

RESET



Christopher Elliman Philosophy of Language

cæsura online 2022

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Editor's Notes

It's a challenge to bring something new to the table, to reset the table with substance, to fill our content with powerful testimonies from the heart, gut, and mind. But, like the uncanny creatures they are, writers and artists create a feast of earthly and unearthly delights. They make our spirits float above the occasion, bringing perspectives that we've never attempted. It has been a profound pleasure to have worked with this years editors and readers. They have created a journal to enjoy, and savor every page. Thank you all for the collaboration; And, thank you, viewers, for participating in our "RESET."

Kimy J. M. Knight *Editor-in-Chief*

Your words took me on journeys
landscapes known and unknown
depths of grief, redemption, connection, loss—
the constant resetting of our lives
and I am grateful for it.

Keep writing!

Alison Hart *Poetry Editor*

Over the past few months I've enjoyed viewing not only aesthetically pleasing but introspective works of art. I want to say thank you to everyone that contributed, those who I know personally to those I have yet the pleasure to meet. For all the contributing artists, I appreciate your time and energy to create and share your personal works.

Jane Kovac *Art Editor*

It was an absolute thrill to edit both the fiction and nonfiction for this issue. I had a blast reading the submissions, and admired how each of the accepted stories had their own sovereign and poignant takes on the issue's theme. And each storyteller lived up to my own personal standard of narrative construction: authors should write the stories that only they can construct. As modern writers, we now have the privilege of participating in a conversation that's been happening since scribbles on cave walls--and this issue of Caesura is its own beautiful kaleidoscope. Look through the lens. Let us transport you!

Joshua Mohr *Fiction & Non-Fiction Editor*

Strange how we ask for advice, wish for a gift, and never notice the multitude received. Thank you poets and painters for letting me lose sight of the shore while being so anchored.

We appreciate the unpublished artists and writers that had the courage to submit, glad we could welcome some of you into print.

Thanks again to the Elmwood Poetry Society for continuing to bring light through the barriers we build.

Bill Cozzini *Managing Editor*

Treading

We ricocheted down the gully
impossibly wide—water's presence
even in the desert,
far more impactful
than our meager human selves.

The height we summited,
scrambling up the last slick boulders
rounding toward vast drops,
already a memory affirmed
now only by the distance we
travel down.
One drawn long line of us,
trying to avoid the cactus,
snaking from side to side
as the rocks, gravel, or shrubs demand.
What would it feel
like to be water
rushing through this cavern
with creative authority,
carving a signature, pushing
aside whatever impeded the path,
smoothing away roughness
how unlike that—

our own limping progress—
as the day darkened.

Later that night,
after hours of trying
to hold it
the body's insistences win out.
I split the cocoon of my sleeping bag,
crack the shell of my tent,
and stumble out into the freezing air
the wind whipping through
an accompanying silence.
I add my own water
to the desert and look up
to the stars,
necessary,
so seldom seen
in my city life,
and stand, their shivering
in time with my own,
breathing them in
head raised, arms wide,
floating, finally, floating,
not drowning.



Christopher Elliman Topography

A day like the others

The car pulls out onto a dark road as the first rays of light cross the horizon,
Even in snow.
Then ensues another ride under the city with a strap to keep the commuting hordes from colliding,
An exit, not to the sleek steel towers with leather-upholstered views of the harbor,
But to a silent iron door next to a dumpster,
Neighbor to an autobody shop, a tattoo parlor, and a suspicious establishment that hosts furtive visitors early and late in the day.

The labyrinths inside the building,
Decreed by funding models penciled in years before the present staff were hired,
Confuse the visitors, who teeter between partitions.
A negation of space,
Not open, not free,
But with walls shorter than an adult, bereft of shelter.

In a corridor or an office or a discarded corner,
Old problems pour from new faces—
The son who will not stay safely in the apartment on a restless night,
The missing payment for a service rendered to a shadowy operation,
The mysterious summons in a text not recognized as language anywhere on Earth.

Perhaps the speakers heard those things from their parents,
Posed on laps in these spaces three decades before.

Some clients welcome the chance to sit for a moment,
With a ceiling between themselves and the vindictive heavens,
A wall between the North wind and their threadbareness.

Other clients have managed to find home in a tenement box,
A roof, walls, a floor—six planes to structure a whirlwind world.
But their minds do not respect walls.

Their noons do not correspond to the sun overhead,
Any more than their children's wanderings curl up in school schedules.

What do they leave with?
A cellophaned mint in a clasped purse,
A life's twist patiently straightened out by a gentle hand,
A needling oppression lifted for a week or a month—
Such are the trophies in care management awarded at the end of the day.

At last the rooms fall quiet
For two hours of computer work,
A rueful laugh at team meeting over the day's behaviors,
Before the return walk to the subway.



Julie Barrett Flies on the wall

In memoriam, Charlotte Oram, 1915-2008

Everyone else turned toward flower bedded gardens,
Groves, trimmed azaleas, poplars overlooking stone crescent benches,
But you headed toward the open field.
I think an ancestral claim was buried there,
But its location was too deep for divining.
A lifetime would not suffice to find and dig it up.
Apparently you didn't mind, because you took untilled fields as your terrain,
And we, in our surprise, often viewed you in them, after many years,
Strolling among the alfalfa, shielding your eyes from the sun with your hand,
gathering fronds along your way.

We learned to enjoy the stories you brought back.
They were wrapped in a musty varnish, yet
Their message was as sharp as bent cane.
We sat on the ground and recorded them
As dogwoods blossomed in a balmy indulgent season.
There were stencils left over from earlier efforts, and they were
Soon committed to memory.
We applied the pen all afternoon.
Everything got written down.
I didn't feel I lacked for anything.

What was in those pages?
We don't need them any more.
We remember what we told each other.
I respun the words so many times
That I established a homestead on them.

Diligence was rewarded in those days, so we always applied ourselves.
You fed me too much, to be sure,
And eventually I taught myself the need for balance.
That wasn't your job, though.
After all, the field went on too far to consider any stopping point.



Michael Foley Oblivious to All the Bullshit

August

August has a desperate quiet strangeness
like coming home
in fading light

its gray cadence
its burning
burnt sienna
with promises of the after-life

no one has a precise name for this
this release
talking inside our bodies
reminding us
we are not so different
blazing with light and possibilities

some people walk among the stars
anticipating that silence is at-hand

when we get tired of the story of our life
closing its last chapter
knowing how it all ends
the world will not seem so scary

our lives nibble at the edge of an immense ocean
waves going out waves coming in
waves going out

The Loveliest of Trees

Who took this photo, we don't know,
we see a cherry tree flush with blossoms,
a small Asian girl standing beside, she's
wearing a pink dress to match the bloom,
but who she was, and if she's alive today
to verify what we observe, no one knows.

We museum visitors, gazing at this
faded, antique photograph, we see
the girl's long hair combed, but blowing
sideways in a dusty, desert wind, and in
the background, a tall-wire fence, where
cows must graze about but none in sight.

But we visitors smile, forgetting at first
one of history's stained pages—we wonder
why anyone would bother to plant and
prune and nourish such an elegant
tree in what seems an infertile, desert soil?
And although a botanist could verify

if cherry trees grow better in Tokyo or
Wash. D.C., in a high-plains desert
in the American west, where this photo
was taken, this hardly seems a likely
locale for Housman's "Loveliest of Trees."

But peering inside the exhibit case, gazing
further into the photo, we see the structures
behind, made mostly of unpainted slabs
of lumber—built like stables and rough-
hewn sheds for keeping chickens and livestock.

Then we recall during those years of war,
when nations went insane, those fences and
buildings were not made for livestock, but
to intern little girls in pink dresses and people
who worked hard in inhospitable places
to insure a cherry tree blossomed in spring.

Time Alone With My Father

There was the year I started bringing knives to school
and sleeping with a baseball bat a fist length
from my dominant hand.

It was the year we lived in a rich family's basement
where I promised to stop wetting the bed
and he made paintings in the corner under the staircase.
Sometimes daybreak would find him still there
dipping horsehair in water the color of sage and bone.

It was the year of birth and genesis
where I gave mouth-to-mouth to birds stiff on the lawn
pressing my thumbs to pump their little hearts.

The year he added stroke after stroke
to something previously lifeless.



Christopher Elliman Topography

Mittens

She knits mittens for her sister
alpaca wool died raspberry pink
liners of silky soft mink hair
knitted together
interchangeable
left fits right right fits left
knitted together sisters
born a year apart
one left-handed
one right-handed
one knits
one sews
one nurses
one teaches
each morning
one calls the other
talk about everything
that's happening in the world
compare weather
though they live only 20 miles apart
once in a while remember
their mother and father
grandparents long gone
they snowshoe up a hill
white pine, balsam fir
hear chickadees calling
pause side by side
knitted warm
as a pair of mittens

For You I Would Wish

a sensory deprivation tank
the numbed pulse of sound
tepid limbs floating
above the black surface
separating here and gone

There would be no trooper
knocking on your door
at daybreak, waking the dog
on a cold Sunday

No spears of light
jamming your eyes
with information

No bristle of his beard
to miss as you look
into the doll faces
of his daughters
who clung to his shirt
the night before

In the silent chamber
all will be mint, eggshell, slate
no windows to the world
saying you are alive
but now he is not
the son you brought the world
in your teenage fierceness
and lost far too soon
to ever want to feel again

Perspectives on an overdose

he
(after an absence) thought he
was just dipping a toe
but instead fell in all the way
& drowned in the shimmer

was a distant
cousin I remember
him visiting one time as a kid
running through the pool screen
blood on the ground & his father screaming



Christopher Elliman The Cage Bird Sings of Freedom

Reconfiguration

This morning, snow unexpected, incessant
over last month's frozen mounds—thaw then
freeze. I went out to walk with the dog,
snowshoes, sticks, layers against cold.
Each step heavy with slick powder, and trails
covered over, treacherous with hidden ice.
Of course, I fell. Fell going uphill, and fell
coming down. I could feel my bones
shift, rearrange themselves.
This is what aging is like. One day, sun,
the next ice. Inside myself, someone young
or younger cocooned in this unknown
frame: the tilted spine, bulging discs,
pressed nerve pain. Yet, sitting here
now on this firm chair watching the sky
clear, lighten—no snow and no sun—
just air and water rearranging themselves:
eternal dance of elements perfect, perfect.



Patricia J. Machmiller Trees in Winter

Happy Hour

Can we bring 'em back for just one day?
Okay, one hour would do, let's not be greedy.
Shall we call it happy hour? Brandy Manhattans
would get us started: dry vermouth not sweet,
cherry not olive. Mother and Father, our gracious
progenitors, would be the guests of honor,
gone these many years, and then we'd usher
in and seat our sibs also missing in action
and we survivors would come in stage left,
carrying the drinks, and take what chairs
remained. Once assembled or animated,
we might say, we'd start talking all at once,
incredibly grateful, what else could we be?
Ignoring or spilling our drinks, our talk spilling
over, we'd tell redundantly and with infinite variety
the same old stories that never stale, pulling
a thread tight here or loosening a truth just a bit.
We'd look in their beloved faces, and if it wouldn't
be too much take them in our hands and believe,
once more, just one more happy hour.



Julie Barrett Neighbor Wolf

A Nudge from Joe Joe

Our outdoor cat. He nudges me where it hurts - my sprained knee and my forearm with metal plates. How does he know where to nudge me as though saying “move on, it’s OK, you can make it-besides I like you and not many others.” I always thank him for getting the rats and sparing the lizards and birds. He sleeps during the days under the Pomegranate tree on drying compost grass and leaves. He will take cover when it rains in our homemade house for him on the porch under the eaves.

He bears the scars of being feral with the tip of one of his ears cut off by the Humane Society-which I never agreed with. I know Joe Joe’s heart should anyone need a warning. How could I deserve his nudges, and claws in my lap while he looks straight into me. Move on he tells me . . while I sit with him in the sun both of us a little feral.



Anna Yang Little Dumpling

Renovations

As the sun sets, the sound of the sea changes. Over lettuce salad and grilled sea bass we discuss a kitchen remodel. As usual, he has one idea (a café in Arles); I have another (Monet's blue tile backsplash). From experience, we know this won't be easy. On TV tributes memorialize John Lewis—preparing for his march over the Edmund Pettis Bridge, he packed his toothbrush and a book by Thomas Merton. An ache in my neck from an old injury returns.

new sandals—
I keep
the old ones

Morning After A Hard Rain

The air is hay-sweet with the scent of damp thatch
and the front walk is littered with earthworms.

The glistening tubes of their bodies glow red
in the sunlight, bare and unseemly as entrails.

Bunching and stretching, they labor to cross
the warming pavement, and fearful of later

finding them desiccated to leathery mummies,
I crouch to lend a hand. At the brush of my fingertips,

the first writhes up in a limber curlicue. I grasp it gingerly,
suppressing an impulse to recoil, and cradle it

wriggling in the cup of my palm, the roiling curves
and loops, a frantic message danced in shorthand.

Spilling it back into the wet grass, I wish it well
then turn to help another and another,

placing each where I kindly assume it would rather be,
that much further from where it was headed.



Michael Foley **Fallout**

About the Poets

Subhaga Crystal Bacon's new book, *Transitory*, is forthcoming in fall of '23 from BOA Editions. She's the author of two collections, *Blue Hunger*, 2020, Methow Press, and *Elegy with a Glass of Whiskey*, BOA Editions, 2004. A Queer Elder, she lives, writes, and teaches rural northcentral Washington. Her recent work appears or is forthcoming in the *humana obscura*, *The Indianapolis Review*, *Wood Cat Review*, and *Hare's Paw*. Her work can be found on www.subhagacrystalbacon.com.

Nick Butterfield. "Poetry is a great way to reset from daily stresses." A veteran who served as a Hospital Corpsman in the USN-R during Operation Desert Storm 1990-1991. He co-facilitates a Veterans of Life poetry writing group which meets monthly. His poems are found in *Veterans of Life Write* publication (2020), *No Ordinary Language* (2013), and *Shared Light* (2011). He has provided medical care for the Homeless since 1999.

Jennifer Campbell is an English professor in Buffalo, NY, and a co-editor of *Earth's Daughters*. She has two full-length poetry collections, *Supposed to Love* and *Driving Straight Through*, and her new chapbook of reconstituted fairytale poems was published by Dancing Girl Press in 2021. Jennifer's work has recently appeared in *The Healing Muse*, *San Pedro River Review*, *Heirlock*, *deluge*, *The Sixty-Four Best Poets of 2019*, *Paterson Review*, *Little Patuxent Review*, and *Bond Street Review*.

Angie Hexum is a speech-language pathologist by trade. She sees poetry as a natural extension of her interest in communication and strives to create poems that connect writer and reader through a moment of shared understanding. Raised in Nebraska, she has resided in California since 1990 and currently makes her home in Campbell, CA.

George Longenecker's poems, stories and book reviews have been published in *Common Ground*, *Cooweescoowee*, *Bryant Literary Review*, *Evening Street Review*, *Gyroscope Review*, *Main Street Rag*, *The Mountain Troubadour*, *Rain Taxi* and the anthology *2021 Best Short Stories from the Saturday Evening Post Great American Fiction Contest*. His book *Star Route* was published by Main Street Rag.

Patricia J. Machmiller, poet, printmaker, and brush painter, has two books of haiku and four books of haiga (a form of art that combines poetry and painting). She is the co-translator of two books. Her latest book on how to write haiku is *Zigzag of the Dragonfly: Writing the Haiku Way* (Yuki Teikei Haiku Society, 2020). She retired from the aerospace industry and lives in San Jose CA.

Karl Miller's fiction and poetry have appeared in numerous periodicals; he also wrote the plays *A Night in Ruins* (Off Off Broadway, 2013) and *Afterward* (LA, 2021). A Best of the Net nominee, Miller lives in Coral Springs, FL.

Andy Oram is a writer and editor in the computer field. Print publications where his writings have appeared include *The Economist*, the *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, and *Vanguardia Dossier*. He has lived in the Boston, Massachusetts area for almost 50 years. His poems have been published in *Aji*, *Angel Rust*, *Arlington Literary Journal*, *Conclave*, *the Decadent Review*, *Genre: Urban Arts*, *Kosmos*, *Miller's Pond*, *Nine Cloud Journal*, *Offcourse*, *Orbis*, *Panophy*, *Poetry Leaves*, *Press Pause Press*, *WhimsicalPoet*, and *Words & Whispers*.

David Perez served as the 2014-2016 Santa Clara County Poet Laureate. He is a recipient of the Arts Council Silicon Valley Fellowship for Literary Art; a repeat guest on the NPR storytelling series, *Snap Judgment*; and author of the poetry collection, *Love in a Time of Robot Apocalypse* from Write Bloody Publishing. He has taught literature and creative writing at San Jose State University and Ohlone College in Fremont, CA.

Irena Praitis has published five poetry volumes, most recently *The Last Stone in the Circle* (Red Mountain Press Poetry Award Winner) and *Rods and Koans* (Red Mountain Press). She is a professor of creative writing and literature at California State University, Fullerton, and lives in Fullerton with her son, Ishaan.

Martin Willitts Jr has 21 full-length collections including the *Blue Light Award 2019*, "The Temporary World" and "Harvest Time" (Deerbrook Editions, 2021). His forthcoming book includes "Not Only the Extraordinary are Exiting the Dream World" (Flowstone Press, 2021).

Reed Venrick graduated from the University of Texas, Austin; taught English and linguistics at Sophia University in Tokyo, Japan before retiring to his orange grove in Central Florida; usually writes poems with nature and/or cultural themes. Recently published in *Cafe Lit*, *Raven's Perch*, *White Enso*, *New Reader*, *Sky Island Journal*, and many others.

A native Minnesotan, **Greg Zeck** has published fiction and poetry in such magazines as *Ambit*, *Bogg*, *Caesura*, *Moon Magazine*, and the *Spoon River Quarterly*. A few years ago, he retired with his wife Jennifer to Fayetteville, Arkansas, where he reads, writes, hikes, bikes, and gardens. In 2020 he published a first book of poetry, *Transitions: Poems, 1979-1980*, and in 2021 a second book, *Lost & Found: Poems Found All Around*, both of which can be found on Amazon. He keeps an occasional blog about writing and culture at www.youngzeck.com.

About the Artists

Julie Barrett. I am grateful to have grown up here in the Bay Area, and my faithful rescue pups Vinni and P-nut always accompany me. I attended California State University Chico completing an extra internship with the British Museum Education dept. in London. After college and a bit of worldly travel, I gravitated towards the underground art scene here in San Jose. My current work is mostly greyscale, charcoal, conté, graphite, etc. on paper. My current multi-media project *Helen: Queen of Flies* is a short film I'm creating using only my iPhone and some simple editing programs. Drawings, puppets, directing, and editing this film will incorporate all of my artistic skills and more!

Christopher Elliman. A sense of life, a sense of art: the composite of interactions. Piece by piece, a fractured portrait of a whole. That which creates me, creates art - I the conduit. The objects of art, tangible outcomes of captured experiences of physical expression birthed from intellectual observations, considerations, and interactions related to behavioral social-psychology; societal "group-think" and its conformity. Antisocial. Anti-conformist. Anti-capitalist. Anarchist, the overcoming of illegitimate power. Found. An introverted perspective and rejection of an extroverted power structure out to manipulate, out to capitalize.

Michael Foley is a self-taught bay area freelance artist, occasional curator and art teacher who creates deceptively layered pieces of work. These works often have a sardonic tinge to them, questioning various aspects of our society and challenging these norms while attempting to create work that appears light-hearted on first viewing. Michael Foley has shown his works internationally and throughout the United States and continues to do so. When he is not creating or teaching, Michael enjoys some damn fine coffee, video games and the company of lovely people.

Patricia J. Machmiller, poet, printmaker, and brush painter, has two books of haiku and four books of haiga (a form of art that combines poetry and painting). She is the co-translator of two books. Her latest book on how to write haiku is *Zigzag of the Dragonfly: Writing the Haiku Way* (Yuki Teikei Haiku Society, 2020). She retired from the aerospace industry and lives in San Jose CA.

Anna Yang is a 17-year-old second-generation Chinese American poet, artist, and student. She creates poetry and art because it gives a voice to those who go unheard, spinning thoughts into stanzas and bridging divisions with the unveiling of common humanity. Her work has been recognized by the *New York Times*, *Hollywood Foreign Press Association*, *National Council of Teachers of English*, *Scholastic Art and Writing Awards*, among others. Anna is the current Santa Clara County Youth Poet Laureate.

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