

INTRODUCTION

For those new to the Society of Classical Poets, this printed journal you now hold is a selection of poetry and essays from the Society's website, which acts as an ongoing online journal of poetry, and to a lesser extent of essays, art, and music. This publication is limited to poetry and essays published by the Society between February 1, 2022 and January 31, 2023, and is not intended to include previously published work. Art is specially selected for this journal with an emphasis on featuring the works of living artists, not necessarily to perfectly match poems, which is different from the Society's website where art is intended to match poems.

The poetry published by the Society of Classical Poets pays close attention to meter as the basic requirement. With the exception of the syllable-counting used to write a haiku and the purposely doggerel-like cleriheuw, all of the poetry contained herein has a discernible meter, following in the footsteps of Homer, Virgil, Dante Alighieri, William Shakespeare, John Milton, Henry Longfellow, Edgar Allan Poe, Robert Frost, and many many others. Consistent meter is the foundational technique in terms of the language itself. Rhyme, alliteration, and other techniques follow on top of that foundation. The meter creates a sense of music, and one might say enchantment, from the very first words onward.

What is important and what I have to frequently tell people is that counting syllables is not meter. A line of iambic pentameter does not always have 10 syllables. So if you can't hear the unstressed-stressed unit of meter, then there is no point in composing a 100-line poem and submitting it. You are much better off working on a four-line poem in perfect iambic tetrameter.

Now that I've mentioned "perfect meter" though, I should mention that there is another group of poets (recovering from the bad acid trip of solipsistic free verse I suspect) who cling to extreme formal verse that always has perfect meter. To those counting ten syllables and to those professing the virtues of perfect meter all of the time, I've said the same thing so often that I might as well put it here: The most

famous line of iambic pentameter is Shakespeare's "to BE or NOT to BE that IS the QUEStion," which is 11 syllables because of that extra unstressed beat ("-tion") at the end. Writing in iambic pentameter simply means you will have five stressed beats by the end of the line and they will tend to (but not always) occur in an iambic pattern. The total number of syllables will not always be 10. If you are an aspiring poet and can't hear the meter yet, then you should just focus on hearing it. High school students, in particular, who are forced to write a poem should have the option to count syllables if they can't hear the meter. If you can hear the meter and you still want not a single extra unstressed beat in there—and perhaps would wag your finger even at Shakespeare's "To be or not to be" line—then chances are that the more poetry you write or publish in absolutely perfect meter, the more unnatural and awkward it will sound. You will be putting too much emphasis on the surface-level technique and not enough on the meaning and narrative flow of the poem.

Meter, rhyme, and so on are part of the language itself. But that is only part of poetry, not the whole experience. The meaning and storytelling of a poem are grounded in the handling of metaphor, personification, idioms, and so on. Last year, the poet James A. Tweedie created his own definition of formal (or classical) poetry and left it open for comment:

The working of magic with words, rhythm, rhyme and form to conjure, spin, and weave an image, a story, a feeling, an idea, in such a way that it comes alive in the reader's mind as vividly and indelibly as possible.

While no definition could probably be perfect, Mr. Tweedie has made an admirable attempt here that I think is instructive. He pulls together the two main elements I am referring to, the language ("words, rhythm, rhyme and form") and meaning ("an image, a story, a feeling, an idea"). These are two elements that must be worked at, and part of that working is balancing their demands.

New readers should also note: you certainly may not agree with all of the opinions expressed in the poems and essays in this book. That is perfectly fine. I do not agree with them all either, and I'm the editor! For example, as you will read in his essay, Dr. Salemi finds it untenable that Shakespeare's plays may not have been written by the man named

William Shakespeare. However, I personally find the Earl of Oxford theory quite compelling. We disagree... so what? I put forward in a poem that Darwinian evolution is false, and that believing in God should mean that you do not believe in Darwinian evolution. You may disagree, but again so what? This journal is about poetry first and foremost and not about individual perspectives. No poems or essays contained herein represent some kind of official view of the Society of Classical Poets, which is simply a group of poets dedicated to the flourishing of traditional verse. It is just that poets are people and people have perspectives and those are reflected in their poetry. Anyone of any faith can enjoy the religious music of Johann Sebastian Bach and the religious art of Leonardo da Vinci. So too can anyone enjoy this journal.

Yet we live in an age where people are being attacked and deplatformed merely for their views. Just this last year, the Society of Classical Poets was deplatformed by Winning Writers, who said it was because of “posts mocking the transgender community and expressing support for fascist-adjacent politicians like Giorgia [sic] Meloni.” (Giorgi Meloni is the current prime minister of Italy and is pretty centrist, and Dr. Salemi wrote a poem in her praise that I had published.) On its About page, the news website Whatfinger has a pretty striking clarification that speaks well to this trend. The people who run Whatfinger are military veterans who may not be as eloquent as the poets featured in this journal, but they have perfectly spoken to this issue in plain language, regarding their own website, and I think we could apply it just as well to this journal:

Honest...if you are a ‘snowflake’ in any way, you might have a heart attack and die from what you will find here on both ends of the spectrum. We do not believe in censorship here, and we do not believe in the fake speech codes of the politically correct. Our Bill of Rights DOES NOT have a clause for ‘hate speech’. There is no such thing as hate speech and if you believe there is, then you have no clue as to why the Constitution of the United States was written as it was. If there is any speech that needs to be protected, guess what? It is what you consider to be ‘hate speech’. So put your big boy or big girl pants on, man up and be prepared to learn more...

Thank you, Whatfinger, for your effective wit and for linking to many of our poems online.

Finally, for those returning to this Journal, note that we have continued to reduce the number of chapters, amalgamating three more chapters in the first chapter The Muse's Song and the third chapter, renamed Light Verse and Satire. The idea behind these changes is to create a more varied and enjoyable reading experience. Your feedback is always welcome.

—Evan Mantyk, March 2023

I. THE MUSE'S SONG

Ode to Winter

by Susan Jarvis Bryant

A honeypool of sun seeps from the skies.
The crisp and clingy leaves have lost their grip.

My scarlet spirits dip
As gold and russet highs bid cold goodbyes.
I feel your icy bite in twilight's breeze—

Your stinging chill;
Your silver nip; your hoary, moon-licked tease
That bends the naked branches to your will.

You suck the thrumming blood from Gaia's veins,
Then frost her plump and sumptuous autumn spill—

That juicy-berry fill
For scrawny critters scouring country lanes.
You scythe through field and fen through thick of night.

A rush of breath
Drifts from your lips to fog the spangled light
Where reapers creep and mortals peek at death.

Your presence comes with promise to excite
With dreamy scenes of lacy flakes of snow.

You leave blue souls aglow
With memories of Christmases of white—
Your shining shawl of glory swathing earth
As sleigh bells ring.

I know your rage and grace. I know your worth.
I know your savage splendor gift-wraps Spring.

The Wind

by Martin Rizley

Listen, listen! Do you hear it? It is on the march tonight—
The incessant winter wind that blows throughout the wood and glade.
Like a spectral army passing through the night in grim parade—
Do you hear its restless movement where no moonbeam sheds it light?
Do you hear the countless legions as they march both far and near
In the shade of gloomy bowers and across the open lea,
Through the waves of high grass rolling like a tempest troubled sea—
Do you hear their footfalls echo in the wild atmosphere?

Do you hear their creaking wagons rumble down the darkened lane,
And their ghostly drummers beating out a melancholy dirge?
Do you hear from time to time an eerie moaning sound emerge
As their weary voices join to sing a wordless song of pain?

In the gusts that keep on blowing, do you hear their riders charge
On the backs of phantom horses through the tops of twisting trees?
Under angry anvil skies they fly, as if to chase the breeze,
Leaping ledges, trampling hedges, as they tear along at large.

Through the night they keep on racing where no human eye can see,
Blazing trails through tangled forests, dashing down the inky stream,
Speeding forward, fast, and fearsome, yet as a fleeting as a dream,
As they gallop ever onward in their ghostly company.

Like the souls of fallen soldiers trudging homeward, battle worn,
Unaware the war is over, and the victory is lost,
Do you hear them shuffle past you in the woods by winter tossed
In their slow and sad retreat before the bright brigade of morn?

In Winter Some Find Beauty

by Carl Kinsky

Just stubble's left where once stalks stood in rows.
Where tassels rustled during summer rains,
snow's scattered like salt spread so nothing grows
Except for loneliness and empty pain.

Above in meadows where lean calves grew fat,
abundance gently reigned and creatures teemed;
now grasses cower, safer to lay flat
and silent while winds tear and ravens scream.

On hilltops stand trees, shivering, beseeching
the heavens, beggars pleading with the sky
for warmth, more daylight, leafless branches reaching
for answers but receiving no reply.

In winter some find beauty though it be
A beauty for eyes blind to what I see.

Yet

by James A. Tweedie

The withered dune grass slumps beneath a sere
Gray frozen sky, as winter tag-teams fall
And nighttime frost compels the Black-Tailed deer
To seek out warmer lairs beneath the tall,

Cone-laden Sitka spruce. The screech of jays
Intone a requiem for summers past,
And fading memories of once-lived days
Grieve “might-have-beens” that long-since breathed their last.

As chill-red sunsets summon forth the stars
And darkness shrouds a world entombed by night,
With lidless eyes we carry unhealed scars
Of broken dreams and wrongs not yet made right.

Yet each new dawn, a-bloom with lightful hours,
Will bear the scent of spring, new hope, and flowers.

Original French

Le temps a laissé son manteau
De vent, de froidure, et de pluye,
Et s'est vestu de brouderie
De soleil luyant, cler et beau.

Il n'y a beste, ne oyseau,
Qu'en son jargon chante ou crie
Le temps [a laissé son manteau.]

Riviere, fontaine, et ruisseau
Portent, en livree jolie,
Gouttes d'argent d'orfaverie;
Chascun s'abille de nouveau
Le temps [a laissé son manteau.]

The Spring

by Charles d'Orléans (1394–1465)
translated by Margaret Coats

The Spring has left off Winter's cloak
Of wind and rain and frosty sting;
She's dressed in brodered blanketing
Of beauties sunlight can evoke.

The beasts and birds, wild forest folk,
All roar and chirp and croak and sing
The Spring.

The rivers, brooks, and fountains soak
The earth with silver drops, and fling
Pied jewels throughout fields blossoming.
All things vest new, and freshly yoke
The Spring.



Proserpine by Nicolàs Fasolino, 2022, oil on linen, 29 1/2 x 17 1/2 in.,
Art Renewal Center Collection. ([Instagram.com/nico_fasolino](https://www.instagram.com/nico_fasolino))

May Day

Maypoles were a feature of ancient Roman festivals to mark the renewal of Spring. The feast days of Saints Philip and James were celebrated by the Church of England in May.

by Cheryl Corey

Having hewed a length of pine,
They drove it in the ground;
Then word was spread throughout the town,
“Ye comers gather round.

Now let us make a joyful song
And share with all good cheer;
The stage is set, the men have brewed
Ten barrelsful of beer.”

And so began the merriment,
Commencing with the drum,
A cannon shot, a round of fire,
And instruments to strum.

They took the streamers in their hands
And danced around the pole;
They sang in praise of saints who died
To save the mortal soul.

They feasted well, and all the day
Was full of heady mirth;
To see the goddess Maia bring
The seasonal rebirth.

Original Middle English

Whan that Aprill with his shoures soote
The droghte of March hath perced to the roote,
And bathed every veyne in swich licour
Of which vertu engendred is the flour;
Whan Zephirus eek with his sweete breeth
Inspired hath in every holt and heeth
The tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne
Hath in the Ram his half cours yronne,
And smale foweles maken melodye,
That slepen al the nyght with open ye
(So priketh hem Nature in hir corages),
Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages,
And palmeres for to seken straunge strondes,
To ferne halwes, kowthe in sondry londes;
And specially from every shires ende
Of Engelond to Caunterbury they wende,
The hooly blisful martir for to seke,
That hem hath holpen whan that they were seeke.

The Canterbury Tales—General Prologue

Lines 1-18

by Geoffrey Chaucer (1343-1400)
translated by Evan Mantyk

When April's sweetest showers downward shoot,
The drought of March is pierced right to the root
Through every vein with liquid of such power
And virtue that it generates the flower;
When Zephyrus too exhales his breath so sweet
Inspiring in ground beneath the feet
The tender crops, and there's a youthful sun,
His second half course through the Ram now run,
And little birds start making melodies
Who sleep all night eyes open in the trees
(For Nature pricks them in each little heart),
On pilgrimage then folks desire to start.
The palmers seek to make their travel plans
For far-off shrines renowned in sundry lands.
Especially from every English town
To Canterbury now their steps are bound,
To seek the holy blissful martyr quick
Who helped them out when once they had been sick.

The Recollected Dream

by David Watt

When midsummer rain is spearing
From storm clouds darkest grey
That provide no hint of clearing
To reveal the blue of day,
The scent from marshland grasses
Permeates each breath of air
That summons as it passes,
Winged creatures from their lair.

Then the wattled spur-winged plovers,
In their element at last,
Re-emerge from reedy covers,
Seeking out a worm repast—
And the droplets from their wattles
Drip on sheath and blade below,
And the soil horizon mottles
Where the trickling waters flow.

Soon the plovers start their calling
That more often graces night,
And the haunting notes keep falling
On a landscape spare of light
Until the torrent ceases,
Re-admitting hidden rays—
And though the spell releases,
The ghostly memory stays.

Now I wait till warm days brew it—
A thunderous downfall,
To renew the did-he-do-it
Of the plover's plaintive call,
Carried clear and unaffected
Though the waters fairly teem,
Proving that calls recollected
Hadn't risen from a dream.



Spirit-bird by Herman Smorenborg, 2008, oil on panel, 23.6 x 19.6 in.
(Hermansmorenborg.com)

Elysium

by Adam Sedia

O golden hour, soft denouement of day,
O mystic time of quietude and peace,
When boughs and rushes whisper as they sway,
Twirled by the sighing zephyrs' soft caprice;

When, fallen from his blinding noonday height,
The dimmed, declining sun, departing west,
Immerses all in glowing, golden light—
Warm relict of the noon's blaze that oppressed.

When all the din and tumult day has stirred
Recedes to silence, hushed beneath the breeze,
And only owl and nightingale are heard
Calling out gently from the rustling trees;

You wearied soul, who now seek only rest
At daytime's end, bask in the golden gleam,
The stillness, the mild airs, this world caressed
In light and languor, glimpsed as in a dream—

Your refuge, this imprint on earthly soil
Of fields beyond the sunset, ever green,
Where blessed spirits know no care nor toil,
Eternally at peace in such a scene.

But this, its mortal counterpart, flies back
Beyond the skies, now leaving them to turn
To evening's pink, then twilight's blue, then black
Of night, whose distant lights but faintly burn.

Ever Flowing

by Dusty Grein

Upon the rushing river's bank I stand,
deep water, ever flowing as it goes.
The turbulence of my life it reflects
as if my mortal pain, it truly knows.

I close my eyes while cruel heartache builds
and boils. It swirls and churns from deep within,
akin to eddies in the river's course,
all ever flowing seaward as they spin.

A lifetime lived within each second's tick,
my heart's emotions ever flowing strong
form rapids, waterfalls, and twisting turns,
which carve deep channels as they sing love's song.

Though time often appears to stand quite still,
it's always ever flowing, moving fast;
toward blank tomorrows and the great unknown,
each day it takes us further from the past.

Through waves of dappled light and shadows dark
we chart the river's course each day anew,
as yearning, ever flowing, on we roll,
to seek the distant rest of oceans, blue.

Before us lies the fear of change and loss—
deep love becomes deep grief when torn apart.
Time's ever flowing nature is our bane,
yet passing time can mend a broken heart.

My life's become the river's equal now,
surviving ever flowing pain and grief
while drawing strength from pools of love and faith,
I cherish moments calm, however brief.

For Love of the Sea

by Catherine Lee

Thalassa spoke when as a child I played upon the sand—
her swirling foam a gentle whisper I could understand.
In playful mood I'd chase her just to run from her in glee,
then stop—allow my feet to be caressed by teasing sea.
She spoke with enigmatic sighs of lands so far away—
I'd sit and listen, lick my face of salty windblown spray.

She called to me throughout the years, beguiled me with her charm
and mesmerized, delighted me—her beauty could disarm.
She summoned me persistently; I missed her when away—
her therapeutic greatness, her spectacular display.
Enchanted, captured by her spell I'd stroll along the shore
admiring her magnificence till I could walk no more.

I've sailed upon her surface, gazed in staggered disbelief
when plunging into chambers deep to view her coral reef,
cocooned in silence all around in Triton's hidden world
to marvel at the multicolored splendor there unfurled.
I've surfed her splendid pipelines, felt momentum unsurpassed,
and stolen countless fish from her with all the lines I've cast.

She beckoned in the evenings with her sensuality,
the moon's reflection on her face creating mystery,
her quietness inscrutable, yet hushed seductive tones
would hold me captivated, sending shivers through my bones.
Her Sirens on those balmy nights intoxicated me—
she stole my heart forever, this alluring, regal sea.

I've seen her calm and tranquil lying blissfully serene,
providing yachts with refuge moored in harbors safe, pristine
whilst white-winged birds shrieked loudly as they hovered in the sky,
admired a pod of dolphins as they've swiftly coasted by,
surveyed the dancing whitecaps when the summer breezes blow
and sunlight glistening brightly on his looking glass below.

I've heard Poseidon bellow and observed with anxious awe
as fearsome forces gathered, rose to crash upon the shore
with raging waters pounding, power nothing can withstand,
as if to prove their mastery of this primeval land—
her impact carving mountains over every century
to sculpt dramatic cliffs, create the coastline of the sea.

Her many moods astound me. She is beautiful and still,
yet treacherous and unforgiving, wild and cruel at will.
I've envied her unleashed emotions passionate and raw,
her silence, freedom, solitude, potential to restore,
respected her invincible and vast supremacy,
secure within her might and her assumed infinity.

So at my end when nothing's left my solitude to ease,
I pray Thalassa calls me still with precious memories.
As long as I can watch her endless steadfast roll and surge,
the sight will take away my pain and all misgivings purge.
Then happily I'll listen to that constant ebb and flow,
which drew me as a child and gripped my spirit long ago.

I know her soothing presence will surround me with her peace.
I'll happily surrender to her lure of sweet release.
One final time she'll speak to me, her voice will fill my mind
and gladly I will ride that swell and never look behind.
I'll close my eyes and drop my weary head upon my chest—
the sea will fill my heart and soul and carry me to rest.

THALASSA: Greek goddess of the Sea



Jason and the Argo by Eric Armusik, 2019, oil on birch, 20 x 16 in.
(Ericarmusik.com)

Valiant Men

by Angel L. Villanueva

The sailors brave the angry storm
As waves the ocean brings.
It seems to them one hundred years
Of fighting death despite their fears,
Like ancient warring kings.

The frigid water stings their hands
And chills their sodden skin.
But they confront the ghastly howls
And fight with death as thunder growls,
To reach their land and kin.

The valiant men unite as one
And bravely surge ahead.
No wave, or grave, their will can break
Nor dim the morning light to wake;
They fight for life instead.

But there, behind a swelling wave,
A larger one, they see.
And so they pray their ship holds out
As they again attempt to rout
A sanguinary sea.

Deschutes River Reverie

by James A. Tweedie

The river, swift and shallow, roils its way
Beneath the outstretched arms of old-growth pines,
Past bank-side willows diamond-dewed with spray,
And hillside ferns and thimbleberry vines.

A fallen cedar, once a forest lord,
Contributes to the nascent euphony
As broken branches add a vocal chord
To water-music's choral symphony.

Behind the cedar lies a quiet spot
Where wrist-flicked Pregnant Adams gently lands.
With flash and tug, a German Brown is caught
And gently held in two well-moistened hands.

The barbless hook removed, the trout set free,
An Upper Deschutes River reverie.

PREGNANT ADAMS: an artificial dry fly used in fly fishing.

Original French

Les cieux resplendissant d'Étoiles
Aux radieux frissonnements
Ressemblent à des flots dormants
Que sillonnent de blanches voiles.

Quand l'azur déchire ses voiles,
Nous voyons les bleus firmaments,
Les cieux resplendissant d'Étoiles
Aux radieux frissonnements.

Quel peintre mettra sur ses toiles,
O Dieu, ces clairs fourmillements,
Ces fournaies de diamants
Qu'à mes yeux ravis tu dévoiles,
Les cieux resplendissant d'Étoiles.

The Stars

by Théodore de Banville (1823-1891)

translated by Margaret Coats

The heavens glittering with stars
In frosty brilliance shimmering
Resemble billows slumbering
With white caps under sails and spars.

When day pulls azure veils toward bars,
We see the dark sky flickering,
The heavens glittering with stars
In frosty brilliance shimmering.

What painter could with peerless arts,
O God, show sparkles glimmering
From diamond bonfires simmering
That to my ravished eyes you bring,
The heavens glittering with stars!

Dark Sky

by Joseph Stuart

Back home, the dark is overborne
By a billion busy diodes
Emitting artificial light,
Thence seeping out into the night.

But, up here, there are auroras,
Constellations, and nebulae—
Or so the motel owners say:
“Last week, we saw the Milky Way.”

So, we wind through wooded headlands
To join a remnant, dousing lamps,
Spraying mists of citronella,
Lying down and looking stellar.

Like unto ancients gazing up
To see a billion burning fires
Ages past—a cloud of witness
Now revealed, but just in darkness.

The Stonechat Listens at the Asylum Window

Stonechat: a type of small bird

by Charles Southerland

I fear I might mistranslate what you said
And lose the very essence of your words.
May I record you as I do the birds:
The warbler, shrike and wren, red's wild-combed head
Who can't fly straight because his wings are strained
By his erratic breaths—the young cock quail
Who only knows four notes, the nightingale?
Perhaps the mockingbird who has profaned
The puerile bluebird to his detriment?
I listen to them all here in the field
Or from the house, the wood, the swimming pond,
The deer-stand in the right-of-way, the tent
I hid in, hunting, while my body healed—
As you well know, from wreckage and its rent.
You are the bird of paradise; I'm fond
Of you beyond compare, despite your squawk
When you were ill with me, the bedroom talk,
Too colorful for feathers to respond.
But when you left, it was the hardest thing,
This separation. Distance has allure,
It surely does. Migration's not a cure.
These days, your speech has turned to twittering.
I asked if you were lonely; you said, no.
I wondered if I heard you nearly right.
I am the red-winged blackbird's gulping tone,
The swallow, swift, the collared dove, hoopoe—
No, not the Merlin, hunting late tonight.
I am the loon, I am the loon, alone.



Landscape at Dawn (霧曉圖) by Xiaoping Chen, 1990, watercolor on rice paper, 16x30 in.

Haiku

The following above haiku include the winner and some of the runners-up in the Society of Classical Poets 2022 Haiku Competition, Judged by Margaret Coats

a cicada's husk
grandfather in his best suit
hands folded, eyes closed

—Ngo Binh Anh Khoa

The night condenses
into black brown coffee drops.
They stain the morning.

—Ezeifedi Chibueze

New blooms on black trees
veiled in quiet bone-white fog
spring's dirge to winter

—Hannah Lee

high-rise balcony
the perfect panorama
of summertime smog

—Srini

Fall's artillery
Acorns spatter on my roof
Rat! Tat! Winter comes

—John Sheills

lost in perfumed air
a small skipper is crossing
the wildflower sea

—Benjamin Bläsi

a hot summer night
only a slice of the moon
for my refreshment

—Urszula Marciniak

What Geese May Teach

by Sally Cook

My mother had the power that knowledge wields,
So questions such as—*Would you like to go?*
Were never invitations, but commands
To fly away, cross yellow fields and low,
Like summer insects, stuck upon windshields.
A raggle-taggle group we were, and so
Like sandflies could not change what time demands.

Beneath a half-known psychic undertow,
My mother screeched her well-worn, wearing wheels
As we pulled up to watch the wild geese soar
In ordered honking triangles. Much more,
We'd missed such ordered symmetry before.

The Cricket

by Jeffrey Essmann

These mornings there's a cricket cross the way
Whose chirrup purls and eddies in the air,
Autumnal now and cool, to counterpoint
The city's muffled thrum as well anoint
The drowsy traipsing of my early prayer.

A cricket on the hearth is luck, it's said,
And though to call an empty New York lot
A hearth may be a metaphor too far,
The thought of luck itself is quite bizarre,
And either one buys into it or not.

In general I trust grace far more than luck,
Yet looking at the world and its upsets,
Although I know full well I should have qualms
At mixing lucky crickets with my psalms,
There's mornings I must cover all my bets.



Looking Them Over by Tim Cox, 2020, oil on canvas, 18 x 24 in.,
cropped image. (Timcox.com)



Toward Yehuling, 1211

The battle at Yehuling (literally "Wild Fox Ridge") was the first major struggle between the Jin Dynasty and the increasingly-powerful Mongol Empire. The march toward Yehuling began in the early spring of 1211. The Mongol victory there would culminate 23 years later in the collapse of the Jin Dynasty.

by Talbot Hook

Unfolding steppes emerge as flattened plains
Of long grasses of gold and April-green,
While crystal streams, like bold and careless children,
Careen away through boundless fallow fields.

Horses graze nearby on budding sprouts
While courtly falcon streaks the sky alone,
Now mantled in the palest morning sun—
As all of under-heaven slowly thaws.

The squatting yurts that stud the overcast
Horizon offer up their steles of smoke.
The men astride their horses test the air,
Describing signs in wind and warming soil.

For soon it will be time.
Soon hooves will faintly stir
From sleep a bounded land
And whisper words of war.

Across the plains, beyond the sleep-eyed herd,
A snaking wall of stone, a coiled shield:
A hoary dragon sinews mountain paths
With flame enough for countless men and steeds.

But here the pasture plains are yet untrammelled;
Here the runnels course like wayward foals.
Here fires only warm, and bowmen hunt,
And here still flows the milk of paradise.

The Agony and The Ecstasy

by Gail Kaye Naegele

I beg among the lonely hours
oblivious to time and space
and pace beneath the Sistine towers
where pigments paint my puzzled face.
Why call me to divine commission,
as if I am the King's magician,
to turn blank skies to holy vision;
oblivious to time and space?

I flee to hills of alabaster,
where ancient gods sleep in soft stone;
there gaze at dawn from fields of aster,
in sunlit clouds, behold a throne!
Benign, God glows in grace and glory,
his finger tracing allegory,
on clear blue skies creation's story
His vision of the towers shone.

With passion's pulse I paint the towers
as form and color mold blank sky;
a tempest tethered endless hours
to paint the vision or to die.
Though my flesh and bones are aching,
for beauty's cause the world forsaking,
for splendor by His love creating
and as I paint I sing and cry.

NOTE: Selected from the Classic Movie-Inspired Poem Challenge initiated by Susan Jarvis Bryant

Original Spanish

Desde la Torre

Retirado en la paz de estos desiertos,
Con pocos, pero doctos libros juntos,
Vivo en conversación con los difuntos,
Y escucho con mis ojos a los muertos.

Si no siempre entendidos, siempre abiertos,
O enmiendan, o fecundan mis asuntos;
Y en músicos callados contrapuntos
Al sueño de la vida hablan despiertos.

Las Grandes Almas que la Muerte ausenta,
De injurias de los años vengadora,
Libra, ¡oh gran Don Josef!, docta la Imprenta.

En fuga irrevocable huye la hora;
Pero aquélla el mejor cálculo cuenta,
Que en la lección y estudios nos mejora.

From the Tower

by Francisco de Quevedo (1580-1645)
translated by Elwin Wirkala

Retired to these deserts and at peace,
and with but few, though learned, books beside,
I live conversing now with the deceased,
and listen with my eyes to those who died.

Open, whether or not I miss their points,
they mend or fecundate my everything,
their music's muted counterpoints when joined
with this life's dream bespeak awakening.

Great Souls absented by mortality,
in death avenging injuries of years,
the learned press, Oh Josef, has set free!

Hours fled forever disappear,
but they are best accounted for in letters,
read and studied, when they make us better.

Sumo's Winning Ways

by Margaret Coats

Fierce frontal impact clenches victory
In less time than an untrained eye can blink,
But connoisseurs of sumo's treasury
Prefer discriminating knack. They wink
When force through fine technique shows mastery.

Drive into the opponent, pull him close,
Then push him, force him, thrust him, crush him out,
Or pull or slap him down to hard-packed dirt.
Twist, pivot, lock his arm or head—and throw!

Throw with authority, because the aim
Is winning! Seconds in the ring repay
The hours and years spent training. Not a game
Is this; give everything you've got to sway
The foe off balance, and your triumph claim.

Throw overarm or underarm or hip;
Use leg trips or a hammer body drop,
A double leg sweep or a hooking twist,
Or all your strength to lift him out—take risks.

The thrill of winning stormy breakneck bouts
By spirit and technique, the fighter's pride,
Deserves his effort and the viewers' shouts;
His body's massive learning can decide
Contentions won through sudden whirlabouts.

To size and strength and speed and skill, add stealth.
Surprises win: a dodge or jump or block;
Clap hands in the rival's face, or slap it hard;
An ankle pick can do the cheeky trick.

New moves that foreign wrestlers introduce,
Reviving clever clashes of the past,
Shock all who let them fall into disuse.
Be quick to study; make a counterblast
Bold, common, unexpected, or abstruse:

The backward belt toss, pulling body slam,
Rear lean out, grabbing arm thrust, thigh-scoop throw.
Two-handed head twists torque a man aground;
The Triple rams the chest and whips both legs.

Charge forward, building power, champions say:
Attack and grip; defense is secondary.
Be master of each ordinary way,
And ready with strange tactics legendary
To dominate divinely fiendish fray.

The Tartini Tones

*“Combination tones generated by violins of good quality
can be easily heard, affecting the perception of the
intervals. The harmonic content of the dyad is enriched
by the combination tones and this is positively
perceived by the listeners.”*

—Giovanni Cecchi, University of Florence
Italian Tribune, November 17, 2022

by Joseph S. Salemi

Yes, it's from Cremona—we're not sure
If made by Stradivarius. Who knows?
Despite the sheer magnificence, the pure
And bell-like vibrancy, the aural glows,

There is no maker's mark. The provenance
Is vague and somewhat sketchy. It's not nice,
But dealers in old violins (to enhance
The reputation and the asking price)

Would say it came from Stradivari's hand.
And even if not true, the instrument
Might well have all the excellence, the grand
Style of that master craftsman's sacrament.

I don't blaspheme. This fiddle channels grace.
Just sit in holy silence while it's played
And hear the *terzo suono* (like fine lace)
Intertwine tones, as if you knelt and prayed

And heard angelic whispers from on high
Hinting of what the sacred seraphs sing
To Majesty Immortal. And you cry
That you are not in their encircling ring.

Those are Tartini tones. The seasoned wood
Of deep Italian forests slowly growing
Untouched through centuries, that had withstood
The chill of countless winters' frigid blowing

Alone can give that *terzo suono* mix
Of doubled, blended notes, and there's no more.
The forests are cut down. You cannot fix
That loss, just as no person can restore

The quarries of *antico nero* stone,
Avranches cathedral, Bibliothèque Louvain,
Or any precious thing for which we moan
That stupid men have wrecked, for hate or gain.

Perhaps this is not by Stradivari. Well,
We hear Tartini tones no matter who
Crafted the violin. It casts a spell
Just as enchanting as those special few.

The nameless maker of this violin
In some ill-lit workshop with his plane,
His pumice, iron moulds, and varnish tin,
Wrought voiceless wood to sing against the grain.

POET'S NOTE: Tartini tones are subtle resonances or vibrations produced by antique violins from Cremona, Italy, most particularly those from the workshops of Antonio Stradivari, Giuseppe Guarneri, and other neighboring luthiers. They were first identified and described by the composer Giuseppe Tartini in 1714, who called them a *terzo suono* ("third sound") that enriched and deepened the played notes. Listeners and recent laboratory acoustical research both testify that these tones are audibly present in the old violins, and negligible or not present at all in modern instruments. Some persons have theorized that the wood used by these early violin makers was of an unusually dense quality, as a result of the "Little Ice Age" that afflicted the northern hemisphere from about 1300 to 1800.

John Adams in Heaven

John and Abigail Adams are being guided through heaven by John Milton. He takes them to a villa in the Elysian Fields, where they meet a famous Roman Marcus Cicero, who shows them a vision of their political ancestors.

by Andrew Benson Brown

Near spartan fields that nurtured simple roots,
A villa sprawled with hints of pagan faith.
Through lavish gardens hanging with ripe fruits,
They entered, crossed a room of marble wraiths
(Ancestral busts, the mugs of common farmers)
Its murals cracked and laced with creeping vines,
And saw a sitting figure chiseled firmer
Than stone, pure morals whitening his veins.
Great statesmen all belong in bliss, ergo
John Adams gazed upon his hero, Cicero.

Stiff muscles creaked and flexed off marble crust.
Two grinding elbows moved to steady knees.
Tan sandals squeaked and shook a robe of dust.
“One needs the fortitude of Socrates
To wait for you, John Adams,” uttered Marcus.
John gaped to speak. A finger silenced words.
“Just follow, or you’ll soon become a carcass.”
A fountain filled a pipette up two-thirds.
Sweet Abby closed her husband’s open mouth.
They followed Tully down a hallway leading south.

“Three eyedrops from the Well of Life. The mind
Needs vision, too,” said Cicero. They both
Leaned backward. Pupils drowned in fluid, blind.
A light-filled tunnel, granting them new birth,
Washed over John and Abby as they stood.
The busts receded from the hall. “Behold
Your ancestors,” said Cicero. Instead
Of marble casts, a line of figures rolled

Before their eyes, seeming of flesh and blood—
Civilization's leaders, risen from the mud.

Stout Moses stands with tablets lightning-seared;
King David plays his harp; wise Solomon,
In his temple, strokes his even-whiskered beard;
Cyrus reclines upon an Ottoman,
Holding his cylinder of human rights;
Lycurgus promulgates his warrior code
To Spartans; Solon scribbles his insights,
Arranging Athen's laws within an ode;
Romulus picks a hill (his twin won't hearken);
The Palatine established, Brutus ousts proud Tarquin.

Augustus maps the Pax Romana's reach
And five good emperors keep it in vogue;
Justinian's wise jurists grant no breach
Of justice as he lies in bed with plague;
Next Arthur, throned on high in Avalon,
Charges his knights recite the Pentecostal
Oath, each sword around his table drawn:
To never kill or quarrel in a hostile
Manner, to flee from treason, give the ladies
Succor and rivals mercy—under pain of Hades.

This oath is taken up by Charlemagne
And mouthed by Roland, that great paladin;
The Lionheart, to honor his domain,
Embraces chivalry and Saladin;
His brother, John the Dog, signs Magna Carta
In front of all the English noblemen;
Then last, in contrast to laconic Sparta,
A queen in armor puts a global spin
On verbal virtues when, the Spanish drowned,
This Gloriana gathers bays to see bards crowned.

A Glass for My Father

Marie-Maurille de Viot, Mademoiselle de Sombreuil
(February 14, 1768—May 15, 1823)

by Joseph S. Salemi

My father was the Marquis de Sombreuil:
An old man when it happened, but back then
The Revolution took no note of age,
Of sex, infirmities, or past distinction.
All they saw was that our family was
Of gentle blood, and for that fact condemned.
When they came to escort him to prison
I insisted that I too should go—
I shared my father's blood, why not his pain?
A maiden girl of twenty-four can die
As easily as men advanced in years.
They dragged us off to La Abbaye, and there
A mock tribunal of some drunken thugs
Read out the fatal judgment: father's life
Was forfeit to the guillotine. I begged
With filial tears and pleadings. They just smirked.

One of the guards sat on a pile of corpses
Freshly slain and still warm to the touch—
Great pools of blood and gore were everywhere.
He poured red wine out for that fell tribunal
Into cups and glasses smeared by fingers
Still wet from pikes and bludgeons and curved sabers.
He took a filthy, blood-polluted glass,
Filled it with wine, and held it out to me:

Drain this glass of blood-tinged wine and we'll
Allow you and your father to go home.
Drink a toast to our great Revolution!
They smiled in mockery, as if to say
A frightened and a well-bred noble girl

Could never put a gore-smeared glass like that
To her shy and hesitating lips.
But I reached out and took it, made the toast,
And drank it down in one impulsive swallow.
They laughed with frank amusement and surprise
That I had drunk a chalice of foul death,
Looked at me with a grudging new respect,
And released us from that hall of murder.
We hurried out to freedom and fresh air.

Still to this day I cannot hold a glass
Without revulsion and a sense of loathing.
Red wine? Just a hint of its bouquet
Turns my stomach like a foetid corpse.
They killed my father and his younger son
At a later date. My elder brother
Fell in the wars that came in terror's wake.
I am the last of Sombreuil's ancient line
And in my own way, I too died with them.
I leave the world this one important truth:
You crush no revolutions with a prayer,
With votive candles or a pious hope,
Or pleas for mercy, or *noblesse oblige*.
The only thing the Revolution fears
Is when you drink hot blood before their faces,
And swear the next cup will be filled with theirs.

POET'S NOTE: About two years after this incident at La Abbaye prison, the old Marquis de Sombreuil and one of his sons were arrested again and executed by the Revolutionists, and Mademoiselle de Sombreuil remained imprisoned until the fall of Robespierre. Her remaining brother died after the battle of Quiberon in 1795, when the murderous Revolutionist general Lazare Hoche massacred several hundred Royalist prisoners who had surrendered.

Original French

«Je me fais vieux, j'ai soixante ans,
J'ai travaillé toute ma vie,
Sans avoir, durant tout ce temps,
Pu satisfaire mon envie.
Je vois bien qu'il n'est ici-bas
De bonheur complet pour personne.
Mon vœu ne s'accomplira pas:
Je n'ai jamais vu Carcassonne!

«On voit la ville de là-haut,
Derrière les montagnes bleues;
Mais, pour y parvenir, il faut,
Il faut faire cinq grandes lieues;
En faire autant pour revenir!
Ah! si la vendange était bonne!
Le raisin ne veut pas jaunir:
Je ne verrai pas Carcassonne!

«On dit qu'on y voit tous les jours,
Ni plus ni moins que les dimanches,
Des gens s'en aller sur le cours,
En habits neufs, en robes blanches.
On dit qu'on y voit des châteaux
Grands comme ceux de Babylone,
Un évêque et deux généraux!
Je ne connais pas Carcassonne!

Carcassonne

by Gustave Nadaud (1820-1893)
translated by Joshua C. Frank

“At sixty years, I’m getting old,
And I’ve been working all my days
Not being able to behold
Fulfillment of my wishing gaze.
I see that life on earth is filled
With perfect happiness for none.
My wish, it will go unfulfilled:
I’ve never been to Carcassonne!

“They see the town from up on high,
Behind the range of mountains blue;
But, to arrive there by and by,
Some five great leagues I’ll have to do;
And do as much just to come back!
Ah! Had the grapes in plenty grown!
They all that yellow ripeness lack:
I never will see Carcassonne!

“I hear they see each day out there,
No more or less than Sunday’s sight,
The people strolling in the square
In brand-new suits and dresses white.
I hear they see the castle hulls
As big as those of Babylon,
A bishop and two generals!
I see I don’t know Carcassonne!

«Le vicaire a cent fois raison:
C'est des imprudents que nous sommes.
Il disait dans son oraison
Que l'ambition perd les hommes.
Si je pouvais trouver pourtant
Deux jours sur la fin de l'automne...
Mon Dieu! que je mourrais content
Après avoir vu Carcassonne!

«Mon Dieu! mon Dieu! pardonnez-moi
Si ma prière vous offense;
On voit toujours plus haut que soi,
En vieillesse comme en enfance.
Ma femme, avec mon fils Aignan,
A voyagé jusqu'à Narbonne;
Mon filleul a vu Perpignan,
Et je n'ai pas vu Carcassonne!»

Ainsi chantait, près de Limoux,
Un paysan courbé par l'âge.
Je lui dis: «Ami, levez-vous;
Nous allons faire le voyage.»
Nous partîmes le lendemain;
Mais (que le bon Dieu lui pardonne!)
Il mourut à moitié chemin:
Il n'a jamais vu Carcassonne!

“The vicar’s right, a hundred times:
Foolhardiness is our condition.
Ambition leads a man to crimes
That lead him someday to perdition.
If I could find for an event
Two days around when autumn’s flown...
My God! How I could die content
Right after seeing Carcassonne!

“My God! My God! Forgive me, Lord,
If this my prayer incites Your rage;
Man always grasps and tries to hoard,
Both in his childhood and old age.
My wife, ’long with my son Aignan,
Has traveled right up to Narbonne;
My godson’s been to Perpignan,
And I’ve not been to Carcassonne!”

So sang a man right near Limoux,
A country farmer bent with age.
I said to him, “Friend, why don’t you
Come travel with me, my good sage?”
We left together the next day,
But (may the Lord forgive His own!)
He died, poor man, en route halfway:
He never got to Carcassonne!

TRANSLATOR’S NOTE: Carcassonne (CAR-kuh-SONE) is a town in the south of France, as are Narbonne (nar-BONE), Perpignan (PAIR-pee-NYAHN), and Limoux (lee-MOO). Aignan (ay-NYAHN) is a French man’s name. All pronunciations given are English approximations of the French pronunciations for ease of reading in English. A great league is a pre-metric French unit of measure; the actual distance between Limoux and Carcassonne is about 13 miles (21 km) as the crow flies and 15 miles (25 km) by road. The other two places mentioned are even farther from Limoux.

Byron Swims the Hellespont

On May 9, 1810, Lord Byron swam across the Hellespont from Sestos to Abydos to duplicate the legendary back-and-forth trips made by the mythical Leander on visits to his lover Hero. This was a distance of about one nautical mile, in very cold water with a dangerously strong current. Despite warnings not to try it, both from local residents and from the British consul, Byron completed the hazardous swim in about an hour. Talk about a poet with a real pair of balls!

by Joseph S. Salemi

What else to do but try it? Just a whim
To be a new Leander, and like him
Brave the cold strait that kept two loves apart,
And show, through daring, how a young man's heart
Is equal in real life to mythic story.
Could I not garner for myself the glory
A long-dead swimmer earned by being drowned?
Lust drove his limbs, and yet Leander's crowned
With honor, just as if he fell in battle.
Shall I not also win a prize: the prattle
Of ladies back in England who will squeal
To hear of this adventure? And they'll feel
The pangs of dreamy passion for a chap
Who's handsome, lithe, and saucy. And mayhap
They'll swoon when greeted by my rakish smile.
I'll tell them how I swam the stormy mile
Twixt Europe's shore and Asia's rock-strewn strand
Not resting for a moment, till the land
Came into view, and how the breakers' roar
Told me that I was coming close to shore.

I hardly think I'd try the thing again—
It took one hour but it felt like ten.
The water was as cold as German hock

Poured over chipped ice, and the fleshly shock
Set me a-shiver. I paid that no mind,
For if I had, I should have been resigned
To death within ten minutes. I just stroked
The waves in endless motion, as I stoked
My brain with thoughts of *Forward! Move ahead!*
If you so much as hesitate, you're dead!
And like a soldier, marching to face guns,
Who knows that if he loses heart and runs
Disgrace and death are bound to be his fate,
I clenched my teeth and kept my body straight.
All I did was swim and keep my aim
In one direction, holding to the same
With dogged perseverance. That was all
I had to cling to. Otherwise I'd fall
Into a lethal stupor and sink under.
Such weakness would have been a costly blunder.

And so I did it, and it brought me fame.
The name of Byron blazes with a flame
Unheard of since the days when poets fought
In combat, or took journeys where they sought
Adventure, fortune, plunder, or romance,
And faced men with the gallant, hardy stance
Of independent, true virility—
The kind that does not bend a servile knee
To beg small favors from a fopling master,
Or falls to pieces at some trite disaster.
Masculine, muscled poets are the types
That women love, for such men have the tripe
To seize the moment, make a sudden lurch,
And not be cowed by ministers in church
Who plead for caution and "all due decorum."
I loathe those geldings. May the devil store 'em
Deep in some dungeon in the pit of hell.
We don't need poets with the flouncy smell
Of nancy-boys tricked out like eunuch slaves—
Such worms won't swim the Hellespontine waves.



Photos provided by the poet.

1914 Sierra Honeymoon

by James A. Tweedie

A picture's worth a thousand words, they say;
A rock at Glacier Point, Yosemite.
Folks aren't allowed to stand on it today
A rule that seems like common sense to me.

Yet, there they are, my father's Mom and Dad,
Three thousand feet above the valley floor;
Together, risking everything they had;
A memory of life and love and more.

A nineteen-fourteen honeymoon where they
Climbed High Sierra peaks and camped and fished—
There were no limits then, back in the day—
When they could hike to any place they wished.

I only knew them when they both were old.
The pictures show them young, in love, and free.
And though they died with stories left untold,
Through pictures they still whisper tales to me.

Rendering Ruins

by Leland James

A barn abandoned, left to drift alone,
wind torn and breached upon the reef of time;
fields, now dust, where summer wheat was sown,
the wagons heaped with grain stood long in line

to fill the grange of this once mighty ship,
now but a shadow, listing, ghostly gray.
Raw winds and pelts of rain how cruelly whip
the wounded roof and soak the rotted hay

—the roof, an April green in days before,
a farmer's name upon it stitched in white.
This ark of kittens, bawling calves, no more.
A rat gnaws on a crib, the final rite.

Yet on this easel, raised by bardic hand,
forgotten barns, *forgotten not*, still stand.

Covid on a Clear Day

by Laurie Holding

One day I window watched for things to write;
the next day I was lost, and underneath
the spell of fever, hot, with skin stretched tight,
I slept curled up with clenched and grinding teeth.
Then came the dreams of elevator shafts
that moved from side to side, not up and down,
and misplaced babies, loosed on Huck Finn rafts.
The nightmares drenched me, but, before I drowned,
when those two weeks had passed, I stood and walked
back to my window, weak, with blurry mind
to peek outside and find myself quite shocked
that all the world was managing just fine.
My neighbors' lawns and lives seemed much the same
as last I sat behind this window frame.



Time... by Victor Mordasov, oil on canvas, 25 x 22 in.
(Victormordasov.com)

Media

by Norma Pain

You told us lies, ignored our cries.
Your platforms you abused.
You cancelled truth; you damaged youth,
And we are not amused.

You took big bites from human rights,
Dissenting voices choked.
With their decree Docs must agree,
Or licenses revoked.

But you can't hide the great divide,
The world is waking up.
They see beyond the muddied pond,
The overworked tin cup.

With little fuss it's over, thus...
Main media is dead to us.

Ottawa Ho!

a poem for the Canadian truckers' convoy

by Jack DesBois

In the days of yore, it is written,
All the dreamers would dream of the sea.
 But the sailor's way
 Has become passé—
It's the trucker's life for me!

How I long for the open highway!
How I yearn to be boundless and free!
 Rising up with the dawn—
 Turn the radio on—
It's the trucker's life for me!

In my sleeper cab parked on the roadside,
I'd be cozy as cozy can be,
 With the freeway's soft sweep
 Lulling me into sleep—
It's the trucker's life for me!

Oh, the solitude, how it is calling!
All those hours with no company
 But the red and white lights
 Gleaming into the nights—
Oh, the trucker's life for me!

And if ever my nation is captured
By the pirates of bold tyranny,
 I'd be there with my truck,
 To help get it unstuck,
For the trucker's life's for me!

Now, considering the fact that I suffer
From a bad, diesel-fume allergy,
 It might logically seem
 I should table this dream
Of a trucker's life for me...

And I'd likely do well to remember
My slight problem with narcolepsy—
 And my failure to best
 That confounded road test—
Is the trucker's life really for me?

Well, perhaps I am better off sitting
At my hearth with a hot mug of tea,
 Sipping "health" to the men
 Doing all that they can
With their trucks to defend Liberty.

And a special salute to the truckers
Of the land of the fair maple tree:
 Your persistence and pluck
 Make me itch for a truck—
It's the trucker's life for me!

La Bandera

A Poem Commemorating January 6th and Ashli Babbitt

*“[The rattlesnake] never begins an attack, nor, when
once engaged, ever surrenders” —Benjamin Franklin*

by Monika Cooper

It was the feast of the Epiphany.
The mall was full, the air alive with flags
And musical with counter-revolution.
We saw the snake, never the first to strike,

The fir tree, firm as praying hands’ appeal
To heaven. Banners red and white and blue
With rows of stars, flexing our chieftain’s name.
Wind rolled them out like notes from trumpet’s throats.

And *Nor when once engaged...* Those stars and shades
She fought for once now wrapped her like a cloak,
Flung on her shoulders in a hero’s taunt.
Who is she, like an army in array?

The smoke of satan took her from our sight.
The gun recoiled to the coward’s shame.
Her spirit, with Old Glory, kept on coming.
March on, my soul, with might. And say her name.

Playing with Matches

“We don’t seek conflict with Russia but we are ready.”
—Antony Blinken, March 4, 2022

by Aiden Casey

We don’t seek conflict with Russia
but we are ready, make no mistake.
The finger that pushes the button
will not tremble, the hand will not shake.

When pillars of fire crown the silos
and tridents breach the blue depths,
we are ready with radio silence
and blackouts and camouflage nets.

At undisclosed sites, we are ready
with body bags, hardtack and guns.
We are ready for the flash and the fireball
that will glow like a thousand suns.

We are ready with iodine tablets
and letters of last resort,
with sudoku, toilet roll, sanctions
and the Int. Criminal Court.

Let none doubt America stands ready
and resolute, as in God we trust,
ready to be charred and irradiated
to a pittance of cinders and dust.



The statue of Queen Elizabeth II by Ethan Doyle White, sculpture, 2020, Elizabeth Gardens, Gravesend, Kent. Distributed under a CC BY-SA 4.0 license ([Creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)).

For My Queen

Queen Elizabeth Alexandra Mary Windsor
April 21, 1926 – September 8, 2022

by Susan Jarvis Bryant

My symbol of nobility, stability and grace,
Who reigned yet never ruled—she was my constant caring face
On TV screen, on stamps, in scenes of history's changing view.
She slipped away this solemn day—her time to bid adieu.

The only monarch I have loved, the only queen I've known
(This stalwart soul my heart embraced as family of my own)
Has left the throne for greater realms beyond the fuss and fray.
She's left me with a wealth of wondrous memories at play.

So on this day, I'd like to say—dear Lilibet, goodbye.
My one and only gracious Queen, please hear my grateful cry—
You shone with poise and dignity and honour and respect
In times when truth had lost its way and hope was all but wrecked...

By those who never saw the light in eyes that blazed as bright
As anthems sung in notes that rose like Windsor swans in flight.

Yet Another Exhibition Opening

*“Art is the pleasure of a spirit that enters nature
and discovers that it too has a soul.”*

—Auguste Rodin

by Shaun C. Duncan

Although this bourgeois slum is flush with cash,
No decent man could ever make the rent;
So Thursday nights the galleries present
The latest styles in bland subversive trash.

Here shameless exhibitionists parade
Their philosophical banalities
To twits with ersatz personalities,
In vain and desperate hopes of getting laid.

They foul the walls with artless effluence,
A crass assault on beauty, wit and taste
Of worth to none but those with wealth to waste
On dumb, grotesque displays of affluence.

And over this pathetic scene presides
A priestly caste of po-faced propagandists,
Drug-money launderers, and smug misandrists,
Applauding as our culture suicides.

Whilst quaffing down my third or fourth free drink
I wonder what Auguste Rodin would think.

After Observing the Working Methods of a Very Important Artist

by Shaun C. Duncan

The aging fool stands deep in dirty water,
Cradling the carcass of a native fowl
To his bare chest like a tired, suckling daughter.
He wears cheap sanctimony like a cowl.
With eyes closed tight in solemn meditation,
He draws a breath in glib anticipation
Then, with a sudden, violent exhalation,
He smears the bird in muddy desecration
Across the paper spread along the bank.
This feckless skid-mark later comes to float
Upon a wall in some vast gallery,
Now worth ten times the monthly salary
Of the attendant in her borrowed coat
Who wonders if it's all a cruel prank.

No Extra Lives

by Joshua C. Frank

While all his friends were learning skills
To gain them wives or pay their bills,
John fought with monsters on a screen,
Got knighted by a game world's queen,
Amassing troves of digi-treasure
That bought eight bits of gaming pleasure.

But as the habit lasted longer,
John's dungeon shackles grew much stronger.
His friends moved on and all gained wives
While he sat gaining extra lives—
One-upped by men just half his age
Who'd put in time and earned life's wage.

One day, much older, John awoke
And felt his electronic yoke:
No friends, no wife, and children none,
His life still stalled at World 1-1.
No princess wishes to be saved
By a gaming hero thus enslaved.

John's game-themed room now seemed a waste,
An emblem of his time misplaced.
No dragon's hoard of jewels and gold
Could buy back time and youth he'd sold
For shiny bits of program code—
He wept beside perdition's road.

But, leaving home and breaking free,
He had no guide for strategy.
The social world seemed too complex
To a man who lived in pixel specks,
And so he ran back home to game,
Never quitting, to his shame.

The moral of this tale in rhyme?
Work while you're young, don't waste your time.
Don't put your life goals off till later;
Shoot down your schedule's space-invaders,
Or, like our captured gamer guy,
You'll find your life has passed you by.

EIGHT BITS: Early video games were run on processors that could only run eight bits (binary digits) per data block; this constraint gave rise to their distinctive graphics and sound effects.

EXTRA LIVES: additional chances to play, gained by obtaining certain items or otherwise playing well; also known as "1-ups," hence the next line.

WORLD 1-1: the first obstacle course in the first themed section of a finite video game using a particular coordinate system.

STRATEGY GUIDE: a step-by-step manual detailing solutions to a particular video game.

The Tech Addict's Lament

by Joshua C. Frank

As I take one more hit of electronic cocaine,
I snort a fresh shot of noise into my brain
And feel the cacophony's endless refrain
Charging at me like a runaway train.

I collapse on the floor, and I think, "What a drain!
I'd love to walk out, and I'd love to abstain,
But the slowness of real-space seems flat and mundane."
So, I'm tied to the tech with a thick iron chain.

An American Tragedy

by Phil S. Rogers

In his mind the purple walrus
mutated to a bat,
its unstable form evolving
till it became a cat.

“Old cat,” said he, “you frown at me,
it seems you are annoyed.”

“I am your mind,” the cat replied,
“it’s I, you have destroyed.”

“This is not right, you cannot speak,”
the man revealed a scowl.

“Like it or not, I am your mind,”
the cat began to growl.

“Magnificent as I once was,
my task is now complete.
I suffered much from your abuse
now fate you cannot cheat.”

“I fail to understand,” said he,
“the riddles which you speak.
So many worlds are known to me,
it’s others who are weak.
The drugs have opened every door
that there could ever be.”

“Behind those doors,” the cat rejoined,
“there’s no reality.”

“Where are you cat? My vision fails,
my sight goes dark as coal.”

“Your end is near,” replied the cat
“It’s time to pay the toll.
You have destroyed your greatest gift,
your musings now are past.”

The man’s mouth opened nigh an inch,
before he breathed his last.

Your Agony Is Mine

What Jesus Might Say to a Teenager
Who Maliciously Cuts Herself

by Jeff Kemper

I bore your healing lashes on my back
To rescue you from your condemning hands.
Dear child, do you believe you can attack
Your agony by etching your own bands?
Your agony is mine and not your own.
Do not give in to alien demands;
Do not deface my image or my throne
And force you to a heartless *cul de sac*.

So I'll cut to the quick: I, Jesus, wept
When they told me that Lazarus had died,
And why did I say he had only slept
Yet prior to the miracle, I cried?
And no one understood. I cried for them;
I cry for you. I'm sitting by your side
To dull the edge of desolate mayhem,
And further chiseled wounds to intercept.

They knew not who I was. I ask: Do you?
I slashed the grief wherein they were detained
To show them I embody what is true:
Their agony was mine! They ascertained
When I was through, that I had borne their grief
They knew not how. The torture-stake remained,
To cut my flesh, not yours. For your relief
I died: my blood, not yours, poured out for you.

Forego the *cul de sac* and face the pain
And leave my image lovely and uncut.
Have done with vain illusions inhumane;
I own your pain, your horror I'll rebut.

Hand me your weapons; break your status quo;
And now, dear child, etch not one novel rut.
I rescued you before your birth, you know,
I bore your gashes, terror, and disdain.

Alone Together

by Joshua C. Frank

Narcissus, in the days of old,
Fell in love with his reflection.
He knew none greater to behold
And starved while staring at “perfection.”
Now we’re enamored with our phones
Reflecting worlds of our own minds.
We sit and stare, as still as stones,
Bound by the modern tie that blinds.

At beaches, churches, concert halls,
Campgrounds, parks, and county fair,
We shut ourselves in online walls
As at our phones we stop and stare,
Side by side with closest friends.
We shun and snub each other thus,
And our relationship descends
To that of strangers on a bus.

Groomers

by Susan Jarvis Bryant

The words the school kids speak are not their own—
Fiends mold the untrained brain till every thought
Is hostage to their noxious sexual drone.
Their toxic tongues are rife with hype that's wrought
To prey on pliant minds and sully souls—
To torture and contort truth to the core.
These grotesques push their grim and ghoulish goals
By pumping tender hearts with gender lore.
Their sick and wicked myth, it sings of joy
And wonderment that swapping sex will bring
To every transformed girl and transformed boy.
This saccharine patter hides a bitter sting...
While sugar coating chemical castration
These monsters never mention mutilation.

Pick Your Pronoun

a pantoum

by Susan Jarvis Bryant

I will not buy the lie we're being sold.
I will not play the pick-your-pronoun game.
I've seen the twisted trickery unfold.
I know the con behind the kindness claim.

I will not play the pick-your-pronoun game.
No clueless child should make a reckless choice.
I know the con behind the kindness claim—
A scheme that spurs the devil to rejoice.

No clueless child should make a reckless choice.
Lies lead to drug-and-scalpel vows of joy—
A scheme that spurs the devil to rejoice
In mutilation of a girl or boy.

Lies lead to drug-and-scalpel vows of joy.
No way will I condone this bogus care.
The mutilation of a girl or boy
All starts with pick your pronoun—Satan's snare...

No way will I condone this bogus care.
I've seen the twisted trickery unfold.
It starts with pick your pronoun—Satan's snare.
I will not buy the lie we're being sold.

Genderosity

*A law providing all gender-affirming health care services
at California taxpayer expense was signed by the
governor on September 29, 2022, and will go into effect
on January 1, 2023. It is intended especially to serve
underage non-residents of the state.*

by Margaret Coats

Free drugs of several kinds block puberty;
The Golden State voids liability
For anyone in perpetuity.

Free hormones are prescribed by telephone
And mailed to children young or grown or lone;
By law, all information's kept unknown.

Free travel, lodging, surgery supplied
For trafficked kids and pimps unsatisfied
With situations anywhere worldwide.

Practitioners may not cooperate
With law enforcement in or out of state;
The gold in California offers great

Prospective gain for predators and panders,
A paradise for global debauchees,
And shelter for too many crimes to rhyme.

A Villanelle for Robert Hoogland

Hoogland was imprisoned for calling his daughter female

by Joshua C. Frank

Their mouths are gagged, their hands are bound;
Their children taken by the state,
These parents have no legal ground.

While children run and play around
The lip of Hell's wide, yawning gate,
Their mouths are gagged, their hands are bound.

If they should ever make a sound,
They'll age in jail for crimes of hate;
These parents have no legal ground.

Their efforts will be quickly drowned
As red tape seals their children's fate.
Their mouths are gagged, their hands are bound.

Their children seized, locked in the pound,
Can't help them now, for it's too late,
These parents have no legal ground.

Must we raise our kids unsound
And watch them eat the devil's bait?
Our mouths are gagged, our hands are bound;
We parents have no legal ground.

I'm Not Too Keen on China Nowadays

by Cheryl Corey

I'm not too keen on China nowadays:
The moves they've made against Taiwan of late;
The way they treat their citizens, negate
Their freedoms, torture, torment, subjugate;

And heaven help the soul who kneels and prays!
The tactics used are such that all are cowed,
As fear of retribution casts its cloud,
Since Xi Jinping's the only god allowed.

I'm more a fan of China's olden days
Of tea and silks, of Chinese brush and ink,
And how the old philosophers made you think;
But now the CCP is on the brink

Of making war—their lust for power obscene.
Suffice to say that no, I'm not too keen.

Amends to the Innocent

by Brian Yapko

Dear Falun Gong, I owe you my amends.
I heard but would not listen to the sighs
Of battered souls I should have known as friends.
An Evil which I failed to recognize
I fed with foolishness. My spirit bends
To you, to never more ignore your cries.

I squandered gold. My clothes, my lamps, each tool,
And picture frame and every useful thing
I bought from tyrants. Stingy like a fool
I only thought of dollars. Everything
I purchased gave them leave to be more cruel;
For “Made in China” hides a vicious sting.

I warped my conscience. I did not pay heed
Or try to help although I heard you moan
In grief and anguish from each wretched deed
Of torture by cruel sadists. Vein and bone
Were bled and broken, genocide decreed
By soulless, faithless thugs with hearts of stone.

I traveled to the Middle Kingdom twice
For entertainment, not for education.
I sipped their tea. I ate their duck and rice
And all the while ignored their desecration
Of human souls. I paid a Judas price
And helped support a persecuting nation.

I closed my heart to you. I gave no care
For Falun Gong across a distant ocean
Defaced, defamed within a dragon’s lair.
Of persecuted souls I had no notion.
My callow selfishness is now laid bare
As I bear witness to your brave devotion.

The future summons me. I failed before
To stand for right, a spoiled moral sieve.
But there are many battles yet in store
And many friends who yet may get to live.
My pen and heart are primed to fight this war.
They're yours if you'll accept them. And forgive.



Brightness of Night by Xiaoping Chen, 2011, oil on canvas, 30 x 40 in.
Description: On this dark night, a Falun Gong mother and her child
post flyers exposing the communist regime's persecution.
(Shenyunshop.com)

A Villanelle for Falun Gong

by Bethany Mootsey

The world dismisses simple right and wrong.
Like newsprint, black and white are obsolete.
Still, evil surges, sinister and strong.

“The truth is what you feel,” croons every song.
Consumers catch its pitch and press “repeat.”
The world dismisses simple right and wrong.

Just take a look at China’s Falun Gong.
Its tenets hold no danger to defeat.
Still, evil surges, sinister and strong.

They place practitioners in cells, prolong
Their pain, and while their parts are minced like meat,
The world dismisses simple right and wrong.

A practice that once drew an eager throng
Has dwindled due to forcible retreat.
Still, evil surges, sinister and strong.

When faced with false notes, will you sing along,
Or will you scream and stand up in your seat?
The world dismisses simple right and wrong.
Still, evil surges, sinister and strong.

Honor's Song

by Susan Jarvis Bryant

I smell the Dragon smolder on the breeze.
I hear its talons scraping at the door.
I feel a gnawing shiver of unease
Torment my bones with all that I abhor.

I know the Dragon steals the very breath
Of those who will not melt within its roar.
I know it feasts on fruitful spoils of death—
Brave blazing hearts snatched by its razor claw.

The peaceful voice of reason told me so.
The stoic words of truth shone crystal light.
I know the torture heroes undergo—
I'm sickened by their devastating plight.

I feel the Dragon skulking just beneath
The fabric of our torn and ragged world.
I see its scaly form and jagged teeth—
I know its wings are wicked and unfurled.

Let's draw upon the strength of Falun Gong
To beat the beast that silenced honor's song.

Shanghai's Robo Dogs

by Maura H. Harrison

With quick unnatural steps, and side to side
Focusing glances, robo dogs preside
And prowl the streets. They wear their growls in little
Speakers around their necks, their barking spittle
A blare of words: Go home, home now, now go.
They click, record, and scurry to and fro
On double-jointed limbs, metallic bones.
They're quickly joined by dark and hovering drones
That troll the high-rise skies and reprimand
The nighttime cries for food. The drones demand
"Control your soul's desire for freedom! Do
Not open windows! Do not sing!" Who knew
That hunger's aria was humming just
Outside so many balconies, a gust
Of air that makes the starved bird scream, or sing,
As soon as darkness hides the face and wing.

Shhh...

by Susan Jarvis Bryant

Shanghai trembles at the edge of hell
As horror wafts and weaves its way through streets.
The moon melts in the flare of terror's yell—
Hot howls of raw despair till morning greets
Locked up souls locked down for safety's sake
As Satan prowls for hearts he burns to break.

He gulps the tears the hopeless start to weep
As faith gives way to panic's rise and rush.
He feasts on fear before the last-straw leap
From ledges to a fatal concrete crush.
The dreams that danced in cherry blossom air
Are caged then dashed because the experts care.

Cruel ghouls amass to grab and bludgeon pets.
The ruthless rip stunned children from warm homes.
Those imposing rules have no regrets—
They'll tread the wicked track the devil roams,
While we sit back in muzzled, mute compliance
Embracing heartless, soulless, godless "science."

Science or “*The Science*”?

“‘The Science’ and science are opposites.”

—Richard Lindzen

by Mike Bryant

So you believe “*The Science*”? That is odd.
Science cannot be about compliance.
Scientists are skeptics. They’re not yes men.
Belief’s more often used to just oppress men.
Reserve belief for the Almighty God.
Skepticism doesn’t mean defiance.
Science doesn’t punish a transgression.
“*The Science*” always punishes a question.
“*The Science*” is no more than a façade.
Science is a strict anti-alliance
With any entities that push oppression.
All fresh expression lessens prepossession.

Parallel Man

by Roy E. Peterson

As I was going to the fair,
I met a man with silver hair.
The more I looked how could it be?
He looked an awful lot like me,
‘Cept furrowed brow and walking cane.
Perhaps my thoughts were just insane.
Perhaps it was a twist of fate.
He started to communicate.

He said something I thought perverse:
“I’m from another universe.”
Then something I remember well:
“My universe is Parallel.”
Since we were walking to the fair,
I did not want to stop and stare.
I thought with growing hesitation
A figment of imagination

Was walking to the fair with me—
Just move along and let him be.
I realized that we were stuck
Together by some stroke of luck.
And like a shadow on the trail
I tried to lose to no avail.
If I walked faster, so did he.
I guess he wanted company.

I told the man from Parallel,
“I hope that you are doing well.”
His voice was deep; his words were pointed—
“I am the one who was anointed.”
I listened to the words he said:
“I am the conscience in your head.
Although you think it quite absurd,
You need to listen to each word.

“I have some things to say to you.
I parallel the things you do.
You still are young and I am old.
Trust in the truth that you’ve been told.
Our paths will always intertwine,
Since we are one of the same vine.
The paths you choose will change me too.
Be careful of the things you do.

“Now go and have fun at the fair,”
Said the man with silver hair.
“Enjoy the rides, enjoy the sun.
Enjoy your friends and have some fun.
Remember that we had a talk
And by your side I’ll always walk.”

Swimming with Dreams and Memory

by Pippa Kay

My childhood dreams and memories remain
through adulthood and old age. My doll speaks.
My toy car surfs that tidal wave, again.
I'm still afraid of darkness, and the creaks
and groans of our sleeping house at night.
My mother, long-dead, beckons from a crest.
She tells me not to cry. Learn wrong from right.
I must believe my mother, who knows best.

These dreams are unsinkable. They float.
They drift away. Sometimes I catch a wish
as it slips by, flimsy like a paper boat,
big as a whale but slippery as a fish.

When I make my bed these visions dive deep,
Forgotten in daylight, remembered in sleep.

Writing a Poem

by Sally Cook

Our planet moves, and so do we,
By forces that we cannot see.
Rhyme, meter always seem to track
The rhythm of the planet. Lack
Of sense or sensibility
Inhibits our ability
To see. In every fervent verse—
Loquacious, moderate, or terse—
Rhyme glues meter where it should
Be glued. The best of poets could
Unleash spasmodic movement when
Not in their normal state, but then
As darkness turns again to day
They speak, to keep the dark away.



Shakespeare by Gary Lee Price, sculpture, 2003, bronze, 53 in. high x 74 in. wide x 42 in. deep. (Garyleeprice.com)

Serious Poetry

by James A. Tweedie

Serious poetry, somber and grim;
Dashing, descriptive, with narrative flair.
 Formal and versified;
 Rhythmic and dignified;
Romance and rhetoric; ribald and prim.
Taking you places while curled in your chair.

Serious poetry, rhyming each line.
Sonnets, rondeaus, villanelles, triolets.
 Explosive hand-grenades;
 Sharp-witted razor blades.
Dangerous, edgy, designed to malign;
Rapturous beauty, inspiring praise.

Serious poetry, heaven and hell,
Painted with strokes of a feather-nibbed pen.
 Shakespeare and Tennyson,
 Dante and Dickinson,
Laugh-out-loud funny or tearful farewell
So good you can't wait to read them again.

Ode to Poets of the Past

by Joe Kidd

I do agree with the sights
that I have seen:
the warm and comfortable steps
where love has been

and with the sounds of truth
that I have heard—
the whisper and the song
between the word.

A now familiar species
comes to bear
a message from an age
beyond this air

and I, tonight
do celebrate the past,
a poet in the light
of beauty cast

alive and free
above the crimson pain—
a spirit that must live
and live again.

While Pondering Alexander Pope's 'Ode to Solitude'

by Lucia Haase

Grateful am I in solitude
while reading Pope's inspiring ode,
a time for pause—an interlude
in my abode.

I'm whisked into the distant past
that once again becomes all new;
his words, his lines like shadows cast
as poets do.

His quill, my pen—all one the same,
his chosen words re-echoing
as there burns peace within the flame
that I too sing.

Blessed are those who write in rhyme,
a truth all poets knew or know—
those presently or in a time
so long ago.

So here I write to have my say
befriended by a poet's glow
upon my porch this quiet day,
my soul to know.

Original Spanish

Mañana los poetas

Mañana los poetas cantarán en divino
verso que no logramos entonar los de hoy;
nuevas constelaciones darán otro destino
a sus almas inquietas con un nuevo temblor.

Mañana los poetas seguirán su camino
absortos en ignota y extraña floración,
y al oír nuestro canto, con desdén repentino
echarán a los vientos nuestra vieja ilusión.

Y todo será inútil, y todo será en vano;
será el afán de siempre y el idéntico arcano
y la misma tiniebla dentro del corazón.

Y ante la eterna sombra que surge y se retira,
recogerán del polvo la abandonada lira
y cantarán con ella nuestra misma canción.

Tomorrow's Poets

by Enrique González Martínez (1871-1952)
translated by Cheryl Corey

Tomorrow's poets will sing beyond all praise
In verse that's out of tune with present day;
New stars will bring new destinies that raise
A shiver of delight in restless souls.

Tomorrow's poets will tread a path unworn,
Absorbed in ignorance and curious tongues;
And when they hear our song, they'll quickly scorn
And toss our old illusion to the winds.

And all shall be for naught, and all in vain;
But some things never change: the youthful lust,
The mysteries of life, the heartfelt pain.

Before the shades of death that wax and wane,
They'll shake the once-abandoned lyre of dust,
And sing with her our selfsame sad refrain.

Erasing Me

by Sally Cook

As I could not do things that had to be
The practical began dismantling me.
They started with my edges; I could see
Each greyed eraser scrubbing silently.

They kindly asked if I would choose from rare
Possessions, one from each pile jumbled there.
They boxed my fur-lined slippers up with care—
Red pumps, that tapping taradiddled pair.

Some searched to find more stuff; then one fine day
My mohair shaved soft silk just blew away
In plastic bags. There were no words to say.
I took the rump-sprung robe that thought to stay.

My mind lay limp and scoured; I was a mess
Until they scrubbed me clean and clipped each tress.
I did not care for work or diet, dress—
My mouth was hollow, mute. But I digress.

As outline faded into memory,
Those myriad things that wove a life for me,
Like moonlit shadows from a branched-out tree,
Could not be grasped by those erasing me.

Two Poems

by Stephen M. Dickey

I.

Dreams are the backscatter of everything
You jettisoned, forgot, or left behind.
Sleep leaves you in their wake, wearing their ring,
Backpedaling forward, wide-eyed and blind.

II.

The hive-mind web is vying for control:
The pixelariat can bend your will
Better than proletarians, until
Nothing is real except your inner troll.

The Linguist

for M.J. Connolly

by Maxim D. Shrayer

The linguist sees the world
and takes it by the horns,
the linguist loves the word
before the word is born.

The linguist deconstructs
the mystery of sound,
he trusts and yet mistrusts;
he is forever bound.

When worlds fall apart,
when people fail to speak,
the linguist feels a spark.

He knows his sacred place:
by practicing his art
the linguist keeps the peace.

Gloucester in July

by Patricia Rogers Cozier

A thousand silent saints and angels
Hewn from vertex, plane, and angle
Raised by blow of mason's hammer
Raised from stone to watch the faithful

Underneath the sinners stammer
Pray and weep, confess and clamber
The thousand faces, gray, unblinking
Witness judgement's heavy hammer

Saints and angels in the rafters
Shadows of the Everafter
Avatars of holy power
Heralds to the day of Rapture

Climbing skyward up the steeple
Looking earthward over evil
Standing vigil from the towers
Sleepless guards of the Cathedral

Lullaby of New Mexico

by Brian Yapko

Duerme mijo—sleep my weary child
As we drive south upon the interstate.
My side-eye checks on you, my tired you.
My calloused hand caresses your wheat hair.
The radio sings dreams, strumming guitars,
The soulful voices of the mariachis
Who sing about the feathers of the dove
And fragile hope. I hear you softly snore.
We pass Socorro, hours more of nowhere.
Ay, when we reach Las Cruces what will be?
Will they decide that I'm not a good father
Because of who I was and where I've been?

I see the whirling winds and desert dust
Kicked up from White Sands and from Trinity.
We're passed by speeding cars with license plates
From richer states, from California, Texas.
But we are just from here my little one.
We drive through shadowed valleys but my heart
Says do not fear. My son, the sound of your
Soft breath is magic. I should stop the car,
And hug you. Maybe bless you with a kiss
Upon your head, but we have miles to go
To race the sun. They're waiting for us, those
Who'll judge if you and I may stay together.

The mountains cast their shadows—mighty, stark.
To see them makes me tremble for they know
To me you're sacred. No, I must not cry.
The sun shifts gold to orange in a sky
That's streaked with pink and turquoise. Even if
We must keep driving I can whisper still
I love you while you sleep. And I can say
I love you to the sky whose colors glow
With brilliant hues that look just like your soul,

Like miracles which feed my weary faith
Which will not falter; and which make me glad
To live still in this ancient, holy place.

What I Learned from Tolkien

by Brian Yapko

The darkness comes and all seems bleak and wrong,
My calm is rent, right burdens can't be borne
And Evil holds an iron grip so strong
It seems it must prevail. With all hope torn,
The path ahead seems lost in storm and murk.
But then I think of Tolkien and his work.

Specifically, his hobbits come to mind.
I treasure Frodo, who destroys the Ring.
But when defeatist thoughts occur I find
It's Sam whose decency and courage bring
Me solace. More than solace! Inspiration
And healing from these times of degradation.

It's Sam who is consistent, calm and ready
To offer words of comfort. Even through
Exhaustion and despair his sword is steady
And valor in his heart stays strong and true.
Sam speaks of stories—heroes, battles braved,
Of dragons fought, dark quests, a Shire saved.

These tales are sometimes full of so much dread
That we may never want to face the end.
What use are they when our own road ahead
Is no less harsh, when death rounds every bend?
Just this: these timeless stories help us grow
And charge our weary hearts in times of woe!

Strength grows when we tell of courageous men—
The best of who we are and yet could be.
Such stories keep us going even when
The world feels lost and hope is hard to see.
The heroes Tolkien writes are plain and bold
And won't give up or in. These heroes hold

To something—something meaningful and true,
Though overwhelmed by loss of strength and grief.
What Tolkien shares through Sam brings hope anew
And we need never question this belief:
When all seems lost, there's yet some Good in store
For this sad world. And it's worth fighting for.

Apollo in Retirement

by Margaret Coats

Quite early he approached a humble hut,
With saxifrage and canneberge sun-brewed
To melt the stone that galled the shepherd's gut,
And brighten him with warmth of health renewed.
The healer was a handsome older man,
Not much accustomed to go far beyond
Spheres where his brilliance had a dazzling span.

The Marvejols midsummer market dawned
As he unwrapped fresh simples, fragrant wood,
And seedling laurel slips. A lovesick blonde
Asked whether lovage and heartsease were good;
"Why not a touch of eyebright?" he advised,
"The sun beams long today to show how fair
This earth is, and how greatly to be prized."

"Pleasures of which you may be unaware
Derive from mental as from senses' fire,"
He tells a troubadour of ailing flair,
"But sacred sharpness fortifies a lyre.
Try hyssop, cresses, or Parnassus grass;
Stop singing of yourself—my mints perfume
Your minstrelsy, and cure digestive gas."

The village mayor's wife complains of rheum.
"Let rhubarb make your temper sweet and bold!
Your splendor and your husband's should illumine
This region where you rule in rank. Uphold
Its glory, as the ancient sun still shines
Undimmed, with radiance rationally revered."
At twilight he strode home through thickset pines.

Around his lodge a pearly glow appeared,
Brighter than solstice bonfires on the hills.
His sister seldom smiled when others neared;

Tonight her artemisial aura spills
Over his hidden croft of favored plants
For physic, strowing, posies, cookery,
And healthful balance in luxuriance.

Directing random passions' harmony
Remains his aim as woodsman of Entraygues:
The surge toward strife he stills with betony;
Valerian can assuage spasmodic plague,
And music civilizes men at odds.
Hunters and farmers, jubilantly strong
Though merely human, correspond to gods.

He ventures out for midnight rites of song,
Converses with a sanctifying priest,
And gathers wisdom through hours dim and long
About the greatest who became the least.
The lordly bearer of the silver bow
Had blazed with intellect and reason but
He meets a multiverse of more to know.

MARVEJOLS AND ENTRAYGUES: sparsely populated places in the French Massif Central.

Inviting Some Friends to a Birthday Dinner

after Ben Jonson's "Inviting a Friend to Supper"

by Jeremiah Johnson

Tonight, dear friends, you're welcome to observe
Another birthday dinner—and deserve
To know it's mainly an excuse for us
To invite friends, no gifts required, no fuss
Expected, though I will confess, I still
Take joy in marking a new year and will
Provide red wine to warm this winter's day,
With oatmeal porter further to allay,
And though I'm not a cook, I'll play the sous
Chef to my wife. We two will bake for you
A rich lasagna, with which you may pair
A side dish of warm bread or other fare,
As suits your taste. Then, gathered 'round the board,
We'll have a blessing, thanks unto the Lord,
Offered not by, but for, the birthday boy—
As that's tradition on my day of joy.
Depending on the evening's structure we
May have a fire 'round which we can see
(thanks to my brothers' woodcraft, not to mine)
A ring of faces happily recline.
And there will be a reading of some sort,
Perhaps a poem of mine, or Pound's retort,
"The Goodly Fere," Tennyson's "Ulysses,"
A psalm of David's—verses meant to please
By way of thoughtful converse—adding to
These Grahame's Wind in the Willows, with a view
To deepening cam'raderie this night.
Dessert will be a carrot cake, the sight
Of which, made out with candles, will invite
Praise of my lovely wife—necessitate
The singing of the normal birthday ditty.
Then, finally, if time allows, there'll be

Another family tradition, where
We'll make the round and each of you will share
Some way in which the one who's honored here
Has meant something to you in the past year—
No pressure though, good-natured jests allowed
(Myself already blushing, meekly bowed).
And then we'll bring the evening to a close,
The gathering of coats; each muffled nose;
Embraces at the door and wishes for
Safe travel as we see you out the door.



A Cup of Tea by Susan Paterson, 2022, oil on board, 30 x 18 in.
(Susanpaterson.ca)

Meditation

"Say to yourself at break of day: today I shall meet people who are meddling, ungrateful, proud, treacherous, envious, malicious. All this is because they do not know good and evil. But I know what the good is, and what evil is; and I know the offender, for he is my brother—not by flesh or blood, but by having the same mind, the same divine spark.

—Marcus Aurelius, Meditations

by Rachel A. Lott

Say to yourself at break of day:
there is a brotherhood of men.
And is it other than you say?
For they are equal, mean and spleenful,
alike not knowing good or evil.
Each to each has othered them.

But I who know the simple good
and gaze on it, as on the sun,
know this: I cannot turn (nor should)
my face from them, for we are one.
They are my Father's flesh and blood;
they wear my face another way;
they do as I too would have done,
with you, and all, had we been they.

This is the otherhood of all.
Say this, then, at the break of day.

The Drive to Reconcile

by C.B. Anderson

We never wish to eat a bug
Or force an unexpected hug,
But intimacy doesn't come without
A cost, and those who disagree, no doubt,
Are lost. But nonetheless we cannot see
Why we can't love the ones who disagree
With everything that we believe,
Without which we must take our leave.

We'll eat whatever dares approach—
A fly, a beetle, or a roach—
And thank the sovereign powers up above
For letting us express our deepest love:
To watch, to eat, or otherwise engage.
Presumably we've finally come of age,
So why do we remain afraid
Of lessons learned in second grade?

Continuation

by C.B. Anderson

You and I are of two discrepant minds:
We disagree on all that matters—plus,
Our separate brains are not quite sure what kinds
Of things they favor, making four of us.

The four of us engage in conversations
That sound like bickering in closed committee
Meetings where doubtful fates of Sundered Nations
Are hammered into shape. It isn't pretty.

Despite the caterwauling that prevents us
From finding out whose foot best fits which shoe,
Much later in the night we reach consensus
And so adjourn for further peer review.

Worth Disguised

by Christiana Thomas,
High School Poet

The hammer lifts, the anvil rings,
The room with screaming noises brings
A torture, here inflicted.

The bellows pump, the fire smokes,
A prodding chisel pries and pokes.
This trial seems unscripted.

The flames blaze hot, the subject melts,
No pain like this has e'er been felt
In testing, deep afflicted.

The searing kiln, the scorching stone,
Has broken to the inmost bone.
A downfall here depicted.

In silence now, the flames dead cold
Once melted stone
Now precious gold.

Freedom in Forgiveness

a villanelle for Timothy

by Daniel Tuton

When chains of cold resentment in the end
Entangle souls and circle 'round to bind,
There's freedom in forgiveness, my dear friend.

When grievance woos the wounded to offend
And "justice" justified is anger blind,
We're chained in cold resentment in the end.

To slay the loathsome slayer with a pen
You thought would bring you final peace of mind,
But freedom is forgiveness, my dear friend.

On death's ill-fated threshold as you bend
With poison rage, and curse the Judge divine,
You're chained in cold resentment in the end.

But vesper light reveals a path to wend
Where self-reproach's shadow fades in time.
There's freedom in forgiveness, my dear friend.

In hallowed halls of mercy, souls will mend—
Forgiveness which the unforgiving find—
Unchained from cold resentment in the end,
There's freedom in forgiveness, my dear friend.

There Is No God?

by Michael Charles Maibach

“There is no God,”
Some men do say.
This doubt, some voice,
And claim this day.

If God is myth
Who gave us eyes?
Who gave us joy?
Who paints blue skies?

Have they no dog,
Have they no wife,
Have they no child
So full of life?

Awake each morn,
And thankful not?
Not on their knees
For all they’ve got?

How does the sun
Rise in the east?
Look now around—
Life is a feast!

How moves our heart?
Who made our friends?
Who made these hands
For wounds to mend?

There is no God?
Just chance and dust?
Life is in vain?
In naught we trust?

Be still your mind,
Let your heart free,
Let feelings in...
There God will be.



Reflection by Steven J. Levin, 2021, oil on canvas, 12 x 9 in.
(stevenjlevin.com)

“In God We Trust”

by James A. Tweedie

The motto for our nation boldly states, “In God we trust,”
Which is, of course, a matter for each person to decide.
We can’t assume such faith is held by all, nor is it just
To claim it as prerequisite for patriotic pride.

But even so, the words, “In God we trust,” make one thing clear:
That when we put our trust in something else, we will have erred.
For party politics will always let us down, I fear,
Regardless of which side we’re on or promises we’ve heard.

For truth be told it will be neither liberty nor law,
The Constitution, Bill of Rights, nor some new civil war—
Where goodness triumphs at the last by means of tooth and claw—
That lead us to the Promised Land like some new Christmas star.

Though Providence has proven true both time and time again
(Despite our human foolishness) we mustn’t think that we
Who dare presume we’re on God’s side are somehow free from sin;
For even when we do what’s right, it’s God who makes us free.

For by the hand of God are life and liberty endowed
And Presidents and Kings who dare pretend they have the powers
To give or take such things away have blasphemed God and bowed
Before a lie that falsely claims to own that which is ours.

I do believe that God’s at work directing history,
By setting limits to the time-bound power that evil wields.
The phrase, “In God we trust” serves as a hint to help us see
That in the end it will be God to whom that evil yields.

Some trust in horses, others trust in chariots and might,
While others trust themselves, as like to Adam at the Fall.
But as for us: “In God we trust!” For such is meet and right.
For were it not for God we’d have no liberty at all.

So let us stand against all those whose power feigns full sway,
For those who claim to give us “rights” can take those rights away.

The Problem of Good

a Petrarchan sonnet

by Jeffrey Essmann

If there's (the armchair philosopher maintains)
A God (most likely writing in his blog),
Then why's the world in such a dismal fog
Of evil will and endless human pain?
Each day the whole thing just gets more insane
And sad. No god made such a senseless slog.
Our fervent prayer is but a monologue
Still rattling in our prehistoric brain.
The bigger question though to pose by far
Is how without God good exists at all;
What source by which small kindnesses accrete
To train us in a loving repertoire?
Why tend to someone with no wherewithal
Or even help some poor old thing across the street?

El Pescado

by Monika Cooper

They gloat: the age of Pisces, it is over.
They chant to call Aquarius' forces in.
In the deep labyrinths we sought the sign,
The two-stroke fish, walls clammy, glittering.

The old Mass book fell open in my hands:
The prayer for government, prayer for the king,
And there, engraved, the printing of a fish,
A fossil find, pressed thinner than a bloom.

Go, little fish. They spangled the dark pond,
Bright streaming kites, their sky under the bridge,
Over the escalator water-stairs,
Into the kettle of the deeper pool.

If anyone is thirsty. Lift your head.
I think you know the water-bearer's voice.
The bread and seafood pass from hand to hand.
My Lord, my God, are you a fish? I am.

So Close By

by Warren Bonham

At one point I was told that I
Was purposely created by
Some perfect being in the sky
Who watches as I live and die.

If that was true, I wondered why
When perched atop His throne up high
He'd let creation go awry;
I asked Him but got no reply.

I started helpless, so I'll die
But in between, I thought that I
Was one who somehow could defy
My impulse to self-glorify.

If He was perfect, why was I
Impure in ways that horrify
In ways that I could not deny,
I asked again without reply.

I'm humbled now and find that I
Can hear His whispers so close by
And see Him here in my mind's eye
Not miles away and way up high.

So, when it's I that I deny
And Him upon which I rely
I know He hears each tiny sigh;
It breaks His heart each time I cry.

Yes, when it's I I nullify
And Him on high I glorify
I'm cleansed through grace and will not die,
An unearned gift I cannot buy.

Justification

by Russel Winick

He smashed the windows, grabbed the wares,
With rage against society
That made him free of any cares
Or thoughts of impropriety.

He stole until his pockets filled
The chance of apprehension slim.
But near his home was robbed and killed
By someone angry just like him.

Uncontrolled

by Russel Winick

When my behavior needs to change,
But I can't make that be,
Such lack of self-control seems strange,
And I'm ashamed of me.

Sometimes the angst I feel inside
Was planted long ago,
And all success that time's supplied
Can't counteract back flow.

Wisdom

by Russel Winick

When young I dreamed of someday being wise,
And pictured brilliant input holding sway.
But via jolts of life now realize,
There's wisdom also in what you don't say.

Tone of Voice

by Russel Winick

The words may be perfectly reasonable,
A message which needs to be said.
But if the voice tone conveys ire or disgust,
The fruit may be bitter instead.

Do Not Return

*“...forgetting those things which are behind and reaching
forward to those things which are ahead.”*

—Philippians 3:13

by Martin Rizley

Do not return where once you were contented—
It is a trap to seal you in despair;
For time moves on, and grieving hearts tormented
By pangs of loss won't find what once was there.

Do not go back where once you felt lighthearted—
It is a snare, to lock you fast in gloom;
The house lies lorn, the loved ones have departed,
And silence reigns in every empty room.

Don't seek the landscapes or the shining places
That glowed like gold mines; now they're dark with rust,
And in the crowds, you'll see no cherished faces,
For time's a grinder that turns all to dust.

It's good to watch the burning embers glow
As slowly they grow cold and turn to ash,
But if you take them in your arms, you'll know
That only pain comes from an act so rash.

Let memories live in your fondest dreams
To make you smile as on life's path you roam,
But do not swim against time's flowing streams,
Nor seek to make of shades a settled home.

Do not go back where once your heart was happy,
The hearth is bare, the palmy days have flown,
And all your loved ones—Brother, Ma, and Pappy—
Have gone ahead and left you here alone.

Do not remain alone, but go forth boldly;
New life awaits you, if you seize the day!
For winds of cherished yesterdays blow coldly
And cannot warm you, when they fade away.

Look up! Take heart! Fresh vistas full of wonder,
New friends await you on the road ahead.
Don't let grief's vultures tear your life asunder.
Come join the living; leave behind the dead.

Original Spanish

Para entonces

Quiero morir cuando decline el día
en alta mar y con la cara al cielo;
donde parezca un sueño la agonía,
y el alma, un ave que remonta el vuelo.

No escuchar en los últimos instantes,
ya con el cielo y con la mar a solas,
más voces ni plegarias sollozantes
que la majestuoso tumbo de las olas.

Morir cuando la luz triste retira
sus áureas redes de la onda verde,
y ser como ese sol que lento expira;
algo muy luminoso que se pierde.

Morir, y joven: antes que destruya
el tiempo aleve la gentil corona;
cuando la vida dice aún: “soy tuya”,
aunque sepamos bien que nos traiciona.

For Then

by Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera (Mexico, 1859-1895)
translated by Cheryl Corey

O, to die upon the open sea
At sunset, facing heaven, where agony
Is but a dream; and soul, the essence of me,
Is like a bird in flight that's soaring free.

To be already one with sea and sky,
And never hear the mourner's plaintive cry
Or prayerful sob; and if they question—why?
Majestic waves will offer no reply.

To die when the sad, fading light-display
Of haloed nets withdraws from emerald spray;
To be as the sun, which slowly slips away,
Once golden-bright, but lost at end of day;

To die while I'm still young and in my prime,
When all of life's a festive pantomime,
Before destroyed by cold, capricious Time;
Though life betrays, let parting be sublime!

This Side of Eternity

by Anna J. Arredondo

I.

Imagination, you're a two-edged sword,
The universe your oyster, opened wide;
Conceiving all the boon life might afford
In dazzling display: what may be tried,
Perpetual possibilities, outpoured
Before the casual confidence of pride.

Infinity thus beckons, but we err
Who hope to taste more than our finite share.

Ideas, lacking opportunity,
Far from propelling us to reach the stars,
Become a heavy burden on the soul—
How can a mind so vast still mortal be?
A lifetime shrinks to naught, and leaves but scars
From every hopeless dream and unmet goal.

II.

The moments swiftly filter through our fingers,
A lifetime of accumulating sands;
Despite the grip of vainly grasping hands,
They flee for good—there's not one moment lingers.
Coming to terms with each new failing strategy,
We strive to keep them, piling them in towers,
Make monuments of all the days and hours,
Only to witness more unyielding tragedy:
That time's relentless, restless turning tides
Demolish these memorials we've molded,
And ragged ribbons of a life unfolded

Adorn our empty, echoing insides.
Impossible, this dream of holding on:
The present's now; we blink, and it is gone.

III.

My soul clings to the dust that constitutes
The substance of its temporal abode—
Its shelter and its mode of transportation—
As leaf and stem cling fiercely to their roots,
From which life's nutrients have ever flowed,
And whose firm grip has kept them from migration.

With greatest pains I must preserve this crust,
For something infinite dwells in the dust.

Unlike the plants of earth, and lowly brutes,
I am comprised of more than eye can see.
In realms unknown I send up tender shoots;
With thought unbound I grow tremendously;
Ideas blossom into sweetest fruits,
Through time and into bright eternity.

Tongues as of Fire

by Phillip Whidden

If men desire to find belief, to sing
It out through throats works best to make the soul
Embrace it. 'This will make the sought faith zing
Behind their hearts and manliness's whole.
'The faith will throb straight through the tenor throats,
'The baritones' and basses' tongues, and play
Up in the tear ducts through the holy notes,
'The notes made sacred by the ricochet
Of music through the body and the brain.
'The holiness will well up from the lungs
And wash, as in a holy rite, each stain
Of unbelief away with concord's tongues.
'The counter tenors chime in, too, above
Conviction like a Pentecostal dove.



My Version of Hope by Esther Huser, 2022, oil on dibond, 39 x 59 in.
(Estherhuser.com)

“Where Ever-present Joy Knows Naught of Time”

—Dante, *Paradiso*, Canto X, D.L. Sayers translation

a rondeau redouble

by Cynthia Erlandson

Where ever-present joy knows naught of time,
The music of infinity is sung
In full-toned harmony and richest rhyme,
In higher speech than any earthly tongue.

Outside the bounds of days or hours, it's sung;
No years are measured as its deep-toned chime
Resounds with overtones, and bells are rung
Where ever-present joy knows naught of time.

Below the bells, cathedral anthems climb
To vaulted ceilings, where the voices flung
By choristers accord with the sublime,
True music of infinity that's sung

Above the arch of sky. No mortal lung
Can give full voice to it. Earth's paradigm
Must serve for now, however much we long
For full-toned harmony and richest rhyme.

Celestial choirs' eternal hymns proclaim
A ceaseless circling psalm—a perfect song
Where Evensong and Matins are the same,
In higher speech than any earthly tongue.

There, night has disappeared, and now among
The music which no longer measures time—
Where past and future, words and notes, have long
Ago become eternal, perfect rhyme—
Is ever-present joy.

Hanging Harps

“As for our harps, we hanged them up upon the trees
that are therein.... How shall we sing the Lord’s song
in a strange land?”

—Psalm 137: 2, 4, Coverdale

by Cynthia Erlandson

Our harps are tangled, hanging on the trees
Of Babylon. Our hopes are strangled, dangling
From sapless branches scorched in desert breeze
That scorns our hymns; its currents strum the strings
Whose groans are haunting us from where they’re hanging,
Mangling the songs we thought our memories
Would sing forever—melodies that ring
Inside our minds. This wind’s harsh howls wring
The heart from Zion’s charming harmonies,
Distort glad dances into mournful keys
Alien to us; these morbid chords
Turn dancing into mourning. Heartache parches
The spirit, till the mind forgets the words.
How can we sing, while our captors wrench such dirges
From long-lived festive rites? Our vocal cords
Are seared by sorrow; these once-graceful harps
Can vibrate only with our miseries
While hanging in this foreign air that warps
Their wood where they are tangled in the trees.



Taking Flight by Anna Rose Bain, 2022, oil on linen, 30 x 24 in.
(Artworkbyannarose.com)

A Holy Picnic

by Sally Cook

A small child had a vision in the light
Of day, while sitting square upon the rug.
It seemed as if she rose to a great height,
And there, her senses gave a mighty tug
As if to warn her there was more to come.
And so there was. Two men, both clothed in white
Addressed her spirit, talked and laughed at some
Occurrences that waited out of sight
In future time. Her mother saw her stare,
Her silence, shook her, cried out *Where are you?*
You look as if you're floating in mid-air!
Except for what it seemed, there in the dew
And wide expanse of Heaven, fear seemed odd
When she was only picnicking with God.

A Broadside

by Peter Lillios

Drawn up before us, proud and sure,
Costumed in their haute couture,
And sporting all the best coiffures,
With colours purple and azure,

Loom the powers of disarray,
Armed with bromide and cliché,
With which to tar or to gainsay
Whomever pines for yesterday.

Though theirs is the academy,
Our economic strategy,
Political anatomy,
And all the latest gadgetry;

So too, of course, the printing press,
The movie house, the new noblesse,
The creeds and screeds we must profess—
Lest they make public your address!

Nonetheless, as arsenals go,
Our own can surely strike a blow:
We've all the minds of long ago—
Schiller, Thales, Cicero.

Wits renowned are in our ranks;
Their words our guns, their truths our tanks.
To whom, then, do our foes owe thanks?
Why, sophists and investment banks!

Two thousand years stand on our side,
Two thousand years shall be our guide,
To make us bold and crystal-eyed
In launching every fierce broadside

Against the powers of anarchy,
Whose 'progress' lies in entropy,
And whose 'right side of history'
Belongs to rot and atrophy!

And though their might may seem outsized,
They've might alone to criticise,
To alchemise and to disguise
As 'love' their wild lust to despise.

And though, likewise, we now seem meek,
We've latent force of Roman, Greek,
Of Templars with their chaste mystique,
And all the knights of days antique.

Have, therefore, no angst or fears,
For all they wield are slings and smears
Against the might of truths and spears
And wisdom of two thousand years.

The Bard of Babel

by Anthony Watts

One eye blind with science,
The other blind with pain,
I saw the Bard of Babel stand
Out on the lonesome plain.

His fingers clawed a broken harp;
A burning song was wrung
From the vestiges of language
On the tatters of his tongue:

*All you busy pimps of Progress,
Your scaffolding is rust;
Your fairy-lights are shattered
And your dreams have turned to dust;*

*Your breath has chased the petal
From the lens of your delight
And the flower of all your knowing
Is a flower of endless night.*

And all around, the desert birds
Were screaming with desire,
As they watched ambitious carrion
Its own scaffold raising higher.

One eye blind with science,
The other blind with pain,
I heard the Bard of Babel sing
Out on the darksome plain:

*Though your crippled tongues squawk lightning
As you climb towards the sun,
All your stairways end in rubble
And your race has not begun*

*And though I'm blind and choked with dust
And deafened by your din,
My spirit soars above your heads
And dances in the wind,*

*For I have been where I have seen
How all your toil is vain.
So sang the Bard of Babel,
Alone on Shinar's plain.*

*All your stairways end in rubble;
All your scaffolding is rust;
All your fairy-lights are shattered;
All your dreams have turned to dust. . .*

The music murdered on his lips,
The quicklime in his eyes,
As lightning snickered down the wall,
I saw the Bard of Babel fall
Beneath the Tower of Lies.

The Way of the World

by Jeffrey Essmann

Some horrid truth seems now made manifest:
Some nothingness tucked in the human core
Parades itself as fullness and the best
In us—our grace, our reason—sore distorts.
In mirror after mirror we adore
A god more false than any made of stone,
Whose heaven is a place where everyone's alone.

The nothingness, however, isn't true:
It vaguely smells of apple and of snake,
The ethers old that make us misconstrue
Creation's mystery as a great mistake.
But those who know its strange Creator quake
Before a light that strikes Unreason blind
(And, for that matter, Reason also far outshines).

“I met Death today. We are playing chess.”

—Ingmar Bergman, *The Seventh Seal*

by Royal Rhodes

In the darkened, box-shaped room
the Swedish film cast loops of light.
A knight, his windswept hair pure white
played chess upon this Day of Doom,
while meeting Death— magnesium
faced. My startled students blinked
at this figure, bored and numb
by epidemics that they linked
to barking throats and missed alarms.
I watched them as they each consumed
the mad girl caught and soldiers harmed,
soon burned for sinful sex presumed
with impish devils, as the knight
climbed the kindling — in her deep
and devilish eye could God or light
be found?— but nothing, as in sleep,
an “O” of terror, as I gazed
into the students’ eyes that cast
back nothing, while my own eyes glazed,
like Bergman’s dreaded atom blast.

NOTE: Selected from the Classic Movie-Inspired Poem Challenge initiated by Susan Jarvis Bryant

The Departing Year

by Satyananda Sarangi

This night shall stand and stare with wintry rage
Through half-closed windows stained in loss and gain;
To measure all astounding feats fame
Against those bitter tears in blinding rain.

The memories shall never wane with sight,
Nor lend to coming days a newer tone;
But serve to blurry eyes of aging time
A light to tread the path of life alone.

So let us bid this passing hour farewell, and
These old, departing years shall hang on walls
Like splendid portraits of some loyal friend
Whose voice within our heart ascends and falls.