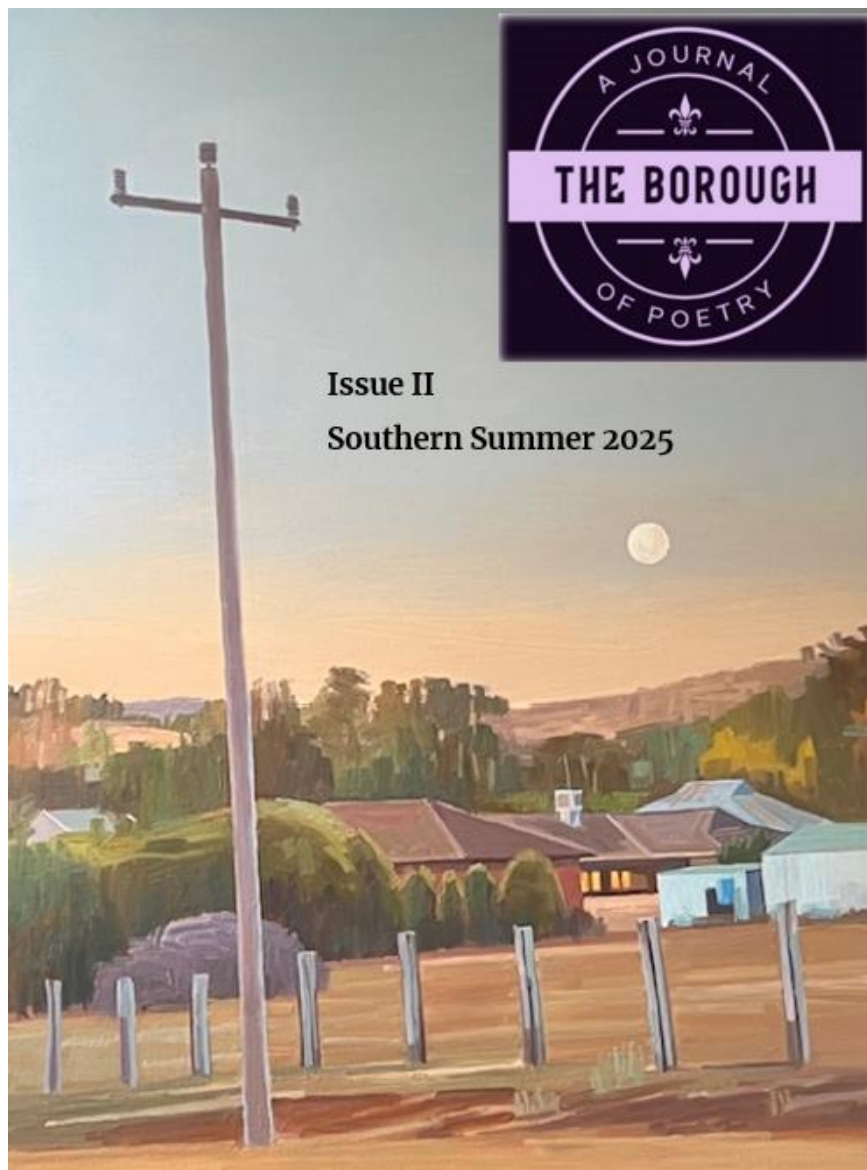




**Issue II**  
**Southern Summer 2025**



# The Borough: A Journal of Poetry

Issue II

Southern Summer

2025

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# R. L. Barth

## Edmund Blunden (1896-1974)

A shepherd in a greatcoat (the MC  
Appended, unacknowledged) you patrolled  
Old battlefields, the trenches, no man's land,  
The rear, the transports, nature all despoiled,  
The shattered houses, farms, and roadside shrines,  
But most of all you celebrated troops,  
The comrades you remembered all your life.  
You would not, could not, let the horror go,  
Nor undermine affection for your friends.  
I honor you for that. I understand.

## Letters from Home

I never understood  
Why others couldn't wait  
For letters when what good  
Came from news three-weeks late?

Came from an alien world  
Of proms and family meals?  
Took mind from war, unfurled  
No memory that heals

But carelessness that kills?  
The truth is that you're here  
On mountains or foothills  
Where life, not home, is dear.

## Letters from Vietnam

I didn't write them. What was I to say?  
I saw a man whose leg was left in shreds  
After he tripped a booby-trap today?  
Traumatize those who sleep in warm, soft beds  
While saying, in their trauma, they've no clue  
Of my reality, although they think they do?

## Death on a Bridge

*In memoriam, R.E., RVN, 1968*

It wasn't just the way you died—  
An eighteen-year-old suicide—  
But your belief that Nothingness  
Was something, more or less.

## Flying Home

*March 1969*

Weapons surrendered to the armory,  
My separation papers well in hand,  
I look at the dark porthole, where I see  
Myself in civvies, ill-prepared to land.

# Susan Delaney Spear

## For Now

A woman slips inside and whispers, "Hello?"  
It is dark and cool. Several votive candles  
send prayers heavenward before an icon  
of Mary. A slender priest shuffles in.  
She shows him a photo and asks "Have you seen  
this young man?" He shakes his head, his lips

mime "no." The woman swishes past dried-up tulips  
in a vase beside the door and nods goodbye.  
The sun burns on the small-town scene.  
A vendor sits in shade, selling hand-made candles  
and incense. The woman approaches a clutch  
of people waiting at the light. A man with a Nikon

strapped around his neck studies the wrinkled icon  
of the young man. His eyes fill and his lips  
wrangle with the words he wants to say, a mash-  
up of "missing?" "son?" "when?" and "oh, hell."  
The mother recalls the rows of unlit candles  
in the church. "Have any of you seen...?"

Then, in a kaleidoscopic whirl, she's at the scene.  
Red lights flash atop the sheriff's cruiser. I-  
Phones groan. The sun blinks like a flailing candle.  
The searchers and the sheriff move their lips.  
She hears nothing. "Oh, no. Oh, No,"  
she says to her son's body, bent in that lush green.

Momentarily, a profound hush  
falls on this summer suicide-scene.  
His spirit rises, flies, and says, "I'm sorry. Good-bye."  
Hope smashes on the asphalt like a crystal icon.  
She recalls the yellow, dried-up tulips  
and regrets she did not stop to light a candle.

For now, when she wakes, she lights a candle  
and recites a prayer in morning's hush.  
When spring replays, she watches tulips  
slice the earth and burst upon the scene.  
Those reborn purple, red, and yellow icons  
open their mouths and sing, "Hello, oh, hello."

## Debussy: “Breyers”

She'd had years of lessons as a child,  
Many-more than most, yet here she sits,  
On a piano bench with music piled  
Around the teacher's baby grand. She grits  
Her teeth, strikes the keys and starts too quick.  
“Whoa,” he says “You're rushing. Start again.”  
He keeps time. She gives her wrist a flick,  
Hears the music in her mind, and then  
Begins. He bows his head to concentrate.  
“Stop. You're right, these lines must fly, but lightly.  
Brush the keys with energy, but little weight.  
Once again. Imagine these phrases “brightly.””  
Skills are hard earned. Progress comes on slow.  
You cannot kick a tree to make it grow.

## Tomato Sandwiches

The freshly widowed man stares out his window  
Across the alley to a lot, a plot  
Of earth, overrun by thistles and a dearth  
Of care. Now, every day he's over there:  
Digging, weeding, turning, feeding the dirt.  
After Mother's Day, in early May  
He's on his knees in soil planting peas,  
Lettuce, tomatoes. He broods over those  
Heirlooms, with their tiny yellow blooms.  
Soon, the roots coax flowers into fruit.  
In his straw hat, he studies the garden patch  
And picks the ripe tomatoes, leaving those  
That aren't quite ready. He stands tall in thread-  
Bare overalls and reaches over each  
Neighbor's wooden fence. Without pretense,  
He leaves a clutch of vegetables for lunch.  
His neighbors savor the comingled flavors:  
Hints of maple leaf, a touch of grief.

# Mike Alexander

## *La via dei stelle*

It starts in darkness. Someone kneels to light  
a candle. Then ten thousand paparazzi  
ignite the fireworks, the dynamite  
that grills a face without so much as *grazie*.  
The standing order is to shoot on sight.  
By morning, herds of maenad-limbed *ragazzi*  
camp out in front of his five-star hotel.  
Thus our most heavenly are put through hell.

Behind the barricade, the ravenous throng  
would kill to touch his scarf, to thrum his lyre,  
to tear his head off, be it right or wrong,  
so powerful this instinct, this desire  
that drives his most devoted, to belong  
the way a votive wick belongs to fire:  
each one, eyeing the penthouse suite above her,  
believes herself his predetermined lover.

In time, it ends the way it always ends.  
Most do recover from the artificial  
intoxication; some remain good friends.  
But one poor girl transcends, a sacrificial  
virgin, the Bride on whom his rite depends.  
A media chorus makes his death official:  
*The star known only by his pseudonym  
was found this evening torn limb from limb...*

## Seven & Up

At seven, he goes clad in corduroys  
& Keds. An eye-patch marks a lazy eye.  
He keeps his distance from the bigger boys,  
who think it is a game to make him cry.  
With television tempting him to try  
new cereals, new soda pops, new crimes,  
he dreams up new, improved, internal rhymes.

At fourteen, he's addicted to old books.  
He volunteers to join Library Aids,  
puts titles back in place, endures the looks  
illiterate sophomores give. His middling grades  
come second to his bookshelf escapades.  
He slides the spines into appointed places,  
while whispering their titles through his braces.

At twenty-one, he's found himself in school,  
& done his worst to shuck his innocence.  
He dresses punk, as much to ridicule  
himself as his professors, poor defense  
against the syllabus of common sense;  
he'd rather he was left alone to read.  
His notebooks should be all he'd ever need.

At twenty-eight, he's faced reality.  
With daily rituals that pay the rent,  
he now has little time for poetry.  
Instead, he seeks a pagan sacrament,  
& hours of his evening time are spent  
in study of the Tetragrammaton —  
sigils he pilfered from the Golden Dawn.

At thirty-five, he's slaving in a bank  
to pay his mortgage, line his marriage nest.  
He scribbles at his checkbook, draws a blank.  
By all accounts, he's losing interest,  
& cringes like an uninvited guest  
in his own house. He holds his tongue, despite  
the voice inside that says to sit & write.

At forty-two he caves to his desire:  
one night a week he wrestles to the stage  
his stand, his microphone, his amplifier,  
so that the chosen of his entourage  
can summon echoes from a muted page.  
He is the savior of the local readings,  
so long as he emcees the brief proceedings.

At forty-nine, he has his manuscript,  
& yet he hesitates to send it out  
into the marketplace, untimely ripped.  
His eyes are red, considering with doubt  
unsatisfactory lines he wrote about  
an advertised, but not too likely heaven  
he first imagined back when he was seven.

## *Le coup de vent: Mistral noir*

This is a drunkard's dance.

Courbet's terrain  
distorts a sober regiment of oaks,  
into a bacchanal of greens, the strain  
apparent in the pressure of brush strokes  
& knifework. Boughs, unnaturally skewed,  
leaves shaking. Wind-swept canvas, it evokes  
the pagan frenzy of a nymph pursued  
by satyrs,  
    Orphic lute,  
        ecstatic cries.

The landscape sprawls, unfettered, like a nude  
discarding her quotidian disguise,  
more sacred now she's shown herself profane.

Inebriated by a pallet that eyes  
cannot explain, she drops what veils remain,  
& spins,  
    a painter's brush,  
        a weather-vane.

# D.A. Cooper

## Toward the Shining Stars

(Paradiso XIX – Alternate Ending)

“Excruciating pain pervades my soul—  
uncertainties and worries I’ve long held.  
I eagerly await to break the fast

that has consumed me for so long. Oh, please,  
give me the words that will assuage my hunger.  
You know the doubt that causes dearth in me:

A man is born upon a far-off shore.  
No one he knows has knowledge of the Christ—  
no one can speak or read or write of Him—

but all his thoughts and words and deeds are good.  
As far as human reason goes, this man  
was free of every sin for all his life

but dies unbaptized, lacking Christian faith.  
What kind of justice then can damn the man?  
Where is his guilt if he does not believe?”

*Now who are you to judge the things of God  
when you can’t even seem to see the ground  
beneath your feet? You people are obtuse.*

*The everlasting judgement of our God  
is far beyond your earthly understanding.  
It is much easier for you to see*

*the bottom of the sea with naked eyes  
than it will ever be for you to grasp  
eternal justice with your mortal mind.*

I pondered on the eagle’s words and said:  
“If God’s idea of justice is outside  
the limits of the mind, what good is it?”

How can we hope to have true justice if  
true justice is incomprehensible?  
How can we even work toward such a goal?"

The eagle then continued to insult  
humanity. It emphasized our lack  
of thought, the ignorance upon the earth;

but I had turned away. I felt a loss —  
that Heaven I had sought could not provide  
answers to questions that still haunted me.

Something about this sphere was incomplete,  
and now I felt that I did not belong.  
I was about to end my journey there,

go back to earth, when I beheld a dove.  
It glided down, alighted on a tree  
with golden leaves and fruit of purest white.

*Why have you turned your back on Paradise?  
Why have you given up your noble goal  
to climb the highest mountain that is known,*

*commune with God as Moses did of old?*  
I didn't want to be rebuked again,  
so I stayed silent, wouldn't answer her.

The dove, however, was the messenger  
sent from that God who watches over all;  
she knew my thoughts, then said these words to me:

*All people are the children of our God  
and will be gathered in as little chicks  
are drawn beneath the wings of mother hen.*

*All creatures of the earth and sea and sky  
lift up their voices, sing eternal praises.  
But many think they know more than they do,*

*and even angels spread and keep alive  
falsehoods when ignorant of truth. Now come.*  
She led me to a door I hadn't noticed

when I first came that way. As I approached,  
I saw it glowing like an ember, growing  
brighter until it blazed. I knocked. It opened.

The messenger then spoke again: *Go, follow  
the path until the end.* I entered in  
and walked along a narrow corridor

lit up by brightly shining stones affixed  
onto the ceiling and the walls. I sensed  
that I was moving upwards, but the ground

did not appear to slant. Each step I took  
was lighter than the first, until I felt  
the earth at last release the hold it had

on me—my body floated up above  
the tunnel floor. I kicked off from the wall,  
resumed my journey gliding in the air.

At length, I thought I glimpsed the tunnel's end—  
another shining door. As I approached,  
I saw a man beside the radiant portal.

He was arrayed in an unblemished white  
and silver costume, finely made yet strange  
to look upon. Even his head was sealed

in some outlandish crystal dish. He looked  
at me and I at him, and then he said  
my name. I knew that voice! But could it be?

He lifted up a visor, and I knew  
the dear, familiar face of my first guide.  
*We have been waiting for you here, unsure*

*if you would wish to make the next great leap.*  
A smaller door, off to the side, now opened,  
another person, dressed the same, came out.

It was my lady, Beatrice! *Hello,*  
she said. My mind was overwhelmed by this,  
and I was overcome as if by sleep.

When I awoke, I was still floating there,  
but looking down I saw that I was dressed  
just like my guides, I even wore the dish!

“What is this place?” I said to my two teachers.  
“What are these clothes? Why don’t we touch the ground?”  
*All will be clear, she said to me. Now come,*

*it’s time to leave this sphere.* And so I went,  
with Virgil and my lady at my sides,  
up to that greater door which was aflame

in all of heaven’s glory, and I knocked.  
The visors on our helmets closed themselves,  
the door began to open. I beheld

a universe more vast and brighter still  
than anything I ever could have dreamt.  
My master said, *You are now free to leave*

*the prison that has held you all your life.*  
I looked into the tunnel at my back.  
*The One you seek is not back there among*

*the artificial spheres,* said Beatrice.  
*That light you knew was but an imitation.*  
*Now come.* She held my hand in hers. We leapt

out of the spheres and toward the shining stars.

# Hilary Biehl

## Landscape

Some clouds have been attempted and a tree  
sketched in a little hastily, one limb  
raised in a silencing gesture. But that housefly –  
or is it an angel – keeps escaping the frame.

The sun is blinking on and off, a beacon  
with a delinquent keeper, and the cows –  
or are they gargoyles – wear blue robes of lichen,  
and the face in the foreground is a ponderous rose.

But was there always, dimly in the background,  
a banshee wringing out her tearstained hands  
like bandages? The river's a minor wound,  
the sky's a blunder nobody defends.

## Insomniac

The sea can't sleep. She is folding and folding  
her sheets on the shore. She can't get them right,

there is always a crease. There is always the moonlight,  
remarking her failure in little white smiles

on the peaks of the wrinkles. There's always a gull  
crying out, "Make it smooth, pull it tight."

# Vivian Smith

## Birthday

Born in the year that Hitler came to power,  
I don't do face book, blog or tweet,  
I've never owned a mobile phone,  
kind of old-school, dressed to disappear,

and yet surprise, surprise, I'm still alive  
with poems waiting to be written down  
like sign writing scribbled on the sky,  
half-erased, already vanishing.

I like my life, the humdrum tasks.  
I never hungered for the hippie trail.  
Indifferent to fashion, I survive.  
Poems can be true in different ways.

I write them down, I do not hold my breath.  
I don't just sit around, waiting for my death.

## Hymns to the Sun

All those poems written to the sun  
I started reading late in bed this morning,  
odes, celebrations, hymns of praise,  
they seem the product of another age,  
cornered in their place in history.

This is this year's bleakest winter day.  
I leave the car park in the icy dark  
and take the escalator up one floor.  
And guess what finds me speechless at the door:  
a bucketful of sunflowers for sale.

I'll get some later when I'm back in stride,  
headlines warning of another gale.  
They fill me with a quick determined pride.  
This unexpected bonus will not fail.

## A Garden in Van Diemen's Land

This walled garden was the one she loved,  
speaking to the Europe of her mind.  
It faced the sun with such serene composure.  
For those who made it, it was just a grind.

The cruelty of plant life still disturbed her,  
the way they use, abuse, and fight each other,  
compete for food, for space in which to flourish,  
rising up by knocking others down.  
They cannot thrive without control and order.  
They need the lash, the stake, the guiding twine.

Beauty is a question of appearance,  
assurance of the lily, the pertinacious rose  
the ivy covets with its cool embrace,  
and every flower must settle in its place.

# Jane Blanchard

## Microsania imperfecta

She was the one who went off on her own.  
She was the one who filed for the divorce.  
You gave her what she wanted in due course.  
Still she will never leave your life alone.

Available through email more than phone,  
You have remained a favorite resource.  
She contacts you supposedly perforce,  
Less for herself than for a son long grown.

She seeks a certain something left behind,  
A sterling ladle or an antique chest,  
A recipe or record you must find.  
Your common past has yet to enter rest  
Since fire so often burns within her mind.  
For smoke fly's sake, you try to do your best.

# George Witte

## Annunciation

It's coming down, not now but soon enough.  
The when depends on whether you comply.  
Appeasements cease, a red line drawn between  
insurgents' blood and this, a child's, erased  
to shoes.

Imagine how that day begins—  
black coffee, cigarette, then shave and dress  
unknowingly, routine your sedative  
and grave.

From satellites deployed above  
you're data-processed probabilities,  
behavior weaponized.

To bargain ends  
won't slow the rush of air, the roar compressed  
by sheer, terrific wings that vortex leaves  
as evidence of will and codify  
the time and manner of our choosing you.

## Barge

A wake of air bows cattails as we pass

entombed in steel, heads bowed to candid screens.  
No god requires such worshipful assent.

From stop to stop beneath slick wheels the rails'  
percussive hiss incants an antiphon  
to chasten doubtful eyes. Enthralled, we doze

adrift through brilliant meadowlands where dew  
tips every stalk. Through automatic doors  
a pall of oil insinuates our lungs  
and harrows dreams with residue of fire,

soft ash enveloping last rituals  
with deep solicitude, as if displayed  
for future wonderment: how small we were,

like children hidden under schoolhouse desks,  
crouched in basements holding hands, fused in bed.

A wake of air bowed cattails as we passed.

# Juleigh Howard-Hobson

## Sylvan Episode

He looked at me as if I ought to know  
just who he was  
but I did not. I looked away, then so  
did he. Alas  
I didn't recognize the Great God Pan  
in human form.  
I simply thought he was another man.  
I felt a warm  
gaze inviting me once more. I turned to  
see him changed. A  
God again, hooves and furry legs, horns grew.  
He gestured "Hey?"  
I was too dumbstruck to do more than stare.  
He shook his curls and sprinted off somewhere.

# Steven Searcy

## Monday Montage

A bright, generic storefront advertising  
the latest shipping rates—  
down the walkway on the lefthand side,  
a faded skeleton,  
a plastic fork, a tiny line of ants  
beginning to inspect  
another rat that's newly dead—the box  
of bait against the wall.

Around the back, next to the loaded dumpster,  
a jumbled pile of cardboard,  
a single woman's sandal, cans of Monster  
Energy, upended.

Across the cracking pavement, by the cleaners,  
another squatting dumpster,  
glass shards gleaming on the ground, a dark  
discarded toddler car seat.

Back on the road—excess of offices  
with rows of tinted windows,  
tall crepe myrtles sculpted, arching, lining  
the wide mown medians.

A cleaner parking lot—Canada goose  
ambling across, another  
casually standing in the brilliant grass,  
stepping here and there,  
pausing to nibble, nonchalant as rows  
of shining parked sedans  
under the nearly boundless tessellation  
of clouds across the sky.

# Jakob Ziguas

## The Grave of Keats

The daisies sprinkled on this happy field  
like pale confetti, could not wait for spring.  
Late winter sun endows sight's meagre yield  
with chiselled white precision. Each stone string,

still legible in marble like a vein,  
eludes all motion but the silent breeze  
that parts the altar curtains of the rain,  
and stirs the cenotaphs of cypress trees.

All that was mortal is now tight-strung bones,  
heroic couplets of denuded ribs,  
through which whines song to move the stubborn stones,  
as black ink floods a glut of sappy nibs.

The flowers droop like tired courtesans—  
mascara smudged—who, in a bitter glass,  
still play coquettes behind their lavish fans,  
while in the street the masked processions pass.

Upon the copper wall, a twisted vine,  
as yet climbs barren of its bloody fruit,  
as tangled with its shadow as a sign.  
Death plays upon his bones as on a flute.

No memory remains perpetual,  
except it gather scattered bones and save  
the poor and homeless logos of the soul  
to rise embodied from its pallid grave.

Chipped steeples rise among discoloured urns:  
motherless cherubs, mossy laurels, dun  
drapery, and countless nameless cairns  
like pebbles left for Goethe's lesser son.

The motley crows patrol their moirai, fly  
across the borders of their shadow-states;  
while—unconcerned, in sunlight, getting high—  
a couple kiss and mock the kindly fates.



## Sparrows

They peck what people scatter,  
and scatter having pecked,  
are brown as blown leaf-litter,  
skittery and stripy-backed.

I pause; I peck. Divine  
compulsion of the dance;  
this mess of wings is mine,  
it rakes the crumbs of chance.

Our ritual disputes  
are authored by the hand  
that scattered absolutes  
on formless, arid land;

this grabby rabble bound  
by rites of manic tact  
no one can understand,  
all live to re-enact.

# E.J. Hutchinson

## With Friends like These

Catullus 73

No longer wish to merit well of anyone,  
Or think that someone will keep faith with you.  
All are ungrateful; it is futile to have done  
A kindness—more than that, it stymies, too.  
Take me, who've been more grievously misused by none  
Than him who lately promised he was true.

## Wronging Love

Greek Anthology 10.29

To say that you've been wronged by Love no doubt  
Feels good; intemperate men are fond  
Of putting this complaint  
To use, but it's  
A ruse.

## Fishing

How often we mistake a look  
Intended not to mean or be unkind,  
And use it as the pointed hook  
To reel an innocent with tautened line.  
When charity abates, from malice we  
Become the monster that we think we see.

# Fergus Cullen

## Theognis: From His Life and Work

I.

(Ἰδιώτης.) “Ah. There you are, Theognis. All alone,  
Eyes in your empty wineglass. Have you found  
Something of interest, down among the dregs?  
Wisdom, perhaps?”

(Θέογνις.) “Yes, I, alone, down here  
Among the dregs, have found the only wisdom.  
The wisdom of Silenus. So: shut up.”

II.

Though drunken pranks may mar my name among the sober,  
Would I sooner, sober, endure the drunk?  
I think not. Your upstanding warnings notwithstanding,  
I’ll keep my swerving path unswervingly  
From tee shy of total to a shade past outrage,  
And thus approximate a golden mean.

## Wisdom of Working Men

“One thing you must accept,”  
Said the butcher— “and I don’t intend this meanly:  
To live is to get divided up  
And to live well is to divide up cleanly.”

“One thought that made sense of things,”  
Said the baker— “perhaps even solved life’s riddle:  
To live is to harden in the heat  
And to live well is to stay soft in the middle.”

“One principle strikes me as ultimate,”  
Said the candlestick-maker— “if not downright holy:  
To live is to burn down  
And to live well is to burn down slowly.”

# L.E. Ward

## Sonnet II

When does it end – the vocal dawn, our breath?  
I could fill a graveyard with what I don't know.  
The stone angel avoids my eyes, looks overhead  
as we walk with our participating shadows.

Nobody speaks of my future but you.  
I pass skeletal flowers in every sun torn row,  
incense burrows to ash, rain rinses its hues,  
in cloudy jars sky rolls off the smooth stone.

But not this – our faces pressed in the cold,  
our breath, wandering away from itself,  
a child free from watchful eyes – if ever called home,  
if our spirits rise beyond ourselves,

if death exhumes the sculpture of our bones,  
let me sleep in you, buried in all we know.

# Joseph Teti

## Ptolemy

“Thine eyes are dim with watching...” — Bryant.  
Rev 22:5.

I.  
When Ptolemaios first observed the sky  
he followed Babylon for their insights,  
presenting realizations of this world —  
the sun an average distance from the Earth  
of just twelve hundred radii. And then  
he mocked up syntax for the math-moved spheres,  
cataloging the motions of the stars,  
and demarcating epicycles, thus  
unmasking that stringent geometry  
whose law commanded galaxies to stir.

II.  
Astronomers built on his work for years,  
predicting futures, giving sage advice,  
some of it even true! For what divine  
and heavenly designs could not foretell  
at least the daily weather here below?  
He saw with secret knowledge tyrants-ides,  
the rise and fall of several empires,  
and esoteric secrets unsaid here —  
all these he saw with fractions of the stars:  
an unpolluted sky, still mostly dark!

III.  
No wonder our astrologers today  
fraudulate the horoscopes in the news —  
more accurate to guess these murky times  
from darkness visible inside their minds  
than to look up, where shapeless, opaque smogs  
slouch across blinded cities street by street.  
If only we could see all of the stars —  
all one septillion suns blazing to Earth!  
Poor Ptolemy! What portents would he know  
within a seamless sky illumined so  
fully that it would be another day?

# Robbie Coburn

## Anchurus

Life, and the frail presence of life  
inside the oracle,  
as the gold and silver  
disappeared

into the deepening chasm.  
he followed the riches down  
as he watched them cast  
into the darkness,

mounting his horse and riding  
away from his father,  
entering the wound in the ground  
and the hole then sealing.

just as how, when you lay against me,  
I long for you to seep  
into my chest and feel my heart  
close around you.

## Arion

You have not died, so I still live —  
as at Thebes, when blood billowed  
across the sand, as if in water.

you draw breath, so I pursue the air it carries,  
as Arion ran to the wounded king of Argos,  
carrying him to safety from the battlefield.

you have a body, so I have arms  
to cradle each day you touch the earth,  
holding your tortured flesh  
and drawing your life into my mouth.

## Smoke Alarm

At what point did I know  
you saved me  
and when did I try to recall it —

further from you then,  
the last bird awake  
falling asleep.

our bodies, unwilling to part  
with each other  
finally falling asleep.

I dreamed my life was as it was  
before you, and of an emptiness

that stood like a mirror  
with one face appearing  
in the reflection.

until suddenly I screamed  
in my sleep

and you woke me so I knew  
that you were there.

# Daniel Brown

## Fan-Letter to Caroline Shaw

On hearing her “Partita for 8 Voices”

As, after an age of kisslessness, a kiss  
Can set your innards all delirious  
In ways on which you’d largely given up  
(So distant were they even as a hope),  
No longer does it seem impossible  
That music of our time can mean—for all  
I’d feared the art had reached a fatal pass—  
As much to me as any ever has.

## I’d Hope

Were I, this late in living’s day,  
To find the providential love  
Life half-amounts to dreaming of,  
I’d hope to cry “Dear Lord, feel free  
To take me.” (Not “How dare you, Love,  
To resurrect a rage at death  
I’d relegated to my youth  
And gotten past, or close enough.”)

## Surrender

To go by the crazed terrain we call his sketches,  
Beethoven also wrestled with notes, but my  
Wrestling was of an abysmally lower order:  
Like that of a writer for whom an operation  
As basic as hooking a predicate up to a subject  
Involves some serious furrowing of the brow.  
No wonder I gave composing up, content  
To let myself surrender to the crush  
Of genius-jaws and feel my struggles cease.

# Lucas Smith

## Fences

Good fences make good  
Neighbours, *someone* said,  
But we have none on  
Our left side; neighbours  
That is, and it's a good  
fence but the chickens  
Have scratched out the dirt  
Underneath. They're skilled  
As refugees, despite  
The bricks and branches  
I've blocked their diggings  
With. They wander past  
My window but we  
Leave them till evening  
To donate fertiliser  
To the neighbour's yard.  
You have to crouch down  
And look from their  
Perspective to find  
All the gaps. Stymied  
They drill on the window  
like woodpeckers and  
Squawk at the door.  
Only when they've turned  
the yard into a food  
Desert will they peck  
At the packaged seed  
Like a child returning  
Softly to cold porridge  
After a fuss but even  
Then they undermine  
A plank or brick after  
A few days and know  
There's a reward of cheese  
(parmesan) or left-  
Over steak to entice  
Them to return. Tomorrow  
The wire goes down.

## Portsea Sunset, Chopin

The baby responds pacifically to baroque.  
Bach, Buxtehude, even Zadok  
compels her gaze into the middle distance  
for the few minutes her mother needs  
to whip up dinner. Born with taste, by chance.

Chopin is another thing entirely, entirely  
Useless in domestic practice.

I am away from home at dinner-time.  
At my desk, gazing off,  
caesuras reflect off the orange clouds  
at sunset over Indented Head  
with after-school gloom,  
    autumn moodiness  
spared infants who have but two registers:  
baroque delight and battle-drums.

Away from home at dinner-time, enclosed in  
blush orange through moonah tinged with gray  
and lavender hedge-rows, the adult  
    pleasures of sevenths, clarity, diminished  
melancholy chord-fall, chromatics rising,  
I hope these will swoop you too one day.

# Claire Miranda Roberts

## After Beauty

Through which we become  
aware of objective  
order;

virtue of any kind  
is something  
in itself.

We can in no way govern  
but assert the reality  
of beauty—

*the highest rank  
of becoming a martyr.*

## Slip

*after "God's Grandeur"*

Some slip of  
beauty goes

by heavenly bodies  
(ah, bright thing!)

Listen, I am a run  
through.

The soil is bare,  
nor can foot

*feel into  
your wings.*

# Privata

## Signs from the Northern Fires

(After Goethe's "Erlkönig"; written during the Canadian wildfires of 2023 and their effects on the United States)

"What rises so red in the afternoon sky? Is it Mars  
Shining sooner and closer to warn us of war looming huge?"

"Our local star, my child, no more. Don't parse  
The sky as script. The smoke is not imbued  
With signs. What smarts our eyes and bloods the Sun  
Is nothing but the northern fires' ash."

"My father, my father, what makes you deny? Day is one  
Endless dusk, and the air hangs malignant like poisonous gas!"

"The evil of our time is manifest.

It shows itself without analogy.

Your gaze, in youth at least, is better cast  
Away from signs. Enough is plainly seen."

Their eyes converged. Now nothing to be said,  
They squinted at a world aflame, half-dead.

# Meagan Cartwright

## They Colonised the Moon

Night. A room more coffin than bed.  
I run a can-opener around my scalp,  
pull back the lid, let my mind seek out

the heads I lopped from succulents.  
I spy, with my telescopic eye, the pups,  
multiplied. Cerberus gardens in full bloom

across the face of the turned steel moon,  
food just out of reach of pastel giraffes  
pinned by the weight of breathing apparatus.

## Selkie

In my childhood, my mother and I toured tiny coastal towns,  
her marvelling at the charm of deserted watchtowers,  
me in her wake, striving for a smile I hoped was a beacon.

Her temperament told of the currents that called her.  
My mother should have been a lighthouse keeper,  
fused with lamps and lenses.

I tell myself she spluttered ashore; seal skin trailing.  
I tell myself I am no briny Rapunzel atop a spiral staircase.

# Clarence Caddell

## Aetiology

There was a girl inside the big strong man:  
A dryad lodged inside that broad  
And virile trunk. How did she get in there?  
At any rate she hid as if outlawed.

Perhaps her face was that of his own mother,  
Or of the little girl with whom  
He'd been caught showing his and being shown  
Inside the walk-in-robe in her parents' room.

No one touched him like that; his awe-inspiring  
Father seldom had reason to raise  
A hand to him, though to his elder brother  
And younger sister he came in third place.

There was that time he humped his mother's pillow:  
His father spanked him then, the shame  
And pleasure shifting him outside himself,  
Until the fact that he bore his father's name

Might mean that he was both parents at once.  
Later such feelings made him cut  
Himself, and loathe her languid movements in  
His breast and loins—the parasitic slut

Who'd never show her face. In future he  
Would prove his manhood man to man;  
And he grew hungrier and hungrier  
For proof from those whom he was manlier than.

And he found many who'd present the rump  
As soon as look at him. A share  
Of that elusive Her he found in some  
Because it was himself before him there,

In bed or elsewhere, in the one he fucked,  
His sacrifice. Soon as he was done  
He'd send them off into the desert. Thus  
He almost found a way to be alone.

But every now and then he'd throw a match.  
And at such times the bear was baited  
Not outwardly but by the bitch within;  
Then nothing could fill him; he was never sated,

But wearied, finally. And thus he caught  
His death, although he lived just over  
A decade, gradually sickening.  
Then he was doubly glad to have nor lover

Nor family except the younger sister  
Who cared for him. When he appeared  
To her post-mortem, head within her lap  
Nothing about the dream struck her as weird;

She'd had like dreams before, though in this one  
She saw him changing, bristly face  
Becoming smooth, his features feminised  
And juvenescent—and yet more than a trace

Of him behind the eyes remained. So she  
Rejoiced, and later, at her twelve-  
Week scan found out she was to have a girl.  
A lovely dream! Not that she would delve

Into occultism or superstition;  
Yet all the same, could it be true?  
The birthmark on her daughter's chest, did it  
Resemble her late brother's dragon tattoo?

And other signs would come over the years:  
Take for example an old song  
Her little girl must more than once have heard  
For her so fluently to sing along.

And she grew beautiful—astonishing,  
Such beauty! so that her endeavour  
To cover or deface it might be only  
Bashfulness—no, they never could believe her,

Not when she had childishly complained,  
Nor as a strident adolescent  
Renewed the same not just in tears but blood  
Also—that just a while had seemed quiescent.

Though surely neither parent made too much  
Or little of her nascent beauty,  
As if what eyes or dreams or mirror saw  
Devolved upon her in the form of duty.

Was she her uncle come again? No more  
A happy thought! Or was she rather  
Become a host to something yet distinct—  
Think of it: a wicked fairy godfather!

The girl fought hard and yet harder again  
When mother nature drew first blood.  
A perfect Amazon, except that she  
Stood outside any form of sisterhood.

Born too early, she found none to abet  
Her autoandrophilia  
At first, but hung on till they came around,  
Her breast tissue at last replaced by scar,

With worse to come. Had she or they or he  
Come more to hate than to desire  
What there was no impediment before,  
To torture nature, prove the bitch a liar?

Perhaps there rests some archive over yonder,  
Repository where one might find,  
In theory at least, an explanation  
To satisfy the sorry heart and mind.

# Robert Krishna

## Sora Nostra

I have not always loved her, for at first  
she was a rival whom I greatly feared –  
I knew not who she was, felt not the thirst  
of love with which, so greedily, she peered

over the cradle that we shared – and later,  
I would resent her snatching all my treasures,  
with the claim she possessed in them right greater  
than mine, but afterwards, in careful measures,

in fossils amber-wrapped, in fragments crumbled,  
in the resurrections memory bestowed,  
in the ambition of desire, humbled  
and forced to beg for what it thought was owed,

she'd dole them back to me, as she was moved  
by pity or by whimsy or another  
fair mood of protean love which often proved  
stronger than our common lust to gather

the world into our arms, and I discovered  
that things I loved grew dearer by her love,  
for they, in her abrasive grasp, recovered  
the sheen use had begrimed with dust above.

So now, though I begrudge her each defeat,  
and she in her turn craves my every conquest,  
we've learned, as siblings must, to find delight  
in this exchange of loss in daily contest.

Another, someday soon, will come and steal her,  
and that undying all-consuming lover  
will not return her. No more will I feel her  
breath as she runs me down; nor will I ever

hear her sing for triumph, see her dance  
for joy; her hands will nevermore enfold me;  
nor will the laughter of her eyes entrance  
mine to entrust her with the means to mould me.

But I will not miss her, for she will have left  
in all my rescued treasures that fine trace  
of her inescapable embrace no theft  
in heaven or earth can evermore erase.

## Contributor Notes

**Jakob Ziguris** is a poet, translator, and lapsed philosopher. He has published poetry—*Chains of Snow* (Pitt Street Poetry, 2013), *The Sepia Carousel* (Pitt Street Poetry, 2016), *Venetian Mirrors* (Angelico Press, 2024)—and translations of Polish poetry and prose, including *Kaddish: Pages on Tadeusz Kantor*, by Jan Kott (Seagull Books, 2020)

**George Witte** is the author of four poetry collections: *An Abundance of Caution* (Unbound Edition Press, 2023), *Does She Have a Name?*, *Deniability*, and *The Apparitioners*. New poems are published or forthcoming in *Consequence*, *Five Points*, *Revel*, and *Think*.

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**Joseph Teti** is an emerging poet, whose work has appeared in *Clayjar Review*, *Foreshadow*, *As Surely as the Sun*, *Silver Door* [substack], *Rialto Books Review*, and other small journals. He is also an MA/PhD candidate in English at the Catholic University of America, interested in Romantic deployment of Platonism.

**Susan Delaney Spear** is a poet and retired teacher. She has published two collections of poetry, *Beyond All Bearing* and *On Earth*, both through Resource Publications, an imprint of Wipf and Stock. She is the co-author of (with David J. Rothman) of *Learning the Secrets of English Verse: a creative writing textbook* (Springer). Recently, she completed the *Camino Ingles*. She lives in Tampa, Florida, and you can find her at [www.susandelaneyspear.com](http://www.susandelaneyspear.com)

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**Lucas Smith** is the co-founder of the publishing house Bonfire Books. His first book, a collection of short stories, will be published by Wiseblood Books in 2025.

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**Privata** is a pseudonym for someone, academic in nature, who prefers to work in the shadows.

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**Fergus Cullen** (@fairgoose) is an apprentice historian. He often translates and occasionally rhymes. He lives south of the river.

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**Robbie Coburn** is an Australian poet based in Melbourne. His poems have been published in *Poetry*, *Quadrant*, *Meanjin*, *Island*, *Westerly*, and elsewhere, and his most recent collection, *Ghost Poetry*, was published by *Upswell Publishing* in January 2024. His verse novel, *The Foal in the Wire*, will be published by *Hachette* in 2025.

**Megan Cartwright** is an Australian poet and college Literature teacher. Her work has featured print and online in journals and magazines including *Barrelhouse*, *Cordite Poetry Review*, and is forthcoming in *Island Magazine* and *Verandah*.

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**Mike Alexander** lives in Houston, Texas, with his wife, his cats, & his guitars. He has one full-length poetry collection: *Retrograde* (P&J Poetics, 2013). His work has appeared in numerous journals, such as *Rattle*, *Measure*, *Texas Review*, *Texas Observer*, *Borderlands*, *New Orleans Review*, etc.