



Reaching for Nature, by Christina MacCorkle.

Blue Marble Review Winter Poems/January 2021

Editor's Note: Winter Poetry January 2021 By Molly Hill

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Dear Readers and Writers:

This week twenty-two-year-old poet Amanda Gorman became the youngest person to read a poem at the inauguration, when she stepped up to the microphone with *The Hill We Climb*.

*When day comes we ask ourselves
Where can we find light in this never-ending shade?*

We've always believed in the power of the written word as a means of connection, and a vehicle to discover our shared humanity. In our going-on six-years of online publication, we've showcased a few hundred poems from student writers who've impressed us with their ability to shape life experiences into art that is relatable, and meaningful.

*...even as we grieved, we grew,
...even as we hurt, we hoped
...even as we tired, we tried*

In our Winter Poetry Issue, we've selected poems about love, loyalty, Covid, identity, summer yearning, grammar, and polyester. As always, it's a privilege to publish these students, and we're delighted to do so in the same week that poetry shines on the inaugural stage.

Hope you'll take the time to listen to Ms. Gorman's incredible poem, and scroll through our most recent issue as well. Youth + creativity wins every time.

Happy New Year—

Molly Hill
Editor

as the moon raises higher
we crawl under barbed wire
and into the fields
that no longer give us their yield

'us' meaning our ancestors
who fought off pests, men, and worse
just for the farm to fall
to bankruptcy like a crooked wall
to more crooked powers
"the farm is still ours"
you say to me
as we head towards the tree,
path like muscle memory,
as it's too dark to see

the tree holds our family's past
our initials will be the last
for the future is far away
this is a landmark of yesterday.

you turn on the flashlight
no more fleeing, I want to fight
but the bright pink 'x' says otherwise
now our entire family dies
with this tree.

our history.

"what will we do with the rest of our lives?"

you hold out the carving knife.

Claire McNerney is a student, writer, and performer from California. She loves space fantasy, audio dramas, and bullet journaling. In her free time, she produces the anthology podcast Cumulonimbus.

Leaf Fall By Emma Zhang

Through my window,

A leaf falls.

A minuet with the Autumn wind,

Drifting, like a feather-

Down.

I wonder-

Did the leaf see it coming

Surely-

Green, yellow, crimson, brown

How long has it been waiting?

Did it cling onto the stem,

Like a child to its mother, afraid-

Did it plead with the sky

For one more sunrise

Or did it let go, accepting?

Ripping away from the stem,

Did pain erupt blinding?

Did light reflect differently

Did the world halt

For a moment?

Was it like meditation
Riding the waves of air,
Letting out a breath?
Was every color infused with alcohol-
Was gravity a friend

And after it lands
On the sidewalk,
Lifeless, drying, brittle
When whisked off by the wind-
Where does it go?

How, does it end?

One day,
we will know

Emma Zhang is an eighth grade aspiring writer who lives in California. Aside from writing, she loves reading, art, creating new drinks, and obsessing over MBTI. This is her first publication.

Summer Last Night By Zara Rahman

swirling in a teapot
tinted broth and lemon wedge bones
corrode into corpses

it was the making of marble memories
sharpening knives under the soft glow of stove light

summer sadness cure

charcoal-skinned moon-eyed faces

have been here once

and will be when the sun diminishes into a candle wick

the dying glow wishfully full

so wicked; alive

swirling in the eye of a hurricane

mold collects between dying peels of citrus

they were the last to witness the power of the night

and now no one is left

to recollect

summer

Zara Rahman is a spoken word artist dedicated to the craft of creative writing and storytelling. Through written and spoken word poetry, Zara has shared stories with audiences up to 2000 and in more intimate settings. The Toronto based artist holds numerous awards and publications in local competitions and virtual settings. She is also the founder of a nonprofit organization called Youth Professionals, dedicated to BIPOC and LGBTQ+ youth and their future careers. Zara's goal is to not only teach the craft of creative writing, but to pass down the courage required to express oneself in new and exciting forms.

Summer Afternoons By Alicia Hsu

i spend my afternoons in the heat-soaked house

sitting backwards, watching bark-wrapped hands

push and pull at eggshell dough
kneading a slow heartbeat beneath
an incessant cricket symphony.
i witness the birth of *mantou*; one, then two
plumps of dusty sugar lining a bamboo basket
warm like the soul she wants to shape me into.

it is hard to describe the space i stopped taking up
when i began drifting into the next world, but
she feels me quietly; watching, learning.

if i inhale too deeply, i may cease to exist:
the afternoon rhythm roots
my empty body
to the stifling, dirt-packed ground.
bike wheels crack gravel outside
and whispering grass hushes laughter.
the sun bakes my cousins' skin gold
but i keep inside
to spend my afternoons in the quiet
letting her press my bones soft.

Alicia Hsu is a Taiwanese-American junior at G.W. Hewlett High School on Long Island, New York. Her poetry is published and/or forthcoming in *Euonia Review*, *Skipping Stones Magazine*, *Vintage* (her school's creative writing journal), and more. When she isn't dreaming up new stories or escaping in a fantasy novel, you can find her watching nostalgic movies and taking walks with her two dogs.

Seedlings By Svetlana Sterlin

we plant seeds like the deeds we forget
to tend like the weeds we need to understand
beauty. weeds are beautiful in the same way
destruction is beautiful. like bleeding
from the prick of a needle. like warnings
we forget to heed. like excavators
of greed. that's us. we should listen
to our own creed. but we never believe
our promises to achieve. when i was thirteen
we planted trees. i was in desperate need
of a friend. not someone who wanted me to like
pop songs and shopping sprees and to always agree.
having travelled the seas and run out of pleas
i didn't know then what i would one day see.
now i've sown my seeds and i am
rooted among a forest of others like me.

After years of relocation, Svetlana Sterlin was raised by her Russian parents in Brisbane, Australia, where she completed a BFA and contributes to Our Culture Magazine and ScreenRant. Her work appears in several publications, including Entropy Magazine, Santa Fe Writers Project, and AndAlso Books' anthology, 'Within/Without These Walls', published in association with the 2018 Brisbane Open House.

<https://linktr.ee/svetlanasterlin>

Covid's Claws By Daniel Boyko

I.
Cold hard gray eyes,

burn holes into my throbbing
chest. An icy, tingling feeling shivers
down my spine, and I realize
I can't beg, plead. Darkness
coats, and something sharp slices
into me, digging deeper,
deeper. If only for half
a heartbeat, I pray
it's a cure, a needle injecting
medicine into my veins
and wrapping a layer around
my gushing blood. But the thought fades
as I realize fangs claw
into my skin, sinking
and sinking further into flesh
and marrow. I want to shout,
scream and cry, but jaws engulf
my neck like a shark. Frozen,
I feel the teeth strip away
limbs. Soon, it will burn everything
like a flame, a blazing fire
that turns cities into ash. But now,
it creeps close, until its reeking breath
clouds over my ears and whispers:
I'm here to stay.

II.

If someone asked me eighty years from now what it was like to live during COVID-19, I'm not sure I would know what to say. I think I would write a poem instead.

Daniel Boyko is an aspiring writer, poet, movie reviewer, and animal lover from New Jersey. A high school junior, he's been previously published in Teen Ink, Blue Marble Review, The Daphne Review, Navigating the Maze, and The Telling Room, among others. He's currently the Co-Editor-in-Chief of Polyphony Lit and the Vice President of Polyphony Lit's Junior Board. Wherever his dog is, he can't be far behind.

Reader, I By Zoey Reay-Ellers

have discarded my name. Cast it into the clattering cattails across the road from my house. It was sucking the marrow from my bones, reader. Devolving me into animation. A desecrated host. I stretched yesterday and felt as though my skin had shifted into that of a worm's. Segmented. Preferring to partake in burial rites. I should have collapsed, reader. The mirror shattered instead, unable to bear the image of my bird-boned limbs. I dashed out into the rain. Knelt in the flooded grass. Painted my jawline and cheekbones stark with muddy hatred. Reader, even dirtied I am achingly bare. Painfully other. A shadow yearning to cast itself into brightness, only to panic when it has been swallowed whole by noon-time sunlight. Left meandering in the clearly articulated limbo of twilight. I need to fill that emptiness with deft strokes. But reader? I am left staring at an unsteady hand.

Zoe Reay-Ellers is a writer from Washington State. You can find her work in The Heritage Review, and The Eunoia Review. When not writing, she can be found baking and taking long walks.

grammar By Jessica Tsang

i thought of you like punctuation. as a period, you stopped me in my tracks with every word that left your mouth. you

acted as a comma, connecting two parts of a whole together like the way our lips seal to one another as if we are trying to become one. the linking of our hands is a semi-colon, because then we are two clauses. able to stand on our own two feet but refusing to because we have each other. your fingers interlacing with mine as we lean on each other like a forward and a back slash, because even on paper, we are a pair. in bed, we fit each other like quotation marks, marking the beginning and the end of unspoken sentences that hang in the air between us. when you were angry, your whole body would be straight as an exclamation mark. pulling yourself tall and taut to tell me you were emotional and wanted some space, so i would tab myself away and give you the room of an indent for your paragraph. your mouth would be a hyphen, nothing like the purse of an asterisk when you leaned in to kiss me. but eventually, we'd shift and come back together again as two curved brackets, like moon crescents joining to make a whole. to me, you are every grammatical rule there is: everything that makes me coherent.

Jessica Tsang is a seventeen-year-old based in Hong Kong. At the age of five, she found that drawing stories was better than simply drawing, then found that writing stories was better than drawing them. When she is not writing or contemplating the meaning of life, you can find her studying, playing music, or drowning herself in copious amounts of green tea.

polyester By Rena Su

every evening, the clock sings lucid songs of grass.
of unknown fields in distant green. heart pumping
in circadian. then the pasture swallows in whole;

grass becomes bed of thorns and lullaby becomes gutted
fragment of sheet music; deafening silence ascending
in clockwork notation. paramnesia in three-four time

my dad gave me the wisdom of counting sheep
to count valley sheep & barn house sheep & to count
in beat with celestial bodies. to be enamoured
with sheep & sheep & sheep

but the difference between dad and I
is that he grew up somewhere around orchards
where the sheep were abundant enough
to properly dampen night terrors

but I grew up with digital sheep
and wear digital wool; polyester-based;
no flocks for me to count at night.

this is a eulogy for the pastures.
a war cry for the digital age.

to sleep now is to sleep between screams
of cellphone ringtones, huddled in a comforter
spun out of plastic

Rena Su is a writer from Vancouver, Canada, and the author of the chapbook *Preparing Dinosaurs for Mass Extinction* (ZED Press, Jun 2021). Her work whose work has been recognized by Simon Fraser University, the City of Surrey, and the Pulitzer Center. You can find her on Twitter @RenaSuWrites

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Woman on Woman By Yejin Suh

Leave me to dream that curve of skin,
curve of lip. For a woman is a woman

only in dangerous land—parts hardened
by gaze, coaxed open by teeth. I realize

all along I've been waiting for a mistake.
This mistake—asking after origin. It never

came—it just was. Like a mountain was, like
a woman was. Umber & sloping.

Yejin Suh is a student from New Jersey whose work appears in *Half Mystic* and *Glass: A Journal of Poetry*, and has been recognized by YoungArts, UK Poetry Society, and The New York Times, among others. She aims to foster love for speculative fiction in the emerging writers' community through her publication, *Wintermute Lit*.

ash looks like sugar through swollen eyelids By Mia Golden

i.

dreams continue to wither & fade behind
gloomy paint-peeling doors; will you succumb to
your own consternation?

the honey is laced with poison, so
stir in covert fructose imposters–
they'll drink your stomach acid &
splatter it against the walls in the
shadows: beset with the throes of
femininity, you bleed once more
into your open palm: tea dripping
into porcelain saucer.

ii.

silent dissension seems tangible in
the dark, saccharine uneasiness
vying for your tastebuds' attention:
the cloying smell of your vitreous humor
set aflame. hope owes you no favors–
she leaves you suffocating in the night,
acid in your uterus, ash on your
tongue, concrete filling your rib cage.

iii.

optic struggles, neurotic mindset:
& you gasp as nitric oxide floods your trachea.

vaseline in your salivary glands, sweat in your
follicles, hands on the doorknob, desperate
to burst into the light– & tenebrosity grabs your
ankle, shoving you back into the filth that is
the time after sleep but before streetlights
ignite. witching hour paints constellations on
your hammering chest: your blood, your tears,
your pigment, your penumbra.
cadaver girl, living husk; your heart thrums,
but your aorta is rubber: a charlatan beneath your lungs.
your irises dim, your pupils dilate,
& you're left in the dark with smoky green tea,
unsweetened and ashen, just as you despise.

Mia Golden (she/her) is a teen writer from California with a passion for activism and love for all things chocolate. She is an editor at Interstellar Lit and Gossamer Lit. Mia is published or forthcoming in Indigo Lit and the Trouvaille Review, among others. She hopes you have a great day!

Hoverfly By Nick Newman

Sunsets feel – like skylarks –
as if they have always been there
draping around you, remaking the touch
of hand in hand, arm around shoulder.

The cold makes us talk in staccato,
short syllables we bite down on and share

drinking in that playground
in the still Scottish air

now, we watch hoverflies on the buddleia
tracing its purple into the coming dusk —

the last ray of light flecks
the gold of your cider onto skin.

In the dark, the clink of buckles
as Orion's belt braids your hair in silver
braids your heart in stars.

Nick Newman grew up in China and Scotland, and studies English Lit at the Uni of Leeds. His work appears in *Mariás at Sampaguitas*, Stone of Madness Press, and *Riggwelter Press*, and you can find him procrastinating on twitter @_NickNewman

Flotsam By Oluwafisayo Akinfolami

Joy is the prescription of practice
between a body and another
a new anthem plays on the radio
and I am floating
all I want is to dance
till I dissolve into the rhythm.

Without hesitation, I rename my country
& translate my allegiance to love yet
another language,
provocating a new form of survival

I don't know if I am entitled to this poem.
Of this newness, that has formed
a devotion on my tongue.

Oluwafisayo Akinfolami is a Nigerian poet. Her poems has appeared on Undivided Magazine, Perhappened Mag, Praxis Mag Online, Written Tales, Writer Space Africa and elsewhere.

Human Hymn By Nick Trelstad

To speak
is to sing.

Just try to say
a sentence and not

make music.
Every word

a rhythm,
every syllable

a song.
O, phonemes

simple sounds
separating

drink from
dragon,

feast from
famine,

Zeus, zipline,
zinfandel.

Strawberries and cream,
American Dream.

Right, wrong,
Atomic bomb.

Holy, harmonic,
Human.

Nick Trelstad is a senior in the College of St. Scholastica's English education program. He still stans Phillis Wheatley to this day.

objet petit a By Zoe Estacio

i should be ashamed but i'm flattered. beauty

exists in solitude and sadness. i did nothing but
hide you in brushstrokes and poetry. the
redundancy of your memory deemed normal. your
soul, the yearning to understand you as boundless
as the ocean. from this terrible addicting hope for
something with you. it's revolting, how much i say

i'll love you through words, how much i want to give
you the skeleton of the universe and the secrets
of every burning star and how much i want to
hold you under the gentle yellow light of a
dying afternoon. what little time we spent

barely, *barely* held any meaning but through the
murky lens of the world, you saw me crystal
clear. i can't count how many times i felt
ready to run to the ends of the earth for you. sometimes,
all the time, all that i am
is the sublimation of my desires for

you. i turned you into poetic value, capitalized
what should've been empathy into a dozen flowery
words. loving you has become a solitary act, a
solitary sin for the ages.

Zoe is an aspiring neuroscience major with a love for ink and calligraphy and a deep
hatred for milk. She spends her time dabbling in poetry and the arts and watching the
same sitcoms over and over.

today I drank the smoke By Ailun Shi

today i walked outside and saw
orange walled sky
like the desert had thrown its skirts
on the ceiling and the walls

i breathe deep
(for it is like this every morning)
i think the orange is searing my lungs
coloring it the same as the expanse above me
heavy as a body
it sinks
(or perhaps it is I who sinks)

i think if i think hard enough
stare long enough
i can make beauty out of this —
this orange plumed Sky with its blood-inked sun
its matching twin peeking out at night
like a blue moon but better because
orange is unmentioned and should therefore be rarer

until there is a scratch within my throat
i cough.
saliva. sticky. phlegm.
i rush inside.

Ailun Shi recently withdrew from UC Berkeley in order to take a gap year to go on the adventure of her life. Her work has been nationally recognized by the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards and published in Helen: a literary magazine, Germ Magazine, the Apprentice Writer, and more. She's an avid novelist and calligrapher. Her gap adventures can be found on ailunshi.wordpress.com.

Reaching for Nature By Christina MacCorkle



Reaching for Nature

This work began as a still life. As I began to work on the plant sprawling out of the vase, I felt a kind of emotional connection to the shape of the leaves– the way they twisted and curled until reaching the flower, almost like they were reaching out to something. This personification of leaves is what inspired me to add hands to my composition. I intended for the gesture of the hands and the positioning of the fingers to express grief, longing and desperation. It felt like these emotions were pervasive amid quarantine, racial unrest, and a turbulent political climate.

As a viewer, I thought this composition was visually interesting because there's so much going on with the hands and flowers nearer to the outskirts of the painting, but you're drawn to the center. You have to make that effort to try to comprehend the full picture by darting around the piece, but the gravity of the focal point tethers you to the center, despite the fact that most of the 'action' is happening elsewhere. In this way, the process of viewing my piece serves a reminder that disparate subjects, people, and systems share a core.

*This idea spurred me to think about evolution– the way we all share a common ancestry. The titles of the books on the bottom left-hand corner are meant to provoke the viewer into thinking about the relationship between race and nature. Specifically, Darwin's *On The Origin of Species* and the golden ratio– 1.16– are intended to communicate our common origin. So, I wanted to have this idea of unity, but also have the hands ultimately face different directions, signifying disparateness.*

Usually, my creative process goes something like that– starting with one idea, then weaving current issues on my mind into the composition.

Christina is a junior at the Thacher school. In her spare time, she enjoys drawing, tea and podcasts.
