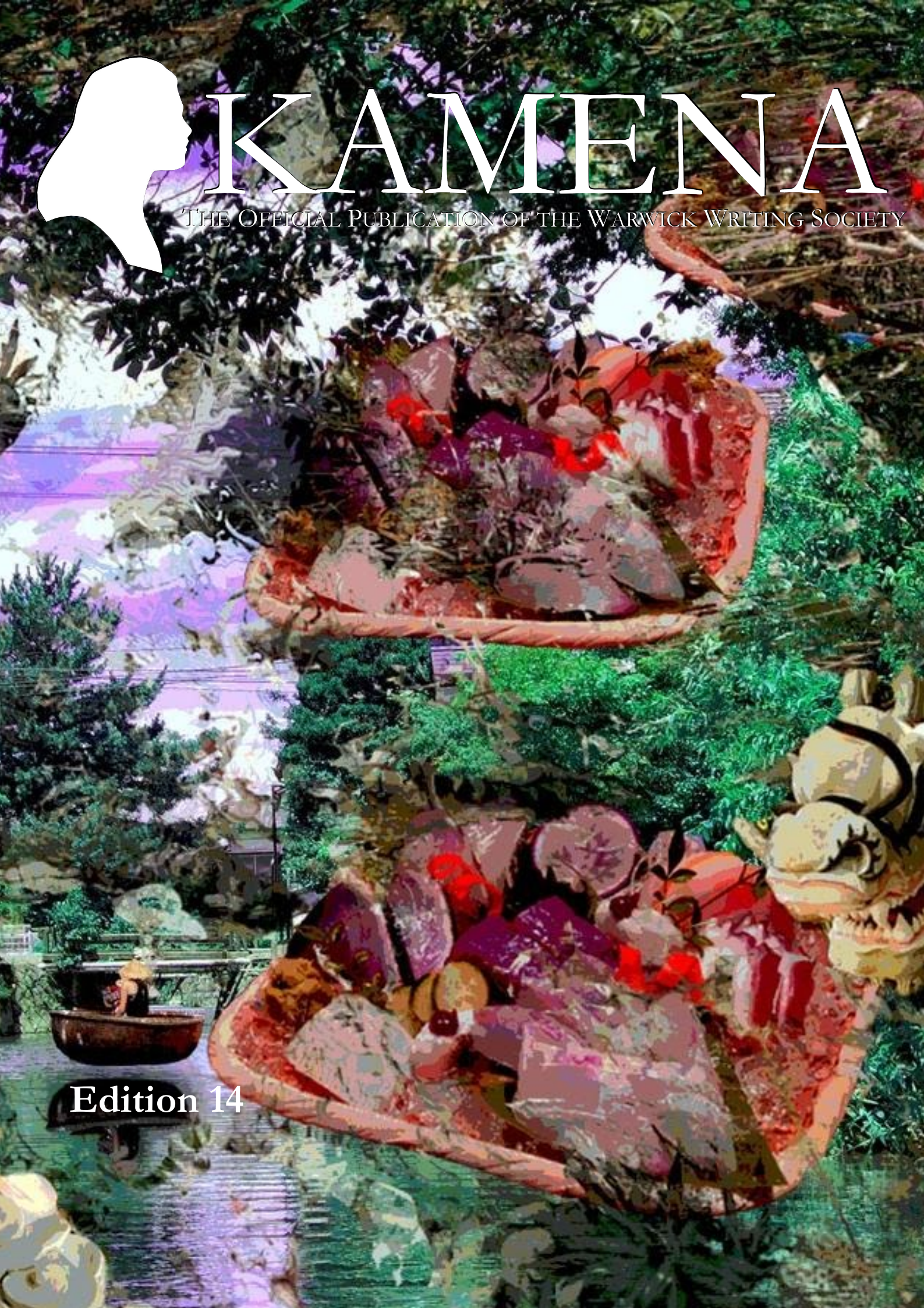




KAMENA

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE WARWICK WRITING SOCIETY

Edition 14



Editors' notes

Congratulations to the Warwick '21 Graduates! We're sad to see some of you go, but hope to see your writings and artworks in our inbox even after you're gone!

At the same time, welcome '21 First Years! We're excited to meet you and the new ideas you'll bring with you!

This edition of Kamena took a little longer than expected, but it was completely worth it! Let us open with an interview with Warwick Graduate and awardee of an Eric Gregory (among others), Cynthia Miller.

The Editors

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Featuring

Cynthia Miller

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Upcoming Writing Society Socials

There are no summer socials planned at the moment, but if you want to interact and chat with other society members you can join our brand-new Discord server!

Invite: <https://discord.gg/X6XaY8W>

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Interview with Cynthia Miller

Cynthia Miller is a Warwick Graduate whose poems have been published in several magazines and journals, and who published *Honorifics*, her first collection of poetry, this year. It was met with outstanding success — it was awarded an Eric Gregory and is shortlisted for the Forward Prize for Best First Collection. She also co-founded the Verve Poetry Festival in Birmingham, and works with the connected publishing house Verve Poetry Press

What drew you to poetry as a form?

9th grade English. I'm pretty sure it was Walt Whitman that was the catalyst – my English teacher at the time covered Whitman and Ginsburg, and it felt like a door to new possibilities had opened. I remember reeling and thinking, "Oh *this* can be poetry?!". It was heady, it didn't rhyme, it was boundary-breaking in all the ways I didn't know poetry could be. My friend and I, who were both in the class and total literature nerds, started writing these ridiculous, surreal, rambling prose poems to each other in response to a homework assignment and then we just carried on.

Where do you get your inspiration from?

Honestly everywhere – news articles, science and technology magazines, Twitter, poems shared on social media, games, conversations with relatives about family history. Lots of the poems that eventually ended up in *Honorifics*, my first collection, were sparked by the most random things: a video of a jellyfish in a Venetian canal during lockdown; an artwork by beeples; a video of Italian physicist Carlo Rovelli talking about the nature of time.

I have an ever-growing Evernote file where I save clips of articles, blog posts, images, lines from poems – anything that is sparky and interesting, which acts as prompts to return to if I feel I need a starting point.

Some of your poems seem to explore similar concepts, what do you think the advantage is of exploring the same thing from different angles?

I think it allows you to delve deeper and read wider. For me at least, once I came across a topic I was interested in, I just got sucked in. It was like hitting a rich seam. Part of the reason there are so many poems about family and time is because the pleasure of researching, reading widely and connecting what I was seeing from different mediums (film, TV, academic texts, poetry) was a generative process in and of itself.

Let's take the poem "Proxima b", for example. It's directly inspired by *The Order of Time*, a non-fiction book about spacetime. As I underlined and dog-eared the pages, I started reading more sci-fi, which led to re-watching the spectacular film *Arrival*, which led me to think about family history in a way that was more stretchy, more nuanced, more experimental than if I hadn't marinated in that subject from different angles. In any case, creativity is about connected unexpected dots, so I think there's huge value in exploring the same concept from different viewpoints and mediums.

Is there any advice you'd give to someone who would like to publish their first chapbook or poetry collection in the coming years? How was your experience with the industry?

Don't rush yourself. Don't be rushed. There's a lot of pressure in the poetry world on debut books – prize culture very much focuses on blockbuster first collections – and it's easy to get caught up in all of that.

It can feel like labouring away on a debut collection is a lonely, individual endeavour. It doesn't have to be and shouldn't have to be that way. There's loads of support out there beyond the university walls in the form of writing courses, mentors, the community as a whole, that can help

shape how you see your book. Don't underestimate the value and support that comes from those relationships.

I had a brilliant experience with the industry. My first pamphlet and book were both with Nine Arches Press and I had the good fortune of knowing my editor, Jane Commane, ever since my Warwick undergrad days. We had worked together for years through writing workshops and the Primers scheme before a conversation about a first collection came up – I'm so glad I had those years to write furiously, experiment, be challenged, meet other poets at different stages of their writing journeys, etc.

Do you have any advice for submitting to magazines, especially for newer poets?

Sure, here's a practical piece of advice that has saved me lots of admin headaches. Have a spreadsheet to track where all your submissions are. It sounds boring but if you go on a submission spree, make sure you know where they are; Jo Bell has an excellent and simple spreadsheet template to track what's in progress, what has been submitted and what has been rejected.

Are there must-have books that aspiring poets should get their hands on?

I'll recommend two books on craft that are sitting on my bookshelf right now, rather than specific authors: *The Craft: a guide to making poetry happen in the 21st century*, is a collection of essays edited by Rishi Dastidar that is a brilliant companion for writing poetry. It covers form and technique, it delves into how to approach poems from viewpoints you wouldn't have considered before, it introduces new approaches and mindsets to poetry that are still refreshing and inspiring even though I've leafed through it many times. I promise it'll be way more useful, interesting and practical than any poetry handbook on any course list.

What made you want to start the Verve Poetry Festival? What is your favourite thing that has come from it?

In 2016 I went to a poetry festival in the countryside. From Birmingham city centre, it took me two trains, a local bus and a lift from my put-upon B&B owner to finally get there. I remember thinking at the time that it was bonkers that Birmingham, as the second city, didn't have its own festival. It deserved its own poetry festival – one as diverse and lively and collaborative and fun as the local poetry community was. There were a good five (or more!) regular poetry nights happening in and around the city, powered by such a lovely community, and it was just the right time and place to do it. At that time, Waterstones was hosting a lot of poetry events so I connected with the store Manager, Stu Bartholomew, and the rest is history.

Favourite thing about the festival... probably the fact that it's grown beyond our wildest dreams. Physically we've grown every year, eclipsing the venue of Waterstones Birmingham then expanding to a 'proper' theatre space. It's become a springboard for a publishing house (Verve Poetry Press). It's brought together poets from around the country and the world. It's shown that festivals can and should be a mix of 'page' and 'stage'. That inclusive, diverse programming is the expectation. All of it, really.

If you want to find out more about Cynthia Miller and check out some of her poetry, you can visit her website at <https://www.cynthiamillerpoet.com/>

Whispers of Autumn

by Megan Cradock

I look up towards the sky. The clouds are moving fast, making their way across the unusually blue expanse. They travel too quickly to distinguish shapes though. Or I might be the one going too fast, moving about my day from one task to the next and the next with no time for idle dreaming. If I were younger, I'd be turning the clouds into characters in a story. I'd see the shape of an animal in one, running across the sky. Or maybe a castle, where a princess would be waiting for the happily-ever-after which she is never going to find unless she heads out to explore the world. Endless possibilities of stories traversing the sky.

Now, it's harder. Now, clouds are just water vapour, working replaces dreaming, and the appeal of laying back in the grass to create stories in the sky disappears.

So instead, I focus on the trees. It's that time in autumn, just before winter signals its arrival when the leaves still cover their skeletons. The reds, oranges, and yellows blurring together from afar to create new shades, colours bright against the backdrop of blue. Each time the breeze picks up, the branches shake slightly and another two or three leaves begin their journey to the ground. Falling not straight down, but drifting, as if following an invisible, intricate path, zigzagging gently to land on the floor. They stay there, making the pavement into an autumnal wonderland, and brighten up the mundane grey of the walkways and roads. On the ground, the leaves are still beautiful. They land atop others that fell hours, days, weeks ago; those that are starting to lose the pretty hues of the season, dying and beginning to dry out, their crunching sound beneath someone's feet an indicator that there are other people like me around, walking and breathing in the cool air.

Sometimes I wonder how many leaves there are. Especially at this time of the year when a blanket of them spreads over the floor. Even in this small area there must be hundreds, maybe even thousands if I count the ones still attached to the branches of the tree above me. They rustle in the wind, playing in the background like the soundtrack to my day. It's not one that I take time to listen to nearly enough. Closing my eyes, I try to tune out everything but that sound. It's hard, focusing on one track of audio amongst a million others until I can just about make out the soft

swooshing of the wind past my ears, and the echoing rustle of the leaves as they brush against one another. I can imagine the wind tugging at their stalks as it rushes around them, chaotically trying to pull them away from the branches and down towards the ground. The branches themselves creak in the wind. They don't move nearly as much, their creaks almost hidden under the rustling whispers.

I open my eyes. Another leaf falls, the flicker of red and orange stark as it floats down the tree trunk, drifting towards me. The colours swirling into each other until it becomes impossible to tell where the red ends and the orange begins.

I smile. Maybe there is still time for dreaming after all.

Reaching up, I catch the leaf out the air, holding it up against a now undisturbed background of blue sky. Beauty held in my hand; one small part of my story.

persimmon blues

by Mahira Mannan

summer is mostly heat
coming from the sun
but other things too
like people
giving into that holiday love
simmering
boiling over
from oranges into marmalade
because if life gives you lemons
summer hands you
tangerines.

and underneath
the great persimmon tree
there are no more
days, weeks, months
(for what is time but just one summer?)
you and i
now only a frozen tempo
it's my true blue
and i'm falling
while our cerulean synergy
slips away quietly.

but

i think falling sounds nice
so for just one more summer
let me fall (sink, drown)
into you.

The Last Weekend in July

by Zach Murphy

Keilani stood up. “And the time you said you would pick me up from my dentist appointment and didn’t show up?”

“I had a panic attack about driving in downtown traffic,” I said. “I had just gotten my license!”

“I had to use a pay phone while half of my mouth was numb!”

Keilani tossed another log onto the fire and a flurry of sparks burst into the air.

“I’m sorry,” I said.

Keilani sat back down, fanned the smoke away from her eyes, and brushed the ashes off her sweatshirt. “I’m going to miss you. That’s all.”

“I’m going to miss you too,” I said.

“So what do you plan on doing?” Keilani asked.

“I want to save the world.”

“Like Wonder Woman?”

“No,” I said. “I keep having these dreams about rainforests losing their color and oceans warping into garbage dumps. I want to try and do something. I’m just not sure what yet.”

“Maybe someday there will be an invention that allows us to see each other’s lives from far away,” Keilani said.

“Sure,” I said. “And maybe Blockbuster will go out of business!”

We both laughed until we snorted.

Keilani reached over and grabbed my hand. “We’ll still look up at the same moon,” she said.

I wondered if I’d ever have a moment with Keilani like this again. “What a weekend,” I said.

Keilani sighed. “Over too soon like a Prince song.”

Sonnet for my Friends and Lovers

by Oliver Redwood-Mears

Consider friends and lovers in contrast.
We love our friends and befriend our lovers,
Each an act of passion for a person
Whom one cares ever so deeply about.
Friendships can be intimate, heated trysts,
Full of secrets and romance and tension.
Love can be a light-hearted adventure,
An afternoon activity for two.
To speak of a line between the two words -
Friends and *Lovers* - is to draw a border,
bisecting a land that had thus been whole.
I will not speak of my heart by degrees.
I will love my friends as wholly and true
As I befriend my lovers. So should you.

seasonal

by Scarlett Bennett-Weston

if we wait until after the soil has flattened,
grass turned great and sprung from his bones rinsed in pain
misery,
a sour taste
that makes the weeds informal friends of the green turning yellow,
feeling limp against his cold.

next comes the spring without him,
the April twisting in June's fingers caught in his nerves
and pulling them up to sit,
ceremonious,
like daises pushing from where their roots sleep in tombs,

black threads to his eyes,
whites broken yellow and pink,
stiff in their sockets tuned to the stillness of his heart.

it no longer questions
how many beats it might skip before it's too tired to run again,
before it decides that he no longer deserves
the ease that it bears

and it might have only been yesterday
that he told us he would stop, or centuries before –

a man sits at the dinner table
where his children's feet do not yet reach the floor
mechanical words go around:

a silver coin,
rolled the wooden way

back home to his stuttering hands
ready to toss more coins to the ground
as his children grow and his heart shrinks,
or his liver shrivels as it ought
regardless of the promises he insures
in overgrown fields of nickel and steel,
asking for a chance in return.

we put rose quartz
over our eyes and say yes in temporary contentment,
trying to nurture the silver like trying to beat blood from a gravestone

dried up,
we give him one last chance,
before he is buried in soil thicker than the promises he made.

the hours thin.

his heart grows stubborn and tired of his hollow coins
and it leads him to the graveyard
where his name is remembered in grey.

if we wait until his body is outlived by the daises
as a home outlives its persons,
if we recollect
the heart as summer recollects snow,
if we wait until the first spring has passed
in the chill of an empty season sewn with endings,
then your body will awaken from its stupor
and we will find the soil flat, the grass great. all that is left then
is letting go.

after Dickinson.

Untitled

by Peter Noblet



Bare Trees

by Millie Woodrow

We both know a woman who lives
just off Endless Street. When I passed
on a thin line between two green parks
I thought of her as we saw her last,
Together edging for a getaway.
Once she'd flown I asked what she needed from us,
The way she looked at us with her eyes singing hunger.

When I passed on foot this evening
I smelt woodsmoke. Perhaps it was hers,
Or a phantom of our domesticity.
Our fruit bowl, half-eaten, bad wine,
Worse dinners. And the smell of our hair
slipping in-and-out of the unlit hallway,
Emerging from between grey plumes
from the shower cubicle.

After all this time do you remember the roses?
The way they sat like stones on my bedside.
I watched the red pale to brown and when at last
they were dead, I took those husks after dark
and I hurled them, with a grunt, to the bottom
of the garden. Spinning water droplets
on their arc into the black, while you watched
from an upstairs window. Finally we were
each unknowable to the other.

We were stopped in our crossing between churchyards,
Drawn out, reflected in the well of her eye,
She looked at us and saw waves reeling back from
The beach, two bells chanting for silence
and stillness, two bare trees growing their roots up
into the wind.

The fire swallows itself, greyed and choking,
And a channel of smoke finds its way out from within.
It spits in rings that dissolve on the evening air,
Gathers like a thread, then floats on the current
sailing towards Endless Street. I have a thirst
to experience her – the touch of another's grief,
Heavy but quiet, like underland rivers.

In Exile

by S.T. Brant

I ask myself, *other* voiced,
What's the worst singing that you've heard?
What would you say's your choral grave?

The speed at which I lost my way.

Time used to be a bird I could watch undisturbed
With no concern for what was happening that day.
But I've since lost the music, lost the words.

All eternity's a choice between the melodious,
the boisterous.
Angels singing sweet coherence of accord, or
the shrieking
Of the feeders of their prey.

Catharsis

by Peter Noblet

Catharsis reverses. The climax never came.
The climax never came. Catharsis reversed.
The climax never came. Catharsis reversed.
Catharsis reverses. The climax never came.

Untitled

by Ronnie Wu



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