup> St. and 8<sup>th</sup> St.  
we get up and through  
the turnstile the food market  
& then The Gallery up the stairs  
onto busy Market St.  
holding hands to her  
hairdresser's and I drank  
my orange juice on the  
pillowy tan couch within  
site for afterwards it  
was about us and pizza  
I was cemented

with each step I was home  
I was me

## Starbucks Memories

Ronald Massa

The LEGEND continues  
in a sea of HONDAs fair youth and laughter  
awaiting the hero's return  
to MICROSOFT car bombs  
in the fragrant barbed wire WONDER BREAD playoffs  
of the world's greatest religious spectacle

Jesus Christ & Donald Trump  
FIRESTONE Tires and  
White Christian NETFLIX deodorant aliens  
with KENTUCKY FRIED CHICKEN  
sunsets on dopey cities  
of dunces screaming

This is the place for tumors and rumors and  
plastic girls wet with excitement  
on Tylenol rainy days

In morphine nights  
heroin beauties  
lustily remember  
our ATOM BOMB years and land mines  
and all the burning graves of Palestine

Ah, this is a place to become a poet  
a STARBUCKS memory of lipstick girls  
the little ghost girls who dance in Arab gardens.

## Ten Words 02\*21\*22

Shontay Luna

The Devil stares at me  
discontentedly as I've  
unburdened myself of  
the concrete gray cloak  
of antipredation. That at  
one time sheltered me  
so violently, holding me  
hostage. That captured  
and collected the blood  
of many generations in  
opaquely bleak time-  
lines. Justice an expert  
at playing Hide and  
Seek with lives of  
color in prison  
populations whose  
numbers are boldly  
elevated behind  
political agendas that  
stead only the  
politicians.

## Waiting for the Call

Kenton K. Yee

Bundled on the roof, an extra windy night. Binocular eyes search the fog-smeared winter sky. Can you dip me in a stardust pie? Feint lights in the sky excite he who hasn't enough. Both eyes shut is how I pass the time. With each word I write, one more comes to mind.

cherry trees  
April nor'easter  
shivering scarecrows





## HOMEMADE

Thaddeus Rutkowski

My brother and sister and I were watching television when our father came into the room. “Why are you sitting here in the dark?” he asked. “You should be outside.”

We left the house but stayed on the porch. I leaned against the railing, while my siblings sat on the steps.

Presently, our father came out. “I’ll give you something to do,” he said. “You can pick dandelions.”

There were many yellow blossoms poking through the dense grass in the yard. My brother and sister and I stood over the flowers, bent down, and pinched the flowers from their stems. We dropped them into a grocery bag.

“Aren’t these weeds?” my brother asked.

“They are weeds,” my sister said.

After an hour or so, our father came to check on us. We had filled only part of the bag. “This isn’t enough,” he said.

We ranged farther, leaving the yard and searching next to the town’s one road. After some time, we had filled the bag. We gave the harvest to our father.

“I’ll make dandelion wine,” he said, “I learned how to do this in Kentucky, where I was teaching – before you were born.”

In the kitchen, he showed us how to separate the petals from the stems. “Throw away the green parts,” he said.

He took the yellow petals and put them into a bucket. “I’ll need water, sugar, and yeast – and a few raisins,” he said as he added the ingredients and stirred the mixture with a large wooden spoon.

When my mother came home from work, she asked, “What’s that smell?”

“I’m making wine,” my father said. “It won’t be Chardonnay. It will be Chateau Pennsylvania.”

I looked at the bucket holding my father's concoction. A cloth covered the top, and a sour fragrance bubbled up from the mixture.

"It smells bad," my mother said.

"I think it smells good," my father said. "We're going to be self-sufficient with booze."

‡

After a few days, I noticed that many yellow flowers had reappeared in the yard. The lawn was dotted with yellow flowers, and some of them had gone to seed. I could kick the gray puffs and send small clouds into the air.

There were enough flowers for another bucket of wine. However, I left the blossoms for groundhogs and rabbits to eat.

Inside, my father was in his studio. He had probably been up most of the night. When I walked past his door, I saw him sitting on a stool, with his head resting on his drafting table and his eyes closed. An empty beer bottle and a can of loose tobacco sat next to him. In the background, paintings of landscapes – farm fields and hills – were stacked on the floor.

‡

Later, my father poured a yellowish liquid from his fermenting bucket into a glass jug. He set the jug on the table at the start of dinner. My brother and sister and I sat silently in our chairs while he poured the wine into stemmed glasses and gave one to each of us. He also poured a glass for my mother, who was lading food from pots on the stove. "I can't drink," she said. "It makes me turn red."

We sipped from our glasses.

"Yow!" my brother said after he swallowed.

"Whoo-ee!" my sister said.

The wine was sweet, with a faint fragrance of flowers. It was the strongest drink I'd ever tasted.

My father poured some of the firewater into a large glass for himself. "Everyone should make their own wine," he said. "We'll take the business from the vintners and distributors. They won't be getting rich from our money."

“We have no money,” my mother said as she tasted the wine.

“That’s right,” my father said, “but we won’t need money when we make our own hooch.”

I looked at my mother’s face: It had turned red. She gestured toward the bowls on the counter. “Come and get your supper,” she said.

The meal she’d prepared – a stew that would feed all of us – smelled good.

‡

I found a mason jar and scooped some wine from the fermenting bucket. I clipped the lid shut and set the jar behind the door of my bedroom. Other valuable things were there: a pack of firecrackers, a padlock and key, a holster with a knife, a chess set. I didn’t want to drink the wine immediately; I wanted to save it for a special occasion.

Later, a parade sponsored by the volunteer Fire Department filled the one street in our town. A band with majorettes led the way. I brought my wine to the small hill outside our house and sat there among the dandelions.

But when I opened the lid, I smelled something beyond fermentation. I smelled rot. When I held the jar to the light, I saw a cloudy liquid. I took my wine to the nearest drainpipe and poured it out.

‡‡

## Evil Always Already Exists in Hamaguchi's *Evil Does Not Exist*

Thomas Johnson, editor

The paradox of cinema sometimes comes into violent collision with the push into new phenomenological territory. Reducibly we are here to be entertained and persuaded, but then there's Ryusuke Hamaguchi opening his latest film *Evil Does Not Exist* with six-minutes of tilt-panned tracking shots staring straight up the forested sky, slowly rolling under the trees of a small village in Nagano prefecture. He's asking us, *what are we thinking comes next?*

Projections onto the scene meet the audience seated in their expectations. The act of buying a ticket and viewing the cinematic arts comes with its grounded genre realities, this is a drama, it will be dramatic. What we already know about nature and the unending great blue yonder above – as a source of life, of wonder, and of, principally, *the state of nature distinct from human involvement* – comes crashing down in vertical illusion onto the viewer suspended in place waiting for something violent to occur. This is merely presage.

It's in that manner of addressing the cinematic arc, through the introduction of pensive backward gaze into the possibilities of the natural past, that Hamaguchi anchors his work with equal footing in the specters of human history as well as the ghosts of our impossibly collapsing future. *Evil Does Not Exist* tells the forward coming event of capital encroachment on the home village of Takumi Yasumura, played by Hitoshi Omika, which we know from trailers, reviews, and YouTube shorts, will involve the for-profit installation of a glamping campground that could (will? already has?) upend Yasumura's ecological balance. And even if you caught the film without knowing that in advance, the teleological presence of the film's title does the work for you – something wicked this way is coming. This is what makes the unbelief of cinema a tacit act in believing itself.

On the screen, whether silent or not, one is dealing with apparitions that, as in Plato's cave, the spectator believes, apparitions that are sometimes idolized. Because the spectral dimension is that of neither the living nor the dead, of neither hallucination nor perception, the modality of believing that relates to it must be analyzed in an absolutely original manner. This particular phenomenology was not possible before the movie camera because this experience of believing is linked to a particular technique, that of cinema. It is historical through and through, with that supplementary aura, that particular memory that lets us project

ourselves into films of the past. That is why the experience of seeing a film is so rich. It lets one see new specters appear while remembering (and then projecting them in turn onto the screen) the ghosts haunting films already seen.”<sup>1</sup>

Hamaguchi is asking for balance between what is there and what is not. “It’s about balance” becomes Yasumura’s chief line and statement among the very few times we even see him speak, and we *believe* him: partly because we want to, because our inner desires are brought forth to haunt our viewership, but also for having watched Hamaguchi’s patience-enduring long takes that follow Yasumura as he ladles fresh water from a mountain stream, one spoonful at a time into clean, white jerry cans, then walking what feels like many miles step by step toward his Toyota 4-Runner and back to whatever life he lives. We hear every crunch of snow under his feet with each silent minute. Eiko Ishibashi, tasked with scoring another Hamaguchi work, leaves these moments empty for the viewer. This is the world moving at the world’s pace. Yasumura is in equal balance where we meet him. Where Yasumura drives off to, we don’t get see. We appear in the next moment with him, and we know that he has driven to somewhere, someplace.

Seeing that 4-Runner appear, listening to Yasumura strike a lighter to smoke a cigarette, catching every beam of light in the crisp midday sun, Hamaguchi mourns for the world around and beyond. That thing unheard. There’s a truck, it will get on a highway, but, even as we’ve walked along with Yasumura for many minutes now, we deliberately do not see the truck drive off, not in this scene. And yet its knowledge, its presence still greets us. We carry with us the expectation now of wanting to go back into that forest, even as we haven’t yet seen Yasumura’s exterior capital world. For us and everything we know about Yasumura, it is of the state of nature, a world of balance.

These filmic slights of hand, leveling the world that no exists against the world that does, are Hamaguchi’s tentpoles in Derrida’s haunted cinema. That nothing can exist without having always-already been somewhere in the past, first as idea, then as object, then as a ghost. We are left with the mourning, the metaphysical presence of memory lingering in our ear and provoking feeling and emotion for something that is – at once – here and not here any longer.

“Haunting then, can be construed as a failed mourning. It is about refusing to give up the ghost or – and this can sometimes amount to the same thing – the refusal of the ghost to give up on us. The spectre will not allow us to settle into/for the mediocre satisfactions once can glean in a world governed by capitalist realism.”<sup>2</sup>

There are layers to the haunting. Subjectively as Hamaguchi nudges us into the centers of our hearts, finding in our own pasts that irreducible longing for nature, and objectively as Yasumura silently bereaves over a photo of his late wife. We're being provoked into the question, *what is it that's not here and why is moving me?*<sup>2</sup> The question of ghosts and specters in cinema has been tossed around for decades now, but Hamaguchi is openly tackling it, alluring to us that something is gone and something else is coming up real quick.

That arrival occurs in the middle third of three distinct acts. Hamaguchi establishes our collective past in Yasumura's daily work, then creates the object of intrusion. Takahashi Keisuke and Mayuzumi Yuuko hold a townhall for their company's planned campground and take repeated questions, which they are unable to answer, about the ecological impact to Mizubiki's way of life. Takahashi introduces the film, "We have prepared a video," and then we jump to ten minutes in the future where the questions begin. The feeling of the video – one we've all seen in some version of our lives – remains with us, even as the ghost of the event lingers off screen. It is the eventual, inevitable collision of capitalism, unwrought and totalitarian in its consumption, that will devour your way of life. This collision is the film's shocking final act.

Yasumura's daughter goes missing and the final third of the film searches for her. We long for her on screen. We are haunted by her missing. Hamaguchi carefully puts both Keisuke and Mayuzumi in helpless position during the search, evoking their powerless abilities as a symbol of the capitalist regime. Then, abruptly, Hamaguchi lets Yasumura's daughter reappear. But something's off, the sun in the sky don't match with the real time scene, and we are watching her very ghost flicker in Yasumura's mind. She's already gone, even as she reappears.

Finally and at last, Yasumura must reclaim the balance of his world again. And as a parallel back to that striking opening image where Hamaguchi gives life to the past, here now returns in whispered, darkened form, a thing taken from us, only the frantic breathing of Yasumura now sounding under a moonlit canopy of tree limbs.

Hamaguchi mirrors his opening and closing images in search of balance. This is a longing for justice:

No justice—let us not say no law and once again we are not speaking here of laws—seems possible or thinkable without the principle of some responsibility, beyond all living present, within that which disjoins the living present, before the ghosts of those who are not yet born or who are already dead.<sup>3</sup>

We leave the film knowing what we already know – this continued abrasion of natural inclination against capital consumption cannot go on forever.

Where we remain lost is looking for the answers. Like the cinematic framework that Hamaguchi works in, defined, time-tested, constrained to the presentation of moving images projected onto a screen, we can only maneuver so much in the realm of politics and possibility. The key, then, is to ask that our future work in conjunction with the ghosts of the past. If we know in our bones that capital progress is going to eat us alive, we have to learn about the failures of its opposite, communism and communism's ghosts, to perform any ideation of a better future:

Marxism remains at once indispensable and structurally insufficient: it is still necessary but provided it be transformed and adapted to new conditions and to a new thinking of the ideological, provided it be made to analyze the new articulation of techno-economic causalities and of religious ghosts, the dependent condition of the juridical at the service of socio-economic powers or States that are themselves never totally independent with regard to capital [but there is no longer, there never was just capital, nor capitalism in the singular, but capitalisms plural].<sup>4</sup>

This antagonism by the persistence of systems already in place is what Fisher calls the “slow cancellation of the future.” There is no resolution for the people of Mizubiki. Rather than the idea of possibilities opening up, rather “than the old recoiling from the ‘new’ in fear and incomprehension”<sup>5</sup> the villagers just conduct a timeworn search that ends in timeworn sadness. It feels inevitable even before it's over. And with our sadness, we know also that the villagers will succumb the approach of capitalism. And we are so worn out.

This is Hamaguchi's final game. We fade to black with Yasumura running away. We haven't gotten the answers, there are more ghosts now than at start, and capitalism continues to disrupt nature in lock step. It seems like evil will always be here.

But, what Hamaguchi is saying, *it always has been*. All the empty spaces in this deeply mournful film are asking, which side are you on?

1. De Baecque, Antoine and Jousse, Thierry. “Cinema and Its Ghosts: An Interview with Jacques Derrida.” Trans. by Peggy Kamuf. *Cahiers du Cinema*, Paris, 2000, pp. 37.
2. Fisher, Mark. *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Hauntology, Depression, and Lost Futures*. Zero Books, Winchester, UK, 2014. pp. 30.
3. Derrida, Jacques. *Spectres of Marx*. Routledge Classics, New York, 1993. pp. xviii.
4. *Ibid.* pp. 73.
5. Fisher, pp. 17.

## My Hands

Emily Kledzik

chipped black polish, wrinkled hands from dishes for almost 16 years now.  
gun-shot sounds as they push beyond limits, friend's looks at the lecture  
interruption—

‘apologies,’ anxiety reaches new heights along with my peace every day.  
tendons bulging beneath skin, wrists thinner than usual again: mild concern.  
i feel them move and wonder what the insides of them would feel like, if  
i was a cadaver, dedicated to the extension of medicine long past my time.

hands hold the power of life or death, far more powerful even than the  
tongue:

for these words shall last eternally; words enter the air and the wind blows  
them apart.

professor says ‘words live forever, even lasting in the smoke of a fire as they  
burn’—

i too shall last forever, my imprint on this world shall be that of pain and  
triumph.

i can already feel the presidential spittle on my cheek as he yells, reminiscent  
of my father.

fingers typing frantically, we shall not die in vain: those after us will know we  
fought for them.

the thin scar above my thumb from the slip of a nail and weeks of infection,  
it seems to cry out to me that time shall heal all things: and yet, i am afraid.

## Cleansing Ritual

E. Peregrine

Black glass pond. Practice: words  
come through page.

No censoring. Flow.  
Ice is only on

surface layers. Illusory night.  
Always something beyond.

I rise from the mud.  
Ancient fish, I rise: fin, eye, lip.

No limbs outside boundaries.  
Ice fractals.

Paint-cracked door frame.  
All illusory.

Hail, hail the cold glass pane!

It sates me;  
I cannot be sated.

Break through water  
like a wave of lemon.

Olive oil dances warning.  
Jealous, strange eyes.

They do not know the  
white candle, copper blade.

Thyme stretches. I stretch.  
Morning releases slowly.

## Halloween: Just Before the Beatles

Gordon W. Mennenga

Night descended on our little town, throwing a cold deep purple blanket over tree and tower. Halloween made us crazy, made us say things that hadn't been said. My little brother Robby had stuffed straw up his sleeves, an earnest attempt at becoming a scarecrow or a human torch. My sister Stella was a bossy majorette with skinned knees and rouged cheeks. She kept whacking my brother with her baton every time he said, "Give me the money" instead of "trick or treat" when we'd practiced for the night's adventure.

I assumed the role of a hobo, a giddy king of the road, counting on admiration and sympathy for generous fistfuls of candy. Who could deny a child with his grandfather's corncob pipe clenched between his teeth, a bandana stuffed with old socks, tied to a hickory stick? Uncle Chet's greasy felt fedora sat heavy on my head. The idea that being fearless and free struck me as a good thing.

After the sun deserted the horizon, we set out anticipating great sweet treats and a good look into peoples' houses. Jack-o'-lanterns winked and beckoned. You couldn't have Halloween without fire. Cloaked in our new identities, we welcomed the rules of darkness. We could say shit and fuck, we could spit, and we could pee in the bushes. We left our parents, Mick and Mona, with a pile of Bit-O-Honeys, our traditional giveaway treat, our mother slapping at our father's hand, saying he'd had enough treats for one night.

To me my mother said, "Roy, you're responsible. Bring 'em back alive." Our neighborhood was an open road, every trickster was on their own.

‡

Tug and Dorothy Henderson, our first stop, usually gave out Good & Plentys. We always made the same choice when it came to sticking out our hands or sticking out our open paper bags. Drop in the hand or drop in the bag. The hand was better because you could see what you were getting, but most people went for the bag so you couldn't see how cheap they were. At every house it was hand or bag, bag or hand. Dorothy Henderson, the tallest woman in town, went for the hand and the G & Ps were ours.

Next Mrs. Somes who gave out quarters. Her husband had hanged himself in their garage, and this had turned her hair white. When my brother said, "Give me the money," she laughed at his little gravelly voice and gave him an

extra quarter. We tiptoed past the garage, imagining the rope dangling from the beam, afraid of breathing in what was left of a dead man's last breath.

We met other kids on the sidewalk, our classmates and cousins, a few out-of-towners, and Kenny McQueen who was a forty-year-old crotch itcher who didn't wear a costume. The Fessler twins, reeking of mother love, showed up dressed as tap-dancing sailors. Their squeaky laughter was both annoying and entertaining. No one talked about school, or being cautious or about little Toby Lister's recent disappearance because we were on a mission of no regret.

Mr. Stark, the barber, was passing out combs, the Giffords handed out their usual undercooked yellow mystery cupcakes, Spud Handy stood in his doorway with a beer in one hand and a cigarette in the other and let us take the full-bar Butterfingers he'd stuck in his waistband. Then it was taffy, sucker, taffy, sucker with a few Tootsie Rolls and Dots tossed in. Our bounty was piling up, our bags crackling against our legs as we hurried from house to house, soaking up the crisp night air.

Stella, in moments of unbridled joy, tossed her baton up into the stratosphere as any good majorette would do, and we imagined it finding some distant orbit and never coming back. She was good at tossing but not good at catching.

The Kramers came up big with super-sized blue and red popcorn balls, and the Swans hit us in our hands with homemade fudge—gulped and gone before we were off their creaky porch. Our breath formed quick clouds that put us in mind of some smoking we'd like to do. The Coopers gave out plastic whistles in a risky move because you could hear kids joyfully blowing their lungs out all over town, deep into the night. The sidewalks were crowded with copycats of every kind. Too many pirates and nurses, a few cowboys, a stumbling bunch of tinfoiled robots. Stella said "shit" each time she met another majorette. Robby got some candy corn caught in his whistle and declared it broken and became a sobbing scarecrow with the sweetest drool in the world.

The Framptons: yellow apples with brown spots. Shuemans: Necco wafers. Warfields: a crumbling Fig Newton. On to the Harshbargers for our once-a-year peek at Floyd Harshbarger in his iron lung. It was like his head was sticking out of a space ship. We wondered how he pissed or scratched his nose or if he ever planked his wife. Mrs. Harshbarger served up huge sugar cookies with orange and black icing. She started reminiscing about every Halloween since she'd been born—how one year it had snowed and one year, when she was a small girl, she'd gone trick or treating on horseback. Our exit

was less than graceful when she asked us if we'd like to say hello and thanks to Mr. Harshbarger.

The Popkins: we passed on them because of the cat hair on the cookies the year before. My sister claimed she had dreams about trying to get cat hair off her tongue while being chased by a pack of hairless cats. The Gelmans, the Ubbens, the Blackfords, the Biebers. When each door opened we got a whiff of the supper we were interrupting: liver and onions, ham hodgepodge, roast beef, bean soup, meatloaf, tuna patties, candied yams, chocolate chip delight. We dodged the Lutheran parsonage because Rev. Zumwalt and his mail order wife gave out tiny New Testaments and the promise of sweet salvation, no candy. Too much religion makes you hungry for candy.

We headed for home when the cold bled through our costumes, and our desire to count our treats became our sugary engine. Our parents watched as we emptied our bags onto the kitchen table, each of us guarding our loot, ignoring the certainty of tooth decay and the dentist's hairy hands.

There were surprises in my bag: a walnut, an unwrapped throat lozenge, a piece of cinnamon toast, a postcard from Nova Scotia, a skeleton key, a ten-penny nail, a shoe horn, a wax harmonica. Too many pencils – one from a French funeral home, as if we'd actually use it. Plenty of Sugar Babies, too many Hershey kisses, not much Lik-A-Made, bubble gum galore. Candy wrappers littered the floor as we filled our mouths with gluey globs, our cheeks pushing against our noses.

In each pile there was one simple surprise: a shiny .22 long rifle shell with a bronze tip. Mick and Mona, in unison, asked, "WHAT IN GOD'S NAME IS THAT?" and "WHO IN GOD'S NAME?" We grabbed our bullets, fought off our parents and in the end each of us owned a Halloween bullet. Stella's disappeared before dawn, Robby rolled his around in his mouth for a few days then flattened it with a hammer on the sidewalk.

I still have mine.

Sometimes you just have to eat the treats and treasure the tricks. Forever and ever. Amen.

‡‡

## Contributor Biographies

NATE CASTELLITTO is a poet in Pennsylvania whose work has appeared in *wildness*, *Ink in Thirds*, *Sojourners*, and elsewhere.

CALEB CHEADLE is a writer invested in discovering the truths hidden in the gaps between words, from an etymological, syntactic, and definitive viewpoint. He holds a BA in Literature from The Ohio State University and an MFA in Creative Writing and Poetics from Naropa University. His passion for life and authenticity is clear in every aspect of his life.

JOHN CULLEN graduated from SUNY Geneseo and worked in the entertainment business booking rock bands, a clown troupe, and an R-rated magician. Currently he teaches at Ferris State University in Michigan. He has had work published in *American Journal of Poetry*, *The MacGuffin*, *Harpur Palate*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Cleaver*, *Pembroke Magazine*, and *New York Quarterly*. His most recent chapbook, *The Observation of Basic Matter*, will be published in 2025 by Bass Clef Books.

AUGUST EDWARDS lives in the Midwest. She holds an MFA from San Francisco State University. You can find her work in *Albuquerque Green Room*, *Word West Revue*, *Mulberry Literary*, *Hard Noise*, and elsewhere.

GARY FOX is originally from Philadelphia and currently resides on Maryland's eastern shore. He went from a neighborhood kid writing graffiti, to a hip-hop producer, and now a retail manager, father and husband. He has published poems in *Toho Journal*, *The Shore*, *High Shelf Press*, *Struggle Magazine*, *Cathexis Northwest Press*, *Sea To Sky Review* and *The Dewdrop*. He has a BA in English and a certificate in creative writing from The Pennsylvania State University.

LORENA AXMAN FREED exists as an Ohioan child of the '80s, with work forthcoming in *Blue Unicorn*. A ghost since her ostensible birth, she is still figuring herself out and sometimes wonders whether she has really been anyone, anywhere.

KJ HANNAH GREENBERG uses her trusty point-and-shoot camera to capture the order of G-d's universe, and Paint 3D to capture her personal

chaos. Sometimes, it's insufficient for her to sate herself by applying verbal whimsy to pastures where gelatinous wildebeests roam or fey hedgehogs play. Hannah's self-illustrated poetry collections are: *Miscellaneous Parlor Trick* (Seashell Books, 2024), *Word Magpie* (Audience Askew, 2024), *Subrogation* (Seashell Books, 2023), and *One-Handed Pianist* (Hekate Publishing, 2021).

*Greenberg's photography is featured on pages 16 and 17.*

EMILY KLEDZIK is an undergraduate student studying Creative Writing. She is a queer woman in Appalachia devoted to understanding humanity. Her writing pays tribute to the people around her, the divinity and slight humanity she sees within her surrounding nature, and the great writers that come before her.

SHONTAY LUNA's work has appeared in *Umbrella Factory Magazine*, *The Crucible*, and (*alternate route*) among others. Her latest book is *The Goddess Journal*. Luna is a native Chicagoan.

RONALD MASSA is a graduate of Williams College and Cornell. His work has appeared in a number of journals and magazines both in this country and abroad including *The Massachusetts Review* and *The New England Review*. He lives in Arizona.

GORDON W. MENNENGA grew up in a small Iowa town where he learned to look and listen. His work has been featured on NPR and published in *Epoch*, *Post Road*, *Epiphany Literary Journal*, and *Necessary Fiction*. He recently made his first appearance on Spotify. Gordon has taught fiction writing and film studies at DePauw University, Coe College, and Oregon State University. He often serves on the faculty of the Iowa Summer Writing Festival. Gordon earned an MFA degree from the Iowa Writer's Workshop and still calls Iowa City his home. [gordonwmennenga.com](http://gordonwmennenga.com).

GRANT MOSER is a writer living in central New Jersey. He likes to play with words.

E. PEREGRINE (they/them) is a transgender conductor, poet, teacher, and Pacific Northwesterner-turned-New England resident. Their writing has appeared internationally in *Meniscus*, *Gold Man Review*, *Roanoke Review*, *Abraxas*, *Variant Literature*, *Bluestem Magazine*, and elsewhere.

IHOR PIDHAINY is a teacher and writer based in the Atlanta area. His poetry appears in *Ranger Magazine* Issue 8, *Litbop* v. 1, No. 4, *W3IRD*, and will soon appear in *Juste Milieu Zine*, *Scapegoat Review*, *Merion West Poetry* and *Meow Meow Pow Pow Lit*. His story “A Lonely Lover and his Dirty Old Man” is viewable at *Bright Flash Literary Review*.

AYME ROBINSON is a multimedia artist, photographer, and activist based in Chicago. Specializing in black and white photography, Ayme captures the diverse corners of the city, documenting its ever-evolving landscape. Her work is not only visually compelling, but also serves as a powerful record of Chicago’s history. As an activist, she uses her art to highlight social issues and advocate for change, focusing on the intersection of urban life and the solitude often felt within it. Through her lens, Ayme captures the beauty and struggle of a city that is both vibrant and quietly introspective.

*Robinson’s photography is featured on pages 32 and 33.*

THADDEUS RUTKOWSKI grew up in central Pennsylvania. He is the author of eight books of prose and poetry, most recently *Safe Colors*, a novel-in-stories. His novel *Haywire* won the members’ choice award from the Asian American Writers’ Workshop. He teaches at Medgar Evers College, Columbia University, and YMCA. Rutkowski received a fiction writing fellowship from the New York Foundation for the Arts.

BIRCH WILEY is a writer and librarian living in New York. Birch's work can be found on the *new words {press}* Citizen Trans® project and is forthcoming in *Pleiades*.

KENTON K YEE’s recent poems appear in *Kenyon Review*, *Threepenny Review*, *Cincinnati Review*, *I-70 Review*, *RHINO*, *Quarterly West*, *Plume Poetry*, *Indianapolis Review*, *Slipstream*, *Scientific American*, *Constellations*, and *Rattle*, among others. A PhD in theoretical physics, Kenton taught at Columbia University. He writes from Northern California.

## Editors

BRIAN ECKERT is an MFA dropout and unofficial Poet Laureate of Dish Pits everywhere. He has been a bartender, farm hand, fry cook, landscaper, and substitute teacher. Brian was born and raised in rural Indiana before attending Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio. In 2019, Brian was diagnosed with leukemia and spent several years undergoing intensive chemotherapy treatments, while also completing undergrad, and then starting and finishing a Master's of Liberal Arts degree at Johns Hopkins University in May of 2022. He has lived in Colorado for the last three years where he loves hiking in the summer, snowshoeing in the winter, driving through the mountains, and visiting every used bookstore.

THOMAS JOHNSON lives in Hoboken, New Jersey and writes in the Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing at The New School, New York, New York. Johnson grew up in East Texas, graduated the University of Texas at Austin, enlisted in the United States Army, lived in Germany, returned to the federal service, then moved to the east coast and received a Master of Arts in Writing from Johns Hopkins University, all in that order. He escaped Washington, D.C. by the skin of his teeth and is for the umpteenth time unemployed, but life remains beautiful.





**TURN  
WHAT  
YOU  
CAN  
INTO ART**

