



River City Poetry
Volume 10
Spring 2021

Edited by April Pameticky
River City Poetry
Rivercitypoetry.org
Wichita, Kansas

Wichita, Kansas
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Introduction for Spring 2021

I find this issue to be bittersweet as we make the decision to move River City Poetry into a sabbatical for the remainder of 2021. The decision does not come lightly but after much consultation and consideration, I feel this is the correct action as we consider how best we could serve our poetry community.

First, a little history.

River City Poetry was started by me in the Spring of 2016. I started small with a small team (Thank you Roy and Raylyn), and we showcased 10 poets in the fall and spring each year. More importantly, we networked, grew, and sponsored events and projects in our community. The digital front, the online journal itself, was always just one aspect of a bigger picture.

I'm so proud of what we've accomplished:

- * 10 issues showcasing over 90 talented local and regional poets
- * June 2020 special issue
- * 2 Epistrophe events (co-sponsors): performances combining poetry & instrumental musicians in a synergistic exchange + several smaller versions of similar style
- * Community Poetry Workshop programming with the Wichita Public Library (monthly from 2018-Feb 2020)
- * Wichita Broadside Project (2 incarnations), partnered with Harvester Arts and the Wichita Arts Council, resulting in over 40 unique collaborative projects between poets and artists
- * 20 Chapbook Reviews: which has now grown into the largest requested service--one we can't currently meet the demand for, but which brings up interesting and unique possibilities for our future

Many of you know that I'm also a mom (2 darling and growing girls), a public high school teacher, and an adjunct instructor. When the country shut down and schools closed in March of 2020, I felt it extremely important to maintain the online platform of *River City Poetry*, to keep things as normal as possible. As the world catapulted into the tumult of June 2020, we just kept moving forward.

I've tried to support my students through a Pandemic. I've tried to insure my own children had what they needed [through two full quarantines, our own familial COVID outbreak, about 50 cloth masks sanitized on a weekly basis so that every person had what was needed, and now finally adult vaccinations]. I know this is no more than millions of others have coped with, and we were very lucky to be able to cope as we did. But now, as I finally face what may be my first real break in over a year, my own work, my own poems... they are calling. In all this time, I have felt stalled, halted, envious of those other creators just... creating through this past year.

It's time. While both the Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 issues saw solid submissions, neither reading period was quite as robust as previous submission periods, and nothing compared to our Special Edition in June 2020. I'm going to take a break and rethink how best we can serve our community. Requests for both chapbook reviews AND for a new installment of the Broadside project are clamoring. We have plans to return in 2022 as a new incarnation of our former self, focused on creating a team of critics for our growing chapbook review requests--and of course it's been a dream to be able to start publishing a limited run of chapbooks! So we'll take time, breathe,

do some consulting, and return stronger than ever in January.

In the meantime, our website will still be maintained, with both archived issues and our current installment. This spring's issue brings fresh voices to RCP.

I had to laugh at the final selections for this issue because apparently the Bs have it--or at least quite a few of our poets have Bs in their names somewhere. We're also shy of some female voices but since we've seen issues swing female-centric in the past, I decided to just let this excellent issue stand on its own.

Thank you for going on this journey with us. Thank you for submitting, reading, sharing, clicking. All the things that support small independent presses.

Sincerely,
April Pameticky

Boyd Bauman
4 Poems

Ode to the Club Cracker

Humble rectangle,
18 holes in 3 X 6 rows,
soft serrated edges,
blond burst of butter
and salt.

The grownups got their salads
while I waited impatiently
for my burger and fries.
Mom passed Club Crackers to me
and I tore open that two pack
from its green and red wrapping,
not quite Christmas,
but a *happening*,
breaking those delicate delicacies,
placing pieces on my tongue
to hold and dissolve,
not quite sacred
but an *event*,
Aunt-Priscilla-from-California event,
Uncle-Johnny-from-Florida event.

There was a country club
north of Sabetha
where they likely served these daily,
but our country club of Mom, Dad, me
pretty much stayed on the farm

the better in retrospect to fancy
each Club Cracker occasion,
dress it up in nostalgia,
go to town with it.

Garage Door

I am trapped inside a lovely suburban home.
No, my life is not so grand as a Kafkaesque nightmare,
rather the north side of the garage door is stuck
at a height of approximately four feet while the south side
has come to rest about half that distance from the ground.

My dad had an automatic opener
for the garage of our 100-year-old farmhouse
in that he didn't have to utter a word
to prompt me to hop out of the Chrysler's back seat,
turn the handle and lift the wooden door.

Have I resided in a subdivision so long
this once ingrained action is forgot, all she rote?
My first thought is not to trip the manual release cord.
Instead, like a psychotic expecting the same action
to produce different results,
I press the glowing button a second time
mangling the track and freezing the door at an aberrant angle.

On the new Main Street, USA,
no neighbors make their way over to gawk or commiserate,
but the tradeoff is at my fingertips,
where I reach a kind soul who visits at 6 a.m.
for an emergency fee of just \$300.

The dumb will inherit the earth,
my Aunt Priscilla would say,
and maybe I have,
or at least privileged my way to a lot
more than I deserve,
this plot many in this world would die for,
that my people have undeniably killed for.

I pay the man his price,
the price of rugged individualism,
our bargain until our offspring underpay
some barely essential workers to let us pass out of sight,
out of mind.

Still, Jesus died to pay for our sins,
so I whisper a sincere transaction
that those who have not my capital
be better with their hands or community than I.

I calculate what my wife and I make in a day
(*make* being the cash crop of create),
back out, press the button, drive to work.

Oh, you holy beings behind drawn doors,
what kingdom do I inherit
if I learn to love you,
which I do slightly better than yesterday,
if only because my discomfort is raw enough
to pay attention.
I wish for us all, if not some sort of bounty,
that at least for one more day,
we break even.

This Poem Has an Ending.

This poem will end.
There will be no sequel,
no prequel, no spin-off,
no origin story, no franchise reboot.
There is no it-was-all-just-a-dream sequence,
no main character back from the dead.
There is no episode two, season two, ...
This poem is not remotely binge-worthy.

This poem is not streaming.
(It barely flows.)
Subscription to its channel is not required.
There is no algorithm embedded,
directing you to other verse you might enjoy.
Adults nostalgic for their childhood
will not co-opt this poem
for any type of remake.

This poem is not part of the 24-hour news cycle.
There is no virtual content.
Heck, there's hardly any actual content.

This poem will not show up on your feed,
claims no social media influence,
will never go viral.
Don't worry about this poem resurfacing
on your timeline:
It will not be liked years from now.
It is a pleasure to know no one is trolling these stanzas.
Your comments on merits or their lack
are not solicited.

No point in sifting through background information
for clues about the author's motivation, sexuality,
previous accolades or indiscretions.
Suffice to know that he, too, will end
or has ended.

This poem has an ending
and isn't that, conclusively,
the most satisfying thing
about it?

The Language of Men

Whadayaknow, Joe?

from the service department boys
at the John Deere dealership
and the response,
It takes a big bull to weigh a ton!
always elicited a chuckle
before Dad commenced describing
the 4020's latest ailments.

Comprehension gleaned,
a guy in green strode confidently
into the back stacks
shelved with genres unfamiliar to me,
seal retainers and worm drive
hose clamps more fictional
than the tactile world-building
for which they were designed.

Dad was fluent in the dialect
of cattle breeds and futures,
but he spoke a Pidgin Machinery
and never lost his brute force
by guess or by gosh accent.

Back in the province
of our native implement shed,
the factory-florescent parts
would transition via WD-40
and elbow grease
to more earthy instruments,
Dad likewise interpreting
for his bookish boy:
clutch pilot bearing
becoming thingamajig,
shaft link plates
doohickies,
but tone and body language proved
most essential to understanding:
a Johnny Cash-register *Attaboy!*
accompanying a callused hand
gentle on a shoulder,
a fleeting smile between laboring men
impossible to misconstrue,
never lost in translation.

Roy Beckemeyer
3 Poems

Age Tries to Recall Youth's Departure

Age collects in those pouches under
your eyes—age and forgotten hours
collaborating, swelling translucent skin bags
the way pails fill to spilling with what drips
from maple spiles, all the sweetness
of life thinned nearly to its own watery
essence of absence. Other parts of the body dry,
husk-like and fragile as will-o-the-wisp,
skin that has its own rules for folding
and draping, resilience, no longer subcutaneous,
has gone missing, that certain inherence
to become supple, to burgeon, has slid away,
unseen, unnoticed, in some quiet moment
between midnight and dewfall as the body
rolled in sleep's surf and surge when youth,
its limberness and ability for renewal,
drifted off on one or the other of time's relentless
equatorial currents, its first tentative, languid
back strokes alternating with slow, lazy crawl,
becoming more urgent the further it left the body behind.

After the Painting “Sea Sprites in Flight” by John Anster Fitzgerald (1860)



When the combers have calmed
and the moonlight claimed
the horizon once again

and the sea lies silver-scaled
as the sides of sardines
flip-a-flop on the deck
of a pilchard-fisher's boat,

then the nymphs of the sea
rise from the haze and swirl
the soft swards of the bay

and lift their arms
and sing with the surf
the tales of the sailors
and sea-faring men
who have slid into the deep.

As the moon entwines

and spritely wings swish and flash,
and the water slips up on the sands,
we gather to write their names once more
though each swell of the tide
lifts them back to the sea.

“For that is where they belong,”
the sea fairies chant,
with tongues that sound
of droplets and spume,

“here in the sea
where her moods remind their bones
of the wind in their eyes,
and the taste on their lips

of the green that can only be found
on a moonlit night after a storm
on the skin of the scrimshaw sea.”

A Father Who Lives Longer Than His Son — A Villanelle

A father who lives longer than his son
learns truths he wishes he did not know:
the novel ends before the tale's begun,

the bet is lost before the race is run.
Rivers, it seems, from seas to mountains flow
for fathers who live longer than their sons.

The blackest sky's at noon, then midnight sun,
the wheat is harvested before it's sown,
the novel ends before the tale's begun.

Death dispensed by prayer, blessings from a gun;
a rock-steady man who wavers to and fro
is the father who lives longer than his son.

The sun-burnt man who's never seen the sun,
the catcher-caught fly ball that was never thrown,
the novel that ends before the tale's begun.

The weightless waif who weighs more than a ton,
the immigrant who never left his home,
the father who lives longer than his son
whose novel ends before the tale's begun.

W.D. Brown
3 Poems

Hay Barn

A call to mind of carefree youth.
When the green in the soul palpitated wild,
And Father Time often forgot about me.
The sheep wool white in the sun
Brought my countenance, liting high
My gentle waif marrow.

Stood high an old barn
For which I deemed myself its—
Prince, hunter, herdsman and critic.
Noble the Sabbath bestowed my imagination
With its slow summer passing.
At mercy to my dreams, though not knowing.

As blocks of hay, they stood—
Death, dry, burnt, fired grass
Towers higher than child mind contemplation.
Where an upward gaze ended you flat on your back.
“Geez Pa! They must reach up there and split Heaven!”
“Maybe so.” His reply, with a raised nostalgic smirk.

The spooked swallows mock my naivete’
From their corner rafters.
Vagabond, freeloading tomcats licked their hum-drum noses,
Hiding in cracks along mice-collared, warped, ageless planks.
Opposite my jubilance, their afflictions spell endless,
Till comes the night.

This was real wood.
The last of the Great American Patina.
Rustic oak and chestnut, weather and sun-bleach,
With each creak you can hear the ghosts—
Father’s, Father’s, Father,
Belting spikes like vertical railroad men of the sky.
Cragged, brown, shirtless, hard-strewn—
Straw hats and soggy bandanas.
Their sweat still seeps in the walls.

A tempered rope swing hung from the middle.
I was Jack climbing the beanstalk—
Peter Pan gallivanting pirate ships—

Spider-Man, King-Kong, Tarzan too!
Heedless bounding between four walls.

My in-bloom, lawless, summer bethel.
Like fine wine basking in the charity of its own means,
I cared nothing for time,
And it took nothing from me.

Eclipse

The Earth or time? I don't know which,
 But one has stopped.
 My silence stirs in echo.
 Warm air mounds my skin with chill.
 A participant in my semi-reverie
 I am aware—however I remain aloof
 To the fragment in detail that is missing.
 A non-premeditated vine that coagulates
 Around an undiscovered spatial membrane—
 Freeform of design,
 Adhering to only nature's most rigid laws,
 Detectable only in the senses of the wild,
 Ambiance outside the boundary of nerve endings.
 I am aware—however I remain aloof
 To this momentary lapse drawing me away
 To a new delicate spindle of reality,
 With tension of an epileptic fit.
 An accidental tug of the light switch.
 Do you want this left on or off?
 Where one more microscopic fleck of dust
 Will shatter this light bulb to bits.
 I am aware—however I remain aloof.
 Freefall with an attached oddment of clarity—
 The calm before the storm,
 The eye flash before a bomb,
 Consciousness in a last breath.
 Hairpin triggers simultaneous to a new meridian
 Fault the illusion of time's essence.
 Where the Sage of the Shakya
 And Jesus Christ become bare-faced screamers
 Of a divinity that is frozen—
 Giving away only to motion and the flawless
 Poetry and ebbs of unfurled truth
 That fool the locust into song
 In the middle of the afternoon
 Thinking night was upon them.
 Perfection in rotation—
 The shaker of days—
 The pusher of dawn—
 Catechism of a sphere, axis, rock, and sun.
 The clock still performed the reduction of a shadow.
 Just a stain in space,
 Little undone.

Bait

Farewell, goodbye—this final swift cast.
The tension unfurls—my slackline to death.
One sharp snag—oh miracle of fish.
Thorax pierced strong—clinging breast.

Savor this momentum—tease the wind.
My prodigal, fat flesh skims once again.
Virgin glides through moss and larvae foam
Announce my arrival—torn arrest.

Liquid orchestra, come hear the news!
Spool dance to nips and passing peeps,
Like a street busker singing blues,
Biding one's time till final tip-out.

Tug and drift, shoot, dodge and whirl.
Dizzy the rubbernecks—birds and passing squirrels
Placing their bets with undisciplined, wet lips.
Lightning thumb fisherman's patience preset.

Each empty toss—tousled, muck-clinged hair,
Snipped, picked, gouged and severed limb,
Bring no futility lesson. I've learned long ago,
They serve no trials for bait on a pole.

Their making plans under green cast veil
To tussle my loin in names of survival.
Dwindling my parts is not friendly fashion,
So I've convinced my inner turmoil.

John Browning
2 Poems

wind on the plains

blow wind, blow
cold, strong, surge and howl
rip a thousand miles

whip and whirl
songs
cold, full of ice and snow

across a flat land
roar of the wind, voice of the wind
wails away
wind of the west

my heart full of ice and wind

feel the wind, power beyond power
indomitably
wrack the land, fix me here
as I am - walk, wait

face-freezing, willful wind
to ice my tears have turned

wind voice of the colossus
without start or end
nature supernatural

when I lean
the wind holds me like a puppet
levitational
skyscraper-swaying
stronger and stronger

reassuringly threatening
older than
thousands of years
millions
wind given as god

I see I hear the wind from the West
it is I who am temporary
the homeless wind is everywhere

she cites the sightless signs

my hat is lost in the wind
the pin on my hat, gone with the wind
the way of the wind, in the way of the wind
the wind continues
it will keep my hat and pin

I am waiting for a ride in the winter wind in 1968, I
am waiting still
the wind still speaks
window rattling, metal warping, earth-shaking
sky clearing
land-scouring
the dust beneath the wind is half ice half grit

when I read the words "when wilt thou blow", I laugh
so alone
know that the wind blows
whether I ask
I am alone with the white wind and the white sky

I see but I see not, I only hear the restless wind

seen from above, seen from below
seen and felt aside
wind blow, blow wind

blow now!
blow still!
rise and soar fast and wild
far away

aye:
blow
nowhere to nowhere
the great plains
wind that never will stop

the wind has found me here again

Reading Chaucer and Joyce to Parakeets

Jack – blue feathered tempest and
 Jorma – caged friendly flash of green light
 love to sing songs that go straight
 to my heart; (mine to theirs, not so much)

but when I recite Chaucer they rejoice, chirp and sing
I glimpse the trail medieval: Middle English in birdsong
Yet for Finnegans Wake they aver – squawk in loud discord
obvious avian sonic displeasure – modernism
 may not be for the birds

 o, simple things often are
 ineluctable, contrarian
 they exist, just Are
(& are not so simple)

is the disparity in accord due to my performance?
they live (Jack and Jorma) much more acoustically than I
I intrude blindly into their milieu and they respond
participants in a phenomenology of sound, music, word

Unlike are we to birds
dull are we not to live and thrive in sound and song and colors streaming
our colors mute, our songs discordant, our minds
clouded, separate
unlikely to know as do they
 the jointure of things

perhaps Chaucer's bird-sense sustains across centuries
or, maybe something even more than that pertains
perhaps mixtures of sound, feeling and magic matter more to parakeets than to me!
or, maybe they just aren't Irish

 birds who sing, birds who also talk
 in an emptiness of time un-flying, undying
 birds sing my words alit on my finger
birds and words fly together atwitter

Robert W. Daly
2 Poems

In the Orchard

He thinks himself
an apple
of late summer
in the orchard south of Onondaga, where
signs read, "U-Pick" and "Pick Your Own."

A red apple, one of many,
low hanging, easy to take, not yet too ripe,
a decent specimen, fated
to be there, now.

She comes by with
her companions and stops,
inspecting his credentials.

"I'm for you!" the apple cries.

"You can have me right here.
Your friends will not think ill of you.
Or bring me home,
show me off, cut me into bits,
bake a strudel, whatever you desire.
Don't leave me here to drop
and end up in anyone's applesauce or
to rot under winter's snow!"

Her hand does not reach for him.

"Not red delicious enough
for my tastes," she tells her friends.
"Someone else can pick that one."

From his branch
he watches her amble
down the path between
the rows of apple trees.
She looks back, as if remembering
their encounter

and walks away.

The Potager

You are invited by the gardener,
weather and mood permitting,
to visit her kitchen garden:

descended from Roman villas,
from monasteries and French farms,
it grows near Dexter on Pillar Point
whose stones lay drowned by Ontario's seas.

*

Down back steps, by the gate,
a sensuous ceramic with ancient signs,
a gift from a friend I was told.

On the left, a woodpile shrouded in plastic
is stacked against the house.
On the right, a soft-blue table
sits near the cool limestone where
the garden may be viewed
and breakfast taken, by just a few.

In the garden's center,
grass with a table and chairs,
ringed by herbs, vegetables,
roses and lavender -
the setting for dinner on warm evenings.

A great tree, a willow I recall, bounds
the northern side, to the west and south
delphiniums bluer than a blue sky
inside a white picket fence that
could use straightening and paint - or not -
constrain the garden's reach.

Beyond the fence,
fruit trees, a little park,
a cistern, a hammock,
an arbor with a table.
Farther still, the woods,
oaks and maples,
the look ethereal.

*

The gardener in her garden: picking flowers, rhubarb,
oregano and chives; weeding,

pruning, imagining another planting.
Listening, laughing, telling of her deceased husband, her
sons, and family; friends and collaborators,
a love of summers past.

Her vision, her labor, her pleasure -
when not in town.
A place for her of warmth, of friendship,
of dark clouds and sudden storms
that shatter July's dreams.

A garden she made and keeps.
She may let you help.

*

When you leave,
take this garden and its mistress
with you, in your own way,

as I did.

Peggy Hammond
3 Poems

Moment of Stillness

In Paris, I sit in a Metro
car, on the lavender
line, its semicircular route
stretching luxuriously
up from Balard
and down to Pointe du Lac,
a cat draped on a chair's back.

Last week, there was
a three-hour delay;
riders settled for the wait.

A man had dropped himself
neatly onto the tracks,
submitting to the oncoming train
like a despairing lover,
a weary supplicant.
His life's ending
arrived on a schedule
of his creation,
not an unknown TBA date.

Endings require time
for sorting and cleaning.
Everyone knows this,
except those
who depart first.

Testify

Graveside, we recite Psalm 23;
our voices follow contours
of valleys and shadows.

Faded highway
spoons the cemetery;
wheels on asphalt
shout a refrain
too frequent and unwelcome.
Our lips move
but we are no longer heard.

Still air beside me testifies
you are gone.

Sunset Blessing

Bed rails frame him as he sleeps,
small trellises securing a sapling.

His chest rises and falls, delicate,
like the gray titmouse that visits our feeder.

I am shelter, building
around him a protective nest.

At the right moment
I will withstand his flight,

let him soar and rise
on swelling updrafts.

Although you will not watch
the slip of his hours into years,

perhaps you will bear witness
from your own distant mountaintop.

Andrew Hodgson
2 Poems

Selections from *Graceful Son-“nots”*

3.

Girl of long, lithe lines and golden strands of wind,
Fair, frost-bit bride of shivering, vibrant spring,
I, once a lone Woolf, savage, filled with wanderlust,
Who still struggles to stay still will not add “still”:

You are beautiful. Only that, though time weathers us.
Tears carve out canyons, whispers of East and West
Sand down mountain peaks into milder foothills like
The one we wed on, were bored to hike, and left behind.

Your hair is shorter, my teeth are longer, as are the
Silver sighs and silences across cushions when we sit
Together. Rooms stretch, spreading, carrying us both

Apart to our chosen seasons, on melting glaciers, carving
New labyrinths between, echoing bare spaces where before
We always shared sublime steps of laughing windchimes.

9.

You’ve traded the easy, lithe elegance of youth,
Your crayon-soft edges, for the bolder outlines
Of sculpture. In a setting sun, we both pose,
Stretching silhouettes of muscle and sweat.

Fingernails, painted when we met, are now stained
With soil. It is not perfume which enchants me yet,
But the pungency of sourdough and kefir.

Dreams, like eggshells, once cracked, quickly shatter,
Then find uses in compost, or protecting tomatoes
From snails. Renovations improve spaces, but the ghosts
Are crueler the quieter they become; those naïve memories

Who smiled more before so many projects and failures,
Before jumping together into the traps of homemaking,
Middle age, masters degrees, dead-end jobs and mortgage.

43.

That power of my youth is but a morning dew on this mowed

Prairie, evaporating into apathy by the end of hot afternoons.
Your cells are recharged by the very windmills I joust with,
Poking up like giant flowers in a grazing stubble of cattle herds.

I pedal into the winds, making my own, whole cold mouthfuls
To swallow, but they do not buy my madness twixt full moons.
Random weeds excite your study, you coax stray cats inside,
Whip wild mint into ice cream and scatter seed to collect birds.

We plant our beauty, your eyes years and yards beyond mine,
Mascots and magic plants for every mood, need, and season;
Willow and maple, bleeding hearts, opossums and cardinals.

I steep between hiking trips like a tea grown too strong, bitter;
For perspective, still seeking summits and chasing rainbows,
You sip yours, serenely stitching scenes from a favorite window.

49.

All my life I was defeated, alone, through thirty years
Of lofty goals and lost causes, questing. First, I am a writer,
A doomed, modest art in a world of hip hop, jingles and slogans-
More a sickness than a gift- which few appreciate anymore.

Poems crept up, tugging at my wrist, while I studied lucrative
Subjects. I adored endangered species, collected antiques,
Worked for less at non-profits, volunteered for causes. I voted
For idealists and cheered underdogs, sided with little guys,

Spoke up for silent trees, fought for clean air ineffectively.
I befriended and defended misfit toys. Love was the same
Before you. I kept in shape and sharpened my sensitive mind,

Offered shy gestures, subsisting on furtive glances. I wrote
Poems to never publish and letters to not send to a platoon
Of girls next door, a parade of old flames, saints, and muses.

Temporary Things
(Pantoum Form)

I have begun to see the beauty in temporary things
One can find lots of treasures in thrift stores
A thread-bare teddy bear, tarnished promise rings
A wobbly brown goblet that spills when it pours

One can find lots of treasures in thrift stores
Bargain items that may have held deeper meaning
A wobbly brown goblet that spills when it pours
I like to thin out my closets during spring cleaning

Bargain items that may have held deeper meaning
I pretend it is the Holy Grail in disguise I've snatched
I like to thin out my closets during spring cleaning
Best not to hoard, fall into ruts, or get too attached

I pretend it is the Holy Grail in disguise I've snatched
Run hands over items, try to sense inner magic
Best not to hoard, fall into ruts, or get too attached
Invent back-stories for rejects; toys' lives are tragic

Run hands over items, try to sense inner magic
A pilling wool sweater, with scuffed wooden shoes
Invent back-stories for rejects: toys' lives are tragic
A mutual friend hugged me with the bad news

A pilling wool sweater, with scuffed wooden shoes
A thread-bare teddy bear, tarnished promise rings
A mutual friend hugged me with the bad news
I have begun to see the beauty in temporary things

David Keplinger
1 Poem

THEFT

A thief whose name was *Never Mind*
also went by *It's Nothing* and *Don't Think Twice*.
These were the common aliases but his lover
called him *Whatever* in bed, and his mother
referred to him as *The Appendix*, since he was removed
by Caesarian. By forty he was almost invisible,
but not yet, which caused him injury when crawling
through protective firewalls. He was arrested shortly after.
As the cops broke down the door, he succumbed,
or succeeded, at last. No wrists to speak of
when they slapped the handcuffs on him. No pain
when the manacles clicked like a camera shutter.

Brian Rihlmann
3 Poems

Out Of Our Collective Asses

from the little waiting area
I can look out into the shop
and see they're working
on my car now, finally

I let the oil get way too black
these days
my old man
would be appalled

there's a woman in here with me
standing, pacing
she's on the phone
evidently with a lawyer
talking about wills and trusts

it seems a private conversation
to have in front of a stranger
but maybe it's better
to vent around strangers—
no need for decorum

one is the good daughter
college educated, successful
the other's a mess, a drunk,
and what can I do? she asks

*I don't want to cut her out
but if I leave her all this money
she'll just drink herself to death...
she's already halfway there, and
her boyfriend is a fucking leech, too*

then she's silent, listening
she squints at the wall
as though seeking
an answer written there
in some very fine print

I imagine the lawyer
as he squirms in his chair

pulling attempted solutions
out of his ass

I bet I know
just how he feels

Your Daily Koan

one old school weightlifting coach
said that if he could
whittle a lifter down
to making only one mistake
that was the best
he could hope for

(when whittling wood
it helps to know
when enough's enough
or you've just turned a horsey
into a doggie)

and it's true—
many of the greats
have had idiosyncratic technique—
Dimas threw his head back
Pocket Hercules yanked the bar
off the floor...

things no sensible coach would teach
nor try to fix
not when an athlete is
breaking records
and bringing home gold

but now I wonder
were they great
because of these flaws
or in spite of them?

it's something to consider
if not to answer
as you stumble
through another day
wielding your little pocket knife

you're welcome

Westbound Greyhound Blues

a flat-yellow sunbaked dump, Amarillo
and yet an hour layover
at the bus terminal is a blessing
despite clouds of flies
missing stall doors
and overflowing toilets

a blessing because
at least for the moment
I am no longer sitting
a temporary reprieve
from that torturous seat
the fire in my ass and lower back
the endless war stories of Vietnam hat guy
who's maybe 50 in 2010

I wander the building
and study my fellow travelers
see the prison ink like faded bruises
the hard lines, dark circles, scars
the eyes brimming or empty
some stretch out and sleep
spooning duffel bags
hugging suitcases like lovers

outside it's hot and still
and the flies are here, too
they've mistaken me for a corpse
I walk around the block
and encounter no one
and feel blessed, again

back at the terminal the call comes
too soon and I climb aboard
find a window seat about halfway back
and watch as they file in
I pray for an empty seat beside me
the answer is no and I get an obese woman
with B.O. and 5 o'clock shadow
she chatters, I pretend to sleep
kick myself for not bringing a bottle

eventually, I doze but am jostled awake
after 5 minutes or two hours
I don't know and it doesn't matter

all I know is I'm still here
it's nighttime and I'm aching to piss
I squeeze past my cellmate
who hates me for waking her
ruining her dreams

I stumble up the aisle
tripping over feet in the darkness
voices grumble or curse
I finally give up trying to step over
and boot them aside

in the bathroom I sway at the urinal
as the bus rocks along the highway
I stand there long after I've zipped my fly
listening to the hum of the engine
I stand there until someone beats on the door
says *Come on, man*

I sigh, a deep sigh
low-down Charlie Brown deep
I've been on the road about 16 hours now
only 30 more til Reno

Review of Abby Bland's *The Odds Against a Starry Cosmos*

From Perennial Press: <https://www.perennial-press.com/>

Review by April Pameticky

I've made this poet and our readers wait far too long for this chapbook review. My only excuse, or at least offering of an explanation, is that the passing of COVID time has distorted for me beyond the recognizable span or reasonable understanding, speeding and blending by while still conversely moving at a snail's pace. It was originally on our docket for February, so I'm grateful for patience and grace.

I've returned to this small collection of poems repeatedly and have wondered, since I know that Abby Bland is a spoken word artist from the KC area, just what some of these poems sound like.

WiseBlood Booksellers hosted a Zoom poetry reading back in November 2020 where Bland can be heard reading excerpts from this collection:

<https://www.facebook.com/wisebloodkc/videos/738183933485837/?scrlybrkr=e769d8dd>

Her self-deprecating humor, the wry awareness of the world, the pursuit of irony, all blend seamlessly in this adroit collection that connects trauma and grace to Job and the burning gas of our cracked knuckles. We are all "burning on the inside."

The opening poem of this collection begins with an introduction: "My middle name... means 'protector of sea'—or some shit—/which is some shit because I'm afraid of water." Later, the book of Job is reduced down to a "bunch of men" sitting around "progressively angrier" because bad things happen to good people for no good logical reason. And don't we all relate to that frustration that the universe seems to play dice with our lives?

In the poem "Pink," the speaker wrestles with identity, and maybe not quite becoming what parents had wanted or hoped for: "Maybe it was Daddy's bourbon or too many Elvis Records." The stories in this collection, while deeply personal, still speak to common experience and frustration as we fully develop an identity separate from expectation and familial obligation. In another poem, it is clear the speaker wrestles with

the pain of past trauma and loss, coupled with that family argument about just who is telling the story right, and who even gets to be the custodian of truth. If readers have ever argued with a loved one who painfully denied that something occurred, or that it didn't happen the way you tell it, they'll sense that familiar devastation in Bland's lines: "Now there is a sycamore tree in your attic."

To be a poet is to experience the world a little differently than others, to try to make sense of memory and event. "She tries to write a poem without blood or bones" strikes at the heart of wanting to create, but not always wanting the devastation that sometimes accompanies the process. This heartfelt awareness of the need for vulnerability makes for powerful poems throughout the collection.

My personal favorite line comes from the title poem, "The Odds Against a Starry Cosmos," combining whimsy and awe with a sense of fate:

0.0001 let to you, my love,
here with your green sweater,
unraveling slightly at the waist

Abby Bland's chapbook, *The Odds Against a Starry Cosmos*, is available from Perennial Press.

<https://www.abbyblandpoetry.com/>

<https://www.perennial-press.com/2020-chapbooks>

Contributer Bios

Boyd Bauman grew up on a small ranch south of Bern, Kansas, his dad the storyteller and his mom the family scribe. He has published two books of poetry: *Cleave* and *Scheherazade Plays the Chestnut Tree Café*. After stints in New York, Colorado, Alaska, Japan, and Vietnam, Boyd now is a librarian and writer in Kansas City, inspired by his three lovely muses. Visit at boydbauman.weebly.com.

Roy Beckemeyer's latest poetry collection is *Mouth Brimming Over* (2019 Blue Cedar Press). *Stage Whispers* (2018 Meadowlark Books) won the 2019 Nelson Poetry Book Award. *Amanuensis Angel* (2018 Spartan Press) comprised ekphrastic poems inspired by depictions of angels in works of modern art. *Music I Once Could Dance To* (2014 Coal City Press) was a 2015 Kansas Notable Book. Beckemeyer lives in Wichita, Kansas and is a retired engineer and scientific journal editor. His work has been nominated for Pushcart and Best of the Net awards and was selected for Best Small Fictions 2019.

W.D. Brown is a Dad, bluesman, published poet, substitute teacher from Kansas City. He performs as a singer-songwriter throughout the Midwest and released his debut album *From A Child* in 2018. You can find his work at www.wadedbrownmusic.com, Spotify, iTunes, or wherever else you stream music from.

John Browning is a poet weathering current times in Flemington NJ with his wife, his dog and his parakeet. He is a 2020 graduate of Vermont College of Fine Arts, a grandfather and a work in progress.

Robert W. Daly, a retired physician and professor, is a member of The Downtown Writers Center, and of the Palace Poetry Group in Syracuse, NY. His poems have appeared in *The Healing Muse* and thousandislands.com, a Canadian on-line journal.

Peggy Hammond's poetry appears or is forthcoming in *Inklette*, *West Trade Review*, *Rogue Agent*, *Ginosko Literary Journal*, *Trouvaille Review*, *Amethyst Review*, *Two Thirds North*, *Cordella*, *Skylight 47*, *Peeking Cat*, *The Comstock Review*, *The Elevation Review*, *Waterwheel Review*, *Jabberwock Review*, and other publications. Her full-length play *A Little Bit of Destiny* was produced by OdysseyStage Theatre in Durham, North Carolina.

Andrew David Hodgson has lived in Illinois, Arizona, Utah, and Wichita, KS. He hikes and climbs mountains and canyons in the West on vacations. He has lost trophies or plaques received for bodybuilding shows, tennis tournaments, Employee of the Year, and Student of the Month. He is currently working on a semi-autobiographical novel, works with a non-profit in Wichita, and is studying for an MBA. He and his wife dabble in homesteading and try to eat like it is 1899. He has not previously sought publication.

David Keplinger is the author of seven collections of poetry, recently *Another City* (2018 Milkweed), which was awarded the UNT Rilke Prize. In June 2020 he was selected for the Emily Dickinson Prize by the Poetry Society of America. Of his four volumes of translations from the German and Danish, recently *Forty-One Objects*, by Carsten Rene Nielsen, was a finalist for the National Translation Award in 2020. Poems this year have appeared in *Ploughshares*, *The New Republic*, *The New England Review*, and *Plume*.

Brian Rihlmann lives and writes in Reno, Nevada. His poetry has appeared in many magazines, including *The Rye Whiskey Review*, *Fearless*, *Heroin Love Songs*, *Chiron Review* and *The Main Street Rag*. His latest collection, *Night At My Throat*, (2020) was published by Pony One Dog Press.