

June 2020



A Pandemic Anthology

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Preface

This is the second in a set of pandemic chapbooks—published alongside those produced by Collusion Books—meant not only to stimulate creative thought and practice during a time of social distancing and quarantine, but also to encourage the financial support of writers, artists, booksellers, and vulnerable communities. While the previous anthology existed in a moment of uncertainty—the final category, “Epilogue...?” says it all—*June 2020* encapsulates a distinct and in many ways more complex period of the pandemic. Businesses are opening again and social distancing regulations are becoming more relaxed, and yet the threat of viral resurgence hangs almost palpably in the air. Regardless of its masked nature (there is something unfamiliar, strained and strange, almost dangerous, in the performed normalcy of patio interactions, for example), the only true certainty within this new reality is uncertainty itself.

Despite this somewhat bleak understanding of our new way of living, the writers featured within these pages have proven most elegantly that there is preciousness in every moment, even those of suffering, and that times of change are also times of possibility. Answering a call for submissions that requested an emphasis on the positive elements of the current global and political situation, these poems do not disappoint. They express a widespread calm and patient resolve for new beginnings, a recognition—and a determination to recognize—the sacred in the simple, and the invaluable in the everyday. Most significantly, these poems underscore the importance of community. Whether lamenting the echoes of empty church spaces, the distance between the walls of neighbourly houses, or the inherent glitches and limitations of cyberspace conversations, the poets emphasize, through absence, the necessity of communication and social communion. The number of collaborative pieces alone speaks to this desire for connection. “Purity of Line,” “Crosswinds,” and “The Beautiful Birds of Prey” present on the level of form what this collection achieves as a whole: words working in tandem, innovative thinking and creativity existing as necessarily collaborative activities, and language bridging the gap left by physical separation.

—*Erica McKeen, Assistant Editor at The /t&mz/ Review*

Poems

Purity of Line

By MA|DE

—*Windsor, Ontario, Canada*

Happiness
is always a relationship
with ourselves, a love
softly formed,
ours to make
or unmake,
polished glass
or sculpted clay,
only as smooth
as the hands
are steady.

Girls on bikes

By Suzanne Chiasson

—Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

she charges through the gate
cherry blossoms imbedded in treads
I can ride down stairs!

they meet on the corner and go

just go

stick together

don't leave anyone behind

they go like the 70's when I chipped a tooth
on a Coke bottle, braking too late behind my brother
lying to my parents that I'd smashed into a brick wall
because I wasn't allowed to go to the store

she lies too sometimes, I know

they drop their bikes
on grassy boulevards, in parks
sit like four points

of a diamond

that didn't exist
before

the cancelled classes
carpools

be home before dark

there was no time
before

to drop bikes
and tune in

to a world
reinterpreting

don't leave anyone behind

On Mushrooms

By Fatima Aamir

—*Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada*

I do not think of my body, but it thinks of me—
globes of saliva thickening like moss. We hold

hands, spit at a fern. Cross-legged on a cliff
above the Pacific, our bodies are no longer

spectacles, but we still account for them. Do you
see that? A lone log on the shore of a black ocean

that will remain impossible long after we're gone.
I am neither wet nor cold, but a part of this world

somehow. Do you hear that?
Suddenly, wild geese are upon us—

We've taken some territory from them. It's dark—
leap over that broken fence, scramble up that dirt road,

find yourself back onto a quiet intersection. It's a global
pandemic—tearing grass with my fingers is all the

generosity I can muster. The dogs we encounter,
attuned to our altered state, pause a little longer.

Point of departure: shaking with laughter under a blonde
streetlamp. People flit past. Our pupils have grown

by now and we realize some learning cannot be felt.
None of this warmth is a dream. A man circles past silently

on a bike, leaves an evening breeze—did you feel it?
I hold you close. Right now,

you're the only one who knows what I mean
when meaning fails. Words thicken like spit—

we walk on, flitting like leaves. It's a global pandemic
and like leaves, we do not hold still.

My phone—a shifting prism of light. I reach for it,
but I cannot pin the sentiment down.

Not yet crowned

By R L Raymond

—London, Ontario, Canada

Most of the pieces are wooden
some he's lost over time
he uses coins and gran's thimble
a button from gramp's shirt

He remembers playing the game
having fun with people
while sharing an afternoon snack
on a cool Saturday

King me he tells himself aloud
munching on a biscuit
found at the back of the pantry
King me —

He thinks it may be a school day
for now he'll keep playing checkers

THE_PAN_DEMIC

By Serena Piccoli

—*Padova, Veneto Region, Italy*

She used to eat at restaurants
table for one
now she's forced at home
practicing the basics
of bacon for breakfast.

In the opposite quarantined house
they're having spinach and monoliths for supper
as the queen of herrings
explains why you can't make an omelette
without breaking any eggs.

And as everyone strives and despairs
and the bacon is not sizzling
cos the pan is demic,
5 mountain goats on main road
are happily regaining what's theirs.

What is the matter?

By Amlanjyoti Goswami

—*Delhi, India*

Look for the chemist next door.
Stop in your tracks.
Saunter into the gate.
Wait. Wait a little more.

Let the breeze blow, the storm pass.
Pretend to be the owner, the house inside the gate. The palace.
Daydream a bit, how you built it, your own hands.
Even the water trough birds come to drink.

Be respectful when they come to ask.
Say good morning, how are you, ask if they need tea.
Then say you have run out of it.
Wear your mask while you say all this.

When they turn, don't rush, take another breath.
Life empties out on the street.
When they are out of sight,
Return to all that you left behind.

“Everything

By Colin Morton

—*Ottawa, Ontario, Canada*

seems fine with the world though terrible things happen,”
writes Susan Gillis, and I can feel it
sitting in the shade on a sunny day, listening to birds.
I and my accounts are healthy in this recession,
no rioting disturbs my street, my local police
have not murdered anyone this year, and I hope it’s a trend.
My garden is growing, I am learning to cook
and even the use of some of my tools.
Terrible things happen, I have seen
some happen right here at home. I know
it’s the scene of at least one divorce and maybe
worse things than I want to write here
in the shade on a sunny day, when things seem fine,
when the promise of better is on everyone’s lips.
In Emergency, you don’t ask if anyone has died
in the bed you are on, you take it as read
and get on with healing. Everything in the world
is on its own hasty path, there’s little you can carry.
Drop grudges, hatreds, superstitions.
Care for your head and feet, your fingers and eyes.
Be kind to your stomach, learn to cook.

Crosswinds

By Ellen Chang-Richardson & Madison Zehmer

—Ottawa, Ontario, Canada & New York City, New York, United States

Bodies ignite crimson-blue on the coldest day of the year
greyfall, misted by wind and hail.

Cocoon casings,
imprints insipid and shallow.

Whisper dusk with bite.

Whisper secrets of oak;
we know because we were children once.

Winter screams, in April
beneath swatches of palest blue.

Mist ghosts into rot
and we think

breathe.

Sirens bright
churning, bleat their agency
as shadows mock out motions in cross
town open windows.

Monotonous
clouds darken;
mangled half-light like moon
or mother rocks us
awake and asleep, awake and asleep.

Corona

By Ryan Gibbs

—*London, Ontario, Canada*

for Catherine

grand church chandeliers
risen among high cornices
bending the light
a circle around the sun
an angel's trumpet
inside a yellow daffodil

In Praise of Bodies

By Charlene Kwiatkowski

—*Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada*

Aching for beauty, I stand on the corner
wanting to go in. The church is plain
beside a blue day

but it could be crumbling
and I'd still risk entry—
call it hope or naiveté.

A pianist presses their soul
into the keys, a *kenosis* that fills
me; these hips begin to sway,

not unlike branches and wind
as if they too are sick of separation
and at last have permission to play.

It is enough, for now, to stand outside
listening, but I miss seeing a body
scaling that grand instrument,

foolishly carried away.

Modern technology when sequestered sixteen hundred kilometers apart

By Albert Katz

—London, Ontario, Canada & Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada

11:00 pm, you in your distant bed, this
the last of our three daily video calls,
looking oh so beautiful, when
the picture freezes, your face contorts,
your smile strangely crooked, mouth wide open,
erotic, and I desperately try to reconnect
to tell you, once again, how much
I miss you

Containment

By James Schwartz

—*Olympia, Washington, United States*

Containment in sacred/spaces

(Matrix-virus)

To elevate exploration

Is abstract/quarantined

Holding memory/space

(Northwest)

Landscapes in reverse

De-center/decolonize

Isolated horizons

(Vast harbors)

Broadcast transformation

Across distance/time

Manifesting growth/gardens

(Ancient wisdom/data)

Into mystic awareness

Bowls in temples of light...

A Language is a Window

By Maria S. Picone

—Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, United States

-for my English-learners in Brazil

To lend her the privilege of this wide-open space
shimmering summertime in her folded speech
to simply sunbeam thoughts to me
a bee alighted on her windowsill
a branch snapped in the first rain after a long lockdown
drought then deluge

told me many gave up understanding her English
I must be patient a hunter setting traps to spring
accidental meaning.

Abelha, *Xylocopa virginica*. My mother wrote on Facebook, "The Carpenter bees
fly around crazily and actually attack each other...they drill holes into wood...
they seem to like the hot sun..."

meaning in our northern fall we must be patient until spring
give understanding to this drought
to not snap in the first storm
drink in simplicity the sunbeam of being still
shimmering, dreaming of the wide lens

open

Elegy with Clickbait Titles

By Kevin Kong

—*Jupiter, Florida, United States*

Father Sends Shocking Message (Daughter’s World Changes Overnight)
8 Clever Hacks to Get Insanely Cheap Flights from Miami to Seattle
You Won’t Believe What This Passenger Did in Her Economy Seat
Surgical Masks, Nitrile Gloves Go Missing: What Your Government Won’t Tell You
These Are the Most Sought-After Hospital Foods in Your State (Must See)
Looking for Things to Do in the ICU Waiting Room?
He Tweeted About This Medical Nightmare While on a Ventilator
How to Drink Your Way Through the First Stages of Grief
5 Expenses Funeral Directors Don’t Want You to Know About
Biggest Transition to Virtual Memorials in U.S. History Has Begun
Unforgettable Eulogy Fails (#6 Will Leave You in Stitches)
7 Mistakes You’ll Definitely Make When Comforting the Bereaved
Brother Loses Everything, Blames Father for His Failures
Memorable Moment Draws Big Laughs—Father: “P.U. That’s a Stinky Diaper!”
19 Teary Facts You Never Knew About Crying
This Family Has Been Mourning Wrong the Whole Time

Things Change

By Jennifer Leigh Kiefer

—*Excelsior, Minnesota, United States*

How quickly the world
has turned on its head.
You say things can't change,
what falsities have you been fed?

Look all around you!
Take just a step out the door.
You must see things *can* change,
so, what are we waiting for?

Afterbirth of Fireflies

By Eli Vandell

—Fairfax, Virginia, United States

And we are the roots which burn
To take hold of our privileged breaths

And we wake in these shaking griefs
Which drop from the trees of our mothers

And the ax-shaped hands of our fathers
How we still open our mouths like chicks

Freshly hatched and waiting for the scraps
With which we must construct a banquet

And how the colors of their eyes are muted
By the gases choking our nesting cities

And by the barely bruised knee which breaks
His spine embedded with cicada corpses, mangled

And how we withhold our sobs and our prayers
Until the next fully funded blue terrorist touches

The baby's palm, soothed by the jangles
Of the glimmering handcuffs

And how we swallow the *sadistic crap legitimized*
By *florid prose*,¹ force fed ducks otherwise known

As foie gras, my apologies, otherwise known as fuck
You fuck police fuck white supremacy and fuck

How we coexist with cohabitators and compliant
Bystanders and when Gen Lee falls I hope

It makes a grand crash, tattooing graffiti
into the pavement and when the pavement wakes

Even the bricks and the rubber and the gas
Will rejoice in their own disintegration

¹ *Firefly*, War Stories

The Beautiful Birds of Prey

By Khashayar Mohammadi & Roxanna Bennett

—Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Untwist the written, rewrite certain
as given, we're all patients-in-waiting,

greenheart, clawing at the continents
in this borrowed sonic space, each child

born on the surface of the tongue
with a single hint to life: the taste zones

are long proven wrong
we are breaking &

a gentle silencing of the world around
heads turn to the screens/streets

fill with animals a generation being
defined in whispers We kneel

at the monuments & with our voice
undivide cities We are the definition

of the indefinable, the unwritten howl
of this predicament &

we are a moment not forever not even long,
nostalgic for the mythology of normal,

inventing new predators but in the clearing
blue of the "widening gyre" cycle kestrels,

the beautiful birds of prey & in the air's
mirror, opalescent cephalopods, anglerfish,

coldblooded moonlight our natural deeprooted
instinct & when the first LED screen cracks

under the weight of

g e n e r a t i o n
g e n e r a t i o n
g e n e r a t i o n
g e n e r a t i o n

g e n e r a t i o n

our words | our song |
is translated | faded into |

a single hand beckoning for wine

Contributors

Fatima Aamir has formerly edited for *The Capilano Review*, as well as *The Talon*. She will begin her masters at the Centre for Comparative Literature at the University of Toronto this Fall. To bask in the unfiltered restlessness of her existence, follow her on Twitter at @fatimaaamir.

The disabled poem-making entity known as **Roxanna Bennett** gratefully resides on the aboriginal land covered under the Williams Treaties of 1923 (Whitby, Ontario). They are the author of the award-winning *Unmeaningable* (Gordon Hill Press, 2019), *unseen garden* (chapbook, knife | fork | book, 2018), and *The Uncertainty Principle* (Tightrope Books, 2014).

Ellen Chang-Richardson (she/her) is an award-winning poet, writer and editor of Taiwanese and Cambodian-Chinese descent. She is the author of two poetry chapbooks, the founder of Little Birds Poetry, and the co-founder/co-curator of Riverbed Reading Series. Ellen lives and works in Ottawa, Ontario on the traditional unceded territories of the Algonquin Anishinabeg First Nation. www.ehjchang.com | Twitter @ehjchang

Suzanne Chiasson is a poet and fiction writer with a background in theatre and odd jobs. She currently lives in the city of Vancouver with her husband, two children and Australian Shepherd. She has an affinity for the ocean and underdog stories. Her debut novel *Tacet* was published by Guernica Editions in the fall of 2019. suzannechiasson.com

Ryan Gibbs is an English professor who lives in London, Canada. His poems have appeared in *Blueline*, *Illumen*, *Tower Poetry*, and *The Windsor Review*, as well as the anthologies *March 2020: A COVID-19 Anthology* (845 Press), *Whisky Sour City* (Black Moss Press), and *Tamaracks: Canadian Poetry for the 21st Century* (Lummo Press). His children's poetry has been included in the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness.

Amlanjyoti Goswami's recent collection of poems *River Wedding* (Poetrywala) has been widely reviewed. His poetry has been published in journals and anthologies around the world. His poems have also appeared on street walls in Christchurch, exhibitions in Johannesburg, an e-gallery in Brighton and buses in Philadelphia. He has read in various places, including New York, Delhi and Boston. He grew up in Guwahati, Assam and lives in Delhi.

Albert Katz was born in Montreal and moved to London, Ontario, Canada for graduate work and subsequent employment at the University. He has a condo in London, where he lives much of the time. About 17 years ago he met a woman who, in time, became his wife. She lives and works in Fredericton, New Brunswick, so for almost two decades he has been living in two places, flitting like a moth circling a light. The poem in this anthology was written in London, when health issues and the pandemic kept them apart for an unthinkable five months. In both of his homes he writes poetry, short stories and, though now retired, the occasional scientific research paper.

Jennifer Leigh Kiefer is a recent graduate of the University of Miami and works as a stage manager for Stagedoor Manor. Jennifer identifies as a proud member of the pansexual community. When she is not running a show or writing, she enjoys hiking, activism, and people watching.

Kevin Kong is a Chinese-American writer from South Florida. His creative work has been recognized by the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards and by The Poetry Society of the UK.

Charlene Kwiatkowski is a city lover living in Vancouver, Canada. Her poetry has been published in *Train*, *PRISM international*, *Barren Magazine*, *Long Exposure*, and elsewhere. She has a Master's degree in English Literature and works at a contemporary art gallery. You can find her occasionally blogging (when new motherhood allows) at textingthecity.wordpress.com.

MA|DE (est. 2018) is a collaborative writing partnership comprised of interdisciplinary artist Mark Laliberte (author of *asemanticasymmetry* – Anstruther Press, 2017) and writer Jade Wallace (author of *Rituals of Parsing* – Anstruther Press, 2018). MA|DE is currently working on their first full-length collection. Their poems have previously appeared in *Poetry is Dead*, *PRISM International*, *Trinity Review* and *Vallum*. *Test Centre* is their debut chapbook (ZED Press, 2019) and their sophomore chapbook, *ZZOO*, is forthcoming from Collusion Books in Fall 2020. Find them on Twitter and Instagram: @ma_de_projects or at ma-de.ca.

Khashayar Mohammadi is an Iranian-born writer and translator based in Toronto.

Ottawa poet **Colin Morton** has published over a dozen books and chapbooks, ranging from visual and sound poetry to historical narratives. His other work includes stories and reviews, a novel (*Oceans Apart*) and an animated film (*Primiti Too Taa*). www.colinmorton.net.

Serena Piccoli (she/her) is a poet, playwright, performer, and artistic director. She writes in both English and Italian about political, environmental, and social contemporary issues with a touch of irony. Her political chapbook *silviotrupp* was published in 2017 by Moria Poetry. Her poems have been published in anthologies and magazines in both the UK and the USA, as well as in magazines in Italy and Romania. 15 of her poems are on the UK Poetry Map placesofpoetry.org.

She is a lesbian transfeminist human rights advocate.

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James Schwartz is a poet, slam performer, writer and author of 5 poetry collections, including *The Literary Party: Growing Up Gay and Amish in America*.

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Eli Vandell (they/them/theirs) is a queer poet and writer from the Washington D.C. area. They are the recipient of the 2020 Joseph A. Lohman III Award in Poetry from George Mason University and the Academy of American Poets. They write about animals, queer identity, androids, and occasionally cryptids. Their work is featured in *Pussy Magic*, *Entropy*, and *Feral*. You can find them on Twitter: @EliVandell.

Madison Zehmer is a poet and wannabe historian from North Carolina, living in NYC. She has published and forthcoming work in *Trampset*, *Maudlin House*, *Drunk Monkeys*, *Gone Lawn*, and elsewhere. Her first collection, *whisper back to earth*, will be released by Another New Calligraphy in 2020.