

UNSTRUNG

A magazine of,
for and about
poetry



Summer 2021

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Unstrung is a project of the nonprofits The Blue Guitar
and The Arizona Consortium for the Arts

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Shireen Arora

Phoenix

The sun looks down through the clear blue sky
deciding which city to heat
reading and analyzing data
it finally chooses Phoenix
After all, the Phoenix emerges from the flames.

The sun looks down and channels all its energy
to show its incredible powers
waiting waiting for the people to show gratitude
yet they do not
they walk in the scorching heat
kids play outside
people amble on the curbside
and under their breath
mutter insults to the sun.

Not pleased with the people's reaction
the sun turns to the plants hoping hoping for a "Thank you"
the plants can't escape
but instead of mourning as their friends and family wither
they stay rooted
fighting and finding new ways to spread their seeds.

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The sun, getting frustrated, turns to the animals
it sees snakes
and lizards
crawling in the cracks
slithering to find a cool spot
birds flapping their wings
trying to cool themselves
it sees scorpions going into the bricks
it sees animals trying to find water
in every crack in the ground
going about their day as if nothing had changed.

4 Disappointed by the response
yet humbled by the resilience of Phoenix
the sun turns away
to heat someplace else.

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Shireen Arora



Shireen Arora is an Arizona resident. In her free time, she enjoys calligraphy, and various art forms such as playing piano, cello, quilling, and dancing.

Shireen Arora

‘They become more hesitant to create poetry’

What is the greatest concern facing poetry today?

6 The poet writes: “In a matter of a couple of centuries, poetry went from being ubiquitous to not being commonplace. What happened? The main challenge facing poetry today is that it isn’t as popular as it once used to be. One of the reasons for this is that schools are not teaching poetry and are more focused on reading and writing stories. Because kids are not exposed to poetry rules like a rhyme scheme, rhythm, or patterns of syllables, they become more hesitant to create poetry. Another reason poetry is not very widespread is because stories are more engaging to readers as they build up slowly. On the other hand, a poem is short and doesn’t have a full build-up. Also, many people do not pursue a career in poetry because it is not very high-paying. Lastly, poems have a deeper meaning which you have to think about. This can frustrate kids and adults who like to know the exact meaning. I believe exposing children of all ages to poetry will make it more mainstream. We have taken the first step in this journey by establishing and celebrating Poetry Day and having role models such as Amanda Gorman.”

Duann Black

Rudderless Memories of Love

A rudderless course through memory maps giddy threads of discovery.
The joy of searching memories is ever present.
Smiles and tears intertwine with love.
The ache of my heart triggers laughter sublime.
Years of joy one moment at a time
bring tender love steps closer to mind.
Time and time again I revisit our love,
never diminished, never complete.
Forlorn memory notes tug at my heart.
Imagination and memory are dreams away.
Remembering the touch of your fingertips along my cheek.
The tingle of memories never fades. 7
Your lips tickle across my eyelid
awakening the brightness of your love in my heart.
Memories of your gentle caress bring goose bumps to my thoughts.
Fondness energized by your hug continually fills my heart.
First as my friend and last as my love, together we live always as one.
My Love, forever am I yours.

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Duann Black



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Duann Black is a writer, author, and poet with stories to tell and things to say. During a multi-year break from emptying ink pens onto paper, she strived diligently to spell “grammar” as chief editor for Alan Black, author of 20 books, including “Metal Boxes” and “A Planet with No Name.” She is a well-traveled military retiree always ready with a story to share.

Duann Black

‘Poets have nothing
new facing them’

What is the greatest concern facing poetry today?

The poet writes: “I can’t think of any great concern facing poetry today. I believe poets have nothing new facing them that generations have not already faced.”

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Duann Black

A Beach Forever Long

My smile is rosy and bright, though rough around the edges.
Laughing is what I seek the most, but have the least these days.

Sadness came to fill my soul with pain and heartsick dread.
Though my heart seeks daily for it, I can't return to then.
I can't replay my life again, to love you more, my dear.

Once around this life we live, so make right this time.
I'd kiss you more and hug again, before you're gone for good.
For once is all we get to love, and live the life we live.

10 Share it well and love it now for never comes too soon.
I'll never feel your kiss, my love, upon my cheek or lips,
for you have gone, replaced by none, as I walk on alone.

My friend, my love, my partner still, alone is how I stand.
When we parted broke my heart and broken it remains.
Its contents spill into my thoughts, each day I'm always yours.

Till we meet upon the sand, a beach forever long,
my heart is yours forever, Love, forever I remain.

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Duann Black

Spring Fell

Spring fell upon the earth, a tidal wave of wind and rain,
tearing apart blossoms refusing to open.
Riotous color assaults the landscape, tantalizing my eyes.
Cactus and shrubs, trees and bushes, explode in florid greens
covering naked shells, tenderly teasing my eyes.
Winged intruders, their cacophony
tickling my ears, prey upon the blossoms.
Earth is designed for all to witness this season of change thrust upon it.
I am designed with eyes to see, a nose to smell,
and intellect to describe the scene.

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11

KellyAnn Bonnell

Remember

I remember you.

I remember me.

I

remember

us.

The Yellow Brick Road

The Crazy Train

The Flight of Icarus

Like fledgling eagles we took first steps and learned to fly

We felt invincible until we flew too high.

I remember the call.

Perhaps that was your fall.

The pain in your voice.

Your music of choice.

I remember your face.

Pain I couldn't erase.

How we said goodbye.

I remember.

R

E

M

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M

B

E

R

?

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KellyAnn Bonnell



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KellyAnn Bonnell is a teaching artist, arts education advocate and consultant supporting programs throughout the state of Arizona. KellyAnn defines herself first as a costume and fiber artist and second as a poet.

KellyAnn Bonnell

‘I like rhythm and rhyme’

What is the greatest concern facing poetry today?

14 The poet writes: “One of the greatest concerns we face in poetry, and the arts in general, is the pretentiousness that comes from embracing the absurd. The idea that art, and by extension poetry, can exist for no purpose other than the aesthetic is patently absurd. And when we embrace the absurd, we risk becoming judgmental and exclusionary. Poetry has many iterations. No one is more poetic than another. I like rhythm and rhyme. Other poets prefer free verse or music and lyrics. The key is that the words are a panacea for deep emotion. At the time of its birth, I know the value of my creation. It is only after I receive the benefits of my cathartic experience that it is ready to engage in a relationship with someone else. As others engage with the piece, it is up to them individually to determine its value. It is a very democratic process that speaks to what fits and what doesn’t in the same manner as trying on shoes. The shoe isn’t bad because it doesn’t fit, it simply doesn’t fit.”

KellyAnn Bonnell

Warzone

A poem for Kaity's Way

A smile, a touch, a whispered word, a flutter, a flush, a sigh.
A tear, a push, the cold hard floor...the punch... the bruise...the lies.
So little it takes to fall in love
So little it takes to die
How easily strange fruit can grow from voluntary seeds
As "war zone" overtakes "young love"
Limbs and psyches bleed.

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16

David Chorlton

Red-tailed Time

Light and shadow balance
on the ridgeline. A cloud tests the air
behind it and drifts away.
High in the leafless branches
where a tree disentangles itself from the sky
is a hawk whose heartbeat
is all of him that moves.
He's wild above
the domesticated golf course grass
with a razor eye
that sees time passing
as he waits to snatch his portion
on the wing.

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David Chorlton



David Chorlton is a transplanted European who has lived in Phoenix since 1978. His poems have appeared in many publications online and in print, and often reflect his affection for the natural world, as well as occasional bewilderment at aspects of human behavior. The Bitter Oleander Press published “Shatter the Bell in My Ear,” his translations of poems by Austrian poet Christine Lavant. A new book, “Unmapped Worlds,” featuring older poems that had suffered neglect, is out from FutureCycle Press. He recently took up watercoloring again, after twenty dry years.

David Chorlton

‘Get on board!’

What is the greatest concern facing poetry today?

The poet writes: “Go to a concert, and you will find an audience consisting mostly of people who don’t play an instrument or sing. Go to a museum or art gallery and you will be among many who could never draw very well and who have no artistic ambitions of their own. Poetry readings are different, and reflecting on the fact that most of us who do go to readings or read poetry publications are involved in writing poems on one level or another. When poets become their own audience, the art form can become self-referential and fail to grasp the spirit of writing that has long been the reason for having poetry around in the first place, a mix of imagination, social consciousness, the pleasure in achieving language that is aesthetically pleasing and stimulates the emotions and the mind. We don’t have a high percentage of our fellow citizens who could name a poet outside of Amanda Gorman, or who show much curiosity about who is writing what and why. A broader audience would provide a stimulus for us to have our work communicate ideas and feelings and while delighting the reader’s ear, and make him or her aware of a way of perceiving our surroundings that would otherwise remain the poet’s secret. As a culture, we are stretched between a celebrity obsession that grants a sense of importance on nothing more than name or face recognition, and an often insufferable resume-building obsession allied with academic concerns that have meaning primarily to the person whose resume is being built. So how do you tell someone who is perfectly happy without ever having taken an interest in poetry that they really do need it? Maybe we spare ourselves the frustration, or we could go out on a limb and quote Lawrence Ferlinghetti: ‘Poetry is a paper boat on the flood of spiritual desolation.’ Get on board!”

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David Chorlton

Memory as a Hawk

Along the dark and tangled paths
through Memory's Preserve
datura light the way. Here are twisted
boughs and fallen
leaves, footprints leading back
in time, and disused railroad tracks where
once the wheels released
a long and ghostly screech.
Here are monsoon clouds

20

muscling into the sky while
grasses in the clearing bow
to their will. Here is yesterday, here
the flash
of cool burning light
by which the sun grants a clear view
of the pale wings opening
and the spreading tail

as the Gray Hawk's call parts
the high leaves in a cottonwood.

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David Chorlton

Heat Songs

#1

A bead of sweat runs down the window.
Light to the east is wrestling
smoke from desert fires
and a handful of wind goes away
down the street and back
to where it falls to ground and slides
beneath a shadow. Doves
peck degrees above one hundred and ten
from the air as they rise.
Today is a rehearsal
for tomorrow
and the sun can't sleep, even
when it's gone
to the far side of the mountain and settled
down with the coyotes
it never shuts an eye.

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#2

Inhale light, exhale darkness: it's eight
p.m. in Arizona and always
noon on the sun. There are landscapes
here where heat
turned to stone, mountains
that call out for clouds to bring rain,

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and a smoky veil draped
across the sky today,
dressing for a wedding, invited
to a wake.

#3

The rats wake up at twilight
and pull their ragged souls out
from the earth.

They are gymnasts
on darkness' edge
as they circle the lawn, scale
a wall, and slip through
the eye of the needle that sews
fascination to fear.

Here is the moon
to guide them, here
the stars to sparkle in
their hungry eyes, and here
the first hour
of a night whose dreams
come burnt from the mind.

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Robert Feldman

image and the images

smoke exhales from underground streets,
smoke that is the breath,
City winter magnifying the image---

click.

image woman rode me,
framed me under the Washington Square Archway,
grabbing my reflection through her lens:
an obscure frontier poem
about a guy with shaggy sideburns and tall spurs
sailing to Marseille to rendezvous with a dancer---

23

click.

her resolve:
to untangle images while not sacrificing distance---
to merge abstract forms with blessed Manhattan nights---

flash.

Continued on page 24

Continued from page 23

a well sorted stranger paddling down Amsterdam Avenue
like a drunken sailor fighting the undertow---

develop.

and prints capturing subway riders wearing flowery corsets
steaming underneath uptown milky sidewalks,
jaywalkers smoking the pretzel vender air,
and untried portraits forever whizzing past her senses,
while alone in the darkroom
she ponders whether these images are necessary
to surrender what these poems
demand from these photographs.

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Robert Feldman



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Born in Paterson, New Jersey, Robert Feldman was inspired early on by members of Paterson's literary tradition, most notably Louis and Allen Ginsberg and William Carlos Williams. Later, while living in St. Louis, he organized poetry readings, produced and hosted a community-issues news hour and a biweekly bebop jazz radio program on KDNA-FM. There, his interest and admiration for the Beat Generation flourished. After relocating to Bisbee in the early '70s, Robert was instrumental in publishing some of Arizona's most influential writers such as Drummond Hadley and Michael Gregory, and in 1980, collaborated with Lawrence Ferlinghetti on his Bisbee publication, "Mule Mountain Dreams." Currently, Robert resides in greater Phoenix, continuing to write, paint, and play tabla, besides actively publishing in several online poetry magazines. "Hineni," a collection of 15 Hebraic photographic poetry, was published in spring 2018, and "Sunflowers, Sutras, Wheatfields, and Other ArtPoems" in summer 2019. The body of Robert Feldman's writing and painting can be accessed at albionmoonlight.net; he can be reached at rfeldman@gmail.com.

Robert Feldman

‘The pervasiveness of scanning and the quick read’

What is the greatest concern facing poetry today?

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The poet writes: “My concern facing poetry today is the pervasiveness of scanning and the quick read that feeds into the apparent demise of intellectual and spiritual curiosity due to the lack of reading. Yes, reading: Sitting with a book minus some electronic device seems to have become somewhat antiquated, particularly among younger generations. Literacy has suffered since the onset of social media, texting, and ‘fast food.’ Ironically, it is true the essence of notable poetry occurs when the poet creates that compelling, yet profound, straight line, shedding excess words in order to clobber us between the eyes! But what misses this axiom is if the audience lacks the overall literary point of reference, shall I say hipness; much of the impact and beauty of the language and that gorgeous song gets lost among the crevasses of impatience, cynicism, cliché, and ultimately, avoidance.”

Robert Feldman

All My Friends Are BackEast

winter, '79.
snowing in Flagstaff.
plows can't pull through the wet white sea.
citizens now realize the six month nighttime.
the western winds have shifted.

3:00 AM he paces the floor, caged,
recounting backeast birthday presents:
post cards, address books, a roll of stamps.

outside the parted curtains,
a streetlight exposes the blizzard like a stripper.
the porchlight beckons like a Yves Klein fire painting.
he quickly tries to think in French.

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distant, she lies across their frigid bed somewhere.
a more profound destiny awaiting him.

5:00 AM the ambient voices of strangers return,
shadows chained onto cave walls.
he remains hostage,
homeless, excised,
and perpetually adrift
with any hint of daylight fading,
any point of reference numb, forsaken.

Robert Feldman

Lost and Old Rivers

we hustled a lot
as old lovers do
when squandered account of cheap highs,
coughsyrup lows
account of allnight nurse and doctor sessions,
Prince and Miles at 16rpm's scratching along on the box,
bleached lovers determined to remain less attached

28 we got off laughing
at each other's exotic expensive weekend package deals
all expenses paid
with or without really ever being there

and we would voyage together dreaming of revivals,
pitching orgiastic tents,
craving hotspring breasts constantly swelling with desire,
bragging about seducing strangers to survive

but old rivers
eventually part for friendship sake,
for we are sincere hip-weary travelers
who have learned
yearning for lost and old rivers cannot satisfy

Continued on page 29

Continued from page 28

we would nurture a solitary entity,
ourselves a neurotic unit,
two half notes
residing within a breathless indigenous romantic interlude,
perhaps something some people pray for,
a home between ocean symphonies,
so masterful this unit,
this old river dividing our downtown dance
into unbounded amatorial tantric performances

and so we remained silent
conscious we had roughed it out once again,
this unit,
this old river
lost, and we are lost
and old rivers,
and there is a place for river travelers
who constantly seek oceans,
because old rivers can become
historic rivers
where the light is gorgeous
even here in this canyon wash
where we drag along
reclusive, adrift

29

Continued on page 30

and so we have become old rivers,
oldtime Mississippi tugboats,
muddy waters that have swallowed so much seed
(and swelled pregnant from the knowledge),
waterways that have seen right through the promises,
right through the onetimelet'sfeelgoodrightnow'stheonlytimethatmatters passion,
old rivers that sweep along
other voyagers like us,
sliding,
scraping, grasping at forsaken currents,
those very rivers carrying lovers like us to some foreign port
to be seduced
incensesinged-oilrubbed-read the classics to,
units like us
drifting down lost and old rivers
determined to withstand these tides, or just free ourselves
and go under, conjoined,
down the inevitable River Styx, where
those stygian waters
pool who we are,
those very waters we will always be

30

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Robert Feldman

Ms. Yucca, why...

brown reclusive Chiricahua wilderness,
waterless stucco shakedown,
magnetic arid atmosphere of swerving dry lines
becoming endless roads trailing everywhere

an infinite photograph perpetually procreating
nested under this impossible sky,
and this vast *azúcar agua* bowleg horizon
hums her sweet old song,
long after final footsteps ascend

Ms. Yucca, why meet here alone,
apart from green treed city parks
espresso and French pastries,
sisters sharing their kindness heart to heart
eyes showering sweet empathy?

Ms. Yucca, why does this ground ache around you,
these thirsty feet somehow tolerating
sun's searing abuse so worn from walking?

Ms. Yucca, why sit in these mountains,
trusting more empty promises of better growing seasons,
signed contracts solicited from feel good medicine men?

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Ms. Yucca, could we at last make our peace,
resolve the heart mind suspicion
that separates your kind and mine?

Ms. Yucca standing before me alive,
leaves shooting skyward
migrating familiar rhythms,
sentient being so well poised with answers,
your subtle richness
imbedded within God's ageless prophecy:

“to endure here in Yuccaland,
each single solitary mind
must bend nightly
to contritely drink from this cracked
fearful historically resolute
unrepentant earth”

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Richard Fenton Sederstrom

Flint Knapping

*Eumaeus, about to face the suitors,
poorly armed, summons wisdom from Zhuangzi,
an honorary distant grandson.*

*“Your left hand still bleeds.
A deep cut too, where
you held the flint.*

*You try hard to think
out the next strike.*

*You strike.
A shard flies.*

*It misses your eye. You
will flinch the next strike.*

*After the decision,
practice is the error. Or
the decision was wrong.
Or only ill-timed.*

*

Don't practice.

*Don't practice knowingly.
Do the thing for good.
Don't practice unknowingly.
Do the thing for good.*

*If you must do it over
and over again—
and you must—
do it now, each try,
and do it for forever*

until the next time.”

*

*For some of us
these are our nights.
Surviving night
never abides practice.*

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Richard Fenton Sederstrom



Richard Fenton Sederstrom was raised and lives in the Sonoran Desert of Arizona and the North Woods of Minnesota. Sederstrom is the author of seven books of poetry; his newest book, "Icarus Rising, Misadventures in Ascension," published by Jackpine Writers' Bloc, was released last winter.

Richard Fenton Sederstrom

‘The impulse toward evocative language’

What is the greatest concern facing poetry today?

The poet writes: “In an interview for *The Paris Review*, A.R. Ammons responded to a question about the future of poetry, which ‘has as much future as past — very little.’ But he added, ‘Poetry is everlasting. It isn’t going away. But it has never occupied a sizeable portion of the world’s business and probably never will.’ In a country where poetry has become a conglomerate in the industry of academia, the intimate energy that has made poetry ‘everlasting’ has been diminished. The poetic ruah remains the impulse toward evocative language. Some ancient time ago, I imagine a voice at the hearth uttering a meaningful sound divorced of utility, and she and someone else lost breath for a moment and were sent some-no-where entirely new and momentarily sublime. A vocal response made such moments in our future new and sublime as well. Poetry is, and should be, as Emily Dickinson challenges, an art that will ‘reduce no Human Spirit/To Disgrace of Price.’”

35

Richard Fenton Sederstrom

Green

to, with, Carol

We have been wed, you and I
not only together but with and into and . . .
and under now the leaf-kicked
tracks of the generations
we have longed again to re-create among the leaves.

We require no language outside our senses
sharing as we all do—
the two of us, the leaves,
the memories and the remembered
sound of yester-leaves crisp-crunching under foot.
We trail along after the heels of our fellow yester-persons.

The sight of leaves fluttering in front of, above us
and the dry smell of autumn
that we would not help but re-create to share
among us all—we, all who have
“talked our extinction to death.”

But we can afford to treat the issue gently
as our seemly gesture to Earth
until all are finally buried and mulched
under the last and heaviest soothing snow-and-footfall.

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Now, perhaps, it might be courteous to live it lastly,
to learn to lie quiet, harmless
among shades,
brown and rust of oak leaves
determined to remind us of our familiar contracts,
or to abide by wisdom to restrain
the exhaustion of our winter distances.

I do not remember promising to return
to next year's falling shades.
But I have had occasions of longing in my autumn folly
to have kept an imagined promise of staying.

*

From first consciousness
we were brought to an edge of memory
in our neglected summers until
we learn out of time finally to enjoy among them
the return from green to gold, red, brown, yellow.
To green, like

*

Penelope's live tree that found her way
into our garden, by its seed self-planted. We remember,
you and I wherever . . .

*

Persephone's red blossoms, the gift of her leathery fruit,
your shared beads of pomegranate,
your gesture of our happy equality now
and in our weathered seasons.

Richard Fenton Sederstrom

à quelque point . . .

1

It's about 10:48 by my grandfather's watch,
but we don't take him seriously in matters of time.
I said "him," my grandfather, Hugh Douglas Fenton.

When a friend asks for the time, he and I look sharp.
We offer a brisk answer, "10:48,"
with a tactful, decorous, unhurried "about."

The truth as we read it, undisguised as fact.

38

A passing stranger asks for the time, and the two of us,
myself at the helm these many years past—
for sure, only by default—are politely circumspect.

"O, yes, I beg your pardon, but I have, Oh, about
ten minutes to eleven," spoken in words, not numbers.
Time is elegant, like this clear lake, a grace for language.

Out of their time, we speak wraithsome slow.
We pace ourselves in conversation,
cadences angling toward poetry.

And to tell time accurately, or about,
I wind his watch, the rectangular Hamilton,
having looked at the heretical digital clock—

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static, songless figures that would regulate
the asymmetric comfort of grain in pine paneling,
generations of story and dream, ghosts on the wall.

Family ghost *pursuivant*, I set the dial of a watch
that runs about a minute fast to keep me
but not, I suspect, my grandfather, on my toes,

translating the wall clock's turgid demands
into the slow, miniature sweep
of the delicate millimeters of the minute hand.

2

One hour proceeds to nothing but another.
We would prefer to live in the other.

39

The hour that precedes does,
by something like definition, m o v e .

But in its office of preceding
it can move nowhere. By definition? By intuition?

Perhaps the hour proceeds in time,
but with no object for the one proceed to, time cannot move

so it cannot proceed.
The next hour cannot come, cannot be,

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Continued from page 39

nor can the object we cannot obtain, out of any time
that cannot be.

Something we want no more than to believe is “time.”
But time is measured in static units, like the hour we search for.

If one hour proceeds, it maintains its own cell in time,
forcing ahead and ahead the time we would prefer to occupy.

The tepid empty feeling of knowing when we are:
we are in the only hour ever possible.

The next hour is no more than an idea.
But it is not an unworthy one. If not worthy,

then no worthy idea can ever be.
Still, with age

it becomes almost possible to bend,
if not the joints, time. But sadly, never in time.

5
It is only in summer, when Carol and I move
into my grandparents’ old summer home
gathering with descendants,

that Hugh Fenton and I separate,
not far apart, and I get to listen
as a grandson again,

Continued on page 41

for in summer our Hamilton stops on us
with significant regularity.
I sit at the dock in my idle rowboat and hear

*Whatever do you need a wristwatch for in summertime?
Anything pressing just now?*

*If I might make a small recommendation,
I suggest that you leave the watch in the cabin,*

*take your boat out onto the lake and fish.
And remember to hold your mouth right.*

I am willing to compromise, always have been.
I keep the watch on my wrist, so as not to mislay it.

41

But instead, I find myself reminded of odd passing debts
I may or may not owe somewhere to anyone, and I will pay

6
gladly and alone for the pain of learning what I have been
by struggling to adapt to what I may become.

So, weaned memory-long from præpotent faith,
yet always gnawing septic self-chastisement,

to survive I inhale the least quantum
of the breath I write to feel: in words I confront

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Continued from page 41

an infinity of possible Feynman diagrams.
Ink-brushed characters sway in Blue Cliff Record

where kaon meets koan, nowhere.
Looking back up, I step back down. *Sin proprio*,

I pause to look in the direction of a pine-shaded kaon
cooling its feet in a sacred mountain stream, invisible in dao.

I rub the stubble of my beard to wake the rest of me
and I wonder all about, inviting an apposite koan.

7

42

*for Bartleby, 167 years after his invention
of Herman Melville*

But what's in all this for the poet? Ah.
The Auction—*Disgrace of Price*.

I would prefer not to; I think,

time

following or,
ocean permitting,

washed away

à quelque point dernier qui le noie . . .

Continued on page 43

8

But not to drown, not just yet, and to keep
the conversation going I do take the boat out onto the lake,

keep the old timepiece dry in my tackle box,
plunk a lure of some sort idly into the clear water.

Admire the poetry of the sky. Then I wobble my lips
and scrunch my face. My grandfather would tell me again to

9

“hold your mouth right,”
and I will, or I will try, *à quelque point.*

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43

Richard Fenton Sederstrom

Leaflight

for Carol

We walk our road again
with purpose-seeming steadiness
until we reach the deeper ruts,
the road-side windbreaks and obstacles—
trodden crumbling emblems of the continents of time.

Hummocks and ruts serve to catch and hold
the first wind-blown leaf-fall: maple, birch, aspen.

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We also catch at the falling leaves,
as many as we can hold away from their fate.

We hold the leaves in the outside hands,
the hands that aren't holding each other,
children's hands again.

Then, children for only another vapor of breath,
we toss leaves: maple, birch, aspen,
until we are covered like Egyptian birds
painted in titanium iridescence.

*

Without feet leaving the path
we rise in our sheen of leaves and fly
into the freedom—

Continued on page 45

rarer, shorter each year now—leaves
Claret and Rhenish, well-aged life
in the colors of wine.

You gesture a silent trick of question
and I ask where.
You beckon to show me.

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Janet McMillan Rives

Charred

At night the mountainside explodes,
each canyon its own neighborhood
of party lights strung on backyard trees.
Overnight explosions fade into the day
as almost harmless fire
smolders beyond foothills
moves from grasses and brush
to heavy chaparral, snakes its way
toward Mount Lemmon
nine thousand feet of rugged terrain.

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Like an early arrival at a car wreck
I can't take my eyes off the desert's carnage,
land untouched by flames for over a century.
Cars line Oracle Road, occupants titillated
by a glimpse of the Bighorn Fire
raging under the night sky.

Patches of hot pink retardant
will soon wash away during weeks
of thunderstorms so unlike the dry
lightning that ignited this blaze,
an inferno that kept us up all night
piling irreplaceable items by the door
just in case. In time our fear
will disappear into the residue
of dying embers.

Janet McMillan Rives



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Janet McMillan Rives was born and raised in Connecticut. In high school, she moved to Tucson, Arizona, where she currently lives. She taught college economics for thirty-five years and retired as Professor Emerita of Economics from the University of Northern Iowa. Her poems have appeared in such journals as *The Avocet*, *Lyrical Iowa*, *Raw Art Review*, *Ekphrastic Review*, *Heirlock*, *Sandcutters*, *The Blue Guitar*, *Unstrung*, and *Fine Lines* as well as in a number of anthologies, most recently “Voices from the Plains IV” and “The Very Edge.” Her first chapbook, “Into This Sea of Green: Poems from the Prairie,” was published in 2020.

Janet McMillan Rives

‘I ask myself ‘What is This?’

What is the greatest concern facing poetry today?

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The poet writes: “Some mornings when I check my in-box and open a message from The Poetry Foundation or Poem-A-Day or The Paris Review, I ask myself ‘What is This? What does it mean? What is the poet trying to tell me?’ Sometimes I just don’t get it. And I worry that no one else will ‘get it’ either and that poetry will be considered crazy, marginal, providing no pleasure for readers, no source of enjoyment, no guide for living. But soon I come across a poem by a favorite contemporary poet: James Crews’ ‘All I Want,’ Danusha Lameris’ ‘Cherries,’ Naomi Shihab Nye’s ‘The Shopper.’ Or I might open an e-mail from someone in my poetry writing group with a poem attached for me to review for our next meeting. I discover that I love the poem, it’s making me think and can’t wait to talk about it. That’s when I realize that poetry today is just fine, as good as I remember from childhood. To celebrate, I crack open Robert Frost’s ‘Complete Poems’ and make sure I can still recite ‘Nothing Gold Can Stay’ and let it move me to pleasure and contemplation.”

Janet McMillan Rives

Giver

A disheveled man stands along
the frontage road holding a sign

*Homeless Vet
please help.*

Inside the dark green beater
stopped at the light is a woman
dressed in maroon scrubs, ID badge,
exhausted coming off the graveyard shift.
She digs in her purse, pulls out a five,
hands it to the begging man.

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Janet McMillan Rives

News of the New Year

In early January, crack of dawn,
I first noticed him flit among
the desert willow's bare branches.
He stopped when he saw me,
sat and looked as I stood and looked,
he in his vermilion vestments
me in black sweats and hoodie
on my way home after taking
yesterday's news to my neighbor.
My flycatcher friend has been back
each morning since to remind me
in his charming voice that this year
will be better than last.

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Janet McMillan Rives

El Miedo

Mama begged me not to go.

Hija, por favor.

Said she'd never see her daughter again
never see her grandson.

I left anyway

thinking about a better life ahead

missing those I'd left behind

those who loved me

those I loved.

When we arrived

they hated us

locked me up

took away my son.

Will I ever see him again?

Hijo, what have I done?

Mama, I need you.

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Editor's Note

52 For this issue, we asked the poets what they believe is the greatest concern facing poetry today. To their thought-provoking responses, I would add: fear of an authentic voice. And with that, fear of where our poems will take us. Too often, we look to see what's out there first. When we don't see that what we're writing is already existing, we hesitate, we alter, we abandon. Too often, we find safety in the collective voice. When we depend too much on what already exists, without committing to our own work, we risk losing our own voice as well as the crucial need for us to experiment and to take risks. We can't and shouldn't all sound the same. For its own sake, poetry must keep pushing forward, must keep creating anew. That's only going to happen if we believe in and follow through on our own generative impulses. We can't fear our own voices. And we can't fear where our poems take us.

* * *

It is with immense sadness I report that my beautiful brother John M. Dean, poet, painter, and lover of the arts, passed away at age 63 in Tucson. In his memory we lovingly dedicate this issue. We lose everyone too soon.

Rebecca "Becca" Dyer

Co-editor

Editorial Staff

Editor: *Rebecca Dyer*

Editor: *Richard H. Dyer Jr.*

Publisher: *Elena Thornton*

Artwork for front and back covers: *Marjory Boyer*

Unstrung • Summer 2021

Coming Nov. 7! The 12th Annual Blue Guitar Festival of the Arts!

**Join us for an amazing showcase of the arts, with music,
dance, cultural presentations, art activities for children
and literary readings!**

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Free admission!

When: 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., Sunday, Nov. 7.

**Where: Desert Ridge Marketplace,
Loop 101 and Tatum Boulevard in north Phoenix.**

**For more information, go to The Arizona Consortium
for the Arts website, www.artizona.org.**

A Call to Poets For Summer 2022

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Unstrung, a magazine of, for and about poetry, will seek poetry submissions for its Summer 2022 Issue from June 1 through July 4, 2022. Poets must submit original work and must have a tie to Arizona. Simultaneous submissions will be accepted, but the poet must notify the magazine as soon as possible if the work is accepted elsewhere. It is free to submit, and multiple poems may be submitted. Please include your name and the best way to contact you on your e-mail submission. Please include in the e-mail subject line: Attn. Unstrung — Poetry submission, and send to Rebecca Dyer at rebeccadyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org.

For more information, e-mail Rebecca at rebeccadyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org or visit www.theblueguitarmagazine.org.

Unstrung, a magazine of, for and about poetry, is a nonprofit project of The Blue Guitar magazine and the nonprofit The Arizona Consortium for the Arts. The Arizona Consortium for the Arts is a startup, nonprofit group dedicated to supporting and fostering artists and the arts in Arizona, including the literary, visual and performing arts. For more information about Unstrung magazine, The Blue Guitar magazine and The Arizona Consortium for the Arts, visit our websites: www.theblueguitarmagazine.org and www.artizona.org

A Call to Writers for the Fall 2021 Blue Guitar

The Blue Guitar literary and arts magazine seeks literary submissions for the Fall 2021 Edition from Sept. 1 through Oct. 4. Submissions are sought in all genres — fiction, poetry, plays, creative nonfiction. Writers must submit original work and must live part- or full-time in Arizona. Simultaneous submissions will be accepted, but the writer must notify the magazine as soon as possible if the work is accepted elsewhere. It is free to submit, and submissions may be made in multiple genres. Please include your name and the best way to contact you on your submission. To submit or for further information, e-mail Editor Rebecca Dyer at rebeccadyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org. For more information, visit www.theblueguitarmagazine.org.

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The Blue Guitar, The Blue Guitar Jr. and Unstrung are nonprofit projects of the nonprofit start-up The Arizona Consortium for the Arts. The Arizona Consortium for the Arts is dedicated to supporting and fostering artists and the arts in Arizona, including the literary, visual and performing arts. For more information, visit our websites: www.theblueguitarmagazine.org and www.artizona.org.

Meet the staff of Unstrung magazine



Elena Thornton, publisher: Founder of The Arizona Consortium for the Arts, Elena is an educator, artist and poet and lives in Phoenix. Reach her at info@artizona.org.

Rebecca Dyer, editor: A Tucson native, Rebecca is a poet, journalist and teacher residing in Mesa with her husband, Richard, her co-editor for Unstrung, The Blue Guitar and The Blue Guitar Jr. Reach her at rebeccadyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org.



Richard H. Dyer Jr., editor: Richard (married to Rebecca, above) is the news editor of two monthly newspapers with websites in the East Valley, a photographer and a welded-steel sculptor.

Marjory Boyer, cover design artist for Unstrung, The Blue Guitar and The Blue Guitar Jr.: Marjory, of Scottsdale, is an award-winning artist, muralist and an acrylic painting instructor. Her biography and contact information are available at mboyerart.com.



UNSTRUNG

A magazine for and about
people



Unstrung will
return in
Summer 2022