

Colleen Addison
Johannah Bomster
Jennifer Browne
Chris Clemens
Renee Emerson
Laura Foley
Jessica Goodfellow
Taisa Jenne
Merie Kirby
Marjorie Maddox
Mark Mitchell
Nina Prater
Susan Roberts
Becky Ventura
Lois Perch Villemaire
Susan Vinson



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submission guidelines

Our submissions are open the full months of October,

January, April and July of each year.

- We welcome work on any subject, including and beyond works celebrating reading, libraries, and books.

- New and established writers are welcome. 18 years or

older, please.

- Please find our full submission guidelines on our website.

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about us

Professor Emerita at Commonwealth University, *Presence* assistant editor, and WPSU-FM Poetry Moment host, **Marjorie Maddox** has published 17 collections of poetry—including *Transplant*, *Transport*, *Transubstantiation*; *In the Museum of My Daughter's Mind*; and *Small Earthly Space*—plus a story collection, 4 children's books, and anthologies *Common Wealth* and *Keystone Poetry*.
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Mark J. Mitchell has been a working poet for 50 years. His latest collection is *Something To Be*. A novel, *A Book of Lost Songs* is due in Spring. He's fond of baseball, Louis Aragon, Dante, and his wife, activist Joan Juster. He lives in San Francisco.

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Susan Roberts' poems have been most recently published in *The MacGuffin*, *The Bangalore Review*, *Dovecote Magazine*, *ellipsis*, *The RavensPerch*, *The Tishman Review (RIP)*, *Salamander*, *The Brooklyn Quarterly* and *Sharkpack Annual*. She teaches literature and writing at Boston College and divides her time between the gothic homestead in central Vermont where she was raised and the busy weirdness of Commonwealth Avenue in Boston.

Becky Ventura grew up in Nebraska and now resides in Michigan, USA. She is a retired music teacher. In April 2019, she received the Dearborn Mayor's Arts Educator Award with US Congressional Recognition. Becky has two published poetry collections, *Radiant Jukebox* (2021) and *Quintessential Cubicles* (2024.)

Lois Perch Villemaire of Annapolis, MD is the author of *My Eight Greats*, a family history in poetry and prose, and *Eyes at the Edge of the Woods* (Bottlecap Press). She is a contributing writer to AARP The Ethel. Lois, a Pushcart nominee, enjoys researching genealogy and propagating African violets.

Susan Vinson lives in South Central New Mexico with her husband of 41 years, 2 young dogs, and a 17-year-old cat. Their three grown children live nearby, along with 7 grandchildren. This is her first published poem.

Little Free Lit Mag is a journal founded with the aim of publishing quality short form writing. Like "little" pockets of literary communities, we think small works can have a big impact. Our mission is to celebrate our wonderfully diverse world of writers and readers by reaching them wherever they are.

We hope that this free access publication will encourage readers to find a greater sense of connection to other readers and writers, along with inspiration and enjoyment in these pages.

We aspire to delight readers who already are aware of lit journals, and to inspire new readers and writers to discover and join the literary community. Each issue is published both online and as a PDF, each available for free.

We hope readers like you will help us bring our lit mag to little free libraries, community book boxes and beyond! Share it with friends! Keep a copy for yourself! Pass it into the hands of a kindred spirit who might like it! Please visit our website if you'd like to download the free pdf to this issue to keep, print, or share.



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contributors

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4	Johannah Bomster has emerged from a long writing dormancy ready to make some noise, like a cicada, only human.
5	Jennifer Browne falls in love easily with other people's dogs. She is the author of <i>American Crow</i> (Beltway Editions, 2024) and some other stuff, too. Find her at linktr.ee/jenniferabrowne or drinking coffee at Clatter in Frostburg, MD.
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Merie Kirby

Echo of tectonic plates

I sink into the earth where I'm set down,
mineral roots seeking community, tentative
among all the deep prairie taproots, slow
to mingle and entangle. Tectonic plates of home
shift thousands of miles away, vibrations pass
root to root through granites, sediment,
limestone, sandstone, through ice plant and sagebrush,
fir, and aspen, cactus and sunflower,
willows, waving grasses, mixed with hoofbeats,
train clatter and road noise and waterfall, and finally
the letters that reach me are so garbled and cross-written
by so many hands that the only words that can be read
say *home, home, home*, and when I write back
everything will say *I am, I am, I am*.

Jennifer Browne

Lumbricus terrestris | Common Earthworm

Eyeless, earthworms tunnel
root-paths, routes for water.
Nothing appears without
something readying its way.
Last night, I drove a moon-
bright road thought of the
other ones you've loved.
Could there ever be a word
to name what they made in
you, what they broke open?
I taste a bit of apple peel
and see the loam, the fungi,
the sun, and the worms. None of us
can last alone. Let's feel our
blind ways forward, pulse
with all those extra hearts.

Mark J. Mitchell

TIME AND THE ONIONS

For herself

You build the soup slowly. She's gone away
for mercy. She's coming home tomorrow
and soup's better that next day. The onions
want to soften, grow gold. You've just begun.
Let them melt into broth and get to know
each herb, meet the barley. A second day
will do it. They'll grow close as her plane flies
into home airspace. Let your hands defy
time and fire, while she gets tender work done
in a middle time zone. You slice onions
miss her mouth, even after fifty years,
but keep working on her welcome meal. Tears—
that's the small price you pay for all she's become
and made you. You're not crying. It's onions.

Laura Foley

Dodes'ka-den, Dodes'ka-den

Watching Kurosawa's *Dodes'ka-den* at the theater,
in the early days dating my film professor,
his tweed beret cocked, his arm in the dark
pressing into mine, mine pressing back. Strolling
through Washington Square Park after rain,
vivid park lights shine in the black night
like constellations. Like train tracks clacking,
I feel my life tugging *dodes'ka-den, dodes'ka-den*,
an inexorable rumble pulling me into my future,
or is it the sound of our unborn children, calling?

Marjorie Maddox

Poetry Reading with Drumming

-Bethany Retreat Center

Each is a beat on repeat,
the organs of voice and vision

syncopated. Tapped rawhide
alternates New Age and Ancient:

pulse of the body pa-pumming
thud of the syllables tha-thumping

in chest and wrist, ear and larynx,
cardio and poem

circling the room,
rocking the earth, in the deep

green-blue of beginnings,
holding and healing me.

Nina Prater

Balance

I like to dull the knives
and you
like
to
sharpen
them.

Merie Kirby

Cheers

to my grandma, cheap chardonnay at her side,
white over ice, and her formula for equilibrium:
if there's only ice in the glass, add more wine,
if there's only wine, add more ice, fighting
Old Solitaire, lining up her aces after dinner,
to Phil, horrified I'd never had a Manhattan,
apologizing for not having better bourbon for my first,
to Tony, making G&Ts in 16 oz plastic cups
to my dad, keeping track of stores that stock
my favorite beer and new ones I might like,
to the friends I huddled with over beer in bars,
wine in restaurants, scotch on the couch,
to Jill and Tricia, to Terri and Mark,
to Uncle George, living on in the coffee
we drink in his name, cut through with Bailey's
and Kahlua, cold winter mornings and late afternoons,
to my husband, quietly placing a glass at my side,
ice cubes clinking in single malt amber, fueling
late night sessions reading first-year papers,
sweetening the grades.

Renee Emerson

Self-Portrait as the Loch Ness Monster

I do not need anyone to believe in me.
I am the shadow beneath still water,
feeding in the depths on rumor.
Still, they do believe—with t-shirts,
mugs, photographs taken on cloudy days.
They need to hold their beliefs in two hands.
I am not afraid of them but do not
want them closer, the frantic pairs
of oars, knitting my sky.
In lightless places, I crunch bones,
the cold water, heavy as stone,
on my strong body, lithe
as the current, toad-green.
They do not know
what they are headed for.
I am the word for their loneliness
arching into the mist on the far shore.

Chris Clemens

Deep Time Pearl

Once I dreamed I was a pearl
deep beneath the blue
ejected from my shelly bed
tangled up, askew
a little push, a tiny shove
forever missing oyster's love
I try to wake, but can't - you see
pearl time moves quite differently
a hundred years or more might pass
and a pearl would never know

Renee Emerson

The Panther

A panther stalked the scrub woods
of Hickory Withe, Tennessee;
a shadow, specter, half-truth
or complete lie, like most
of what my father ever told me.

I never saw it up high in tree limbs,
on porches, prowling ditches,
down on Donelson Drive at dusk
(he swears—right over his car).

What danger in it anyway, a beast
so foreign to our settled squares
of farm and field as to be Dragon,
Kraken, Grendel, lurking
in the darkest places outside our home.
My father, sometimes a good father,
did not want his daughters to roam.

Jessica Goodfellow

New Family Order

As I reach down to shake awake my sleeping father,
his 4 o'clock pills rattling like dice in my left hand,
I don't know which father he'll be. He may startle awake,
and know me, and be my Dad—though not the scolding dad
I dodged all my life till dementia gentled him—not that dad,
never anymore that disappointed dad whom I'm surprised to miss.
Or I might lightly touch his shoulder, then gently prod it, whispering
Dad Dad, then shake it with a little vigor till he rouses groggily,
gumming the air with strangled sounds not quite words, not knowing
this room in this house he bought thirty-some years ago, not knowing
me—he might not be my Dad. In this moment, still asleep as I reach
for him, he is both Dad and not-Dad: he's Schrödinger's dad.
And I am my own stepster.
And nobody gets to be god.

Taisa Jenne

Blood Moon

Look!
Low moon.
Blood-blown.
Blooms.
Not of holly
or thornwood,
not of pond
or coy brook.
Moon of ghosts.
Moon of gold gloss.
Moon of blood on snow,
of cold floods,
of old, old worlds.

Johannah Bomster

Adam's Wives

There's a man and a woman.
A tree in a yard.
A car in the drive.

They could be any man
and any woman
standing side by side.

Back then, the tree so young the man
could wrap his fingers right around it,
and then the woman says

I'm not cutting my hair just for you.
She has snipped herself
from the wedding photos
and taken herself away.

Later the man remarries,
but this wife's no better:
she trims all the hedges too closely,
she plucks all the fruit from the tree.

You don't believe me,
the woman tells him.
You don't believe
I'm shoring up the world.

Colleen Addison

Duvet

Before the operation, I went sheet-shopping, hard to rest when all around you might rip. Already in pain, I stepped cautiously through the store entrance, my faltering feet drawn to the duvet covers. This year's themes were birds, botanicals, and all aspects of nature. Unaccountably though, I noted, the manufacturers had left out the fiercer fauna. There were no lolling lions, no hippopotamuses heaving their hefty bulks out of rivers or lakes. Certainly, there were no chimeras or sphinxes. No one, it appeared, wished to sleep in a roc's nest or gryphon's lair. As sick as I was, I understood. *Do you like this one?* asked the saleswoman, selecting a package. The sweet sedge beckoned, and I sighed.

Lois Perch Villenaire

Books Are Our Friends

my mother repeated
like a prayer
teaching us to respect
those printed pages,
fostering love of reading.
She grew up walking
to her local library.

*Don't scribble, write, or color inside
she often reminded as we placed
the pile of picture books
from the library on the kitchen table
leaving through stories and poems
eager to hear our favorites
our eyes on familiar images.*

*No pencils, pens, or crayons
shall be used on these pages.
We understood—*

except my youngest brother
who secretly scribbled
stick houses, triangles,
rectangles, and doodles
with a red magic marker
on the pages of The Gingerbread Man.

Merrie Kirby

The Fool and her dog

Only one card in the classic deck features winter: the five
of pentacles, the card of your own misery hobbling
barefoot and inadequately clothed through snow while
everyone else is snug in a building whose stained glass
windows glow like vacation photos from the tropics. But
here I am, March 15, one hour south of the Canadian
border, snowbanks on either side of the sidewalk above
my knees, a packed path of ice and snow obscuring
concrete. No wind and above zero, so it is a beautiful day.
Yes, the sky is grey and yes, three more inches are coming
our way, but right now my coat is warm, my scarf a bright
yellow plaid shot through with violet, my grey wool
mittens patched with bright blue felt, my son's knit hat
pulled over my tangled morning hair. At my feet my grey
dog thrusts his nose into snow, huffs the footprints on the
ground, stops and, listens until I hear it, too, another dog
barking three blocks away. He gives a brief bark back,
returns to the work of tugging me forward to the next
scent. We both stop and look up when we hear it - a song
blooming like a bright spring rose on a bare branch - a
robin, somewhere, somehow, at last.

Susan Vinson

Poems

*When you come back to me
it will be crow time
and flycatcher time*
-Ruth Stone, "Poems"

When you come back to me
it will be hummingbird time
and mockingbird time,
with rising choruses of cicadas
beyond the yucca plants.
The ground will be powdered,
cracked, and inviting
drifting seeds, brittle weeds.
The hummingbirds, their iridescent
bodies, whirring
toward the red blossoms;
distancing, ruby-throated;
squeaking and flashing
And on the ground
I find you stilled, stunned
the stain-glass poppy shining from the window.
In the warmth of my hand
I feel your warmth.
Resting the tip of your beak
in a shallow lid of sugar water –
Revived – you lift and dart,
returning to hover.

Becky Ventura

Taos Speaks

Taos speaks thunder-rumble and water-trickle
Taos speaks mountain peaks and gnarled sagebrush
Taos speaks buzzing fly and prickly pear
Taos speaks xeriscape, dirt, and dung beetles
Taos speaks stumps, roots, evergreens, and wind-whistle
Taos speaks green pine cones dripping with viscous sap

A robin, flying through tall trees,
chirps her favorite song

Susan Roberts

Cervidae

A deer can cause a storm in an apple tree. Watch
the old limbs tremble at the hips' dark gloss.
A deer doesn't travel far from where it was foaled,
making it easy to track: fawn to doe to buck
to shimmering tail lashed to a pickup's hood.
A deer is a kind of death: half-life of badger
or otter if winter brings too much snow.
It has its own rhythm of exchange: a quivering
insistence that violence lives just beyond
the periphery.
How do you handle them feeding on your turnips
and carrots, the lettuce you'd planned on for supper?
A deer will not yield to metal and glass: it believes
its leap will transect space and it often does on lonely
back roads. It does poorly on highways.
Once, in a pasture, I lay on my back watching a fading
day when a thunder crossed over me: bellies of speckled
brown, two of them side by side, soar across the sky
and into a stand of firs. Gone.

Jennifer Browne

Antrostomus vociferus | Eastern Whip-poor-will

Whip-poor-will, here you
are, a caution appearing
on the sill. Little corpse-
bird, the body is already
cold, and there is no one
else to tell the stories
of their red-soil Alabama
childhood. What can any
of us do but try to be still,
be safe, feathers blending
with the fallen leaves,
and in the dark, dark night,
sing the only song we have
in conspicuous throats.