SONIC BOOM

...for writing that explodes

ISSUE TWELVE
August 2018
(Poetry, Fiction & Art)
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Issue Twelve

August 2018

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INTERVIEW WITH SALIL CHATURVEDI

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EDITORIAL

Have four months elapsed since we brought out our last issue? Well, here we are with Issue Twelve — a fresh dose of poetry, Japanese short-forms, fiction, and visual art.

I would like to thank K. Srilata, Indian poet, fiction writer, and Professor of English at IIT Madras, for guest editing The Poetry Shack section. It was pure delight working with her as we set about looking for poems that begged for attention. C. M. Donahue, at the age of twenty-nine, writes a poem in response to his grandmother’s fourth husband; Deepa Onkar makes her presence felt in a new city and describes her experiences in “Reason”; join James Meredith as he looks for shapes in clouds in his poem “Nephelococcygia”; and read what advice Steve Klepetar’s father gave him in “Conclusions,” among others.

The Paper Lanterns section contains 35 exquisite haiku, senryu, cherita, and concrete/visual ku, along with the winning entries of our Fourth Annual Senryu Contest. Alan Summers, our contest judge for this year, had to choose the top five poems from 160 entries. It was a tough ask, but we are proud of our winners. Please visit our website to read Alan’s detailed commentaries.

The Fiction section features a mix of short prose, beautifully crafted haibun, and a flash fiction piece. Angele Ellis confronts the past in “Palimpsest”; Gautam Nadkarni recounts a childhood memory of visiting the circus in “Performing Flea”; and Kyle Hemmings narrates a surreal tale that revolves around JJ and her less-than-supportive family members in “The 40 Watt House.”

The Visual Art section is an eclectic selection of asemic work, haiga (both experimental and otherwise), photographs, visual poetry, collage, and digital/abstract art. It is always exciting to see returning contributors share their work with us, as well as first-timers joining our ever-extending family of artistes.

This issue also includes an interview with Indian poet and writer, Salil Chaturvedi, conducted by K. Srilata. Salil talks about his debut collection, the artistic process, his influences, and more, in this engaging discussion.

In other news, if you’ve been following our sister press Yavanika, we have now added four e-chapbooks, an online gallery of artworks, and a paperback anthology to our growing catalogue. We will remain open for chapbook submissions until September 30, 2018.

- Shloka Shankar
Making

By Alvin Pang

Made something happen and then it happened to stop, is all. Something flows upon contact, the right quiet force applied at the appropriate juncture. Does not make divine the physics of commotion, this writ of spring, this haunting. Is swing. Is in lieu of right. Thinking a different kind of real but still being, its own entire, shame enough to shiv sleep, a cut above the brow of mooncrawl. Hands that ought to have been here, midway through the journey, found lost within a darkened word. Thence shivery, mammalian, prey, eaten away at, etched. What’s trace not full until it becomes the only full left to speak of; the speaking of it.

These walls for staying inside of as long as is.
In Another Country (from Costa Rica)

By Angele Ellis

When I think of our love, I imagine a friend
receiving the dark prognosis: a year—two—three.
How tender I would be, how understanding, cherishing
the days spent with her, the movements of her face.
Counting as miracles autonomic breath, steady heartbeat.

To lose a month of finite exquisite being, journeying
in another country, would be hard. I wonder if
on my return, I would see death shadowing her eyes,
hear the murmur of frailty in her form as I embraced her.

We two must live like this—hour to hour, kiss to kiss.
Let those exulting in the luxury of formal vows—
Forever, under frangipani bowers—disbelieve it.
The Grief Filling the Empty Dirty Nests Clutter
the Tree Branches Lining My Lack of Understanding

By Ariana D. Den Bleyker

I feel that smile, its tiny hammock—
choosing words I wouldn’t have chosen for myself.

I musn’t mourn it but remember it’s lived
in pieces of me. I take the best of them & breathe deeply.

There’s beauty in sickness & dying & rotting—
I know it in my bones as they shiver against each other.

I know. When I look at it today,
its skin a sun that stares, I remember waking up

the night I almost died thrashing, the snow outside falling thinly, freezing the shoulders of night,

first sweet, then harsh—
icce rising rapidly like shame, the devastation

unveiling in me. Admit it. Admit it, it called to me
in memory. Admit you like things tender,

leaving me without something, my body floating,
mania, my love with shiny plumage rising above voices,

it, now a woman with two wings & quiet hands
in her lap, broken hair in her face—

more than not—not going—the way birds rise
malignant, slit sky for something lasting

in death here on the shore of my death with only time
& photographs between us, grief like laughter,

grief shaking stardust from its head.
& though the world darkens, stars remain

burned into memory, tiny pieces of life glowing
forever inside me.
In Response to My Grandmother’s Fourth Husband

“You know, you can’t hit snooze on your biological clock. It’s always ticking!”

By C. M. Donahue

At 29 and single, I started to become the target of side-eyes and tsks, my IRS tax filing status a favorite topic of my grandmother’s fourth husband. I was the one stubbornly setting up camp at the top of some desolate mountain while faint warnings carried on the wind from crowds of rapidly propagating millennials below. I used the invitation to a gender-reveal party as kindling for my first DIY fire. For the next week, I had to fight the impulse to list potential wedding hashtags to get Orion and I trending on Twitter. I spent hours fruitlessly peeling skin from the sole of my left foot in search of the barcode inked with my bride price. My practiced expression, I haven’t really thought about it, began to sound hollow so I decided to add jazz hands when I return.
Soft & Pine

By David Bankson

The blind see paintings
like soft music

in their bladders.
My father is a pine,

receives the blur

of our body language,
cannot digest

strewn needles
of our visages. My son's crayon,

my sister's movie makeup make

patterns to him:
Chimes ring clear

from the porch,
laughing faces unfold within

a bell jar, cardinals

land here, twirl and alight
in the yard. A visual

orchestra. Pine shines
aloud, then

profound. The trunk sways

with the colors
in his mind,

his ears alive
from outside,

the euphonious pine.
Reason

By Deepa Onkar

I would rather write you a poem
than a postcard

because it is dusk, and the light
strange and secret

the colours molten
and unreachable. because, then, I can tell you

of the quiet that hangs above
the tumult of traffic,

and of the way I let my gaze
linger on pooled fruit, flowers, lamps.

because this is not just another street.
because I have no questions

of Bangkok’s smells. I am not a tourist.
this moment is endless – yet

not wasted. I walk slowly
to gilded buddhas lying with street dogs.

because aimlessness is my luxury:
streets and words lead me where they will.

because soon I will begin to belong.
After Escher

(Escher, Relativity, 1953)

By Eileen Murphy

where are the bedrooms?
where is the basement?
there are no baths
yet everyone’s clean

a woman who committed a crime
is hidden in the gunny-sack
that a servant hoists to the attic

he climbs
fantastic & frantic stairways
hurting his back

meanwhile someone eats dinner
in the library
that has no books.
Elegy

By Eric A. Lohman

Did you see it,
from your vantage point,
bent over at ninety degrees,
your vanishing point
in the lights of an oncoming car?
Did you mean to cross one street
but crossed another?

Did you try,
scurrying your folded frame,
cradle to corner,
curb to casket,
ending flayed upon that table?

Did you see them?
Did the angels lift you up,
moments after
it would have been more helpful
for them to do so?

Did you see us,
going about our lives,
not saving you?
We who knew you
never knew
and who held you,
met you late.

Did we see you,
checking you in one last time,
assessing your shambles,
applying available resources
and you winding up, once again,
discharged?
Nephelococcygia

By James Meredith

The photograph shows a cloud-filled sky, little fluffy cumulus like a thousand meringue peaks one next to one next to one. Lying on your bed you look out through the skylight window & see the same sky, the same clouds. You switch your gaze between the photograph & the window, the photograph & the window. It’s the same, exactly the same. You wait, & watch, until finally, in the bottom left corner of the skylight window frame, a passenger plane appears, moving upward toward the clouds heading someplace, maybe far away. The plane moves through the sky. The photograph shows only clouds. Things are there, & then they’re gone.
The Transhumance Sutra

By Joseph Salvatore Aversano

we leave the place for a few days
and all the garden bugs cross
from some plot of grass or mud to
some other plot of grass or
mud and the moonlight will not stay
in place having glided along that
wall and having been sliced through
the shutters on that third floor
and it disperses while we’re asleep
or in the middle of a conversation
or as soon as the automatic
payment system we’ve set up
has a glitch and a guy from the
Gediz Delta Electric Co.
comes to turn off
the light.
[overflow]

By Margot DeSalvo

pile
these
breaths
like
language
in
pieces
upon
stolen
love
and
lyrics
crashing.
How
do
I
release
this
wake
that
consumes
my
voice
with
accusations
and diagrams?
Tea and Biscuits

By Matthew James Friday

The day started with Radio 4: the UK Theme bouncing through history, pomp, myths, naval jaunts; then the Shipping Forecast deluding me into dreaming I could float off somewhere other than school. Mum served her motherhood: a cup of tea and two biscuits, usually digestives, my favourite, slightly soppy when wet.

Rich Tea biscuits if supplies were low. Crunchie Creams at the weekend. The real treat was sitting with me while I soggily surfaced to face the facts: walk to school, few friends, grow older.

leave school, home, Mum. Every day for years she arrived, sat by my bedside. Not much to say, nothing new, sipping the same tea with me, dunking biscuits.
From an upstate window, the view is sprained through kinegrams. These characters are suggestions; that husk can't hold a lease. My pencils harbor row houses tilting over, inexplicable.

Just lick the newsprint from my finger as though it were more blood: too much treble, or a trio of paroles. Wild lavender waves its lassitude further out. Nebula spiral; subplots quorum.
Conclusions

By Steve Klepetar

For years now I have come to conclusions
without my father’s help, discovering
on my own what I know, what I don’t know…

Li-Young Lee

“It’s better to give with warm hands
than with cold,” my father said,
when he slipped me some money,
unasked for and certainly undeserved.

He never cursed.
“Only unhappy people curse,”
he told me, and he was happy
with his newspaper and his books,

even in this strange land he never understood,
even with his unhappy wife,
who imagined cancer every few months.
How patient he was as she made the rounds

of doctors, fretting at every test.
When she returned from a trip to Prague,
visiting her sister, he raced to her at the airport,
embraced her as she turned ever so slightly away.
PAPER LANTERNS
THIRD ANNUAL SENRYU CONTEST WINNERS

FIRST PLACE

just when I smiled
at the trophy
a wild card entry

- Aparna Pathak, India

SECOND PLACE

a church steeple harpoons the moon
forced childbirth

- Robin Smith, USA

THIRD PLACE

red spider lily
the toddler lets out
a new word

- Marilyn Appl Walker, USA

HONOURABLE MENTIONS

washed jeans —
his love note
still dirty

- Susan Burch, USA

skunk cabbage
he says I'm almost as cute
as my sister

- Carol Ann Palomba, USA
morning rain the gravitas of stones

- Sondra J. Byrnes

morning birdsong mais où sont les neiges d'antan?

- Tim Murphy

green ink mountain lake where the dream healing is

- Tim Murphy

it’s enough if
at thought’s edge
a crow

- Joseph Salvatore Aversano

returning to the backyard
the grackle
of my mind

- Ben Moeller-Gaa

cold spring rain
the gray fashions
a cloak around me

I sit here
fumbling with the keys
to my imagination

- Richard Grahn

snow upon snow
the full weight
of this poem

- Ben Moeller-Gaa
diseased gods return asking for deliverance

- Keith Polette

11:11
12:12
1:11
2:22
3:33
4:44
5:55
my sum of prayers made in one day

- Fractled

bedtime prayers
which time zone
does God live in

- Vandana Parashar

the long way home from wildflowers to cut flowers

- Elmedin Kadric

ikebana
the shodo
of shadow

- John Hawkhead

white lilies
my forebears pay it forward

- Devin Harrison

globular cluster
the craving for older gods

- Martha Magenta

the simplicity
of a null set
seedless grapes

- Nika
the vagueness of juxtaposition earthshine

- Rajandeep Garg

[insert what you see here]—
it remains to be seen
when it’s gone

- Hansha Teki

the hole in my pocket falling stars

- Susan Beth Furst

the suction of stars...
a dream
almost remembered

- Dave Kuhlmann

flat earth
swinging on the edge
of anything-can-happen	onight

- Martha Magenta

streaming radio into the night space sensations

- Devin Harrison
absinthe spoon
in every lowball glass
a fairy tale

- Eva Limbach

the perfect line
that never comes to me
horizon

- Louise Hopewell

trying to fix my mistakes mother’s button tin

- Julie Bloss Kelsey

as if it were more
than one word
s o r r y

- Pat Davis

inevitably I reach back into puberty

- Samar Ghose

humming the tune
a song never sung

- Christine Ann Tabaka

stillborn . . .
a small, smooth stone
inside me

- Mark E. Brager

thumb fatale

- Helen Buckingham

whale song
the human propensity
for naming

- Pat Davis
hummingbird

what flutters
beneath my ribcage?

- Mary Hanrahan

shield of Achilles living in half a parenthesis

- Keith Polette

so much hope it is goldfish

- Elmedin Kadric

bare bulb how many wishes does it take?

- Susan Beth Furst

redundant passwords
redacted memories

- Mark Gilbert

my lack of commitment terminal schwa

- Robin Smith
FICTION
Palimpsest

By Angele Ellis

Last night I passed our old house: my lost manuscript, my hidden key. Brick façade faded to the color of lip prints on a junk-drawer Valentine’s card. Etched like lines in a secret notebook.

Behind walls all over this city are rooms where I laid my erased head against yours or another’s. Discarding bed sheets like calendar pages.

The loneliness appears unexpectedly: a tear in the window screen of memory.

canvas corner    neck bowed with a rose tattoo
Performing Flea

By Gautam Nadkarni

I still recall with nostalgia the time our uncle took us kids to the Gemini Circus which was camped on the Cross Maidan. This maidan was more like a large untended field badly in need of a haircut.

As we headed toward the grand entrance, I caught a glimpse of wildcats in cages, trumpeting elephants, and other fauna of the two-legged variety. No, I don’t mean chimpanzees. Chimps do not venture out in sleeveless vests and boxer shorts. But the tigress at the ticket window stole the show. She snarled as she handed us our entry passes. I was still looking at her over my shoulder as Uncle herded us into the Big Top or whatever they call the oversized tent.

The show started. I was awestruck by the animals who obediently went through their steps and kept their views about the intellect of the gawping audience to themselves. There is much we can learn from the denizens of the jungle. And then came the disappointment. The clowns.

I have been much more amused by the Hindi news readers on television. My kid brother was slapping his thighs, highly entertained. I decided he needed education.

That night, I dreamt of myself jumping through hoops.

job interview —
doubled up with laughter
at my syntax
You bleed. Shapes breathe within the secretions. A man with the face of your father, eyes black as sin, silent and brooding, framed by the blinding eclipse. A beast with myriad chitinous legs who also wears your father’s skin, licking your giggling face with a ribbed tongue. One is a memory, the other a fabrication, a phantom dressed in scarlet haunting the halls of your veins with who knows how many limbs.

Brittle branches clatter overhead, stark skeletons in the coming dusk or dawn, growing flesh where once were leaves. The breeze is refreshing on your open wounds and smells of forgotten hills vomiting carcasses. Your father’s scent. Your spilling elixir casts shadows of continents in his fractured silhouette. His countenance is a mask carved from bile and gnashing teeth, or else a glacier treading dust. This man is no longer a man, and now the faces you can’t remember are the ones you can’t forget. Trade your blood for lies. Illusions. A desperate coping mechanism. Under the boughs of this false paradise you lie wasting, praying that the trees grow a smile or scarab wing or any other unclaimed thing.
JJ was raised in a house with four other family members. Whenever she remembers the house and growing up in it, she thinks of the small living room, which was where most of the members spent their time, and how, in remembering, it’s like looking into a light bulb...or being inside one. A world sealed, practically self-contained. To JJ, it feels weird to look back and try to put oneself inside that fragile light bulb world, so easily breakable and not completely understood. Inside outside, outside inside, and you know the rest.

When JJ looks back, one thing is apparent. No one talks to her very much. At the time, this felt normal, but now, a grown woman, she has problems with how she should expand and contract, problems with shape, width, depth, and ideal height.

Very often, the members used to watch TV rather than talk to JJ. Maybe they felt that words never travel very far and break upon touching the skin. Or maybe they had nothing to say. Or too much to say, but didn’t know how to say it or what effect it would have. *Do you know you stammer when you’re nervous? Do you know that your eyes are uneven and people will not trust you? Never try to cover up a fart by sneezing. A true lady will say excuse me. A true lady would go somewhere else first.*

So when JJ reached the age of trying to spill out of the house without ruining her dresses, she had no clue what she should say to others, why so much distance, whether she was too tall or too short, why the other girls looked away when she did speak. Most of her sentences ended with “and...” but nothing followed.

Then, one by one, the family members died. She was more or less a shadow who lived and breathed under or near light bulbs. Late at night, JJ imagines her brain as a light bulb and inside are sitting the four family members and herself in the living room. They’re watching TV. She wants to ask, “Does anyone have anything to say to me? I am here, right? You can all see me, right?”

But JJ knows that if they did have something to tell her, it would probably be best left unsaid. In her head, she makes up stories involving the other members. In their secret, unsaid...
lives they robbed banks and threw people from cliffs. At least one worked undercover during a war. Yes. Maybe. Really?

And with that JJ turns out the light, says good night to the faces she can’t see, and goes to sleep.


Roy Wegerle

By Michael O’Brien

Overnight the cold front has passed bringing us into summer. Low lying clouds want to cast speckles of rain but don’t. The greyish light enhances the features in the buildings and the bare tree’s bark.

hidden sun
if we keep moving away
it’ll go faster

Some things just never leave your mind. Incidental things crop up. Weeds on the ploughed field as we all wait impatiently for barley. World Cup ‘94 Roy Wegerle panini sticker. The U.S’s away jersey grey blue w/ stars down one side. Hot summer and football all along. The deep primordial smell of ink and glue. The touch of the front and back is different — the side you keep is smooth and the disposable side is coarse.

abraham’s last smoke
a womb hovers
over the wilderness
William Seven Four Seven

By Michael O’Brien

Today I crashed a 747 into the suburbs. I am not mad. I am not a terrorist. I am not a buy one get one free egg mayonnaise with chives sandwich. It’s just that I thought I saw William Carlos Williams picking purple periwinkles.

wandering planet
this spring breeze
and I

The proof of woodland is your lawn. The proof of woodland is bone meal. The proof of woodland is early June — not that June ever arrives early. The proof of woodland is blood sausage. The proof of woodland is you.

In this cell counting wildflowers. One wood sorrel. Two red dead nettle. Three…

spring breeze
i ask the moon how
to eat a cow
Rodeo

By Richard Grahn

I could sit here right next to you all night long, proper as a church mouse. Okay, that’s a lie. I’m really just a frisky old man who hasn’t been to church in years. You do the math. Add my age to yours, divide by two and voila, we’re the same age. What could be more perfect? Cat got your tongue? Well then, let me bend your ear…

This old horse has been to many a rodeo. Oh, the stories. There was that time when I got this scar horsing around as a kid. I have a short but scary history with motorcycles, you see. Seems I’m better off without them. And then there’s this scar…oh…never mind, let’s talk about love.

Each one was the last. I swore it. How could there be anything more important than making love stay? Giving up on love is like leaving the rodeo early. I don’t mean to be improper, but would you care to leave a scar?
VISUAL ART
Nucleus Series, No. 1 by Nicola Winborn
An Owl’s Mind by Lori A. Minor
three dreams by Marianne Paul
Memory by Nelly Sanchez
Mist by Barbara Turney Wieland

my sleeping daughter
hush-heavy in my arms
my milk still sour sweet
on her breath I remember
transparent as the nightgown
left wet once upon one night-time’s grass
footsteps left discarded
revelation left unmentioned
years even after I remember
lost in a typo finding you untranslatable

—Keith Polette
Godot’s false teeth
i have no need
for typewriters
Malevich segmented by Mark Young
The Architect by Dawn Nelson Wardrope
Tenement House by Kyle Hemmings
Deconstruction by Olivier Schopfer
nuages by Mark Young
Haiga by Lori A. Minor

reaching

the seabed

mood swings
Blue waltz by Jayne Marek
aspen at night
by David Kuhlmann

aspen at night
all the world's words
Joyful Noise by Tiffany Shaw-Diaz
blood clinic

everyone shares their numbers

Elizabeth Crocket
antique glass by Debbie Strange
INTERVIEW WITH SALIL CHATURVEDI

K. Srilata, Indian poet and fiction writer, interviews award-winning writer and disability campaigner Salil Chaturvedi about his debut collection, “In the Sanctuary of a Poem,” and his artistic process, among other things.

KS: The bio note on the back cover of your book says that you love “marginal spaces” and that Goa for you is a “special edge place.” Does your love for marginal spaces seep into your poetry? If so, how?

SC: The natural world populates my poetry... I can’t seem to complete a poem before some animal—a cat, a millipede, an orangutan, fireflies—or some kind of plant decides that it wants to make room for itself in the poem. It’s natural, I think, that beings with whom we share the world want to enter the poem. My psyche is embedded in ecology. The natural world, especially in diminished urban environments, has been tamed and driven to the margins of our life experience. In so far as they are a presence in my work and find a voice, an utterance, I think I am working with the marginal.

Other than that, the experience of being a disabled person in a society like ours—and frankly, any society—is strangely alienating. I have learnt that it is a question of aesthetics—it’s called “aesthetic nervousness.” That’s what happens to people when they are around persons with disability. Many of the protagonists in my short stories are from marginal spaces—either people with disabilities or people who you might meet in a jhuggi, or in the periphery of a city.

KS: The epigraph in your book, a quote from Charles Simic, reads, “Poetry attracts me because it makes trouble for thinkers.” Can you tell me why you picked this particular line? Does it frame your understanding of poetry in some way?

SC: I came across this line when I was reading “The Life of Images,” selected prose of Charles Simic. It’s a book I return to every now and then. Well, thinking, or rationality, has gotten us into so much trouble, hasn’t it? Poetry, because of its reliance on metaphor, bypasses our thinking selves. I use the quote from Simic with a sense of interiority—in the sense of our own thinking selves being troubled by our own poetry. We are attracted to the poetry of our lives and our thinking sides are quite troubled by the risks involved. Here’s a longer quote from Charles Simic’s book:

“Heidegger says that we will never understand properly what poetry is until we understand what thinking is. Then he says, most interestingly, that the nature of thinking is something other than thinking, something other than willing. It’s this ‘other’ that poetry sets traps for.”

KS: What was your hardest poem to write? Tell me about it.

SC: “Grandmothers” comes to mind. This was after my maternal grandmother passed away. She was very fond of me and used to call me ‘Kanhaiya.’ I don’t remember having too many
discussions or extended conversations with her but just being around her was such an important life experience. The past was given a shape and a voice through her being. The world made more sense. She was quite frail and sick towards the end. I wanted to write something around her departure and her absence. Then the Ibis appeared and the poem came together.

KS: How long, on average, does it take you to write a poem – from start to finish, including revisions?

SC: There is no standard process here. Some poems happen quickly; some grow more slowly, organically sprouting sentences over days; some are pruned over a month. I read all the poems aloud to test what they sound like because I do believe that the basic unit of meaning in a poem is sound.

KS: I loved your poem, “Making the mistake of stopping before a rendezvous,” especially the lines:

A thirsty deer
stoops down to the lake
The thirsty lake
takes a long sip of deer

The inversion works in such a precise way and it leads to a decidedly poignant concluding two-line stanza:

I won’t be able
to meet you tonight.

Can you tell me how this poem came about?

SC: Almost a decade ago, I spent some time in the hills of Kumaon and Garwhal. The smell of pine in the poem gives it away and every time I read those lines, I can smell the pine once again. The lines are obviously addressed to a lover, with a hint of sadness or at least a happy-sad resignation at an unfulfilled rendezvous.

The narrator is seduced by the anima mundi, the world soul. He experiences what Lévy-Bruhl calls “participation mystique,” a partial identity with the world where the subject-object separation dissolves. The pathos, or gentle sadness, if you will, that surrounds this poem—there is no way for a reader to know this, but I can tell you since you ask about the poem—is in part from the ten months that my wife and I were involved in caring for my sister-in-law whom we eventually lost to cancer. In fact, another poem in the collection, “A name is not a knowing,” is an elegy to Mandira. The inversion is even more direct in that poem: “…the outside is the new inside.” I guess we were going through a massive inversion ourselves and naturally it spilled out into some of the poems. Our lives changed forever that year.
KS: Your poem “Instructions to an architect” mentions the phrase “splintered contexts,” and I am intrigued by what it means.

SC: Splintering, as in a separateness, a material broken off from a larger piece, a fragment. A fragment that perhaps has a memory of what it broke away from. And context refers to relationships. The phrase really means woven together. If I want to be kind to myself, I might think of myself as a prayer flag strung over a valley that is frayed at the edges. That would be a fairly accurate image of how I perceive my location in the world. When I imagine my ideal dwelling place, I don’t imagine a house that is held together perfectly. Rather, I imagine a splintered dwelling, a distributed space that is somehow equal to my fragmented self.

KS: Have you ever written or thought of writing in any language other than English? Are you conscious of having more than one language in your head even as you write in English?

SC: I do write poems in Hindi. In fact, I recently released a book of Hindi poems titled “Ya Ra La Va Sha Sa Ha.” It was released to coincide with my fiftieth birthday and contains fifty poems, including a few haiku in Hindi. So, yes, I’m bilingual, though much of my output is in English. It’s quite strange how poems choose a language within me. They aren’t felt as two neatly separated entities, but rather like two different forces: a centrifugal and a centripetal force, a push and a pull.

KS: What is the most difficult part of the artistic process for you?

SC: Knowing when it’s done. I rework a lot of my poems. There are some published poems that I would still like to change a bit.

KS: Now that the act of putting together your first collection is done, do you look at each of your poems as separate, stand-alone pieces or are you conscious of the connections between them? If there are connections, what are they like?

SC: An editor once told me, half in jest, that if you have twenty short stories you have at least three books in place, implying that changing the order of the stories would completely alter the essence of the book. While making choices for the sequencing of poems, I found a new joy: the joy of echoes. I was so taken up by how different poems played off each other that I kept experimenting with the sequencing of the poems. Eventually I had to pull away from this and start taking decisions. However, I prefer reading a single poem and thinking about it for a while and savouring its possibilities. I don’t need to “get” a poem. Sometimes, I open a book of poetry just to browse through the shapes of poems without reading them. I enjoy that, too.

KS: How does your work as a photographer tie in with your writing of poetry?

SC: For me, the image is supreme. It exists before thoughts start doing their work. My poetry tends to be very imagistic. The school of poetry I am most influenced by is the Deep Imagists,
my favourites being Robert Bly and James Wright. When aspiring poets seek a response to their poems, I usually talk about finding the right image instead of using abstractions.

Speaking of photography, I used to have a series on my blog under the rubric of photo-poems. These were poetic ideas rendered photographically, for example, a book lying open in a meadow with grass blades and seeds arranged as punctuation on the page. Recently, I have begun experimenting with haiga, a Japanese art form where a visual and haiku come together to create a poetic experience. The form is new to me and has immense possibilities.

**KS:** You have worked to draw attention to the issue of accessibility for persons with disability. This is work that you have done in the real world, work that needs to be done. Poetry is a very different sort of pursuit in a sense. How does it all come together for you?

**SC:** Gosh, I don’t know if it all comes together at all, or if it ever will. Does it? Frankly, each day is quite a struggle...to explore the self, to try and find out aspects of your inner world that seem to be in such a sharp conflict with the outer world. There are so many fractures that one encounters—disability, gender, privilege, class, caste. It’s a tightrope walk and one needs to adjust the weight constantly without losing the forward momentum of life. Poetry helps—it is my balancing pole.
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Marianne Paul’s haiku have appeared in various publications, including the Literary Review of Canada. She has won the Vancouver Cherry Blossom Festival haiku contest and the Jane Reichhold Memorial Haiga Competition. She is the author of the novel Tending Memory and the poetry collection Above and Below the Waterline. Marianne is a member of Haiku Canada.

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