

the Stratford Quarterly

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The territory where Beliveau Books of Stratford, Ontario, is situated is governed by two treaties. The first is the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant of 1701, made between the Anishinaabe and the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. The second is the Huron Tract Treaty of 1827, an agreement made between eighteen Anishinaabek Chiefs and the Canada Company. These traditional hunting and fishing lands and waterways have for generations been shared and cared for by the Anishinaabe, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, the Wendat, and the Neutrals. We are grateful for the opportunities to engage in the process of learning how to be a better treaty partner.

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Kenneth Pobo

Waiting For It

Darkness skins its knees—
suddenly there's morning.
The sun prods with gold pitchforks.

Raylene walks out into the light waiting for a revelation, a bus scheduled to arrive, but it never does. A black butterfly, blue on the bottom of both wings, grabs a sunflower.

This is the moment!

It flies away. A cloud rolls up torn sleeves and glowers.

Nancy Byrne Iannucci

Sandals

on the sand, ten shadowy dents fan leather like trace fossils, preserving impressions from a lost time. They surround my blanket in all shapes and sizes, none colored as blue as the ocean that tumbles and foams with laughter or the sky I see laying on my back. I look up to find more remains: ribs and spines in a cirrus vertebratus swirl, providing a passing shield from the sun. I pick up the paper. It was sunny in Kabul that day, no shields, no cover, just the blast beating down, and then the sandals on the ground, all around. Mohammad Shah recognized his friend from his sandals. I wonder if he traced the ten dents with his fingers and remembered the walks, the weddings, the trips to Paris, the conversations they had, all from a lost time. I wonder if those sandals were still warm from being worn.

Sean Sexton

Departure

The bony old cow in the set-aside field, one eye blind, swollen shut. We'd have shot her but for lack of a gun as she lay panting. We fixed a waterline in the far pasture, rather than fixing her for death, and passed by once more on our noon break.

I brought water in the early afternoon meted a small sum of feed with doubt she'd eat, found her curled into a dark shell of herself, forlorn embryo between worlds.

I patted her, felt her shallowing breaths, wished her on her way.

My mother died like that.

Kit Roffey

Holly Leaves

Today you dug up the holly bush, or what was left of it after last winter, when it grew sparse from the deer that travelled across the road from neighbour's lawns, the more expensive homes that backed onto the ravine that dipped between streets, all cracked pavement and crushed pine needles.

A small token of nature that you shared where you caught your first tadpoles and saw the death that you caused, limp half-frogs that slushed in a bucket until the algae welcomed them home.

A cluster of tan spotlighted by red and green Christmas leftovers, does and larger bucks that had already shed their antlers all looking for sustenance, bold and desperate, when the bird feeder ran empty, and your parents just couldn't keep up, and the sharp-edged holly leaves had all been devoured by soft flitting tongues.

Yellowed blinds pushed open a little more than a peak, your body drawn forward enough to release a hot exhale that obscured the frosted view just to inhale stale air, dust packed from lack of use.

You never perfected the art of it, could never keep still, even with your muscles tensed and cramping up your calf, as you watched spotted hides glide over compounded wet snow fleeing when you got too close, accidental knock on the glass enough to startle.

Your coarse whisper was an eyes-open prayer to Mary to be merciful when a car screeched its way towards the bend, and the last doe hadn't quite made it over the concrete trap of black ice.

With your palms itching, and the tumbling thrum an arrhythmic bounce caught between clammy skin and cable-knit acrylic, maybe the desperation you saw was all yours this time.

Lake Louise

The T.V. screen is anticipation, your face all blue shadows, as you turn the volume up to compete with the heater's steady buzz and your brother and his girlfriend on the couch making plans to head back to the city when the freezing rain lets up.

Then your mother's hand appears in frame, skin still thick, but blurry from the unsteady camcorder as she narrates highway signs, stopping to point out the sun-streaked moose just beyond the road.

You are background noise, voice high pitched and tinny, as you complain about the lack of A.C. in the motor home and how dizzy you're getting as you travel too close to the side of the cliff.

The drop over the rusted guardrail is steep and your father's turns too wide.

You're ten and already anxious about the inevitability of death even though you've only seen it up close a couple of times, a sick cat and a blue jay, all puffed up, that you try to revive but can't.

Alberta in the summer is wicked hot but you still run through parched plains with those looming blue-grey mountains in the back, small enough to be the needle that must be in the haystack of the ranch you visit where you try not to draw blood when you dip your hand into the prickly straw.

You pause the DVD, converted from tape by your father, who cursed out the same name he had refused to sing the night before when the machine from Amazon overheated and distorted the film.

Press rewind to nestle into the miraculous little creature that is still waiting to expand into something as vast as Lake Louise, and you wonder if it's frozen over yet, and if the turquoise shines under the snow.

Call out for your mother, who is the slide of socks on tile, and roasted Christmas squash, and Clinique Happy, as she stands in the doorway, gaze flicking between the present and the past.

You want to hold her paper-veined hand, but you don't, and you want to lay down on familiar pet hair-thick carpet until the dog presses her warm body against your side, but you wiggle numb feet up to standing and set the table for dinner.

Joseph A Farina

Street History

I have written poems to you.
Love-hate letters
scribbled on torn out
Sunday missal prayer book pages
left littered across the city
for stray dogs and strangers to find
like old bones and torn movie tickets.
Relics of remembered times.

Because we had a history, our past remains on street corners.

Nothing is forgotten there from the rough side of town.

Broken with crooked edges.

Treasures in the cracks.

Survival in its struggles in the shadows of the foundry stacks.

Under broken wire fences,
metal marked with our blood
invaded the manicured athletic park
that was meant for the chosen only.
Refusing to stay on our side,
accepting the expected trouble,
wearing bruises and bleeding knuckles
for a right to their geography for free.

The park kept us entertained:
marching bands, tattoos and football
until the darkness would end it
but we were never late,
the evening shift whistle
sounded time to leave.
Water Street waited, its street lamps
and our porch lights always bringing us home.

seeds

I wake to the early darkness of a late September the scent of harvest overwhelming where no fields or garden are tomatoes, pole beans and peppers dew drenched rapini and cucuzza the perfume of my father's garden returning to inspire and remember the labour and love of a zappatori the reaping of his seeds sown in both earth and in spirit conjuring his Sicilian orto again

Andreas Gripp

Cactus

There's a cactus on the kitchen table in lieu of the roses I promised.

It's not a slight to you, nor am I casting shade on our love.

It's just a sign of resiliency, that little is required to continue its green, that its needles are misconstrued, much like thorns,

that if touched in the gentlest way there's no affliction in the embrace.

Adding and Subtracting

It was much simpler then, counting to ten on the abacus, the sliding coloured beads denoting how much added, how much taken away and I wanted nothing taken away, no loss of red or blue or yellow though we called it gold as if it were somehow worth a fortune, this uncomplicated rising, falling on a numerical scale that left everything that lay beyond it to the imagination, the realm of a billion dreams unexplored and nightmares having no place in which to play.

A Rose for William

Every autumn, you pine for what has passed. The garden in all its glory. Her touch upon your face.

You adore the summer and the fireflies of night. What is light but space surrounded by the caress of darkness; flame but the intensity of a love so strong that it incinerates all who come too close?









Oisin Breen

Driftwood

A lingering stillness, Permeates The mellifluous air,

And none of this.
It has not and will never be Enough.

Yet this
Is us,
Kissing,
The wet earth,
Beneath this city
And its stone.

And we are driftwood, Tomato seeds Trapped between An old man's teeth.

The Binary Heretic

I am left, Surrounded by cigarette ends, Taped to the dirty floor Of a nondescript bar.

Here, much has been stowed away, Not least this incipient gladlessness.

But the tree of life Gushes thorned dock-leaves And bleeds nettles Into chalices of human hair.

And this city of man, machine, and mulch— It is as any future: it operates.

And it rains:

asphalt and glue.

It pours:

fog and sightlessness.

Then, as birdsong collapses, I am left surrounded by poison fruit.

DG Foley

Bentham

The astigmatism was nary an excuse, losing all to the croupier who failed to claim the earnings on his taxes, the roulette wheel a cheating flat-earther, wouldn't last an hour on a cart pulled by a mule, and then the utilitarian, Jeremy Bentham, who mightn't a rat's ass give for the lone beggar as long as the masses thrived, and your matchstick's unkindled because all of living's a blur, light that gives no light.

Dolomieu

Although dolomite is named after Déodat de Dolomieu, gold is not after you, Thaddeus Goldstein, though I recollect a Thaddeus among the Twelve of Christ, his appearance a mere cameo, like the drops of rain upon your parched garden, where the Zinnias would have been lovely, no?

James Kangas

Silence

Disgust, I think it was. Disgust made him silent. I said "Pa, it's me" some twenty times into the phone before he uttered a word. He was sick of exhaustion and his cow-sized heart and I was stupidly intruding on his effort to die. He finally sang out from the brush he was deep in: "I'm going to kick the bucket." Hoarse, and determined.

I will never know if, groggy, he took an extra pill or three, or if, lucid, he was only trying to sleep through the night, but he was speechless, one eye locked shut that April Sunday morning when my mother tried to wake him. I will never know if, later, when *stable* turned to *shut down*, the doctor took him the love I sent those 500 miles

(yes I used the word loosely, and no doubt he would have cringed at the sound of it). Why he dealt my brother silence for 20 years I'll never know either. His lips have gone inert, my brother's before him. But they share a small plot now, their dumb state, the weight of the indifferent earth. And, yes, birdsong from the maples which, all day long, hardly ceases.

Presque Isle Sundown

Lake Superior was swallowing the pink-gold globe, our ruddy boyhood an illusion at least as far away, washed to sepia now. We leapt boulder to boulder to the end of the breakwater, you with your light-footed twelve-year-old son, I with my ghost gods, my quicksilver charmers.

At his age, how close, how footloose we were, but never so coltish. He seemed clear-browed as the water, as you were back then. I was always bewildered.

I remember how we ran those dark trails through the pines side by side to the pooled creek, our lean-to, our very own world, and our breathing seemed one, our bloom just beginning, while I choked back my wild heart which sprang toward my mouth, like a trout from the shadows jumps into broad daylight, not knowing what awaits it, out of its depth.

Denis Robillard

A Book of days

This is a book of days and I can feel these notebooks getting stronger Night stamps its date in crow magnitude upon it.

I am told to sit down with the self and write a hole in it with these pregnant clouds ready to burst to ponder the inconclusive rain smeared in the grey fulcrum of sky.

For now words are better than scissors in the cupboard to forget about the sharpness placed upon you.

To feel the dark breath buried beneath you.

To reach only once the strip mine of your ganglions and cut it all away.

Your teenager says they drunk ordered something on Amazon.

You have displaced the code book of all of this meaningless chatter. Sitting on the front porch reexamining yesterday's sunset you poke your head through one more jet contrail looking for one last inescapable detail of this life you have created. But what you get are crumpled up missives; fairy tale stories told out of turn. Out of tune moonscaped over Neptune in June. What is this inept penmanship, this parsing of dates and killings of fate? I take turns suffocating the swallows, lost inebriated, living in the nothings of an ink well.

Sleeping beside you

By any means this is not a conscious uncoupling. The mind always stays faithful to the body lying beside me We abide equally in this bed's long journey into night Where we both stake claims to regions and principalities not our own. When we awake we can speak candidly of this sharpened business This dark nameless thing we know. The private skin we are both forced to wear. Mindful not to awake the stranger in either you or me. The one cradled in the raven dark puddle where I have seen such strange things. Alone, when darkness pulls down the narcoleptic balloon To the place of neglected dreams. Sometimes you can arrive there alone like a bathosphere at the bottom of the ocean.

Bereft of good air.

Speak to the beggar thief of forgotten stories.

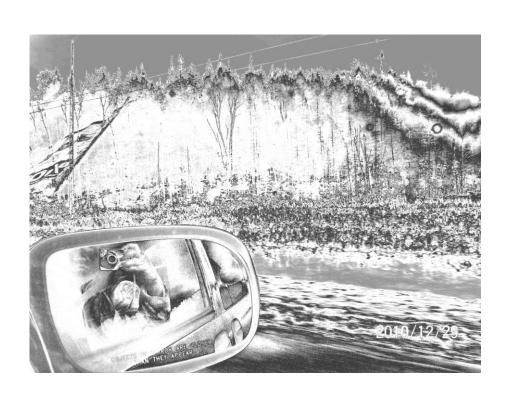
Smitten to bits by your enraptured senses, you haul up all the deep dark archaeology.

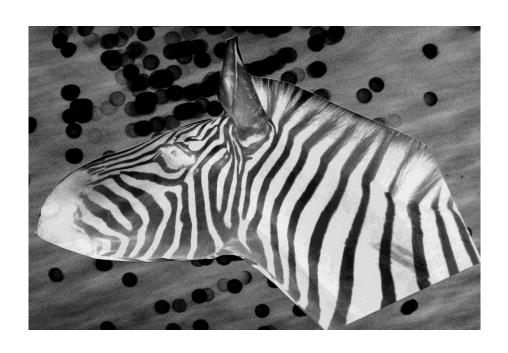
The domestic scars, the road weary complaints

Review every single poem broken up on the dashboard of our travels.













Fabrice Poussin

Like a Vacuum

Vast is this land we call the universe life and death seem to be the making of this symphony constant motion at phenomenal speeds.

Fires sleeping for centuries still twinkle somewhere in space no numbers can account for their presence in every realm and in all souls.

Like vacuums extinct glees vanish as they steal memories from the living behind them a void like a vertiginous abyss.

Who are we to resist the pull when a friend vanishes?

How do we live without his heart?

Beginnings and ends the only assurance pursue us with relentless energy and leave us empty until we too join in the unknown.

Ambling through streets emptied of our joy led by souls limping from one sun to another we continue disabled by so many absences.

One more eerie door has opened for the one who crossed into eternity soon to close and leave us with the faint recollection of the last embrace.

Perfection

She runs blindly through the tall weeds in that tailor made summer dress as she did yesterday in the bien coat leaving those gleeful footprints in the snow.

He may never tire of the spectacle father of this little girl of one going on seven as many like to say smiling as she does carefree as her brothers.

A great question hovers yet in his mind how did this miracle happen yet again so perfect as it was galaxies ago while she continues on her great race.

Her existence unknown then today the evolving definition of the powerful thigh pushing her forward to an unrecognizable adulthood.

Considering the plan in motion the man may simply stay wondering how every atom joins so perfectly again and will anew in the many ages to come.

This young lady in her puerile coat is not merely a best friend on four legs she is a reminder of the machinery at work unstoppable of a caring engineer.

Bruce Meyer

The Bell Ringer of Iturbide

She is bent as if an almond tree, white-haired in an azure smock; straightens as she leaves the church

and grasps a bell-rope of rosary thorns running from iron clapper to earth to summon dancers to vesper duty.

Teens file out of the civic hall drawn like daylight to the dusty air.

I know the toll from a churchyard elegy

describing streets of an ancient town where every cobble leads to the grave. Houses are painted in broken rainbows,

low and hunched yet stoic as the sky, while someone merely passing through, feels like a volume nestled in the hand

comprised of sayings no one can say in a language silence forgot how to speak. History is a dog asleep in a doorway;

a cat lies down in the shaded square; and every minute of my life has been a summons to this moment here clenched in incisors of Sierra Madres between the green of their Caribbean smile and the Joshua trees of Galeano.

A trail of bright red bougainvillea flows in holy drops of blood down the pale flesh of sanctified walls

to remind me of cactus served in its thorns while among all the living and the dead, I, a traveler, claiming neither world

nor desiring to count myself a ghost, sit in the square, and listen as prayers vanish with day in the bell ringer's hands.

Pero

When they seized him at the border, they took his name saw. Waiting for someone to come and claim him, he slept beneath a mylar blanket

that reminded him of a fiesta balloon he'd played with on special days. The sound of a firecracker opened his eyes to the long way north,

his mother carrying him as he tired, her sweat against his bare arms melting into him with the hard sun. He could see through the chain link

a calendar hanging on the guard's wall, each day he learned the name for another day until he lost count. He thought July would be a good name but someone

already owned that, and by the time the shadows came biting at his face it was already March, a time when days wandered from cool doorways to beg the sun for mercy or be struck down in the empty street. He remembered the streets and the stars above them and aces of houses disguised as clowns.

A dog followed him home one day and wanted so badly to play but a woman chased it away before it could be his friend. He never forgot the dog; only his name.

Shiyang Su

A Bad Day

A bad day starts with an extra cloud howling in the sky several drops of lemonade on your favorite t-shirt & tea cup, what's more-your glasses, broken like diamonds under the sun, reflecting rainbows. Now you lean against the breakfast table pondering at this misty world. You find a thread of hair in your coffee, balancing toes in Subway labyrinths; on your left hook, a bag of necessities with spoiled scent. You think the world is a cheesecake, where people spin relentlessly in a circle of fluffy cream being scooped by a hole of emptiness and sweat stains: that's when you could distinguish a good day from a bad one --on a bad day there's no destination only a million shadows crawl on the sidewalk, heading nowhere.

Memory: The Drowning

Intoxication is about throwing away old boots, loosing both hands in the air and forgetting.

I told my mother this on our way home. You can't drink until you are eighteen was her only reply.

She ended our talk with another call from her client.
We stopped for the traffic light.
I tapped my thighs in a made-up rhythm.

Are you still thinking about that memory stuff? It surprises me that she still remembers.

No.

You just can't get over those, can you?

She is right.
I never get over them.
I keep taking stuff in until I am a big pore shoe in the swamp.

I guess it's about the constellation (which my mother considers unreliable). I am Aquarius. The Drowning.

Lantern in Closet

I thought you would like to do this trip with your dad. No. I curl my hair into a terrible bun.

There's always a cloudburst in movies as if you could never leave someone without streaks of water.

The universe didn't rain on me

when my father went to Dubai.
I was left in the dry air of April,
I was so cold, so cold, like
the haze of winter.

Memory tends to dramatize his leaving. The triggers vary from the click of a Snapchat to a pink leopard. Each day, the scale expands.

What I see: ashes on the desk, a winter clothesline, lantern in the closet.

What I see is the emptiness, the loss, the cooled collisions of stars.

CONTRIBUTORS

A poet, part-time academic in narratological complexity, and financial journalist, Dublin-born **Oisín Breen**'s widely reviewed debut collection, *Flowers, all sorts in blossom, figs, berries, and fruits, forgotten* was released in 2020. Breen has been published in a number of journals, including *About Place, the Blue Nib, Books Ireland, the Seattle Star, Modern Literature, La Piccioletta Barca, the Bosphorus Review of Books, the Kleksograph, In Parentheses, the Madrigal, and Dreich magazine.*

Joseph A Farina is a retired lawyer living in Sarnia, Ontario. An award winning poet, his poems have been published in *Quills Canadian Poetry Magazine, Ascent, Subterranean Blue, Tower Poetry, Inscribed, The Windsor Review, Boxcar Poetry Revue,* and in the anthologies *Sweet Lemons: Writings with a Sicilian Accent, Witness,* and *Tamaracks: Canadian Poetry for the 21st Century.* He has had poems published in the U.S. as well, in the magazines *Mobius, Pyramid Arts, Arabesques, Fiele-Festa, Philadelphia Poets and Memoir,* as well as in the Silver Birch Press *Me, at Seventeen* Series. He has had two books of poetry published: *The Cancer Chronicles* and *The Ghosts of Water Street.*

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Nancy Byrne Iannucci is the author of *Temptation of Wood* (Nixes Mate Review 2018) and *Goblin Fruit* (Impspired, September 2021). Her poems have appeared in numerous publications including *Autumn Sky Poetry, Gargoyle*, Bending Genres, *Clementine Unbound*, *Dodging the Rain*, 8 Poems, Glass: A Journal of Poetry (Poets Resist), Hobo Camp Review, and *Typehouse Literary Magazine*. Nancy is a Long Island, NY native who

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Bruce Meyer has published 68 books of poetry, short stories, flash fiction, and non-fiction. He live in Barrie, Ontario. His previous books of poems are *McLuhan's Canary* (2019) and *Grace of Falling Stars* (2020).

Kenneth Pobo is the author of twenty-one chapbooks and nine full-length collections. Recent books include *Bend of Quiet* (Blue Light Press), *Loplop in a Red City* (Circling Rivers), and *Uneven Steven* (Assure Press). His work has appeared in *North Dakota Quarterly, Nimrod, Mudfish, Hawaii Review*, and elsewhere.

Fabrice Poussin teaches French and English at Shorter University. Author of novels and poetry, his work has appeared in *Kestrel, Symposium, The Chimes, La Pensee Universelle, Paris,* and many other magazines. His photography has been published in *The Front Porch Review, the San Pedro River Review,* as well as other publications. His most recent poetry collection, *In Absentia,* was published in August 2021 by Silver Bow.

Denis Robillard is a poet living and writing in Windsor, Ontario, where he teaches high school. Publication credits include *Rampike*, *The Windsor Review*, and six books of poetry.

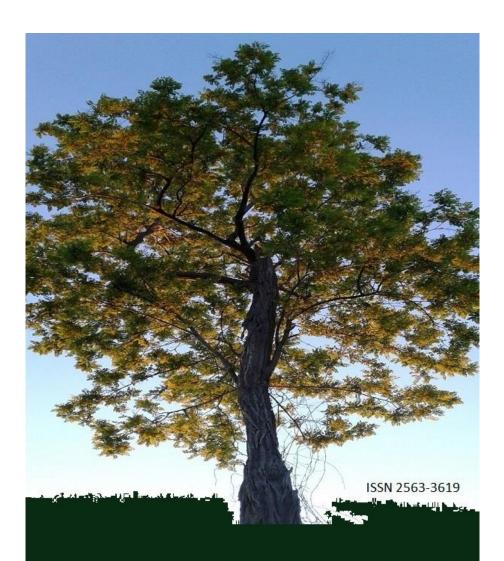
Kit Roffey (They/Them) is a queer nonbinary writer studying English and Psychology at Huron at Western University in London, Ontario. Their work has appeared in *Symposium* and *Iconoclast*.

Sean Sexton was born in Indian River County and grew up on his family's Treasure Hammock Ranch. He divides his time between managing a 700-acre cow-calf and seed stock operation, painting, and writing. He has kept

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Shiyang Su is an international student who is currently studying creative writing. She is a firm believer in "Show don't Tell." Her favorite poet is Sharon Olds. Her poems have been published in *Autumn Sky Daily, Neologism Poetry Journal, YAWP journal, Trouvaille Review,* and others. Her poetry is forthcoming in *Eunoia Review*.

The Stratford Quarterly stands in solidarity with Black Lives Matter and against the oppression, abuse, and exploitation of our sisters and brothers which have been going on for centuries right up to the present day. It's critically important to use the platforms we have to speak out in opposition to injustice, hatred, and violence—in this context perpetrated against the Black community; and also against Indigenous Peoples (both in this country and around the world), People of Colour, People in Poverty, People with Disabilities, Women, Children, and members of the LGBTQIA2+ community.



Oisín Breen Joseph A Farina D.G. Foley Andreas Gripp Nancy Byrne Iannucci James Kangas Bruce Meyer Kenneth Pobo Fabrice Poussin Denis Robillard Kit Roffey Sean Sexton Shiyang Su