

the literary forest poetry magazine
issue seven (2025)



LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

ABBIE HART

welcome back to the forest. it's me again. i'm so excited for you to read our seventh issue. this little magazine has been through quite a bit this year. we had our first intern, moved states, and then continents, and here i am, still able to curate my most beloved. lfpm is excitingly now based out of dublin, ireland, which, as you know, is just a stone's throw from houston, texas, where we began.

every time I write my letter to the editor i get even more emotional about it. y'all (yes, y'all, even still) believed in me as a teenager, and now you believe in me as a master's student. i love the forest. i yearn for the forest. thank you for letting me take care of it.

this year, just like last year, and the year before, and the year before ad infinitum, contains beautiful voices, beloved voices, new voices, old voices, and a whole lot of weird shit.

maya rose is being kissed by minnows. dan raphael is walking in circles. yf wang is swallowing raw salmon, cigarettes, and god. heikki huotari is not the owner of that flying object. frederick pollack is not native to that planet. michael rerick is fumbling in a simple transaction. sarah watkins is in a mcdonald's playplace. john grey is lonely but intact. andrej bilovsky is the lining in your rampant pockets. james croal jackson is once again asking for forgiveness before the bar. debrah morkun is reaching across several decades to find her own child. trevor cunnington is living with the witch in the forest. philip davison is braking too hard. finally, john ronan, lfpm veteran, is publishing his collection *the idea of light*, which we are so grateful to be running our first ever book review of!

as always, I hope you continue to love the forest as much as it loves you. issue seven stands before you, issue eight looms in the hallway. behave. we're watching.

sincerely,



abbie hart, editor-in-chief

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ENTER THE FOREST.

JANGLING JOE ANDREJ BILOVSKY

Says one, I seen you up there night and day,
the greaser turned water, the highlands railway man,
with a jug of clouds and a lecherous cresset
lighting up your spinning slot-machine eyes.
You was there when the birds came and went,
with someone else's riches stitched into your side,
mopping up flooded floors with the snout of a pig.
You was aurora borealis one minute,
and a room of circling wind, the next.
You was murdering someone with a pearl curtain
an office chair, and a Turkish diplomat
who you shoved down that sucker's throat.
Then you looked at me like I was your dear son, Leopold.
Your celluloid doll. The lining in your rampant pockets.

Andrej Bilovsky (he/him) is a poet and performance artist, and the former editor of Masculine-Feminine and Kapesnik. His poetry can be found at the Quiver and Down In The Dirt.

UNDERGROUND LOVER

YF WANG

I'm licking a wrist, it tastes salty, rugged, like stagelight
 an hourly wage of love from balding men. Fatherly,
 exclusively, but underground flowers
 don't know about petals, the birds, the bees, only water, thirst,
 and cowshit. Carmen in the hotel prying at the underside
 of his black heart and bawling how all the fingerprints are mine, mine, mine,
 we hold hands like little kids when the cameras are asleep, we
 play blood like playdough.
 Eyes catch under fluorescence. Some guy is curing cancer,
 he's sewing my initials on his stomach, I'm
 always in the waiting room. Chihiro is a cat that thinks
 I'm her mother. The body on the mattress asks me to stay for sunrise,
 I'm swallowing raw salmon and cigarettes and God,
 the night has gone cold, wet, devoid of sex, love, mine.
 San Francisco, can I still come home?
 A man wants me at his big finance talk and I'm scared
 of the rips on my black tights and the band of bills
 once crinkling on leather davenports, my mouth is a moth outside of bedrooms.
 I've seen New England's most handsome between my ankles, now I
 want to be kissed where the sun does shine. Underground
 flower, underground lover, Starr-y night,
 he cut off his ear instead of mine, rich neighborhood
 smells young blood, the burnt of the cross is mine, mine, mine.

YF Wang studies at Wellesley College. Her poetry can be found in t'ART, Exist Otherwise, and more.

WALKING THE HOOD

DAN RAPHAEL

how can I walk ahead when there's so much on either side of me:
 fallen leaves, seeds, 8 chairs in one yard, 7 cars in another
 a garage that hasn't been opened for decades, another garage
 on top of a fallout shelter, many trees amputated for power lines,
 not even the houses for sale are empty, some real estate agents
 are also exorcists, a freshly painted bright green cottage a front yard
 heaped with rubble and a side garage with more gaps than walls

I can't stop to count anything, walking another jagged circle—
 not all the streets here go through--the wind is in my face
 and there's water in the wind, Every crow I near flies back
 the way I came, silently, always another, just one, ahead,

the November squirrels seem smaller and slightly transparent
 a quarter of the parked cars are facing the wrong direction
 "roadway not improved" means I'm almost home

Dan Raphael's chapbook *How'd This Tree Get In?* was published in spring of 2025 by Ravenna Press. His full-length book, *In the Wordshed*, came out from Last Word Press in '22. More recent poems appear in *Umbrella Factory*, *Concision*, *Brief Wilderness*, *Disturb the Universe* and *Unlikely Stories*. Most Wednesdays Dan writes and records a current events poem for The KBOO Evening News.

THE TOW

PHILIP DAVISON

I do not remember the circumstances / I was not told what had happened / it was another of many complicated situations with an unlikely convergence of competing elements requiring much avoidance / brother in hiding / cannot recall why so / was never told, I'm sure / father, too, in the dark / it's a soft-top MG Midget / my brother's car / yellow ochre body, bucket seats, missing passenger-side midget windscreen wiper / won't start / not the battery / a soft-top is vulnerable in this lane, but more to it, most likely / don't ask / best off the street as soon as / our father will tow in his two-tone Humber Sceptre / I get to steer the stricken vehicle - a red letter day for this fourteen year old boy / my father shoulders the responsibility for the rescue, but with me undeniably attached / I look right / I look left / I look right again / I fail to anticipate the jolt of the rope going taut / no matter / we're off / it's a new era / I squeeze the life in the steering wheel / foot lightly pressed on the brake / steady as we go / will other drivers make allowances for my steady dad, the length of the rope, me? / enough to prevent calamity / the steering is heavier than ever I expected, which makes me more of a driver, yes / across the traffic lanes / turning / turning sharper / my father slows to get me in line / I brake too hard / He stops before the rope snaps / a miracle of sorts / no complaints from the old man, anxious, of course, but he's on top / start-procedure re-enacted / an approving nod in his rear-view mirror / which I return / my giraffe muscles already stiff from the stretching / the begetting of these lapses - these sudden absences - are a regular feature of my brother's business ventures and personal affairs, requiring his going to ground and the family taking clandestine action / several hundred yards only to the new place of hiding in this instance / my father creates an arc into a gravel drive, the arc wider than I expect / I miss the near-side gate post by half an inch, but in we go, the Humber veering left, the MG veering right, the rope snapping, but mission accomplished / my father is now grinning madly with relief / lovely grown-up ratchet action to the handbrake / something big has happened / as yet, there is no singing in my head / this is to allow me contemplate my leaden glider tow across the universe.

Philip Davison lives in Dublin. Among his published novels are *McKenzie's Friend* (Cape), *The Long Suit* (Cape), and *Eureka Dunes* (Liberties). His play, *The Invisible Mending Company*, was performed on the Abbey Theatre's Peacock stage. He writes radio drama. He co-wrote *Learning Gravity*, a BBC Storyville documentary on poet and undertaker, Thomas Lynch. His poems have appeared in various journals.

LILAC SHROUD AND LINKAGE

DEBRAH MORKUN

Melanie Klein (1940) writes, “there is a close connection between the testing of reality in normal mourning and the early processes of the mind” (p. 95). In my own mythopoetic swan dive, I find an entire black hole between my weeping/wailing & the adult mother/child split. When I reach across several decades to find my own child, nestled into the 8-track tapes of the 1970’s, she is sitting rather baffled in the backseat of the car while her father waits in his yellow VW bug for petroleum. The Cold War was maybe a form of mourning for me because somehow I knew my cousins were fearing the gulags. What right did I have, a young girl at a tender age, to wait for a petroleum I hardly understood as they awaited life or death? I could remain a child while a child. They were born to mourn not only the linkage to the milk of the mother, but the link to family, earth and tribe. What is reality testing in such a condition? Whose tired hands are watering crocuses in the labor yards while my grandmother, as a young girl, enters the mourning process so far, so distantly from her great grandmothers, and all the great-great-great-great grandmothers before her?

Debrah Morkun believes in near-death experiences and prays to the old gods. She is the author of *Projection Machine* (BlazeVOX, 2010) & *The Ida Pingala* (BlazeVOX, 2011), as well as several chapbooks. She lives in Philadelphia, where she works as a depth psychotherapist & sometimes teaches college writing & psychology. Visit Debrah at www.debrahmorkun.net

MAKING JOKES ABOUT YOUR FATHER

JAMES CROAL JACKSON

You laugh and encourage it
 but I apologize anyway.
 We drink angel wings,
 Earl Grey-infused beers.
 There was a photo of me
 in his phone from when
 I lived with your sister
 and he visited but I knew
 him best in our high school
 band room— the class clown
 of parents, or percussion
 magician who turned down
 a gig as Foreigner's
 touring musician to raise
 you. I couldn't make it
 to his funeral, full
 of weeping cousins though
 you said you joked the whole
 time, finally able to release
 after his weeks of leukemia.
 And now, thirteen guitars
 in your house you have
 no space for. Two full
 drum sets. We could start
 the worst band. We just have
 to learn to play.

James Croal Jackson is a Filipino-American poet working in film production. His latest chapbook is *A God You Believed In* (Pinhole Poetry, 2023). Recent poems are in *ITERANT*, *Stirring*, and *The Indianapolis Review*. He edits *The Mantle Poetry* from Nashville, Tennessee. (jamescroaljackson.com)

THE WITCH AND I LIVE IN THE FOREST

TREVOR CUNNINGTON

The blankets blow in the light breeze. Hung from tree to tree, the edges of clothes undulate like snakes. When you look for the meaning of life, it comes in threes. In a dream I was eating an egg and drinking lime water, but the tines of my fork broke. We are as grizzled as time's weathered beacon in the empty town square. The tuning fork is a good focuser of attention (it is lost now). The dream disappeared as quickly as water flowed over a precipice ten to twenty feet high, an otter flopping up on the rocks below with a fish to eat, a piercing chatter-chirp coming from the otter's mouth. But where is the group now: down and out? When time came to die, she was dressed in afterbirth. Before that, a black cat with amber eyes sat in her lap. A memory of a debt to pay, a hamper with tea, fruit, bread, cheese, and advice unasked for: where'd that come from? When I told her the rumor about her being a witch, we were eating french fries from the concession stand at the front of the park. Bald eagles stood on rocks and eyed us hungrily.

Trevor Cunnington is a queer and neurodivergent writer/artist/educator who lives in Toronto.

They are the poetry editor of KayTell Ink Publishing. Their work has appeared in The Rivanna Review, Radon, The Orchards Poetry Review, Grey Sparrow, God's Cruel Joke, and others. Additionally, they have work forthcoming in Word For/Word, BlazeVox, and North of Oxford. You can find them online at www.patreon.com/trevorcunnington or on instagram

@trevorcunnington.

THE GREATEST FISHERMAN

MAYA ROSE

water came out of the sand.
 he did not see, but i did. i tried to tell
 i sat and waved my arms but he was looking at the sky and he said
 i will ruin you. he said do you know what i could do?
 it was not to me, but he said that, anyway

i had never drowned before then.
 he was scared of it. he had described it to me.
 he said you think it feels like closing up, but it is opening.
 there is the flaying, sure.
 the long cut underneath. the reversal. the chime.
 your scales fall on the boat deck but first
 there is the drowning. anyway, the water came.

first it was like the tide but it was so big. there was no way we could escape
 but i was not scared like he was. courage in not knowing.
 those early minnows kissed me with their sweet tiny tongues and
 anyway, the drowning.
 it can happen anywhere. on dry land, even. think about a fish.

i remembered looking at that lake, nighttimes ago.
 the water and the sky were the same deep thing and i saw the big fisherman
 come in the big boat
 drop the dangerous line to swing low
 i wondered why it did not catch me. i saw it catch others
 i asked him once and he said you are stardust, can't you see?
 he said you are a piece of shit. but it was not to me

i heard him though. the water came.
 it swept him out and back again, like always, anyway,
 the water and the boat were the same terrible thing. so i thought maybe i would turn like that
 rise.
 but i was so small. there was no way

it was everything i was: the flat of the surface way up there and the weeds and the flecks of
 scale skin and the sound of a shell and heat of the rot and the cold and the soft-legged water
 mites and the light webbing cracks and the light going down and the mud and the fish and the
 stars—

Maya is a writer and educator from Michigan. Her work lately focuses on growing up – how
 the worlds we live in as young people are full of strange delusions and equally strange truths.

NO RAIN FREDERICK POLLACK

The evidence of our pupils showed
 we weren't native to that planet.
 Progress was light and heat, fashion was furs.
 From the beginning, candles
 meant color – each
 revealing, as it burned, each
 interpreting a color; this
 survived into the age of chandeliers.
 Leaves were dense and dark.
 Our major grain was a molar-destroying
 barley. Wars were few and regretted,
 men listened to women. Religion
 reminded us that the sun
 was just another star.
 Philosophy was ethics, shades of grey.

I've no idea how or why
 I'm home. Sunlight enters
 in waves, reduced to its famous role
 as disinfectant. (Which I question:
 things breed.) The troughs between waves,
 determined by swift clouds
 so white as to be painful to the eye,
 last ten or thirty seconds,
 during which I can think.

Frederick Pollack is the author of two book-length narrative poems, *THE ADVENTURE* and *HAPPINESS* (Story Line Press; the former reissued 2022 by Red Hen Press), and four collections, *A POVERTY OF WORDS* (Prolific Press, 2015), *LANDSCAPE WITH MUTANT* (Smokestack Books, UK, 2018), *THE BEAUTIFUL LOSSES* (Better Than Starbucks Books, 2023), and *THE LIBERATOR* (Survivision Books, Ireland, 2024). Many other poems in print and online journals. His website is www.frederickpollack.com.

the stray stale dust-fuzzy french fries in the corners of the playplace
reek of grease and socked feet—blackened soles from the lack of care—

but we, free, squeal and run barefoot up the dull pink slide
pretending we are bitsy spiders in waterspouts.

palms pressed against the staticky walls and socked feet skidding,
we race to see who can reach the very top first,

and when, breathless, we have ascended, we pause to laugh and overlook the grownups—
ants crunching burgers and shoving wrappers into our empty Happy Meal boxes.

running down the three stairs to the fishbowl room, we yell for our mothers' attentions,
too young to analyze the sound mechanics—how our voices will never reach them.

when we give up on that, we run down the long thermoplastic strip
and climb backward down the ladder to the open plane

where the green and blue slides gape at us, then down the next few stairs
to the entrance level. we turn left and go to the trampoline room.

the trampolines don't have much give—but they are trampoline enough.
apple slices bouncing in my belly, I call out to you.

flash, print; our pointillism portraits show all ten of our upper teeth.
now we smile from my dusty scrapbook, with pin-prick holes from where we hung on my corkboard.

when I drive 35 past where the playplace was,
I walk much slower through the structure in my mind,

where, turning right at the entrance with you, my friend,
to pause on the tangy-scented trampolines,

I ask, “what'll happen if we start going down the big slide
and it starts falling?” (and I vividly see it going down

piece by piece, in front of me and behind me,
and slowly sink on a plastic island, alone)

and you say, “ain't gonna happen.
we ain't got no earthquakes here, anyway.”

An Arkansas native, Sarah Watkins is an educator by trade and a writer by necessity. She currently resides in northeast Arkansas with her husband.

WHAT SIMON IMPLIED

HEIKKI HUOTARI

As long as it's identified it's not my flying object. I might leave to the imagination all that the imagination is entitled to. If your commitment covers every situation it contains a calculation, it contains a contradiction.

With my posture and my preferences commensurate, I'm trading pleasantries with veterans of foreign wars, with veterans of foreign wars, with veterans of foreign wars. We all have the same lung of lobes. We all have the same head of hair.

So is this noise too joyful for you Goldilocks? So is it me or is it just or is it just the second day? The color of the water complements the color of the sky. To die by biting or by biding, inwardly or outwardly, to die a spider is to die.

As there are many ways to get the golden rule wrong, a theory of mind is what the astral traveler wants. It's suddenly incumbent on the astral traveler to go mentally where only flesh and bone have gone before.

Heikki Huotari, on a hunger strike in opposition to the war in Vietnam, was court-martialled for refusing to eat. Since retiring from academia/mathematics he has published more than 400 poems in literary journals, including *Pleiades*, *Spillway*, the *American Journal of Poetry* and *Willow Springs*, and in six chapbooks and six collections. He has won one book and two chapbook prizes. His Erdős number is two.

THE MAN ON THE PARK BENCH

JOHN GREY

I am many times lonely but intact.
 All the important people are absent.
 A park bench is my patio to the world.
 A three-legged terrier hobbles past.
 My eyes mist up at the fate of a stranger's dog.
 I despise cruelty, even the truthful kind.

The eyes of a tiny child are like a god's.
 They stare me down. I am no more than a wall.
 I am fair with sad eyes and outnumbered,
 by the pigeons, by the ducks, by the couples in love.
 I think of my heart as a dying bulb.
 Its flicker is no match for all these brighter lights.

I envy the pond. So many people bend over,
 see their faces, rippling who they are.
 There are no liars on its surface.
 And the depths are all the water's own.
 Meanwhile, I'm rewarded by the happiness of others.
 I catch a ball and throw it back.
 The kids at play immediately forget my hand.

John Grey is an Australian poet, US resident, recently published in New World Writing, River
 And South and The Alembic. Latest books, "Subject Matters", "Between Two Fires" and
 "Covert" are available through Amazon. Work upcoming in Paterson Literary Review, White
 Wall Review and Cantos.

**THE FLOWER CLOUD CATCHES US BY SURPRISE WITH
A SHIFTED FREQUENCY**
MICHAEL RERICK

the flower cloud catches us by surprise with a shifted frequency
 past the porta potty line like a gambit to the open grass throwing a frisbee
 proving the closer we are the less our light distance equation
 even at the crosswalk even at the bus stop even at the grocery line even
 passing in different directions we mostly like to nod a quiet hello
 like running a hand over the mossy rock wall hiding a mysterious house
 I stop to pet a cat careful to not pet too much and make sure it stays
 I fumble in a simple transaction and breath to tamp the sudden anxiety
 safe in the flower field the neighborhood churns in an errand of repair
 as white tufts stream the air catching in our short sleeve shirt pockets
 dirt barrows fill and empty at the old house with a new yard wall construction
 strata of maple leaves toggle midday to evening against bark waves
 as mail and plastic recycling can imports slice and rattle a ticker of houses
 saying
 to the bushes: my father has shrubs that burn faster than you

Michael Rerick lives and teaches in Portland, OR. Work recently appears or is forthcoming at BlazeVOX, Brief Wilderness, Cola Literary Review, Epigraph Magazine, Ginosko Literary Journal, Marsh Hawk Review, Slouching Beast Journal, and Word For/Word. He is also the author of In Ways Impossible to Fold, morefrom, The Kingdom of Blizzards, The Switch Yards, and X-Ray.

THE IDEA OF LIGHT

JOHN J. RONAN

REVIEW

John J. Ronan's *The Idea of Light*, out through Main Street Rag, is a spectacle, an expansive masterpiece. Situated broadly in the world and now in my heart, it is classical, modern, technologically advanced, and a Luddite. It is beautiful and urbane. Forming a historical taxonomy that seems almost ritual, *The Idea of Light* surpasses expectations, religions, and chronology, often all in one poem, like "Windowsill," which damn near knocked my socks off.

Ronan has woven a religion, and a spectacular one at that, rooted in the organization of Egyptian myth and Catholic seminarians. It is familiar, possesses familiarity. It is well-worth the read. LFPM published "Leaving Thebes," found in the first section, some years ago, and it remains spectacular.

Find Ronan's *The Idea of Light* and other collections on his website, www.theronan.org.



enter the forest

