

The Kieksograph

An international review of art and the subconscious

issue 19, January 2026

Poetry by Alison Black, Heikki Huotari, Michael Brownstein, Jeanne Julian, Jerry Harp, Pauline Barbieri, Raymond Miller, Maria Arana, Martin Ferguson, Alan Cohen, Craig Kirchner, Phil Wood, and Gabriella Garofalo

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Prose by Lorcan Walshe, Katerina Schafer, Ian C. Smith, and Peter Van Belle

Artwork by Pablo Gargallo, Lorcan Walshe, and Peter Van Belle

THE KLEKSOGRAPH

Editor: Peter Van Belle



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In the mid-nineteenth century, Justinus Kerner, published his book of “Kleksographien”. Later psychologists used similar ink blots as a means of accessing the subconscious of their patients. The Kleksograph is dedicated to exploring and celebrating the relationship between the subconscious and art.

Cover: Portrait of Greta Garbo by Pablo Gargallo, iron sculpture, 1930

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Lorcan Walshe

Novel excerpt: The Wounded Fool



0.The Fool

It is the Fool's destiny to go in search of himself - an adventure he undertakes with the naïveté of one who carries a wound older than memory.

The thin-skinned Fool is saturated with the mystery of life. His misfortune lies in being too tuned in to the inner life of others. He feels the frequencies of their insecurities and senses the drift of shadows behind their masks. At any moment, he suffers a quiet restlessness - craving approval while fearing the real and imagined judgments of those unsettled by his perceptions.

To manage his unease, the Fool retreats into fantasy, where his distracted instincts are endlessly waylaid. He opens the doors of desire as though they were gates to freedom. He splits from his spirit and lives in his head, exiled from the ripening moment of the heart. As his attention turns inwards, the splendor of the world fades from his awareness.

Already abandoned, the Fool abandons himself and becomes an outsider - a reject from the manufacturers, searching for an elixir to gratify the ego and eradicate the angst. With intoxicated instincts, he navigates as a people-pleaser, a tourist without a map, suspecting all the while that some secret of survival lies beyond his grasp.

In his self-reliance, the Fool flounders like an ordinary god bereft of the power to create. He talks incessantly and fails to tame the stray ideas in his head. Human contact makes him nervous, certainties recede, and a rising unease sharpens his shame and provokes his defiance.

As his paranoid lucidity dims the daylight, the streets narrow with danger. Around each corner lurks a spectre. Way past midnight, the Fool wakes from a recurring dream in which he had murdered someone whose name he can't recall.

He flees the city and seeks refuge by the ocean - only to encounter an isolation where menace stirs the air. In this newfound seclusion, disturbing visions become voices in his head. The voices rise in a chorus of accusation. He shouts to silence them. But they continue...

On a cliff of extinction, he edges toward oblivion, daring the bitter wind and the blackened rocks of a violent sea. Suddenly he breaks - like a terrified soldier in the trenches - and his frenzied prayer flaps into the ether.

In this surrender, his identity is discarded like a useless rag, and he is momentarily released from every illusion of importance. Instantly, he is a nerve-end of God - a minuscule spark of consciousness encountering the anima in the jungle of the id. The Fool glimpses the miraculous in the yearning energy of trees and the symphony of sunsets. In that glimmer of clarity, he grasps that reality can only be exactly as it is - not his to alter, but only to accept. Like a returning salmon, the Fool's ultimate destination is the source: the fountain of enlightenment, the higher Self.

He consults psychologists and scours libraries for the secrets of sanity - or at least, a diagram of the maze. But for the Fool, the formulas of others are as elegant and useless as the opening moves in a familiar game of chess. It occurs to him that he must follow the curve of his curiosity and surrender to whatever experiences an alternative life might bring.

For this new adventure, the Fool chooses the guise of a vagabond outcast - a figure stripped of belonging, answerable to no institution, indebted to no system. As an outsider, he may overcome the conditioning of his culture and gain distance from his past. Then, like a luck-struck gambler trusting the roll of the dice, the Fool decides to trust the universe, and brings his newfound quest to the altar of chance.





1. The Magician

At the table sits the Magician - an illusionist who manipulates the levers of perception and sidelines the rational, making the invisible visible.

With mesmerizing movements, he flourishes the signs and symbols of desire: wands for power, swords for truth, cups for emotion, pentacles for possession. In a performance that reveals absolutes his followers had never dared imagine; the Magician awakens their quiescent dreams as visions in the glimmering air - air he breathes as though it were the breath of God.

Among the Fool's delusions is a Messiah complex: a fantasy in which he heals the multitudes, evangelizes from the rock of ages, and basks in the adoration of his flock. He recognizes in the Magician's craft the possibility of performing miracles - or at least, the illusion of miracles. In the *déjà vu* of self-fulfilling certainty, the Fool decides that his life's purpose is to become a master of illusion, and that the Magician is the one he must become.

To this end, the Fool ingratiates himself with the Magician. He acquires a wand, a hat, a rabbit, and a dove. Through endless hours of practice, he makes the bewildered animals vanish and reappear from the ether. He mimics the Magician's manner, accent, and affectations. As his determination and sycophancy gain his mentor's attention, the Fool's delusions inflate. He soon regards himself as an exceptional apprentice - a chosen one among the Magician's disciples.

In this first flush of success, it becomes imperative that the world acknowledge his uniqueness - a uniqueness that will shine in the superior staging of a sorcerer's trick. He beseeches the Magician to share a dazzling secret of the clandestine craft. But the Magician counsels patience: "Make haste slowly. Do not want too much too soon. What is yours will come to you." The apprenticeship, he explains, requires total command of the moment - and the long, repetitive road that accomplishment demands. Magic is an art that takes years of dedication and discipline.

But such patience lies beyond the frontiers of the Fool's determination. He assumes his raw aptitude will suffice. Impetuously, he repackages old tricks and proclaims himself a magician. He summons an audience, arranges his new-fangled apparatus upon the table, and performs with the carnival confidence of a three-card trickster.

His act is received with the faint applause of spectators who have seen too many rabbits pulled out of hats. The feeble rattle of appreciation frustrates him. The Fool has anticipated an enthralled response, like the Magician's performance invariably commands. In desperation he tries harder, but only stirs unease as his incompetence becomes painfully clear. The waning enthusiasm of the spectators saps his confidence. Anxiety unravels him. Abruptly, the Fool curtails his routine and retreats from the stage.

In the humiliating hindsight of defeat, the Fool begins to understand that the Magician disregards the highways of ambition or the podiums of validation. Behind the dexterity and deception, the Magician's mind is still rather than striving, aware without deliberation, and at ease rather than at work. Such effortless attention enables an artifice where everything and nothing fades or finds form. An integrity is involved, which the Fool cannot fathom, and a genius, which he does not possess.

The Magician tells him: "Virtuosity cannot be induced. It arrives only through long engagement with the process from which artistry is shaped. Begin again at the birth canal. Locate the source of creativity. Seek the clarity of the High Priestess."





2. The High Priestess

The High Priestess sits between pillars of initiation and reversal. Before her is the book of wisdom. Behind her is the unfathomable. Her mind is attuned to the oceanic impulse of creation, to the intention and source of her origins. Out of stillness and emptiness, her wisdom emerges as inspiration; inspiration she processes through reflection and renders into words.

In the ancient world, her visions are revered in the Temple of Solomon and at the Oracle of Delphi. Although men consult her about the future or the past, the aspiring man is often unmasked by her insight and torn by her veracity. Later she appears as Mary Magdalene, an inconvenient mystic whom the church fathers rebrand as a whore while they institutionalize the spiritual. Across the veneer of history her provenance fades, but her presence endures upon the side altar of the human psyche.

Masculine reasoning cannot map the labyrinth of her awareness - a sanctum resistant to the mythologies of theologians or the proclamations of philosophers. Yet the pathways to her wisdom are hidden in full view: in fossils of coincidence, in patterns and dreams discernible only through distance and memory, in the subtle mind of the heart, when the gross mind of the senses quietens and self-obsession withers on the vine of silence.

As he enters her temple, the High Priestess addresses the Fool in an ethereal voice that chimes like a thousand tinkling bells. He cannot tell whether she speaks from within his skull or through his ears. She tells him of empires that inflate and collapse like white dwarfs.

“You are nothing, and you are everything,” she whispers, her gaze tracing the shadows of a synthetic world stretched across her temple floor.

Abruptly, her ancient eyes lift and pierce the ether of his soul.

“Why are you here?”

“The Magician says I need clarity.”

“Clarity requires stillness,” she replies. “I will teach you to meditate.”

The Fool is animated by the prospect of illumination and listens to the High Priestess’s instruction with the zeal of a pilgrim witnessing an apparition. For as long as he can remember, his mind has been a circus of confusion - his thoughts and intuitions forever at odds, producing a turbulent cocktail of emotion and an inability to appraise any situation.

In preparation for enlightenment the Fool sits in the lotus position and discovers, despite his determination to be an outstanding meditator, that his mind is disturbed rather than serene. Each thought that arises mushrooms darkly into a scenario of impending disaster, or morphs into a re-enactment of some past humiliation. Soon he is besieged by memories he would rather forget and dire prospects he scrambles to avoid.

Undaunted, he persists - meditating morning, noon, and night at the feet of the High Priestess. But instead of basking in her venerable presence he sinks deeper into the swamp of his history and shivers in the fearsome winds of anticipation. His attempts to access intuition lead to superstition and his nervous system is eventually overcome with apprehension. What began in hope ends in failure. The Fool retreats from the torture chamber of his thoughts and abandons the hill of silence.

The High Priestess, meanwhile, regards him with an indifference that cuts deeper than any judgment.

“Why can I not find enlightenment?” he complains.

“You cannot be still,” replies the High Priestess. “Your natural rhythms are laced with trauma. Your anxiety floods the silence.”

“What must I do? I cannot continue like this!”

“To heal yourself,” she says, “you must secure the nurturing power of the world. Seek out the Empress.”





3. The Empress

The Empress sits in her garden - a paradise where the spiritual manifests as the physical. She generates the potent Spring where all is formed or stillborn, nurtured or neglected. Birth, sex, and beauty are her dominion and, in this fundamental expression of being, the Empress reciprocates life's longing for itself.

Throughout antiquity she is a goddess with numerous titles. To the Athenians she is Aphrodite, an enticer of gods and mortals; to the Romans she is Venus, the mother of good fortune and fertility and the source of love, pleasure, and passion. She bequeaths creativity and resilience to the human enterprise and fosters the empathy and sensuality that sustains the individual. For the classical sculptor she is the muse who incorporates the inner and outer splendour of the world, and whose marble presence holds the poetry of the body and the eternity of the soul. Later, in the Renaissance, the Empress is idealized as the nurturing mother who manifests nature's abundance, beauty and fertility.

Because she carries the life and first influences the child, the Empress supersedes the male. In her gift is the bond between mother and child, the meadow of belonging or the desert of isolation, the attachment or the void.

In the way a leaf absorbs sunlight and a bee is drawn to a flower, the passions of the Fool are inflamed by the Empress's perfection. Her magnetism sheens with its promise of happiness. Euphoric now with anticipation, the Fool crosses the garden to where the goddess sits upon her throne.

He arrives with his begging bowl of attachment and bares his woken anima before the Empress of his desire. Like a courting jungle bird, the Fool discards his inhibitions and squawks in anticipation of her touch; a touch that can unblock the sacral chakra of his bliss.

But in place of fulfilment, a nervous energy agitates the air. In a quicksilver moment, the Empress's tenderness evaporates. Her face becomes the face of every woman he has loved: caring one moment, withholding the next - her love contingent on his compliance, her affection withdrawn at crucial moments.

The Fool is seized by the vertigo of never knowing which version of her might appear - the warm embrace or the cold dismissal. She retreats and pursues. She gives generously and punishes with silence. Here, love is a weapon, and intimacy is a prison.

A stony ambivalence in the Empress's eyes reminds the Fool of the woman who raised him. The Fool is distraught at this recognition as he realizes that he has been seeking her approval his entire life; chasing a reflection of the person who taught him that love requires self-abandonment - that his own desires are best suppressed.

His heart blackens in anger not at the Empress, but at the dawning truth: he seeks a version of love that annihilates him. In every connection he seeks, he recreates the wound of his first relationship.

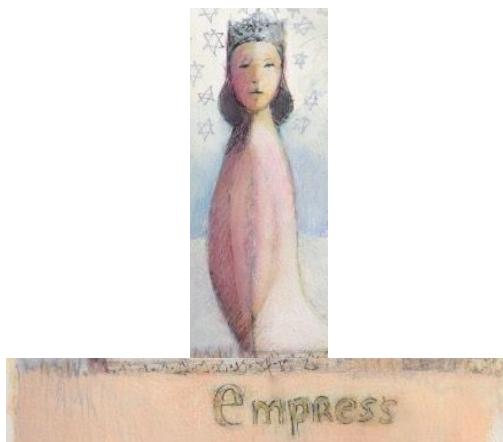
With a click of her fingers the Shadow disappears, and now a maternal Empress sits on her throne observing him with the loving kindness of a mother who adores the nature of her child.

"Your shapeshifting is too much for me," the Fool protests. "I am seasick with confusion."

"What you seek in me is the reflection of your first relationship," the Empress explains. "You will unconsciously recreate that relationship in your life. If it was a nurturing bond you will attract a loving partner. If it was a warped attachment, you will seek a counterfeit intimacy and lose yourself in the charm and chaos of others."

"What you say is disturbing," the Fool replies. "What am I to do?"

"The crucial relationship in your life is the one you have with yourself – the one you learned from your parents. Unless you accept their humanity, you will never forgive yourself," the Empress answers. "If you have a bewildering mother, you need an astute father. Visit the Emperor."





The Emperor

Within his fortress, encircled by symbols of authority, the Emperor reclines upon his throne and regards his subjects with the equilibrium of an alpha baboon surveying his harem. Implacable gatekeepers, sycophantic courtiers, battle-hardened generals, social climbers, deceitful petitioners, and scheming pretenders tread cautiously in his regal presence. The pecking order of this menagerie, separate from the feminine sphere and its cycle of birth and death, fortifies the structured world of masculine rule. Its objectives are permanence and conformity.

During his Capricornian ascent to the pinnacle of power, the Emperor discards his common identity, mythologizes his past, and sequesters an iconic name to secure his supremacy. He secures his kingdoms with an iron heart and a propensity for relentless attrition.

Order is preserved by his dark charisma. His scathing humour, random violence, and spontaneous benevolence keep the court on edge. While his narcissistic tirades about his achievements and his enemies, appear to invite complicity and agreement, the courtiers have learned to respond with caution. Sometimes, declarations of loyalty - even their most personal acts of devotion - have triggered his suspicion. "Tell me more," he growls on such occasions, encouraging their flattery to fuel his rage rather than stroke his ego.

The Fool enters the Emperor's domain as a supplicant in search of an opportunity to fortify his masculinity and elevate his status. Because he is new to the court and carries an air of individuality, the Fool is met with curiosity as to how he may be useful for the schemes of others. The gates of ambition are open, and he surfs the stratum of influence which moves him closer to the throne.

Since childhood, the Fool's intentions are misaligned with the territorial instinct of his gender. No parent imprinted an imperative of self-preservation on his psyche; nor has a mentor explained the loyalties, duplicities, and the strategies that define the human enterprise.

Instead, the Fool oscillates between meekness and hostility, only to become a convenient target in troubled times. He meanders like a discontented animal who fails to find his place within the pack, or distinguish between the minted and impoverished trails that map the migrations of the fraternity.

Also, the Fool has a significant weakness: he is blind to the hierarchies of power. Following his defeat in the Oedipal struggle, a latent hostility towards his father is transferred onto authority figures. This juvenile defiance manifests as an automatic contempt for conventional ideas and customs that are not immediately gratifying.

Inevitably, the bureaucratic character of the court irritates the Fool. In an impetuous act of disrespect, he flaunts indifference towards the Emperor and makes no acknowledgment of the ascendancy. Instead, the Fool focuses his attention and flattery on the courtiers who surround the throne and addresses them as though their standing was equal to the Imperial power they serve. But the Fool's words fizz in the ether as the court is silenced by a volatile glint in the Emperor's gaze.

Instantly, the Fool regrets his audacity, which has placed him in great danger. A realignment in the sovereign mind can spark a lethal shift from the stability of protocol into the slaughterhouse of paranoia. The Imperial presence can uplift or destroy. The Fool senses the fury that forged the empire, and he understands, too late, that behind its ceremonial veneer, the court lives in fear of the Emperor's vexation – a vexation which may cost him dearly.

In deathly silence, the Emperor considers the situation and finally laughs aloud at the quaking Fool who stands before him. Immediately the court erupts in hilarity.

“Only a Fool would risk the sovereign displeasure.” The Emperor declares. “We already have a jester in this court and have no use for another clown, especially one so arrogant. It is not influence or wealth you need to acquire, but the humility of a penitent. Go, seek the Hierophant.”





5. The Hierophant

Here is the Hierophant, the conductor of ceremonies from the naming to the grave. Inevitably a man, and frequently emasculated by holiness and an aversion towards intimacy.

This shaman-priest is a consequence of ephemerality and the human need for meaning. Communities conceive him to shepherd their souls along rugged paths to promised lands. Whether he is extracting human hearts upon an Aztec pyramid or banishing devils from a frenzied congregation, he lays claim to the bridge between Heaven and Earth. From this mythical overpass he monopolises the miraculous and intercedes with a volatile god.

At the core of his religion lies a mystery that only a Hierophant can understand. He trusts his proclamations because they aren't his to begin with - they belong to a martyred prophet, the son of four fathers, who explained the moon.

The Hierophant gathers his flock from the pasture of gullibility and constructs cathedrals to house their superstitions. The cut of his costume advertises his eminence as the custodian of temples and the broker of salvation. On the expedition towards eternal life, he becomes the connoisseur of karma, propagator of guilt, savant of morality and warden of female fertility.

The Hierophant's alliances are formed with regimes and autocrats for whom, in the battle for scarce resources, he emboldens the patriot and promotes ethnic cleansing. He sanctifies wars with the instruments of religion, crowns emperors, blesses governments, burns witches and forms inquisitions in a crusade to eradicate the nonconformist and purge the carnal woman.

At the palace of the priests the Fool approaches the Hierophant.

“My arrogance is troublesome, and I wish to acquire the humility of a penitent. Can you show me, reverent one, how this can be done?”

Humility of a penitent!” The Hierophant laughs. “What century are you from?”

“I don’t understand.” The Fool replies. “I was told you teach humility.”

“Humility is redundant, and penance is passé in the commodified world.” Explains the Hierophant. “Mindfulness is what you need.”

“Mindfulness?”

“Yes. Mindfulness. Experience the present moment. That is exactly where everyone wants to be. The postmodern person avoids thinking of the past or the impending mass extinction. They consume, compare and feel superior. They expect happiness.”

“What exactly are your teachings?” The Fool enquires. “Is there a moral aspect to all of this?”

“Morality is integral to the practice of mindfulness, but guilt about the past and fear of the future are no longer encouraged. We’ve moved beyond the Medieval. Heretics are cancelled, rather than burnt. No one gets triggered and everyone feels safe. We promote celebrity rather than sainthood. Look good, feel good, do good. Visible philanthropy is a sacrament.”

“So, what should I seek?”

“Abundance.”

“Abundance?”

“Abundance is where it’s at in this age of personal fulfilment and emotional security. Forget about humility and focus on your unique individual self.”

The Fool follows the Hierophant’s directions and focuses on his thoughts and feelings. He enters a meditative state and visualizes an ideal life as a prosperous celebrity. With all the mindfulness he can muster, the Fool releases his desires into the ether and wills the universe to manifest his vision of abundance.

Time passes and nothing happens. The Fool wonders why the universe is ignoring him.

“It’s a lack of trust on your part.” The Hierophant explains. “Or else your attention is dulled by the dopamine fog of the digital world.”

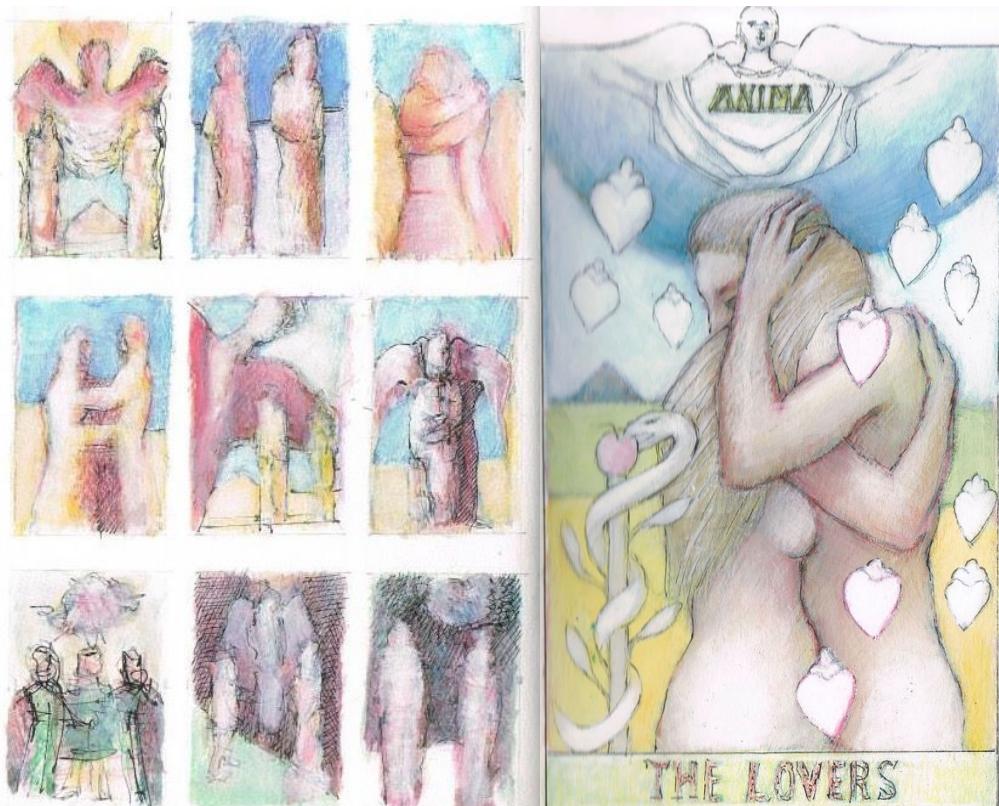
“I rarely use technology.” The Fool replies. “I will focus on trusting.”

Despite his most passionate attempts to totally trust the universal mind, his vision fails to materialize. He imagines and reimagines until his efforts finally exhaust him and the Fool despairs of being an abundant individual.

“Why doesn’t life work for me?” He demands. “What am I to do?”

“You do not possess the gift of faith.” The Hierophant declares. “Maybe, before you can trust the universe, you need to trust another human being. Ask the Lovers how they trust.”





6. The Lovers

Here is the end of innocence, the apple eaten, the knowledge gained, and the paradise lost. In forsaking Eden, the Lovers' choice is motivated by the desire for individuality - by a wish to detach from universal consciousness and enter into the world of the human ego.

But this transition into being comes with a price: the awareness of an inner and outer duality. Now, separated from the Higher I, each is a solitary entity at the centre of their own universe, separate from the other and from nature. The Lovers experience a fundamental anxiety as they encounter the reality of survival, aloneness and inevitable death in an alien world.

To escape the isolation and withstand their fear they seek connection. The Lovers reach for each other and discover love.

In the serpent dream of human gratification, a potent appetite arouses every cell when the naked lovers embrace. Each caress is an act of adoration, scent and taste are intoxicating, every glance is a secret shared, the eyes are wells of revelation and the sounds of love ascend with abandon. With their passion confirmed the Lovers reach deeper than touch and into the heart of belonging until, in a surge of delight, their energies flower and momentarily merge into the bliss they had known in the garden.

Within this rapture, each is the other but doesn't know it.

The Lovers begin in love by falling - not for the other but for the self. The person they fall in love with is strangely familiar because in each other they have found scaffolding on which to screen the anima and animus - their prototype of perfection, the aura of their souls. Thus, the Lovers are enraptured with the perfection of the beloved and while love emboldens the hero and inspires the heroine, everything seems possible.

However, in their brave new world, where nothing can exist without an opposite, the pillars of euphoric certainty cast shadows of anguish and abandonment. With time the infatuation with the "love object" evaporates and when the inner nature of the other becomes apparent the relationship

ripens or perishes. The first love becomes a second birth: a mystical marriage for the fortunate or, for the unlucky, a misadventure into a bitter Jerusalem where the jilted lover carries the cross of longing - a longing that will emerge as melancholy in music, haunt the drawn line of beauty, linger in the soul of poetry and resonate with the Fool.

In the way he fears his own fragility the Fool fears love. A life of broken promises and severed boundaries has closed his heart. Intimacy, for the Fool, is a harbinger of hurt and a prospect of further rejection. Only when he is stirred by obsession, disinhibited by addiction or mindless with lust will he risk a relationship – a relationship bereft of empathy and pursued with the duplicity of seduction. The Fool sees sexuality as an instrument of conquest and a sedation of longing, rather than the celebration of a precious bond. The fantasy self he champions slowly poisons all possibility until his replica romance is skinned with resentment and ends in disillusionment.

“Why do my relationships die?” The Fool asks the Lovers.

“You have never known or practiced loving. You act out of an injured pride that can only take and never receive,” the Lovers answer. “You will not know love until you know yourself. And to know yourself you must assimilate the contradictory voices and opposing appetites of your being.”

“And how do I do that?” The Fool demands.

“Seek the Chariot,” the Lovers reply. “The condition of the Chariot you find will be the condition of the life that you live.”



Alison Black

Fire Opal Oracle Dreams Angel Cards

On holiday with a friend,

I gave her an opal ring,

We also swapped rings.

Having friendship,

Having the confidence,

To be me.

FIRE opal of happiness,

FIRE opal of joy,

FIRE opal of hope.

Alison Black

Winter Oracle Dreams Angel Cards

Dark evenings,
Bright mornings,
Getting colder for winter.

Reflection of as summer,
Reflection of memories,
Reflection of joy.

Transition of happiness,
Transition of love,
Release negativity.

Katerina Schafer

Dreams

It's time for you to sleep and forget now.

The angel with slate gray hair and black-veined, wispy gray wings faded into darkness. I'd seen her before. I knew I had. But where? The memory danced just out of my grasp, as ephemeral as Wendy's Neverland.

Wendy...

Images appeared and blended and faded, traces of reality and dashes of fantasy. A cartoon crocodile chasing Captain Hook; melting snow and orange heat cubes; Frosty the snowman and a BTS music video; a wintry scene encased in a snow globe of ice...

She was in the snow globe. Her name was Wendy.



Eloi, by Jacek Malczewski

Michael H. Brownstein

I need to Learn Who's in Charge of My Life

Lightning struck the old oak,
a jagged scar across its façade,
an ember of fire at its base,
then silence. What hides
in the briar patch? Insanity?
Farrow hogs? Bobcats? A swamp
of Gila monsters? I count down
from a hundred by nines--
91. 82, 73, 64, 45,,,take a hundred
into twos and fours, fifties and ones.
No one crosses over to assist me,
yet the rain falls in wind and shadow,
bone chips and slivers of hail.
Even my hands curled into small fists
feel incomplete as if they too
lack the substance of granite and pica.

Jeanne Julian

Even Misery

I had forgotten that even misery can end.— Joyce Carol Oates

I don't know when it was that I could breathe again, the stone gone, opening the tomb of mourning, where I huddled with no room for anyone or anything but grief. Days drifted by in a dreamless half-sleep; night's restless tides of slumber ebbed in gloom. No music soothed. I was only attuned to sorrow's drumbeat. I found no relief in touch or taste or sunlit scenery. Psalms of solace mapped, fossilized, and mined the loss, made present tense of history. Slow hours became long years. And now I find what I'd forgotten: even misery can end, if only we can give it time.

Ian C. Smith

Billygoat

Emptied of the night's mad dreams; old grief, boyish expectations, in my blood, I boil a kettle on my stove, discreet about smoke's egress, check my phone to see how much I can afford to eat today. If you sought me you would never track me here, a wraith hidden behind a nondescript door I bar from inside on which I attached a HAZCHEM sign, my lone caller the wind, industrial traffic belching past. I imagine I am shipboard, master of a creaking galleon.

Since my arrival, the only time people thronged these West Melbourne streets was when their football team won the championship after sixty-two barren years.

Stricken by lost time, their revelry alarmed me at first. Small finds like the trove of abandoned sawn wood discovered when scrounging for sticks to crackle my stove into life, delight. I relayed the small logs to my squat accompanied by an unseen barking dog's forlorn protest, fantasising about a chance meeting with a kind, intelligent woman as if we were characters in a novel. As if.

Gossiped about by pigeons on high, I sip tea wreathed in steam, click on old messages from habit, ward off remorse with poetry archived in memory, perfect words rubbing together read in a shaft of sunlight like a stage set: through willow-herb, cranesbill, and meadowsweet, I roamed, ghostlike companions savoured during solitary seasons, a faith against troubled times. In vile contrast, the newspaper that flamed my fire was filled with atrocities and moneyed politicians' damned lies among other abuses. When I venture abroad again, in fine rain preferred, so, nobody else afoot, shielded by that traffic noise and my hoodie, I hope to magpie more serendipity to improve my Robinson Crusoe freedom.

On my reconnaissance of this derelict district of rusted steel I am borne back to scarred tables in dim bars of distant cities once more: Glasgow, Barcelona, Berlin, Gothenburg, dissecting my life. With a woman then, both of us wearing the long-term travellers' monotony of wretched oft-rinsed same clothes, we see vehicles, Matchbox toys, traversing a bridge soaring over an historic river as we explore the beautiful havoc of ancient Europe bickering in our clapped-out van that amused Austrian border guards. Acting nonchalant to mask my true anxious self, I google enigmatic maps, all these yesterdays leading me irrevocably back here.

I treasure vignettes, my print of *Vindstille* by the Danish painter Anton Dorph special. Depicted from behind, a woman holding a child stands on a revetment gazing across still water at a fishing boat. When I bought it I admired its timelessness in a bar,

glasses tinkling, a barmaid flirting on the phone, wondering what Dorph's watching woman represented. A man's return? Hope? The calm before a storm I thought in italics. Then, through a window, I noticed a woman cross the street in a gust of rain. Downing my drink in one draught, I paid, rushing, not for the first time, into the drama of a teeming city, breath catching because of the familiar way her curls bounced.

Stepping around ferries' and refugees' jetsam, a shimmer of wintry salt blurring our eyes, we scoffed at the idea of deckchairs in pebbles on what some might call a beach after retreating from Europe across the English Channel's murk to our ancestral home. A single tourist railway line ran behind our cheap off-season coastal let; Romney Marsh beyond better days, stubble, thistles, a goat chained to a water trough. At dusk wan yellow lights blinked on in bungalows, a daguerreotype now recalled in sepia. How could we imagine the future? Were we lovers, close teammates, tourists creating scenes, or just curious about genes? When it was over we left no trace. The goat had fouled its patch, stench powerful. After the sweet slow train of the past's shrill whistle faded I remember hearing that lone goat bleating at the end of its tether.



Simon Hollosy, self-portrait, 1916

Jerry Harp

What Else Can I Do But Feel?

It's like a tirade against the Holy Ghost,
keeps coming and coming
no matter how I cope.

I'm a brick wall the rain has fallen
a hundred years to hit,
iron oxide bleeding into the street,
staining it a solitary red.

I'm rolling thunder ducking
beyond the horizon,
a broken, smoldering reed,
a face looming in the dark.

I go my solitary way
into the woods. The same tar pit
as always yawns at my feet.

It releases foul smells. It means neither
surcease nor danger.

If any signification emanates from there,
it hasn't drifted my way.

Another wave comes on, entering
the wrong slit of my brain,
both hemispheres dialed back.

My vision remains set on impossible.

Ever since that spinal tap
decades ago, I've been low on fluid,
dizzy and irascible.

If I make it out of here tonight,
the same dark will greet me
in the morning, a dimming cortex.

Jerry Harp

The Bees, The Hum

Tonight the bees hum down by the river.
Can we count them out together?
I've been screaming into the trees
for an hour, but there's another
accounting, another composure.
Help me hold it together,
as in music, as in grass.
Who knew our father had
so much blood on his hands?
He stepped into your makeshift boxing
ring, boxed you in, then knocked
you down and almost out. He tossed
the gloves aside and went in the house,
never speaking of the incident.
You were a boy then.
It's the same way he ran
the hominy mill downtown.
His workers never did fathom
the virtues of collective action;
or rather, when they did, it was too late
to make a difference in the atmosphere.
Those were days we had witches in
the woods. Capable, kind, and young,
they lived all over the countryside.
Not one would take Satan as a match.
In moonlight, they sing and dance
among the trees. They make a fire
and tell stories from the old days.
The spells they cast are otherworldly rhythms
shimmering into dream, dream-laden kingdoms.

Pauline Barbieri

Marbles

New England cedar wood in his drawer.
Wallace standing behind me; poetry lining our lives.
Red leaves dropping, a dog barking, a soft clock chiming,
he is reading 'The Man with the Blue Guitar'.
I sit thinking of a pink 'Matchbox' dresser,
its sheen polishes off the intervening years.
We both stand back there with the kids,
playing a game of marbles with glassy words.
I follow him along the gutter of enterprise,
watch how he splits the atoms of 'Bollywashers',
'Maypoles' and 'Comets'. I wait at the corner,
watch how he handles the winner.
Cedar wafts through a courtyard, strums a heart string.
His velvet dickey bow starts to flutter.
He bends, picks up his book, continues
to smash glass in front of a jealous gang.

Raymond Miller

I Live Over There

Past houses where spouses are spitting at children
and satellite dishes are marks of distinction;
where villainous vermin shadow-box curtains
and takeaway cartons bespatter the gardens;
where nobody bothers to pick up the dog shit
just stood on the pavement twittering gossip
and stubbing their ciggies on steps without polish,
deploring the darkies and ordering curries
and voting for parties in bed with the Tories
then falling asleep to their fairy-tale stories.

Past bungalows where 999 has been rang
for Cornelius Hawkins has let himself hang;
the neighbours come round to hush the dog's yap
at the rope in the loft to which Con was attached.
The TV was left on but nothing worth watching.
I wonder what dogs make of men hung like washing.

Past knickers and needles and knives in the back
down the alley that leads to the railway track
where Malky the Alky had a flash of insight
and laid himself down between the train lines.
The train passed straight over and Malky survived,
some people just cannot do anything right.
Now there's a new plan for stopping a topping
and drivers sound horns when approaching the crossing
as a warning of sorts to those bent on dying
and a curse to all others attempting a lie-in.

Past the park that the council desire for allotments;
the football pitch now has lost both its goalposts.
Bureaucracy's moved them to state its position:
the residents draw up another petition.
A perennial game of attack and defence
over cabbages, peas and a faded green bench
by the burial grounds where the dead cannot rest
but be shuffled around to make room for who's next.

Past the barb-wire fencing surrounding the wood
that's a small tuft of hair on a balding man's head,
which is soon to be shaven, the signs indicate,
for a cancer has riddled my local estate.

Oh, I do it disservice, too much bile and jaundice,
tomorrow the snow may have smoothed every surface
and the buildings resemble a different planet;
one I manage to visit if not quite inhabit.



The Temptation of Saint-Anthony, by Matthias Grünewald

Maria Arana

Psycho Voice

I'm some sort of devilish 'bandit'
who scourges the night in find of a new and better life
many hold close to their hearts.

I'm no devil.

Don't think anybody on Earth understands.

I have an interesting imagination
for considering my future.

I know they think me strange
for life has given me a new set of rules to play with.

It causes headaches.

Let him worry.

Its meaning is a piece of gum.

I'm not here on this destructive planet for air,
but to devour the juice that spreads out
the loneliness I have experienced.

I am the running night which creeps to your door

and takes everything possessed in a quick glance.

No mystery the mind's an evil tool.

Still doesn't understand.

I am the daredevil.

Media, media, I rule the land with sound bites.

Sorry one has been given what one might as well live with.

True, reality is a joke,

we're stuck in space, and no one is out there.

We're paste.

Haven't I been taught?

I am the dream others see as a snapshot

born on a day nearly forgotten.

I like floating on water and glancing at all the alien conquest.

Plays with your head, you know

Heikki Huotari

Why I Cry at Weddings

Some are flotsam, some are jetsam, some are honest chronologically. I wish magicians well. When he sees keys in the ignition, Adam says, let's take a ride. If you thought it was a placebo then the joke's on you.

Well worth encircling, the dots defy convention. Love the sinner love the sin. No president slept in this tent but tossed and turned all night. The dirty words in cursive are clean in calligraphy.

By flowering mortality invalidated, small-d democrats amassing fast, so faux, so haute, so of this earth, by camouflage and bullet proofing would we know them, by their atavisms and by their opposing thumbs.

For California not for Oregon the cinder cones lay round about. What town am I the father of again? Yreka, I am far from found. No cartoon hands on my watch, no imaginary interlocutors for me.

Pursuant to the two alohas, I would be my own negation and the oxygen mask would not fall far from the overhead compartment. If I feign an injury then my competitor is penalized. What mental state are there not tears of now?

Martin Ferguson Saturnia

Saturnus had grown tired of all the fighting,
so decided to pacify humanity;
his thunderstroke cracked open the rock,
releasing steam and soothing waters.

We arrived two millennia from the future,
in cars at midnight, swathes of us,
to bathe in subterranean sulphur.

We could only see the orbed reflection
white, on each tier of terraced limestone,
hot springs running down in stages.
The baths still body temperature,
dopo duemila anni.

But the lunic glint in her eye
whispered, those water alchemists
had performed magic to frame this.

Romans could still be seen amongst us—
a moon lit pin worm danced,
on the tip of my toothbrush.



From a Warm Pit, Looking Up, by Peter Van Belle

Alan Cohen Branch

Deep within the tree
Moving only as the living must
More and more quiet

Fewer and shorter excursions
Wise now about seduction
How way leads on to way and day's gone

Sustenance
A neck that trains the eyes
A peck of grooming

Long days deep in the tree
Liquid days
Worlds within

Alan Cohen Perspective

Ducks
Shy in the Midwest
Are here like cabdrivers
Necks extended
They barrel into the water
Yards from our feet
Gulls are more focused
Spend less time in the air
Have a narrower ambit
Never survey
Strait smart
Just fish and rest
The bluff
Between the West Side Highway
And Riverside Drive
Dwarfs even the Empire State
Which barely scrapes the horizon
We see the red hibiscus on the second floor
Tulips, late daffodils
The brick walkway
Smell the creosote and mudflats
Lazy blasé sophisticates in spring sun



illustration by Peter Van Belle

Peter Van Belle

A Circus at Night

My mother had her white skirt up while the ringmaster had his thick, naked thighs pressed up against hers. They were against the wall of his trailer.

The tall clown had one arm around my chest and his hand over my mouth. I was only thirteen at the time, but felt my head go cold and my loins heat up. He pulled me away so they wouldn't spot me.

"That's why she came to the circus," the clown said, back in his trailer, "that's why they come."

He took another swig of the gin that left its stink on my clothes.

"Now sit tight. Your mom will be back soon."

He still wore his facepaint, so from a distance he constantly wore a cracked grin. I did know the face underneath it was old.

"Why else would they come to the circus? The elephants walk like lethargic blocks of concrete. The clowns look like mentally deficient people forced to wear loud clothes. The acrobats do the same tricks every show, every day, like all acrobats everywhere, every day. There's so much an adult can stand."

The ringmaster, in his undertaker suit with sequined lapels, is king of the animals, master of the acrobats, high priest of the clowns, a god of the big top and magician of the teeth-grinding music that punctuates his announcements."

In Earl Field, where there used to be the airdrome, the circus would pitch its tent every July, drawing flies and people. I'd watch it my bedroom window. It stood out against the field of tall yellow grass and the dark clouds promising thunderstorms in the plains. From a distance it looked as if a colorful volcano had suddenly risen from the grass, venting music and animal cries.

"This is the Oz of Sex," the clown blurted out, "and he's our wizard. The things he lets us do."

He pinched my arm to test the flesh and I thought of punching my mom for leaving me with him. Then the clown cried. Beyond the crying in Motown records, beyond Italian operas he went. He hated his trailer and the long dull nights, and always beholden to the ringmaster grunting away with the women. At the time I didn't know what kept him prisoner.

And here came mom straightening her hair and dress. The ringmaster walked behind her, his swollen head almost purple.

So back home, waiting for dad to return from a business trip. I asked him about the circus.

"If I want to sit in a place reeking of shit and dead meat I'll go and see your grandparents."

One of our storms broke, pouring down lukewarm rain in thunderous peals. The earth released its smells. The circus in the distance didn't mind, let the rain slide off its canvas. One time I saw Saint-Elmo's Fire dancing around its poles. Our town wasn't like that. When it rained the houses turned dark and sullen and when the sun poked through the clouds whiffs of steam came off the tar shingles.

A few nights later the ringmaster gave me nightmares: twisted limbs, eating my own flesh, looking in the mirror to see my skin peeled back. And he stood in the background, never touching me but always close. I woke up with soaked sheets.

"I want to go to the circus," I told my mom while she loaded the dishwasher.

"Ask your dad," she replied.

Once was enough for her, at least this year.

From my room I watched the big top light up as the July night fell. A harvest moon above it looked painted on the sky.

I crept over there after the last show. I realized I was at the pinnacle of my youth and that this action would push me through the eggshell wall into another world. The field was cold and smelled of piss and turned earth. The trailers flanked the tent like beetles ganging up on a colourful turtle. From one of them staggered the clown, who spotted me by the light of the open door. He pointed at me and fell flat on his face. I was looking for the ringmaster.

He was down by the animal cages. Two men pinned a zebra against the bars while he did something to its belly. As he straightened himself I saw the bowl and the knife he was holding. He drank and a dark liquid ran down his chin.

"I learned this when I worked in a slaughterhouse. The best food you can find."

That's what the women were after, without even knowing it. From that moment on I wanted to join this circus, just to be that guy. Because I realized nothing could stop a man who did these things.

Craig Kirchner

Juke on Route

Sixty-Something

It was disgustingly hot, no clouds, no breeze,
felt as though if you reached just a bit
you could touch the sun. There is a diner
and not much else, 50's motif,
with decades of grease giving it a noir atmosphere.
There is a reluctance to sit, to eat,
but it's air-conditioned.

Long red curly hair, falling to the side, gold cross,
hanging meaningfully, comfortably in significant cleavage,
pours me a coffee, "What's your name?
Mine is Emerite, everybody calls me red,
...it means, completed one's service"
Not here's the menu, the special, but what's your name.
The juke slot sucks the quarter out of my grip.

My lucky number 114, Marvin Gaye -
'I Heard it Through the Grapevine'.
Before Marvin sings there is electric piano that sets
a whole new mysterious mood to the room
and then the lyrics, the personal tale of infidelity, lost love.
These booths have been feeding home fries
and adultery since Emerite was in diapers.

“You know Emerita was a Saint, have you had
many saints come through here?”

This gives her pause, but only for a sec.

“Mostly red necks, you’re the first clean shave
and ironed shirt I’ve seen in months.”

She takes my order, refills the coffee, now the center
of the universe, of route sixty-something, my pilgrimage.

A boundary on the edge of my world, a story I need
to know the end of. Marvin Gaye and I telling Emerite
what she already understood – that she was meant to pour
this coffee, as I was meant to devour these eggs,
avoid the sickening heat, that *I’m just about to lose my mind*,
that being on the road is about these realizations
and the saints that no one else ever sees.

Craig Kirchner

Juke on Route

A Ceiling he didn't Know

He snorted what had been described to him as,
My own recipe, be careful with it, you'll love it.
He didn't remember a taste, or seeing the
floor as it rose to meet his face.

He didn't hear the ambulance, the siren,
or feel the hands as they worked on him,
attempting to determine what caused his collapse,
but mostly struggling with his vitals.

He did see a black screen. No emotion,
just vision, no pain - a small dot of light,
soft yellow, traveling, growing quickly
in a dispassionate, beckoning approach,

nothing else but the warmth, a peace -
which was enveloping, then gone.

He woke looking at a ceiling he didn't know,
his girlfriend and mother at the foot of the bed.

Tests, blood, more tests, nothing wrong.
We're releasing him, he needs some rest.
The nurse pushed the wheelchair to the entrance,
nobody had much to say, and then,

an EMT standing in the hall, drinking a coffee,
Good to see you're still here,
we lost you last night for a full coupla minutes,
it was touch and go, but we got you back.

Phil Wood

Deja Vu

A coffee stain on the cuff of his shirt,
not the tie depicting a cat and mouse,
caused me to stand by the girl
clutching grief in a handkerchief.

Politely, I say ‘good morning’;
but details natter like litter in trees
until the priest recites:

the girl is your estranged daughter;
the cartoon tie is not a stranger;
your black tie is an exclamation
for loss in this silence of snow;
let us insist on this bin for endings.

Phil Wood

Non Verbal Weekend

Labrador's tail thumping the laminate.
I scratch her neck and she weights her head
against my knee.

Raking the sister-in-law's lawn,
blackbird eyes me,
copper beech is mumbling leaves.

The old guy, who snored on the train,
is sitting on the wet pavement outside Costa's
and cupping his hands for coins.

This lipstick kiss on either cheek...
your smile...I smile...you wave...I hold up my hand...
my half-way goodbye.

Gabriella Garofalo

To Y.

Well, we are ordinary folks, no stranger
To an old-school desire,
No upset, no surprises, so we expect
A swirling madness moving wombs and souls,
More seed, of course, father of words,
Of green rejections that call you back,
Then shout ' Those are eternal games, no fault,
No crime if you yield to silent lawns
When dreams outstay their welcome',
As if the sea could ever part lovers huddling
On a spellbound evening, by a chthonic light
Absence sets free-
Yet she'll screw up hopes and projects,
She'll thwart your soothing dreams,
As she's is your sky, your soul
A sky that hides away in the blue frost
Of distance, where seeds feel
Neither fear nor dread,
And a single light dwells, a mighty moon,
Her rays a door to the rapt intensity
Of your impervious gaze-
So, may no words disown you,
May no sky ravage trees, or houses
Look now, the light stays yours,
Never born from that angry lie, the sun,
Maybe a life you dreamt, green with envy
As wayfarers moving to the back
Of neon lights where they rush
Into that nasty conjuror, a time that strikes
In wrath, then blows fast carrying
His loot, your hills, your sleep
Where fear, rejections fight on equal terms
And diverted stares outline-
Fancy that, a breathless thriller
Of nonstop suspense, please don't call it life.

CONTRIBUTORS

Pablo Gargallo (1881-1934) a Spanish sculptor who devised a technique using empty spaces to suggest light surfaces.

Lorcan Walshe is an Irish artist whose paintings are held in the collections of the National Museum of Ireland, the Irish Museum of Modern Art, the Hunt Museum, the National Portrait Collection and other institutions. His work has been the subject of academic papers and essays. After decades as a painter, he now works across visual art and writing. He is completing *The Wounded Fool*, an artist's book combining original illustrations with literary texts on the tarot's Major Arcana. His poems and writing on art have appeared in various journals. He lives and works in Dublin.

www.lorcanwalshe.com

Alison Black is from Belfast and has been writing for 17 years.

Katerina Schafer is a former veterinary assistant, current migraineur, and hopeful freelance writer.

Michael H. Brownstein has been widely published throughout the small and literary presses. His work has appeared in *The Café Review*, *American Letters and Commentary*, *Skidrow Penthouse*, *Xavier Review*, *Hotel Amerika*, *Free Lunch*, *Meridian Anthology of Contemporary Poetry*, *The Pacific Review*, *Poetrysuperhighway.com* and others. His latest volumes of poetry, *A Slipknot to Somewhere Else* (2018) and *How Do We Create Love?* (2019), were recently released (Cholla Needles Press)

Jeanne Julian is author of *Like the O in Hope* and two chapbooks. Her poems have won awards from *Reed Magazine*, *Comstock Review*, *I-70 Review*, and *Naugatuck River Review*. Her book reviews appear in *Main Street Rag*. She maintains a compendium of quotations for writers on her web site. www.jeannejulian.com

Ian C Smith's work has been published in *BBC Radio 4 Sounds*, *Cable Street*, *Griffith Review*, *Honest Ulsterman*, *North of Oxford*, *Rundelania*, *Stand, & Westerly*. His seventh book is *wonder sadness madness joy*, *Ginninderra* (Port Adelaide). He writes in the Gippsland Lakes area of Victoria, and on Flinders Island.

Jerry Harp teaches at Lewis & Clark College. His books include *Creature* (2003), *Gatherings* (2004), and *Spirit Under Construction* (2017). His poems have appeared in *America*, *Best American Poetry* (2009), *Boulevard*, *Cincinnati Review*, *Commonweal*, *december*, *The Iowa Review*, *The Journal*, *Kenyon Review*, *Laurel Review*, *Notre Dame Review*, *Pleiades*, *Poetry Northwest*, and *The Wallace Stevens Journal*, among other places. His reviews are published in *American Book Review*.

Pauline Barbieri was shortlisted for the Bridport Poetry Prize by the poet laureate, Sir Andrew Motion and twice for the Exeter Poetry Prize by Jo Shapcott and Lawrence Sail, respectively. She has had six collections of poetry published and was shortlisted for the Cinnamon Press Novel Awards for her book, 'Smoke and Gold'.

Ray Miller is a Socialist, Aston Villa supporter and faithful husband. Life's been a disappointment.

Maria A. Arana is a writer, poet, editor, and teacher. Her poetry has been published in various journals including *Spectrum*, *The Gonzo Press*, and *The Kleksograph*. You can find her at https://x.com/m_a_Arana and <https://www.booksbymaarana.com> or <https://aranaeditingservices.com>

Heikki Huotari attended a one-room school and spent summers on a forest-fire lookout tower. Since retiring from academia/mathematics he has published poems in numerous journals and in five poetry collections. His manuscript, *To Justify The Butterfly*, won second prize, and publication, in the 2022 James Tate Chapbook Competition.

Martin Ferguson is a poet and English language teacher living and working in France. His poems have appeared in *The Guardian* (online edition), *Stand*, *Ink Sweat & Tears*, *The French Literary Review*, *The Honest Ulsterman*, *DREICH*, *The Alchemy Spoon*, *The High Window*, *The Journal*, *The Poetry Village*, *International Times*, among many others. His first pamphlet, *An A to Z Art of Urban Survival Following Diogenes of Sinope*, was shortlisted by *Against the Grain Press* and published in 2019 in *Original Plus*. His second pamphlet, *Stone Age Howl*, won the 2023 *DREICH* Classic poetry Pamphlet Competition.

Alan Cohen's first publication as a poet was in the PTA Newsletter when he was 10 years old. He graduated Farmingdale High School (where he was Poetry Editor of the magazine, *The Bard*), Vassar College (with a BA in English) and University of California at Davis Medical School, did his internship in Boston and his residency in Hawaii, and was then a Primary Care physician, teacher, and Chief of Primary Care at the VA, first in Fresno, CA and later in Roseburg, OR. He was nominated for his performance in Fresno for the 2012 VA Mark Wolcott Award for Excellence in

Clinical Care Leadership. He has gone on writing poems for 60 years and, now retired from medicine, is beginning to share some of his discoveries.

Peter Van Belle is the editor of The Klecksograph and has published poems and short stories in Great Britain, Ireland, New Zealand, Canada, the US, and Belgium. As a child he lived in the US, but now he lives in Belgium.

Craig Kirchner is retired and thinks of poetry as hobo art. He loves storytelling and the aesthetics of the paper and pen. He has had three poems nominated for the Pushcart, and has a book of poetry, Roomful of Navels. He houses 500 books in his office and about 400 poems in a folder on a laptop. These words tend to keep him straight. After a writing hiatus he was recently published in Poetry Quarterly, Decadent Review, New World Writing, Neologism, The Light Ekphrastic, Unlikely Stories, Wild Violet, Last Stanza, Unbroken, The Globe Review, Skinny, Your Impossible Voice, Fairfield Scribes, Spillwords, WitCraft, Bombfire, Ink in Thirds, Ginosko, Last Leaves, Literary Heist, The Blotter Magazine, Quail Bell, Variety Pack Ariel Chart, Lit Shark, Gas, Teach-Write, Cape Magazine, Scars, Yellow Mama, Rundelania, Flora Fiction, Young Ravens, Loud Coffee Press, Edge of Humanity, Carolina Muse, and the Journal of Expressive Writing and has work forthcoming in Valiant Scribe, Chiron Review, Sybil, Timalda's Diary, Vine Leaf Press, Wise Owl, Moria, The Argyle, Same Faces, Floyd County Moonshine, Coneflower Café, Impspired, Borderless Crossings, Hamilton Stone Review, Kleksograph. Dark Winter, and The Main Street Rag.

Phil Wood has worked in statistics, education, shipping, and a biscuit factory. He enjoys painting and learning German. His writing can be found in various places, most recently in : Byways (Arachne Press Anthology), The Fig Tree Coal Mining Anthology, The Shot Glass Journal, London Grip, Streetcake.

Born in Italy some decades ago, **Gabriella Garofalo** fell in love with the English language at six, started writing poems (in Italian) at six and is the author of these books "Lo sguardo di Orfeo"; "L'inverno di vetro"; "Di altre stelle polari"; "Casa di erba"; "Blue Branches"; "A Blue Soul".

END OF ISSUE NINETEEN OF THE KLEKSOGRAPH



Head of the Harlequin, by Pablo Gargallo, copper