

OLLI POETRY



Fall 2023

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Iceland

Ken Autrey

We board the boat, don
insulated coveralls, and lean
over the gunwale
on Jokulsarlon, frigid lagoon
at the foot of a glacier,
its centuries of ice looming vast,
gradually melting southward,
calving translucent topaz bergs,
drifting with contorted shapes,
ancient beasts from the past.
A hooded worker in a skiff
motors up beside our boat
and, like a priest raising
a chalice into brightness,
lifts up a chunk broken
from a greater mass.
I chip off a shard, an uncut gem,
and place it in my mouth
where it sears my tongue,
pure as an ancient wafer.

Visage

Ken Autrey

In all faces the eyes lie farther
down than you might imagine.
Begin there and work outward.
Provide plenty of forehead,
room to think and dream.

Get the spacing right—eyes, nose, mouth.
Go lightly in case you miss the mark
and need to alter the parts.
The nose grows in shadow,
not line. Don't overcommit.

Use a tender touch. Give the features
time to surface. She's in there somewhere.
Watch for when she begins to breathe.
Not too hasty with the pupils.
Vision comes later.

Gently fill the gaps. Pale pastel
for brightness on the bridge of nose
and chin, blurring it with a finger.
Precision comes in space.
Ease up and let the shapes emerge.

Finally, drop a spot of white in the bead
of each eye, tiny glimmer sending back
not just light, but if you squint, also
one version of your own expectant face,
a mirror twinning your undying gaze.

Passage

Wendy Cleveland

There's an eerie sadness in the absence of hummingbirds, who,
after a summer of flitting and flying and fighting, without warning

vacate the feeders, the backyard now fraught with silence.
Each bird will fly alone, even the fledgling newbies with no

experience or practice, just a knowing unknown to us. These
iridescent creatures engorged with sugar head south to Mobile

or perhaps on a longer southwest flight path through Alabama
toward the fertile delta of the great Mississippi, then on to Texas

and Mexico, navigating by instinct, rivers, coastlines, the migration
pathway with fields of nutrient goldenrod and asters before crossing

the Gulf of Mexico for a night flight of 500 miles to the insect-
rich Yucatan Peninsula, its tropical rainforests and Mayan mangroves

alive with ants, flies, and aphids, and lush with nectar-rich ixora,
jasmine, oleander, all wearing brilliant blooms to lure and nourish.

In our backyard, leaves curl and drop, we tidy the garden, tilt eyes and ears,
greedy for one more darting glimpse, a straggler's buzz to break the silence.

Lack of Wisdom

Carole Corsby

Lack of wisdom brought us to this plight.
Greed and power ruled to make us blind.
Planet Earth cares not who's wrong or right.

Grabbing ever more with all our might,
We've ravaged nature's treasures for our kind.
Lack of wisdom brought us to this plight.

Gorging on the bounty, bite by bite,
We've gobbled up the riches, left the rind.
Planet Earth cares not who's wrong or right.

For many years, a few have fought the fight.
Wise ones warned us of this looming bind;
Lack of wisdom brought us to this plight.

Now it's late, and more can see the light,
Know our peril, spread the word, just to find
Planet Earth cares not who's wrong or right.

Will we continue on our path toward that dark night,
Or will we open up our hearts, our souls, our minds?
Lack of wisdom brought us to this plight;
Planet Earth cares not who's wrong or right.

Our Maggie

Carole Corsby

My charge is swaddled close when she arrives,
transferred carefully into my waiting arms
from the tender comfort of her mother's breast
where she's been nurtured, loved from birth.
I hold her close, look into her shining eyes,
quietly hum into the sweet swirls of her ears.

Can she hear my joy within her infant ears,
and sense in me the music that arrives
when I gaze into her bright, clear eyes?
Will she find new comfort in these old arms
that have not held her often since her birth?
Can she feel free cuddled gently on my breast?

I'll feed her with a bottle, not my breast,
pour old ballads into her shell ears,
tell her tales about her preemie birth,
the thrilled relief we sighed when she arrived
to be named, whisked away in doctor's arms,
and the long month under strangers' watchful eyes.

When she wakes, I'll smile and look into her eyes.
As she's sleeping, keep my hand upon her breast.
While she feeds, hold her closely in my arms
as I sing sweet songs to seep into her ears,
and embrace her first laugh when it arrives.
Each moment I'll be grateful for her birth.

As years go by, we'll celebrate her birth.
What truths will she uncover with her eyes?
She'll learn to live each day as it arrives,
and hold those she loves close to her breast.
What sounds will she discover through her ears?
Which rosebuds will she gather in her arms?

Now at four, she freely comes into my arms
to whisper me a tale about the birth
of a kitten, shy and sweet, with perky ears,
or a puppy's tail, sharp teeth, big brown eyes
that likes to cuddle soft upon her breast
and lick her face each time when she arrives.

My heart thrums with new birth when she arrives,
crawls into my arms, leans her head upon my breast,
and pours into my ears sights seen with hazel eyes.

Transformation

Margaret Craig-Schmidt

Cosmo, the Tufted Puffin, stands guard over black rocks
Jutting from the foamy ocean waves off Coquille Point.
Birthed from sea trash washed up on the Oregon beach,
The unwanted and broken became a regal sentinel.

On a bench near Cosmo, a woman sat enjoying the warmth
Of her down overcoat as she watched powerful, icy waves
Splash against large black rocks protruding from frothy ocean.
The vibration of her cell phone in the coat pocket startled her.
The diagnosis made her as cold as wind blowing in from the sea.
The doctor gently told the woman that the news was not good ...
That the pathology had come back positive for breast cancer.
Further tests would need to be done as soon as she came home.

The woman's mind raced, thinking of the implications of the diagnosis.
Would breast removal and subsequent chemotherapy render her worthless,
Like discarded rubbish washed up on the cluttered beach of the sea of life?
Would even her best friends view her differently when she lost all her hair?
Or would her life be enriched by suffering ... somehow becoming meaningful
As she weathered the powerful, destructive winds of a terrible disease?
Like Cosmo, would she become more attractive as her body was healed,
Her spirit becoming stronger as she fought courageously to become whole?

The woman got up slowly, held her coat tightly, and walked toward home
On the narrow pathway winding its way along the cliff above the ocean.
She glanced back at Cosmo, the Tufted Puffin, standing in royal splendor,
Presiding over a beach where he was once mere pieces of worthless plastic.

Finer Than Prayer

Caroline Gebhard

For Heidi

Scene: Somewhere near Yucca, Arizona, 1978

It's 2 a.m., a dark deserted highway
Bleary-eyed, miles from our destination
We wait for the hot engine to cool
The poorly designed Vega no match for the Arizona desert.

Bright white lights suddenly appear from around the curve
We are two women in our twenties headed East
Now on high alert as a strange young man
Gets out of his truck

But he has only stopped to see
Are we okay
To advise us where to go
The next day
Not to get cheated in town.
He is on his way home, after driving over one hundred miles,
To see his sick baby in a Los Vegas hospital.
Yucca, he says, is the Armpit of America.

Kindness is an anchoring, a sheltering from the heat
A voice in the emptiness, water in the desert.
The scent of our armpit, Whitman tells us,
Has an aroma "finer than prayer."
But kindness is true divinity incarnate
The balm we all need
To go on

An Anchoring

Daydrie Hague

The right hand loosens its grip;
the keys fall.
Sense, structure, speech
slip into a song with cadences awry.
Stricken.

A word wings away,
the tongue, ungoverned
signals a mayhem,
a feathery panic.

Practiced soliloquies
will not come to heel;
blank or crooked,
they emerge from choking circuits.

But then, with ministrations,
the vessels freed
the breath comes
the blood flows
the grounding is grateful
eloquent
timely.
Speak the speech, I pray you!

I pray.

Memory Care
Dayddrie Hague

There is an aviary
in the sunlit confines of the
habitat for the aging.

The birds are sequestered there, too.
They perform their lives
behind the glass
hiding in the paper branches
pecking at seed in bright plastic bowls
flying in stunted arcs.

The senescent residents
watch and watch.

It sets them to dreaming
of the grandfather who raised canaries
of Ulster Parades and orange lilies
the Blue Ridge
beloved porches
vibrant bodies.

My mother and I
watch and watch
in the long afternoons,
her fury momentarily abated by the
dance of the birds.

Count Alfred Korzybsky Sestina

Steve Harrison

--Born a Polish count, Korzybsky founded in Chicago the Institute for the study of Non-Aristotelian Semantics. He published *Science and Sanity* in 1933.

In the old debate of chicken and egg,
the bald and intrepid Non-Aristotelian
semanticist Alfred Korzybsky
assures us that neither came first,
for the dissension began with words:
neither chronology holds water.

I doubt that the primeval water
could simply have wrenched up an egg,
and even had I been there with words
for woman, bird, and little else, could Aristotelian
logic have altered the fate of the first
egg as fodder, whether raw, poached, or fried? Korzybsky,

come now. Count Alfred Korzybsky
polemicizes fodder, monsoons, and water
to unspeakable realms in the very first
chapter of *Science and Sanity*. Not egg-
heads alone does Aristotelian
hoodoo hamper; it knots up the words

for toes, potatoes, and kisses with words
for higher abstractions. Korzybsky
swears in chapter two that Aristotelian
rigor, falsely construed, takes the wet out of water,
fun out of kneelaps, and the sizzling egg
in its pan is alien from the first

abstraction thereof we utter. The first
sincere guilt derives from words,
and those who argue it egg
on the complex, says Alfred Korzysbky,
until demons like rings on the water
spread from the center, the stone, the Aristotelian

gee-gaw that is man. Non-Aristotelian
languages posit man first,
and with him bare earth and water,
unplagued with demons, because words
remain abstract, and Alfred Korzybsky
says the egg's a mysterious egg.

Korzybsky, semanticist of the first
water, can none but a Non-Aristotelian
tongue ennoble an egg with words?

Not Counting

V. Louise Katainen

I drive more slowly now
No need for speed
No gain from pain
propelled by triumph's call.

I think more calmly now – or try –
I try to quell the impulse raw,
the rush to deed,
to action stripped of care for meaning.

The dreams of youth, of middle life
have fled. I live bemusing death,
not counting hours or days or months,
but pausing,
pondering how
I heed the inner call.
I drive more slowly now.

Whose Country?

Margaret Kouidis

“I’m just country,”
The old man said, perplexed
before the doctor’s digital check-in.
I sympathized
for I, too, am country, dismayed
by technological wizardry,
by laptops and printers, coinless parking meters,
“Smart” TVs, cell phones, and digital ovens.
I bemoan the loss of basic “on” and “off” buttons,
the surety that a quarter gets you thirty minutes.

Among the many possible countries
the old man and I might also share,
I claim the flag, “Old Glory,” as equally mine.
In my America, History is composed of many histories.
Truth is not written for all time.
If light may be wave or particle,
show me the science.

Does the old man share my memories of a rural childhood?
Does he know the loneliness of country life?
The disappointment of a bus kid, my brother, denied after-school baseball?
At age twelve, boy or girl, the grime and sweat of a day in the harvest sun?
Does he know the pride of country triumphs:
A 4-H teen awarded a blue ribbon at the county fair
for a well-made dress or an Augean Black Angus?
The pleasure of a guilty kiss on a Sunday School hayride?

Feral

Peter Livant

Under your blotter
 Lives an ink-stained otter.
Within the steering wheel
 Slithers a glistening eel.
In the garden plot,
 In the thorns of roses
Romps an ocelot
 with too many toeses.
Within the tenon's mortise,
 yawns a tired tortoise.
And in the cereal box, reading Hegel,
 eating a bagel,
 and lox,
 an ox

Within every question mark
Wild animals enough to fill an ark!

To say these critters are invisible
is just plain risible.
The world *within*,
The world *under*,
Makes poets (and me)
Wonder.

Oh, what a joy to be
Alive amidst not yet poetry.

Taking Leave of the Sea

Peter Livant

(A poem making use of the words *curve*, *dripping*, *spare*, *noise*, *sea*, *leave*)

In the sea I am weightless. Sounds seem a dull thrum.
I walk slowly out of the shallows, dripping water.
Weightlessness, by slow steps disappears.
Ashore, the noise of waves re-sounds in my old ears.
The weight of air presses full.

Memories fall away like seawater as I walk out
Of my life in slow steps, slow decades, toward a distant curve.
Wondering what waits there;
To live the last of my life, short now,
and spare. Bearing the weight of air.

Heart of Nature

Scott Melville

I stepped from the trail, back into the woods
with no other thought than to pee, to not be seen.
It was as if I had passed through a door.
This shaded entanglement once reigned supreme,
held sway, continued on and on across this Eastern
land before we came. Is not this the heart of nature
with its upper and lower chambers, atriums
and rough pericardium, its great aortic trunks
and branching limbs transporting nutrients,
the leaves oxygenating the world?

Let Winter Come

Scott Melville

*He who fears he shall suffer,
already suffers what he fears.
— Michel de Montaigne*

Let the colored birds forget their songs,
conspire to leave town without a word,
leave the woods to the caw of crows.

Let the lawns go brown, the trees go bare,
the streetlight shine across your bedroom
walls and floor. Let winter come.

Let the city swings hang from their chains,
the pools close, the ponds and lakes
turn cold and gray. Let winter come.

Let the ferns freeze in the length of night,
the furnace kick on, the decks and railings
get frosted white. Let winter come.

Look for your gloves and woolen hat,
get the quilted comforter out, roll up the
hose and drain the pipes. Let winter come.

Appreciate ordinary things, how marvelous
they are, the year will end, come what may,
it's okay, let winter come.

Helping My Son Learn to Walk

Charlene Redick

Now go,
Little guy,
Up off the floor,
Twinkle-toed,
Twitchy,
Reaching up for ballast,
13 months old.

Hob a nob,
Little hoppy happy
E E Cummings child.
A poet being born,
As you chortle and take off.

And here I am waiting on the floor by the sofa.
I have taken on your dimensions,
Three feet tall,
A coach major, wanting you to win
Over gravity, obstacles, fear.
Setting you up for victory
By singing out: *Here I am.*
Walk this way.
Life is so ahead of you.
Take hold.
One foot, then the other, a touch or two,
Then another for balance.
Then let go and fly toward me!

We laugh.
I catch your eye on the wish I am sending your way:
Go for it!
Everything is ahead of you
as you gather jumping, running, climbing into your own keeping.
Your delight is such a better state-of-mind
Than this inert, crawly state that you are leaving behind,
as you rise from infancy to toddler and gain possession of yourself,
And tumble toward me into giggles.

The Use of the Personal Pronoun

Charlene Redick

He used the personal pronoun.
That's how he hooked me.
It was not the class,
My book,
Tomorrow's assignment,
The editor's objective.
It was OUR class,
When WE submit the revisions,
If it were up to US.

Older than I
And with a lot of experience with philandering,
I let him lead me down the rose-strewn, thorn-hidden path of enlightenment,
As I learned the ins and outs of obsession, possession, transgression, deception, elucidation.

In the end, he was begging
For just a word,
Any word,
Personal pronoun or not
From me.

Falling

Crystal H. Rogers

Red line in the thermometer
creeps lower every morning.
Sun starts later, stops earlier,
Never warming quite enough.
Leaves started a slow trickle
down, it's getting late.
Where are you, gone so long?
Remember me? You must,
you follow me everywhere.
Memories bubble up
like Sprite in a glass,
burst at the surface, gone.
Except those waiting
on the sides to
glide out at the
least provocation.
Still, remembering is
better than not.

All About Alligators

Crystal Rogers

He said it was a known fact:
there are Alligators in the Uphapee.
Maybe. I just have not seen them.
I did see the 12 footer
that walked down Sandy Creek
to Roger's Pond.
Roger and the Game Warden
watched him for several days.

The Game Warden got tired,
left the Alligator. Silvia said
it was her, or the Alligator.
Roger dispatched the Alligator.
I went to see him,
stretched to his solemn length,
lying by the chain link fence.
scary, even dead.

A Local Wife
cooked the tail
for the local
Wildlife Aficionados.
It was proclaimed
to be excellent,
tasted like pork.
As, in fact, it was.

Advice to a Senior Citizen

Mary Ann Rygiel

In the month of Nisan, Nehemiah
Asked for wood for timbering the gates,
For the city wall, and for his house.
The prophet's house in Judah brings us
To scanning Auburn's current housing market.
The pandemic led to a rise in lumber prices.

A quite plain house with an undistinguished yard
Right down the street from you
Said by the realtor to have
Lush landscaping and charming curb appeal,
Labeled as a picturesque corner lot
Is seeking a price in the range of a Tolstoyan fable,
"How Much Land Does a Man Need?"
How much money?

It makes you think of selling—
Too much yard, too much square footage to clean,
Too many memories. Too many ghosts.

But if you sell, where will you live?
Surely not in a tent.
A book by an NYT columnist
Said that a survey showed
People don't want to give up indoor plumbing.
You have good instincts.
You don't need a study to tell you that.

Work on your inner house,
Your bone-house, as the Anglo-Saxons would say.
How long does forever last?
The boy you went to your junior prom with--
You, wearing a blue dress, red-faced with
Awkwardness over what to say, holding a
Cup of pink punch, with white gloves,
listening to Franki Vallie and The Four Seasons:
Think, can you love a poor boy like me?
That boy just passed.
He had become a hand surgeon.
He was a good person and classmate.

Read Luke. He will grip you
And tend to your own wellness
As a good doctor does.

Take those stories—
The father of the prodigal,
The Publican in the back bench, head bowed,
Dives, who wouldn't listen to Moses,
Wanting to warn his brothers,
The Samaritan opening his wallet
To someone unknown, a brother only in need,
Mary, with the ointment and cleansing long hair.
Make their message part of you.

A Shakespearean who was tasked
Unexpectedly with playing Hamlet
When the regular choice got sick
Spoke of how everything in his life
Filtered through him
As he played his role.

Let it be that way for you.

The Beekeeper

Mary Ann Rygiel

What if the hive breaks up before its measure
Is yielded, of wax and amber treasure?
Is there a way for us this to prevent?
Of course! From Anglo-Saxon times it was sent.

Manuscripts show keepers clanging their tins.
Old books hint they were repenting strong mead sins.
They used herbs, prayers, and chant incantations:
Honey helped Blessed Mary's ministrations.

Now, brain, you and your lax lucubrations.
When will paper see your deliberations?
Don't let thoughts escape like renegade bees
As you fret about the end of life's lease.
Why feel alarm at the unleashing swarm?
No harm, no foul. Use an Old English swarm charm.

My Mother's Pearls

Barbara Sforzini

My Mother's string of pearls so beautifully that she wore
Lay curled inside a velvet box Inside my dresser drawer
These tiny lustrous orbs from underneath the sea
With earrings that perfectly match are the jewels she bequeathed to me
Each pearl so perfectly round matched in color, luster, and size
With tiny silk knots between them which I now know to be quite wise
For if per chance they break and fall upon the ground
Would not be lost forever but easily could be found.

The Wake

Barbara Sforzini

The casket was lined with satin and lace
The mourners all dressed in black.
The corpse well dressed in her finest attire
With a pillow placed under her back.
Her cheeks painted pink, her lips painted red
With polish on each fingernail.
For her long trip to heaven to meet the Lord Jesus
And a glorious send off....farewell.
The mourners passed slowly with tears in their eyes
For the loss of their dear sweet soul.
That she'd finally meet Jesus at the pearly gates
Where streets are paved out of gold.

Around the Block with Herk and Jerk
William Tolliver Squires

What chance do I have of an easy walk
with unmatched dogs on twisted leashes?

One yanks left the other right

young	old
black	white

Herk and Jerk romp round and round

leaping	lunging
scratching	snorting
bounding	biting

it's nip and tuck	hold on tight
the lead shifts	don't give up
cut them loose	off they'll go
to pee and poo	bark at ghosts
sniff up strangers	chase balloons
bury bones	howl at night

How to Feel Small

Gary Wagoner

It should be simple, now we know
nothing turns around us
but the barren moon.
And that the billions of trillions of fiercely burning stars
are still not everything.

We've learned to see beyond anyone's sight,
gathering the dark red light from near creation
that flows out to us still,
to see deepest time
before the first cell, before water.

And yet still we measure with our bodies the nature of things
as if it were all so close, so familiar,
within the ambit of eyes, arms.
We incline toward grasping what little we might master,
seizing our fleck of time.

Better to try shrinking against the immensity
To open to the beauty of bewilderment,
the clouds and streams of the incomprehensible
to be found in skies, stones:
the ancient becoming
held in every last thing.