

# The Mark Literary Review

Edition Ten

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# *The Dark Hung Heavy Above Me*

Adam Gibbs

*After Ginsberg*

The dark hung heavy above me,  
in an apartment on the edge of town,  
at an hour when night and morning  
had called a brief truce,  
and I was thinking I'd rather be  
anywhere but here,  
rather be driving the back roads of Illinois  
at dusk with nowhere to be,  
rather sing hallelujah on the banks  
of the Mississippi in Memphis,  
rather fall from grace in St. Louis,  
rather lose my nerve  
at a sidewalk café in Iowa City,  
rather feel anointed under the bar lights  
in Minneapolis and stumble drunk  
back to my hotel room alone,  
rather wake up forgetting  
who I was in Sioux Falls,  
rather feel the cold snow  
stinging my cheeks in downtown Topeka,  
rather pace like a caged animal  
amid the slots of a Tulsa casino,  
rather get lost driving through the prairie  
west of Amarillo and have the guy  
behind the gas station counter laugh  
when I ask for directions,

rather have expensive cocktails  
at a rooftop party in Santa Fe while  
listening to artists argue about sincerity,  
rather ascend body and soul in Boulder,  
rather lock my key in my room in Salt Lake City,  
rather have a glimpse of perfection in Cheyenne,  
rather feel the warm breeze with the windows  
down as I speed past Reno's neon bulbs,  
rather see the morning fog burning off  
above the trees in wine country near Sonoma,  
rather taste the salt as I dive head-first  
into the Pacific at Big Sur,  
rather turn the car around in San Francisco  
and point it east toward the future,  
rather drive and drive and drive,  
rather withstand wave after wave  
of American dreams as I head back,  
almost home but not yet,  
still plenty of time to wonder what's next,  
still plenty of time to imagine  
who I'll be until the day I die.

# *Sign*

## Megha Sood

This winding street  
in front of my lonely house reminds  
me of the winding noose which went  
around his neck  
did not spare him.  
Like a sparrow with a broken neck,  
he stopped chirping.  
That winding black track  
ends in the front of my house.  
*Is that a sign?*

# *The Lonliest Age*

## Richard LeDue

We didn't starve,  
but were malnourished;  
learned to read  
from the back of cereal boxes  
(part of a complete breakfast).

Our favourite TV shows  
taught us  
the joy of tearing plastic,  
cardboard apart;  
bedroom floor littered  
with action figures like a battlefield  
where everyone lost.

Adolescence was no better.  
Toy soldiers buried  
in shoeboxes, no monument,  
just acne and the realization  
that childhood had too many bowls  
filled with sugar.

Legally an adult at eighteen,  
yet un-kissed,  
lips over licked,  
especially in winter,  
builds to a fantasy that sex  
would mean someone  
else to pour the milk.

Not elderly yet,  
but envision a beautiful nurse,  
sponge baths daily,  
along with diaper changes.  
She'll spoon feed us hot cereal,  
grown cold.

# *Burning Down the Past*

John Tustin

I tried to walk away  
without  
burning down the past

but I keep looking back  
and seeing it  
not as it was  
but as I thought it was.

I no longer  
pretend  
I don't notice  
your indifference  
to setting a match to me  
and walking away

as I go down  
in flames.

So I light my own match  
and toss it behind me  
knowing that your indifference  
is so vast  
you won't feel  
a thing.



# *Otsu*

## William Doreski

Lake Biwa, the largest in Japan,  
lurks unnoticed in the background.

I watch men drop buckets down a well  
to water oxen harnessed to bales

bundled onto pairs of wheels as tall  
as the draymen waving little sticks.

Then I enter the shop that sells Otsu-e,  
folk pictures sketched locally.

They depict draymen leading oxen  
to the well, and some include me

in the background, my western clothes  
a humorous distraction from

the workday world too busy  
to enjoy a dip in the lake.

# *Extra Protection*

Andy N

Filled with ghosts  
even the toilets were laced with tension  
on the deserted train  
almost like everybody had crammed in there  
for extra protection  
just before it crashed.

# *Fancy*

Richard LeDue

My imagination is fuelled by lines  
in the grass, where someone stopped  
mowing. I fantasize that they thought  
enough done: sweat soaked shirt,  
bug bites promising to itch later,  
sun overcooks exposed skin,  
while wind sits on its hands,  
or did their neighbour not ask them in  
for a drink, had a party last  
Friday, kept everyone up  
until 3 A.M., even those  
uninvited—whatever the reason,  
a border exists now, damning  
as any wall that kept people in.

# *Nissaka*

## William Doreski

My favorite scenery, abrupt  
and shaded, the trail wrestling  
past the Night-Weeping Stone.  
This marks the spot where bandits  
killed a pregnant woman, spilling

her blood on the stone. It weeps  
every night in her memory.  
The goddess Kannon in priestly  
guise rescued the unborn child,  
who later avenged the murder.

I don't want to linger after dark  
and hear that ghostly sorrow,  
but I like the scenery and legend  
and the trail sloping so abruptly  
I almost have to crawl on all fours.

# *Joanna's Earth*

## Emma Sedrel

Joanna knew it was her time. After ninety years on earth she had grown sick of it. There had been too many wars and too many deaths. She was ready for the end. She was ready to be free.

Joanna rolled her wheelchair down the nursing home's large ramp and let herself roll to a stop. Her breaths were becoming slower and slower. She undid the straps of her weighted shoes with the little strength she had left and smiled as her body floated up.

Joanna floated above the stone fountain in the nursing home's lush garden, above the blooming cherry blossom trees, and above the dark, towering buildings. At last she reached the soft clouds. They parted for her in a grand gesture like she was floating to Heaven.

Joanna floated farther and farther until she reached the Earth's atmosphere. With her last breath, blink of her eyes, and movement of her body, all Joanna could think about was how beautiful the Earth truly was.

# *Erosion*

## Megha Sood

The nakedness of this moment  
the silence—  
deeply nestled in the crevices  
of this deep nothingness  
I can hear and pretend not to like it  
but it comes and goes  
strikes at my rapt attention

like a grey colored pigeon in the square  
pecking at food  
ready to take flight at the thinness of the sound  
petrified of its survival

I stand here bereft of the emotion  
like the air losing its moisture—  
the eternal soul of a cloud;  
like a rainless chunk of vapor  
broken and crumbled into pieces  
roaming with a dejected look

a vagabond wandering from place to place  
a stray dog at the mercy  
of the people of the town  
an unwelcome guest

Loss is a personal thing  
it takes chunks out of your soul  
like the angry river from the land touching its shores  
I'm losing myself to the time  
slowly but surely  
the erosion is taking place.

# *Open Windows*

## Adam Gibbs

In the night's restless quiet,  
I slide through a drop-down menu  
on my laptop's glowing screen;  
not quite like booking a flight,  
I point and click my way around the globe.

I feel tomorrow's afternoon  
heat in New Taipei City,  
listening to the symphony of traffic  
at a busy downtown intersection,  
watching a fleet of motorbikes stream past,  
each rider a flicker of existence,  
ghosts in the machine.

I dig my toes into the cool sand  
at the Soggy Dollar,  
a beachfront bar closed for the night  
somewhere in the British Virgin Islands,  
the dead-in-the-water yachts keeping watch  
like sentinels just off the shore,  
enjoying the soothing rhythm of  
small waves washing in at my feet,  
echoes from the beginning.

I stand on an island in the controlled chaos  
of Tokyo's Shibuya Crossing,  
everyone waiting on the starter's pistol  
of the light change, then striding by in all directions,  
trying to find the shortest distance  
between here and there.

I bathe in the neon light of Times Square  
as the crowd surges forward, unable to see  
where they're going above their smartphones,  
spying a young man whose thumbs  
tap furiously at the screen,  
and I imagine him punching  
"live city cams" into a search engine,  
perhaps vaguely aware that,  
somewhere in the far off suburban darkness,  
someone he'll never meet is sitting godlike,  
peering at him through open windows in the sky,  
looking down at this teeming mass  
of joy and pain below.



# Contributors

**William Doeski** has published three critical studies and several collections of poetry. His poetry, essays, and reviews have appeared in many print and online journals. He has taught writing and literature at Emerson, Goddard, Boston University, and Keene State College. His most recent book is *A Black River, A Dark Fall*.

**Adam Gibbs** is a writer and poet originally from Sidney, Ohio. His poetry has appeared in *Fourth and Sycamore* and been honored by the Hayner Cultural Center and Tipp City Arts Council. His novella *Dumb Luck* is forthcoming from Unsolicited Press. He currently lives in Grove City, Ohio, with his wife Lindsay and their daughter Clara.

**Richard LeDue** was born in Sydney, Nova Scotia, Canada. He currently lives and teaches in Norway House, Manitoba. His work has been published by the *Tower Poetry Society*, in *Adelaide Literary Magazine*, the *Eunoia Review*, *Mojave He[art] Review*, *Little Rose Magazine*, and *Black Bough Poetry*.

**Andy N** is the author of three full length poetry collections, the most recent being *Birth of Autumn* and co-hosts the Spoken Word Open Mic night in Stretford “Speak Easy.”

**Emma Sedrel** is a senior at Mount Mercy University, majoring in English and minoring in diversity studies. When she’s not writing, she likes to spend time with her family and friends. She is an avid runner in her free time.

**Megha Sood** lives in Jersey City, New Jersey. She is a contributing member at *GoDogGO Cafe*, *Candles Online*, *Free Verse Revolution*, *Whisper and the Roar* and contributing poetry editor at *Ariel Chart*. Her 300+ works have been featured

in *Adelaide, Fourth and Sycamore, Foliate Oak, KOAN, Visitant Lit, Quail Bell, Dime show review, Nightingale and Sparrow*, etc. Works featured/upcoming in 20 other anthologies by the US, Australian and Canadian Press. Two-time state-level winner of the NAMI NJ Poetry Contest 2018/2019. National level poetry finalist in Poetry Matters Prize 2019. She blogs at <https://meghasworldsite.wordpress.com/>

**John Tustin** has had poetry appear in many disparate literary journals in the past ten years. You can find links to his published work on [fritzware.com/johntustinpoetry](http://fritzware.com/johntustinpoetry)