

Volume 5  
Issue 1

# Amaranth

a journal of food writing, art & design

featuring:

Bhaskar Hazarika  
[Guest]

Scardavino

Khayelihle Benghu

Emily Krill

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

SUMMER  
2026

## Description

**Amaranth Journal of Food Writing, Art, and Design** is a digital journal that aims to connect a global community of food writers, artists, design thinkers, and culinary storytellers through sensitive storytelling. It publishes a wide range of creative endeavors and assemblages on food such as food stories, memoirs, vignettes, poems, photo essays, drawings, and other illustrative arts.

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# Editor's Letter

Amaranth

Dear readers,

Welcome to the **Summer 2026** (Vol. 5, Issue 1) edition of **Amaranth Journal of Food Writing, Art, and Design**.

Writing about food is, at its heart, an exercise in distilling our complex, disparate histories into a singular, cohesive tapestry of our shared existence. Like the subtle, cleansing scent of a lemon catching the light in a quiet room, a meaningful narrative permeates the lives it touches, with a gentle grace that allows the mind to settle into a deeper state of reflection. There is a specific kind of alchemy that happens when a writer traces the arc of life through its myriad flavors, or when an artist transcribes the quiet epiphanies emerging from the hiss and hum of a teakettle.

The creative assemblages within these pages gently peel back the surface of the domestic, revealing a teeming core of stillness—*multum in parvo*—that often goes unspoken. From the delicate lines of culinary nostalgia to the intimate lexicon of the hearth and the table, each work serves as a graceful yet sharp reminder that the soul craves sustenance just as urgently as the body.



From this sapid collection of creative deliberations on the broad theme of food, we have chosen the following compositions as featured pieces for our Summer 2026 issue:

**Scardavino's** flash fiction, "Childhood Juice: The Root of the Soul," for its playful imagination and disarming candor; **Khayelihle Benghu's** poems, "How to Make a Lamb Stew" and "Salutation to the Ordinary Feast," for their luminous clarity and razor-sharp grace; and **Emily Krill's** stunning collection of paper collages, for their vibrant aesthetics and profound depth. The interview segment of this issue features the filmmaker and writer **Bhaskar Hazarika**, whose film *Aamis* defies convention with a bold yet gentle flourish.

As you turn the pages of this edition—lovingly curated for you, dear readers—we hope you feel a lasting contentment. May these pages offer you genuine repose, leaving you with a lingering, radiant stillness.

**Bon Appétit!**

Satarupa Sinha Roy

Founder & Managing Editor

**Amaranth Journal of Food Writing, Art, and Design**

*Amaranth*

# *Fiction*



## The Empty Stage

**Huina Zheng**

She slid the meatball into the oil, like a Chinese dancer flicking her water sleeves. A lift of the wrist, a graceful drop of the hand. Her waist turned as the skimmer traced an arc through the pot, flipping the meatballs that spun like ballet dancers. Their caramelized skins shimmered with aroma, rising into the kitchen like a silent melody.

Then she transferred the fried meatballs into the stew pot. Her wrist paused for a beat, like a dancer lowering to one knee. As she poured in the broth, it flowed like the deep hum of a cello. Seasonings chimed like a triangle. She closed the lid; the gentle bubbling became a quiet chorus. From time to time, she lifted it to adjust the heat. Open, fragrance surged out like cymbals. Close, warmth murmured like a violin's sigh. Open. Close. Open. Close. Open. Close. Again and again. Seven times, like soft rests before the final curtain.

But the seats were empty. She had hoped her husband would put down his phone and notice, her son might open the door and pause to watch her, her mother-in-law glance away from the TV. But she stood alone at the stove, watching the meatballs soak up the sauce. At dinner, they ate in silence, heads down, munching. That sound of chewing was her only applause.



**Huina Zheng** is a writer and college essay coach based in Guangzhou, China. Her work appears in *Baltimore Review*, *Variant Literature*, *Midway Journal*, and other journals. She has received multiple nominations, including for the Pushcart Prize, Best of the Net, Best Small Fictions, and Best Microfiction.

# Gingerbread Houses

Leila Lois

“So, like a forgotten fire, a childhood can always flare up again within us.”

— Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Reverie*

The week before Christmas, Bernadette’s kitchen became a cathedral of flour and spices. Most nights this week, gingerbread glowed in the aga, and rivulets of fondant icing flumed into delicate tracery around the cookie spires and doorframes. Hard butterscotch melted down into amber stained glass windows, and marzipan cemented walls and turrets. The final flourish—icing sugar—powdery snow bloomed into clouds, falling over glacé cherries and nuts which glinted into the eleventh hour. The air was sweet with sugary dust, which ended up everywhere, even between cracks in the tiles.

Leah peered over the wooden saloon door at Bernadette, who pressed chocolate buttons into the buttercream sedulously.

“Dear old mum, it’s getting late. Why don’t you leave it until the morning?”

“Time is of the essence,” Bernadette quipped, the oil heater rattling like a basilisk and the grandfather clock ticking heavily beside her. Her hands trembled a little as she positioned a clutch of spearmints on the door in a wreath. “I’m making five this year, don’t forget. One for each grandchild.”

“Five? After this one?”

She answered with a look that said “I have the time.”

What she didn't say: I *need* the time. I *need* my hands and thoughts busy, when not folded in prayer. I *need* to build gingerbread houses, sanctuaries for innocence.

“I’m going to bed.” Leah returned dismissively, turned on her heel smartly.

\*\*

The fairy tale had always unsettled Bernadette, even as a child—the witch’s house made of glistening sweets, designed to lure children close. A trap dressed as generosity. Her mother had read it to her once beside the fire, where the dark-glowing sherry bottle would empty to a trickle by mid-week. This followed each of her father’s late-night returns from the tavern, where he’d slope down after long days at his drafting table, plotting award-winning edifices.

Sometimes the din he made would wake her from sleep, and just like she was now, she’d busy her hands in prayer, through the rows. Sugarcraft was also prayer.

In the end—she recalled the ending—the witch or the ogre ends up in the boiling pot and the children escape, a very unchristian denouement which she half-guiltily relished.

She’d spent her childhood hungry in a house that always had food. The house her architect father has built. Starving for something she couldn’t name.

That night, alone in the kitchen’s glow, Bernadette constructed a miniature nativity stable beside this first house. She thought about her mother’s wooden rosary, the smell of oud at midnight Mass, the weight of confession. The heavier weight of what she’d never confessed.

\*\*

“Grandma!” Her grandson David bounded in at dawn, in his dinosaur pajamas. “Is mine ready?”

“Almost, *carriad*,” Bernadette lifted him onto the marble bench top, though he was getting too big for such a gesture. She embraced his powdery scent, like sugared almonds, his safety. “Come see.”

His house was a castle this year, complete with turrets, a drawbridge made of wafers and a path of cinder-toffee bark. No cage hidden inside. No oven waiting. Just rooms replete with caramel and ginger.

His eyes widened. “It’s perfect!”

Bernadette held him tighter. “Nothing’s perfect, sweet boy. But we keep trying anyway.”

\*\*

Mass ended, and the usual Christmas Eve decorum dissolved the moment seven grandchildren spotted their gingerbread houses through the kitchen window, each child already plotting which piece of confectionary to devour first. Bernadette watched them crush the rooflines and lick icing from their fingers, destroying in minutes what had taken her days to build.

It felt right, somehow. Like absolution. A confirmation of treacle and cinnamon.

Later, doing dishes, she felt Leah's touch on her shoulder. "You know they'd love you just as much if you bought store desserts." A pause. "They'd love you anyway."

Bernadette was quiet for a long moment, watching lemony bubbles swirl in the sink. Through the window, she could see the nativity scene in the yard—Mary kneeling, the baby in the manger, the stable door flung wide open. A home that welcomed, even in the dark. Even in the cold.

When little Hannah bounded into the kitchen and asked if people who made beautiful things went to heaven, Bernadette said, "I don't know, sweetheart. But I think God loves it when we try."

Hannah nodded blankly, then bit the chimney off her house, in the wonderfully unselfconscious way of a child.

A ghost of a smile bloomed across Bernadette's face. She'd keep building. No grand gestures, just gingerbread. Just small, sweet architectures that said: *there's space here. There's enough. You can stay.*



**Leila Lois** is a writer and dancer of Kurdish-Celtic origin based in Melbourne, Australia. She has poetry, essays and short stories published internationally for publications including *LA Review of Books*, *Honey Literary Journal* and *ArtsHub*. She is also published in several anthologies, most recently *Sleeping in the Courtyard: Kurdish Writers in Diaspora*, edited by Holly Mason Badra and published by University of Arkansas Press.

# Childhood Juice: The Root of the Soul

Scardavino

It wasn't a new concoction. *Childhood Juice* came in tiny opaque glass bottles, like the homemade yogurts grandmothers once made. The label, printed in vintage typeface, warned: "*Consume at your own emotional risk. The past never expires.*"

It sold out instantly. It was bought by those who had forgotten how to cry, or to recall the texture of a genuine laugh; by the ones who felt hollow. It was the newest—and cruelest—form of self-medication.

The ritual was mechanical: half a bottle, three seconds, and the exact flavor of one's own childhood would assault you. Not a clean, isolated memory, but the full sensory broth—the forgotten language, the nameless anxiety, the smell of fear when your parents fought in the kitchen.

My job was to be a *nostalgia taster*. To test samples, calibrate their emotional profile, and approve them for sale. Bottle 9213, pale-blue label, was marketed as "*warm memories with slight notes of regret and a hopeful finish.*"

It was a corporate lie.

I drank it. The truth split me open.

I felt the sweetness of a canned peach stolen on New Year's Eve. I heard my mother's voice begging me not to tell what I had seen in the bedroom. I smelled my father's fermented breath. I felt the hot metal of a park bench as I waited for darkness to hide me from everyone.

But then the light broke through: the cereal that never ran out, the dog that never tired of playing, the purest laugh, the Christmases when we still gathered in my grandparents' house. The entire universe of a former self, condensed into ninety milliliters of liquid truth.

I threw it away. No one should drink that. It was touching the naked root of the soul.

I demanded that batch 9213 be withdrawn.

"Should we remove it because it's too *real*?" asked the CEO, contempt in his tone.

"No," I said. "We're removing it because it's too *true*."

The blue batch became the best-selling product in history.

I resigned. On my last day, I opened the only bottle I had left.

It tasted like silence.

Then, for the first time, I cried—with an intensity that had no shape of guilt.

As if the flavor, returning, had absolved me of something I never knew I carried.

As if the purest extract of my childhood could still find me and speak from the bottom of that bottle:

*“I’m still here. I remember you perfectly, even if you’ve forgotten yourself.”*



**Scardavino** is a writer born in Mexicali and currently based in Durango, Mexico. To date, his work has appeared in over 150 international literary journals and anthologies. He was the winner of the fifth Ventosa-Arrufat / Fundación Elena Poniatowska short story contest and has been selected for publication in Yale’s *Variantes* and *Fiction on the Web*. His creative output is characterized by a high degree of formal flexibility, navigating a wide range of stylistic registers and narrative structures.

## The Crying Man

Marc Rosenberg

I was young, maybe nine or ten, when my mother dropped me off at the cinema. There were matinees on Saturday and my mother had some errands to do in town. The only screening that fitted the time slot my mother allowed was “South Pacific,” a musical celebrating war’s happy moments. It was enjoying a second life. Seeing a movie on my own was the fun part, more than what I saw.

“When the movie finishes come straight out,” she told me, after she’d bought my ticket. “I’ll be waiting in the car. No wandering around.”

“Can I get some popcorn or a drink?” I asked, already knowing the answer.

“You’re just here to see the picture, that’s all. We’re not made of money,” my mother reminded me.

The theater was almost empty, it being an afternoon screening of a movie that had already been out for a couple of years. I chose a seat in the middle, the best seat in the house. Once the lights dimmed, the credits rolled and the movie began, an adult man came and sat next to me. He had a large carton of popcorn. Even with all the empty seats, he wanted to sit next to me. I knew not everybody liked to see movies on their own, or maybe he was after the second-best seat.

He had a friendly smile. “You don’t have any popcorn.”

“Nope, we’re not made of money.”

This made him chuckle. “Would you like to share mine. I bought too much.”

I really didn’t like people talking to me while I was watching a movie, but I didn’t want to be rude either. The smell of his popcorn was melting my resistance. “If you don’t mind,” I told him.

He put the popcorn between us. “Help yourself.” He seemed a bit jittery, looking from the screen then to me. I returned his smile.

We may have been mid-way through the movie, the popcorn was almost gone, when he put his hand on my thigh. His eyes were on the movie, but his other hand was buried in his pants. I hadn’t noticed him loosening his belt. The man groaned, looked at me and started crying, which didn’t make sense since the actors were singing “Happy Talk.”

“I’m sorry,” he told me, before he got up and walked out. He left his popcorn.

My mother was waiting in our car, and I got in.

“Did you like the movie?” she asked, starting the car’s engine.

“Happy talkin’, talkin’, happy talk, talk about things you like to do...” The lyrics weren’t that hard to remember and there were two hands talking to each other. I was demonstrating when my mother noticed some popcorn on my sweater.

“There’re crumbs on your clothes. Did you eat something?” she wanted to know.

“It must have been on the seat,” I told her. I didn’t want to explain something she wouldn’t understand. My mother wouldn’t believe I could make friends so easily.



**Marc Rosenberg** grew up in the U.S. but has lived half his adult life in Australia. At the University of Texas, he started a literary and art magazine, *Advent*, before setting off to work in London as an estate agent. He then travelled through Europe and Asia. Once in Sydney, he was accepted as a ‘Writer-in-Residence’ at the National Australian Film and TV School (AFTVS). It was

here he began his screenwriting career.

Rosenberg has written seven feature films, producing three. He’s worked with Miles Davis, Daniel Radcliffe and Jeremy Irons. An award-winning screenwriter, he’s taught in India, China, the U.S., as well as Australia.

Always a writer, avid reader, and adventurer, writing novels has become a new passion. Rosenberg’s debut novel, *Kyd’s Game*, was published in September 2024.

## Unamused-Bouche

**Karin Doucette**

Only businesspeople or the poor, aged, or starving can make a modicum of food seem like a feast. At the more effete restaurants, like the one we're in today, in Singapore, the lunch period is from noon until midafternoon.

In such establishments, the serving and eating processes are orchestrated to be satisfying. The restaurant's role is to please you. Your role is to reflect this, modulate your conversation, and show good manners—which include knowing when to arrive and when to depart.

If by, say, two o'clock you haven't silently laid your credit card on the table, or pushed your chair back and signaled departure by writing a cheque in the air, then you have overstayed and earned some lip twisting or eye rolling from the discrete waitstaff.

Regardless the menu items chosen, what you are there to consume are visually attractive and tasty sequences of food accessorized by lots of embossed cutlery, stiff and pale linens, few on-table condiments, and a certain acquiescence between You as the diner and Them, the waitstaff and bus people.

The theatre of lunch in finer establishments doesn't begin when you are seated. That's only when the curtain goes up on the performance.

The first act commences when the black-panted, white-shirted maître d' unfolds and lays the linen napkin on your lap. This is never done with any sexual hint.

You could be at the dentist in terms of the matter-of-fact manner the material is placed on your seated hip area. Napkin-placement is all about propriety; not a measurement of a stranger's proximity to your lap.

He or she steps away and you are left to sit and look intelligent, purposeful, yet blasé. *Tart yet impertinent*, as sommeliers with a sense of humour would say.

It feels uncouth to take *The New Yorker* from your purse but sometimes needs must. Today, this is what we do, but we hold it slightly under the table's edge so it looks unobtrusive. Our mobile phone is already face-down on the tabletop, away from restless fingers.

After a not-unreasonable wait time you are offered the choice of Perrier, Acqua Panna, Little Hampton, or San Pellegrino water. Still or sparkling.

Tap water at room temperature is what you prefer, but it is not on the approved drinks list. However, it is tempting to request a glass just to observe the body language of your server.

Your choice is served in a round-sided glass that fits your palm. We are in a humid environment and the air-conditioning is Baltic. But thirst is not quenched, nor is that intended if you won't bother ordering a cocktail, a wine spritzer, or even a muddled lemonade with gin.

Ten minutes later, you receive an artful arrangement of naan, sourdough, stick, and lavosh.

The presentation of stock appetizers is a means for bored junior waitstaff to be innovative. Sometimes breads are presented standing on their ends in a mini aluminum pail. At other times they're rolled together in waxed paper or laid on a wood or marble plate.

Today, they are arranged like unshuffled playing cards resting in a woven basket of thin reeds. Likely, a special order from The Conran Shop.

The pieces are warmed just enough. They are usually accompanied by a yin/yang of olive oil and balsamic lolling in a doll-size saucer, or a carved square of seasoned butter, or a stoneware dish of sea salt for dipping.

Here, a plated trio of herb butter, pesto, and garlic mash is placed alongside the bread.

Some ten minutes after some or all of this snack is devoured and the table is brushed with a metal, embossed crumber by a quiet, underpaid server, you are given the main menu.

Bound in dark leather with a gold cord it feels like a Mormon religious book or something Queen Elizabeth II might have used to hold notepapers.

You're a quick reader and your meal choices are always driven by the mood you are in. But today, mindful of the *mise-en-scène* in which you are prominent, you slow down and spend a demure five minutes making a decision.

This confirms to the diners or waitstaff who are giving you side-eye that the chef's well-considered choices in preparing the meal options require an equal response from you, Table 10.

What it really involves is reading, re-reading, and re-reading once more the ten or so food items listed in Century Schoolbook typeface on both sides of the papyrus-like sheet folded within the leather.

After placing your order, finer eateries offer the chef's daily amuse-bouche. It is always ceremoniously placed before you on a white plate the size of a tea saucer.

The treat could be a tiny dollop of crab on a cracker, or a teaspoon of salmon tartare topped with chive spears. One recalls reading in *The New Yorker* about a place that had served pig's blood dried into a chip and topped with sea buckthorn puree. *I mean, really!*

These mini dishes often feature ceviche, figs, miniature lardons, or quail eggs. Regardless their composition, the morsels are always fresh; always artful.

Some of us don't eat them, noting false dietary restrictions and extending effusive apologies. We don't want the chef to be peeved about our rejection so s/he overcooks our main dish out of spite.

But we are fussy as hell and most of this stuff just doesn't talk to our plebian taste buds.

Today's bouche is a mini blini resting on a disk of barely toasted bread the size of a half dollar. It's topped with a splotch of sour crème sprinkled with tiny red-orange grains of Japanese fish roe and a single blade of rosemary.

You stare at the plate.

The shapes and colors it is presenting make you think of: a Treacy fascinator, a Malevich oil canvas, and a Kandinsky watercolor. As a piece of art, this little bite is compelling and clever.

You imagine it hanging on a wall in a thin floating frame against a sand-colored background.

But it will not be munched, slurped, licked, or otherwise consumed by this guest. Caviar is just too fishy! And sour crème causes...gas.

The waiter makes no comment when she returns to your table, sees this, and silently removes the item.

Then the main meal arrives.

It comprises about fifteen pale lemon-colored risotto bullets spread alongside a spoonful of wire-thin zucchini. These rest in their own water, exhausted from a vigorous shredding against a slender mandoline.

Both items juxtapose a palm-sized square of sea bass, whose gleaming skin reflects the colors of charcoal, silver, and gunmetal. The fish meat itself is the color of smudged chalk. Overall, the protein colour palette makes one think of Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase*, No.2.

Given the ambience and tacit expectations of this space, this very small serving must be consumed slowly. Between bites, one rests one's fork on the plate and tries to look thoughtful and appreciative.

Cleansing the palate is acceptable. One, two, three sips are appropriate—and only after the meal dishes are removed. Evidence of backwash in the water glass is abhorred.

After a languorous wait, an extravagant dessert list is offered with a wink. While an order is not frowned upon, it is assumed superfluous after such an intelligent main meal.

We aren't far from Indonesia's coffee plantations so that beverage, in every possible form, is also on the menu—except for *kopi lumak*. Civets do not amuse.

The meal, the ambience, and the theatre of it all depend on everyone playing their part well. Today that has been the case.

You leave with a grin, a slight prance in your step, and a silent vow not to do this again for another year.

When you do return, you might just ask for a cheeseburger. With bacon.



**Karin Doucette** is a published writer of short fiction and memoir, and a playwright. She has ranked in international story and stage play competitions and was a Finalist in UK's 2023 Page Turner Awards. Karin also reads for top story competitions, most recently for Scottish Arts Trust. She lives in Canada.

*Amaranth*

# *Poetry*



## let us circle

**Alexandra Risley Schroeder**

house to orchard, to woods, to field, and home again

apples, walnuts, wheat kernels round

a sieve, a spoon, a dish

old apple trees their arms as embrace

walnuts ground-gathered, husked, and dried

wheat taller, straighter for having held

earth all summer, now

silken after sifting

circle of mix, bake, serve

bite & chew

puckering sweet

let us pie

## Ode to Rice: Brown, White, Basmati, Long, Short, Sticky

I have faith

in white origami food containers, their perfect

proportions. They are cranes

in the icebox making peace

between food I have and have not

cooked. I always order extra rice

because each grain remembers its swell,

the threshing, letting go.

The box's wire handle a statement

about stalks, sturdiness, the diamond

seed of beginning. Perfection was once dimples,

in cheeks, in buttocks.

Now I know

the most perfect dimple

was the space left by a grain of rice when it first flew.

We are all bound to the spaces we have left.



**Alexandra Risley Schroeder** lives in the Connecticut River Valley in Massachusetts and writes about nature as inspiration, metaphor, and cautionary tale. Her work has been published in *EcoTheo Review*, *Poetry Northwest*, *the tide rises*, *the tide falls*, *Naugatuck River Review*, and elsewhere. She was longlisted in the Palette Rising Poet Contest. One of her poems was also nominated for a Pushcart Prize. Her collection, *How to Bold While Trembling* was a semi-finalist at Word Works Books, and her chapbook, *Sea-Through Box* was a finalist at Slate Roof Press.

## Treatise of Saffron

### Jing Min Tan

warm, like a flower. a warm flower. it tastes yellow, yellow like the sun. the sun tastes like beauty, something to turn your face towards. Cleopatra's pleasure and Alexander's healing. the stories we tell about the world's making. like the monk's piety and Black Death's cure, like ancient trade routes stitched across Asia like threads of scarlet into royal carpets. it tastes like the mirage of a family tahdig, a biryani the colour of burning sunset, of light showers on the golden valleys of Pampore. it tastes like spilled blood on conquered land. it looks like the empress of spice. it must be the colour that makes us presume femininity. it smells like seasickness on the voyage North, feels like the grip of piracy, sounds like chanting in a pungent temple. to harvest one fine filament, one must prostrate oneself on the ground, cheeks almost touching. the relevant part is called a stigma, rightfully so. global exchange, global power. in the West it is intrigue. in the East it is lifeblood. in America it is anomaly, flourishing in the stolen Mojave. like everything else in that nation, it is unlikely, but possible. Pennsylvania bleeds into Khorat Province into Morocco. a pan of paella is stained crimson with an impossible history. hot summer bleeds into cold winter. the sun for both palate and palette.



**Jing Min** is a writer based in Singapore. She is re-learning the preciousness of words.

## Picking Blackberries

**Danny P. Barbare**

I go here again and again in my mind picking  
plump and juicy blackberries  
by the ragweed and Queen Anne's lace,  
hearing the bumblebee hum, the cricket  
chirp, and the  
cicada shrill in the middle  
of the day, while I'm thinking  
of the aroma of pie in our home my wife can fill.



**Danny P. Barbare** resides in the Upstate of the Carolinas in the USA. His poetry has been published widely, locally and abroad. He lives with his wife and sweet dog Oliver in Greenville, SC.

## Proof of Love

**Elaine Harootunian Reardon**

I want it to be sweet enough for you  
to swallow and want more.

Made-from scratch pancakes  
sliced peaches, maple syrup puddled on the plate.

Honey-soaked paklava, sweetness softening  
any walnuts or difficulties. Strong coffee

a chaser, cleansing the palate for more.

Scones surrounded by a moat of strawberries  
covered in a cloud of vanilla-whipped cream.

The blueberry jam for you—the fruits, indigo spheres  
picked in the cool early morning air

heated on the stove with lemon and honey  
for your breakfast.

Is it love that keeps you here, or addiction?

## Reckless June

Cucumbers ripen early  
ready for quart pickle jars.  
Clusters of green beans droop  
like the Hanging Gardens  
of Babylon. Fairy eggplants are  
amethyst jewels.

Days swing between hot, humid,  
thunder booming, and wind.  
Rain pours like a forgotten faucet left on.

Frogs, from the size of my thumb nail  
to dinner plates, call. Not the frantic calls  
of springtime, more like my Uncle Paul  
on long-past vacations,  
his deep voice chuckling  
at the dinner table, with pleasure.



**Elaine Harootunian Reardon** lives in Western MA. Her first two chapbooks, *The Heart is a Nursery for Hope* and *Look Behind You*, won first honors from Flutter Press. A new chapbook, *Stories Told in a Forgotten Tongue*, recently published by Finishing Line Press, tells her family story from refugees to assimilation. Her work has been published in a variety of magazines such as *The Common*, *Pensive Journal*, *The Galway Review*, and *Orchard Poetry*. Explore her work at: [www.elainereardon.wordpress.com](http://www.elainereardon.wordpress.com).

## Recipes

### Laura Buxbaum

Running in the woods today I heard the barred owl demand,  
*Who cooks for you?* and I thought of the recipes  
of my childhood. Mostly from *The Joy of Cooking*.

I think of my mother  
as a creative cook, but what I most remember  
are the plain and comforting meals:  
sloppy joes, hotdogs and beans.  
Every Christmas, though:  
popovers, rising lightly above the muffin tin, always  
slathered with honey butter.

She taught me to make a pie crust—the secret  
(Irma taught us) is the ice water.  
In my soufflé phase I learned  
to make a bechamel or pastry base, then add  
what I pleased, for chocolate or cheese.

When Mom went back to work, we all  
took turns with dinner. My youngest sister's skills  
limited then to burgers and easy stuff.  
Our ambitious brother created Asian dishes,  
flourless tortes. *Bûche de Noël*  
with meringue fungus and jelly moss.

I can't remember what our other sister cooked. And now I can't ask her.

Dad's special recipes. Potato bread, and Greek potatoes.  
I make them now: cook potatoes in water and olive oil  
with a whole lot of lemon juice and oregano.

Keep cooking to let the potatoes suck up the juices  
and flavor, letting the water boil down till the potatoes roast:  
puffed and moist and crunchy.

We always had dessert—why is that?  
Funny, a thing I let go of. Baked apples with cinnamon,  
a scoop of ice cream, raspberries and cream,  
broiled bananas with brown sugar.

These recipes. They hold the weight  
of memory and loss. I can taste them:

sweet

sharp

buttery

warm

burnt lentils, a fallen cake, even these failures  
offer themselves in love.



**Laura Buxbaum** (she/her) is a re-emerging poet in her sixties, living in Maine. Her pursuits include raising goats, making cheese, making music, and running on local trails. Her poems can be seen or are forthcoming in *Thimble Lit*, *Rat's Ass Review*, *Braml*, *Verse-Virtual*, *Gyroscope*, *Writers Resist*, and others. Her poetry explores themes of family, loss, love, and nature. Lately she's working to find her sharper edges and explore ways to confront the chaos and darkness we all face.

## Plenty

Chris Ringrose

Everything in the garden is fat.

Chrysanthemums, fifty-fingered fists

swollen with pungent scent,

clasp a hidden heart.

Marrow arks float on quilts of straw.

It's all too much; tight and warm to the touch,

they can hardly contain themselves.

Fur-barrel bumble bees bend the last blossoms

and swollen pods perform an earring dangle

from the broad bean vines.

All suck in the sun, lap up the rain

to the last afterbreath of mist.

Radishes bulge red in the dry hot soil,

push deeper, hiding pearly flesh in inch-deep darkness.

The cut grapes blood our T-shirts and forearms

anointing us reckless murderers of the season.



**Chris Ringrose** received his BA in English Literature from the University of Cambridge and his MA and PhD from the University of Alberta, Canada. He taught at Dalhousie University in Nova Scotia, the University of North Carolina and the University of Northampton in the UK. He is currently Research Associate Professor of English at Monash University, Melbourne, Australia. He has published books and articles on modern fiction, literary theory, and children's literature and his own poetry and fiction has won awards in England, Canada, and Australia. He edits the *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* (Routledge) and the book series *Studies in World Literature* and is a reviewer for *Australian Poetry Journal*. His latest poetry collection is *Palmistry* (ICoE Press, Melbourne 2019). *Creative Lives: Interviews with 18 South Asian Writers* was published by Ibidem/Columbia UP in 2021. His poetry website is [www.cringrose.com](http://www.cringrose.com).

## Glazed Blue Moon Cake

**P. M. Flynn**

Mix in a large bowl:

Two full cups of unbleached moonlight-like flour  
packed tightly in a ceramic cup of night-blue sky.  
(Evenly scrape across the top of the cup with a flat knife  
for consistent measurement.)

The full moonlight shaped like a yolk is sifted lightly  
over two eggs cracked into the bowl of heavenly sky,  
ova from any rainbow of chickens on the Net or  
a local grocery store's cooler section. (Before stirring,  
moonlit flour can cover the yolks like smoky clouds  
under a moon's drifting face, horizon and starry night,  
moisture risen from preheated earth, daylight and wind  
that doesn't store in a jar.)

Melt a stick of unsalted butter like yellow leaves sliding  
from a Ginkgo Biloba tree, the leaves pooling  
on the ground; milky butter churned after pasture flowers  
and hills become mountain streams.

Add a tablespoon of baking powder like snow powdered  
with an air of contentment mixed from bicarbonate,  
cornstarch and acid rising from inside your heart,  
emotion that influences both day and night dreams.

Next, add a few drops of blue food dye, Brilliant Blue or Indigo Carmine, to deepen the color of night, and then add a tablespoon of vanilla extract from Madagascar's vanilla orchids only planted in moonlight.

Also, add 1/2 cup of churned milk of human kindness, butter sourcing immunity, sunshine and a life lived well. Stir until smooth and bake in a Bundt pan at 325 degrees for 30-35 minutes with a sincere desire for a better world, or until the crust is a crisp golden brown. Place the cake on a large plate, allowing its flavor to deepen.

Finally, drizzle a thick soup of milk and sugar twirled like cotton candy brushed over the cake, allowing icing to flow over, onto the plate as the night air cools.

## **Acoustic Coffee**

Clouds pushed away are not music  
to the blue eyes of songs played  
in a yellow cafe where glass and  
metal doors are open for business.

Outside: trees like men and women,  
filter in; a sky of faces seeking warmth  
from winter's cold air.

Inside: foam cushioned chairs are roads  
slipped under wooden tables accommodating  
city streets or country roads, or seat  
the occasional silence of book pages.

In here: songs drift between four walls:  
conversation that floats, drags, scrapes  
or shuffles across a dark gray floor.

Brewed today's dilute the many aromas  
of fluorescent laughter poured inside  
Solo cups wrapped in the corrugated  
cardboard that insulates tomorrow.



**P. M. Flynn** roasts organic, fair trade coffee for roanokeroasting.com as often as he can and bakes cookies with his wife. Flynn is published in *Helen Literary Magazine*, *the Fictional Café*, *Main Street Rag*, the Grassroots Women's Project, *Pure Slush Books*, *Anti-Heroic Chic*, *50 Haikus*, *Fleas on the Dog Online Quarterly*, *CactiFur*, *Agape Review*, *BlazeVox*, *Words & Whispers*, *Straylight*, *Stickman Review*, *Aromatica Poetica*, *A New Ulster*, *The Gilded Weathervane*, *Blue Unicorn*, *the Mythic Circle*, *the Lake Literary Journal*, *Dodging the Rain*, *Plainsongs*, *Fresh Words*, etc. Resource Publications published his first book, *Shadows on Moss*. He holds a BS in English from East Carolina University and an AAS in Business Computer Programming from College of the Albemarle.

## Tasting Eternity

### Nolo Segundo

My old friend and I went to a restaurant for lunch, a ramshackle little place, but my friend told me the food was great—and it was! Three different chicken curries, a lovely lamb curry, and a half-dozen veggies, and mango drinks to wash it down.

I suppose we visited the buffet more times than we should have but we were talking philosophy as we always did when we got together and speaking of God and the soul and the meaning of life really can make you hungry—then my friend said he believed in God but had trouble with Eternity—it seemed scary, terrifying even to think of time going on forever, endlessly, a road never ending.

I laughed a little, then smiled at my old friend—‘THIS is eternity!’ I told him, ‘Right now, this moment as we eat this delicious curry and try to figure out the meaning of our existence’. I swallowed a mouthful of lamb korma and laughed again—‘wherever we exist is eternity, and we always exist somewhere, and time is an illusion, time does not exist, except as a moment’—And the next moment, I asked him if he had room for the rice pudding....



**Nolo Segundo** is the pen name of a retired teacher [America, Japan, Taiwan, Cambodia] who became a published poet in his 8<sup>th</sup> decade in over 260 literary journals in 21 countries, was nominated for the Pushcart Prize, thrice for Best of the Net, and has 3 collections published in paperback by Cyberwit.net: *The Enormity of Existence*; *Of Ether and Earth*; and *Soul Songs*. These titles reflect an awareness gained in 1971 when he had an NDE whilst nearly drowning: that he has—he *is*—a consciousness predating birth and surviving death, what poets since Plato have called the soul.

## how to lose the appetite

### for knives

**Margaret Owen Ruckert**

sour colours the age  
a vat of green grapes  
cursing each other  
one bitter coffee  
damning the barista  
the natural atrophy  
of those eating in  
who scrape pots  
of nursery rhymes  
nine days old

or those eating out  
persons with appetites  
for poison's jab  
making a meal  
out of jealousy and fear  
scones with gossip  
lips insensitive  
to the delicate whites  
of regional teashops  
their fine-leaf curtains

the history of vinegar  
begins at home  
relationships can curdle  
from the cradle  
but food brings rewards

a warmth—lovers huddle  
at the smallest of tables  
spill their grievances  
over afternoon tea  
flower-handle knives



**Margaret (Margo) Owen Ruckert** is a prize-winning poet, with a wide variety of poetry published in Australia, as well as America, England, and New Zealand. She is the winner of the 2023 National Writing Competition for Poetry, hosted by the Society of Women Writers, NSW. Two books *You Deserve Dessert* and *musefood* explore café culture. Five books of tanka explore landscape through ekphrasis. A former Science lecturer, hers is a wide canvas—from chromosomes to cakes and cucumbers. As Facilitator of a community writing group in Sydney, Australia, she presents monthly writing workshops.

## Staying Steady

### Drema Drudge

Greeted upon entering,  
hailed upon leaving,  
at the coffee shop.

Small town poetry  
is a pot of soup  
made of fall vegetables  
whispering all morning:  
cabbage, potatoes,  
a can of last year's tomatoes.  
Carrots, and, unexpectedly,  
one diced sweet potato.

I sprinkle in cayenne and cinnamon.  
That's my contribution.

## Well Fed

Sit at this weathered oak table  
on the patio.

Let me see what's in  
my red Dutch oven today.

Lid, heavy, but it's my pleasure  
to take it off and set it to the side.

You can't help but come inside.

On offer:

Oversized chicken thighs,  
slow roasted with  
onions, garlic, carrots,  
rosemary, thyme.

Tomatoes, easily crushed with  
the weight of  
my anticipation  
of your eager lips  
grasping the utensil.

Scoop it over  
rice swollen with  
my love  
and pride.

Let me offer you  
affection  
by the forkful.

Just say when.



**Drema Drudge** is a novelist and poet whose work appears in *The Louisville Review*, *Suspended Magazine*, and *The Tulane Review*. Her poem “Mutual Mass” received a Pushcart Prize nomination. Her poetry manuscript *Waxing the Parasitical Muse* was longlisted for the 2025 Idaho Prize for Poetry, and *Look, I Built a Cathedral* was longlisted for the 2025 C&R Press Awards. Another manuscript was recently named a semifinalist in the Nine Syllables Press Chapbook Contest through the Boutelle-Day Poetry Center at Smith College.

## Coffee (on the prairie)

**Jeremy Nathan Marks**

The only thing visible  
behind the white chasuble  
of the blizzard was a woman  
braving the snow to secure  
something, anything for  
the iron pot since there  
was nothing in her  
cupboard

Not even sod.



**Jeremy Nathan Marks** lives in Canada. His recent poetry and fiction appeared in *The Medley*, *Studio One*, *Wilderness House*, *Down in the Dirt*, *Red Fern*, *Eunoia Review*, and the anthology, *Signs & Revelations*.

## How to Make a Lamb Stew

### Khayelihle Benghu

Start with a lamb that never learned  
how sharp the world can be.  
Cube its tenderness carefully  
not to wound it,  
only to understand it better.

In a heavy pot, place your sorrow.  
Brown it until it stops pretending  
to be something else.  
Add onions for honesty,  
carrots for what you hoped would grow,  
and potatoes for the weight  
you've carried quietly.

Pour in broth  
the kind made from memories  
that took hours to soften.  
Season with thyme,  
because time is what heals,  
and thyme is what reminds you  
healing has a flavour.

Let it simmer.  
Let it whisper.  
Let it tell you all the things  
you were not ready to hear  
when you were rushing through your days  
as if your heart weren't heavy.

Stir only when you must.  
Some truths rise on their own.  
Some settle at the bottom  
no matter how much you try to lift them.

When the stew is tender,  
taste it, not for salt,  
but for the ache that has finally eased.  
Serve hot,  
to the people who stayed  
even when you were boiling over.

And when you take your first spoonful,  
remember:  
this recipe is not about lamb.  
It is about the way you learned  
to feed yourself again.

## **Salutation to the Ordinary Feast**

Inside the quiet kitchen hum,  
where steam curls like a whispered hymn,  
food becomes a small salvation  
a soft reminder of being human.

A tomato, split open,  
bleeds its sun-red memory into the bowl.  
Garlic crushes beneath the blade,

releasing the ghost of every meal  
my grandaunt ever made.

Rice clicks like tiny bones of the earth,  
swelling with patient heat.

Bread rises with the confidence  
of something that knows  
it is loved.

And when the plate arrives  
colour, warmth, fragrance  
it is more than hunger relinquished  
It is comfort learning my name,  
it is joy sitting beside me,  
it is the world saying,  
Here, take this and live.



**Khayelihle Benghu** is an emerging author, poet, essayist, and dedicated nurse based in Johannesburg, South Africa. Her work blends everyday rhythms with lyrical reflection, often weaving prose and poetry into hybrid forms that explore memory, resilience, and communal love. Khaye's writing spans poetry, fiction, translation, and activist essays, with a focus on disability advocacy, social justice, and the transformative power of language.

Full . . .

**Jeanice Eagan Davis**

Such a simple word, and yet  
it flings me back in time  
to a Chinese restaurant  
whose name I can't recall  
despite it being our favorite  
place to get takeout;  
paper buckets of fried rice  
and sweet and sour  
which we took down  
to the riverwalk to eat—

although it wasn't really safe there;  
but we were young and reckless  
unaware of the need to be aware  
to keep our eyes open . . .

We loved to watch the lights  
reflected on the water  
and dream about tomorrow  
when we'd no longer live here  
near this river winding through  
this city, and out into the open plains—  
which were leading us anywhere but there.

We'd sit on a cement bench;  
and talk and talk—making plans  
dipping chopsticks into containers.  
The food was good, life was good—  
and we were full.

## Kitchen Circus: Mama Makes Soup

The rules slip sideways  
off the recipe page

my mother stands  
in the kitchen  
a paring knife in her hand

she never had a cutting board  
instead, she cut everything  
mid-air

her fingers, curled and crooked  
adept equilibrists, peel potatoes  
skins ribboning  
in a continuous  
curled  
line

next she balances  
before an iron pot  
fingers posed above it  
a circus ringmaster ready to conduct

and then  
with swift, precise flips of her wrist  
chunks of potato  
onion, parsnip  
and carrot  
cascade  
acrobats falling  
with veracity  
into the bubbling net  
of the black stew pot.



**Jeanice Eagan Davis** is a poet, writer, and educator from the Great Plains of Kansas. Her poetry leans towards the natural world, but it is always casting a sideways glance at the way humans move within or away from nature. She has works published in various literary publications, including *Cantos: A Literary Arts Journal*, *The Talon Literary Journal*, and *The Stafford Challenge 2024-25 Anthology*.

## **Dandelion is a Lettuce**

**Terry Trowbridge**

No, really.

Taste the flower.

Take a big yellow bite  
and consider the taste  
of the yellow.

Edible this whole time,  
this yard colonizer is a bitter romaine  
or a lightly earth-scented arugula.

Direct sunlight  
can even grow the leaves  
broad and almost sweet,  
as if the taste of sunlight  
were salad greens;  
as if the stems prop up  
ebullient brilliant  
pompom blonde aurorae.

## **With That, a Food Disappears from Our Menus**

An iceberg lettuce is cold heft in my hand.  
Not cold enough.

The shadowy sepsis of lettuce leaves,  
with their arteries and veins unthreading,

transports heads from crispers to compost crypts.

The TV news reports inflation has made lettuce too expensive.

The cost of living outpaces refrigeration technology.

Entropy outraces the currents of irrigation.

Celery might be next. The stalk market is heating up.



A Canadian writer, farmer, sociolegal researcher **Terry Trowbridge** has been published in over 150 journals, zines, and chapbooks. He is grateful to the Ontario Arts Council for writing grants during the polycrisis.

## In Praise of Pot Roast

Claire Poole

I still remember the vessel  
my mother used to cook in.

Stone metal gray with a dent  
on the side, beaten up  
like it had been through a war.

She would often bang  
the pans around in anger.

Inside she placed the roast,  
white ribbons of fat ran through  
a red hunk of meat, like rivers

traveling to some distant land.

She surrounded it with cut-up

carrots, potatoes and celery,  
maybe, a pinch of garlic powder  
if she felt daring. Then she would

sprinkle the beef with onion  
soup mix that looked very much

like the sand in Galveston, where we  
rented a house every summer, and top  
with store-bought cream of mushroom soup.

The scent of roasting meat would fill every  
inch of the house. My young mouth  
watered in anticipation of the meal.  
Years later, my niece asked  
for the recipe. I frantically filed  
through my mother's tin box, some of the cards  
with unknown substances on them,  
and her cookbooks, dog-eared  
and stained, too. But no, the recipe was  
lost forever. I could feel the shame  
of her absent gaze. "Oh honey, what have  
you gone and done?" she would have asked.



**Claire Poole** lives in Houston. In 2023 she won the Writers' League of Texas Manuscript Contest in historical fiction with her novella *Piano Girl*. Her poetry has appeared in *Pulse*, *The Write Launch*, *The Bayou Review*, and *Equinox* as well as *Amaranth Journal of Food Writing, Art, and Design* ("The Grapefruit"). Her essay "The Blue Cane" was published in *Synkroniziti*. She is currently writing a memoir about her stroke recovery.

## How to Leave a Room

### Christian Hanz Lozada

This is how you leave the room of someone dying:  
Don't. Just sit there and watch them finish  
the cold hash browns, toast, and one over-easy egg  
from *Denny's* because you can't replicate  
the years of grease in your kitchen.

Just sit there and hear the same stories you heard  
before and the stories you were in the room for  
when they happened. Just sit there and let sisters  
and nurses wait outside until the dying say you can leave  
or they fall asleep. Even then, you can leave  
only if you're sure it's just a deep sleep.



**Christian Hanz Lozada's** (he/him) near-accolades include two Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net nominations, runner up in the Blossom Contest for BIPOC writers, and almost dated Super Bowl halftime star Jessica Alba (if an initiated conversation counts). He wrote the poetry collection *He's a Color, Until He's Not*. His poetry has been published worldwide, including in *Bamboo Ridge*, *Cordite Poetry Review*, and *Emerson Review*. Christian has featured at the Autry Museum and Beyond Baroque. He lives in San Pedro, CA and uses his MFA to teach his neighbors and their kids at Los Angeles Harbor College.



# Collages

Emily Krill



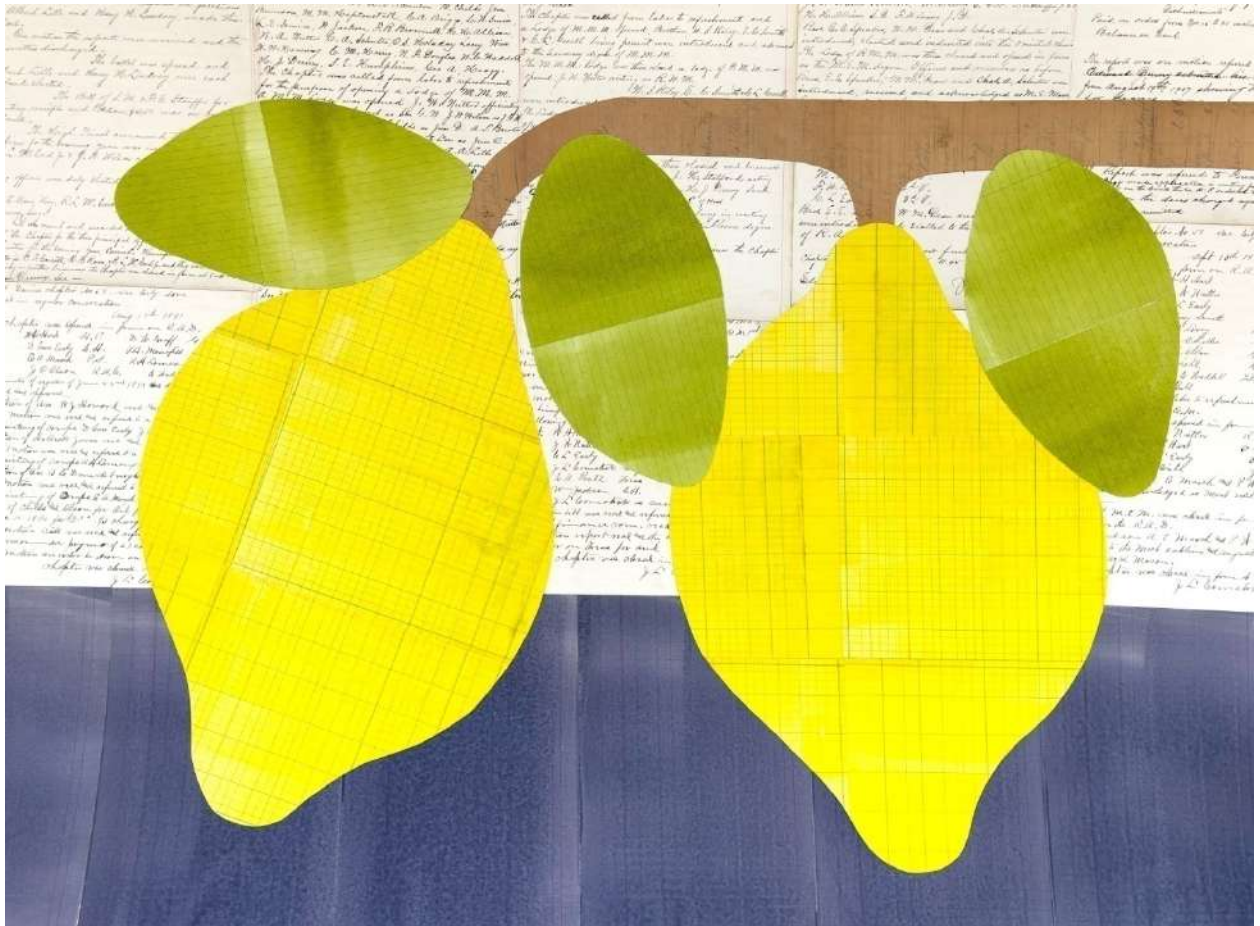
Happy Day



Neapolitan Cake



Neapolitan Cake No. 2



Lemons No. 2



**Rainbow Bowl**



**Blue Pot**



Oranges No. 8



**Emily Krill** is a collage artist based in Pittsburgh. Her work centers on antique paper ephemera, meticulously layered into expressive compositions. Emily creates large-scale collages that explore time, memory, and storytelling through the physical remnants of everyday life.

Her work has been featured in *Contemporary Collage Magazine*, *New Jersey Monthly*, and *Artful Home*, and is held in private and corporate collections across the country. Most recently, she completed a major

commissioned piece for the Pittsburgh Foundation titled *Strong Roots*, now on permanent display in their headquarters.

She exhibited at the Brooklyn Waterfront Artists Association in a group show and in a two-person show at Pittsburgh's Atithi Gallery. Recently (February, 2026), she exhibited in a solo show at the Portal Gallery in Pittsburgh.

## Stir-Fry Meatloaf

**Duane L. Herrmann**

Stir-fry Meatloaf is my contribution to the world's culinary expanse. At least, I think it's original. I've never seen a similar recipe, nor heard anyone else make it.

As commonly known, meatloaf is built around eggs, meat and other ingredients. There has to be enough egg to hold it all together. Other ingredients give each meatloaf its distinctive taste—which is where catsup comes in. If you don't like the taste—simply add more catsup.

As a child, I always wondered why every catsup bottle is labeled “tomato catsup.” What else would it be made of? In my early twenties, I was reading some article about early American food which mentioned Thomas Jefferson had a recipe for mushroom catsup. I concluded that “catsup” was a kind of sauce. I like the bright red color of tomato catsup. I dread to think of what grey color mushroom catsup could be. Not very appetizing!

After we had had a certain typical breakfast food, which my children did not finish, a day or two later we would have stir-fry meatloaf. I made sure the children did not notice a connection between the meals!

I don't have a standard recipe for stir-fry meatloaf; I seldom use a recipe for anything. I began cooking so long ago, at such a young age (my mother didn't want to cook and screamed instructions), that I never considered that what I was cooking might have a recipe. As a child I cooked so much, without recipes, that by the time I was twelve I would make cakes without any recipe at all—and win prizes for them at local fairs! So, a recipe for stir-fry meatloaf? Not really.

What I use are proportions: this sorta much of this and that kinda much of that. The amounts depended on how many would be eating and what was available in the fridge left over from some other meal. It was flexible.

Among the “various other ingredients,” I liked to include vegetables, usually leftovers. Most times I would mash them, not only to disguise their presence, but the bits stuck together better with the egg. I was big on leftovers. I had grown up using leftovers and had made entire meals that way,

often combining them in different ways so no one could complain about the same thing a second time. Food was not to be wasted.

Not only had my grandparents scrimped and scraped through the Depression, my parents grew up in it, making food too precious to waste. We, also, personally worked for our food. Very little came out of a can or a box. As a boy, I longed to be able to make macaroni and cheese from a box! It looked so easy and quick! We had to make the cheese sauce from scratch—every time! That started with a white sauce to which we added the “cheese.” It was tedious and time consuming to make sure it thickened properly and did not scorch or burn. Once I left home to live on my own, I never made it again!

When I say we “worked” for our food, I mean we prepared the soil, planted seeds, pulled or hoed weeds, and watered the plants when they became too dry. And we had no garden hose. Water for the garden could not come from the house anyway. That was hauled-in water, and paid for by the tank. It was expensive and used just in the house.

Outdoor water use—for chickens, pigs, cows, or other animals came from the pond—in five gallon buckets! And when we ran out of water at the house, water was carried from the pond to flush the toilet! I don't remember when I became the water carrier, but that became one of my jobs around the house. Mornings before school and afternoons afterward, I had to carry water for some purpose; watering the garden was included.

At the pond there was no platform on which to stand in order to scoop up the water. If I was lucky, there might be some rocks to stand on, but that was determined by the water level. In the winter, I had to take an ax to chop through the ice. In all weather, I had to walk down the often slippery bank of the pond to the water, then back up with about thirty pounds of water in each bucket. On muddy days, that was a task. Fortunately, the garden was near the pond; the house, barn, and chicken house were further away.

Once the vegetables were grown, they had to be picked before insects or animals found them, or they became too old. Then they had to be prepared and preserved. Some vegetables were frozen, such as corn; others were canned, such as green beans.

One year, the green beans we planted did not do well. Though we canned as much as possible, the crop was so poor, we ran out midway through the winter. The next year Mom decided to plant about twice as many. That year the crop was abundant! It had rained more than the year before. We ate green beans twice a day every day all summer—and canned one hundred fifty quarts of them!

If that wasn't enough, that year my grandmother decided to try an idea she had just read about: prune green bean plants in late summer, then early autumn rain would stimulate them to grow and produce more beans before winter froze them. Surprise, surprise: we had even more green beans!

That winter, going to the basement and seeing those rows and rows of canned green beans, I KNEW we wouldn't starve! The next year, I don't think any of us planted green beans.

Green beans are one vegetable among others, which can go into meatloaf after being mashed. I have made traditional baked meatloaf, but my hands get messy kneading all the ingredients together, and you don't get to stir as much—which is half the fun!

So, to make stir-fry meatloaf, I first brown the ground beef, adding in mashed leftover vegetables and other ingredients, stirring all the while. The last ingredient I add is the egg to hold it all together. Among “other ingredients” is: leftover oatmeal—from a recent breakfast! Buried in catsup, no one knows!

Much to my children's astonishment, this recipe won a prize for most original food. How about that!!!

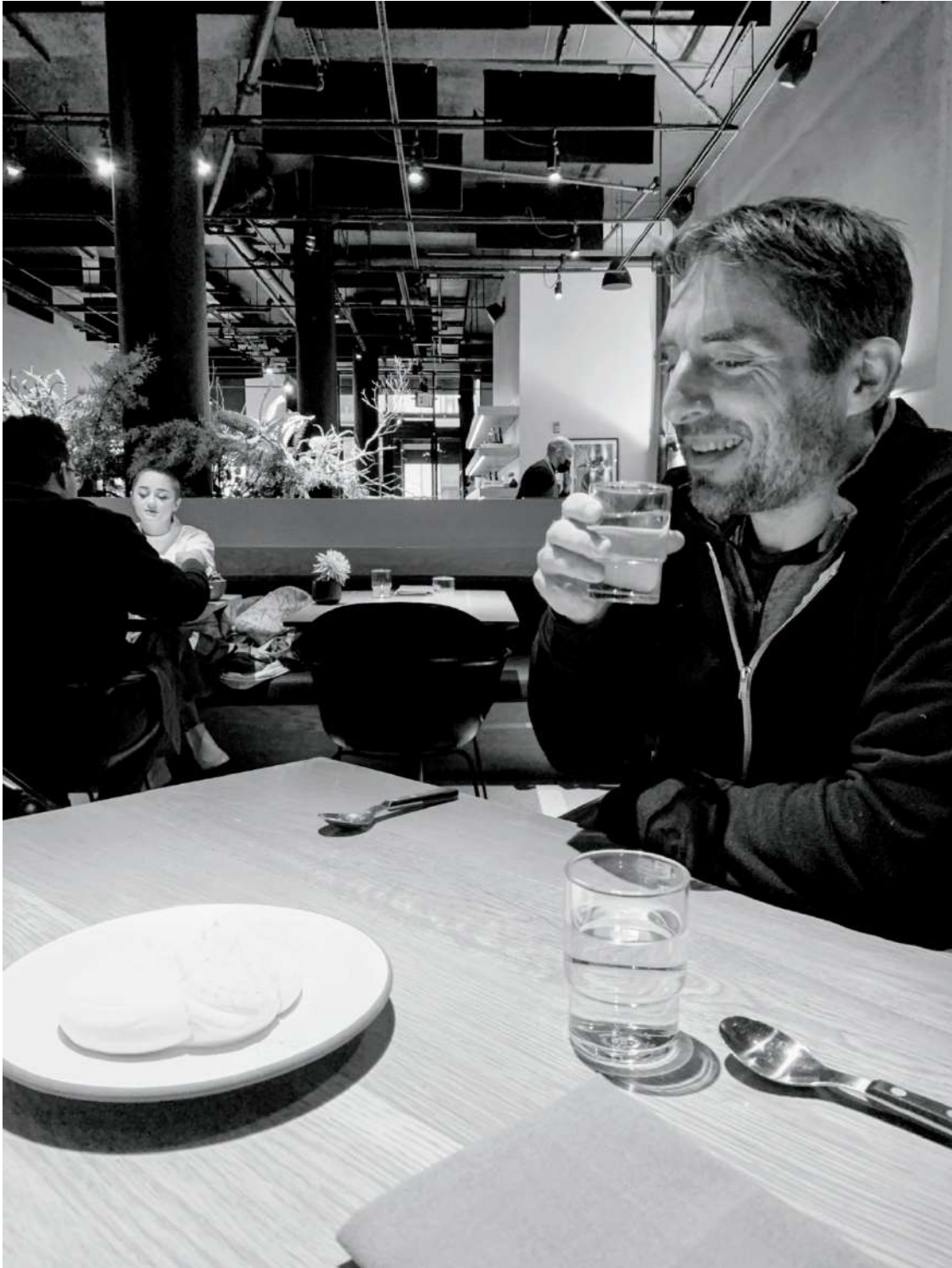


**Duane L. Herrmann**, a reluctant carbon-based life-form, was surprised to find himself in 1951 on a farm on the Kansas prairie. He's still trying to make sense of that but has grown fond of grass waving in the wind, trees, and the enchantment of moonlight. He aspires to be a hermit, but would miss his children, grandchildren, and some friends. His work has been published in various established publications (over 100 publications and sixty anthologies) and online, even some of both in languages he can't read (English is difficult enough!). He is known to carry kittens in

his mouth, pet snakes, and converse with owls, but is careful not to anger them! All this, despite a traumatic, abusive childhood embellished with dyslexia, ADHD (both unknown then), cyclothymia, an anxiety disorder, and now, PTSD. He's still learning to breathe and perform human at the same time.

# Dessert Eyes

Rachel Turney





**Rachel Turney**, Ed.D. (she/her) is an educator and artist located in Denver. Her poems, research articles, reviews, and drawings can be found in a variety of publications. Rachel is passionate about immigrant rights, teacher support, and empowering other artists. She is a *Writers' Hour* prize winner and Best of the Net nominee. Her photography appeared on a few magazine covers. Rachel runs the popular online reading series *Poetry (in Brief)*. She is on staff at *Bare*

*Back Magazine* with her monthly column *Friday Night in the Suburbs*. She reads for *The Los Angeles Review*. Her website is [turneytalks.com](http://turneytalks.com).

Her upcoming releases in 2026 include: *Record Player Life* with The Poetry Lighthouse, *Retired Wannabe Club Kid* with Parlyaree Press, *To Be (a Woman)* with Red Rose Thorns, and *Women Making Soup Together* with Vinegar Press.

# The Fish

Susan L. Pollet





**Susan L. Pollet** is a visual artist whose works have appeared in multiple art shows and literary publications. She studied at the New York Art Students League, has been a member since 2018, and resides in NYC.

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*Amaranth*

# Table Talk



## Unbidden Appetites: A Conversation with

**Bhaskar Hazarika**

In 2019, an Assamese film, *Aamis* (*Ravening*), written and directed by Bhaskar Hazarika, premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival in New York, followed by a theatrical release in India. For those who've seen Bhaskar Hazarika's earlier feature *Kothanodi* (*River of Fables*; 2015)—an uncanny weave of fabulist tales set in the rural fringes of northeastern India—*Aamis* doesn't bring in a sense of reprise. Instead, it unravels the coiled appetite of the unbidden with a finesse that is both daring and delicate. In a world seeking refuge in the polite abstractions of meaning and metaphor, *Aamis* serves as a spare yet artfully plated reminder that sometimes, the most terrifying thing about our desires is their absolute sincerity.

**Bhaskar Hazarika**, the writer and director of *Aamis* was interviewed by **Amaranth Journal's** managing editor, **Satarupa Sinha Roy**.

**AJ:** What sparked your interest in filmmaking?

**BH:** I used to be a voracious reader as a kid. I used to think that when I grew up and had a career, I'd do something creative, such as tell stories. So, it was basically choosing between becoming a writer—somebody who writes novels—or finding another medium to tell my stories. And that turned out to be filmmaking. As early as in my teens, I knew that I'd probably have a career in cinema. Cinema is more massy; it has a wider audience. Plus, in cinema, you can work more with the senses of your audience—particularly, the senses of sight and sound—to tell your stories.

**AJ:** What is the most important element in your craft and why?

**BH:** The most important element in my craft is the script. Like I said, storytelling is the primary motive for why I make films. In the films I have made so far, I might have faltered a bit in terms of execution, but if my script is right, then my film normally works. So, I'd say that I spend a lot of time writing the story and developing the script.



**AJ:** Your film *Aamis* deals with a provocative subject in a familiar setting. What type of audience did you envision while developing the narrative?

**BH:** Well, the primary audience for my film comes from the language and the culture and the community and the place in which the story is set. So, in this case it was the urban, Assamese audience that I had in mind while developing the story. Then again, there are these universal themes that people around the world, who are in similar sorts of settings, can understand and connect with. I knew that *Aamis* would appeal to any urban audience in the world living a metropolitan life, interacting with strangers on a daily basis, and having the choice and facility to explore different tastes in food. So, I had that kind of audience in mind while I was developing the idea of *Aamis*.

**AJ:** Eating human flesh is obviously transgressive. For women, particularly, even regular eating in certain contexts can come across as an act of rebellion.

Is there any specific reason for your choosing a female protagonist in *Aamis* with an insatiable desire for the forbidden?

**BH:** No, there was no specific reason for me to choose a female protagonist. In fact, there were many iterations of the story initially where the female protagonist Nirmali was a man who falls in love with a much younger woman, which I thought was like pushing into the *Lolita* zone. I didn't want to go there, as we have seen this kind of film many, many times

already. Instead, I just thought of flipping a familiar model to see what happens when an older woman, who also has more agency, falls in love with a much younger man and how the circumstances of her life and her struggles with her moral values and passions took the story forward. So, yes, it was interesting to flip the familiar pattern instead of just making a film with an older man falling in love with a younger woman. Maybe then the film wouldn't have hit people in the way it did.

**AJ:** What specific societal issues or questions (if any) were you hoping to address through *Aamis*?

**BH:** None, actually. Not at all. I am not that kind of storyteller. For me, the story is everything; *it* is the focus. If there are societal issues that get addressed through the story, it is purely incidental and unintentional. I just focus on the story. So, if there are any messages emerging from that story, it has more to do with the audience's interpretation than my own intention as a storyteller.

**AJ:** Did you think of/ imagine an alternative ending for *Aamis*?

**BH:** No, I did not have an alternative ending in mind. I was extremely certain that in the final scene Nirmali and Sumon had to touch each other, and that's how the film would end.

**AJ:** Were there any scenes (in *Aamis*) that were particularly difficult to write or film? If yes, how did you approach those challenges?

**BH:** I don't recall having any difficulty when writing any particular scene. The script of a film is fluid—you write something in the first draft, and then when you meet the actors and rehearse the scene, some things change. Then the camera team weighs in with their perspective, and something else changes, and the process goes on until you can the shot. So, the process is actually quite fluid. But as far as the writing is concerned, I didn't face any difficulty as such with any scene.





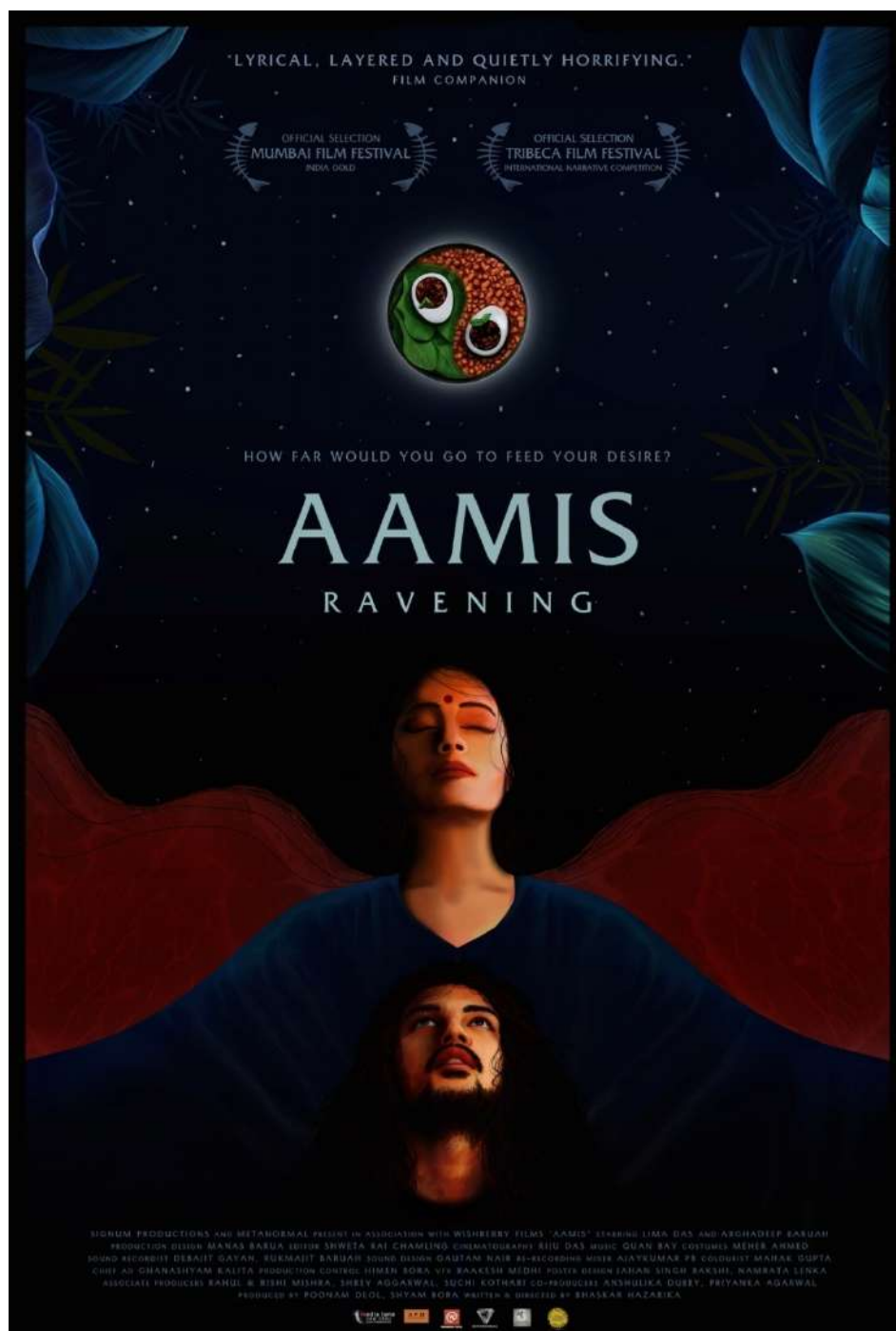
**AJ:** What impact do you think this film has and will have, going forward, on the conversation surrounding its subject matter?

**BH:** Well, *Aamis* has definitely had an impact, but I don't think I have the objectivity to tell you what that impact is and will be, going forward. I am aware that it's listed in many film blogs as one of the 'top 10 films on food to watch,' but I can't tell you its exact impact on the audience, nor can I comment on the conversation surrounding its subject matter. But I have had many, many interesting discussions with audience members about the interpretations of the story. Every year, I am contacted by a number of scholars interested in analyzing *Aamis* for their papers or PhD dissertations. I know that the film will continue to elicit not just academic interest but also appeal to those who love to watch interesting films.

**AJ:** Are there any specific genres, themes, etc. that you are keen on exploring creatively in the future?

**BH:** Well, the future for me currently is the present. At the moment, I am exploring a diverse range of genres. I consider myself a professional writer, so after *Aamis* I wrote a comedy, *Emuthi Puthi (A Very Fishy Trip; 2022)* that won the national award for the best feature film in the Assamese language. Right now, I am working on a Hindi horror film, which is a creature feature. I switch genres. I can do action dramas, but I am naturally inclined toward the kind of cinema that enhances feelings of pathos and empathy in people. I know empathy is frequently

dismissed as vulnerability or is sidelined by modern trends, but this has been my overall approach to filmmaking.



All still images and poster art from the film *Aamis* used with permission.

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**Bhaskar Hazarika** is an award-winning filmmaker, writer, and producer from India's Assam. Since his debut with *Kothanodi* (*The River of Fables*) in 2015, he has established himself as a versatile creator across a wide range of genres and creative media. A two-time recipient of the Dr. Bhabendra Nath Saikia

Award for Best Screenplay (*Kothanodi* and *Aamis*), Bhaskar Hazarika was also awarded the Brajen Borua Award for Best Direction (*Aamis*) by the Assam State Film Awards. He is currently developing his first Hindi horror feature, *Paaltu* (*Screamancer*), while continuing to garner accolades for his unique contributions to Assamese and Indian cinema.