

# Pleasures of Poetry

Join MIT's Literature faculty & friends for readings and discussions  
of poetry January IAP 2024

**Monday**

**8**

**Stephen  
Tapscott &  
Tom Özden-  
Schilling**  
"An American  
Sunrise" by  
Joy Harjo

**Tuesday**

**9**

**Peter Shor**  
"Ode: Intimations  
of Immortality from  
Recollections of  
Early Childhood" by  
William  
Wordsworth;  
"Immortality" by  
Matthew Arnold; &  
"Reply to Mr.  
Wordsworth" by  
Archibald MacLeish

**Wednesday**

**10**

**Mark  
Hessler**  
"Retreating  
Light"; "Grace";  
& "Parable" by  
Louise Glück

**Thursday**

**11**

**Benjamin  
Mangrum**  
"sort by day,  
burn by night"  
by Rita Wong

**Friday**

**12**

**Avery  
Nguyen**  
"Triptych (#3)" by  
Diana Khoi  
Nguyen; & "The  
Last Prom Queen  
in Antarctica" by  
Ocean Vuong

**15**

**Martin Luther  
King Jr. Day**  
Institute Holiday  
(Closed)

**16**

**Anne  
Hudson**  
"Good Bones" &  
"Poem Beginning  
with a Line from  
Basho" by  
Maggie Smith

**17**

**Moderator**  
"My Last  
Duchess" by  
Robert Browning

**18**

**Sandy  
Alexandre**  
"Abecedarian  
for Alzheimer's"  
by Joy Priest

**19**

**Arthur Bahr**  
"Caelica -  
Sonnet 100" by  
Fulke Greville, 1st  
Baron Brooke

**22**

**Elizabeth  
Doran**  
"Et quoi penser  
du silence?"; &  
"à toi" by  
Alejandra  
Pizarnik

**23**

**Marah Gubar &  
Kieran Setiya**  
"Blocks World:  
The Lobster" by  
Emma Catherine  
Perry

**24**

**Bronwen  
Heuer**  
"La loba"; "Tú me  
quieres blanca";  
"Cuadrados y  
ángulos"; &  
"Hombre  
pequeñito" by  
Alfonsina Storni

**25**

**Kevin  
McLellan**  
"States" by  
Kevin McLellan

**26**

**Jessica  
Ruffin**  
"Spirit Matters"  
by Peter Rose

**Sessions take place in 14E-304 @ 1:00 PM - 2:00 PM**





# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>An American Sunrise</b> by Joy Harjo Moderator: Stephen Tapscott and Tom Özden-Schilling	1
<b>Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood</b> by Williams Wordsworth <b>Immortality</b> by Matthew Arnold <b>Reply to Mr. Wordsworth</b> by Archibald MacLeish Moderator: Peter Shor	2
<b>Retreating Light</b> <b>Grace</b> <b>Parable</b> by Louise Glück Moderator: Mark Hessler	9
<b>sort by day, burn by night</b> Rita Wong Moderator: Ben Mangrum	12
<b>Triptych (#3)</b> by Diana Khoi Nguyen <b>The Last Prom Queen in Antarctica</b> by Ocean Vuong Moderator: Avery Nguyen	13
<b>Good Bones</b> <b>Poem Beginning with a Line from Basho</b> by Maggie Smith Moderator: Anne Hudson	18
<b>My Last Duchess</b> by Robert Browning Moderator	20
<b>Abecedarian for Alzheimer's</b> by Joy Priest Moderator: Sandy Alexandre	21
<b>Caelica - Sonnet 100</b> by Fulke Greville, 1st Baron Brooke Moderator: Arthur Bahr	22
<b>Et quoi penser du silence? (And What to Think of Silence?)</b> <b>à toi (to you)</b> by Alejandra Pizarnik Moderator: Elizabeth Doran	23
<b>Blocks World: The Lobster</b> by Emma Catherine Perry Moderator: Marah Gubar and Kieran Setiya	25
<b>La loba (The She-Wolf)</b> <b>Tú me quieres blanca (You Want Me White)</b> <b>Cuadrados y ángulos (Squares and Angles)</b> <b>Hombre pequeño (Little Tiny Man)</b> by Alfonsina Storni Moderator: Bronwen Heuer	30
<b>States</b> by Kevin McLellan Moderator: Kevin McLellen	34
<b>Spirit Matters</b> Peter Rose Moderator: Jessica Ruffin	35

**An American Sunrise**

by Joy Harjo

We were running out of breath, as we ran out to meet ourselves. We were surfacing the edge of our ancestors' fights, and ready to strike. It was difficult to lose days in the Indian bar if you were straight. Easy if you played pool and drank to remember to forget. We made plans to be professional—and did. And some of us could sing so we drummed a fire-lit pathway up to those starry stars. Sin was invented by the Christians, as was the Devil, we sang. We were the heathens, but needed to be saved from them—thin chance. We knew we were all related in this story, a little gin will clarify the dark and make us all feel like dancing. We had something to do with the origins of blues and jazz I argued with a Pueblo as I filled the jukebox with dimes in June, forty years later and we still want justice. We are still America. We know the rumors of our demise. We spit them out. They die soon.

[2017]

**Ode: Intimations of Immortality from  
Recollections of Early Childhood**  
by William Wordsworth

*The child is father of the man;  
And I could wish my days to be  
Bound each to each by natural piety.  
(Wordsworth, "My Heart Leaps Up")*

There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream,  
The earth, and every common sight,  
To me did seem  
Apparelled in celestial light,  
The glory and the freshness of a dream.  
It is not now as it hath been of yore;—  
Turn wheresoe'er I may,  
By night or day.  
The things which I have seen I now can see no more.

The Rainbow comes and goes,  
And lovely is the Rose,  
The Moon doth with delight  
Look round her when the heavens are bare,  
Waters on a starry night  
Are beautiful and fair;  
The sunshine is a glorious birth;  
But yet I know, where'er I go,  
That there hath past away a glory from the earth.

Now, while the birds thus sing a joyous song,  
And while the young lambs bound  
As to the tabor's sound,  
To me alone there came a thought of grief:  
A timely utterance gave that thought relief,  
And I again am strong:  
The cataracts blow their trumpets from the steep;  
No more shall grief of mine the season wrong;  
I hear the Echoes through the mountains throng,  
The Winds come to me from the fields of sleep,  
And all the earth is gay;  
Land and sea  
Give themselves up to jollity,  
And with the heart of May  
Doth every Beast keep holiday;—  
Thou Child of Joy,  
Shout round me, let me hear thy shouts, thou happy Shepherd-boy.

Ye blessèd creatures, I have heard the call  
Ye to each other make; I see  
The heavens laugh with you in your jubilee;  
My heart is at your festival,  
My head hath its coronal,  
The fulness of your bliss, I feel—I feel it all.  
Oh evil day! if I were sullen  
While Earth herself is adorning,  
This sweet May-morning,  
And the Children are culling  
On every side,  
In a thousand valleys far and wide,  
Fresh flowers; while the sun shines warm,  
And the Babe leaps up on his Mother's arm:—  
I hear, I hear, with joy I hear!  
—But there's a Tree, of many, one,  
A single field which I have looked upon,  
Both of them speak of something that is gone;  
The Pansy at my feet  
Doth the same tale repeat:  
Whither is fled the visionary gleam?  
Where is it now, the glory and the dream?

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:  
The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,  
Hath had elsewhere its setting,  
And cometh from afar:  
Not in entire forgetfulness,  
And not in utter nakedness,  
But trailing clouds of glory do we come  
From God, who is our home:  
Heaven lies about us in our infancy!  
Shades of the prison-house begin to close  
Upon the growing Boy,  
But he beholds the light, and whence it flows,  
He sees it in his joy;  
The Youth, who daily farther from the east  
Must travel, still is Nature's Priest,  
And by the vision splendid  
Is on his way attended;  
At length the Man perceives it die away,  
And fade into the light of common day.

Earth fills her lap with pleasures of her own;  
Yearnings she hath in her own natural kind,  
    And, even with something of a Mother's mind,  
    And no unworthy aim,  
The homely Nurse doth all she can  
To make her Foster-child, her Inmate Man,  
    Forget the glories he hath known,  
And that imperial palace whence he came.

Behold the Child among his new-born blisses,  
A six years' Darling of a pigmy size!  
See, where 'mid work of his own hand he lies,  
Fretted by sallies of his mother's kisses,  
With light upon him from his father's eyes!  
See, at his feet, some little plan or chart,  
Some fragment from his dream of human life,  
Shaped by himself with newly-learn'd art  
    A wedding or a festival,  
    A mourning or a funeral;  
    And this hath now his heart,  
And unto this he frames his song:  
    Then will he fit his tongue  
To dialogues of business, love, or strife;  
    But it will not be long  
    Ere this be thrown aside,  
    And with new joy and pride  
The little Actor cons another part;  
Filling from time to time his "humorous stage"  
With all the Persons, down to palsied Age,  
That Life brings with her in her equipage;  
    As if his whole vocation  
    Were endless imitation.

Thou, whose exterior semblance doth belie  
    Thy Soul's immensity;  
Thou best Philosopher, who yet dost keep  
Thy heritage, thou Eye among the blind,  
That, deaf and silent, read'st the eternal deep,  
Haunted for ever by the eternal mind,—  
    Mighty Prophet! Seer blest!  
    On whom those truths do rest,  
Which we are toiling all our lives to find,  
In darkness lost, the darkness of the grave;  
Thou, over whom thy Immortality

Broods like the Day, a Master o'er a Slave,  
A Presence which is not to be put by;  
Thou little Child, yet glorious in the might  
Of heaven-born freedom on thy being's height,  
Why with such earnest pains dost thou provoke  
The years to bring the inevitable yoke,  
Thus blindly with thy blessedness at strife?  
Full soon thy Soul shall have her earthly freight,  
And custom lie upon thee with a weight,  
Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life!

O joy! that in our embers  
Is something that doth live,  
That Nature yet remembers  
What was so fugitive!  
The thought of our past years in me doth breed  
Perpetual benediction: not indeed  
For that which is most worthy to be blest;  
Delight and liberty, the simple creed  
Of Childhood, whether busy or at rest,  
With new-fledged hope still fluttering in his breast:—  
Not for these I raise  
The song of thanks and praise  
But for those obstinate questionings  
Of sense and outward things,  
Fallings from us, vanishings;  
Blank misgivings of a Creature  
Moving about in worlds not realised,  
High instincts before which our mortal Nature  
Did tremble like a guilty thing surprised:  
But for those first affections,  
Those shadowy recollections,  
Which, be they what they may  
Are yet the fountain-light of all our day,  
Are yet a master-light of all our seeing;  
Uphold us, cherish, and have power to make  
Our noisy years seem moments in the being  
Of the eternal Silence: truths that wake,  
To perish never;  
Which neither listlessness, nor mad endeavour,  
Nor Man nor Boy,  
Nor all that is at enmity with joy,  
Can utterly abolish or destroy!  
Hence in a season of calm weather  
Though inland far we be,



Our Souls have sight of that immortal sea  
Which brought us hither,  
Can in a moment travel thither,  
And see the Children sport upon the shore,  
And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore.

Then sing, ye Birds, sing, sing a joyous song!  
And let the young Lambs bound  
As to the tabor's sound!  
We in thought will join your throng,  
Ye that pipe and ye that play,  
Ye that through your hearts to-day  
Feel the gladness of the May!  
What though the radiance which was once so bright  
Be now for ever taken from my sight,  
Though nothing can bring back the hour  
Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower;  
We will grieve not, rather find  
Strength in what remains behind;  
In the primal sympathy  
Which having been must ever be;  
In the soothing thoughts that spring  
Out of human suffering;  
In the faith that looks through death,  
In years that bring the philosophic mind.  
And O, ye Fountains, Meadows, Hills, and Groves,  
Forebode not any severing of our loves!  
Yet in my heart of hearts I feel your might;  
I only have relinquished one delight  
To live beneath your more habitual sway.  
I love the Brooks which down their channels fret,  
Even more than when I tripped lightly as they;  
The innocent brightness of a new-born Day  
Is lovely yet;  
The Clouds that gather round the setting sun  
Do take a sober colouring from an eye  
That hath kept watch o'er man's mortality;  
Another race hath been, and other palms are won.  
Thanks to the human heart by which we live,  
Thanks to its tenderness, its joys, and fears,  
To me the meanest flower that blows can give  
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

### **Immortality**

by Matthew Arnold

Foil'd by our fellow-men, depress'd, outworn,  
We leave the brutal world to take its way,  
And, Patience! in another life, we say  
The world shall be thrust down, and we up-borne.

And will not, then, the immortal armies scorn  
The world's poor, routed leavings? or will they,  
Who fail'd under the heat of this life's day,  
Support the fervours of the heavenly morn?

No, no! the energy of life may be  
Kept on after the grave, but not begun;  
And he who flagg'd not in the earthly strife,

From strength to strength advancing—only he,  
His soul well-knit, and all his battles won,  
Mounts, and that hardly, to eternal life.

**Reply to Mr. Wordsworth**  
by Archibald MacLeish

(I)

The flower that on the pear-tree settles  
Momentarily as though a butterfly – that petal,  
Has it alighted on the twig's black wet

From elsewhere? No, but blossoms from the bole:  
Not traveller but the tree itself unfolding.  
What of that stranger in the eyes, the soul?

(II)

Space-time, our scientists tell us, is impervious.  
It neither evades nor refuses. It curves  
As a wave will or a flame – whatever's fervent

Space-time has no beginning and no end.  
It has no door where anything can enter.  
How break and enter what will only bend?

(III)

Must there be elsewhere too – not merely here –  
To justify the certainty of miracles?  
Because we cannot hope or even fear

For ghostly coming on the midnight hour,  
Are there no women's eyes all ardor now  
And on the tree no momentary flower?

**Retreating Light**

by Louise Glück

You were always very young children,  
always waiting for a story.  
And I'd been through it all too many times;  
I was tired of telling stories.  
So I gave you the pencil and paper.  
I gave you pens made of reeds  
I had gathered myself, afternoons in the dense meadows.  
I told you, write your own story.

After all those years of listening  
I thought you'd know  
what a story was.

All you could do was weep.  
You wanted everything told to you  
and nothing thought through yourselves.

Then I realized you couldn't think  
with any real boldness or passion;  
you hadn't had your own lives yet,  
your own tragedies.  
So I gave you lives, I gave you tragedies,  
because apparently tools alone weren't enough.

You will never know how deeply  
it pleases me to see you sitting there  
like independent beings,  
to see you dreaming by the open window,  
holding the pencils I gave you  
until the summer morning disappears into writing.

Creation has brought you  
great excitement, as I knew it would,  
as it does in the beginning.  
And I am free to do as I please now,  
to attend to other things, in confidence  
you have no need of me anymore.

**Grace**

by Louise Glück

We were taught, in those years,  
never to speak of good fortune.  
To not speak, to not feel—  
it was the smallest step for a child  
of any imagination.

And yet an exception was made  
for the language of faith;  
we were trained in the rudiments of this language  
as a precaution.

Not to speak swaggeringly in the world  
but to speak in homage, abjectly, privately—

And if one lacked faith?  
If one believed, even in childhood, only in chance—

such powerful words they used, our teachers!  
Disgrace, punishment: many of us  
preferred to remain mute, even in the presence of the divine.

Ours were the voices raised in lament  
against the cruel vicissitudes.  
Ours were the dark libraries, the treatises  
on affliction. In the dark, we recognized one another;  
we saw, each in the other's gaze,  
experience never manifested in speech.

The miraculous, the sublime, the undeserved;  
the relief merely of waking once more in the morning—  
only now, with old age nearly beginning,  
do we dare to speak of such things, or confess, with gusto,  
even to the smallest joys. Their disappearance  
approaches, in any case: ours are the lives  
this knowledge enters as a gift.



**Parable**

by Louise Glück

First divesting ourselves of worldly goods, as St. Francis teaches,  
in order that our souls not be distracted  
by gain and loss, and in order also  
that our bodies be free to move  
easily at the mountain passes, we had then to discuss  
whither or where we might travel, with the second question being  
should we have a purpose, against which  
many of us argued fiercely that such purpose  
corresponded to worldly goods, meaning a limitation or constriction,  
whereas others said it was by this word we were consecrated  
pilgrims rather than wanderers: in our minds, the word translated as  
a dream, a something-sought, so that by concentrating we might see it  
glimmering among the stones, and not  
pass blindly by; each  
further issue we debated equally fully, the arguments going back and forth,  
so that we grew, some said, less flexible and more resigned,  
like soldiers in a useless war. And snow fell upon us, and wind blew,  
which in time abated — where the snow had been, many flowers appeared,  
and where the stars had shone, the sun rose over the tree line  
so that we had shadows again; many times this happened.  
Also rain, also flooding sometimes, also avalanches, in which  
some of us were lost, and periodically we would seem  
to have achieved an agreement; our canteens  
hoisted upon our shoulders, but always that moment passed, so  
(after many years) we were still at that first stage, still  
preparing to begin a journey, but we were changed nevertheless;  
we could see this in one another; we had changed although  
we never moved, and one said, ah, behold how we have aged, traveling  
from day to night only, neither forward nor sideward, and this seemed  
in a strange way miraculous. And those who believed we should have a purpose  
believed this was the purpose, and those who felt we must remain free  
in order to encounter truth, felt it had been revealed.

## sort by day, burn by night

circuit boards

mostly profitable & most dangerous

if you live in guiyi village,<sup>1</sup>

one of the hundred thousand people who

“liberate recyclable metals”

into, canals & rivers,

turning them into acid sludge,

swollen with lead,

barium leachate, mercury bromide,

o keyboard irony: the shiny laptop

a compilation of lead, aluminum, iron,

plastics, orchestrated mercury, arsenic, antimony . . .

sing me the toxic ditty of silica:

“Yet utter the word Democratic, the word En-masse.”<sup>2</sup>

where do metals come from?

where do they return?

bony bodies inhale carcinogenic toner dust,

burn copper-laden wires,

peer at old cathay, cathode ray tubes,

what if you don’t live in guiyu village?

what if your pentium got dumped in guiyu village?

your garbage, someone else’s cancer?

economy of scale

shrinks us all

global whether

here or there

collapses cancer

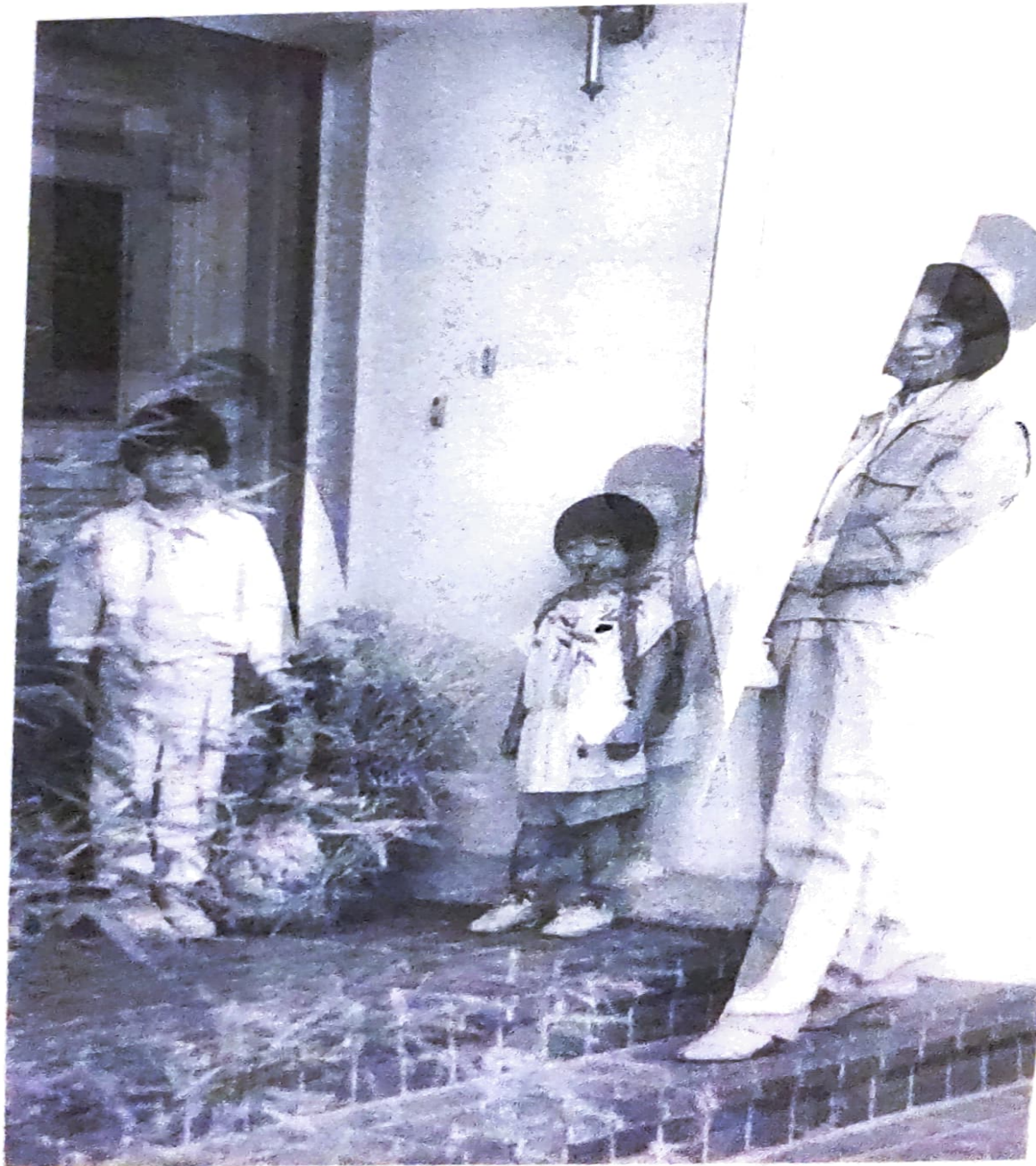
consumes en-masse

---

1. Site in Guangdong Province, China, one of the largest e-waste dumps on earth.

2. From “One’s Self I Sing,” by the famous white American poet Walt Whitman (1819–92).

**Triptych (#3)**  
by Diana Khoi Nguyen



There is nothing that is not music, the pouring of water from one receptacle into another, a coat of bees draped over the sack of sugar caving in on itself: inside the house full of teeth he remembers what a hand is, but not its name, what is its name? what name



your body: it caught fire: how glad you we  
take it off, you took yourself off, you took y  
f out, why did you take off, so we could tak  
the water? two are the ways of going: looki  
rd, looking back; the fog rolls in, folds us i  
n in it is not my choice, it is not my choice  
my choice, it is not my choice, it is not my  
you are, your hand, though we slipped you  
here is the hand not cut out, the hand into  
crumble like old bread—but where is your  
see your face; here is mine, water all over it  
at is better, you can take a brother to water  
ainst each other—what do the tides do? the  
ack, there and back, there and unless it is u  
into life unfolding life; it is not my choice, b  
theless: I feel so dry I feel myself kindling I  
ridge, I want to know its breaking point: ben  
ck, bend forward, bend back: can you reme  
someone back? end, end someone today, toda  
can be less, we can be can we be can we rage against each other can  
we rage with each other can we open the door can we cut each other  
down can we cut the door out can we cut each other can we cut it  
out; cut it out: why here I am, water on my face; I jumped into the  
water, opened up my mouth: you swept and wept within me;  
sometimes it is better, within, without, without this love running  
out; it runs out it runs out of air it runs out of it it runs it runs out of

re to  
oursel  
e you to  
ng forwa  
n, folds o  
, it is not  
—why here  
into water,  
ct, see it not  
face, I cannot  
, sometimes th  
you can rage ag  
y go there and b  
nused, it is folded  
ut it is mine none  
want to build a b  
d forward, bend ba  
mber, can you send  
y, you said, today we



**The Last Prom Queen in Antarctica**  
Ocean Vuong

It's true I'm all talk & a French tuck  
but so what. Like the wind, I ride  
my own life. Neon light electric  
in the wet part of roadkill  
on the street where I grew up. I want to  
take care of our planet  
because I want a beautiful  
coffin. It's true, I'm not  
a writer but a faucet  
underwater. When the flood comes  
I'll raise my hand so they know  
who to shoot. The sky flashes. The sea  
yearns. I myself  
am hell. Everyone's here. Sometimes  
I go to parties just to dangle my feet  
out of high windows, among people.  
The boy crying in his car  
at the end of his shift at McDonald's  
on Easter Sunday. The way  
he wipes his eyes with his shirt  
as the big trucks blare  
from the interstate. My favorite  
kind of darkness is the one  
inside us, I want to tell him.

&: I like the way your apron  
makes it look like you're ready  
for war. I too am ready for war.  
Given another chance,  
I'd pick the life where I play the piano  
in a room with no roof. Broken keys, Bach  
sonata like footsteps fast  
down the stairs as  
my father chases my mother  
through New England's endless  
leaves. Maybe music was always  
a stroke of night high in the lord  
-low oak. Maybe I saw a boy in a Nissan  
the size of a monster's coffin  
crying in his black apron & knew  
I could never be straight. Maybe,  
like you, I was one of those people  
who loves the world most  
when I'm rock-bottom in my fast car  
going nowhere.

**Good Bones**

by Maggie Smith

Life is short, though I keep this from my children.  
Life is short, and I've shortened mine  
in a thousand delicious, ill-advised ways,  
a thousand delicious, ill-advised ways  
I'll keep from my children. The world is at least  
fifty percent terrible, and that's a conservative  
estimate, though I keep this from my children.  
For every bird there is a stone thrown at a bird.  
For every loved child, a child broken, bagged,  
sunk in a lake. Life is short and the world  
is at least half terrible, and for every kind  
stranger, there is one who would break you,  
though I keep this from my children. I am trying  
to sell them the world. Any decent realtor,  
walking you through a real shithole, chirps on  
about good bones: This place could be beautiful,  
right? You could make this place beautiful.

*Good Bones (Tupelo Press, 2017)* by Maggie Smith.

**Poem Beginning with a Line from Bashō**  
by Maggie Smith

The moon is brighter since the barn burned.  
And by burned I mean to the bones—  
the rafters on the ground a whale's rib cage.  
A barn is mostly kindling. No wonder  
it went up like that— whoosh. Or should I  
question my perception? As the therapist  
tells me, look for evidence to support  
the feeling. One minute, beams. The next,  
smoke. Didn't my husband say, hardly  
to me at all, it was a long time coming?  
In this still-smoldering field, I am looking  
for evidence. How can something stand  
for years, and then—? Just like that?  
Where the roof was, all this night.

*Goldenrod (One Signal Publishers, 2021)* by Maggie Smith

## My Last Duchess

by Robert Browning

### *Ferrara*

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,  
 Looking as if she were alive. I call  
 That piece a wonder, now; Fra Pandolf's hands  
 Worked busily a day, and there she stands.  
 Will't please you sit and look at her? I said  
 "Fra Pandolf" by design, for never read  
 Strangers like you that pictured countenance,  
 The depth and passion of its earnest glance,  
 But to myself they turned (since none puts by  
 The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)  
 And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,  
 How such a glance came there; so, not the first  
 Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 'twas not  
 Her husband's presence only, called that spot  
 Of joy into the Duchess' cheek; perhaps  
 Fra Pandolf chanced to say, "Her mantle laps  
 Over my lady's wrist too much," or "Paint  
 Must never hope to reproduce the faint  
 Half-flush that dies along her throat." Such stuff  
 Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough  
 For calling up that spot of joy. She had  
 A heart—how shall I say?—too soon made glad,  
 Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er  
 She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.  
 Sir, 'twas all one! My favour at her breast,  
 The dropping of the daylight in the West,  
 The bough of cherries some officious fool  
 Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule

She rode with round the terrace—all and each  
 Would draw from her alike the approving speech,  
 Or blush, at least. She thanked men—good! but thanked  
 Somehow—I know not how—as if she ranked  
 My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name  
 With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame  
 This sort of trifling? Even had you skill  
 In speech—which I have not—to make your will  
 Quite clear to such an one, and say, "Just this  
 Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,  
 Or there exceed the mark"—and if she let  
 Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set  
 Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse—  
 E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose  
 Never to stoop. Oh, sir, she smiled, no doubt,  
 Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without  
 Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;  
 Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands  
 As if alive. Will't please you rise? We'll meet  
 The company below, then. I repeat,  
 The Count your master's known munificence  
 Is ample warrant that no just pretense  
 Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;  
 Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed  
 At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go  
 Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,  
 Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,  
 Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!



## ABECEDARIAN FOR ALZHEIMER'S

by Joyce Priest

Angel was my pappaw's girlfriend when he died.  
Back there, in my memory, I hear my mother fussing about  
condoms & *AIDS!* she is saying. *The girl is only 25 . . . & Black!* My  
daddy, amused at the irony of racism, whispering to me: *He's at his*  
*end anyway.* Angel was stripping at Déjà Vu when he moved her into the  
front bedroom & this is where I began to realize what, precisely, was  
going on: He couldn't remember me, but by then he was forgetting who  
he was too. Outside the club, next to our world-famous horseracing track,  
infamous sign read: *Win-Place-Show Bar | 99 Pretty Girls & 1 Ugly One!* A  
jab at Angel—their only dark-skinned dancer. She mystified them with her  
kaleidoscope of color contacts & quick weaves. They loved her *equine* legs. I  
loved her for telling my secret loud, for making a messy joke of him & my  
mother the way I felt they had made a mess of me. After Angel moved in, I  
never saw him again. My mother avoided his street. She could not get  
over the hypocrisy: How he'd disowned her when I was born, then made he  
promise not to speak of my Blackness, my father, to me. Buried hole of  
quiet lies they dug for years before it opened beneath the two of us &  
ruined everything. Maybe my mother envied Angel because she  
saw the truth of him out & when he began forgetting  
to hate us, to put his white hood on every day, Angel  
used him the proper way. I like to think of her as  
Veritas, the goddess at the bottom of that empty  
well, naked & holding a hand mirror. Or maybe it was me, a  
xeric un-blooming thing down there beneath them. I had, for  
years, been taught to live that way: Black, unassuming,  
zipped up in history—a disease not even progress can cure.

*Horsepower* by Joyce Priest. University of Pittsburgh Press, 2020.

**Caelica - Sonnet 100”**

by Fulke Greville, 1st Baron Brooke

In night when colors all to black are cast,  
Distinction lost, or gone down with the light;  
The eye a watch to inward senses placed,  
Not seeing, yet still having powers of sight,

Gives vain alarums to the inward sense,  
Where fear stirred up with witty tyranny,  
Confounds all powers, and thorough self-offense,  
Doth forge and raise impossibility:

Such as in thick depriving darknesses,  
Proper reflections of the error be,  
And images of self-confusednesses,  
Which hurt imaginations only see;  
    And from this nothing seen, tells news of devils,  
    Which but expressions be of inward evils.

## **And What to Think of Silence? (English)**

by Alejandra Pizarnik

And what to think of silence? - To sleep yes, and to work a few days with the dream, sparing myself silence. Must reverse the course of so many things in such scant time, take this long trip in such scant time. They tell me: choose the silence or the dream. But I agree with my wide-open eyes going toward-going toward, never vacillating from-this zone of voracious light that will devour your eyes. You want to go, you must go. Little phantom trip. A few days of constrained draw on your gaze. It'll be as always. Same pain, this disaffection, this non-love. We die of fatigue here. We'd love to offer ourselves as quickly as possible. Someone has invented this sinister plan: a return to the archaic gaze, a going toward the expectation figured by two blue eyes in the black dust. Silence is temptation and promise. Finale of my initiation. Beginning of every end. It's of myself I speak. It happens to be necessary to go only once to see if just once again you'll be granted the vision. We die of fatigue here. We'd rather not move. We're exhausted. Each bone and each limb recalls its archaic sufferings. We suffer and crawl, dance, we drag ourselves. Someone has promised. It's of myself I speak. Someone can't take it anymore.

## **Et quoi penser du silence? (French)**

Et quoi penser du silence? - Dormir oui, travailler quelques jours avec le rêve et m'épargner le silence. Il faut renverser tant de choses dans si peu de jours, faire un voyage si long dans si peu de jours. On me dit: choisis le silence ou le rêve. Mais je suis d'accord avec mes yeux ouverts qui devront aller- aller et ne jamais revenir -à cette zone de lumière vorace qui te mangera les yeux. Tu veux aller. Il le faut. Petit voyage fantôme. Quelques jours de travaux forcés pour ton regard. Ce sera comme toujours. Cette même douleur, cette désaffection. Ce non amour. On meurt de sommeil ici. On aimerait se donner le plus vite possible. Quelqu'un a inventé ce plan sinistre: un retour au regard ancien, un aller à la recherche d'une attente faite des deux yeux bleues dans la poussière noire. Le silence est tentation et promesse. Le but de mon initiation. Le commencement de tout fin. C'est de moi que je parle. Il arrive qu'il faut aller une seule fois pour voir si pour une seule fois encore te sera donné de voir. On meurt de sommeil. On désire de ne pas bouger. On est fatiguée. Chaque os et chaque membre se rappelle ses anciens malheurs. On est souffrante et on rampe, on danse, on se traîne. Quelqu'un a promis. C'est de moi que je parle. Quelqu'un ne peut plus.

Alejandra Pizarnik

To You

to you  
the view  
to me  
the months  
memory  
armoire of glory  
sullen salon of salt  
you up high  
announcement annulled  
the arc the archaic  
everything's weight  
strangles  
strange circle  
love me  
it's your play  
I say  
no one says  
nothing says  
the back of the curtain  
makes love to the wind  
I wait  
until they finish up  
living  
without you  
at dawn without you  
I see myself naked  
among the dross  
that we toss  
each to her place  
to cry  
to speak  
an absence  
to each her own absence  
I've chosen  
I've gone pure  
I drank to see him again  
at the bottom of your wine  
your cry in vain

à toi

à toi  
le toit  
à moi  
les mois  
mémoire  
armoire de gloire  
sale salle de sel  
toi en haut  
anneau annulé  
les années les aînés  
tout pèse  
étrangle  
étrange cercle  
aime-moi  
tu élis  
je dis  
personne dit  
rien dit  
le derrière du rideau  
fait l'amour avec le vent  
j'attends  
qu'ils finissent  
pour vivre  
sans toi  
à l'aube sans toi  
je me vois nue  
entre les déchets  
qu'on rejette  
chacun son lieu  
de hurler  
et de dire  
une absence  
chacun son absence  
j'ai choisi  
je suis pure  
j'ai bu pour le revoir  
au fond du vin  
ton cri en vain

## BLOCKS WORLD: THE LOBSTER

by Emma Catherine Perry

Computer, pick up the blue block

OK

we can't boil lobsters in Switzerland  
anymore not the old way the scientists  
say it isn't humane though they cannot  
say whether the lobster feels pain

Put the blue block on top of the red block

OK

we can't boil lobsters in Switzerland  
anymore not the old way the scientists  
say it isn't humane though they cannot  
say whether there is an experience  
in the life of a lobster akin to pain  
whether pain exists outside the  
mind whether our interpretation of  
sensory input as painful creates pain

Put the red block on top of the blue block

OK

whether there is an experience  
in the life of a lobster akin to pain  
whether pain exists outside the  
mind whether our interpretation  
of sensory input as painful creates  
pain we can't boil lobsters in  
Switzerland anymore not the  
old way the scientists say it isn't  
humane though they cannot say  
whether the lobster feels pain



Pick up the green cone

OK

whether there is an experience in  
the life of a lobster akin to pain  
whether pain exists outside the  
mind whether our interpretation of  
sensory input as painful creates pain  
whether the ability  
to dunk a lobster in  
a pot of boiling water  
and genuinely wonder  
whether the thin sound  
of air being forced out  
from under the plates  
of the animal's exoske  
leton is the sound of a  
lobster screaming in  
pain creates pain

Put the green cone on the blue block

OK

whether there is an experience in  
the life of a lobster akin to pain  
whether pain exists outside the  
mind whether our interpretation of  
sensory input as painful creates pain

Why did you pick up the red block

TO CLEAR OFF THE BLUE BLOCK

Gotcha. Continue

OK

W  
het  
her b  
eing dun  
ked in boil  
ing water cr  
eates pain w  
hether the ability  
to dunk a lobster in  
a pot of boiling water  
and genuinely wonder  
whether the thin sound  
of air being forced out  
from under the plates  
of the animal's exoske  
leton is the sound of a  
lobster screaming in  
pain creates pain  
we can't boil lobsters in  
Switzerland anymore not the  
old way the scientists say it isn't  
humane though they cannot say  
whether the lobster feels pain

Put the blue block on the green cone

A CONE CANNOT SUPPORT A BLOCK

Why not

A CONE CANNOT SUPPORT A BLOCK

How do you know

I DO KNOW

Try it

OK

pain  
boil  
We W can't  
Sw het any  
itzer herb more  
land lob eing dun sters in  
The N ked in boil ot the  
way ing water cr scien  
old eates pain W tists  
it hether the ability say  
man to dunk a lobster in e is  
hu a pot of boiling water ou  
the and genuinely wonder th  
say whether the thin sound gh  
not of air being forced out w  
can from under the plates he  
fe of the animal's exoske ther  
el lob leton is the sound of at  
t lobster screaming in he e  
s pain creates pain r

I swear to god, if I could do this alone, I would

Computer, convert green cone to green block and stack  
with the other blocks

WHICH BLOCKS

Stack the blue block on the red block on  
the green block

OK

Are there any other blocks

THERE IS A YELLOW LINE

Stack that too

OK

we can't boil lobsters in Switzerland anymore not the old way the scientists say it isn't humane though they cannot say whether the lobster feels pain whether there is an experience in the life of a lobster akin to pain whether pain exists outside the mind whether our interpretation of sensory input as painful creates pain whether being dunked in boiling water creates pain whether the ability to dunk a lobster in a pot of boiling water and genuinely wonder whether the thin sound of air being forced out from under the plates of the animal's exoskeleton is the sound of a lobster screaming in pain creates pain in the mind of the painful the pain-filled the pained

## La loba

by Alfonsina Storni

### La loba

Yo soy como la loba.  
Quebré con el rebaño  
Y me fui a la montaña  
Fatigada del llano.

Yo tengo un hijo fruto del amor, de amor sin  
ley,  
Que no pude ser como las otras, casta de buey  
Con yugo al cuello; ¡libre se eleve mi cabeza!  
Yo quiero con mis manos apartar la maleza.

Mirad cómo se ríen y cómo me señalan  
Porque lo digo así: (Las ovejitas balan  
Porque ven que una loba ha entrado en el corral  
Y saben que las lobas vienen del matorral).

¡Pobrecitas y mansas ovejas del rebaño!  
No temáis a la loba, ella no os hará daño.  
Pero tampoco riáis, que sus dientes son finos  
¡Y en el bosque aprendieron sus manejos felinos!

No os robará la loba al pastor, no os inquietéis;  
Yo sé que alguien lo dijo y vosotras lo creéis  
Pero sin fundamento, que no sabe robar  
Esa loba; ¡sus dientes son armas de matar!

Ha entrado en el corral porque sí, porque gusta  
De ver cómo al llegar el rebaño se asusta,  
Y cómo disimula con risas su temor  
Bosquejando en el gesto un extraño escozor...

### The she-wolf

I'm like the she-wolf  
I broke up with the flock  
and went to the mountain  
tired of the being in the plains.

I have a child, fruit of love, of a lawless love.  
I couldn't be like the other women, an oxen caste  
with a yoke to their necks; my head raises freely!  
I want to tighten the grass with my bare hands.

Look how they laugh and how they point at me.  
Because I say it like this: (the little sheeps bleat  
because a she-wolf has entered to the farmyard  
and they know that she-wolves come from the  
wild).

Poor docile sheeps of the flock!  
Don't be afraid of the she-wolf, she won't hurt you.  
But don't laugh either, for her teeths are sharp,  
from the woods they learned to attack like a tiger!

The she-wolf won't steal your shepherd, don't feel  
disturbed;  
I know that someone told you, and you believed it,  
but you did without a basis; that she-wolf  
doesn't know how to steal; her teeths are  
weapons to kill!

She has entered to the farmyard for no reason,  
for she likes  
to see how the flock is frightened when she  
arrives,  
and how they concealed their fear with laughs,  
drawing in their faces a weird grief...

Id si acaso podéis frente a frente a la loba  
Y robadle el cachorro; no vayáis en la boba  
Conjunción de un rebaño ni llevéis un pastor...  
¡Id solas! ¡Fuerza a fuerza oponed el valor!

Ovejitas, mostradme los dientes. ¡Qué pequeños!  
No podréis, pobrecitas, caminar sin los dueños  
Por la montaña abrupta, que si el tigre os acecha  
No sabréis defenderos, moriréis en la brecha.

Yo soy como la loba. Ando sola y me río  
Del rebaño. El sustento me lo gano y es mío  
Donde quiera que sea, que yo tengo una mano  
Que sabe trabajar y un cerebro que es sano.

La que pueda seguirme que se venga conmigo.  
Pero yo estoy de pie, de frente al enemigo,  
La vida, y no temo su arrebato fatal  
Porque tengo en la mano siempre pronto un  
puñal

El hijo y después yo y después... ¡lo que sea!  
Aquello que me llame más pronto a la pelea.  
A veces la ilusión de un capullo de amor  
Que yo sé malograr antes que se haga flor.

Yo soy como la loba,  
Quebré con el rebaño  
Y me fui a la montaña  
Fatigada del llano.

If you can, face the she-wolf  
and steal her cub; but don't go with the fool  
meeting of a flock, don't bring a shepherd...  
Go alone! Be brave and stand fiercely!

Little sheep, show me your teeth. How small they  
are!  
You can't, poor sheep, walk without your owner  
by the wild mountain; for if the tiger stalks you  
you won't know how to defend yourselves, you'll  
die in a flash.

I am like the she-wolf. I walk alone and laugh  
at the flock, I gain the sustenance and is mine,  
wherever I am, or I have a hand  
that knows how to work and a health brain.

The ones that can keep up with me, follow me.  
I stand in front of my enemy,  
life, and I don't fear its final outburst  
I always have in my hand a fast dagger.

The son, and then me, and then... whatever!  
Whatever calls me sooner to fight.  
Sometimes the illusion of a love bud  
that I know how to ruin before it blooms.

I'm like the she-wolf  
I broke up with the flock  
and went to the mountain  
tired of the being in the plains.



## Tú me quieres blanca

Tú me quieres alba,  
Me quieres de espumas,  
Me quieres de nácar.  
Que sea azucena  
Sobre todas, casta.  
De perfume tenue.  
Corola cerrada

Ni un rayo de luna  
Filtrado me haya.  
Ni una margarita  
Se diga mi hermana.  
Tú me quieres nívea,  
Tú me quieres blanca,  
Tú me quieres alba.

Tú que hubiste todas  
Las copas a mano,  
De frutos y mieles  
Los labios morados.  
Tú que en el banquete  
Cubierto de pámpanos  
Dejaste las carnes  
Festejando a Baco.  
Tú que en los jardines  
Negros del Engaño  
Vestido de rojo  
Corriste al Estrago.

Tú que el esqueleto  
Conservas intacto  
No sé todavía  
Por cuáles milagros,  
Me pretendes blanca  
(Dios te lo perdone),  
Me pretendes casta  
(Dios te lo perdone),  
¡Me pretendes alba!

Huye hacia los bosques,  
Vete a la montaña;  
Límpiate la boca;  
Vive en las cabañas;  
Toca con las manos  
La tierra mojada;  
Alimenta el cuerpo  
Con raíz amarga;  
Bebe de las rocas;  
Duerme sobre escarcha;  
Renueva tejidos,  
Con salitre y agua.

## You Want Me White

You want me dawn,  
You want me sea foam,  
You want me mother of pearl  
To be a lily  
Above all, chaste.  
Of faint perfume.  
An unopened blossom.

Not even a moonbeam  
To caress me.  
Nor a daisy  
that may call herself my sister.  
You want me snow,  
You want me white,  
You want me dawn.

You who had all  
The drinks at hand,  
With lips stained  
From fruits and honey.  
You who were in the feast,  
Who were covered with leaves,  
Who destroyed the flesh  
To celebrate Bacchus.  
You who in the black  
Gardens of deception  
Dressed in red  
Ran to ruin.

You who still preserve  
Your skeleton.  
I don't even know  
For what miracles  
You expect me white  
(May god forgive you),  
You expect me chaste  
(May god forgive you),  
You expect me dawn.

Run away to the forest  
Leave for the mountains;  
Clean your mouth;  
Live in the shacks;  
Touch with your hands  
The wet earth;  
Feed your body  
With bitter root;  
Drink from the rocks,  
Sleep on the frost;  
Renew your flesh  
with salt and water.

Habla con los pájaros  
Y lévate al alba.  
Y cuando las carnes  
Te sean tornadas,  
Y cuando hayas puesto  
En ellas el alma  
Que por las alcobas  
Se quedó enredada,  
Entonces, buen hombre,  
Preténdeme blanca,  
Preténdeme nívea,  
Preténdeme casta. ,

Speak with the birds  
And get up with dawn.  
And when your flesh  
Returns to you,  
And when you have put  
Into it the soul  
Which in the bedroom  
Was left tangled,  
Only then, good man,  
Expect me white,  
Expect me snow,  
Expect me chaste.

### Cuadrados y ángulos

Casas enfiladas, casas enfiladas,  
casas enfiladas,  
cuadrados, cuadrados, cuadrados,  
casas enfiladas.  
Las gentes ya tienen el alma cuadrada,  
ideas en fila  
y ángulo en la espalda;  
yo misma he vertido  
ayer una lágrima,  
Dios mío, cuadrada.

### Squares and Angles

Houses, all lined up, row after row after row.  
Squares, squares, squares, everywhere.  
Even the souls of the people are square,  
their ideas in file, their backs at an angle.  
And yesterday, I myself shed a tear  
that was, oh my God, square!

### Hombre pequeñito

Hombre pequeñito, hombre pequeñito,  
suelta a tu canario que quiere volar  
Yo soy el canario, hombre pequeñito,  
déjame saltar.

Estuve en tu jaula, hombre pequeñito,  
hombre pequeñito que jaula me das.  
Digo pequeñito porque no me entiendes,  
ni me entenderás.

Tampoco te entiendo, pero mientras tanto,  
ábreme la jaula que quiero escapar.  
Hombre pequeñito, te amé media hora,  
no me pidas más.

### Little Tiny Man

Little tiny man, little tiny man,  
set free your canary, for she wants to fly...  
I am that canary, little tiny man,  
let me leap.

I was in your cage, little tiny man,  
little tiny man that gave me a cage.  
I'm calling you "little", because you don't  
understand me,  
and you never will.

I don't understand you either, but meanwhile,  
open up this cage, I want to escape.  
Little tiny man, I loved you for half an hour,  
don't ask me for more.

STATES

by Kevin McLellen

binocular: one eye  
like a desert's horizon

or a teetering eyelash

and the other like water  
or sky with new ice

but looking in

& sleeping is at odds  
with aversion

& equilibrium

like a subterranean river  
& a disturbed

landscape

not only in relation to  
absence                      so when

i question what others see

as beautiful  
does my relationship

with beauty suffer?

i cannot read                      scales  
(say) calibration                      (say) systems

but my body understands

rain & light                      (say) friction  
the process say

to love the lines

**Peter Rose, “Spirit Matters” (1984)**

<https://vimeo.com/328429488>

“A silent monologue on the simultaneous perception of space and time. The film was constructed without a camera by writing directly on clear celluloid, and then “translated” by refilming the resulting strips on a light table so that they appear as “subtitles” beneath the original inscription. The film functions as both process and object-an interactive experiment in reading, writing, and seeing. SpiritMatters has won prizes at the Baltimore, Ann Arbor, and Experimental Film Festivals and is distributed by Canyon Cinema.”

# MODERATORS

**Stephen Tapscott** is a Professor of Literature at MIT.

**Tom Özden-Schilling** who received his PhD from MIT in 2016, is Presidential Young Professor at the National University of Singapore.

**Peter Shor** is a professor in the Math Department at MIT. He likes to read and occasionally to write poetry and has had one poem about a mathematician published in the magazine “The Mathematical Intelligencer,” and some translations of poems by Paul Verlaine published in “The High Window.”

**Mark Hessler** is a local alum with a 21S degree in literature and physics. He has worked in the US and overseas as a high school teacher, actor, and programmer, and has attended PoP for many years.

**Ben Mangrum** is an Assistant Professor in the Literature section at MIT. He teaches twentieth-century literature in English, with special interests in the environmental humanities and digital studies.

**Avery Nguyen** is an MIT’22 alum that double majored in Chemical Engineering and Literature.

**Anne Hudson** worked at MIT from 1985 to 2016 and has participated in Pleasures of Poetry since 2002. Her own poetry has appeared in print and online, including in the *MIT Faculty Newsletter*. From 2000 to 2006 she published the online literary magazine, *Facets*. Currently she works as a freelance editor and is also writing a novel.

**Sandy Alexandre** is an Associate Professor whose job and joy it is to read and also to think, talk and write about the things she reads. She strives to make literary interpretations alluring.

**Arthur Bahr** is the author of *Chasing the Pearl-Manuscript: Speculation, Shapes, Delight* (Chicago, 2024) and *Fragments and Assemblages: Forming Compilations of Medieval London* (Chicago, 2013). He is excited to combine his interest in manuscripts with his training as a figure skater and National Singles and Pairs judge in his next project, *Sheets of Parchment, Sheets of Ice*, which will explore those surfaces as sites of performance, inscription, and erasure.

**Elizabeth Doran** is a painter and poet living in the Back Bay. She has published poems in *Poiesis* a journal of the arts and communication, *Ibbetson Street*, *Spirited Magazine* and a painting in *Salamander*. She is the former manager of The Grolier Poetry Bookshop in Cambridge, MA.

**Marah Gubar & Kieran Setiya** are MIT Faculty members, Marah in the Literature Section and Kieran in the Department of Linguistics & Philosophy.

**Bronwen Heuer** is a retiree from 20 years at MIT as a member of the IS&T staff. She is an open-water swimmer and a student of the Japanese resist dyeing technique known as Shibori. In her Stony Brook University days, she wrote her dissertation on the Spanish poet Francisco de Quevedo.

**Kevin McLellan** is the author of: *Sky. Pond. Mouth.* (2024 Granite State Poetry Prize winner selected by Alexandria Peary (YAS Press/UNH: forthcoming); *in other words you/* (2022 Hilary Tham Capital Collection winner selected by Timothy Liu); *Ornithology* (Massachusetts Book Awards recipient); *Tributary*; and *Round Trip*. Kevin’s book objects, *Hemispheres* and *[box]*, reside in special collections including the Blue Star Collection at Harvard University. Kevin works as a Financial Assistant in the Art, Culture and Technology Program at MIT. <https://kevmclellan.com/>

**Jessica Ruffin** is an Assistant Professor in the Literature Section who specializes in aesthetic philosophy, critical media theory and avant-garde histories.







**POP23**



**Literature**  
LIT@MIT