

Issue 27 | Winter 2020

The broken c|I T|Y



I KNOW
WHAT YOU DID
LAST PANDEMIC

The broken



Winter 2020 Issue 27

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In this issue:



Welcome to *The Broken City's* pandemic panorama. Join us in quarantine as we fret about masks, order delivery, day drink, walk the dog, bake zwieback, shake our heads at Carnival Trump and look for Love in the Time of Corona.

Cover Illustration/Photo:

Ann Marie Sekeres's drawings (front cover, page 5) have appeared in publications worldwide. She recently illustrated the cover for *the samurai* by Linda M. Crate, published by Yellow Arrow. She lives in the New York area and draws every day. Follow her work at [@annmarieprojects](https://www.instagram.com/annmarieprojects) on Instagram and at annmarieprojects.com.

Collin Inman (back cover) is a multimedia artist based in Philadelphia and studying photography at Tyler School of Art & Architecture. They've most recently been published within *NUMINOUSmag*. You can find more of their work at mischiefssystem.com. Their work explores liminal spaces, strange intimacies, and false reflections.

The Broken City is currently accepting submissions for its summer 2021 edition: Beach Party Tonight.

Let's look on the bright side: a semi-normal summer may be possible; what's happening on the beach? Ship us your tales of surf and sun.

Send poetry, fiction, essays, illustrations and photography to thebrokencitymag@yahoo.com.

Deadline is: May 31, 2021. Submitters will be contacted after that date, with news of acceptance or rejection.

The Delivery People with No Masks

Donna J. Gelagotis Lee

I'm happy to get my package.
But can you wear a mask?

Who knows where you've been
With no mask?

Who knows who else was where you were
With no mask?

Without a mask, you are tempting
The Fates; you are making me

Stay inside for a reasonable time after
You leave. And who knows what that

Really is? 8 min? 12? 1 hour?
3 hours? It depends. Aerosolization.

Non-aerosolization. Length of
Time. Who knows what they'll tell us

Next week? The day is a job
With little masks around it. It has

Virus lurking like a robber.
The day used to be summer,

In August. But now it's another coronavirus
Statistic. Mystic hour of mine. Why do I

Hold you like a package? I'm hoping
On a delivery from god. I'm hoping

He'll wear a mask with a robe of lightness.
Maybe if we can make this devil-day holy,

We might be able to breathe the air
As if it weren't there.

Donna J. Gelagotis Lee is the author of two award-winning collections, Intersection on Neptune (The Poetry Press of Press Americana, 2019), winner of the Prize Americana for Poetry 2018, and On the Altar of Greece (Gival Press, 2006), winner of the 2005 Gival Press Poetry Award and recipient of a 2007 Eric Hoffer Book Award: Notable for Art Category. Her poetry has appeared in journals internationally, including The Dalhousie Review, Existere, Feminist Studies, The Massachusetts Review, and Vallum. donnajgelagotislee.com

In Target

You protect me with an opaque curtain
and a plexiglass shield—Marcel Marceau
miming behind PPE. Your Maybelline
mascara is luscious, and we share glances
at roots revealed in center parts. No heel
clicks behind me; everyone wears sneakers
or sandals. No small talk, but a cart wheel
squeak-squeaks nearby, pushed by a Cyclops
with an N-95 on his forehead, not on his face.
We may have smiled. We are fused first
by commerce, then joined by an arc of safety
that protects us from invisible particulate matter.
We are stiff figures figuring how to connect
through plastic where you pass the paper
receipt through the mouse hole in the barricade,
and I take it by two fingers that I'll sanitize
with gel outside. We both mumble something
like "thanks" filtered through our cotton masks.

If We Were Quarantined

together, I would wake you with coffee, black,
and a kiss before our breakfast of scrambled eggs
and toast, no jam. We would catch up on the news
and glide into our favorite chairs, toes touching,
fingers connecting to the internet and beyond
until lunch—which could be served back under
freshly laundered sheets or not at all. It's a crisis.
We have plenty of booze, and "aperitivo" starts at
two o'clock with an Aperol spritz or a glass of wine.
We have no milk or butter, but a brownie mix suffices
for that sugar fix, and Netflix leads us to the future
or back to Casablanca where Rick lies to Elsa and you lie
with me waiting for that plane to Portugal which never
arrives, but still we stand there in the fog, listening.

Kim King's poetry has appeared in Wild Onions, In Gilded Frame, Point Mass, The Midwest Quarterly, The Road Not Taken, Poets for Paris, O-Dark-Thirty, SWIMM Every Day, The Hands We Hold and other publications. Her poems were recorded for the Telepoem Booth Project in State College, PA. Kim has an M.A. in Writing from The Johns Hopkins University. A former French teacher, she volunteers with HighHopesforHaiti.org and lives in Hershey, Pennsylvania.

Ann Marie Sekeres



A Triptych of Poems in the Manner of Tom Jenks' "Spruce" During the Time of the Coronavirus Pandemic *Clay Thistleton*

"The Trump Administration as a False Positive"

social distancing in a wet market in Wuhan
by a sneeze guard with some convalescent plasma
in an iso-hair outbreak in full PPE

in a second wave R naught hotspot
the Trump administration as a false positive
hotel quarantine for the pangolin herd

immunity strategies of the Toyota Corona
the contact tracing of stray sanitation stations
tears on the pavement that glisten like glass

"Donald J. Trump is the King of all Ventilators"

injecting disinfectant with the disaster capitalists
in a lax travel bubble with clandestine hairdressers
with some flu bro covidiot in a soft wobble room

the coronasplaining of the armchair virologists
Donald J. Trump is the King of all Ventilators
by a hard lockdown under drone biosurveillance

zoonotic diseases under the doona
a cytokine storm by the pop-up COVID clinic
the tears of the masked covfefe in bars

"The Trump Administration is Asymptomatic"

the horseshoe bats vector for an online migration
in an old normal without sanitiser fatigue
in an exponential growth of TP panic buying

an uptick in naso-pharyngeal swabs
the Trump administration is asymptomatic
aerosolising hate in Lafayette Park

flattening the curve by the zombie businesses
herd immunity by the respiratory droplets
on iron-covered rooftops rains scatter like wails

"A Triptych of Poems in the Manner of Tom Jenks' 'Spruce' During the Time of the Coronavirus Pandemic" was first published at Infection House (infectionhouse.com) in July, 2020.

Clay Thistleton has taught creative writing and literary studies in universities, community colleges and not-for-profit organizations for almost two decades. He is the author of Noisesome Ghosts (Blart Books, 2018): an Elgin Award-nominated collection of found poetry. His current project, Never Mind the Saucers (Stranger Press, forthcoming), examines documented instances of alien-human sexual contact. Along with his son Dylan, Clay lives in New South Wales, Australia with a fluctuating number of feral cats.

Celibacy 2: Love in the Time of Corona

James B. Nicola

What guides the hand to take the cup
that breaks the nightly rest?

It's not the same as waking up
and having to get dressed:

You'd try on clothes, deliberate
on which ones from which shelf

Would most aptly communicate
some aspect of yourself

To others, then select to show
a bright mood, or the blues.

Now no one else will even know
the coffee cup you choose.

James B. Nicola, a returning contributor, is the author of five full-length poetry collections with three in the pipeline. His decades of working in the theater as a stage director, composer, lyricist, playwright, and acting instructor culminated in the nonfiction book *Playing the Audience: The Practical Guide to Live Performance*, which won a Choice award.
sites.google.com/site/jamesbnicola

A Bite of Zwieback

Martin Groff

*Hoffnung die Nahrung des Herzens ist,
Sie uns Verzweiflung und Kummer abküßt*

The recipe goes: 4 cups milk, 1 pound butter, 6 cups flour, a cake of yeast. There's a little more to it than that, but it's a family secret. Well, not really a secret I guess, but when a recipe has been passed down for so long, you hesitate to give it to just anybody. Anyway, you melt the butter in the milk, mix it into the flour and yeast, knead it, and form the rolls out of two dough balls stuck together, one about the size of a walnut, the other a little bit smaller. The trick is getting the smaller ball to stay on top of the larger one while they're baking—this is an art in itself. You should only pull them apart when you're ready to eat the roll, so you can put butter and

jam on the fluffy insides. And make sure you let it rise long enough before putting it in the oven. That's what makes good zwieback.

When I lived in Germany for a semester in college, they sold zwieback in the store that tasted to me like dry toast—nothing like Olga's recipe. Olga was my great grandmother, and the zwieback people baked where she came from, a German immigrant community in Russia, is more like a dinner roll. I first made it with my grandma when I was a kid. Well, she made it—according to the home movies, I just played around with the little bit of dough she gave me. There was always something mystical about zwieback when I was growing up; it was something no one else seemed to know about—a rare treat for me, with a

history I knew vaguely but certainly not well.

That changed when I was in high school, and my grandma gave me a box filled with family photographs, records, and old books—including Olga's journal, the one she had started during the First World War, when the Russian government barred German immigrants like her from attending school. She continued it during the Soviet Revolution, when she and her family were forced into internment in Siberia. Of everything I saw in that journal, one quote on one particular page stuck with me: "*Hoffnung die Nahrung des Herzens ist, / Sie uns Verzweiflung und Kummer abküßt.*" She must have written these verses somewhere toward the end of her trials, when she and her family

escaped to Germany and then emigrated to America. “Hope is the nourishment of the heart,” I had translated it as, “it kisses away our doubt and cares.”

I wish this is what I had been thinking about one Sunday afternoon at the beginning of the pandemic, the day after my governor declared a statewide shutdown, as I sat on the concrete driveway outside my house with a piece of zwieback. Despite the extra anxiety from recent events, and the feeling I was entering a warzone whenever I went grocery shopping, I was actually doing pretty well—even enjoying the chance to simplify, and slow down the fast-paced life that had long whirled around me. I was loving the unusually late spring weather, swatting mosquitoes, and observing how much harder they were to kill than I remembered. It had been awhile since I had gone out just to sit. Somehow, working from home at the computer all day, though not that much different from what I would do in my office anyway, inspired in me an intense longing to be in nature. It was as if walking through the parking lot to and from my car had been enough the past few years; I’d get a little sun, a few breaths of fresh air, maybe even see a squirrel or bird occasionally. These things were there every day, but I never really paid attention to them. Now, however, I was really noticing things. I saw how the wisteria buds fluttered when the breeze caught them from underneath, and listened to how the cardinals always chirped three songs before flying to the next tree. Most importantly, as I chewed long and slow on a bite of zwieback, I noticed how spoiled I was—and how spoiled I had long been.

The day before had been very sobering. I had never heard the word “unprecedented” used as much as it was after they played the governor’s speech on TV. Sensational headlines flashed ev-

erywhere on social media, and I listened to news radio all day long, as if the next broadcast would somehow put my mind more at ease about what was happening. It did not. My instinctive reaction had been to pull out Olga’s zwieback recipe, which was sitting in my pantry drawer, unused for years. For some reason, I couldn’t shake one of the stories I had read in her journal—about how her family was given only twenty-four hours notice that they were required to travel to Siberia for internment. They spent nearly all that time baking zwieback, so they would have something to eat along the way. It’s what saved them from starvation—the fate of many of their neighbors.

I made three dozen zwieback rolls that day, and I didn’t starve. Sitting outside among the peaceful trees the following morning, I reflected on how much other food I had stored already; there was hardly enough room to stock what I had baked. It was with a bizarre feeling of guilt and embarrassment that I remembered stuffing most of the zwieback in my freezer the night before, and with that same feeling I ate it now, out there with the mosquitoes. It had become a symbol of panic to me, and I felt ashamed to have panicked. I wasn’t being forced out of my home to starve. And unlike some of my friends, I was healthy, still able to work remotely, and stocked up on all the essentials. It felt wrong to be afraid, wrong to seek unneeded security, selfish to have the luxuries I was enjoying.

Summer came, and it got too hot to spend much time outside. Plus, I was sick of getting bitten by mosquitoes. Over time, too, I managed to eat all the zwieback I had baked, bite by bite. And with each bite, it seemed to get a little bit sweeter. I’ve actually had an inkling to make some more.

Something had changed. In

July, while cleaning my closet, I had been fortunate enough to run across an old forgotten picture frame. Printed inside in a fancy font were those words that had once meant so much to me, as they had to my great grandmother: “Hoffnung die Nahrung des Herzens ist,/ Sie uns Verzweiflung und Kummer abküßt.” Mostly out of sentimentality, having not seen my family for a couple months by this time, I hung it on the wall where it was readily visible. But eventually, seeing it every day, I found myself thinking about the phrase “Nahrung des Herzens,” nourishment of the heart. My heart was hungry, and I realized why. I had allowed panic, rather than hope to define everything around me—even the zwieback in the freezer that I was slowly working through. But Olga had not passed down that recipe because it reminded her of panic and fear—it was so important to her because it represented what helped her overcome great suffering. Just as zwieback had nourished her body, hope had nourished her heart. Although my suffering was not as great as hers, the zwieback in my freezer became a gift from her to me, reminding me that I too could let hope rather than anxiety define my situation—and maybe spread hope to others as well.

The next time I bake zwieback will be for Thanksgiving, regardless of whether the plans I’m looking forward to with my family fall through. If we can’t bake it together, we’ll bake it at the same time separately. If I can’t visit my friends, I’ll drop off some rolls in a basket by their door. Now, I think back to that day I spent baking zwieback as a humbling experience—one that taught me not only how fragile prosperity can be, but also how blessed I truly am, not only with enough food to eat and a comfortable, safe place to sleep, but also with the fact that Olga had enough

hope to carry her through hard times, far harder than anything I've experienced, and start a loving family and a new life on the other side of it. When I take a bite of zwieback and think of the hope that sustained my ancestor, I will let it nourish my heart as well.

Martin Groff is a graduate student and instructor of writing at UNC-Chapel Hill. He is most passionate about enabling students to find their own voice and innovate on genre expectations, and makes this the goal of his own writing as well. His work appears in The Quaker and Green Blotter, among others.

How to Walk the Park

Mikki Aronoff

Leash your old blind dog, follow his pinched circles. Foxtails dry as dust lie in ambush. Yank him away.

Check the text on your phone. Circle clockwise. Wider.

Catch him sniffing a scatter of feathers on the grass. Yank him away. Check for coyote scat.

Track a confusion of baby pine cones like slick turds, nudge one with the toe of your shoe. Pick it up. Turn it 'round & 'round.

A murder of crows rises & lands. They caw & swoop in spirals, over & over. We are all agitated. Join them. Raise your arms. Cast continuous loops like figure eights.

Walkers walk too near. Tighten your mask. Turn away, tug the leash.

Yank your dog away from the head of a dull-eyed mourning dove. Sweep another infinity sign. Loop the ends over beak & quill. Unite its parts.

Walk south. Pause at the ten-year-old plaque for the four-year-old boy, a Spider-Man action figure and painted stones on top. *Luke*, who didn't know it was loaded.

Beg that a cuddly psychopomp tugged at his shirt, hauled him away. Maybe a puppy.

Our country is burning. There's a fox in the hen house.

Cast the sign over Luke & his parents, his brother. Fold them into each other.

Gather all that's separated.

Mikki Aronoff's work has appeared in The Lake, EastLit, Virga, Bearing the Mask: Southwest Persona Poems, Love's Executive Order, bosque9, Intima: A Journal of Narrative Medicine, SurVision, Love Like Salt, London Reader, Popshot Quarterly, and elsewhere. A New Mexico poet and Pushcart nominee, she is also involved in animal advocacy.

Collin Inman

