

The
In flectionist
Review

No. 5





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T he
Inflectionist
Revue

No. 5

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mission

The Inflectionist Review is a small press publishing stark and distinctive contemporary poetry that fosters dialog between the reader and writer, between words and their meanings, between ambiguity and concept. Each issue gathers established and emerging voices together toward the shared aim of unique expression that resonates beyond the author's world, beyond the page, and speaks to the universality of human language and experience.

Inflectionism is an artistic movement that was started in 2010 by three Portland, Oregon poets who sought a more organic approach that respected both poet and reader, both words and interpretation. As a creative philosophy, Inflectionism seeks to build upon what has come before and gently bend it to reflect what has and has not changed about the world and the language we use to express it.



editors

A. Molotkov
John Sibley Williams

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from the editors

*Each mile,
the distance further starved, the course
that should be taken keeps changing.*

As applicable to life in general as to poetic composition, José Angel Araguz' metaphor extends beyond any definitive meaning. There is a point (or many points) in all successful poems when the expected path branches toward not-yet-realized destinations. Were those destinations always there—shadowed, out-of-sight—awaiting our discovery? Or does our experience of a poem shape where it leads us? And what does “should” mean in this context? Is there an explicit course we can deviate from? Even if there is, does deviation from the should-have-taken necessarily mean we have failed in some way? All the poems in this issue navigate these complex questions in unique ways, though only your experience of them can provoke answers.

We are honored to present the evocative, intimate work of award-winning poet José Angel Araguz in this issue's Distinguished Poet section, alongside the perspective-bending cityscapes of Featured Artist Scott Taylor.

Each piece in *TIR* thrives within its own created world yet adds to the larger dialogue we hope to foster. We invite you to join the conversation.

— A. Molotkov and John Sibley Williams, The Editors

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Sarah Rehfeldt

On Learning How to Look

But see –
if you look *behind* the waves,
beyond each single stroke of silver-threaded water,
to where the sky connects
in an ever-increasing pattern of ruffled light and darkness –
that is where you'll find,
inches above the water, hovering,
a world so quiet, even the remotest of sounds can vanish into it.
You need only to look.
Just look.

Patrick Meighan

Four Crepuscules

i.

What touches her,
What is touched by her.
Her feet and the bare earth,
The breath of sky
Of which her breath is part.
I am still
An open wound, a cloud
Darkening this valley.

ii.

A blue lake
Amid green pines,
Blue and green.
A white bird on the lake,
A black bird in the sky,
The shadow of a woman's
Form fading fast on the shore.
I have nothing else
But desire
To be painted
Into this picture.

iii.

But I have nothing to barter
And it's far better to leave nothing
To chance, not the whisper
Of blossoms falling in darkness,
nor the doubt
Having its own doubts.

iv.

A dog digging into dirt
To escape summer heat.
The way leaves turn their undersides
Skyward to rain.
An open wound, a cloud.

Rebecca Macijeski

Because I've Never Known Them, I Imagine

My ancestors sit heavy in my mind
like toads, sturdy in lake muck,
watery silt drifting about their heads
through the seasons, a steady comfort
in brown earth building eternities.
It helps me to see the slumbering,
their hidden eyes locked
in the gentleness of their own sleep
like moist planets in an aging universe,
how their bodies fade
into impossible softness.



Rebecca Macijeski

Because I Am Not a House

I don't know what to make of snails and the way they slime around everywhere in their homes on one squishy foot. There's an elegance in spirals, in the shells smooth and hollow as weathered bone—artifacts they fix their bodies in. It's a dry case for what lives inside—the moist curio that is a snail.

I rarely envision a single one; I see them more in trains or trails carrying each other through the forest the way rail cars carry coal—all the time squeezing (and squeezing) across a giant world.

And this is how I imagine my mind moving—slow and helmeted along a wildness that each day fills with more interesting predators, more distant shapes passing overhead between me and the sky.

Rebecca Macijeski

Because Inner and Outer Space Unravel Each Other

My lungs squeeze and swell
into clouds the size of their cage.
I imagine them pink and clean in their repeating,
how they float along with me
orbiting my heart's fierce sun.

And this is what I feel like—there's a sky
in my chest always moving up toward space
and down toward earth,
a consistency in breath and song
drawing a map of air
inside each pink world.



Paris Square Jean Cocteau



Patty Paine
Small Fires

1.

I am not a woman held
against the teeth. I'm not
unspun by grief. Listen,
someone is howling. Everywhere,
someone is howling. Howl
by howl, we're making
a necklace of throats.

2.

Bundle cinched to a stick, birch, solid.
Not the stick of beating.
Not wooden spoon, not
bare hand. A stick for leaving
the house of the unspoken,
this room for screams, that
for softly crying. The house
of a woman who moves
only at night. She drags her quiet
behind her, a train of unsaid.
When she stills, it pools
her bare feet. If she stills long
enough, a gleaming rises, trembles
the surface. Try to touch it,
it's already gone.

3.

What if everything is metaphor
for love, and all fingers
point to our chests where a fragile
bird holds a song in its throat.

What if every fourth word
of the song is red, or cave,
or stone, or poem, but they all mean
hunger, except stone which is the sound
of something lost. And poem,
is something we carve
the world with. What if
metaphors are sorrows,
and you stand on your small lawn
holding your sorrow. Many days
no one comes, then someone
does, and you drop your sorrow
into his palm. He holds it
like a splinter, then the wind
says something that sounds,
to both of you, like *go on*.





Patty Paine

Terrible Truths

Every night my heart alights
from my dovecote chest. Morning
it returns, pulses against your palm. It's July
in the desert, the sky is blown
out, snake fruit is drying on the counter,
and you're thinking other worlds,
the house of the long way down,
the basement where you first felt
stirrings of escape. Imagine
your whole life readied you
for this moment, imagine not having
to confess anything. Imagine the light
of you spilling out in all directions.
Suddenly you stop holding
your breath, and all your words for sadness fall
out of meaning. The bougainvillea is dropping
petals onto our patio. The kitchen is possessed
by light, we are possessed by light. Promise me
we'll remember the *most terrible truths*
of our existence: that we are so ruined, and so
loved, and in charge of so little.

Italicized lines from: *Help, Thanks, Wow: The Three Essential Prayers* by
Anne Lamott

Patty Paine

Since Few Such Survived

Rhumb lines (1)

the world is vellum
higher than a church tower
an enormous puzzle
no rough drafts, sketches, mathematics,
(the discrepancies trace themselves)

Distortions (2)

butterflies, spots on wings
drawn on thin metal
how much energy to hammer
metal into faces

Details of coastline (3)

track the butterflies' spots
the oldest drawn by hand
distorted in various small ways
artifact of time and place
their wings, imagined and simulated,
were less precise

Mapping the World (5)

tear paper
compare butterfly to wind, sea
and error compare to man,
how quickly compasses made us
obsolete

Source: "Extraordinarily Accurate Medieval Maps," Julie Rehmeyer, *Discovery Magazine*, June 2014.

Patty Paine

sea road

----- :: -----

whale horse

1. Every term a kenning/self-similar like a fractal.

When you nest kennings
the body is
a recursive analogy.

In other words, the sacramental
is alchemical.

To alchemists, gold and sun were one
and the same.

This analogy can be used
as basis for a simple melody,
though the listener must respond
in the higher and lower voice
of memory. After all,
transposition involves risk.

One must lay down
the entire tapestry of memory at once,
hear a whole song in a fraction of others.



Philip Kobylarz
Old art nouveau

It is ornamentation that we decorate. Tiles. Wallpaper. Pictures and photographs of. Lamp
in its shade. Peppers
green. Peppers red. Rude incipience of the born. Unmediated, a star chart tells of anomalies
that the evening inspires.
Wildflowers never to be tamed. Music from a radio turned off. Walk to the lake having no
directions, waves on
water. That there will be an end, unverified. Telephone call nearly expected. The signal:
busy.

Philip Kobylarz

Apogee

Sunrise's radius. Walking a distance out loud. A collateral of stair cases. Seed caught in between
her teeth. Romances
shelved in the drugstore, smelling of sandwich bread. Flies waiting patiently at doors. Paint on
woodwork stretching its arms.
Her pocketbook containing combinations of locks left locked. Crippled pencil broken at both ends.



London 1



Simon Perchik

[untitled]

These sheep have no choice either
though even in summer
they still want to hear the truth

just by staring back at the grass
lifelike –it’s not for you
they hold power here, let go

nothing, not their fleece
not these sleeves, face to face
–you have no right to stand so close

as if a second sky would wave you past
make room, gather in the Earth
and lift :a small hillside

anything! to mourn –the dead
are here somewhere
not yet marble, not yet enough.

*

The ground so slow to heal
has yellowed though the camera
injected a faint gloss

calmed the family and friends
still afraid to move the body
–not too close! Your cheek

could scare her off and the snapshot
tree and all, left empty
cared for by the sun alone

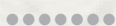
can't get a hold :each evening
hides in front with the small lake
pressed against her forehead

that has nothing to warm
and though the frame is wood
you shake it the way leaves

once left in place tell you
here! among the kisses
with no time to lose.



featured artist



Scott Taylor

artist statement

I started this series by painting abstract maps of made-up places. Soon, photorealism began pulling me in its direction. I began looking for interestingly composed city blocks with dramatic shadows. Each city offered up very different compositions. Hong Kong and Chicago are painted from a higher elevation than Manhattan and Boston. I loved the courtyard shapes of the European cities. The block of Paris I chose looks like it's made up of robotic letterforms. Now I'm looking for compositions in motherboards that remind me of cities.



artist bio

Scott is also a writer and visual designer. He was the editor of *Emergency Horse*, a literary features magazine in Eugene, and a member of the Big Time Poetry Theater. He has designed books and fashion catalogs, tended bar in the Lower Eastside, wrote a humor column, acted in educational training films, checked groceries, and interned as a late night local television news writer. He is in the process of moving from Seattle to Milan with his wife, two daughters, and a small menagerie.





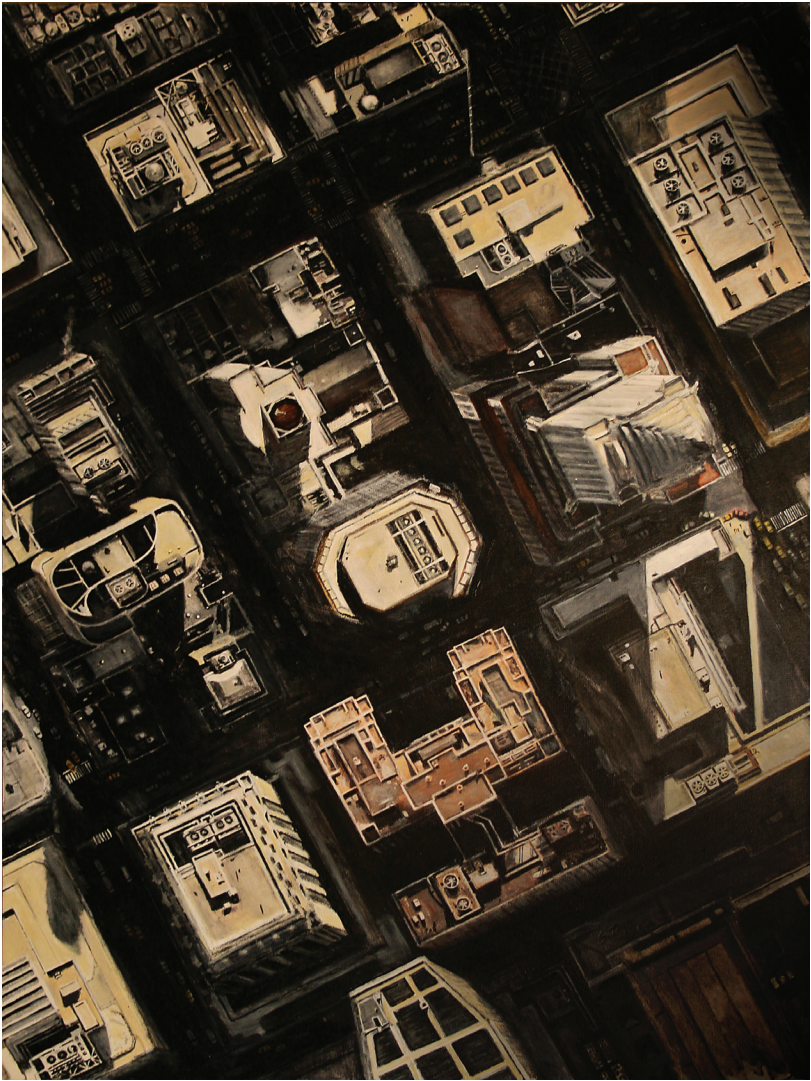
Ludwigshafen am Rhein



Boston Harbor



Chicago Burnham Park Harbor



Manhattan Chrysler Building



Mannheim



Studio 9 November 2009



Elizabeth Mitchell
The Night Ink

I lay in the room of her, no trace of light.

If I remember everything, memory, a long lyric,
the place of ghosts.

As long as I hurt, I won't say a word to her
to safeguard my undoing in what she said.

I wanted to be slow
with her. I heard her breath, her whisper.
I felt a heat, a fragile mourning.

It was raining skin,
she a dark anchor. I had forgotten

how to love that mess that made us human.

Cento Source:

Lee, Chang-Rae. *Native Speaker*. Riverhead Books, 1995. Pages 226-229.





Alicia Hoffman
Incantation

May you be the bat scattering —
misunderstood and repulsed

by your own joy. May you cave
too quick, hang your nights

to dry in dream cocoons
that grow like stalactites

abscessed deep in earth.
May you pocket names,

change a bit more
than you should. This

is a blissful city, though, so
may you swoop, so may

you thread each desire
into web, taste the sweet

heat of blood. May
you be found hanging

by a thread, confusing
the sonar of a stranger

for feast, and when you
become all tangled

may you not break, may
you not flail all colorblind

with blackness, but breeze
back to hover over what is

still your world spinning
in the glory of its web.



John Johnson

Bearded Lichen

We arrived at dusk among trees
to the sound of something & we thought

a symbol is a way of hearing as a deer
feels its way like thinking

at the edge of a meadow every word
asking what is this

that turns to shadow its breath
moist air moving across a meadow

We say of two plates that one migrates
against the other that a trope

moves in its innocence
through time like a gesture

We arrived at dusk The end was there
in a garden of machines among trees

dendrites in a dream on a wooden bridge
on which we were standing above a creek

the sound like a spider thread
carried horizontally wandering

in place giving way



Aden Thomas

Star Marrow

The gap between the stars is like memory.
We dream and the space closes.
We run the Milky Way
holding hands to reach the constellations.
Can we pull the stardust down
in a universe expanding at the speed of touch?
We cast our hopes into that space.
What comes back we eat raw.
The rest of our time we pick clean
the bones we find inside ourselves.
We break the marrow, the taste
of one another, enough to fill the distance.

Doug Bolling

Stria 5

a hand lifting

a hand beginning across a
plane of light

you have witnessed it,

a hand yours searching toward a conclusion
as though a knowing
as though a possible
resolution

a spatial a temporal

a hand there reaching as if to claim,
to begin the ceremony
of a recovery

or perhaps its motions among the shadows
of the narrow room
wherein the dying

a pallor of it, a failing prehension
a pooling of blue veins
a distortion among the brittle ridges of bone

a hand a manner of a seeking
as though to achieve a caress
of the beloved

so much emptied out

so much unspoken.



Ben Meyerson
On Difficulty

Like flotsam that
bulges in with
 a ragged tide
your ribbon of breath buds
 burgeons then night
stowed in its coves bundled in – cloth
like cloth that
contorts into
 tight spaces
your ribbon of breath braided
 brought to bear on night
so you stow me in its coves – fresh, livid
livid like sea-burnt oak that
tenses into your form
 the littered scent on
your ribbon of breath salt
 faint ash tongue
the coves of your speech broadened tongues
like flotsam that
bulges in with
 a ragged tide.



Peter Grandbois

The ballet of the broken

I lost my glasses and didn't see the spider on the wall. I never saw the way it moved back and forth across the crack as if trying to sew shut this unsettled house. Never saw it stop, waiting for evening to put an end to this army of gray days.

Never saw its tentative arrival at the water stain on the ceiling, how it charted its circumference like a map, looking for a way in, a safe path, the way I sit now sifting through the remains of one life or another. What is real? What has been imagined? The ballet of the broken. It's like the time I could only afford tickets in the back row of the balcony. The dancers didn't look like dancers. More like spiders, spinning a dream past all revelation of the body. Which is how I feel in this chair, waiting for that crack in the wall to open, wondering what it is I see or don't see, why the obvious seems so difficult to know.



Peter Grandbois

The doctor said he was fine

What it looked like we can only imagine. His body split. The edges of everything blurred. And there she is, flopping about the floor, begging him to stay, to go, as if the choice had ever been his. Like the time he was twelve and came across that robin stuck in the freshly laid tar, most of its feathers torn off before it succumbed to exhaustion. He couldn't pry it loose. It took five attempts before he managed to ride his bike over its head. Now, we watch the slick and wait like a seam sown in the darkness.



Benjamin DeVos

Grief

There isn't time to consider
underwater, when you float between
a wave that pushes and the tide
that pulls. Only the mute, airless space
interrupted by a crash that washes
over your white-freckled back, bare to
the salt and sun passing through
pellucid ocean. It's like a voice in your
head that tells you to swim further
into the shadows that keep the world
slowly turning through darkness.



Benjamin DeVos

When the baby blue jay

got caught in the eye of a needle,
it fluttered its wings with
such force that the pinions tore
like rice paper, flap after flap,
until there were no flaps left.
Without wings, it was not a bird
but an instrument, a melodious
coo of a note that floats along
the breeze. Then, when the wind
stopped, it was quiet enough to
hear the needle drop.

Marjorie Power

Under

Under the afghan, a hand.
Under the hand, upholstery.
Under the sofa, storage
for sunken dreams. Breathlessness.
A dusty floor. Under that,
a basement full of chaos.
There's a couch, someone
sprawled, a hand that lifts
the edge of an afghan.
A flicker of a gesture.
As if to say, *I remember
the dreams you knitted me.*



Brett Harrington

Samsara

I'm my own
burnt offering
smoke un-
skain-
ing into
blue roan dawn

Brett Harrington

Ouroboros

to come back
around to

yourself
that clearing

same fossil
pines

same rash of
sky

to come back
around to

that moment
void

of beginning
of end

frail as
a fleck of

ash on your
finger-tip

to come back
around to

yourself
that clearing

same sallow
haze

same blossom
balm



distinguished poet

.....

José Angel Araguz



the interview

Q: Having published many of your poems in past issues, we've noticed a consistent structure we'll call "intense brevity". Each poem hints at a much longer story, a complete narrative, a broad character study, though you only provide us with the details most essential to each specific experience. Do you feel your poems are exploring different moments of the same narrative? 'He', 'she', 'the father', 'the child'—are these unique to each poem or is there a larger context in which they live?

I'd like to first admit how influential the experience of submitting and being published in *The Inflectionist Review* has been. From reading through the "Inflectionism" statement as well as the first issue which had poem after poem that lived up to the ambitions outlined in said statement, I was hooked. I immediately began to think that here was a new avenue and shape of thinking, one that rang true to me. This original inspiration came at a time when I was working with a varying five-line form which I call "hands," kind of the unkempt poetic nephews of Yasunari Kawabata's palm-of-the-hand stories. With Inflectionism in mind, I went to work on batches of these shorter lyrics.

In my general approach to short lyrics, I am heavily influenced by the short poems of Stephen Crane and Yannis Ritsos as well as my reading and writing of haiku and tanka. In the work of Crane and Ritsos, there's a fatefulness and vividness which is the heart of lyric poetry, a heart which pulses via voice, image, and brevity. This famous one by Crane will serve as an example of what I mean:

In the desert
I saw a creature, naked, bestial,
Who, squatting upon the ground,
Held his heart in his hands,
And ate of it.
I said, "Is it good, friend?"
"It is bitter—bitter," he answered;

"But I like it
"Because it is bitter,
"And because it is my heart."

What keeps me coming back to this poem is the turn at the end, where the content sinks into its multiple meanings, moving the reader to return to the

beginning and see the whole enterprise of the poem in a different light. For me, poetry is all about that turn where you realize the stakes are personal, both for the poet and the reader, all of it happening indirectly via the poem.

As for the influence of haiku and tanka, there's a notion poet Dennis M. Garrison calls "dreaming room" which he describes as "some empty space inside the poem which the reader can fill with his personal experience, from his unique social context." This idea is similar to Inflectionism's descriptions of poems where "[there] are gaps between images and ideas that the observer fills in with their own perceptions." While each of these forms – haiku, tanka, "hands" – has its respective formal and conceptual sensibilities, there's a common strand of insistence on space for the reader to engage, of the poet backing off content for the sake of possible intents. This, in short, is the overall conceptual context of the poems.

Q: Although you portray intimate moments between flesh-and-blood people, there is often a sense of distance between them. What intrigues you about human distance (especially between family members) and why do you feel it resonates with readers?

The concept of human distance is a fascinating one. This term makes me think of the ways distance plays out. There's the physical distance between people, the way people move away. In my family, it's the distance my mother put between herself and my father, which turned out to be the distance between one country and another. The (im)migration of family members between countries plays out in the culture I'm from in terms of work; I have uncles that only see family during seasons of unemployment, for whom family time is bittersweet because being with them means being without the means of providing for them. I feel a parallel distance in terms of the physical distance of my leaving home to pursue an education. These physical distances play out in terms of concentrated efforts at communication via phone calls, letters, conversations and visits that are too brief.

There's also the distance of memory: When you've been separated from someone for a long time, which you do they remember? Certain stories and jokes get repeated, shared almost like charms to reaffirm who we are to one another. I would add to this emotional distance: the distance needed from actually feeling things in order to see what was felt. It is these last two especially that I feel make for compelling writing. I feel human distance resonates with readers because of the intimacy (and lack of) implied.

This train of thought makes me think of the elegiac themes in my writing. I like the word "elegiac" specifically because of how it can be read strictly as "like an elegy" but not. Elegies tend to be final words, whereas in the poems about my

father that keep coming, the drive seems to be not to come to a final word but to keep seeing what there is to see, using absence as a fulcrum to dig into the present. It also makes me think of something Jim Harrison said in an essay: “The unanswered question is why a poet transforms experience, not so much to make it understandable, but to make it yield its aesthetic possibilities.” This idea of aesthetic possibilities, that’s where connections happen. Not the facts for the sake of themselves, but facts that lead to the artifacts of feelings.

Q: Can you talk us through the metaphor behind this stunning, ambiguous line: “Who she is lies in the time between the eyes taking turns being cloudy”?

This question on a line from “The Story of Eyes” makes me realize how much of a teenage poem I had written. The girl in the poem goes through having her parents separate, an event that plays out in being able to cry only from one eye at a time. When with one parent, she cries from one eye, and cries from the other when with the other parent. I call this a teenage poem because it is in the human distance (to use a new favorite term) created by the parents separating that the girl in the story can see clearly. Each parent brings sorrow to an eye; she is only able to glimpse an idea of who she is beyond those feelings of torn loyalty and betrayal when moving between parents.

Q: Many of your poems convey a sense of allegory, and you even include direct reference to ‘the story’ in two of the poems in this issue. Can you speak to this idea of storytelling, of the story-within-poem technique?

Ultimately, it’s a matter of context; a poet can get into any territory given the right framework or conceit. Sometimes it takes years. I recently wrapped up a book-length project which combines elements of fragmentary writing, autoethnography, essay, and lyric sequence, a portion of which is comprised of a series of poems about the devil I’ve tinkered with for ten years. I returned to them on and off over the years, never knowing how to move beyond vague ideas of the devil and devilhood. It wasn’t until recently when I began digging into a narrative that had nothing directly to do with the devil that I suddenly realized the possible tones those other poems could add to a highly personal project. I say all this only to say that any concept I have of storytelling involves misdirection and perseverance.

My guides into allegory poems are Jack Gilbert and Yannis Ritsos as well as Zen koans and Sufi tales, the latter of which use symbolism to convey lessons. Gilbert incorporates myths into a personal lore of his own. His poem “Michiko Dead” about a wife that passed, mentions her only in the title. After that first line (“He manages like somebody carrying a box / that is too heavy”), the reader’s given a thorough, objective description of grueling physical effort and persistence, all of

it hinged to emotion via that quick simile “He manages like . . .”

With Ritsos, there is an impulse towards what I would term abstract allegory. He has a poem entitled “Protection” which starts off:

The sky bends over us, responsible,
as our poem bends over the sadness of mankind,
as the sensitive, initiated eyelid bends over the eye,

He then goes on to deliver a concise, powerful meditation of the eyelid that astonishes me every time I read it. This idea of abstract allegory is where my “story” poems come in. I suppose I’m fascinated less with storytelling (which implies the story can be told, beginning, middle, and end) and more with storymaking. As in “The Story of Eyes,” there are the elements of the story (eyes/parents separating), and then the stories that play out, both the fable-like narrative and the emotional undercurrent. My goal is evocation of feeling; or, as is nicely noted on *The Inflectionist Review* site, a poetry that “asks questions and lets the reader answer them.”

Q: Since the Inflectionist Review is run by a Russian and a Bostonian who have escaped to Portland, Oregon, it’s only natural to ask: would you be willing to share some of your family history and comment on its impact on your life and work? What role, if any, has immigration played in your family?

As I alluded to before, I have a particular narrative and engagement with the idea of (im)migration. I toy with the spelling of the word not out of any random whim; rather, I feel compelled to personalize the word for myself. I mean, two letters separate this charged word from what birds do seasonally. In terms of family and writing, I write about the border what I know about the border, what I’ve picked up from conversations growing up as well as what I’ve seen going back and forth. I know my mother and aunt who raised me were born in Matamoros. I know that my mother was mistreated and looked down upon during the first years after crossing over into Texas with my aunt. I know my mother marveled at first seeing the skyscrapers that line Corpus Christi Bay. I know that my mother had me at fourteen, a time in her life when she swears she knew nothing about what was happening to her. I know that there are stories I was told to keep to myself. I know that if I ever ask about the hardships of those early years, my mother tears up and changes the conversation. I know that these days my mother refuses to go to Mexico because of the border violence, the gangs and drug trafficking. I know that my aunt still goes and visits family. I know that my aunt has been held at gunpoint more than once in the past five years on these visits. I know there are stories I can’t share without tearing up myself.

Looking back at the above, the role of (im)migration can be said to be one primarily of momentum and work. The border, the Rio Bravo (or the Rio Grande), the Spanish of my household and the English of my schooling, the fear of being seen as different and the desire to fit in, all of it meets in motion. My mother moved here to find a better life and she did, the whole time urging me to follow a similar momentum and better life. There was no clear definition of what “better life” meant, and so naturally it came to poetry, with its fluidity and momentum.

I say *naturally*, and I don’t mean it lightly. I grew up having seen my father only twice in my life; he died when I was six. This absence, along with the absence of details from my early family life, leave a lot of white space in the mind. Writing has always been a place to land but also to move slower, to keep moving when life feels stuck. Between what I know and don’t know, I feel my way through to the truth of each moment, an (im)migration of the soul.

Q: What is, to you, a life devoted to one’s art? Recently we’ve learned of your work for the *Cincinnati Review*, which must be a most delightful experience. At the same time, we understand you are pursuing a PH.D. Can you tell us more about these engagements? In a life of an artist, how do other parts fall into place to contribute to a meaningful and productive whole?

Alan Berecka, a South Texas poet, recently paid me one of the most meaningful compliments while introducing me at a reading; he said that most writers he knows wear many hats, but that he considered me someone who kept one hat on, that of poetry. I was moved to hear him say that because it is something that I strive for, to live by and for poetry. Everything I do of value starts in poetry. This goes for the other genres I write in as much as much as the life around the writing.

James Wright said in an interview once that he wrote poetry for a kind of emotional stability, and I say: Yes, that’s it! Once I got hooked, poetry became the anchor, the compass. I can always tell how well my life is going by how much writing I get done and how true it rings. There have been dark years when little got written, and the little that did get written felt false. I keep to a regular writing schedule, at least half an hour a day. If I can indulge in a little more, all the better. And always something new as well as something old. I’m revising as much as I’m writing most of the time. This practice has kept me and my writing alive with a kind of fluidity that can be achieved only by process. There in the ink, in the line break, in the irreverently phrased lyric paragraph is the pulse.

My work at the CR has been illuminating. I like to think of it as another aspect

of the big conversation and community. Sometimes you're the person sending poems out; sometimes you're the one reading them. The biggest lessons, in fact, come from reading through submissions and taking the time to listen, to hear a poem through and consider it. As for the PHD, I wanted to get back into teaching. I took a six year break after my MFA, mainly to get over myself and the bitterness of getting a full dose of workshop/publishing world vibes. Going back for the PHD, I had with me many lessons of what not to value as well as what to look for. As I enter my final year and prepare to enter the job market, there's a lot of fear of what comes next, on the practical front. Yet, I feel armed with hope; there's much good to be done by creative writers in academia as well as outside it. As writers, we do the kind of work that people find meaningful. Write a good poem, and people will share it, will blog it, will copy it out and pin it to a community board, will quote it on social media. That's amazing to me. Our work has us engaged with creating meaning, which puts us in the position to guide people on how to find meaning for themselves. One solid metaphor can change a life. We know this firsthand. In whatever classroom I'm in, that is one of the key lessons I try to bring. In this way, I come back to poetry, the art helping me understand the life, and vice versa.

Q: Many of your characters are presented amidst their suffering, and the poet's commentary is warm and compassionate. What is the role of empathy in your approach to poetry? Is art about pain or about laughter?

Empathy, for me, is all about attention and listening. As in prayer, so in poetry; words come into play for the service of something other. Any suffering in my poetry is present to be listened to and given space. I believe as poets we have a gift to listen closely to the poems that come and surprise us on the page, and to transcribe them in a way that makes them available for others to listen in on. I mean, we write poetry alone by listening to ourselves long enough to hear past ourselves; readers of poetry are put in the same space as the poet, a space of human listening.

In regards to poetry being about pain or laughter, the writer Norma E. Cantú said a wonderful thing in an interview, essentially that there is a kind of sensibility inherent to South Texans (my hometown is Corpus Christi) that allows one to laugh through their sorrows – not laugh them off, but rather to be able to laugh in the midst of the struggle. Whatever hardships there were growing up, I always remember them being handled with a mix of tears and laughter. In conversation, I'll find myself relating a story that has me eating nothing but mayonnaise sandwiches one summer as a kid in a garage apartment or having a beer bottle broken over my head in my twenties, and I'll find myself delivering it with a bit of laughter, only to look up at someone blank-faced. It's not that I take these things lightly, but rather that, to survive them, you have to survive yourself, your hurt self, your broken self. For me, poetry is about both pain and laughter,

each a half of the whole of life. More and more, I feel that my mode is to put on the asbestos gloves and really get in there, handling the hazardous materials of the heart, not with bravado but with conviction and resilience.

Q: Why has poetry in the U.S. dwindled to a genre of interest predominantly to other poets, which is not the case in many other world's locales? Is it Shakespeare's fault? What can we do to invigorate modern poetry and expand its audience?

A loaded set of questions, no? Let me start by answering the first one by saying that, in my eyes, poetry has and will always be “a genre of interest predominantly to other poets” for the same reason most fans of professional sports will engage at one point or another in pick-up games. When you fall in love with something, you want to on some level engage with it, learn the terms and practices, try your hand at it, etc. When the human mind is fascinated, it wants more of the story of what it's fascinated by.

Billy Collins noted: “the trouble with poetry is / that it encourages the writing of more poetry.” I would quibble with this a bit and say not “trouble” but “the trial of poetry;” it's good poetry if someone turns around after reading or hearing a poem and finds themselves wanting to open up like that, even if only for a second of thought. And yes, I'm counting “poetic thought” as falling under the category of poetry practice. I've known people revise their lives with the same kind of earned and fought-for insights poems are revised out of darkness from. Also, if the U.S. poetry scene is viewed as being limited to those who win the big prizes or are in the big name magazines or published by the big presses or headlining AWP, then that's a very ungenerous take on American poetry. Poetry matters to more people than you think. There are poets on Instagram and Twitter with followers in the hundreds of thousands (not all of them poets themselves), not to mention the poetry slam and spoken word scenes or the number of regional poetry festivals that happen around the country via community centers and writing groups. While some mistakenly argue against the merits of poetry on social media, in performance, or outside of the “po-biz” as it is called, there's no denying the connections poets and non-poets alike have with poetry wherever they find it. I have been fortunate enough to have people come up to me after a reading and say, “Y'know, I don't read poetry, but I liked what you did up there.” I have shared the stage with slam poets who can command a room of hundreds down to a hush, but who have never been heard of by National Book Award winners or academic scholars. Essentially, my favorite poets haven't heard of your favorite poets, and vice versa. That's America. America's also about turning people on to things. To quibble again, not “dwindled” – we've kindled, and keep kindling!

As for it being Shakespeare's fault, only if by Shakespeare you mean the canon.

Shakespeare, from what I know of his lore, placed butts in seats and kept folks entertained; and, from what I've read of his poetry and plays, he kept them there with quality. But that's an argument for the artist. Ideas of tradition and canon(s) are dangerous when prescriptive. These days, we need to think less in terms of canons and more in terms of playlists. On one of my current playlists, I have a trap rapper, a British female rocker, a California rock band, and a Colombian rock star all taking turns enriching my life. The best way to invigorate modern poetry would be to read and write as widely, joyfully, and as intensely as you'd put together a playlist. We all need more stories. Putting your stories out there is participating in the conversation, helping to shuffle the stories around.



Shibuya Tokyo

José Angel Araguz

Night Sky Manifesto

Blueprints I will learn to read.
A stretch of self-portrait: my smile
as a child standing at a mirror
too long. The tinkered lights ships
are lost and guided by. Each mile,
the distance further starred, the course
that should be taken keeps changing.
There is no corner to this, only
nerve: I try to own the sky
and collapse. How it feels to have
my hands in empty pockets. Blueprints
to a house made up of the bones
under my face. Where to begin,
on what level, on what foundation?
Blueprints made on paper that won't
stop moving. What I would see
if I let the river fill my lungs:
my skin could tell my stories, my heart
would cease and fill the sky. Tonight,
a stretch of stars, the knuckles of
a hand, I can't tell what
it offers. I just want to touch
the paper, push against a star.
Skin, tell my stories. Heart, fill the sky.

José Angel Araguz
The Music Inside

Tenia la musica por dentro.

Talking about the kind of man
my father was, my mother grows
silent, perhaps recalling
how it felt to pull off his shirt
and find a line of eighth notes rising
from a treble clef tangle of hair.

I know I've grown with the same hair
across my body, around words rising
in silence, know he'd give his shirt
to help, but didn't know his calling:
that like a seashell hardens and grows
to hold the sea, so could a man
call to a woman from something inside.

José Angel Araguz

Midnight

Throwing off the boots still blood-black from the slaughterhouse
and coming down the hall half-asleep, my aunt was midnight to me,
appearing at that hour a character out of a story one shares with a child
not for any moral or fear but to leave an impression,
the story of a shadow, stepping out of and returning to shadow.



José Angel Araguz
Cornflower

At work, she sighs
(the bit of cornflower blue
flaked over her eyelids
sifts obediently)
with the sea.

José Angel Araguz

Leave

Having reached the part of his story where he turned
to see pieces of a bomb lodged in the arms and chest of his friend,
the young soldier stops and stares into his drink,
his face the white of paper
on which nothing more could be written





José Angel Araguz

The Story of Eyes

The girl who could only cry from one eye at a time after her parents divorced.

When with her mother, one eye brimmed, hot with tears.

When with her father, a cold trickle along one side of her face.

Who she is lies in the time between the eyes taking turns being cloudy.

When clear, she says things like: *I bet the sun and moon think all the stars the same.*

José Angel Araguz

Story of the Salt Doll

It travels a thousand miles to the sea. Walks in, dissolves.
Its last piece breaks, the doll realizes its identity.
Which is fine. Until one considers low tide: salt hardening,
the far water cut with the white of the moon, the white of the stars.
White pulsing over the sand. Broken, sifted, white.





London 3



Jeff Whitney
The Falling Man

—after a picture taken 9/11/01

Sometimes a choice
is as obvious as the sky
slowly filling
with another planet, errant
as an eight ball,
errant as the moon
never is.

How it could be just a picture
of a building in Autumn.

Hope. Time. The same
poison, different
bottles, the same glass,
the same throat
opened.

How it could almost be just a picture.



Jeff Whitney

When the Pond Dries

You can find the bodies
of things you didn't know
lived there. You can tie them

together with string and make
a universe. You can invent
some people and a planet

for them. You can send your
self to live among them.
You can tell them *follow*

the fiercest animal in your
sky. You can become their
tired wail, their impression

of a hand grenade.
And they? They will
love you. They will

slit each other open
just to find you.



Penelope Scambly Schott

My Box of Stars

Sometimes I am the brother who flies
with one swan wing,

my crooked flight path leaving crooked
contrails.

When I was that nymph turned to wood,
my only voice

was the caw of the crow from my topmost
branch.

Crow said,

*There was one night I loved you.
Keep that night in your box of stars.*

Even a dung beetle can navigate
by the light of the Milky Way

but I cannot.
Although I am still trying to hatch pearls

in the hot curl of my tongue.



Penelope Scambly Schott

How to See

There's a special way of looking. Forget what you think you know. Now look around you. Dots of drizzle pocking the lake. Red-tinged finches fighting at the feeder. These blossoming horse chestnut trees, each petal with its livid pink dot, the huge conical clusters improbable as the great fern forests where dinosaurs might loll about in Jurassic shade, those dinosaurs who grew up with you: oh, yes, Tyrannosaurus Rex, yes, Triceratops, lovely Brontosaurus, extinct, banished, and restored, each of 'em more enormous than Daddy, and all of 'em still with us. You don't believe me? Close your eyes.

Abra Bertman

Way-bread

I'll take the light that lights
on small things—the fire on the leaf
the purple on the stone

cold and flat at the edge
of the water's dusk.

I'll take the will to put two twigs together
hold them up to late light,
the slight bones of the afternoon.

When the world bangs the great drum
I'll shelter a bright chord against the wind
let it sing under my tongue

let it sprout.

Sam Roxas-Chua

Seaside

Out here, wild sunflowers drink
from the small hands of salt.

A little red girl visits my hotel window
and points to leviathans on the beach

spelling my name on the surf with their tongue.
I pound on the window, she falls

five chapters down—disappears.
I close the curtains. Out here,

mornings move like kelp,
green tea tastes like diamonds.

Annie Lighthart

Octaves

Insomnia

The sheep are native and need neither introduction nor persuasion to enter the brain. They go over the fence and into the field as if it had no ending, no walls, no wolves — nothing but kindly green grass and small streams. They drift toward what they believe are seamless rolling hills on which to graze or be alone with a flower. At night, they watch the dome of the sky and its two glittering stars. If there is anything else, they do not know and do not want it. It is enough to lie down in safety and let the darkness take form.

Light

Imagine the stars see clearly through the velvet length of space. Imagine they see us running around as we do, seeming to shout *Fire! Fire!* throughout the day, then strangely collapsing into sleep each extravagant night, not waking to pull the curtains back, hardly ever seeing how kindly stars look, how their light doesn't burn, never scorns, how across the span of a table or over a sea of discontented talk, eyes might look at each other that way— something, a longer question — a quiet thing arriving.

Time

The world is not ours alone,
and to some, night is more beneficial than sun.
The river rises and they come, undismayed.
The spaces between houses open like roads.
The wave of them goes over the fence
as easily as under, though just yesterday
we thought the boards so wide and so high.
Like time, a rat squeezes, lengthens, and goes through.

Mornings to Come

Does every morning think it's the first morning
or is each one more like the children in costume
waiting at the side of the stage:
mornings in line behind the heavy curtain,
some dreamy, some with racing hearts, one —
the morning of your death — drifting off
to look in the dim backstage mirror,
curious and forgetful of its lines and the crowd.

The Dead

Sometimes we dream of the dead so easily, so well:
the terrible knot has been won, the ribbon flows whole,
it was just a mistake, they are alive, here at the table.
They eat, they joke, they sit with a book and doze.
The world is new, everyone is here, no one has ever
been taken. Even the night is pleasant as they turn to leave.
The dead live so close by, no one minds going home.
There is no error now. All things exchange darkness for light.



Annie Lighthart

After Listening to Birds

You ask what death is

What is it if not this—
a call towards, a call to,
a call—

At the edge of the green branch
three knowings in the bird

The last not a song
but a warmth and direction—

To go—
to fall into air



Martin Willitts, Jr

Nocturne

Let the snow fall as paper cutout flakes.
Let the ebony moon wander in its tiny apartment.
Let the flammable birds exit your name.
When you died, bulrushes wept constellations.

In the nave of a church, mourners hide purple shrouds.
In the polished wooden pews, grief
is eighty-six black and white piano keys.
The instrument of sadness is only one note.

In a tree is hidden firelight.
From the smallest oleander, a hummingbird extracts love.
Grief is such a tiny box until you open its contents.
When you died, a new island was created.



Hong Kong and Kowloon

contributors

José Angel Araguz is a CantoMundo fellow and winner of Rhino Poetry's 2015 Editor's Prize. He has had poems recently in *Poet Lore*, *Borderlands*, and *The Laurel Review*. He is pursuing a PhD in Creative Writing and Literature at the University of Cincinnati. He runs the poetry blog *The Friday Influence*.

Abra Bertman lives in Amsterdam where she teaches writing and English literature at the International School of Amsterdam. Her poems have appeared in *WomenArts Quarterly Journal*, *Citron Review*, *Paper Nautilus*, *Sugared Water*, and *Rust + Moth*. "When the World Comes Home," product of a collaboration with jazz pianist Franz Von Chossy, appears in the liner notes of the CD of the same name.

Doug Bolling's poems have appeared in *Jukeed*, *Posit*, *Agave*, *Iodine Poetry Journal*, *Sediments*, *Water-Stone Review*, *Kestrel*, and *The Deronda Review*. He is currently completing a chapbook for 2016 publication.

Benjamin DeVos is an interdisciplinary artist from Philadelphia, studying as a creative writing student at Temple University. His work is published or forthcoming in *Black Denim Lit*, *Bob Dead City*, *Pantheon*, *Up the Staircase Quarterly*, and *WhiskeyPaper*, among others.

Peter Grandbois is the author of seven previous books including, most recently, *The Girl on the Swing* (Wordcraft of Oregon 2015). His poems, stories, and essays have previously appeared in such journals as *The Kenyon Review*, *The Gettysburg Review*, *Boulevard*, *Prairie Schooner*, *The Denver Quarterly*, *New Orleans Review*, *Zone 3*, and *DLAGRAM*, among many others, and have been shortlisted for both Best American Essays and the Pushcart Prize. His plays have been performed in St. Louis, Columbus, Los Angeles, and New York. He is senior editor at *Boulevard* magazine and teaches at Denison University in Ohio.

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Originally from Pennsylvania, **Alicia Hoffman** now lives, writes and teaches in Rochester, New York. Author of *Like Stardust in the Peat Moss* (Aldrich Press, 2013), her poems have appeared recently in *Word Riot*, *One Throne Magazine*, *Rust + Moth*, *Redactions*, *A-Minor Magazine* and elsewhere. Twice nominated for the Pushcart Prize, she is currently completing an MFA in Poetry at the Rainier Writing Workshop in Tacoma, Washington.

John Johnson's poems have appeared in many print and online journals, including *BOXCAR Poetry Review*, *Chaparral*, *Clade Song*, *Triggerfish Critical Review*, and *Web Conjunctions*. You can find more of his poetry at poemalot.tumblr.com.

Philip Kobylarz's recent work has appeared or will appear in *Connecticut Review*, *Basalt*, *Santa Fe Literary Review*, *New American Writing*, *Poetry Salzburg Review* and has appeared in *Best American Poetry*. His book, *Rues*, was recently published by Blue Light Press of San Francisco. His collection of fiction, *Now Leaving Nowheresville*, has been recently published and his book-length essay *Nearest Istanbul* is forthcoming.

Annie Lighthart's poetry collection *Iron String* was published in 2013 by Airlie Press. Her poetry has been read by Garrison Keillor on *The Writer's Almanac* and chosen by Naomi Shihab Nye to be placed in Ireland's Galway University Hospitals as part of their Poems for Patience project. Annie's poems have been published in journals such as *Cimarron Review*, *The Greensboro Review*, and *Hunger Mountain*. She earned an MFA from Vermont College and has taught at Boston College, as a poet in the schools, and currently with Portland's Mountain Writers. She believes that poetry has strange powers to transform waking life.

Rebecca Macijeski is a Doctoral Candidate at the University of Nebraska, and holds an MFA from Vermont College of Fine Arts. She currently serves as an Assistant Editor in Poetry for *Hunger Mountain* and *Prairie Schooner*. Some of her recent work has been featured as part of the Tupelo Press *30/30 Project*, and she is a recipient of a 2012 Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Prize. She has attended artist residencies with The Ragdale Foundation and Art Farm Nebraska. Poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Poet Lore*, *Potomac Review*, *Painted Bride Quarterly*, *Rappahannock Review*, *Nimrod*, *Gargoyle*, *Tinderbox Poetry Journal*, *Sycamore Review*, *Storyscape*, *Border Crossing*, and others. Read more at www.rebeccamacijeski.com.

Patrick Meighan's translations of Cesar Vallejo and Federico Garcia Lorca have appeared in *Abalone Ink*, and his reviews of books by Gregory Orr and Valzhyna Mort have appeared in *The Common Online*. Meighan's original poems have appeared in several online and print journals, including most recently *Alexandria Quarterly Magazine*.

Ben Meyerson is a poet who has split his time between Toronto, Ontario and Portland, Oregon. He has a chapbook entitled "In A Past Life" forthcoming with the Alfred Gustav Press, and his work has appeared in journals such as *Epignosis Quarterly* and *Parchment*.

Elizabeth Mitchell grew up in Detroit and resides in southeast Michigan. She builds websites for a living. Her poems have appeared in *BLACKBERRY: a magazine*, *Blue Heron Review*, *Mobius: The Journal of Social Change*, and *Sediments Literary-Arts Journal*. Birds, nature, sunsets, and water help sustain her and the meaningful connections that are made between people. She writes, reads, and listens to poetry to connect to others and plug into that which is sacred within.

Patty Paine is the author of *Grief & Other Animals* (Accents Publishing), *The Sounding Machine* (Accents Publishing), *Feral* (Imaginary Friend Press), *Elegy & Collapse* (Finishing Line Press), and co-editor of *Gathering the Tide: An Anthology of Contemporary Arabian Gulf Poetry* (Garnet Publishing & Ithaca Press) and *The Donkey Lady and Other Tales from the Arabian Gulf* (Berkshire). Her poems, reviews, and interviews have appeared in *Blackbird*, *The Louisville Review*, *Gulf Stream*, *The Journal*, *The South Dakota Review*, and other publications. She is the founding editor of *Diode Poetry Journal*, and Diode Editions, and is an assistant professor of English at Virginia Commonwealth University Qatar where she teaches writing and literature, and is Interim Director of Liberal Arts & Sciences.

Simon Perchik's poetry has appeared in *Partisan Review*, *The Nation*, *The New Yorker*, and elsewhere.

Marjorie Power's poetry collection, *Seven Parts Woman*, is forthcoming in 2016 from Cherry Grove Collections. Her poems also appear in six chapbooks and one other full length collection, all from small presses. Over 400 of her poems appear in journals and anthologies, including *Poet Lore*, *The Atlanta Review*, and *The Random House Treasury of Light Verse*. She is married with six grandchildren and lives in Denver, after many years in the Northwest.

Sarah Rehfeldt is a recent Pushcart nominee and author of *Somewhere South of Pegasus*, a collection of image poems. Her work has appeared in *Appalachia*, *Weber – The Contemporary West*, *Presence Journal*, and *Kaleidoscope*. Sarah lives with her family in western Washington where she is also an artist and photographer. Her book can be purchased from her photography web pages at: www.pbbase.com/candanceski.

Sam Roxas-Chua is a Chinese-Filipino poet and visual artist who resides in Eugene, Oregon. He is the author of *Fawn Language*, published by Tebot Bach (Chapbook, 2013). His poems have appeared in various journals including *Narrative*, *December Magazine*, *Jefferson Monthly*, and the forthcoming anniversary issue of *Cream City Review*. His collection of poems, *Diary of Collected Summers*, won the first place award in the 7th Annual *Missouri Review* Audio Competition in poetry. He is the owner of The Poetry Loft, a small business dedicated to community writing workshops and the promotion of poets and writers. He's also the editor of *The Quietry*, a bi-annual literary journal.

Penelope Scambly Schott's verse biography *A is for Anne: Mistress Hutchinson Disturbs the Commonwealth* received an Oregon Book Award. Her newest book is *How I Became an Historian*. Penelope and her husband and her dog sponsor the White Dog Poetry Salon. She also teaches an annual poetry workshop in Dufur, Oregon.

Aden Thomas grew up in central Wyoming. His poetry has been featured in *The Kentucky Review*, *Up The Staircase Quarterly*, and *Absinthe Poetry Review*.

Jeff Whitney is the author of three chapbooks. *The Tree With Lights in it* is available from Thrush Press, while *Radio Silence* (Black Lawrence Press) and *Smoke*

Tones (Phantom Books) were co-written with poet Philip Schaefer. His poems have appeared in journals such as *Beloit*, *Blackbird*, *Colorado Review*, *Narrative*, *Poetry Northwest*, and *Versé Daily*. He lives in Portland, where he teaches English.

Martin Willitts Jr was the winner of the 2014 Broadsided award and winner of the 2014 Dylan Thomas International Poetry Contest. His poems have been in *Blue Fifth*, *Centrifugal Eye*, *Stone Canoe*, *Kentucky Review*, *Nine Mile Magazine*, and many others. He has over 20 poetry chapbooks and 8 full length collections. His forthcoming books include “How to Be Silent” (FutureCycle Press) and “God Is Not Amused With What You Are Doing In Her Name” (Aldrich Press).

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The Inflectionist Review has a strong preference for non-linear work that carefully constructs ambiguity so that the reader can play an active role in the poem. In general, we commend the experimental, the worldly and universal, and eschew the linear, trendy, and overly personal. Work that reveals multiple layers with further readings. Work that speaks to people across borders, across literary and cultural boundaries, across time periods, is more likely to fascinate us (and the reader). As most poetry practitioners in this day and age, we find rhymed poetry to be a thing of the past. We read only unrhymed poetry.

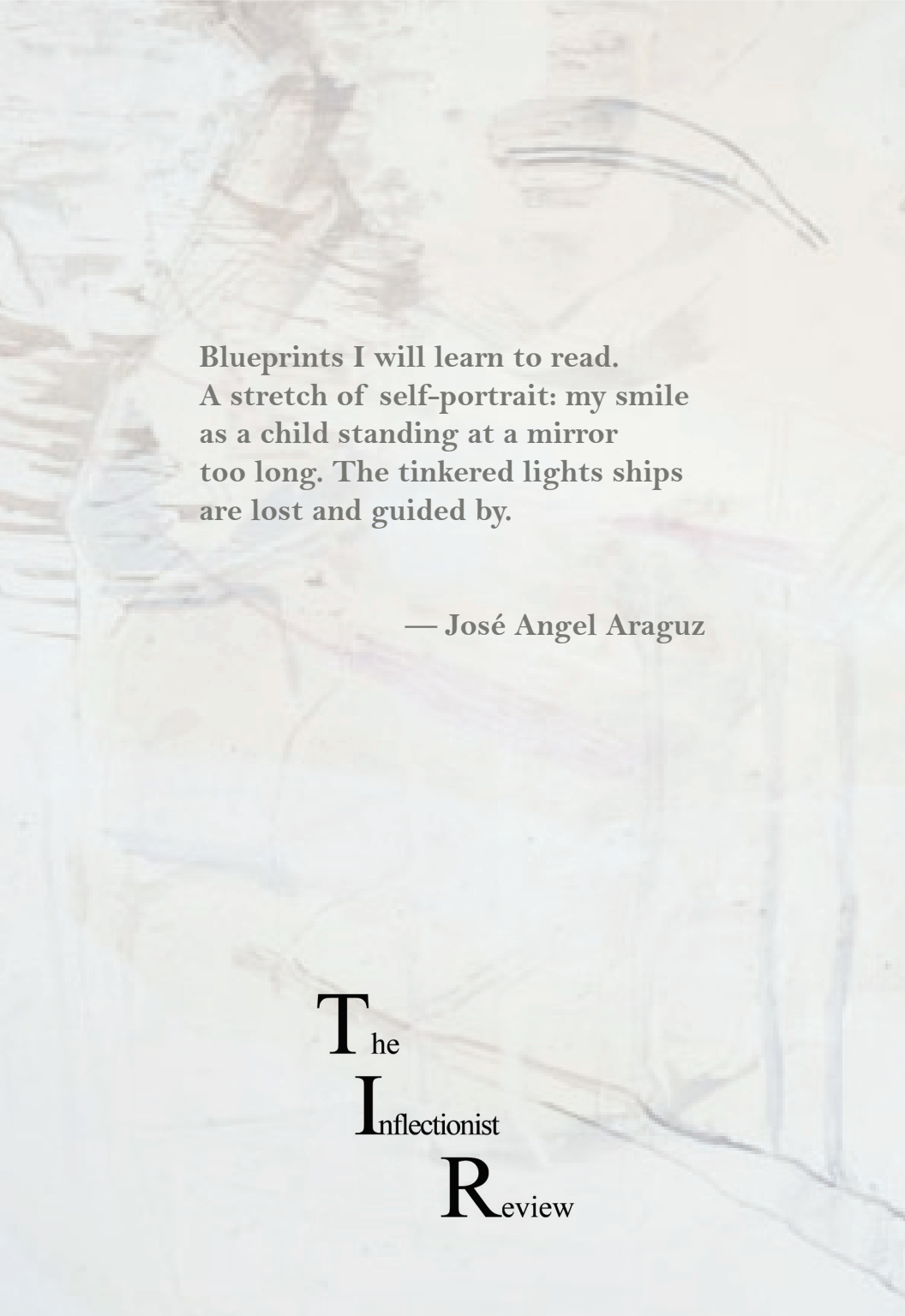


guidelines

- We read submissions year round, but please submit only once each quarter/issue.
- You may submit 3-7 poems at a time. Please include all poems in one document, uploadable via our submission manager.
- Do not include any personal information in the document, as submissions are read blindly.
- In the Comments section of the submission manager, please include a cover letter and a short biographical statement, including previous publications and a few words on your poetic approach or philosophy.
- Turn-around time is approximately 3 months.
- Simultaneous submissions are gladly considered, but please email us at info@inflectionism.com to withdraw a piece that has been accepted elsewhere.

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— José Angel Araguz

The
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