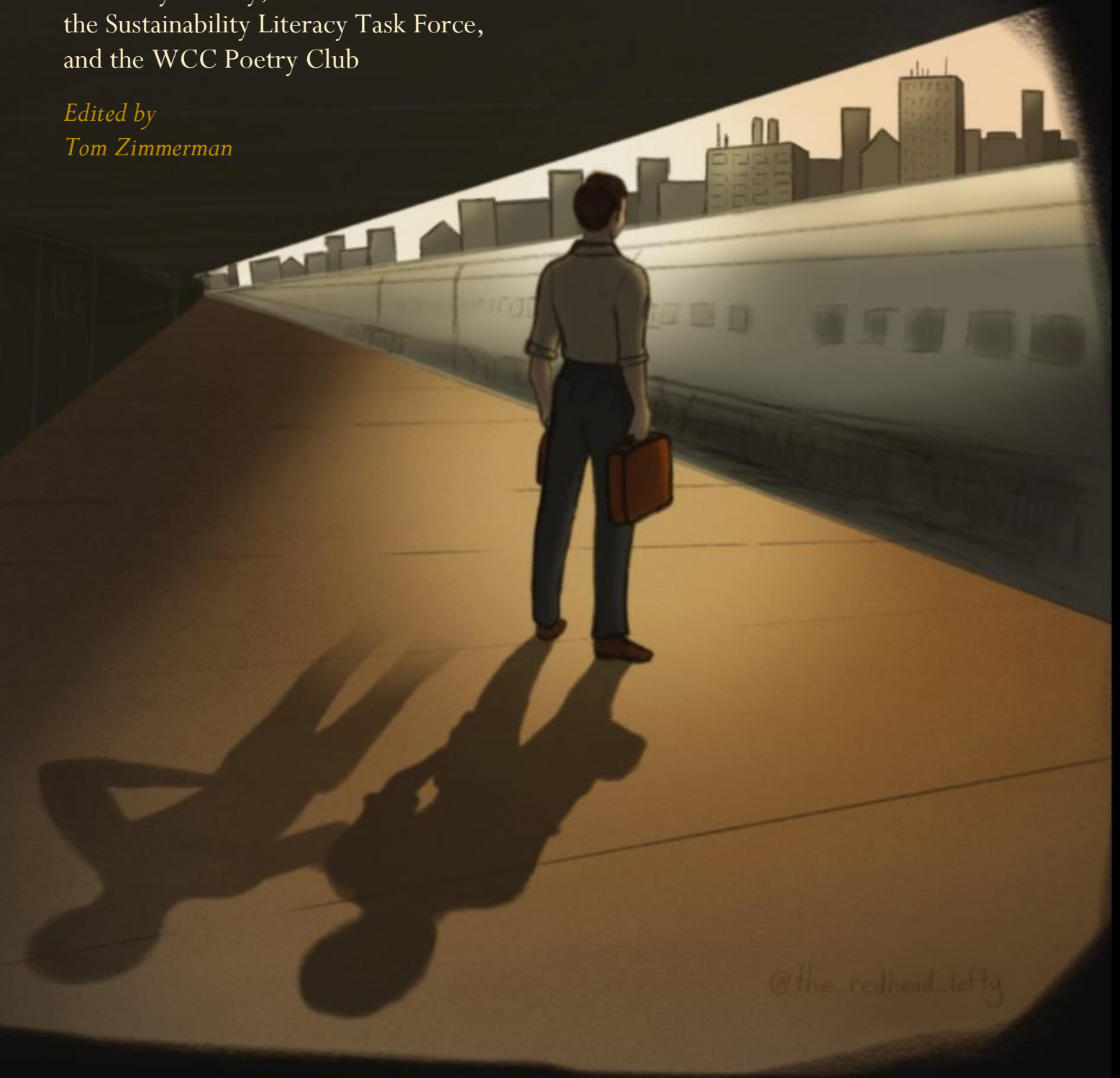


Poetry Sustains: Heroes

An Anthology
Produced by
the Bailey Library,
the Sustainability Literacy Task Force,
and the WCC Poetry Club

*Edited by
Tom Zimmerman*



Acknowledgments

This *Poetry Sustains: Heroes* anthology, celebrating National Poetry Month (April) and Earth Day (April 22), is a production of the Bailey Library, the Sustainability Literacy Task Force, and the WCC Poetry Club, at Washtenaw Community College, Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA.

It features work written by WCC students, faculty, staff, alumni, and friends that was posted on the WCC Poetry Club website in March and April of 2021.

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www.wccnet.edu/library

<https://www.wccnet.edu/engage/sustainable/sustainability-literacy-task-force.php>

wccpoetryclub.wordpress.com

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Maryam Barrie

Dear John Keats

*The persuasion that I shall see her no more will kill me...
I can bear to die – I cannot bear to leave her
–John Keats in a letter to Charles Brown,
during the fatal trip to Italy*

I imagine you, well-loved by your small circle of friends,
by Fanny, saturated with poetry, worn down by nursing
your mother and brother to their consumptive deaths,
thinking your way through the big literary questions
in your early twenties, before tuberculosis consumed
your lungs and mercury corroded your stomach.
You write to your brothers of negative capability,
charge yourself with accepting
uncertainties, mysteries, doubts,
without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.
If you are right, and you usually are,
the poet must be permeable, susceptible.

It is too easy to say I have fallen under your sway,
that you are my new dead boyfriend.
Your words have hunkered into me and their impressions
in the clay of my body have flooded with feeling.
I fill my brain with stories of love lost, or almost lost,
and your words thread their way through the synapses
between my neurons, glimmering all the way from Rome,
where unopened letters from Fanny, and a lock of her hair,
lay with your bones under your last poem, your own epitaph:
here lies one whose name was writ in water.

I am breathing into the human warmth of your letters –
I want to take them up to the red light of my own small heart
and bear their weight in my blunt brown hands.
When you write to Fanny, *You have absorb'd me*,
I think of the heat in the packets of poems
and pictures I sent weekly to my own beloved
when I dove into him, his waters deep and safe,
and mine, mine, mine. I swore vows and oaths,
remember saying, “I’d rob a gas station for you!”
You write her *My Creed is Love and you are its only tenet*,
and the fire I am for him and our daughters glows red at the bone.

I see my whole life reflected back to me in each letter,
know that I am projecting my hillocks and chasms
onto your landscape. *I see nothing but thorns
for the future... Oh, Brown, I have coals of fire in my breast.*
I have been lost and wandering in the dark swamp
of personal history, paying for imaginary sins.
I yearn for your prickly sweetness, the idea of you
echoed now in pages and dust, fragments of bone.

When I read your last letter, the last anything you wrote,
my eyes well with your longing for Fanny and your death,
as if they were the same thing. I wait with Fanny
until December 1865, through her husband and three children,
until the moment she slides out of her body and finally
comes back into your arms. I imagine my own heart sore
with longing for my beloved, the peace of joining again after.

Ethan Berman

I deserve to fly

It's time to fly

It's time to climb

It's time to try

By self-sabotage

I was blinded

For so much more

I am meant

Taking Flight

I was wrong.

I found out

I often cried

I tried to try

So, I tried

To go on

Had no reason

Felt like I

Sometimes I

***Walden* Book Club Event**

I really enjoyed attending the *Walden* Book Club Event. It was absolutely fantastic to listen to everyone read excerpts and connect their own personal stories to the text. I especially enjoyed listening to how many people used the environment as a way to disconnect with the hustle and bustle of the outside world and reconnect with themselves on the inside. I personally used the beginning of the pandemic to really self-reflect on the choices I was making in my life during that time and evaluate if that is really how I wanted to live. I think during normal day to day life, we get too caught up and forget to really take care of ourselves. I really enjoyed this event and look forward to future events.

Sequoia National Park

The sequoias dig their toes
Into granite
And hang on
For 500 years
But we are peripatetic
Here in the grove today for only half an hour

Partial to sunlight
Five minutes after leaving
The dark cathedral under the trees
We are seated in a brightly lit lunchroom
Waiting for burgers

Like a river rushing past
We watch the birds, visit the meadow
Eat lunch, drive on to Lodgepole Village
Talk, breathe, sing, hike to a high peak
Admire the park
And its trees

These Words

Inside my head
Brain notwithstanding
There is still at times a blank canvas
A still pond
A blank sheet of paper

Defended from the thick crowding of event and emotion
By a wall
A habit
Of blind skepticism
Ready to take one more impression

I am not me
But an advanced observation post
And the trajectory of the universe
Depends
On its ability to distinguish

Honolulu from Berkeley
Berkeley from Heidegger
And the morning glory
From the princess flower
To make a record

And to share it
Even its errors a restraint upon
The impressions and instincts
Of other records
Tree and shoreline and sundial

And nervous system
On the canvas
A red slash
A stone in the pond
These words



Golden

Tears of gold adorn her face
Wisdom beyond years allow her grace
Eyes dark as night
but pools of Amber in morning light
Curves carved by the gods
But Smile marred by life

True Beauty

Society has put this burden on me of who I should be
They have turned beauty into a tangible thing
Height weight, age these numbers do not define me
they are not me,
nor will they ever be
Short
Daughter
Fat
I call myself these because I am
But I also call myself beautiful
Because despite of what society thinks
Beauty is not a number. It is not a thing
I didn't always think that,
but now I know
Society's the beast?
You and me were the beauty.

Coming Home



Artist's Statement

“This piece was inspired by a favorite Broadway musical of mine about World War II veterans, called Bandstand. One of the main themes of the musical is about the different kinds of unseen weight that each character carries because of the war, including the loss of friends in combat.

“My artwork is a visual depiction of this. A soldier standing in a train station, finally free to return home to a world made brighter by his service. But the shadow of a lost friend lingers at his shoulder— holding him back and tying him to a traumatic past, or standing at his side as a comforting presence and memory, or perhaps somehow both at once.

“People often make massive sacrifices with the most precious parts of their lives, and yet the shadows of those sacrifices are seen only by themselves. Veterans, and heroes of all kinds, deserve our deepest respect and thanks.”

Rivers and Trees

The stand-tall trees of the forest—rooted, indigenous, steeped in the language of wind and rain—give away nothing about what they're thinking. Mute and fossiled monuments, they give up their history in their ringed hearts, a silent story told only in their death.

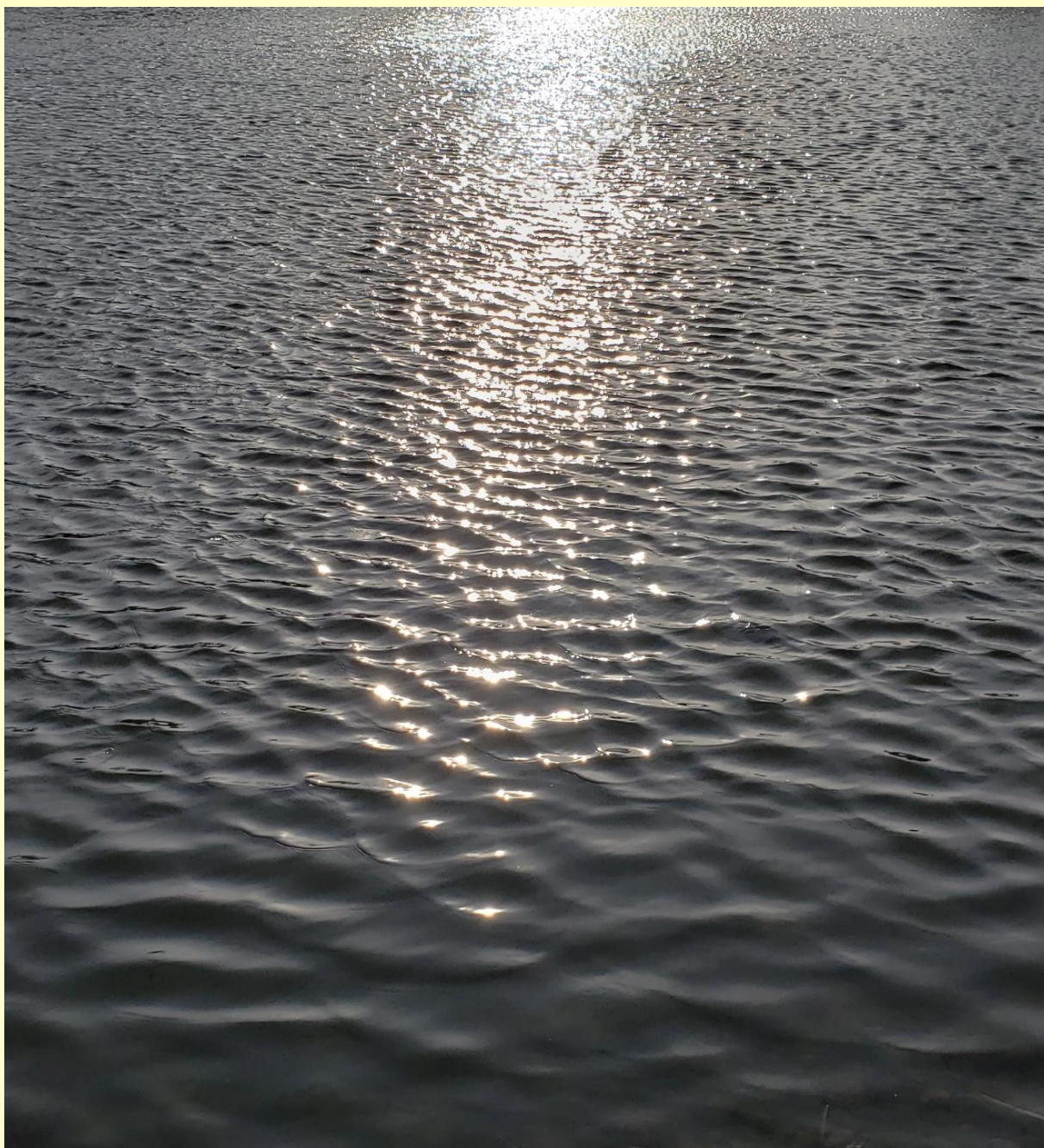
What lives after them feeds the forest floor, cradles a nursery of their seedlings, breaking down generation after generation—leaves of their storybook climb toward the sky. Once steeped and cultured, the dregs leach far down, like deciduous tea flowing through snow and rain into its cousin river.

River swallows hard, races past without a thank-you or shadow, whisks away its mineral brew, chafes unsuspecting boulders, rises to every occasion. River has at its heart no boundaries, no game plan except flow. It rushes past the borders of men, feeds what it must, claims what it will, drives a hard bargain.

Tree wishes only to stand strong, overseeing wild tangles of green, deep roots in a family warren.

River wishes only to be free,
running marathons to the sea,
seeking the conversation of waves.

Neither wishes to know man.



Root-Cave

I know this tree well.

When I walk out in the woods looking for
firewood I seek it out, knowing I'll get
a good armful to take back home.

I also try the hole in its roots on for size,
in case I need a place to hide. You never know
when dad has too many beers or mom goes
all bitch-faced and wild.

Each day I bring a few things with me to put
inside the hole formed by the roots of this ancient tree,
things I'd need if I were going to live here for a few days
inside this root-cave, just big enough for one.

I have a stash of crackers and a pot of cheese,
a rolled-up sleeping bag, my rubber boots and parka.
I know I'd be found if I took a flashlight so leave that behind,
but take a dog whistle to scare away the wolves.

I want to tell my little sister, but I know she'll tell mom
and give us away, so I keep my secret. I'll spend one afternoon
snug in my root-cave. I know one day it will be my only home,
and its clever arms will embrace me when no one else would.

What Trees Know

What is it that trees know about dying?
They do it so gracefully every fall,
over and over practicing letting go.

What if we could know what they know?
Could we also slip from our tethers
and move into death with the same ease
as going on vacation?

What if we could shed our dependence
on the sun rising every day, shed our
inadequate language, our own insecurities?

What could we learn about letting go
that doesn't define the act of dying?
Would we cherish our place
on the family tree?

Would we stop wasting time
as if we had an overabundance?
Would we see our way back into
the present moment, mindfully?

Would we make each day count,
like adding more pearls to a necklace?
Could we make a positive choice?

What is it that trees know?
Is it that their hope is as much in

the shedding of leaves, gathering
and storing as in their solitude?

Knowing full well that as visible life
recedes, restorative soul life carries on,
silent and sure in God's care.



Draganel Magda

Mami

She . . .

Wasn't an Officer dressed in blue
Wasn't a Soldier bold and true
Wasn't a Firefighter fighting fires
Wasn't a Doctor saving lives

She . . .

Couldn't stop criminals in their tracks
Couldn't respond to an enemy's attacks
Couldn't have rescued cats from trees
Couldn't diagnose and treat disease

She . . .

Didn't attempt to arrest a soul
Didn't train to be on patrol
Didn't respond to emergencies
Didn't assist in surgeries

She . . .

Did forgive me when I made a mistake
Did sacrifice for her family's sake
Did protect me from the start
Did love me with all her heart

She . . .

Could be caring, kind, and strong
Could be firm when I did wrong
Could brighten spirits with her laugh
Could advocate on my behalf

She . . .

Was a woman of a selfless breed
Was a confidant in times of need
Was my comforter in times of sorrow
Was my mother . . . my personal hero



The Selfless Youth

The world we live in was at first,
A source of knowledge to calm the thirst.
But now it is an evil place,
That brings the worst of most in grace.

When people are exposed to hate,
They tend to fall in it with fate.
However, there is still some hope,
The selfless youth will cut the rope.

The rope of hate and lies
Will fall from truth and smiles.
They sing along with those alike,
To save the world with warmth.

The heroes that embrace the soul
Of broken dreams and injustice of the world
As I believe, there is still hope,
To build the future for the mob.

How to Survive a Feeling

Rob died in his sleep,
The obituary said.

Rob called me one day
He was high
He wanted to start a marijuana farm in Canada.

On the way to rehab,
Rob asked to taxi driver to stop
So he could smoke crack
Before being admitted.

He was in love with me
But he is gay.

Rob's father told him that he would only inherit 50 million if Rob got
Married.

Well, that was quite a dilemma.

So he used every drug—some I've never heard of.

His psychiatrist said to him, and Rob repeated this to me several times, "Do you
have the guts to be a real person."

50 million.

It killed him.

Heroes of the World

The day is bright and sunny. Believing in hope and peace, as we feel lonely and afraid,
the sun shines bright and golden. Hoping for change and progress,
suddenly behind the walls our heroes rise and battle and destroy fears within us.

We're bound together as the three musketeers: one for all, all for one.
The whole world feels free and safe, knowing that our true heroes
have come to save us all from destruction of broken vases.

We see the sun rise, smiles on everyone's faces, feeling great happiness and joy,
knowing that our heroes have come to save us.
Our heroes wearing their capes fill our bodies with super powers and human
strength.

Break in the Back

(for the City of Angels)

It must have been the fires
 that ignited our urge to live
 after the storm of ashes had settled
 and the embers red as blood had died,
the smoke billowing up like sails
 like clouds like apparitions
swept away by the ebbing breath of the wind.

The heroes had converged en masse upon the land
 and in the skies
 spraying water and dropping water
 on the fingers of flame
that reached through our frail bodies
 pulling out our hearts
 destroying our materials
 but saving our souls.
For it was the fires that ignited our urge to live.

Each of the elements had a life of their own,
 the wind, the fire, the water, the air.
They danced a mad tango
 a purifying death that grants a rebirth
a transformation we cannot deny.

The breath came first.
What began as a simple sigh
 became a panting and then a blast

swirling through the canyons around the trees
over the fields and up against the walls
somersaulting back to the way it began.

Somewhere

the spark occurred.

An accident? A perversion? The will of Great Spirit? Or chaos?

Somewhere

the spark occurred

catching on a brittle branch

eating through the tender timber

and fanned into a fire.

First an inch tall but growing fast into a dragon

roaring and thrashing and rolling and leaping

with what looked to be the speed of light.

Do not doubt that this dragon was alive

filled with the fury of lost values, corrupt morals,

and a break in the back of spirit.

Those glinting pots of gold that drew us here

became tarnished, misplaced, and then lost

outside of us forever.

Somewhere

another spark occurred.

An accident? A perversion? The will of Great Spirit? Or chaos?

Another spark occurred

and another and another and

the Earth cried out (the trees, the bushes, the grasses, the grains)

“Sweep me clean if you must but I beg you please

leave me my roots. Leave me with how my life begins

deep inside the womb of my mother pulled up and out

of the surface by the light and warmth of the sun.

Please leave me my roots I beg you.”

The dragons took reign of the hillsides and the canyon
roaring and thrashing and rolling and
leaping and...

As the heroes continued with their quest,
the humans frantically circled
shuffling their feet, clenching their hands
sorting through photographs, jewelry,
sweet mementos and the cash,
crying out

“Who will save us? How will we rebuild?
There is but one choice that is to surrender.”
And they did
except for the lone man watering
the roof of his house with a hose.

He screamed,
“This is mine. This is mine. You cannot have it
though you are much bigger than me.
I am a knight and with the sword of intent
I will defeat you.”

Meanwhile the animals
the swimmers, the crawlers, the four legged
and the winged ones
traveled further away from the dragons
further away from the dragons
they are still traveling further...

If only we had watched them closer
their every sound and move
they would have taught us how to live.

Thank you thank you for the water
quenching the thirst of the dragons

roaring and thrashing and rolling and leaping
The Earth, sighing in her relief
reveling in her comfort
“Our roots have been saved.”

The water fell from the sky like the tears of angels
weeping over the lost values, corrupt morals
and the break in the back of spirit.

Tears falling in rivers
water rushing to the shores
as the wind began to tame.

Through the whine of its exhaustion
or maybe through the intent
of something greater than we
it unwound.

The tango of the elements became a waltz
and whispered to a stop within the smoky air.

The embers red as blood cooled in the stillness,
the embers of what was left of things.

The dragons retreated to their dens
unseen but not gone
poised to reappear when the fears
inside humans need a face.

We did not ask for the fires.

But perhaps they were conjured
through our vain search in mirrors;
our hopes to win the lotto;

our smallness never acknowledged against the power
of something greater whoever whatever it be.

We did not ask for the fires.

But it was the fires
that saved our souls
and ignited our urge to live.

Two Haiku

Snowflakes fill the air
Falling like embers
Igniting serenity within me

As the seasons change
Feelings bloom and fade—
A natural connection with our mother

Ore

Oh, what we say . . . it matters. Words and deeds,
yes, those who say and do the ones that move
us, they're our heroes. Say our country bleeds:
sounds heavy-handed; also true. To prove
the planet's warming? We can check the stats,
then witness and react. To wear a mask
or burn it? I know where I stand, but that's
just me, a white male privileged to ask
such questions, also dodge some tougher ones:
on gender, race, and social justice. (Odd
for me, this sonnet. Patience.) What of guns
and immigration, hunger, warfare, God?
So there. These words I've laid down, rough as ore.
And what shall I become if I do more?

Spring Fever

“I’ll burn this fucking house down!” dream-self rants.
Rehearsing taboos in my mind: will be
like this until I die. A diva chants
me earbud Bach, a beer’s in front of me,
the pasta water’s on the boil, my wife
is watching Lifetime: men behaving madly.
Brand-new cutting board, same damned dull knife,
it’s just the onion makes me cry. I’ve gladly
half-assed Hamlet, holding life less dear.
I also like the thought that life makes sense,
naïve but thrilling, heroine with clear,
unclouded brow, a mind in future tense.
I *love*, however, ambiguity,
the sonnet measuring fatuity.

A *Walden* Book Club Event

Going into this event I knew nothing of Henry David Thoreau, only heard his name, but now I can say I'm vaguely familiar about him and his work *Walden*. I find it interesting that he was involved with the Underground Railroad. It's also fascinating that because he was so sad about his brother's death, he got sympathy symptoms of tetanus. It was lovely being in a group meeting and people taking turns reading, it seemed like we were actually in class! 😊 "Change oneself before changing the world." I really like this because there's always room for improvement for one and for two it just makes sense to make sure you have your self together before setting out to change the world. Also by changing yourself, that seems to be the first step in changing the world.

I agree with him that being one with nature and simplifying your life is best.

From what I learned about Thoreau, I find him to be admirable and very intelligent.

Is it weird to say that him and his work kind of inspired me to go on a self-journey?

Because of this event, when I have free time, I'm going to look more into Thoreau and *Walden*.

March 31st, 2021



Contributors

Maryam Barrie's bio: Married mother, lives in woods, writes.

Ethan Berman writes, "I woke up one morning feeling under the weather. I went for a walk, took my pups, and came back with a new mindset halfway through this piece. I came back feeling grateful. Why choose to be under the weather when you can be over it?"

Umang Bhojani is a WCC Student.

Alan Cohen/Poet first/Then PCMD, teacher, manager/Living a full varied life/To optimize time and influence/Deferred publication, wrote/Average 3 poems a month/For 60 years/Beginning now to share some of his discoveries/130 poems accepted for publication so far this year/Married to Anita 41 years/in Eugene, OR these past 11

Adrianna Green writes, "I'm a wcc student who loves writing and reading in my spare time!"

Megan Johnson (@the_redhead_lefty on Instagram) writes:

"This piece was inspired by a favorite Broadway musical of mine about World War II veterans, called *Bandstand*. One of the main themes of the musical is about the different kinds of unseen weight that each character carries because of the war, including the loss of friends in combat.

"My artwork is a visual depiction of this. A soldier standing in a train station, finally free to return home to a world made brighter by his service. But the shadow of a lost friend lingers at his shoulder— holding him back and tying him to a traumatic past, or standing at his side as a comforting presence and memory, or perhaps somehow both at once.

"People often make massive sacrifices with the most precious parts of their lives, and yet the shadows of those sacrifices are seen only by themselves. Veterans, and heroes of all kinds, deserve our deepest respect and thanks."

Diane M. Laboda is a former teacher-librarian and retired WCC executive assistant. She enjoys exploring life's mysteries and sharing with others in her writing and artwork. She's published poetry, short stories, articles, and photos in literary journals and anthologies both online and in print. She has published two chapbooks, *Facing the Mirror* and *This Poet's Journey*, and is working on her first book-length collection of poetry on grief and care giving.

Draganel Magda writes, “This poem is dedicated to my mother, who was my personal hero. ‘Mami’ is what I called her as a child. It is a Romanian term of endearment for mother, and is the English equivalent of ‘Mommy’ with the same pronunciation.”

Anastasiia Noguier is a nontraditional student and an immigrant who discovered creative writing as a way to enjoy life and spread ideas. Anastasiia’s main interests are social and environmental injustice and technology.

Olivia Oakes is a WCC Poetry Club member.

Ayowole Oladeji is a WCC student who has been active in many WCC endeavors, including WCC Poetry Club.

S.L. Schultz, a graduate of California State University-Long Beach, teaches English Comp and Creative Writing for WCC and works as a faculty tutor at Jackson College. She writes in various genres, including poetry, short prose, and novel. Nature is her cathedral, culture her muse, and travel her passion.

Sophia Sims writes, “I’m a student at WTMC who spends my free time making music, writing, watching movies, and spending time with my dog. I find a lot of inspiration through personal and other people’s life experiences. And one way I express that is through poetry.”

Tom Zimmerman teaches English and directs the Writing Center at WCC. He also serves as editor of *The Huron River Review* and *The Big Windows Review* and faculty advisor of the WCC Poetry Club.

Shania Zwalesky is a WCC student.



**Barrie Berman Bhojani Cohen Green Johnson Laboda Magda
Noguier Oakes Oladeji Schultz Sims Zimmerman Zwalesky**

