April 2021, Branford, CT:

It starts with a seed.

Issue 4
June 2021

Edited by
Gemma Mathewson
Mark McGuire-Schwartz
“. . . more things in heaven and earth . . .”

— Shakespeare

“Describe a circle, stroke its back and it turns vicious.”

— Eugène Ionesco

Merry.
Go.
Round.

Masked, unmasked, immunized, we play with circuitous visions,
always searching for the Great Circle.

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Mark McGuire-Schwartz

A publication of Pi Poetry

Circumference
Issue 4
June 2021

*We are changing the way we label issues, to go with the word Issue and a number. We are dropping the Volume and Number designations. Our first issue was a page on our website that grew like Leaves of Grass as we kept adding more poems. Then, Volume II, Number 1, July 2020. Then Volume II, Number 2, January 2021.
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A few evenings ago, at a performance of a student-written musical in MA at The Pioneer Valley Performing Arts School, in South Hadley, the introductory announcement included an acknowledgement by a student on behalf of the players. They had learned that the land of the school they were performing on had been taken from the Pocomtuc (meaning clear stream) Confederacy, who lived in what is now called Central MA. The area was called Nolwotogg, in the best variant of the local dialect.

Although there are small reservations for the enrolled Nipmuc and Wampanaug people of MA, the Pocomtuc have no current home ground, either having been absorbed into some of these other tribal people, or “the world at large” (according to wiki)

So … the world at large …

Many of the poems in this issue of Circumference seem to be asking WHO FITS IN and who doesn’t, and how, and why.

Who gets “absorbed” and who gets turned away, who gets deported and who gets lost. What happens to an independent woman? A “hoarder of privacy?” Is home an empty church or an “outer district?” What happens to seniors and other people “on the margins”? How can we still find a small community, literally or figuratively? Will there even be a world-at large for a newborn grandson to thrive upon?

A few months ago, I learned that the town where I grew up on the CT Shore was a near-miss. Before she slipped into dementia, my cousin wrote in her brief memoir that my machinist uncle, who came from the Milano region in Italy via NYC was offered work building assembly lines in a local factory. Problem was, when he went to buy land within walking distance to build two houses, (one for his family and one for his brother’s), the nearby neighbors offered the seller twice the price not to sell the land to an Italian man.

I don’t know the seller’s name, but he refused the easy 5,000 dollars, a good sum in the late 1930s, and sold the land at the original price agreed upon.

*There is absolutely no equivalence implied* in my family’s very small, relatively painless and tangential story seeking belonging.
Indigenous people whose land was stolen, African people kidnapped into slavery and systematically oppressed ever since, the persecution of several religious groups over our nation’s history, the persecution of LGBTQ people, Asian people, Immigrant communities, and the marginalization of the physically and cognitively differently abled in our country - each of these are crimes against humanity.

They have only one thing in common with my uncle - someone decided, and still decides, they are “the other”.

And in my uncle’s case, someone else decided that was wrong.

If one man could change the story of three brothers, 8 children, 9 grandchildren and several great-grandchildren (and counting…) I hope we will all continue, whether as “The Poet” or “The Thinker”, to look down on the hell we have created for others and examine, understand, and learn how to correct our prejudices. And then do so, and repeat.

Oh, and back to the Musical at PVPA (which was composed by my granddaughter and twelve other students) - it was called “Girl From Mars - a new musical tale of representation, music and the courage it takes to love yourself” a story about two teenage girls who fell in love.

Gemma Mathewson
What’s a poet worth? What is the value of a poem?

When Circumference put out a Call for Submissions, one poet emailed us to ask how we compensate poets.

“If a publication is in print, at least a poet can receive compensation in the form of copies,” he wrote, or words to that effect.

I did not respond, except to say that we are strictly online. My first thought had been “Oh, we also pay in copies. Feel free to print out as many as you want.”

I thought that would have made a valid point. Pointedly, in fact. But some might have perceived it as rude or cutting. And I wished to be neither. So I said nothing. Then, after the rousing success of our January issue, (more on that later) (as in, What is success? How is it measured?), (Another issue: What defines an Issue? Our definition seems to have shifted.). Oh. Perhaps I ought to finish the sentence. The one with the words “After . . . rousing . . . issue . . .” and that would have been more complete with words like these: “We posted a Call for Submissions for the next issue (which is the one you may actually be reading now).”

Of course, the poet with the history of questioning worth was back with a similar question. (By the way, the poet in question and with the question is not named Wordsworth.) And now I could not resist.

I suggested that some of our contributing artists take pleasure in having their work in Circumference, and in circulation. In fact, some have said as much. For them, publication may be adequate compensation. Maybe, they don’t need the added value of 2 copies of Nooshkabile Illustrious Journal of Gardening and Fine Arts. (And how much can 2 copies of N!JoG!FA be fetching these days?)

Apparently, my remarks were off the mark, and I was informed that plumbers may like their jobs as poets do, but they still expect to be paid for their efforts. True enough. So, I dropped things there. After all, I do not know a great deal about what fair compensation is for various activities. I do not believe that every activity should fall into the realm of paid employment. And I do not know what is fair
compensation for baseball players or poets, factory workers or factory owners. I have heard that some people play baseball for fun and others are paid. In any case, I did not re-tell the old joke about the plumber and the brain surgeon. Nor did I mention that I have done more than a few plumbing projects over the years, proudly fixing sinks and re-installing toilets when I couldn’t afford to pay a professional. I will confess that some projects didn’t turn out perfectly, and I think one effort got Noah to consider building a new ark. I am circling around to the point, which is that plumbing is hard work. It takes special knowledge and skill, and it also takes physical strength and the enough flexibility to crawl beneath sinks & stay there in positions years of yoga couldn’t teach. Hence, not too many plumbers spent much of their free time plumbing Pro Bono.

Another thing I did not discuss with my questioner of worth is that we had mentioned a relevant core principle in our January issue, when we quoted the Bread and Puppet Theater from their manifesto on Cheap Art. It is still a foundation stone, so we quote it again below. Bottom line, we do not pay our poets and artists and we do not have any money anyway, even if we thought we should. We are not a Non-Profit group. We are No-Profit. The other side of that is that we do not charge for our efforts, as we feel duly compensated by earning the feeling that Circumference and our other efforts leaves this universe a little better. We hope you agree.

“ART has to be CHEAP & available to EVERYBODY”
-- Bread & Puppet Theater,
from the WHY CHEAP ART? manifesto

Photos are from Bread and Puppet Theater Production, Rochester VT, September 2012.

“Everything that needs to be said has already been said. But since no one was listening, everything must be said again.”

― André Gide

In this issue, there are roads and reflections – people looking back and people going forward. Women seem to be in the center of this issue and at the edges.
And families. There is a focus in some poems on visual art and derelict landscapes. And ants, of the 6-legged variety, find themselves starring in one poem and appearing in at least one other, as well creeping into the issue disguised as part of the following non-insectile words: antlers, flagrant, giant, abundant, wanting, restaurant, important, migrant, attendant, wanted, constant, Byzantine, chanting, San Antonio, remnant, descendant, and Hartford Courant. We also see weeds, cacti, and various ways to lose one’s mind.
A Woman: Re-Written

I know Lilith,
she's the first
who decided to leave

there isn't much
one can do
when another wants to own

"Can freedom be owned?"

She left,
answering what no man
wanted to ask.

Adam requested another woman
to blame
demanded she be made of his rib
yet, none of his bones were guilty...

I know Lilith,
she fought demons,
embraced loneliness
until she felt
the emptiness in between
the atoms of her being...

Lilith ran in the night
to hide her tears,
and hold on to her pride,

the demons couldn't have her
so they made up stories-
don't men love stories?

They do!

I met Lilith by chance
one night when I was searching
for my breath.

She was silent and told me
to stop searching:
just listen to the void
for there stood all breath
since the beginning of time

and so I stood—my hand in hers,
skin to skin, emptiness to emptiness,

demons invent what they can't have
so, do men.
But the night hides truth
from those who don't deserve it.

Aida Bode
Reflections

I saw a murder in the mirror
while brushing my teeth,
crows passing by

Today, already interesting,
like a cousins’ club picnic
in Paramus, sixty years ago

Edward Walker
Wish I Were An Artist

I thought I could draw..
but I couldn’t,
as hard as I still try
my people are sticks, and all my waves
are the first wave, trees, Mondrian like
all my dogs draw the same ears
that you can picture

Crossing the threshold
a valley of roof-tops
climbing hills like ants, soil & snow
quilting fields, a covered bridge
where lovers stop to kiss, the river whitening
rocks below grade, meandering past
twisted stalks in disarray I note,
speeding by at seventy one, interstate eighty nine

Edward Walker
This is Not How I Thought It Would Be

Today I want to finish the closet, pull dresses and finally box them. I can’t keep all these books. Water pools in the basement. This is not how I thought it would be. In my kitchen I make coffee and think of you in your kitchen taking your chemo capsule at seven. You still have most of your hair.

I dreamed I had written a history of plagues. The many times black plague flared in European villages. I think of smallpox, then cholera, polio and malaria, Ebola, swine flu, AIDS and COVID-19. Some evangelists believe in a lifting of souls, only the good ones, I understand. Will there be a final signal?

Out my window, the clean sky reveals nothing about the day to come. Yellow bees buzz around shrubbery leaves. I wonder are hives still empty? How does the bee know where to wander? Winds last night left plastic bags floating in trees spaced almost evenly apart. You said science fiction stories always play out trauma in some fashion. Here’s this one, a pandemic.

You looked good in your hat at the hospital last week. Yesterday my brother called and wanted to talk about our times on Canal Road, a favorite place between the river and canal. We saw an alligator there once. I walked through a tornado when I was twelve and didn’t pray until I’d made it through the sallow air to our front porch at the Red Bird Road house in Georgia. Yesterday Sara next door swept her walkway and sang “Willow weep for me, hang your branches down upon the ground and pity me…” over and over.

I rinse my plate and coffee cup. I climb the stairs with two long boxes for the dresses in my closet. The animal in me wants to roam a forest before forests are off limits. Before a final sequence of shut-downs happens—if it does. Will there be a final signal?

Sherri Bedingfield
Weeds

And wildflowers grow where the roses will not.
Banished to the margins where the soil is poor
but sunlight and rain are abundant
they survive and prosper. They do not whine
or complain about their lot. They know in exile
lies their freedom.

They do not envy the orange blossom its position
and its privilege. They know its time is brief.
The orange blossom knowing this too
does not despair. It flourishes. And it does this
without opinion, expectation, or belief.

Ron Savage
No Bowling for You

This town
so down on its luck,
scrapping all heels
has replaced its bowling alley
with a Cube Smart storage facility
where the poor people,
who can’t pay a thousand a month to rent
two bedrooms in an old Victorian
with a saggy porch and yellowed wallpaper,
can park their belongings
while they move in with friends or family.

Clever things these Cube Smarts.

A small park in the center of town,
a hangout for local addicts,
a sports field on the east-side
and the bowling alley were all this place had
besides a dozen churches, a handful of restaurants
and a “gentleman’s club.”
The newest buildings are always
pharmacies, gas stations, banks.
Look around, it’s the same most places.
Not even a spot to hear live music any more
or a place to dance,
though in the summers one night a month
the streets fill with vendors and a local band.
Third Thursday, they call it.
Special.
Like a medieval feast day.

Once there was a bookstore with a New Age vibe,
serving healthy food,
hosting book talks,
acoustic music,
but it didn’t last.
Everyone too thrifty to pay that much for a meal.
Now, even the bowling alley is gone
as the Cube Smart waits to claim dishes, books and chairs,
see whether their owners will ever come for them
or if the pickers will get there first.

Karen Warinsky
Going places/traveling/moving/moving on
Forgotten City

Life returned
to the stubbled hills
to the ancient stones
though archeologists with lithified hearts bewail:
refugees are moving the rocks!

Who cares about refugees?

Syrians,
pommeled and pounded
ten years now
live among the ruins of Byzantine,
ruined themselves.

Nestling against half-walls
rose-pink in the dawn,
they pen their animals,
prop their tents,
hear the wind call their ancestors;
Nefeli, Justus, Theodora, Kadir,
hear it repeat
old glories of the past in this northwest land,
Assad’s poisoned hand not yet touching this final sanctuary
while cement-filled historians and archeologists
fret about the displacement of the marble,
the zahr, the basalt,
the integrity of the site,
as the people maneuver themselves
inside the consequence of war.

Karen Warinsky
Going Back

She lives, this Ancient Mother, in the dirt, unseen, unseeing, unmoved by windows, reflections in mirrors, stockings, painted lips, kaleidoscope colors. Her unsung songs shudder, muscular amid ruins, deafened in the cold grit, silent, supine in the uncertain tunnel of her spine.

All she knows is what is right here on earth: the manic pacing, the snarling of men at war, shredded black rags, the unproven statistics of stars. She sinks deeper, torn hands dig to a time before governments, before countries, churches, slaveries, pox. Before horses, dogs, wheat and corn. Before amphibians walked, before jellyfish, amoeba, protozoa, water. She craves birth in the unimaginable forge of magma.

Claudia McGhee
Joys of the Walk Sign

One note affixed to what he thinks might be a charm, an overabundance of an idea or a sound. What the townspeople sought; what they still seek -- before the leaves fall. He spits into his hands, claps his hands to begin what’s to be done this day like a moon rising in the bottom of his shoe. He pushes his hands into clay from the chaos of the sea. Last night he wiggled. He spun dervish-like. The geography of the town circumscribes the possible. One looks skyward, a visionary, and another looks downward and greets no one. He tries to rationalize that odd feeling of being surrounded by those who would harm him and how he lashes out at them. Perhaps they are his neighbors. He commits himself to adding his name and number to all directories.

Her name might be Alice. She always carries an umbrella. The sun succumbs to clouds. Folded tissues and used ones balled up into a corner of this bag bought from a street vendor some time ago. Enough coin to fill the parking meters of a small city – say Poughkeepsie. A wallet within the bag almost bursts its dual clasps. Cards for various memberships date back a decade and more, and a register accompanies a leather-clad checkbook. There are photographs of family and a tattered love note penned one February. There are medications for headaches and arthritis, sunburn and snake-bite.

She buys a carton of cigarettes, steps outside, and then she goes back into the store for matches. The store attendant tells her she must buy something to get matches. She says nothing, but holds up the carton. Right, he says, and passes a pack of matches across
the counter. Outside it starts to rain. She cups her hands, but either the wind blows out a match or the rain puts it out. At the cemetery she sits by the largest monument – its front legs have been knocked out and the chipped slab leans into muddy earth. Some verses, now unreadable, cover the surface; warn of sin or celebrate virtue. She leans against part of the slab; uses it to shield her match and light her cigarette. She inhales and exhales, relaxed by familiarity. She hears a voice, but sees no one. The wind makes a sound like speech and she tries to decipher the words.

Dennis Barone
Sky Down

Mountains, Lake, Lamps 1

Mountains, Lake, Lamps 2
THE HARVEST OF DRAGON EYES

Brazen days of August begin with the long light of dawn blinking like a dragon’s eye through the sunburned sky.

The snip of scissors echoes down the line of low-hanging trees in the orchard, as I gently trim the branches holding tan-colored fruits, but try to spare the fragile leaves.

When my blue basket is filled I adjust my dusty headscarf and carry the frail crop to the rusted-out truck bed. There are dozens of empty crates to be loaded still.

The harvest is a crowded city emptied by a tsunami of dutiful hands. The jade leaves left behind point at the descending sun like fingers wanting to be free.

Accept one fruit to savor but choose carefully: unripe longans have no flavor and those too old tend to fade in taste—like human memories waiting to be made or lost.

When the peel is gone and the seed discarded, place the translucent white flesh on your tongue.
and let the sweet juice
drip down your throat
like a tincture of honey
spun from fragrant blossoms.

Alison McBain
The Sad Glamor of Traffic

“But where are they going?” he sobbed, although only in sighs, for the furious steel of their glassy flanks and fiery glass, rejected all such questioning.
And the other man was just a myth – as tinsel dangling from a branch above a savage river seems a remnant of some misery.

And yet dense traffic, squealing wheels, made him hear his inner self --
a savage god carved out of corn, who sits in our seat, our deeper seat, and wills its way into the world. “Where are they going?” he sobbed, although he knew that men were primitives and he was their demon -- his one clear flame.

Don Barkin
Dusk

Day’s end, and life is on an IV drip.
Objects lay bedridden, still and exhausted.
Silence swallows the last gauzy light.
Desire is as dull as a hospital bed.
You feel as though you’ve been washed up
from the hellish water of a Cimmerian river
benumbed from the day’s travel through
reality’s random pop-up portals to and from
the unknown. You’re dying without dying.
You’ve lost control. Any ideas you have
flow into the catheter bag that is your brain.
But it’s that jackass Fate – the weary gypsy –
his arms wide like an open book who asks
if he can chat a while. And you say “Come in.”

David Cappella
Facts About the Body

The eyes    all of our eyes    filled with love
or anger   and the other feelings    The eyes
with their wide questions       small answers

And the hands with their    constant motion
moving about       reaching and holding on
helping    hurting    or simply fixed    with sleep
hands that hang at our sides     fold in a lap

And the mouth    with its twists    its sticky shiny words
words like    glass or ghosts    words like powder
words with their heavy weight

And the heart with its sensitivity       with its hum
it’s even rhythm    beat beat    beat beat    sweet heart
waiting on a sleeve    amazing machine
no thought of safety

My heart    with its whine    its messy wounds
worrisome nature    its stony withdrawal
dripping on everything    who knows    where it goes
to clear its fear.

Sherri Bedingfield
Dirges
Reflections in a rearview mirror, after Dalí

At fifteen degrees Fahrenheit, entwined choreographies of machine and beast fail.
The clock stops. The truck driver’s cuffs are frayed, stained as if she were a man who did not care.
Blood from the broken doe puddles, freezes.
Crystallized heat erupts from the supine meat.
Car chassis gallop away on horse legs, winged notions of pain migrate north on the dark.
A monkey-headed hawk with hunger’s eyes grips the stripped limb of a dead tree, thinking.
Spikes protrude from hummocks of grass. Impaled, dead insects wave like appetizers on toothpicks.
Plasma, heavy as stone, pools in the head of a body hung upside down. Rattles strike.
Several butchering hands hold flint knives, deconstruct the Dance, reveal organ and bone.
Grit clogs the hinges of the mammoth heart.
Boulders of pain pile against ribs, belly, humped backbone. Buck rams antlers into giant spider web, trapped. The herds stampede eastward, race under a smeared cough of clouds and crimson.
In a procession, weeping dogs, chanting cats shuffle the sand, hold hands with their Men, damned.

Fingertips burn in the cold with true love, death
disguised as pleasure. There is no captain. There are no rearview mirrors on this wrecked train.

Claudia McGhee
RSVP

Sing me your morning song.

Silent. Perhaps,
you wait. Your voice, dumb, like boulders
lying beside a slack tide,
half-buried by the weight
of weightless quiet. Still. *****

Or no. You float.
A marsh-honed chorus greets the day.
Do you listen? Breezes shuffle
dried leaves, gentle,
waves whisper in soft patters.

The east wind gusts,
wheezes troubled sighs. Grasses dance,
the breezes lead. Seedheads click
on the beat. Cattails brush soft
rhythms. The combo settles.

A capella,
the birds begin.
a chirp here, there,
One or two. More
form trios.

Red-winged blackbirds fling
sweeter notes, gracing marshlands
with their melody. Breeze, Wind,
Grasses, Birds: the symphony
with redwing solos.

You have ceded your morning song to them, yes?

He Declined in Silence

He sang once.
I never asked him for his songs.
Nor did I glance through the farmhouse windows,
summer or winter,
to see what he was about or where.
I had been taught, and I learned,
how beyond price he held his horde of privacy.

He sang once

at the end.

Patricia D. Topitzer
THE SUMMER MY MOTHER LOST HER MIND

Something dropped into a hole, slipped
into a pocket forgotten, slid under a pile of books,
was shoved under a boulder, sent to hide and seek in the dark.

The hat left behind in a restaurant, the knock in the brain
where no one is home, cracked shell, spilled yolk, broken crown,
shard of shivery crystal, zinnias scorched by frost,
plow left to rust in the field, mornings of days without sun,
old jam spoiling on the shelf, bread gone to mold.

Broken machine awaiting repairs, slippery moss
on the rocky shore, the only person in an empty theater
and she can’t remember her lines.

Unseen children screech, untethered from the mothership in the shrunken galaxy,
the forest blackened by fire, an expensive gift arrived broken, a car idling
at a stop sign but doesn’t move on, doors and windows left open so snow,
wind and rain
dance inside, a drunk looking for her misplaced drink, the garden
with no scent, the book’s spine ripped off.

Trying to catch recollection’s quicksilver, she cups her hands.
Mystified, she looks at me,
and waves a child’s goodbye.

Elaine Handley
Full Wolf Moon

Everything is restless.
The wind is sharp
with an extra biting sting.
The brittle brown grass
wears its white morning coat
almost in protest.
A turkey buzzard
circles in the gray sky.

The extended evening light
casts new shadows
that sends the Brittany
into full-throated barking.
Ancient Native American
grave sites uproot the earth
so spirits may escape.

R. Gerry Fabian
**Chipped Plates**

are what we use.

After years
of constant wear,
they should be
trashed.

They were a wedding
present
some
twenty years ago.

It's past time to throw
them away.

If we could only
find someone
to do it.

**R. Gerry Fabian**
MASKING

The Air Force shaved our heads, was it because of the heat of a San Antonio summer or that we’ll all look equally like fools, and easier for Sarge to maintain unit cohesiveness in his rag tag band of semi-successful Army avoiders.

Now we all wear masks and assume we all look equally foolish, knowing the virus cares nothing for cohesiveness, and normal is insignia only to dreams and at times life is shot on a shingle now.

We want our childhoods back, before the war, before the barracks and bad food, before expectations, and those few imposed could be ignored at minimal parental retribution, we want what never really existed, it is our right.

We marched and sang “Suicide is Painless”, never believed it for a moment, but now we consider it in passing as we walk down the shortening pier into the ocean of darkness.

Louis Faber
“A republic, if you can keep it”.
– Ben Franklin, 1787
EASTER SUNDAY

Yesterday  
I celebrated Easter  
In an empty church.  
Actually  
it wasn’t empty,  
there were seven of us.  
The organist in the loft,  
The Rector,  
three readers,  
a soloist  
and me,  
in my bathrobe,  
sitting at my laptop.  
It was by far the most meaningful  
Easter service I have ever experienced.  
And the Widor Toccata,  
played as the postlude,  
left me in tears.  

Juliana Harris
CONVALESCENCE

At one point pieces of you will melt and flow out through the abrasions caused by fresh laundered sheets. This is something you need to prepare for, not something you can stop.

Birdsong will become as nails on a chalkboard but snow on the other side of the window will never lose its magic even as your legs do.

Bedpans make excellent instruments in ward sing-a-longs. Make sure they have been sanitized.

When they hand you the menu, if you don’t know the answer, choose C.

It’s time to call someone when you wake in the middle of the night and the sheets below your shoulder blades are damp.

Robert Beveridge
This Ant

It doesn’t matter if you saw wood or catch fish.
It doesn’t matter if you sit at home
and stare at the ants on your verandah …

from Hokusai Says by Roger Keyes

This is what I should have known. This ant
on this rock is this ant and this ant
is this ocean and this boat and this fish and this
child and this moon and star and this getting

old and this coming and going and this birth and this
dying. This ant hauls joy and sorrow. This ant knows
what it is to climb and what it is to fall. And this ant
knows what it is to stay and what it is to go. This ant

knows what it is to be exhausted and neither chooses
to stop nor to go, but simply stops or goes. Here
is the child within my ancient self. Here escapes my,
Oh, no! Another day begins, another day ends. Oh, no.

But then again, Oh, yes! With the ant on the rock.
With the going forward. With the staying back.

Patricia Horn O’Brien
As If Covid Changes Nothing

Every week

neighbors or contractors mount
internal combustion engines and ride

roughshod over buff plots of man-made green
that decorate the properties that people the theme park of
the petrochemically suave lifestyles that capitalism built.

They

plug
seed
transplant

spray
mow
blow-dry

Privatize.
Invest.

The children stay inside.
The moment the dog finishes
its business scooped into plastic bags as

industrial-high-decibel machines whine for hours
some of us strain to listen further afield as

thunder petrichor larvae night crawler
would-be trap rock mountain meadow grasses,
the buried alive underground,
the civilization of life
resurge

Donna Fleischer
Our Smallish Valentine

bitter, bitter, these lies
this state of the union
valentine year

we love, we love
in our small bed without words
in a tangle of white sheets our us

we love again, far and wide
during raucous dinners with
friends we tangle over

politics, over who
could possibly triumph over
such hate with

our common language we grasp at
as we glimpse the Void
within, armed with only that

which continues us as
we take our pens to cross
the edges of the blank, white pages

to write speeches
for the republic, to
bring us back to

our senses, our birth right –
to love and to be loved,
to fold our smallish valentine

and send it out
into the world we love
then wait for it — our answer

Donna Fleischer
Her name is Princess,
His, Jose. Her hair, painted
wild berry, traverses her face
with every breeze. When I offer
to take the selfie they’re trying to take,
we chat a bit, as is anybody’s way.

When I warn
that their faces will be lost
before the shadow of the water's glare,
Jose says he doesn’t care … they need to
pose there
before the sea, their likely disappearance
the price they’ll pay. Every year now,

Jose says, they journey to Westerly,
despite how sad he gets as they pass
the house of his friend's mother,
now deceased. He’d helped his friend
take care of her. He loved her and is sad
every time. Yes, every time. But glad, too, he
says…

They rode their motorcycle here,
I learn, as I contemplate Reverse
in my Subaru and cocktails ahead,
the rough blare of their engine heating
the lot’s black top. Roughing up
everyone’s sign-off ears.
Their music, confident loud, rouses the evening’s drowsy heat.
Lifts gulls’ wings.

All late winter, early spring, I stormed the beach,
my breath steaming curses against the cold,
pretending myself warm. Damning the useless sun. Today, this sun brought Jose and Princess, my erstwhile useless curses flown.

And as the sun bows out to eventide,
Jose and Princess, helmets strapped and certain for the Interstate, in opposition to the lot’s arrowed path repainted last season ...
…
faint but, nonetheless, able to convey the safe way In and Out … roar away.

His friend’s mother's house, empty still, awaits their passing by. He'll nod then, even as they fly beyond, Princess's escaping hair banner of love's constancy.

Patricia Horn O’Brien
Cactus

I am sharp. This is true.
I quench too.
I flower sometimes.
Brighter than you ever knew.
But you are stuck on my thorns.
As if they do not warn you.
I can take heat and go without rain.
Take me seriously.
There may be a million fuzzy splinters in your hand.
Recognize my spines. That would be cool.
See that I can stand alone.
Within this space my soul is home.

Shaunda Holloway
LITTLE DUMPLING

Little dumpling
You came into this world when everyone was dying

Driving up I-91 that Sunday morning
The only car on that highway
Going through security at the airport
The TSA officer asked me “Are you a doctor?”
No, I’m a grandfather

Good luck he wished me

Ten of us on the flight to St. Louis
Not even a glass of water handed out

Three cars in the rental parking lot
I took this giant SUV
Good luck the rental agent wished me

Driving down another empty highway to the Fort
Where my son-in-law was stationed
Driving past caverns and national forests
All closed

Checking in at the hotel
The clerk telling me there would be no free breakfast
What brings you to St. Robert?
To see my newborn grandson

Good luck he cried out

Little Dumpling
All of five days old
Swinging back and forth in your harness
Sucking on your pacifier

You got here at a really bad time

I left a few days later to fly home
Good luck I whispered to the little dumpling
Good luck

Now little dumpling is in Texas
Nine months old
Flying to San Antonio
Plane not so empty
Stewardess gave us water and cheese and fruit

I picked little dumpling up as soon as I got to the house
He looked at me surprised then smiled

Again a few days later I had to fly home
Good luck I whispered to little dumpling

This is a dangerous world you were born into
Maybe a little safer than when you arrived
But watch out there are a lot of other bad things and bad men too

So good luck little dumpling

Good luck

William Ciaburri
A SONG OF SCOTLAND

Breezes and sunshine—a plaid blanket laid upon the grass. Whenever aid is denied me in the battle between id and ego, I’ll picnic at the River Dee.

Ghosts drift along the banks there, where thistles meet the sky. Here, my ancestors departed ere they starved. A bland tale—a mutiny of sheep—farmers losing land, America beckoning and answered, usage rights abandoned. In descendant hindsight, a sage choice. But I dream of a long-ago age picnicking beneath the shade of castles, and I remind myself of tartans lost. I’m of the mind to build up stony fortunes my family undermined.

The highlands sing dirges to cairns and clast, but only a family’s stories—and future—will last.

Alison McBain
followed

1) followed th lite inn-sighed
   th knight i; dighed

2) ma-n?

3) thawed th pro:miced l&
   wuz puss-sea & prix
   NIX!
   (nex.................................................................
   ......................................................)T!

Bill E
OUTER DISTRICT

The surf of me circulates
through alleys with ceilings of fog;
street signs, illegible in the gray swell.

At times I reach the storm drain,
which draws me back to my room.
I am the wave of a body, of a ghost

that scatters and regathers all night long.
By dawn the haze dissipates,
as though an eyelid opening,

and reveals the blues, pinks and yellows
of the stucco houses and the dunes
that one day’ll claim more of this coast.

Stephen Campiglio

y*&#z
Let the Lurid Times Roll

A congressman is accused of sex crimes, another is stripped of responsibilities, and a senator hides in Mexico. They join a reportedly gropey governor, an ex-president prosecuted until death, an ex-cop prosecuted for murder, slanderous accusals in the thousands, and law suits in the millions. It seems as if every politician uses ‘allegedly’ as a first name. And their profession has become a training ground for criminals.

Ed Ahern
Natter Chatter Cha-ching

Somewhere, perhaps Africa early on
we gave noises significance,
and then, in a lurch from animal,
combined noises into meanings.
And then, filling our mouths,
meshed meanings into thought,
all from noises.

Ideally we could share our thoughts
by merely thinking them, but
cannot, and gave symbols to sounds
so we could see noises and
preserve meaning beyond stillness.
And those cartouches overtook sound,
dominating the thoughts that birthed them.

We live under the rule of words,
clotted syllables that dictate meaning,
live-bury instinct, and swarm emotion.
And are so addicted to figural sounds
that we memorize and repeat them.
And we know nothing beyond
the noise we hear and see and say.

Ed Ahern
DOLAR REDUX

I have known the inexorable sadness of endless meetings in windowless rooms, the minutia of policy and duty, desolation hidden in euphemistic language, the one-upmanship and endless clichés about politics at the coffee pot. Our morning faces, sleep restored with a tint of color, close down by noon, and our mouths settle into grim determinism through tedious afternoons. We reside in lonely offices, fears and failures hidden in the misery of manilla folders and endless paper, the tyranny of email, the endless multiplication of responses, begetting yet more we need to reply to. Dust settles on us, until we see each other only in sepia tones, grayscale, tasting its acid on our tongues.

Elaine Handley
I wrote the original Dreams of Monotremes (all but the last twelve lines) 12 years ago, inspired by Science Friday feature announcing the discovery the wonderful genomic properties of the Duckbill Platypus, after zoologists mapped its unique genomic sequence. Just last year, the bioluminescence feature was announced on the same program. Though redoing poems is usually against my principles, this one tested the rule.

The Dreams of Monotremes Revisited

Mammalian, yet without a teat
in grooves abdominally neat
collecting mother’s milk discreet
her furless babe laps up the treat

while swimming up Australian streams
her snout collecting sensory beams
to electrolocate shrimps and breams
and feast with dreaming monotremes

From reptilian genes, in fact
if jealous male suspects attack
with venomous spur he will extract
a pain exquisite and exact

And generating countless reams
I’d scrawl out am’rous giddy themes
seductive sensual supremes
erotic dreams of monotremes

Avian chromosomes decree
five xy pairs the male will be
but just her left side ovary
produces eggs, from one to three

Biologist skeptics searched for seams
in taxidermic samplings
unlikely hoax they must have seemed
to dream up dreaming monotremes

Orificial nomenclature states
one perforation indicates
they eliminate and defecate
precisely where they procreate
blueprint outrageous, it beeseems
A fine economy redeems
designing principles esteem
the pipe dream form of monotremes

Let my symbolic third wish be
to dream what platypuses see
in REM, the genome tree
and each potentiality
mapped deftly to infinity
or to, at least “here dragons be”.
and every path not taken, me.

Rejecting higher branching beams
from evolutionary schemes
and forking alternate extremes
while dreaming dreams of monotremes.

*****12 years pass*****

This monotreme’s re-emergence
as a creature of resplendence
centers on her fur’s quintessence -
cool blue-green bioflourescence!

She swims unscathed - her fur’s proclivity
confounds her predator’s ability
while she hunts with sure agility
in Tasmanian twilight tranquility.

Zoologists, as they will and must,
submit new research to discuss
as I, with glowing wondrousness
dream dreams of duckbilled platypus!

Gemma Mathewson
1 Only Merle
Merle alone, in a room. “Allowed to exist,” he says.
He becomes self-conscious. As if in a crowd, standing, on a bus. Or in a line, waiting for something.
A man near him may have said nothing. Or cleared his throat. Or made some unintelligible grumble.
But Merle – having not been listening – now thinks the man may have addressed him.
“Huh?” the man may have said. And Merle feels – embarrassed – he must reply.
“Did I say that aloud?” he says. “I am sorry.”
“Yes,’ the man may say, “You did say allowed.”
But Merle is back in his room, realizing there is no train, no bus, no group of queued up waiters, no other speaker. He remembers where he is.
“Aloud and alone,” he says.

2 The Elephant
“What a large beast,” Merle thinks.

3 Collection
Merle picks up these things, and looks a each:
• a book of Matisse Cut-outs
• a rock containing a fossilized brachiopod
• an empty plastic jar
• a pair of pliers
• binoculars (and looks through these)
• a thought that plants need watering and to be re-potted

4 Messages
The phone rings. Merle does not answer it. He does glance at it, but he does not look to see who is calling.

5 Employment
Merle wonders if he should apply for a job as a lion tamer. He weighs the pros and cons.

6 Yesterday and today.
Merle wonders whether yesterday is tomorrow. Or whether order really matters.
7 Computer
Merle wonders aloud why the computer effin thinks it knows better than he knows.

“Why is it always correcting me?”

8 Journey
Merle attends the lunch, as planned. He thinks he is appreciated, is considered warm and charming. But he thinks he may be saying too much.

9 Narcolepsy
Merle’s doctor assures him there is nothing wrong with him.
“Then why do I feel like this?” Merle wants to know.
“Then, you won’t help me?”

10 Impossible
In his car, after lunch, Merle does not turn the key. He drank no wine, though others did. He only imbibed water.
“Turn the key,” he tells himself. “You can drive.”
“But I am so tired. I may fall asleep.”
“Drive.”

Mark McGuire-Schwartz
What's the partial question?

They asked.

Moon eclipse
On Mars

1
4 billion years
ago, I stood

on the shore of
Grand Crater Lake

so beautiful in the
sunlight of that

Martian afternoon.

2
I looked forward
to seeing it again.

3
I did not return
until 500 million

years later.
Grand Crater Lake was gone.

4
An apparent victim
of geology shift
and climate change.

5
I missed its quiet,
pristine beauty.

6
By Valentine’s Day,
two thousand and twenty-one.
several probes, from several
nations, were on or nearing
Mars.

7
Such an unpleasant word: *probe*.

8
Life teems in the underground lakes.

9
What precautions are being taken to protect the Martians from earth germs?

10
That same February day, I stood on the edge of a line in CVS.

11
I waited for my turn to get a Covid vaccine.

12
CVS was not scenic.

13
Hard to describe how the Martian lake Shimmered in the sunlight.

14
How could we so often manage to be so wrong?

15
The former president
had just been found
not guilty in his
second impeachment
trial.

16
I remember also
watching Wooly Mammoths
in migration.

17
People ask to interview me.
But what can I say? A billion years
or two, in a flash. Yes, saw this, did
that, but for each for us most of life
works on a subatomic
level, working by the arcane rules
of quantum science. How can I
explain what I don’t really understand?

Mark McGuire-Schwartz
All Statues Melt

incrementally
betraying observation
The strategically wicked one
melts more efficiently

Urs Fischer spared Julien Schanabel’s
wax face in this way
while his head
dripped down his torso -
and its reflection in the mirror -
for the duration of the Whitney exhibit
(The clam digger
cavorting gollum
on the observation terrace
drools mud)

All statues wear snobby nose masks
The Master and Mademoiselle of
The English Pug and The French Poodle
whose canines slobber unrequited love
across the square, as collateral damage
of their owners’ “Canadian Culture” wars

All statues store melting clocks
Dali’s Venus de Milo With Drawers
the mink pom-pom drawer knobs
quiver “tick-tock”

All statues waft dust
Little Dancer
fourteen year old Degas ballerina
beeswax and human hair
with wire rope and paintbrush armature
inside her brittle tulle tutu
chin elevated in acute angle precision
with fourth position

All statues have nine lives
Undersized under-welcomed
General Wolfe of Quebec City,
arm once pointed harbor-ward -
kidnapped by pranksters,
shipped around the world,
demoted to pub figurehead,  
rotted in a doorway,  
menaced by molotov cocktail,  
finally fully restored  
inside the Morrin Center

All statues morph  
The Thinker originally named  
The Poet -  
specifically Dante -  
peered down at the Inferno  
of suffering souls

All statues self-replicate  
Three giant-sized Davids in Firenze  
(the sling only works on real one)  
(The one with the hairline fractures in the ankles.)

All Statues cry  
Lady Liberty most of all

All statues melt  
1,700 pounds of milk chocolate  
Lenny, Maine’s chocolate moose  
preserved at exactly 70 degrees  
until the power failure

Gemma Mathewson
Standing Julian, exhibited at the Whitney Museum.

This portrait of Julian Schnabel is sculpted out of wax, by Schnabel’s friend, Urs Fischers.

The wick atop the sculpture was lit each morning that the sculpture was on exhibit.

Gemma Mathewson
Bios

Aida Bode

**Alison McBain** is an award-winning and Pushcart Prize-nominated poet with work in *Litro, Tiferet Journal,* and *Yellow Arrow Journal.* She is lead editor for the small press publisher Fairfield Scribes, and associate editor for the literary magazine *Scribes*MICRO*Fiction.

**Bessy Reyna**, is the author of *Memoirs of the Unfaithful Lover,* a bilingual poetry collection. A former opinion columnist for the Hartford *Counant* and editor of the Arts pages for *Identidad Latina* and *CTLatinonews.com.* Reyna was the recipient of a Lifetime Achievement Award by the CT Center for the Book of the Library of Congress.

**Bill E:** bio:boi eau (boi) bio:(psy)-(d-Gr8-a-bill), dU.S.t uv th rd. lik n e udr ma-n. + looz th b in "ph 4b th " & wuile were @IT make "reast " breast Ta 2 U2 bill e . (b)looz-bury hOP itz knott 2 mutch 2 ass(k)

**Claudia McGhee** has dealt in and with words for decades as technical writer, poet, fiction writer, columnist, and freelance editor. Finishing Line Press published Claudia’s chapbook, *Paperlight.* While her technical writing has been translated and distributed worldwide, she is currently working to ensure her words read properly in American English

**David Cappella** has co-authored two books on the teaching of poetry: *Teaching the Art of Poetry* (Routledge) and *A Surge of Language* (Heinemann). His book *Gobbo: A Solitaire’s Opera* will be published in Spring 2021 by Červená Barva Press and published as an Italian bi-lingual edition by *puntoacapo Editrice* in November 2021.

**Dennis Barone:** My most recent works are Frame Narrative, poetry from Blaze Vox, and Walkers in the City, a small collection of urban walk poems by fourteen different poets selected and introduced by me and just published by Rain Taxi.

**Donna Fleischer:** < *Periodic Earth* > (Casa de Cinco Hermanas Press, 2016) is Donna Fleischer’s fourth chapbook. Her poems are in *Contemporary Haibun, Kó, Marsh Hawk Press Review, Otoliths, Poets for Living Waters, Solitary Plover,* and elsewhere. She is a recipient of a Tupelo Press – Mass MoCA residency. She lives in Connecticut with her wife and dog.

**Don Barkin:** I’ve published poems in *Poetry, The Virginia Quarterly Review, Prairie Schooner,* and other journals. Antrim House has published three collections of my work. One was a finalist for the Connecticut Center for the Book’s Poetry Book of the Year. I live in New Haven and often teach writing at Yale.

**Ed Ahern** resumed writing after forty odd years in foreign intelligence and international sales. He’s had over three hundred stories and poems published so far, and six books. Ed works the other side of writing at Bewildering Stories, where he sits on the review board and manages a posse of six review editors.

**Edward Walker:** Born in Brooklyn and moved to Guilford, CT in 1977 where he and Laury raised their children, and a few Labrador retrievers. Ed has degrees in English and Business and was founder and CEO of East River Energy. He is a member of The Guilford Rotary Club and The Guilford Poets Guild.

**Elaine Handley** is a published poet and fiction writer who has won The Adirondack Center for Writing Best Book of Poetry Award three times in collaboration with two other poets. Her latest chapbook, published by Clare Songbird Publishers is Securing the Perimeter. She is a Professor at SUNY ESC.

**Juliana Harris** has contributed poems to The New York Times, The Mid-America Poetry Review, Well-Versed, Caduceus, The Best Times and Chicken Soup for the Soul, among other publications. She currently serves as President of The Guilford Poets Guild.

**Karen Warinsky** is a retired reporter and English teacher from Connecticut. Her poetry career took off in 2013 when she was named a finalist in the Montreal International Poetry Contest for her piece “Legacy.”
Since then she has published widely in several lit journals and in anthologies including two poems in the 2017 anthology *Nuclear Impact: Broken Atoms in Our Hands*, two poems in the 2019 *Mizmor Anthology*, and a piece in the newly released *Honoring Nature: An Anthology of Artists and Authors Festival Writers*. Her debut collection of poems, *Gold in Autumn*, was published by Human Error Publishing in 2020, and she is currently busy organizing several Covid-safe outdoor poetry readings to be held this summer at Roseland Park in Woodstock, CT.

**Louis Faber**'s work has previously appeared in *The Poet (UK)*, Dreich (Scotland), *The Alchemy Spoon (UK)*, *Atlanta Review*, *Arena Magazine (Australia)*, *Rattle*, *Borderlands: the Texas Poetry Review*, *Midnight Mind*, *Pearl*, *Midstream*, *European Judaism*, *The South Carolina Review* and *Worcester Review*, and in journals in India, Pakistan, China and Japan.

**Patricia D. Topitzer:** I have been writing short fiction since my adolescence and authored Manuals for my professional endeavors for more than 25 years. I am relatively new to writing poetry, an endeavor that is equally exhilarating, challenging and frustrating. The profound differences between writing poetry vs prose are both fascinating and illuminating.

**Patricia Horn O'Brien** belongs to GPG and CT River Poets, initiated *Paintings & Poetry* at FGM, is included in *Laureates of CT and Waking up to the Earth*. She’s Poet Laureate of Old Saybrook. Her collection, *When Less Than Perfect is Enough*, is in its 2nd printing. She co-wrote *The Laughing Rabbit: A Mother, a Son and the Ties that Bind*, with her son, Richard Manders. Her new book, *Scatter and the Gap* is in the works.

**R. Gerry Fabian** is a retired English instructor. As a poet and novelist, he has been publishing his writing since 1972 in various literary magazines. He has published four books of his published poems, *Parallels*, *Coming Out Of The Atlantic*, *Electronic Forecasts*, and *Ball On The Mound*. His web page is [https://rgerryfabian.wordpress.com](https://rgerryfabian.wordpress.com) Twitter @GerryFabian2. He lives in Doylestown, PA.

**Robert Beveridge** (he/him) makes noise (xterminal.bandcamp.com) and writes poetry in Akron, OH. Recent/upcoming appearances in *Page and Spine*, *The Pointed Circle*, and *Failed Haiku*, among others.

**Ron Savage:** I am a painter. Studied at Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. Wrote poetry in high school and have not stopped since. Chinese and Japanese poetry have been influences. I have written songs, been a performing musician. The pandemic returned me to poetry. Painting and poetry spring from the same place.

**Shaunda Holloway**

**Sherri Bedingfield** of Connecticut has featured at many New England venues and in Dingle, Ireland. She is the author of two poetry collections: *Transitions and Transformations* (2010) and *The Clattering: Voices from Old Forfarshire, Scotland* (2016). Bedingfield is also a licensed psychotherapist.

**Stephen Campiglio**'s poems and translations have recently appeared in *Aji, Chiron Review, Circumference, Glimpse, Journal of Italian Translation, Manzano Mountain Review, Miramar*, and *The Wayfarer*. For his translations, he has completed a manuscript of selected poems by Sicilian/Italian writer, Giuseppe Bonaviri (1924-2009), while his new translation project, with co-translator Dr. Elena Borelli, is focused on Italian poet Giovanni Pascoli (1855-1912).

**William Ciaburri** is still at home, still aging, and for no good reason still working.
Our Next Issue

We are aiming to put out our next *Circumference* issue this fall. By which time, the world will be so much better in so many ways.

Look for a Call for Submissions to be sent out soon.

We will be looking for art and heart, fresh word use, peace, justice, diversity, reason. If your work supports those things, send it in. We’d love to see it, and if it fits, we’d love to use it.

We may try to add links to video or audio clips.

We welcome your comments, suggestions, and even complaints.

We can be reached at the address below:

poetryinstitute@gmail.com

We refuse to be herded

and demand to be heard!
In Support of Justice,  
Peace, Democracy.

We are proud to stand with all who work to advance Justice.

We believe that Black Lives Matter

We champion the quintessential right:
- to vote
- to vote
- to vote
- to vote
- to vote
- to vote
- to vote
- to vote
We support a just path to citizenship for our undocumented residents.

We support human rights and humanitarian asylum for all migrants who seek refuge at our borders, fleeing violence, hunger, poverty, climate disaster and all forms of persecution.

We are Circumference that welcomes all into our circle.
Thanks to all the poets who submitted work.

And thanks to the Institute Library,
for allowing us to use their wonderful space.

And thanks to all who have shared their poems at Pi.
And to all who have blessed us by listening.

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around we go. for freedom and justice

Life, a Circle of Poems; Poems, a Circle of Life.
This zine, the Circumference of poetry and life.

Aiming to be a round peg in a square world