

VOL 1 NO 1  
FEBRUARY 2021

# THE PRAIRIE REVIEW

grassroots literature  
& poetry



“—When the rest of Heaven was blue”  
Edgar Allan Poe

---

## The Inaugural Issue

---

Welcome to *The Prairie Review*, a laboratory for reading, writing, and publishing the works of grassroots poets and writers. The words in the pages of this magazine emerge from the inner life of our various communities — they are the document of our passions, projects, creativities and friendships.

In order to increase the possibility for authentic and focused reception of the featured material, each edition of *The Prairie Review* will showcase only a handful of writers and a single visual artist.

*The Prairie Review* is published tri-annually in February, July, and October. We engage with:

*poetry*  
*flash fiction*  
*experimental writing*  
*criticism*  
*translations*  
*art criticism*  
*drawings, paintings, photography, & collage*

The majority of our contributors are friends and members of the Poetry Meetup in Chicago, a community of readers and writers who meet weekly to recite, discuss, and appreciate verse.

For details about submitting work for publication, see the back of this issue.

We are glad you are here,

Kinga Lipinska, *Editor*  
Max Starcevich, *Graphic Copy Editor*

Contents

ART

Featured Artist: Gregory Muenzen 1

POETRY

*M.S. Maxwell* 3

The Not-Forgotten Dream

The Silver & the Sea

The Vision of the Little Jade Box

*Lenska* 7

Girlhood

Dear Orpheus

Ragdoll

*Rhianna Herd* 11

Haunted House

12 seconds of her (+me) for *Jericho Brown*

Things I Didn't Know I Hated for *Nazim Hikmet*

*Samantha Vajgert* 17

Stimulus Check

Do you feel alive or are you just killing time?

*Collaboration by Samantha Vajgert and Lisa Marie Farver*

whisper

positivity

*Margo Smeland* 21

Temperance

The Alone Place

Duck and Dodge

Contents Cont'd.

POETRY

*M. Zyst*

Hesitation 25

FICTION

Clay Piece 27

*by Lenska*

ESSAY

Words & Lines 30

*by Kinga Lipinska*

# FEATURED ARTIST

GREGORY MUENZEN attended the Rhode Island School of Design and lived for a time in Italy, then for nearly thirty years in New York City.

The subway studies featured in this edition of *The Prairie Review* were drawn on site on all of the subway trains and platforms in NYC and the surrounding boroughs. According to the artist “these works on paper are as much about the process of drawing and graphic design as capturing something of the emotional tenor of the varied subjects.”

Gregory Muenzen also enjoys making sculpture and painting, and currently lives with his family in Katonah, New York.

To learn more about artist’s work please visit:  
[www.gallarusarts.com](http://www.gallarusarts.com)

*The Prairie Review* chose Gregory Muenzen’s work for its evocative vocabulary in the expression of the human figure. The contour of the isolated forms of individuals, the principal subject of Muenzen’s drawn studies, is most often juxtaposed against minimal or even non-existent ground. The figures float on a single visual plane while their unstudied gestures intensify their contingent beauty and uniquely personal presence. It is the outstanding quality of Muenzen’s jagged outlines - their quivering and expressive fragility - that effectively sets these figures apart from all possible peripheral context and gives them a specifically transcendent and great emotive quality.



## **This Not-Forgotten Dream**

*M.S. Maxwell*

I have not seen what lies beyond this not-forgotten dream.  
This crumbling palace stands between the lies before its golden gleam.  
I have felt about in the dim light of dawn—  
I have knelt and groped in the thunderous storm—  
Waiting I have waited for an eternal sunshine,  
But my spotted mind cannot see what lies beyond this not-forgotten dream.

## **The Silver & the Sea**

*M.S. Maxwell*

Suspended by a sandstone sky,  
The silent waters come undone  
While mist and lightning collide,  
Their fantasies and figures sweeping:

A silver beast came softly creeping,  
As if its presence could pass me by.  
Silently, I began to spin  
A wicked web to catch its hidden pride,  
To wound the beast and take that shining hide.

But tenuous stars hindered my reaping,  
My web was broken, its weave, awry.  
Behold that silver beast—crashing through the sun—  
Burned with golden fleece, with diamond spurs it won!  
From that sandstone sky the silent waters guide  
My worn-out spirit's grieving, breathing eye,  
Downward to a sea whose waves are softly sleeping.

## **The Vision of the Little Jade Box**

*M.S. Maxwell*

There is a little jade box with a world inside,  
A lovely place, with mistletoe and myrrh.  
There run shining children—there run diamonds,  
Fountains run there—no pitchers broken,  
No cords bruised, or silver bands unspoken.  
Alone, by an unforgiving bosom's token,  
My own lies waiting to be opened.

But to open is to close and to enter is to leave.  
For by its heavens' writhing its sea begins to heave,  
Bleeding light, as an arrow through the Moon—  
Or the selling of a species—  
Or the falling of a house—  
Or the calling of the Sparrow in the morning.

Quiet—watch now the abellista dancer, and wait for that refrain!  
Yes, there comes a voice calling,

“How I wish I could be that dancer,  
Or the grace and charm of her eyes.  
For not some idol do I dream but for the power of the vision,  
For the power of the fragment that lies within.”

At last—some silken sorrows have manifested within the long trance:  
A shrouded cavalcade of stones and pillars,  
Their lament rides the mist—

“We cried and you did not answer  
We danced and you did not speak  
We called our soldiers and prancers  
But you turned away your cheek.”

And as those stones kept walking  
Through centuries of song,  
I wearied of watching  
Their droning go on.  
But while I stopped stalking  
That sad-hearted throng,  
I knew in my heart  
They would never be gone  
—those jaded stones approaching the dawn.



## **Girlhood**

*Lenska*

From the ground of my being  
A girl springs up  
Full of stars  
Out of the soil of my heart she grows.

And runs  
towards a hidden door.  
We are together now  
as in a secret garden,  
full of laughter and sun.

Still, I whisper: stop,  
I do not want to dwell in this place too much,  
even if we think it a perfect one.  
Lest the sanctuary we make  
becomes a glass jar  
or a moonless cage  
for us.

## **Dear Orpheus**

*Lenska*

My precious stars turned to ice and flew  
down from a darkened sky.

New. I have become what I have never tried.

I see you. I hear you.  
I am not indifferent. But

see, our beloved hilltops rise.  
Then their peaks retreat. Then collapse into a pyre of grumbled rock. Dissolve.  
And the meadows are no more.  
No more.

Another moon illuminates new and cloudless nights.  
Another sun shines in an inverted sky.

Knock softly on my tomb.  
Whisper and sing for now. If you must. Then

stay silent long enough to find that  
I am not hiding, Orpheus.  
I do not want to go back.

## Ragdoll

*Lenska*

Abandoned by her child  
in a lonely place.  
Homeland of the soul, sisters -  
how far is it from where I am thrown?

Homeland - for my displaced unadjusted body,  
my softening bones to rest upon.  
Pray - stir the summer winds; I yearn to set the sails, sisters!  
For a new shore.

Homeland, it is a dream that wakens me.  
And you, shrouding in gray smoke  
my sisters, from the burning stakes of ones eager  
for the smell of my charring flesh.

Homeland, though on the far horizon  
- I long for you with bright severe clarity.  
dark are the waters that surge and break  
yet it is here, on this land - that I forget how to rise, move my legs.  
Carry me, Sisters, carry me!



*Man on Ground*



## Haunted House

*Rhianna Herd*

You go Through the red door  
Up a flight of stairs, to the  
Library, where books lay dusting  
On their shelves, the finger-prints  
Indented in the dust  
like footfalls in The snow  
A spiders web rocks gently in  
The hiss of the furnace, for the  
Rooms are colder and darker, as  
Autumn seeps in under the door.  
Do not follow me past the elegant amethyst  
Armchair and into the room  
Beyond, where you're sure  
Xanadu does Not reside,

do not let the chill raise  
Your hair, but look out the window  
to the falling leaves,  
the maroon of dying hours and  
dig inside yourself for a comfort of a  
Warm fire that will never be  
lit in the mantle. draw your eyes

to me, opening the door  
to which you lie on the bed,  
putrid and moth-eaten

the bed you've been lying on  
for centuries.

## 12 seconds of her (+ me)

*for Jericho Brown*

*Rhianna Herd*

comet naming can be complicated,  
like the dramatic excavation of me

my excavations of her dramatic  
interstellar dust sweeps me away.

sweeping dust makes her interstellar  
t-minus 12 seconds to impact.

12 seconds until I'm impacted  
by her solar-system fingers

solar-system hands grasp hold of me  
when [frozen] she is a small town of stars

I'm [frozen] in her small town of stars  
she is a rugged, textured surface

and on this ruggedly textured plane,  
comet naming can be complicated.

## Things I Didn't Know I Hated

for Nazim Hikmet

Rhianna Herd

It's February 2nd  
and I'm sitting in the  
library, amongst the stacks.  
Outside, Day is calling  
and my head is pounding  
from the hangover that  
tastes of stale wine.  
I never knew I hated wine.

The wind plays through the trees...  
I never knew I hated wind until  
I moved to the city by  
the bay, I want to love it  
but it turns my hair  
into a jumbled mess  
and tosses my mind about...  
I like watching the wind sway drunkenly  
from the warmth of the library,  
the subtle destructions  
it pitches into the air.

I didn't know I hated football  
when its deafening chatter  
issuing from nearby screens,  
I never knew I hated the culture  
of violent play that rattles brains together  
that damages skulls and careers.  
I never knew I hated sounding so political.

and here I also hate noise  
the incessant need to have music  
in my ear, I'm tethered  
to it through thin white wires  
and I hate how I need it  
to get out of bed

but I hate silence more  
because it roars louder than sound  
it leaks under doors and makes it  
impossible to fall asleep anymore  
is it possible to both loathe  
and love?

I never thought I'd hate my heartbeat  
until it's pounding against my chest  
in the thousandth failed escape attempt  
and my fingers are seeking the delicate skin  
of my wrist to find its vapid aliveness  
as if to tell myself *it's a physical  
manifestation of your mind* but it  
pounds and pounds away and I hate  
the cage it's housed in,  
always fluttering scared.

I never knew I hated "against the wind" by  
Bob Seger until they played it at grandpa's funeral,  
my dad is driving and it comes on and I pretend  
to sleep and pretend not to hear him cry through  
choked out syllables  
*seems like yesterday, not so long ago.*

I knew I hated goodbyes,  
but I never knew I hated the lack of them.  
When you left with nothing but a text and a promise  
that *we'll still hang out* like you hadn't  
just moved away. I never knew  
I hated that part of you.

I just remembered nighttime  
I hate her too.  
She whispers inadequacies through her silky throat  
and tells me things I ignore in the daylight  
but I love her texture and her stars and the way  
she looks against a city backdrop.

I just hate her secrets.  
and envy her depth.



*Gary at the Group Home*



*Farmer During an Outdoor BFA Meeting*

## Stimulus Check

*Samantha Vajgert*

This apocalypse  
has us scaling  
the acropolis  
seeking a god  
is just common sense  
when you've lost  
confidence  
due to the  
consequences

your expenses  
rising higher than  
your recompenses  
the disillusionment  
when the condescension  
of the government's  
twelve hundred pence  
is already spent

and you haven't even  
cashed the check  
the economy wrecked  
and without a plan  
except a contact ban  
and don't forget  
to wash your damn hands

nothing else on  
the syllabus  
but this ridiculous  
stimulus  
that only simulates  
rehabilitation  
stabilization  
in a world  
full of fluctuation  
imitation  
and placating  
masturbating  
monsters

## Do you feel alive or are you just killing time?

*Collaboration by Samantha Vajgert and Lisa Marie Farver*

I remember  
when I held moments  
like reins on a wild steed  
and rode each  
unfettered wave  
until it crashed

But now  
time seems to  
seep between  
white-clenched knuckles,  
a desperate strangling grip  
whose only aim is  
to suffocate  
mundanity

Sometimes, I feel like an unworn  
sock / with all my still-locked  
potential / still holding shape / in a  
pile of just-washed clothing.

But suddenly it's  
Saturday morning  
hamper full,  
crumpled, wrinkled  
remnants  
of the weeks wash ready  
soak. wash. rinse.  
And here I am  
collecting dust bunnies  
misplaced  
forgotten.  
The dark crevice  
baseboard corner joint  
the only embrace  
I'll ever know

And you sit there. Listless.  
Longing to feel the dryer vibrate  
against you.

What does it even feel like?  
Does warmth even exist?  
It has been so long.  
Too long.

So long, she remembers how  
casual it sounded when he said it.  
As though those two words couldn't eviscerate her.

What's even good about  
goodbye?  
Nowadays  
no one knows  
the origin lies  
16th century  
God Be With Ye

We've forgotten the heart  
of everything  
now haven't we.

### **whisper**

*Samantha Vajgert*

whisper woman  
the vibration of your heart  
will fill the blue sky  
with a song

### **positivity**

*Samantha Vajgert*

be puppy positive  
we were warm  
when warmth  
was wonder full  
happy is she who  
is tickle d more



*Doug drawing in the summer on Cape Cod*

## Temperance

Margo Smeland

She spread her unconditional love like butter  
Over the burns he had from the inside to surface  
A throwback to the 1950's, when people  
Believed butter was a perfect salve  
Could cure everything from a sore throat  
To a third-degree burn over 80% of his heart  
Declared that men swallowed their feelings  
Fought skirmishes between duty and tenderness  
Those years of internal warfare to be manful  
Not knowing that once roiling, lava erupts  
Comes from their mouths like firebombs  
Leaves scorch marks on their souls  
Begging for others to keep distance

Her ashen hair is grey from the singes  
Some mornings her body smelled like toast  
The cool shower of gratitude and grace  
Brings the pink flush of compassion  
She makes bacon and hums softly to him  
Songs of love, kindness and the stars  
Knows that vulnerability is a long road  
She knows because she has walked it  
Barefoot through burning ruins  
Iron soles tempering thick on her soul  
It took her years to file the thickness down  
And without his fire to melt the remainder  
She may not have learned to have tender feet

Walk softly now  
This world has too much iron and fire  
Let the false ideology of strong men,  
controllable women  
and difference  
Burn out  
Let the winds of forgiveness  
spread the ash  
...to dust  
Settling on this earth  
Fostering healthy growth

## The Alone Place

Margo Smeland

I used to think Foolish hopes  
That "Alone" And worst of all  
Was a great place to be Lost Love  
Never needing anyone And all it's Memories  
Or anything And Loneliness  
Misery  
Never wanting more  
Than I could give This place is -awful-  
Myself Frightening  
But something Obscure  
Just swept over me  
I can't find my way out  
A realization And the shadows  
Of everything  
That "Alone" place I'd like to run from  
Where I was Just cling to me  
The safe one Like unseen cobwebs  
Doesn't exist anymore  
I abandoned it The more I fight them  
For awhile The more entangled I become  
I fear  
And now that I am back That I am drowning  
It seems distorted somehow In this darkness  
It's not the haven it used to be  
And the "me" I once knew Quiet  
Will die in this wretched place  
Peaceful  
Reminiscent  
This "Alone" place It's all dark now  
It eats away at you  
Taunts you Full of my own fears  
Disintegrates you Broken dreams  
Swallows you whole Strewn across the floor  
Like so many old discarded newspapers...  
Yesterdays news.

## Duck and Dodge

*Margo Smeland*

Altering time  
A minute stretched golden  
Into hours of soft unabridgedness  
Moments we remember  
Being  
Like breathing  
Naturally in unison  
A chorus of sycophantic seconds  
Melting the clock  
A encomium of eons  
We can touch the sun  
It's rays ageless to our body  
Absorbed not reflected  
Parsimonious happiness  
Our skin cools  
We forget the minute  
Minute in its ocean  
Of infinite  
nihility  
Construct time  
A gauge of notions  
Sense of place in existence  
Sans logic  
A mere marking  
Hour after our  
Last heartbeat  
Just another tick  
Erased  
Only held in memorium  
The sense of which  
Makes no room  
for time



*Lovers On a D Train from Coney Island*

## Hesitation

*M. Zyst*

Sharp sprint along the match strike  
see laughs float along the precipice  
One starts at reversible severals.  
Stares sometimes seek apprenticeships with scrying,  
Hallways at once also airways  
an elongated time presides over pixelation  
never expresses coinage in pocket yet mandates a slit at once.  
The slit that pries under a saggital law,  
A slit that chants between epigram and epitaph  
unlimited splinters in a single chew  
charge or posit: threaten triply  
this gusher: baroque smoke palace or translucent plenitude  
Having acted already, supplicates to time for rehearsal  
Entrapping confusion at its milieu  
pretension flagellates a prolonged sepsis  
agglutinations spat that is popcorn ceiling,  
steam criogenized a crinkle on its epidermis  
easy money sniper hesitates, money.

*This work was inspired by the style of basketball player Kevin Durant  
who is one of the pioneers of the moves called hesi or Hesitation Pull-Up.*





## Clay Piece

*Lenska*

### Crisis Context:

Writing needs to arrive and remain at tension, at strident odds with the strange tyrannical forces at work in our lives. Lift your leg when you are knee deep in the mud of the world.

### Chorus 1

- We want to be submerged, overcome. We are fatigued by moving our legs, it takes energy. Up to the eyeballs and gasping for air is who we are. Why not be agreeable about the situation?

### Soloist

- I want to stand up and breathe so I can see and speak and move.

### Chorus 1

- We don't like the idea of going against the grain. Have you ever lifted anything while standing in the mud? We would like to go with the current.

### Soloist

- This place is without a current. It is the clay of the world.

### Chorus 2

- Are you playing at Dante and setting up an infernal task?

### Soloist

- We can work the clay.

### Chorus

- We want to stay here without lifting our hands or legs or anything.

### Soloist

- I can't let go breathing.



## Words & Lines

*Kinga Lipinska*

Working with art, maturing in art, constituting my-self as subject through art is primarily a process of dissolving barriers that make practice of any (art)form in life inauthentic and thus kind of impossible.

When we write all the filters we do not want can fall away. We learn that they can be shattered. Fear must be shattered, politics must be shattered, mass mentality shattered, laziness – yes, weather also. And especially February – that long short month of tedious transition towards something more tolerable. My birthday and Valentine’s Day are in the same month, two strays in the same meteorological limbo that marks no special events. And yet thinking or enjoying or bemoaning this arbitrary cluster gives me some peculiar comfort. It ruptures the dead zone of identically gray days. It opens-up a possibility of freedom to imagine.

But the real topic of this flash criticism is a relationship - a correspondence between words and lines. Pages of *The Prairie Review* are full of words and lines on purpose. I have always felt that an intriguing and lively connection was there, between the way we use words to articulate what we experience and the way an artist uses lines to articulate essential features of what they see. Both are a means of writing the self and the world.

Notice how contours of a drawing can transform a detail of something or someone’s gesture into an essential and satisfying element; notice, how in drawing - totality is elusive, how it haunts the mind. How it taunts the viewer. By active looking at drawings, just like by active writing and reading poetry we find ourselves freed from some usual constraints. We can sidestep or even dissolve boundaries that impede a creative mode of being in the world. All of this makes life more tolerable, especially come February.

Do we exhaust our subject, whatever it might be? Yes and no. The very impossibility of this oxymoron, its inherent tension, marks a space of freedom where I learn that there is always a long way to go. Yes and no. I want to exhaust what I also want to keep untouched, wild, still to be explored. I love that about both drawing and writing. This sense of flight towards a yes and a no.

---

## Submission Guidelines

---

Thank you for your interest in submitting your work to *The Prairie Review*.

We publish three times a year - in February, July, and October. We accept submissions on a rolling basis. We close issue submissions at the end of the prior month.

For consideration for the July issue, submit by June 30.

For consideration for the October issue, submit by Sept. 30.

We request material that has not been published elsewhere. We prefer to focus on short forms: short fiction, short criticism (art and literary), and short commentaries. Maximum of about 500 words for prose writing.

Please submit no more than four works at a time. This does not apply to art submissions (photography, drawing, collage).

Email submissions to: **editor@theprairiereview.com**

*Written works to be submitted in PDF or .Doc format*

*Art may be submitted as preferred*

All submissions will be reviewed and considered.

Visit our website at: **theprairiereview.com**



**THE  
PRAIRIE  
REVIEW**

grassroots literature  
& poetry