



~ ADAPTATIONS ~

A WCC Anthology ~ Edited by Tom Zimmerman

~ ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ~

This ***Adaptations*** anthology 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 November and December 2022.

An *Adaptations* open mic took place November 16, on Zoom. Some of the authors in this anthology read work.

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www.wccnet.edu/library

www.wccnet.edu/engage/sustainable/sustainability-literacy-task-force.php

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~ MARYAM BARRIE ~

Oudolf Garden on Belle Isle

swells with color in the heat –
globe thistle, goldenrod, yarrows,
grasses, wild geraniums, allium,
and culver's root. The garden
burgeons in front of the Peace Carillon,
a bell tower nestled between the hum
of happy bees swooning in the beds
and the Detroit River. The wind sways
forms and textures softly. Purple aster
bloom fiercely amid twelve varieties of sedum.
Milk, swamp, Joe Pye and butterfly weed,
yellow and pale purple coneflower,
Russian sage, anemone, and bee balm
nod towards us in welcome.

Our circle of four rendezvous every month.
We are all a little broken. My friend
with the stagnant marriage dances
through the borders. The eldest of us
jots down ideas for her suburban yard.
My singing sister photographs the wild
borders, while I breathe in liatris
painting vertical lines of violet
as a painter darkens shadows.
I am drifting above my body again.

~ MARYAM BARRIE ~

To Teach

for my parents

My mother woke up swearing
at 5am to grade her students' work.

They loved her. My Afghan father relied
on shame and humiliation to set the standard.

They had different philosophies of classroom
management. My daughter prepares

curriculum before her maternity leave
at a Midwestern State University.

Aunt Phyllis, a very white High School
English teacher, chastising me for my

morbid teenage reading habits,
(I was reading Toni Morrison and James Baldwin)

told me that *the black experience was
no different than her own*. She drank.

My sister teaches elementary art –
winds the kids up with color and form.

Our sister-in-law works in an at-risk elementary
school, sneaks in mindfulness and social justice.

I carried my love for my students as a fever
for years. 37 years in, I wear that love lightly,

but can explain just about anything
with the appearance of patience.

~ SOSTHENES BEHN ~

The Land of Eternal Summer

“Life is a path which ends in the land of eternal summer.”

– A Finnish proverb

The sky hangs low on the horizon, like a shroud obliterating the winter sun.

Grey clouds forewarn of a coming snow. The wind feels like a dozen sharp knives against my face.

As I walk up the trail on which I had traveled many times, I reflect on how it has changed since my last visit. The trees, once lush, are barren; their leaves now serve as a multicolored carpet on the trail.

A sharp pain in my right calf reminds me that I had not stretched before starting up this morning. Freezing wind penetrates my three layers of clothes, chilling my chest.

I begin to feel very tired and remind myself that I have three miles to go. I start up a hill and am conscious that my body is drenched in sweat. I feel sleepy and have a fleeting thought that lying down by the path might be a good idea. My vision becomes blurry and loses focus.

Two miles left to go.

I come around a corner and an albino deer a mere six feet away startles me. I stop and stare. The deer approaches. I reach out to touch it and lose consciousness.

I wake up lying on a beautiful beach. The sun



Photograph by the author.

warms my face and waves crash in the background.

I look around and observe small groups of people dressed in formal attire walking around the beach.

A group approaches me. A stern-looking man dressed in a three-piece suit looks down at me. He smiles, turns to the group, and says, "This is my grandson Sosthenes."

I smile, close my eyes. I am at peace.

~ RACHEL BULLOCK ~

Carnivore

Cobra Lily, your lucent leaves draw your victim deeper within to be digested in darkness
Australian Sundew, your adhesive raindrops offer no hydration instead slow death waits
Red tipped Pitcher Plant, the frog's foe, although no one knows as only the feet linger
Nepenthes, a.k.a. Monkey Cup- your wafting nectar calls your prey to an acid pool of digestion
Inflated Bladderwort, bright cupped-leaf in dark murky bogs lures wanderer's to certain demise
Venus Flytrap, you infamous villain, whose tiny hairs brushed twice encloses forevermore
Oh Sarracenia Flava- yellow pitcher plant tall, upright, regal your conicine gift is the insect's curse
Rosettes of flat leaf adorn you little greasy one, butterwort sessile glands dissolve all evidence
Each of your adaptations has benefitted your survival; do you take the time to thank your prey?



~ STEFANI CARTER ~

About Howard Johnson's

Every summer my father did his penance to Mama for bringing her north to Detroit and he packed us into the Chevrolet and drove us for a visit to the small town in North Carolina where she was from. The trip was long and tiring. And we didn't look forward to our Grandfather's house where there was no television and we would spend our days going through the Sears catalog and our evenings catching lightning bugs in mayonnaise jars. Sometimes we were carted around to see Mama's old friends and family, who would pat us and pinch our cheeks and then turn their attention to whatever adults needed to talk about.

One summer, when I was about 12, as I stared, bored, out of the window as we drove, the question became too weighty to be contained. I had seen the orange rooftop many times. I knew that we didn't need to stop for food — Mama always packed sandwiches. But somehow I was aware that under that orange roof, dwelled ice cream. Now Daddy would take us to the Dairy Queen after church on Sundays, but somehow the ice cream at Howard Johnson's held a delicious mystique that seemed irresistible. And so I asked — "Daddy, why don't we ever stop at Howard Johnson's?" Without skipping a beat, in his soft, strong voice, my Daddy replied, "Honey, Howard Johnson's doesn't serve Negroes." That was the entire conversation. Nothing else to be said.

I knew that we were in the South. And I knew that my parents had always made a point of talking to us about how we were to act — since we weren't in Detroit anymore. Even in Detroit, while I was aware that I wouldn't be served at the lunch counter at the Sander's Ice Cream shop on Grand River, at least they would let you order from the take-out section. But this was a real slap in the face being told that we weren't going to be served at all under the orange roof. Who were these people anyway? What right did they have to refuse hard-earned money from my beautiful honey-colored family? What nerve!

A few years later, in 1964, the Civil Rights Act was passed, supposedly forbidding

discrimination in public accommodations. The next summer, as we drove south, Daddy announced that we would stop and get ice cream at Howard Johnson's. We pulled into the parking lot and, filled with trepidation, my sisters and I followed our mother into the ladies room, in case we had to "go," and to wash our hands. If those good Christian ladies could have sent us straight to Hell by their daggers, we would have been on our way then and there. But we ignored them and tried to reflect our mother's calm, proud countenance as we washed our hands and walked to the counter to join Daddy and my brother. We all got our ice cream and triumphantly returned to the Chevrolet, to continue our long road trip.

I believe that was the best ice cream I had ever tasted.

~ STEFANI CARTER ~

The Crystal Dish

Sally was too brown to pass
Sisters were a paler hue.
As soon as they could Sisters left their small town
and headed North, Passing.

When Big Mama passed on Sisters returned
with big bunches of flowers and buckets of tears
Though they hadn't been back for years –
because they were busy Passing.

“Let's settle the estate before we leave,” they said.
“We'll divide up the few dollars Big Mama had left, and Sally,
you can have what things are left in the old house.”

In the house were Big Mama's dishes,
which she had somehow managed to collect.
Some given by rich ladies whose garments she tailored,
some passed down from her own mother.

Later that year, Sisters returned – one last trip.
“Sally, we'd love to have Mama's things. Of course,
we'll buy them from you and send you a check
soon as we return to the City, where we're Passing.”

Sisters packed up possessions – which they determined had value
and returned to the big City, Passing.
Sisters never were seen again, nor did the check arrive.
The only thing left, hidden away and unnoticed, was a small beautiful crystal dish
that sparkled when the light hit its intricately chiseled designs.

Sally treasured the dish, her only keepsake,
Big Mama's precious possession.
Its pedigree unknown, but its beauty undeniable.
Beloved because of the loved one to whom it had belonged.

Time passed.

Sally raised her children, heating the old house
with the pieces of coal
that her daughters retrieved from the road outside
as the coal trucks bumped along past.

Sally passed away and the small crystal dish passed on to her daughter, my mom,
who passed it on to me – along
with stories the ancestors told,
stories of what they endured.

And I have shared with my daughter the stories
and value of the little sparkling crystal dish
which will go along to her and then to her daughter, passing.

~ STEFANI CARTER ~

Thoughts

Gallows.

Death threats.

Feces on floor.

Broken windows.

Bear spray.

Guns.

Fallen cops.

“Proud” of what?

~ CAROLYN CRANE ~

On Being Asked: "Who Is Coyote Woman?"

She knows where she lives
and how to get there from
any of the six directions.

Coyote Woman knows her needs,
creates paths to meet them
on her own behalf.

She offers no apology
for what she feels and
states only what she means.

Coyote Woman hones a passion,
bathes it with her tongue
on the earth floor of her den.

She howls in the throes of love,
snarls at unkindness,
flips a playful paw at folly.

Coyote Woman can't stop growing.
Each year her fur is thicker,
heart larger as she greets the moon.



~ AMY HIGGINS ~

Raspberry

white
pink
snug cap
reddens then
loosens, fills with juice—
nature's own thimble fits my thumb.

dog
sees
watches
tilts her head
my gifted mimic
takes one in her teeth and she's gone.

sweet
fat
seed-filled
together
we select the best
her way works well; I use my teeth.

*Note: This poem is a fib. For more info:
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/68971/1-1-2-3-5-8-fun>*

~ AMY HIGGINS ~

Yew Outside my Window

Our yew is squat and crudely shaped
Like the bush a child makes
To keep her house from floating high
Up and away from the paper sky.

Our yew tucks her plain green skirt
Against our house to hide bare dirt,
Keep crumbling bricks where no one sees,
And cover up her knobby knees.

I know who really hides in you,
Modest, self-effacing yew—
I hush and hear the hermit thrush
Scratch and kick beneath the bush.

Gathering tufts and grass to start,
She's tucked her nest in your dense heart
Where wind can't reach, nor vicious jay
Break in and steal her thrumming eggs.

Reckless robin, careless, brash
Knows no better than to stash
Her nest in supple maple tree
and dares each gust to blow it free.

Hermit thrush, aptly named
You've found a home much the same
As you in nature—elusive, shy.
Shelter her, yew, from prying eyes.

~ ELLE HILLER ~

The Captain

The captain rises long before dawn. In the inky darkness, he pulls on his threadbare jeans and buttons his sun-bleached work shirt. *I grow weary of this*, he thinks. In repetition of thousands of days, he dons his well-worn, white rubber boots and exits his house.

He makes his way to the dock, thinking about the lean season so far. The yield has been meager and he worries about rising fuel costs and the plummeting price of wild-caught shrimp. Competition from Asian pond-raised shrimp threatens the livelihood of fishermen.

The *Miss Hope*, his trusty 69-foot trawler, stands at the ready. His motley crew eventually trickles aboard in various states of leftover inebriation. In the pilothouse, Cap fires the noisy diesel engine and languidly guides the vessel away from the dock. The bright white trawler traverses the murky snake-like creek. Under the ancient swing bridge, past the flats of Egg Bank, and out to the open waters of the sound he navigates.

Impulsively, he decides to fish a new area today.

The choppy waves battled the previous day have lain down. The mirror-like water reflects all above it. In the galley, Harry, the only crew member who can cook worth a damn, makes a hearty breakfast for the crew.

At precisely 6:00 AM, Cap lets down the “wings.” The tall outriggers open like outstretched arms. Massive and weighted green nets attached to the outriggers hit the water with a splash and slowly sink to the sea bottom. Dragging commences. The entire boat shudders and hums with the steady vibration.



Dragging the Nets

Dolphins ride the wake alongside the bow like galloping horses. Hundreds of gulls trail behind the aft deck in a swirl of chaos as the sun rises behind them.

Some time later, a long pass finished, Cap stills the boat. He leaves the wheelhouse and mans the winch. The outriggers creak into action, lifting the now-burgeoning nets. The crew struggle to reign in the starboard net and position it above the sorting table. Below the turtle excluder, the mouth of the net is expanded to release an astonishing bounty of squirming sea creatures onto the table.



Nets Birds Dolphins

Jimbo sobers some at the sight of such a huge catch and entertains thoughts of all the pints of hooch he can now buy. All hands aboard separate the shrimp from the by-catch. Various undesirable fish are tossed to the deck, only to be push-broomed through the scuppers and back to the sea. Handfuls upon handfuls of shrimp are gently placed into orange plastic laundry baskets by the strikers for transport off the boat. The port net yields an even larger load than the first.

At day's end, the weary crew arrives back at the fish house. The scales reveal the total for the day is a whopping 843 pounds – a record day not seen in years.

After a hot shower and buoyed by the day's success, Cap heads to the island watering hole. He is greeted by the regulars who have already heard news of the monster catch. The captain offers to buy the house a round of shots in celebration. He revels in the camaraderie and lifted spirits, and dares to feel a shard of hope.



Crew Sorting Shrimp

Cap is a rugged and weathered-looking man, yet still handsome. His natural

a charisma leads him to turn his attention to a young woman seated at the bar. With an indolent smile he drawls, "Princess, I've got socks older than you are," and winks at her.

The very next day, the island "telegraph" brings news to all of the captain's untimely death. He was only 58. It is said that he died of an exploded heart, aboard his beloved boat, doing what he was born to do, in the bright sunshine.

~ ELLE HILLER ~

Stealthy thief of life
brain aflutter in undeath
trapped and lingering ...

~ JOHN KRITZ ~

Change of Station

I don't have to wake up at 8am tomorrow

Or be home at 1:30pm

Or 6pm

Or feign interest in British television

Or negotiate bed time

Or fold a stack of blankets

Or pile cushions

Or try again to push the correct button

Or disconnect various moorings

Or avoid the drywall

Or find another box of kleenex

Or grind pills into a slurry

Or deflect concerned looks as the lift takes up the slack

Or figure out where any of the lip balms have gone

Or tuck in a saffron quilt

Or remember whether the morphine goes in the cheek

Or under the tongue

There are no last minute head and feet adjustments

No need for a fluffed pillow or shifted body

Or carefully adjust a mask

Or wrap a scarf

Or apply a kiss

Or play a corny lullaby

Just turn out the lights (I just have to turn out the lights?)

Goodnight my love, I miss you.



~ DIANE M. LABODA ~

Bittersweet

The bittersweet has burst, tiny orange berries nestled in a straw-colored hat. It is the season of colors lost and dried and mulched to ground. Color is now a premium that flashes amid thin branches in the marsh.

They're like small explosions of happiness when days get shorter, darker, grayer. The gentle almost snow falls fine and wet, and makes each starburst shine even redder. Once covered over by a tangle of marsh reed, it now becomes the decor of fall with all its blemishes and imperfections.

The bittersweet, the red clad dogwood branches become the texture, the pattern, the beacon of hope as days no longer shine on their own, and often weep as colors fade into marsh browns, bark grays and splats of green holding on by the root.

Bittersweet lights another gray day guiding birds out of nesting and into the not so inviting sky, only to fly away toward a sun we can no longer worship, that hides behind the solstice and fades the year away.

The day the berries burst open in their silent breakout, they have no idea what hope they bring to all other drab and spent branches. They have no idea what hope they bring to onlookers who hide from frost and an almost snow premonition of what's to come.

~ DIANE M. LABODA ~

Choices

I once wove a minimalist basket from thin air
and raffia. The basket did not know what
it was going to be at the beginning. I did not know
what I was going to create with my imperishable hands
until well past the middle.

I once painted a picture of blurry trees
with watercolor paints. The trees did not know
how green they wanted to be.
I did not know how many shades of green
there are in the rainbow.

I once wrote a poem using words
in my buttoned-up head. The poem did not know
what it wanted to say. I did not know
what I wanted to know, so I trusted the words
as they churned out of my pen.

I once entered the stubborn door called living.
Living didn't know what it was supposed to be.
I did not know what living could look like, until I
discovered it was actually the process of dying,
and one day I would no longer be able to make
indelible choices.

~ DIANE M. LABODA ~

The Wisdom of Trees

Consider: if our hearts knew how to move on when it's time, when it's felt so deeply and ached so much, to accept its momentary shattering, absorb all it can from the time spent and slowly and gently release.

Consider: what a tree knows, that their hope is as much in the shedding of their golden, quaking leaves as in their gathering and storing from the network underground. They know how to be the solitary sentinel in the solitude of the woods.

Consider: our hearts take and take and take emotion after emotion, as if adding to a choker of pearls. Hearts that move our life's blood also store our passion, our shame, our despair, gathering to overflowing.

Consider: a letting go of the wreath of emoticons just as the tree sheds its overcoat each fall. How much lighter life would feel, how much more open our arms would be to what really matters in the only moment we are given.



Consider: standing tall together, supporting
our comrades, our friends, our family
from the earth until it is time to take leave,
return to the cosmos from which we were birthed.
Consider the blessing
of letting go.

~ DANIEL W. LONG ~

Untitled (December 10)

In the English language
There isn't a word to describe
The feeling of December.

That time of year when
The temperature drops and
The cost of living rises and
The number on the paystub hasn't changed
In three fiscal years.

In the English language
There isn't a word to describe
The exact level of anguish felt
When even the thread which you hang by
Is coated in oil

And you measure out your pills
Because even though they keep the blood right and
Because even though they balance the brain chemicals
You only take them every third day
Because the \$150 copay eats the grocery money

And the English language
Doesn't describe
The despair and the agony and the rage

Because platitudes ring hollow
And the Grinch's moral is empty
Because a child surrounded by affluent peers
Doesn't get the concept of wealth disparity.

The English language
Doesn't have a word to describe
Being utterly broken.

So.
We say "Fuck."

"Fuck!" screamed alone in a parked car
"Fuck" muttered as the housing payment is made
"Fuck" whimpered in the loneliness of 3 A.M.
"Fuck" whispered when only part of the bills get paid.

"Fuck."



~ DRAGANEL MAGDA ~

Ode to Hate and Anger

You don't look like me –

I hate you.

You don't believe like me –

I despise you.

You don't speak like me –

I loathe you.

You are accepting –

It angers me.

You are forgiving –

It infuriates me.

You are independent –

It distresses me.

Hate and anger fuel my emotions.

They're my drugs of choice.

They exhilarate me.

They make me feel alive.

I love to hate,

And anger makes me happy.

Now, leave me alone!

Hatefully yours,

– Small-Minded and Immutable

~ DRAGANEL MAGDA ~

Footprints line the sand.
Sunlit beaches glisten —
Optimism swells.

Cool winds forebode.
Green leaves transform to red —
Another page turns.

~ AYOWOLE OLADEJI ~

Adaptation of the Universe

As the living organisms of different species evolved throughout the ocean seas, it shows how all different species adapt to the wild when it's warm or cold. All animals, like birds, bears, rats, deer, and elephants adapt really well to their surroundings.

It's easy for all living species to experience and adapt just like we humans. All humans adapt to their surroundings so well because we are used to adapting in any kind of environment, hot or cold, it doesn't matter.

Adaptation of human and species and living organisms represents the wilderness of the seasons, of adapting to every environment, whether land or in the desert, facing the challenges of reality that lives for thousands of years and beyond.

~ SARAH SMITH ~

Haiku(s): Survival Against All Odds

The only constant
on this ever-changing earth
is change. As living

beings evolve and
adapt to survive. Finding
inventive, clever

ways to endure, to
acclimate. All to prevent
species extinction.

*inspired by the film *Where the Crawdads Sing*

~ SARAH SMITH ~

Sonnet: Internal Protectors

Humankind's presence on earth came with the opportunity for growth, primary, as humans continued to evolve, a way to survive. Evolutionary adaptation from primal instinct set the foundation to endure. Though subdued, instinct still exists. Any perceived threat challenged by survivalist aptitude. In the face of conflict comes different responses for all: fight, flight, freeze, fawn. Those mechanisms utilized to prevent potential harm; find safety, I suppose. Fueling natural instincts to conquer, flee, halt, appease: internal protectors.

~ WILLOW SYMONDS ~

A Better Autumn

Last year, leaves stayed green
Until they died, but this year
They fall red and orange



Fall Trees

~ WILLOW SYMONDS ~

My Tongue Splits in Two

Like stories in mirrors, I always knew:
my face detaches, my tongue splits in two

I welcome the strange, the lost, the few

Budding seeds inside, my daydreams have grown
Phantom wings of mine, black-veined and blue-boned,
push through shedding skin like the newborn babes,
stealing flesh with its slime and untouched rage
They break my spine with winding erosion

Breathing life into her mind's creation

Skin hides no secrets, but my three eyes do
Black pupils bleed, stain irises blue,
like wing bones and bruises and air-starved lips
Alive in my lungs, something bites and rips
Bright blades of fire escape like a plea

*Her own celestial epiphany,
drunk on dead moonlight, no feast for a fight*

My veins collapse out, yet my ears still pound
Drowning my thoughts, in absence of sound
My blood decays, moves through pores, poisons ponds
Wet earth blankets all, sinks my dull talons
In a swamp or a meadow, no matter

*With angels buried in mud below her,
sacred grounds bloom, resurrect and whisper*

No starlings sing, and no roses rustle
My clothes float as dead petals, the seared wool
In my webbed hands, a soft prayer, I cup
Colors seep into one, collect raindrops
Not a curse, nor a blessing; not virtue, nor confession

If I eat her pain, do I feed my sin?

Cradling teeth, saved from mundanity
Slaughterhouse mercy on me, maybe
Tongue forked and feeling, tastes the night's music
Healing the gaps and devouring quick

*Famine of the mind and drought of the voice,
I enchant my own, my being, my choice*



~ KARA ZABLOCKI-SHAW ~

Old Friend

Slumped down near your trunk
Ground cold, wet, rotting
Melancholy washes over
I look up
Sturdy
Reaching to the clouds
Your branches go on forever
Slowly swaying
Creaking in the autumn air
Standing firm one hundred years
Weathered the storms
Watched the days fleeting
Standing so majestic
Bringing beauty to all that gaze upon you
What can you teach me? I whisper.
Wisdom –
Always stand tall and know the power within
A refuge- grounded so deep
Change is all around you, yet here you are unchanged-
The birds find protection, home in you, as do I old friend.

~ TOM ZIMMERMAN ~

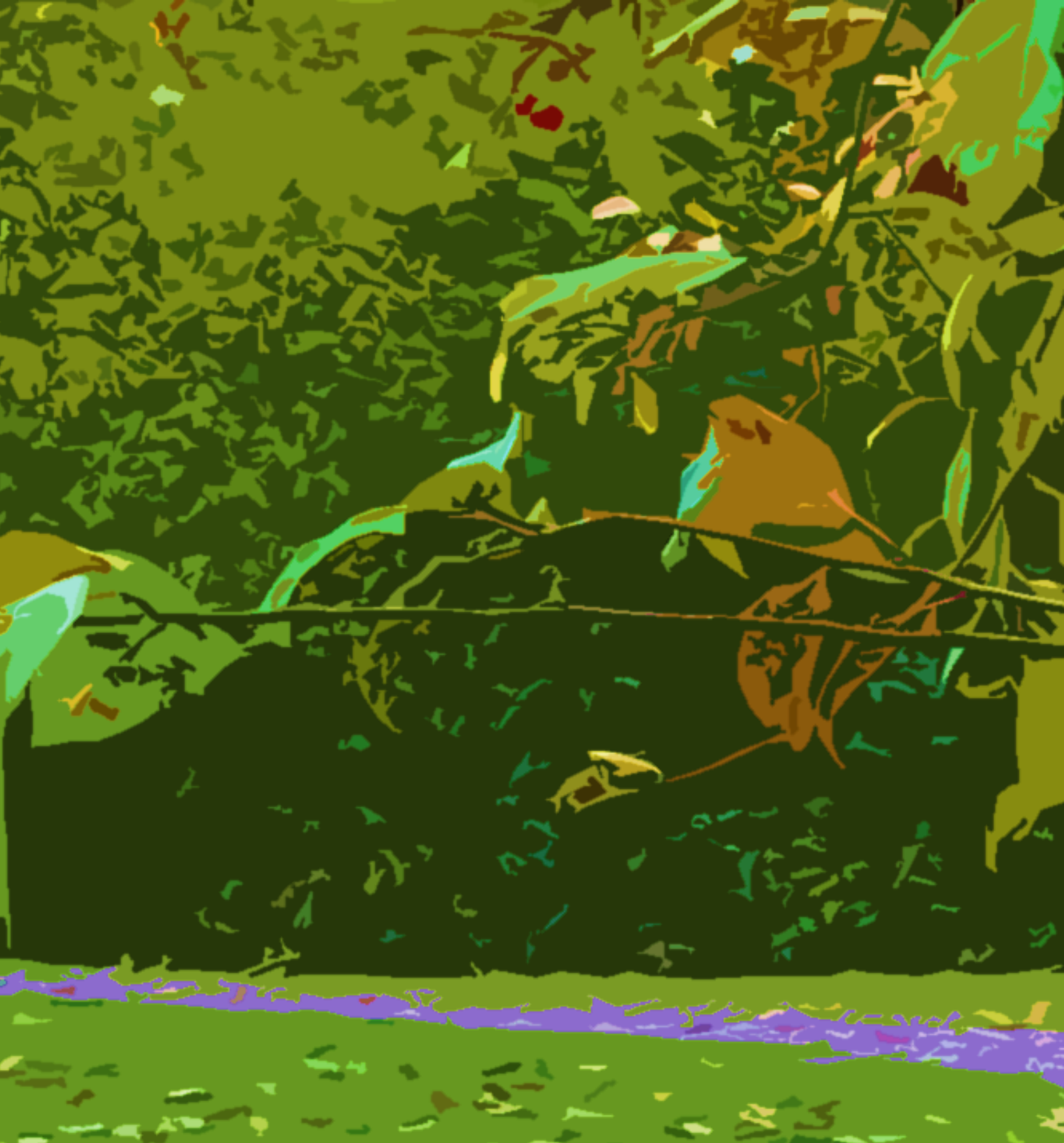
Entering the Underworld

Three a.m., no moon
Sick black dog and I kick leaves
Lit in cellphone glow

~ TOM ZIMMERMAN ~

Dreaming Phoenix

Gilt-edged horizon, dimming western sky.
My mind spins east with Earth. Rebirth. Red dawn
among the Mongols. Pharaohs rise and set
to stretch their wingspans over history.
The Ottomans and czars glow gold as rye.
The shoguns and the Trojan kings ride, drawn
by stallions bright as embers. Minaret,
pagoda, pyramid: their mystery
breathes out patchouli, lavender, and musk.
Computer snore and cellphone burp can't mar
my reverie. I've come unstuck in time.
My psyche's stoked and lit, my body's husk
sleeps, wrapped in tissue made for flight. Bright star
and moon alike rain light as old as rhyme.



*Bailey Library ~ Sustainability Literacy Task Force ~ WCC Poetry Club
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