

COLLEGE *of* SOUTHERN MARYLAND

# Connections



FALL 2021  
LITERARY MAGAZINE

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The logo for 'Connections' features the word in a serif font. Behind the text are two overlapping, semi-transparent rectangular shapes. A black spiral graphic starts from the bottom center and winds upwards, passing behind the letters.

# Connections

COLLEGE *of* SOUTHERN MARYLAND  
**Fall 2021 Literary Magazine**  
**volume 29 number 1**

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# Table of Contents

## POETRY

Though We Are Day and Night We can Love Each Other All the Time, <i>Zoe Brookbank</i> .....	9
Women’s Shelter, York, PA, <i>William Miller</i> .....	10
Chronic Adjustments, <i>Michael Miedzinski</i> .....	12
Sitting in the Mystery, <i>Jennifer Polhemus</i> .....	13
Scrolling Through Facebook on a Friday Morning, First Day of Summer, 2021, <i>Ian McFarland</i> .....	20
Fourteen (for now), <i>Sarah Meado</i> .....	22
An Unscheduled Stop on Alternate Route 40, <i>George Miller</i> .....	24
Parenting During the Pandemic, <i>G.H. Mosson</i> .....	26
Emerging, <i>Kate Lassman</i> .....	27
For Roger Horn, the Mensch in a White Hat, <i>Judy Allen-Leventhal</i> .....	28
Beaugard, <i>Patrick Allen</i> .....	29
I was Okay, <i>Kate Richardson</i> .....	44
Summer Sunrise, <i>Jessica Atkisson</i> .....	46
Imperfections, <i>Richard Weaver</i> .....	48
Unsafely Grazed, <i>Michael Durack</i> .....	49

## CONNECTIONS FEATURES .....

30

In Colorado My Father Scoured and Stacked Dishes, <i>Eduardo C. Corral</i> .....	32
Mirror, <i>Wayne Karlin</i> .....	38
Vietnam Veterans Memorial, <i>Nguyễn Phan Quế Mai</i> .....	40

## PROSE

City, <i>Michaila Shahan</i> .....	7
Hero to Homeless, <i>Stephen Michael Berberich</i> .....	15

## PHOTOGRAPHY

Stairs to Somewhere, <i>Lena Hancock</i> .....	6
Christmas/Gas Light: Greeting Season, <i>Edgard “Gardy” Domenech</i> .....	11
Xmas in the Woods, <i>Michelle Brosco Christian</i> .....	14
Feathered Ice, <i>Diane Payne</i> .....	21
Gina, <i>Aryn Wilson</i> .....	23
Untitled, <i>Shayna Zabiegalski</i> .....	45
Butterfly Wings, <i>Judy Angelheart</i> .....	47
Trees — Come into the Light to Find Me, <i>Erica Clark</i> .....	50

## CONTRIBUTORS .....

51

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# Connections

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**Stairs to Somewhere, *Lena Hancock***

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## City (sleepless dream)

*Michaila Shahan*

Blackness cut through the blades of plastic, of light grey. It pierced artificial and outdoors, between the stagnancy of Walmart and manufactory and that of coolness. Outside, it seemed to be hanging still over the heavy grumbles, moans, screeches. Bangs and whoops and sirens, piercing the rumble that was like a conversation between one community and another. It was a void, making her want to distinguish a triangular piece of green, of living. She longed to challenge the obsolescence of the night, argue that everything existed when it said. Plainly, nothing is here — me and the blinds.

Sometimes it went away; sometimes the light, bearing through the window, matched the blinds. At 7:30 her lips bent, thinking of the crispness of the moon when it receded and gave way to the dampness of 6 a.m. humidity. Of the way her ears moved to the crickets under the window ledge. One eye, and then the other, staring into a whitely visible sheet. The room would be like it, like the out-of-doors. Speckled and inconsistent, blurry shadows and crevices like it wasn't receiving a good signal yet. There was always one bird, the first one. A stream of light pouring like liquid, moving with the translucent leaves till it danced. First on the wooden beam, then the window. Scattered over the blades of grass that leaned, bent towards it for a moment. As if no one was watching, and, really, they never were. She wasn't watching, she was a part of it. Awakening, not yet awake.

*Continued on next page*

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Now there was the fuzziness from the lamp. It was bright and white, LED bouncing from the plastic exterior into the similar interior. Strands of her hair shot up against the highlighted wall like a subject of a flash-on photo. Her ears did not bend but listened to a steady vibration. Beyond the slatted plastic and glass and the metal pole, there were yellow lines and black ones and white ones. Subconsciousness asked why it went, to and from. But she herself knew, for in a few minutes, when her phone chimed, she would be in it.

---

# **Though We Are Day and Night We Can Love Each Other All the Time**

*Zoe Brookbank*

The Sun leaned to the Moon and said “good day!”  
Even as She shined and walked away.  
The Moon smiled as the night crept in,  
Despite the lurking black as dark as sin.

One might wonder why Night and Day even converse,  
But they fail to think of the balance of the Earth.  
The two sides of a coin may differ but they still touch.  
The Sun and the Moon rely on each other as such.  
For without Day there is no Night,  
And to be blind you must be aware that there is sight.

On clear summer evenings together they sit,  
Silently in love, though neither will admit.  
So smile the days both the Sun and Moon are in the sky,  
Because normally the two lovers don’t get the chance to look  
each other in the eye.

---

## Women's Shelter, York, PA

*William Miller*

All that summer, I did Christ's chores—  
Meals on Wheels, the only man  
at the clothing drive, penance  
for leaving my wife, the woman  
I left my wife for.

Past red brick facades, colonial  
slave porches, I followed a wet  
cobblestone street to a door  
with a barred window,  
rang the buzzer.

That face in the window turned  
me to stone, the pale woman's  
hard brown eyes, her only  
request simple and blunt—  
"Put it down, leave."

I wanted credit, time served—  
my mother abandoned me  
when I was twelve. I still  
saw her in every dyed blonde  
with fake breasts.

No other choice, retreat inevitable,  
I put down two plastic bags  
filled with toothbrushes,  
toothpaste, candy bars  
and soap bricks.

These walls were made  
of more than fired clay  
troweled by slave hands--  
they were two-feet thick  
like the fear between us.



**Christmas/Gas Light: Greeting Season,**  
*Edgard “Gardy” Domenech*

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# Chronic Adjustments

*Michael Miedzinski*

Summarization: Being hired as a wounded warrior with the understanding that you have appointments and being told you can attend these appointments and then being counseled for having appointments. Also, not fitting the mold of what a disabled veteran is in most people's eyes; they want the glamorous image of legs missing, but don't understand that chronic pain ends military careers as well.

Find what works best for you,  
Adapt and achieve,  
Accommodations will be made,  
So long as it doesn't challenge normal perceptions,  
Your condition will fall within our definitions,  
Acceptable and perfectible,  
Defective and rejectable,  
Sit this way not that way,  
Appointments abound take all the time,  
Don't worry your annual will reflect your usage of leave sick time,  
We welcome you with open arms,  
And will compare your injuries to those we can observe,  
Combat versus non-combat injuries,  
You are the lessor,  
Maligners...they know me so well,  
Despite my objection to ever serving myself,  
I reserve the right to bestow judgement upon oneself,  
I can't see your pain,  
It must not exist,  
This on a daily basis,  
So chronically I adjust to fit their definitions of the disabled,  
Eventually I'll just get a chair with wheels and then maybe my Pain will seem real?

---

# Sitting in the Mystery

*Jennifer Polhemus*

As she tells me her story of brokenness  
I realize I am hovering  
in the aboves and bellows of consciousness  
where my own heart releases me  
from blindness, from bondage in Past and Future  
and casts my truth onto the shores of Now  
This Sacred Moment

Shadow and light share their quantum dance  
in an autumn meadow  
Naked  
under a waxing gibbous moon  
I can feel my life mysteriously calling  
as I watch my dreams and who I thought I would be  
turn to dust

I look into her eyes then, so full of emptiness  
swallowed by an anger  
that devours all other emotions  
and know that my magick-making  
my devotions and potions, words in whispers  
strings of energy looping us together  
as the Serpent Goddess coils up my spine  
crosses over yours where the third eye looks  
upon our genderlessness  
and our venom alchemizes into an elixir  
offering the fearful comfort of Nothingness  
There is a queer beauty in silence  
that floats like diadems  
around my crown and down my arms  
drips from my fingers  
into the endless pool of another day.



*Xmas in the Woods, Michelle Brosco Christian*

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# Hero to Homeless

*Stephen Michael Berberich*

Nov. 4, 2003

Dear Travis,

Everybody back here in Georgia is eager to welcome home the best damn soldier in the U.S. Army. Son, I trust you are still serving our country well over there. Be a leader always, son. Only six weeks left on your tour. You will report to my buddy at Officer Candidate School at Ft. Benning. I arranged everything. I'm counting on you, Travis. Don't mess up. Make me proud. Dad.

\*

In a barren, rocky region of Afghanistan, several armored combat vehicles travel at a deliberate pace up a dusty road into a cluster of tan and gray mounds leading to an open dryland hummock. Big, rugged U.S. Army Sgt. Travis Hunter rides shotgun in the lead vehicle. He pulls out the little folded letter after he can no longer see through the dirty windshield. The soldier driving says, "We are approaching the target, Sgt. Should you be reading?"

Hunter, bristling with strong-minded determination, ignores the question, and keeps reading the letter from home. Hunter replies hurriedly, "Letter from Dad. It came just as we packed up."

"Everything okay, Sgt.?"

"He's getting me into officer training."

"You deserve it after four combat tours. But I thought enlisted personnel need special clearances to get into officer training."

Hunter smiles and replies, "You don't know my father." The old road is rocky, creating too much vehicle noise and slowing progress.

*Continued on next page*

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The soldier at the wheel says, “We're here, enemy compound is over the ridge. The lieutenant says that a soldier interpreter on the patrol picked up Taliban chatter. They are in that flat structure just a bit more. Yes, right over there, Travis.” He slows the vehicle to a crawl with the others.

Hunter folds his father's letter and tucks it into a chest pocket as the armored convoy drifts to a halt, motors silenced.

Hunter takes charge. “Listen. The lieutenant wants us to go on foot. Come on. Take your weapon and follow. Watch for side movements.”

The U.S. patrol forms two columns, each in a single file up the ridge. Point men for each column sweep for improvised explosive devices, IEDs. The columns move quickly and lightly with minimal clamor. The two columns converge near the earthen structure.

A crackle of automatic weapons breaks the silence and a premature grenade explodes in the air, sending the soldiers scattering behind boulders.

Hunter stays up halfway on his knees and pumps both hands, palms down, for the men to lower their voices randomly saying, “There, there. ... See 'em? ... Heads up.”

He ducks flat to the ground with Lt. Sam Jones who whispers, “Hunter, take six guys and advance to the right. We'll go left. Go, go, go, go.”

The soldiers open fire on the structure, raising clouds of dust. As they advance, return fire hits Jones, the first up. Another round hits a soldier who then stays back with wounded Jones who is holding his bloodied right knee.

The firefight lasts just five minutes until shooting ceases from the earthen structure.

At the quieted structure, armed U.S. soldiers kick in an old wooden plank door. They find a large cache of weapons and just two dead enemy soldiers.

Hunter quickly assesses the situation, “Men, pile these weapons up. I'll check on the lieutenant and get a vehicle to load up.” He then speaks into his hand radio to Jones. “All clear, sir.”

---

When he then spots the lieutenant huddled behind with another man, Hunter runs to Jones and the soldier who is frantically working with bandages and tourniquets. The soldier ignores his shoulder wound and treats Jones first.

Jones says, “We need to get back to the forward operating base before sundown, Sgt. Hunter. Get stretchers. Harris here caught one in the shoulder and will be okay, but my knee, oh.” Jones is writhing in pain but maintains a self-assured tone and demeanor.

Hunter is inspired by the lieutenant’s fighting spirit and reports stalwartly, “Sir, the men are loading the cache. We took out the only two enemy. I’ll be back soon. This area should be okay, sir, the Marines cleared it Monday.”

“Be careful, sergeant and make each of your steps back to our vehicles exactly the way we approached.” Hunter is already off running as Jones adds, “Same footsteps. Hear me, Hunter?” Hunter hastens down the hill with an M249 light machine gun and his holstered M9 Berretta on his hip. He feels for his father’s letter over his heart as he climbs into a vehicle to drive to the wounded men.

He doesn’t realize that the soldier who drove the vehicle to the firefight left the front wheels turned sharply to one side. Hunter begins driving. The vehicle veers off the uncertain course of the dust-covered road.

An explosive sound and flash of light in the fading daylight flips the vehicle, throwing bulky Hunter 10 feet away. Moments later, the semi-conscious warrior Hunter hears an approaching Medivac helicopter’s pulsating wop-wop-wop of the spinning blades and its roaring turbine engine.

*Continued on next page*

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Baltimore, Maryland, five years later

On a misty cold October weekday morning, former U.S. Army Sgt. Travis Hunter, a wounded warrior now 33, wakes up lying on concrete under the Russell St. exit ramp. He pours water from an old army canteen over his head and wipes his face. His full, reddish-brown beard is unkempt and to his chest.

He ambles off aimlessly, carrying a folded wheelchair full of rust and dents. The ambulatory chair is missing one footrest. He carries it only to the edge of the darkness near Oriole Park at Camden Yards where amber streetlights might expose his game. Only then he gets into the rickety chair and covers his legs with an olive-green blanket.

Travis wheels himself through a smelly alley leading to his first stop of garbage cans and a dumpster behind a Greek restaurant on Pratt St.

A Purple Heart medal is pinned to his tattered greasy Army shirt. He wears a well-worn Atlanta Braves baseball cap from the 1980s. Travis is big and muscle-bound even in the wheelchair. Yet the most distinguishing feature of his physique is his twisted and awkward posture that leaves his tanned and chiseled features in an expression of perpetual pain.

Yes, he fakes needing the wheelchair. He is not faking the twisted look.

Down the alley, Travis is disturbed to find another vagrant lying next to the dumpster. He becomes anxious, causing spasms to begin in his twisted muscles. He holds his jaw to the left to control tremoring spasms.

He continues wheeling to the unconscious soul. He walks to the limp body to check for life. It is a woman. "Hey, you there, lady. Wake up." The former soldier gathers up semi-conscious Mary Ann Gilford, 28. He gently places her in his wheelchair and starts pushing it.

---

Mary Ann regains consciousness quickly, fearfully, “You a doc? Hey, I can walk, mister. Get your hands off!”

Daylight is breaking slowly with a heavy, low cloud cover.

“Listen, lady,” Travis barks to the ungrateful woman, “I just want to help you. You've got blood all over your clothes.”

She panics, “Are they gone? ... I mean, them dogs. Oh God, where are they?”

“Do you mean street dogs did this to you?”

“Well, I didn't do it to myself. Hey, what's wrong with your neck?

You look worse off than me. Your head's all crooked, mister.”

Travis turns away, disgusted.

“Okay, none of my damned, whatever, right?” she says. “Yeah, dogs were in the dumpster, angry. The Greeks throw bags of uneaten lamb in there. I tried getting in to get some.”

As he takes charge of the situation, the pangs of anxiety calm in his stomach. Travis's muscle spasms stop. He says, “I know about the Greeks' throwaways. Dogs got to the meat first? I'm sorry.

Come, I'll fix you up. Got a name?”

---

# Scrolling Through Facebook on a Friday Morning, First Day of Summer, 2021

*Ian McFarland*

Poems do not have to be  
about nature, they can be  
about things that are artificial  
like Facebook.

Poem titles  
do not have to be short,  
they can be long  
like this one.

Good, now that's out of the way.

A woman posted photos  
and a paragraph. It turned out  
her husband killed himself  
less than a year into their marriage.  
Married her husband  
within a month of when  
I married my wife.  
Only six dared comment.  
Three hundred commented  
on my grandpa's obituary,  
his wife, son, and daughter dead  
before him, he died four days shy of 99.

Life next to life,  
and death next to death.  
I cannot get to the bottom of it.



**Feathered Ice, *Diane Payne***

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## **Fourteen (for now)**

*Sarah Meador*

I've lived in this house for a  
year now but I still count the steps  
every up and down even though  
I know  
there are fourteen  
which I know because  
I've counted and counted and  
still count every time  
just in case  
one disappears or  
melts or  
packs up and decides  
to follow you  
out of the door.  
sometimes, I fear  
there were never fourteen  
to begin with.



*Gina, Aryn Wilson*

---

# An Unscheduled Stop on Alternate Route 40

*George Miller*

The oncologist says, "Go home,  
enjoy the time you have left."

None of us speak  
between Johns Hopkins Hospital  
and Fells Point, not a word in Little Italy,  
silence circling the Baltimore Beltway.

Finally, as we veer onto Alternate Route 40 in Catonsville,  
my brother James inquires, "Is anybody else hungry?"

Two miles short of Ellicott City, Dad suggests,  
"There's a Greek Diner just up the road."

James, Dad, and I sit quietly in a formica booth.  
Greek Diner is a simple concept.  
Home, that's complicated.

James, being from San Francisco,  
reads the menu on his phone.

I don't need a menu to order a gyro,  
this being a Greek Diner.

Dad, being seventy-two years old,  
fiddles with the menu.

His taste buds crave Moussaka.  
His gut prefers pita bread.

---

Twenty miles short of my house in Frederick,  
a hundred east of Dad's in Cumberland,  
decades since Mom died in Frostburg,  
we stop to recharge in Ellicott City,  
a familiar place to ponder  
the path home.

James checks the calendar on his phone,  
"I can drop out of grad school until ..."

Dad takes James' hand,  
"We'll be fine, you can visit."

I stack my hand on theirs,  
say nothing.

Hours later, we veer into my driveway,  
wheel Dad into the living room,  
his home for the time  
he has left.

---

# PARENTING DURING THE PANDEMIC

*G.H. Mosson*

Dear Diary,

To get through—all of us sheltered here—working from home, and the kids home too in online school. The usual “interrupted,” though “do not fall behind.”

No one dares to ask, What’s next?  
With eyes agape, it’s step by step.  
So when might this virus subside?

Our weekly car trips, to exchange the kids, is permitted by the Governor’s Order, thankfully, so we can share in the parenting. Better with buffer and skilled at sharing.

Awkward as stick figures  
of a child’s picture, I had forgotten us  
in the blur getting things done.

Let’s meander after lunch. Walk together after dinner. A slapstick, a binge of kickball, a tournament of cards, glancing at each other, shoulders shrug with questions.

In the slow time, more time.  
In this home time, our time.  
In this spring time:

a cycle

seeded to bloom,  
a song—pregnant air

igniting singers:

We are a chorus  
for a blind smile.

---

# Emerging

*Kate Lassman*

I have to leave the house today.

It's only errands, commonplace,  
or used to be, before the world locked down  
and how we all live changed.

As I make breakfast, my mind reviews  
an anxious pre-flight checklist:  
efficient route, completed list,  
fresh mask, sanitizer, keys, and phone.

I press the button and hear the coffeemaker  
hiss and swirl and hum.

My favorite mug feels familiar, warm;  
the complex taste of French vanilla  
with macadamia beneath  
begins the day same as it has for years.

Though life has altered radically,  
not everything has changed.

---

# For Roger Horn, the Mensch in a White Hat

*Judy Allen-Leventhal*

What is in a life?  
a life well lived, that is.  
After that life has been lived,  
what is left?

Admiration for the one who lived that life.  
Gratitude from the survivors who shared that life.  
Fond memories. Deep respect. Great love.

The spouse, children, grandchildren,  
family, friends, colleagues, neighbors,  
all manner of people who crossed that life simply,  
the life now ended,  
they all reflect on that life with  
sadness and loss profound.

They always looked up to this Mensch in a White Hat  
and know now with certitude  
that he was never too good to be true.

Roger that.

---

# Beauregard

*Patrick Allen*

The thing about loving someone was  
That they knew all your pressure points.  
They knew all the spots that were open and raw.  
You let them in your heart  
And they cased the place.  
They knew what made you weak and ticked you off.  
Like somebody hanging up on you.

Found Poem

From "Blacktop Wasteland," S. A. Cosby, page 70

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## CONNECTIONS FEATURES

### *Fall 2021 Readings*

For our Fall 2021 Connections Literary Series, we have been privileged and honored to welcome poet Eduardo Corral, novelist Jennifer Rosner, novelist Wayne Karlin, author Nguyễn Phan Quế Mai, Dr. Ho Nguyen, and Irish poet, theologian, and mediator, Pádraig Ó Tuama. Their words and wisdom gave us more gifts than we could have imagined. And during this time of pandemic, mostly online, we have treasured these moments we've shared with these blessed and gifted souls who brought us back in touch with our humanity, our belonging, our pain and joy, our love of this life, and our belief in a brighter tomorrow.

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## September 16, 2021: Poetry and a Conversation with Eduardo C. Corral



**Eduardo C. Corral** earned degrees from Arizona State University and the University of Iowa Writers' Workshop. His debut collection of poetry, "Slow Lightning" (2012), won the Yale Younger Poets Prize, making him the first Latino recipient of the award. His second collection is "Guillotine" (2020). Praised for his seamless blending of English and Spanish, tender treatment of history, and careful exploration of sexuality, Corral has received numerous honors and awards, including the Discovery/The Nation Award, the J. Howard and Barbara M.J. Wood Prize, a Whiting Writers' Award, and a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts.

[www.eduardoccorral.com](http://www.eduardoccorral.com)

<https://youtu.be/Xyq5ZRK52Sg>

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# In Colorado My Father Scoured and Stacked Dishes

*Eduardo C. Corral*

Written in a Tex-Mex restaurant. His co-workers,  
unable to utter his name, renamed him Jalapeño.

If I ask for a goldfish, he spits a glob of phlegm  
into a jar of water. The silver letters

on his black belt spell Sangrón. Once, borracho,  
at dinner, he said: Jesus wasn't a snowman.

Arriba Durango. Arriba Orizaba. Packed  
into a car trunk, he was smuggled into the States.

Frijolero. Greaser. In Tucson he branded  
cattle. He slept in a stable. The horse blankets

oddly fragrant: wood smoke, lilac. He's an illegal.  
I'm an Illegal-American. Once, in a grove

of saguaro, at dusk, I slept next to him. I woke  
with his thumb in my mouth. ¿No qué no

tronabas, pistolita? He learned English  
by listening to the radio. The first four words

he memorized: In God We Trust. The fifth:  
Percolate. Again and again I borrow his clothes.

He calls me Scarecrow. In Oregon he picked apples.  
Braeburn. Jonagold. Cameo. Nightly,

to entertain his cuates, around a campfire,  
he strummed a guitarra, sang corridos. Arriba

---

Durango. Arriba Orizaba. Packed into  
a car trunk, he was smuggled into the States.

Greaser. Beaner. Once, borracho, at breakfast,  
he said: The heart can only be broken

once, like a window. ¡No mames! His favorite  
belt buckle: an águila perched on a nopal.

If he laughs out loud, his hands tremble.  
Bugs Bunny wants to deport him. César Chávez

wants to deport him. When I walk through  
the desert, I wear his shirt. The gaze of the moon

stitches the buttons of his shirt to my skin.  
The snake hisses. The snake is torn.

---

## October 6, 2021: A conversation with Jennifer Rosner about her novel, "The Yellow Bird Sings."

**Jennifer Rosner** writes "The Yellow Bird Sings" (Flatiron Books) is my debut novel. [It] is grounded in interviews, travel, and a great deal of historical research. I previously published a memoir, "If a Tree Falls: A Family's Quest to Hear and Be Heard" (Feminist Press), about raising my deaf daughters in a hearing, speaking world, and discovering genetic deafness in my family dating back to the 1800s. In both the novel and memoir, I explore themes of silence and sound, loneliness and connection. My short writings have appeared in The New York Times, "The Massachusetts Review," "The Forward," and elsewhere. Currently, I teach the Bard-sponsored Clemente Course in the Humanities, a college-level course for women living in economic distress, at The Care Center in Holyoke, MA., MA.



*Excerpt:*

As Nazi soldiers round up the Jews in their town, Róza and her 5-year-old daughter, Shira, flee, seeking shelter in a neighbor's barn. Hidden in the hayloft day and night, Shira struggles to stay still and quiet, as music pulses through her and the farmyard outside beckons. To soothe her daughter and pass the time, Róza tells her a story about a girl in an enchanted garden:

In this make-believe world, Róza can shield Shira from the horrors that surround them. But the day comes when their haven is no longer safe, and Róza must make an impossible choice: whether to keep Shira by her side or give her the chance to survive apart.

---

Inspired by the true stories of Jewish children hidden during World War II, **Jennifer Rosner's** debut is a breathtaking novel about the unbreakable bond between a mother and a daughter. Beautiful and riveting, "The Yellow Bird Sings" is a testament to the triumph of hope—a whispered story, a bird's song—in even the darkest of times.

[www.jennifer-rosner.com](http://www.jennifer-rosner.com)

<https://youtu.be/u4wIPGKK0dY>

*Continued on next page*

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## November 9, 2021: A Conversation with authors Nguyễn Phan Quế Mai and Wayne Karlin



*Nguyễn Phan Quế Mai and Wayne Karlin, pictured here with Rachel Smith's ENG 1010 class at the Prince Frederick Campus, where the authors appeared live and on Zoom.*

Born into the Việt Nam War in 1973, Nguyễn Phan Quế Mai grew up witnessing the war's devastating aftermath. As a girl and young woman she worked as a street seller and rice farmer before winning a scholarship to attend university in Australia. She is the author of eight books of poetry, fiction, and nonfiction in Vietnamese and bilingual English editions, and her writing has been translated and published in more than 15 countries. She has been honored with some of the top literary awards of Vietnam, including the Poetry of the Year 2010 Award from the Hanoi Writers Association. Her debut novel and first book in English, "The Mountains Sing," has become an international best

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seller. It received the BookBrowse Best Debut Award for 2020 and has been named a best book of 2020 by more than 10 media establishments, including NPR. Dr. Nguyễn was awarded a Lannan Literary Awards Fellowship for contribution to peace and reconciliation and "The Mountains Sing" is a runner-up for this year's Dayton Literary Peace Prize.



"[An] absorbing, stirring novel... Que Mai contains her saga with a poet's discipline... She evokes the landscape hauntingly, as a site of loss so profound it assumes the quality of fable."  
– New York Times Book Review.

Wayne Karlin is the author of eight novels and three non-fiction books. He is the twice-recipient of a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts, and has received the Paterson Prize in Fiction, The Vietnam Veterans of America Excellence in the Arts Award, and the Juniper Prize in Fiction. He served in the United States Marine Corps in Vietnam.

<https://youtu.be/AzBXn7ubWgY>

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# Mirror for Le Minh Khue

*Wayne Karlin*

At fifteen  
she'd run away to  
join the army  
to fight you, she said  
she'd never been this close  
to an American before.  
I was nineteen, I said.  
Once, she said,  
she'd spied on G.I.'s  
bathing near Khe Sahn,  
needing to see them  
unshelled and human,  
but they were too far away,  
she couldn't see anything.  
You were ghosts to us too, I said.  
The helicopters scared her  
the most, she said.  
They came down.  
I know, I said,  
and thought of how  
differently each of us  
heard those three words,  
and then thought of  
her crouching under  
jungle canopy,  
the downward arc  
the red flashes of my tracers  
the strangeness of connection.  
Twenty and more years before  
I'd searched for her  
on the ground  
as she'd searched for me  
in the air

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our eyes aching with  
the need to see  
but I didn't see her  
beneath the green canopy  
the camphor smoke twisting  
like ghosts  
against dark mountains  
and she didn't see me  
in the stir of treetops  
the light shivering  
like panic  
through the branches  
until now  
as simply  
as forgetting  
a dream  
we looked  
and our faces emerged  
as if from leaves  
as if from sky.

Note: Le Minh Khue is a Vietnamese writer and war veteran who visited the United States in the summer of 1993. The poet is also a veteran but of the other side of the Vietnam War. If they had met over 20 years before, they would have been enemies.

<http://wayne-karlin.squarespace.com/about2>



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# VIETNAM VETERANS MEMORIAL

*Nguyễn Phan Quế Mai*

Birds' song knocks on the White House;  
Lincoln's smile resounds;  
sunset soaks Washington in deep red.  
The black wall,  
fifty-eight thousand, two hundred and sixty-seven names I don't  
know,  
who fired gunshots into my mind,  
their boot tips still drenched with blood.  
I want to bury them once more.  
Agent Orange flares up its color,  
And the burning Phan Thi Kim Phuc  
runs out from the rows of names.

Black, silent,  
the silent answer for thousands of questions.  
A tiny rose lights up a sharp pain,

a letter dim with tears that someone wrote  
for his dead father.

"Father, today is my daughter's birthday. I wish you were here  
to blow out the birthday candles with her. There isn't a day  
that goes by without me thinking about you. Why, father?  
Why did you have to go to Vietnam? Why did you have  
to die?"

The rose petals wilt. Letters carpet below the Black Wall. Their  
Words flicker and bleed.

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I hear from the gloomy earth  
the sounds of American fathers  
carrying their babies in their arms,  
their eye sockets like bomb-craters,  
their hearts bullet holes.  
Agent Orange lives in their bodies. Their blood  
flows and drags their crying babies from their arms.  
Every name on the black wall sinks into my skin  
to become each face of the fallen Americans;  
Washington this afternoon,  
red sunset or tears?

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## November 10, 2021: Poetry and a Conversation with Pádraig Ó Tuama



Irish poet and theologian **Pádraig Ó Tuama**'s work centers around themes of language, power, conflict, and religion. He is the author of four books of poetry and prose: "Daily Prayer with the Corrymeela Community," "In the Shelter," "Sorry for your Troubles," and "Readings from the Books of Exile." He presents the podcast "Poetry Unbound" with "On Being Studios," where he also has responsibilities in bringing art and theology into public and civic life. From 2014-2019 he was the leader of the Corrymeela Community, Ireland's oldest peace and reconciliation community. He is based in Ireland.

[www.padraigotuama.com](http://www.padraigotuama.com)

"Probably the best public speaker I know."  
—William Crawley, BBC

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“Today, we are not just neighbours, but old friends who, tragically, have travelled a troubled road, along which many wrongs have been done. I wonder, here, whether I might quote the words of a Cork man, the poet and theologian Pádraig Ó Tuama, whom I met when my wife and I visited the Corrymeela Community in Northern Ireland three years ago. His poem, ‘Shaking Hands’ makes reaching out an imperative of leadership.”

—Prince Charles

“Putting to work poetry and gospel, side by side with story and Celtic spirituality, Ó Tuama explores ideas of shelter along life’s journey, opening up gentle ways of living well in a troubled world. The reader can’t help but be drawn in, slip-sliding into the harbor of the author’s soulful words.”

—Chicago Tribune

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1BCwbbE-uHY>

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# I was Okay.

*Kate Richardson*

The clothes were folded, given away.  
Colleagues praised his years.  
Raised glasses of scotch.

The bed lifted, carried out  
Walkers and scooters sold  
Drawers of prescriptions disposed

And I supposed that, after the early laments,  
The grief would become comfortable—  
An old, but heavy, friend.

Even the box with his ashes, calling  
Whenever I passed by, wasn't too hard  
To embrace, rest my head on, stroke the sides.

Then I saw the sock, fallen from some long-forgotten wash—  
A sock that had held his poor foot.  
Dark and soft, it lay curled up on the rug,

Like my heart.



**Untitled**, *Shayna Zabiegalski*

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# Summer Sunrise

*Jessica Atkisson*

When I look out into the horizon,  
You are never there.

How I yearn for your peaceful colors  
that gently rise through the sky,  
Lifting the worries of yesterday,  
turning them into a new day.

Oh, how I would love to greet you  
with a cup of coffee  
and some rest,  
But as a mother,  
I was up last night trying to forget.

The empty promises he made,  
I can no longer keep  
within the shadows.

What keeps me up at night  
is no one's problem but my own -

I wrap them tight,  
so no one sees; the pain.

It is time to wake up!  
The summer sunrise is waiting  
and It is more exquisite  
than you could ever imagine -



**Butterfly Wings, *Judy Angelheart***

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# Imperfections

*Richard Weaver*

For the second time in a year  
a duck has nested under a crepe myrtle  
root-bound in a large pot, its eggs hidden  
under a loosely knitted blanket of feathers,  
ferns, twine, and tangled twigs. The why is easy,  
the how not problematic, and the when  
less a guess than luck. The eggs are hip-high  
from the plaza surface. forty-four steep steps  
down to the bricked walkway of Scarlett Place  
where a raised wall rises, a hard mattress  
for those who opt to sleep out. Beyond that  
the Falls Way flows flameless into the harbor.  
Not a promising beginning. A three-foot drop  
followed by a chasing waddle after mom  
who takes the long way to water, a disguised  
blessing since she can fly and her ducklings  
are land-based lurchers. Then 44, 10-inch plops  
down concrete steps. Another 50 feet  
to a two-foot wall, and a leap, and another  
until the ledge is made and the water is six away.  
Newly hatched turtles have an easier time  
digging upward and out at the beach  
before racing to the water's edge and entering  
the aptly named gulf, blissfully ignorant  
that from a nest of 120 eggs, one percent survive.

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# UNSAFELY GRAZED

*Michael Durack*

Sheep may safely graze,  
nibble on moors, freely roam  
while we do click-and-collect,  
resort to takeaways, eat at home.

Cattle may safely graze  
and sup, contentedly ruminate  
while we stare at empty pubs,  
curse Lockdown, stagnate.

Giraffes may safely graze  
on high leaves, craning their necks  
above us sanitised mask-wearing,  
socially-distanced nervous wrecks.

Once we were proud, we walked tall;  
now half-stoic, half-crazed,  
supplicants who creep and crawl,  
our scabby knees unsafely grazed.



**Trees - Come into the Light to Find Me, *Erica Clark***

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## Contributors

**PATRICK ALLEN** is a retired CSM professor.

**JUDITH ALLEN-LEVENTHAL** lives in Accokeek, Maryland in Piscataway National Park with her husband and black lab.

**JUDY ANGELHEART** is usually focused on the moment and often forgets to take pictures. However, she enjoys capturing interesting images. These photos were all taken on her phone, which she still finds amazing. She loves to go for walks with her husband, Dimitrios, and her dog, Pudge. As we all know Southern Maryland is a beautiful place to live and take photos.

**JESSICA ATKISSON** is a mother of three beautiful girls, living in its fullest while earning a degree in elementary special education. She finds writing is her safe place, allowing her to express herself in ways that nothing else can. Others can draw, dance, or sing; she puts her feelings into her writings.

**STEPHEN MICHAEL BERBERICH** Stephen Michael Berberich is a local writer and leader of the Charles County chapter of the Maryland Writers Association.

**ZOE BROOKBANK** is a senior at Chopticon High School. She is a part of the poetry club at CHS and is very devoted to other clubs, as well, like theatre and envirothon. She has been writing poetry for about seven years, and though she intends to be an environmental science major, she definitely wants to pursue poetry as a hobby.

**MICHELLE BROSCO CHRISTIAN** enjoys being outside capturing images as she walks around sites near and far. She is a communication professor at CSM.

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## Contributors (Cont.)

**ERICA CLARK** is a CSM student that finds pleasurable peace in bird watching and listening to them talk while clouds pass by. It brings her joy to share the captured blissful moments in words or photography as an amateur.

**MICHAEL DURACK** lives in County Tipperary, Ireland. His work features in journals such as "The Blue Nib," "Live Encounters," and "Poetry Ireland Review." Publications include a memoir, "Saved to Memory: Lost to View" (2016) and two poetry collections, "Where it Began" (2017) and "Flip Sides" (2020) from Revival Press, Limerick.

**LENA HANCOCK** is a mom of two, Maryland native, and serves as the director of marketing at CSM. She considers herself an amateur "iPhonetographer" and enjoys taking pictures of anything and everything, although butterflies, sunsets, and her children are current favorites. She has been published in *Connections* previously.

**KATE LASSMAN** is an adjunct instructor of English composition at the CSM La Plata campus. She holds an MFA in poetry from George Mason University and lives in Waldorf, Maryland, with her husband and four spoiled rotten felines named Hope, Joy, Grace, and Zany.

**G.H. MASSON** is the author of five books and chapbooks of poetry, including co-author of "Simultaneous Revolutions" (PM Press, 2021) and of the chapbook, "Family Snapshot as a Poem in Time" (Finishing Line, 2019). His poetry and literary commentary have appeared in "The Evening Street Review," "Measure," "The Tampa Review," "Smartish Pace," "Free State Review," "Rattle," and elsewhere, and his poetry has received four Pushcart Prize nominations. An attorney since 2012, Mosson enjoys raising his children, hiking, and reading. For more, visit [www.ghmosson.com](http://www.ghmosson.com).

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**IAN MCFARLAND** is originally from western Pennsylvania and now lives in Grand Rapids, Mich., where he makes a living as a high school social studies teacher. His poetry has appeared most recently in "failbetter," "Right Hand Pointing," and "Vita Brevis Press."

**SARAH MEADOR** is completing her final semester at CSM. She will then transfer to the University of Maryland to pursue a degree in English and a career as a writer. She has a love for words and what they can show us about each other when we are careful enough to listen.

**MICHAEL MIEDZINSKI** is a veteran who served in the Marines from 2001-2005 and the Army from 2006-2009. He has championed the hiring of disabled veterans at several government agencies and at one point chaired a veteran support group. He's not a political person at all and cannot stand politics because he holds the view that politicians do not care about anyone except for themselves.

**GEORGE MILLER** is an author and a poet. A 1967 graduate of Davidson College, he first served his county as an office in the U.S. Army during the Vietnam War. His subsequent civilian career saw him engaged with the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, the Lockheed Martin Corporation, and later as a successful CEO of his own computer software company. He is the author of several works, including *Wrap Your Ass in Fiberglass*, a novel, and "The Bucklodge Flagstop and Other Poems."

Recently he partnered with Elisavietta Ritchie's Wineberry Press to publish "PAX: An Anthology of Southern Maryland Poetry" (the works of 13 regional poets of the lower Western Shore of Maryland), "Navigational Hazards" (Ritchie's poetry, Donald Shomette's photography), and "The Best Free Verse Ten Dollars Can Buy" (Miller's poetry, Shomette's photography).

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## Contributors (Cont.)

**WILLIAM MILLER'S** poems have recently appeared in "The Santa Clara Review," "The Flint Hills Review," "The River," "Fine Lines," and "Whistling Shade." His eighth collection of poetry, "Lee Circle," was published by Shanti Arts Press in 2019. He lives and writes in the French Quarter of New Orleans.

**DIANE PAYNE** is a full-time electronic support technician for the marketing department at CSM.

**JENNIFER POLLEMUS** is a CSM alum (class of 1999). Her work has been published in Connections Literary Magazine since 1993 and she is an internationally published poet. She was twice nominated for the Pushcart Prize in Poetry. Polhemus lives and loves in Pennsylvania.

**KATE RICHARDSON** has been a literature and writing teacher, editor, and copywriter. She now enjoys writing poetry and playing in a Baroque recorder quartet.

**MICHAILA SHAHAN** is a native of Calvert County and a transfer student from CSM, currently in her sophomore year at Regent University. She is inspired by (and misses) the culture and natural beauty of her home, the Chesapeake Bay region.

**RICHARD WEAVER** hopes to once again volunteer with the Maryland Book Bank, CityLit, and the Baltimore Book Festival, and return as the writer-in-residence at the James Joyce Irish Pub. His work has been appeared in "FRiGG," "Mad Swirl," "SPANK the CARP," "Adelaide," "Dead Mule," and "Magnolia Review." He's the author of "The Stars Undone" (Duende Press, 1992), and provided the libretto for a symphony, "Of Sea and Stars" (2005), performed four times to date. More recently, his 140th prose poem was published.

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**ARYN WILSON** is excited to submit some of her work in hopes to be published by Connections Literary Magazine for very the first time! She has always had an eye for capturing beautiful scenery, memories, and the special moments in life. Her family lovingly and jokingly nicknamed her paparazzi because she always has her camera ready to capture a moment! Along with photography, Wilson enjoys singing, playing her guitar, “Gina,” watching Netflix, and spending quality time with her loved ones.

**SHAYNA ZABIEGALSKI** has a shop at Shepards Old Field Market in Leonardown. She likes to play with dead things.

